Imagining the Romani Nation: Connection, Conflict & the New Construction of Roma Identity

by

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Class of 2011

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Government

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2011
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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my adviser Peter Rutland for his exceptional wisdom, wit and guidance throughout the entire thesis process. Without his help and mastery of Youtube I could not have completed this project.

I would like to thank the many professors who helped me along the way, particularly Michael Byron Nelson for his advice and Sarah Wiliarty for sparking my interest in European politics and offering her encouragement when I most needed it at the very beginning. This thesis also owes a great deal to the wonderful teachers of my formative years, particularly Andy Doan and Michal Hershkovitz.

Many thanks to my thesis mentor Yara Kass-Gergi for of her help and my wonderful friends and housemates.

I could not have written this thesis without the incredible patience and unwavering support of my parents who are my greatest role models. I would also like to thank Nell S. Hawley whose friendship has meant more to me than I can articulate.

This project owes a great deal to the people and organizations in Budapest who guided my understanding of Hungarian Roma issues. I would like to thank Central European University’s Human Rights Initiative, Klara at the Council of Europe Library and the amazing people working at OSI: Roma initiatives and the Romedia Foundation.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff of Mundi Romani for taking me on as an intern and for their tremendous courage and dedication to promoting Roma rights and inclusion in Europe.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

“I went, I went on long roads,
I even met happy Roma
Oh Roma where do you come from,
With tents on happy roads?
Oh Roma, Oh Brothers

I had a great family,
But the Black Legion1 murdered them
Come with me Roma from all the world
For the roads of the Roma have opened
Now is the time, rise up Roma now,
We will rise high if we act
Oh Roma, Oh Brothers”

– Gelem, Gelem The Roma National Anthem

INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago, the Roma did not have a national anthem. Gelem, Gelem was created at the First World Romani Congress in 1971 when delegates put the words of a poem written after the Roma holocaust to a traditional melody. For many years after the Congress, the anthem was virtually unknown outside the Romani elite. This was not surprising. There are roughly 15 million Roma spread from India to California and this community is as diverse as it is scattered. Roma groups do not share a common religion, language or territory. While the majority of Roma are concentrated in Europe, they have never been united under a legitimate political entity. Given their

1 Gelem, Gelem was written by the Yugoslav Roma Poet Jarko Jovanović after the genocide of Roma during the World War II. The “Black Legion” mentioned in the second verse refers to an infamous Croatian military brigade, who oversaw the extermination of Croat Romanies. Historians believe the majority of the Roma population was killed during the Holocaust (Fraser, 1992, 262)
immense diversity, scholars have questioned whether the Roma should even be
categorized as a coherent group, let alone a stateless nation.

The Roma are by all standards an exceptional case. Despite lacking the
traditional foundations of communal identity, the concept of a Roma nation is
spreading. In recent years Gelem, Gelem has become more widely used and
recognized. The anthem is sung to open meetings of the European Roma Summit. It
is performed at Roma Arts festivals in New York, Romania and the United Kingdom.
It appears as background music in numerous Roma rights documentaries and news
reports. Increasingly, it is sung locally in Roma neighborhoods and schools. Not all
Roma know the song, but its use is undeniably spreading and this marks a significant
development. As Benedict Anderson says of anthems Imagined Communities, “no
matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in the singing an

Gelem, Gelem has become a symbol of Roma identity and Romani Rights.
The song’s message is clear: Roma have suffered tremendous abuse. They have
become scattered and divided along many roads. Still, Roma are brothers and they
must come together to rise above historical patterns of violence and abuse. The story
of the anthem reflects the development of the Roma nationalist project as a whole.
Romani nationalism was built by elites and it remains a relatively newborn
phenomenon—still in the process of construction and only just beginning to spread on
the transnational, national and local levels. This thesis will document and analyze the

2 Gelem preformed by the Roma Gandhi School Chorus in Pécs, Hungary
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9webTBSuRz8) and Preformed at the Second European Roma
Summit in Cordoba, Spain (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTf6VvKVabs)
development of the Roma nationalist project, and argues that European Integration, Internet technology and the threat of right wing extremism encourage identification with the Romani stateless nation.

CENTRAL QUESTION

Many scholars writing on the Roma have dismissed the idea of Romani nationalism as the illegitimate fabrication of a small and self-interested elite. Gay y Blasco (2002) argues that Roma politics are characterized by the “overarching weakness of a Gypsy imagined community,” while Chon (1993) calls Roma nationalism a “myth” and Kovats (2003) derides it as “ridiculous nonsense.”

The aim of this thesis is to question these arguments by tracking and understanding recent developments in the Romani nationalist movement. My primary goal will be to ask: what is Roma nationalism and what factors account for its current state? I find these questions to be inexorably tied to the larger puzzle of Romani identity.

The existing literature on Roma nationalism is incomplete and out of date, because it fails to recognize the interrelated nature of these questions. There is fierce debate among scholars who write on the subject: some offer optimistic and oversimplified defenses of the Roma nationalist project, while others, alluded to above, sharply dismiss it as nonexistent. In disagreeing so intensely, scholars fail to recognize the significance of the rising Roma nationalist trend. In the past, nationalist mobilization was hindered by the incredible diversity of Roma and the resulting uncertainty over what really constitutes Roma identity. The existing literature has
failed to recognize the impact of recent international and technological developments that have encouraged the unification of Roma group identity. As Roma identity is consolidated and constructed, Roma nationalism is built alongside it.

This project will expand understandings of Roma exclusion and politics by asking not only what is Roma nationalism? But also, what is Roma identity? How has European integration affected Roma? How does the EU legitimate Roma as a political group and provide direction for the Roma nationalist project? How has it strengthened Romani elites? What methods are they then using to “imagine” a new Roma community? How has this community responded to the threat from far right nationalism? And finally, how do these interrelated factors work to construct a new Romani identity and how then does that construction work to generate nationalism?

CENTRAL ARGUMENT

Roma nationalism is in its infancy, but the recent developments of European integration, Internet technology and right wing extremism are helping it to grow and develop. Romani identity is consolidated and constructed through the confluence of these factors, while the Romani nation is increasingly “imagined” in the process.

These changes have tremendous implications for the international Roma community. For hundreds of years, Roma groups have been scattered and fragmented across Europe. With no home state or government to provide a coherent vision of Romani culture, groups adopted tremendously different cultural, linguistic and religious traditions. Most had had little or no knowledge of the span or scope of the larger Roma community, and instead identified with small regional or linguistic
subgroups. As the famous Roma scholar Jean Pierre Liégeois once explained, “from the gypsy point of view there is no such group as the gypsies” (Quoted in Kovats, 2003, 4).

Both the concept of a unified Romani group and a Roma nation are relatively new. Roma nationalism began to circulate among eastern European elites in the 1930s but was not clearly articulated until the First World Romani Congress in 1971, which established a national anthem, flag and name. For many years after the congress, these symbols existed, but were not widely spread. Aidan McGarry (2009) labeled this phenomenon “ambiguous nationalism--” the Roma nation symbolically existed, but was virtually unknown outside the Romani elite.

In the coming chapters I will observe the development of new and interrelated trends, which have begun to change the pattern of “ambiguous nationalism.” I will suggest that European Integration has helped to construct and legitimate Roma as a political category while also providing direction to the Roma nationalist project. The EU has helped to strengthen and fund Roma NGO elites who then use new media technology to connect Roma groups and standardize Roma identity. Roma also connect and come together at the international, national and local levels in response to the growing threat from the extreme right. The interaction of these variables has worked to create a new vision of Roma identity and with it increased Romani nationalism. My research works to bridge these gaps by linking larger European and national factors and updating the nationalist debate for the Internet age.
SIGNIFICANCE

The development of Romani nationalism is significant to both Roma studies and international politics. First, the development of the Roma stateless nation is important to the field of Political Science and understandings of nationalism and the globalized world. Second, the fate of Roma has become inexorably tied to that of the European Union. Third, Roma nationalism can provide a better understanding of the persistent trends of Roma exclusion. And finally, the Roma case can enhance and contribute to academic understanding of other minority groups.

NATIONALISM STUDIES

There are many different and conflicting theories of the nation and nationalism. Scholars, like Anthony Smith (1986) and Walker Conor (1994) claim that nationhood is rooted in deep primordial ties of kinship, religion and territory, while others like Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1983), and Liah Greenfeld (1992) argue that nations are constructed in response to industrialization and the resulting standardization of language and culture. Roma nationalism, however, lacks all of these traditional foundations. Romanies are not tied by a common tongue or belief system. They do not share a geographical area and most have lost the historical narratives of Indian origin and kinship. As a result, the potential maturation of the Romani nation represents an entirely unique model: a transnational nation not based on common territory, language or religion.

This vision of nationhood creates a new precedent in nationalism studies and may reflect future trends as the world order becomes increasingly cosmopolitan and
globalized. Marton Rövid argues that Roma have the potential to be an “avant-garde” nation” that “challenges the principle of territorial democracy and the Westphalian international order” (Rövid, 2009, 11).

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Roma nationalism also has serious implications for contemporary European politics. Roma represent a critical test of the EU’s commitment to its core principle: the equality of all European citizens. As a result, the Roma have emerged in European relations as an explosive and perhaps even dangerous issue that has the potential to fray the fabric of European unity.

With the 2004 and 2007 expansions, the number of Roma inside EU borders has more than doubled. Roma are the EU’s single largest minority group and their population approximates that of a mid-sized European nation like Portugal or Sweden. Despite the fundamental EU values of equality, Roma groups across Europe are socially excluded and fall far below European standards of employment, income, housing, healthcare and education. This is a perpetual source of embarrassment for the EU, which considers itself a defender of democratic values, cooperation and human rights.

70% of EU Roma live in new member states (Ringold, 2005, 3). With European integration these populations are given freedom of movement within European borders under Article 45 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Roma immigration has subsequently become an explosive issue in Union politics. In the summer of 2010, the French government began to deport Roma from Romania
and Bulgaria. The expulsions were widely criticized as a violation of the EU directive of free movement and an explicit targeting of members of a specific ethnic group. Paris was sharply criticized by Viviane Reding, the European Commissioner for Justice and tensions between the Sarkozy government and Brussels escalated as officials took steps to bring legal action against France. Although the case was quickly suspended, the incident exposed deep tensions between the sovereignty of member states and the preeminence of European law. The controversy revealed that immigration remains a serious and unresolved EU issue, while at the same time demonstrating the fundamental failure of the Union to legally defend its Romani citizens.

Roma have thus emerged as an explosive and potentially dangerous issue for Brussels. European political systems are convulsed by the emergence of anti-Roma parties and the core values laid out in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights are called into question, as the EU consistently fails to defend its most basic promises when they are violated by prominent member states like France and Italy.

ROMA EXCLUSION

For centuries, Romani communities across Europe have suffered pervasive abuse and exclusion. Over the course of their long history, Roma have been victims of discrimination, segregation, enslavement, forced sterilization and genocide (Crowe, 2007). The situation of contemporary Roma continues to be characterized by pervasive poverty and social injustice. Throughout Europe, the average Roma earns less than half of the average non-Roma salary (ERRC, 2010). Roma levels of
employment and education lag far behind those of non-Romanies and Roma communities are significantly less likely to have access to quality housing and healthcare.

This pervasive poverty is coupled with outright discrimination and flagrant abuse of Romani rights. Roma children in Eastern Europe are systematically tracked into classes for the mentally disabled even if they exhibit no mental impairment (EERC, 2005). In 2008, the Italian government introduced legislation intended to “fight criminality” that involved the selective fingerprinting of all Roma in Italy. In Kosovo, more than 700 Roma were forced to flee their homes after violent attacks in the wake of the 1999 Kosovar nationalist victory. They were relocated to a refugee camp built on a toxic waste site where they have been left for the last ten years – exposed on a daily basis to more than 300 times the healthy amount of lead (The Forgotten Roma of Mitrovica, 2007).

Roma rights are being violated throughout Europe on a massive scale. While this marginalization has many factors, it has continued so unchecked in part because Roma have no valid political entity or movement to represent and defend their interests. After 1989 as possibilities for ethnic activism opened there was a marked increase in minority political participation. Other groups like the Albanians in Macedonia, Turks in Bulgaria and Hungarians in Romania & Slovakia managed to successfully mobilize and gain parliamentary representation approximating their respective populations (Barany, 2002, 277). Given their demographic strength, Roma should have some political weight, especially in Central Europe. However, despite the creation of post-transition political parties, Roma across Europe failed to mobilize.
Roma parties were fragmented and failed to win solid bases of support (Vermeersch, 2005, 104).³

Aidan McGarry’s 2009 article “Ambiguous Nationalism? Explaining the Parliamentary Under-Representation of Roma in Hungry and Romania,” suggests that the failure of Romani mobilization may be tied to the ambiguity of Roma nationalism. While Turkish minority parties in Bulgaria and Hungarian minority parties in Slovakia appealed to a clear set of nationalist principles, Roma were too diverse and factious to devise a unified platform.

Stronger belief in a common Roma community might create a solid foundation for stronger and more unified political action. While nationalism generally came to be discredited in Europe during the 20th century and is now viewed as a negative phenomenon that encourages xenophobia, racism and violence, perhaps the Roma case is again exceptional. A unified nationalist movement has the potential to unite disparate Roma groups and create a legitimate political authority, which might be able to advocate for and defend Roma interests. This Roma political entity could more effectively call attention to gross violations like the toxic refugee camps in Kosovo. The International Romani Union, which advocates Romani nationalism argues that the only way for Europe to finally realize Roma rights is through Roma participation in the European Union as a stateless nation.

³ Several Roma scholars including Aiden McGarry (2009) and Peter Vermeersch have written on this topic. Vermeersch provides a full account of the failure of Roma mobilization in The Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia in his 2005 book “The Romani Movement:”
ACADEMIC SIGNIFICANCE

For centuries, Roma have been misunderstood, misrepresented and presented as “other” in European culture. This endemic misunderstanding has created patterns of distrust and fear that fuel discrimination, social exclusion and ethnically motivated violence. While more studying the factors that perpetuate Roma marginalization is in itself valuable, it may also help scholars to understand trends of other Diaspora and minority groups.

Despite their historical and contemporary significance, Roma have not been studied as extensively as their unique situation merits. Unlike many other marginalized minority groups, there have been virtually no incidents of large-scale violent Roma uprising or territory based conflict. Peter Vermeersch suggests that this long held pattern of non-violence may explain why Roma have failed to attract significant amounts of academic attention. “One does not have to be cynical to realize that violence usually attracts increased attention from the media as well as scholars. The large body of literature on the Balkans is a case in point” (Vermeersch, 2005, 2). Scholars want to understand why violence breaks out in certain regions; however it is only through also understanding non-violent ethnic relations that scholars fully isolate and comprehend the variables that lead to violent ethnic conflict (Vermeersch, 2005, 3). While more fully understanding Roma is valuable in its own right, it may also help explain other cases.
DEFINING NATIONALISM

There is a substantial body of literature that discusses theories of the nation and nationalism. Nationalism is an abstract concept and thus difficult to both define and measure. The Oxford Dictionary defines Nationalism as “patriotic feeling, principles or efforts; particularly an extreme form of this, marked by feeling of superiority over others, or advocacy of political independence for a particular country” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). Other definitions describe deeply felt identification with a nation that takes precedent over relationships with outside individuals. “Nation” is another complex and layered term. The Oxford Dictionary defines the nation as “a large aggregate of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular country or territory; a North American Indian people or confederation of peoples” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010).

These definitions provide a useful foundation, but ultimately fail to capture nationalism in its full complexity. In this study I use Benedict Anderson’s theory as my primary lens for understanding Romani nationalism; however, I will also incorporate elements from several other theories into my analysis. Anderson’s 1983, *Imagined Communities*, expands the established definitions of nationalism, describing the nation as an “imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and inherently sovereign” (Anderson, 1983, 6). The nation must be “imagined” because “even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members… yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, 6). The nation must also be limited because even the largest has borders; “no nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind” (Anderson, 1983, 7). The nation is thus
an amalgamation of individuals who perceive themselves to be linked and somehow distinct from all others communities. Finally, Anderson says that the nation must have the right to national self-determination—it must be sovereign.

This theory conceives of the nation as not inherent or inevitable but rather constructed. Once the nation is imagined, Anderson suggests that it is then “modeled, adapted and transformed” (Anderson, 1983,141). Ease and frequency of communication are essential to creating a belief in a shared history and common set of interests. Anderson argues that the “convergence of capitalism and print technology … created the possibility of a new form of Imagined community” (Anderson, 1983,47).

This theory draws heavily on Ernest Gellner’s Nations & Nationalism, which links nationalist identification to the rise of the modern society. Gellner’s book suggests “nations and nationalism are not natural because they are not a permanent feature of the human condition but constructed with the transition to industrialism”(Gellner, 1983, XXIII). Gellner argues that the Gutenberg printing press was an essential component in the creation of national identity. The press greatly reduced the cost of printing and made publication more widely possible. It sparked the mass circulation of printed material, enabled wider readership and eventually led to the standardization of language and culture.

Both Anderson and Gellner’s nationalist models depart from the earlier Primordialist school of nationalism. Primordialist theorists like Walker Connor and Anthony Smith believe that while the phenomenon of nationalism is modern, nations are primordial. They are inherently occurring bound to specific territories, religions,
languages and kin groups. Anderson and Gellner challenge this approach, arguing instead that nations are unnatural and constructed. As Gellner explains in *Thought & Change*, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (Gellner, 1983, 169).

Eric Hobsbawn builds on Anderson’s model, also describing the nation as an “imagined community” but emphasizing the importance of class structure as the base of nationalism. Hobsbawn’s “Nations & Nationalism Since 1780,” emphasizes the role of elites in the creating and maintaining national identities.

This thesis will combine insights from Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbwam’s theories of nationalism. I suggest that the Romani nation is not inherent or naturally occurring, but rather in the process of construction. Ideas of a Roma nation were historically developed and expanded by Roma elites. Today intellectual, artistic and NGO elites have been given new tools and platforms to imagine Roma identity. For today’s Roma, I suggest the Internet acts as Gellner’s printing press. Internet technology has allowed disparate Roma communities to connect and interact in unprecedented ways. Elites are attempting to continue the Roma nationalist project by connecting Roma and giving them common historical narratives and feelings of pride in Roma identity. In doing so they forge a new Roma identity and with it, spread the concept of the Roma nation.

MEASURING ROMA NATIONALISM
Using these definitions, my thesis will examine current efforts to “imagine” a Romani nation. I will evaluate emerging trends by looking at the following measures: historical development, primary documents and a case study.

I will begin by examining the historical progression of Roma nationalist activity. This narrative will trace the development of the Roma nationalism from the search for a territorial Roma homeland in the 1930s to present day efforts to secure Roma representation within the European Union. I will examine the circulation of the symbols of Roma nationalism and the construction of “Roma” as a unified political category. I will also look at ideas about the future and potential directions of the nationalist project.

My second measure of nationalism will involve looking at primary documents produced by Roma elites, which work to create new visions of Roma identity. I will look at NGO and artistic programs, which challenge popular Roma stereotypes, emphasize Roma history, spread information to the Roma community and enforce Roma pride. Most of these projects are circulated using new media tools, thus my argument in this section will be largely drawn from online Romani information networks, websites, and youtube channels. These sources may be unorthodox, but they shed light on important trends of Roma self representation and identification.

My final measure will be looking at Roma responses to the common threat posed by the emerging and virulently anti-Roma extreme right. The belief in a common enemy is often one of the most powerful elements in creating and maintaining a national identity. I will assess the effect of right wing extremism on
Roma, looking specifically at the case of the 2008 and 2009 Hungarian hate crimes against Roma.

POTENTIAL MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS

There are several potential obstacles in researching Romani nationalism. First, it is always difficult to study the Roma community because of the diversity of Roma identities. Groups are so various that it is difficult to speak of the Roma community without generalizing. This however, is exactly why Roma nationalism is an interesting topic because, as I will argue, a large part of the Roma nationalist project is attempting to standardize and unify conceptions of Romani identity.

Second, it is generally impossible to come up with reliable statistics describing Roma communities. As victims of broad of discrimination and the historical targets of genocide, Roma infrequently participate in national censuses. This trend is exacerbated by high poverty and illiteracy rates. The total number of Roma in Europe is unknown but generally estimated at between 12 and 15 million. As a result there is very little reliable population information or polling data.

Additionally, I have observed that many existing studies on Roma issues are problematic because they are often not taken in the context of national populations as a whole. For example, in Hungary a significant body of research has been dedicated to quantifying the “high levels” of domestic violence in Romani households – however there have been no control studies on domestic violence in Hungarian non-Roma households within the same socio-economic strata or within the Hungarian population as a whole.
This total lack of reliable demographic information makes quantitative analysis of Roma issues impossible. It also poses a major problem for measuring the influence of the Internet, as there are no statistics on Romani computer use, access and ownership. Since there is no way to measure how many Roma are using the Internet and what sites they are visiting, the only way to observe the important development of the Roma Internet presence is through examining what web sources have been created for the Roma community.

Finally, it is difficult to measure the activities of small-scale local Roma activities, as these movements typically do not publish information, and when they do it is often unavailable in English. As very few scholars have written on this topic it is difficult to find information about small-scale local movements except from occasional NGO reports or news stories. The lack of information about local communities skews the focus of my thesis more towards elite projects and activities.

STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW

This thesis will be laid out in six chapters. After this introductory section, Chapter Two will provide the historical and theoretical background necessary for understanding Roma nationalism. This section will also outline the unique development of Romani history, focusing on the group’s migration, dispersion and resulting diversity. I will explain that the tremendous heterogeneity of Roma groups is essential to understanding the contemporary situation of Roma and the development of the Roma nationalist project. I will offer a brief literature review and
explain the intense array of conflicting scholarly opinions, explaining why Roma nationalism has traditionally been “ambiguous.”

The next chapters will explore the recent international and technological developments that have begun to push Roma nationalism out of ambiguity. Chapter Three will discuss the effect of European enlargement on the transnational Roma community. I will begin by suggesting that Roma immigration has emerged as a major EU tension and that Brussels is thus eager to eliminate potential problems by promoting greater Romani integration across Europe. I will argue that in attempting to secure Roma inclusion, the EU has inadvertently strengthened Roma nationalism by legitimating and circulating “Roma” as a political category and providing a clear goal to the Romani nationalist project – representation as a stateless nation at the European level.

Chapter Four will describe the Internet’s tremendous implications for Roma nationalism. I will begin by explaining the traditional patterns of Roma representation in western popular culture, suggesting that mainstream stereotypes worked to further the fragmentation and separation of Romani groups by robbing them of accurate awareness of the larger Romani community. The Internet provides unprecedented access to popular media. After centuries of being represented by the outside, Roma can now represent themselves. I will examine the Romani elite’s efforts to reclaim and redefine Roma identity using new Internet mediums. This new identity emphasizes Roma historical narratives and shared interests while celebrating Roma diversity and encouraging Romani pride. In constructing this new vision of Romani
identity, elites have also circulated the concept and symbols of Roma nationalism and in doing so laid broader foundations for Roma nationalist identification.

Chapter Five will discuss increased Romani unity in response to the threat of rightwing extremism. While chapters three and four addressed the transnational developments which encourage Romani Nationalism, this section will examine the consolidation of Hungarian Romani groups on the national and local levels in response to right wing violence. I suggest that Hungary is a critical case (Patton, 1990) that can be used to help understand the potential trajectories of Romani consolidation in the face of extreme right threats throughout Europe. The chapter will track the rise of the far right anti-Roma Jobbik party and their paramilitary wing the Magyar Garda. These extreme groups explicitly targeted the Hungarian Roma community and created an environment of increased ethnic tensions which led to a wave of more than fifty hate crimes against Roma in 2008 and 2009. I will discuss the ways in which Roma responses to these crimes began to unify the historically factious Hungarian Roma community and create common platforms where none previously existed.

I will conclude this thesis by arguing that while Romani nationalism is an infant phenomenon these recent international and technological changes are leading it to grow and develop in ways that were not previously possible.
CHAPTER TWO
THE AMBIGUITY OF ROMA IDENTITY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND & THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Roma nationalism is an ambiguous phenomenon primarily because Roma identity is in itself ambiguous. For the reader to appreciate the full significance of the emerging trends discussed in this thesis, it is essential to first understand the diversity of the Roma community and the extent of its exceptionalism. Roma nationalism is a controversial topic because scholars, policy makers and even Roma themselves often disagree about what exactly constitutes Roma identity. So who then are the Roma? Are they multiple national minorities? Are they a transnational non-territorial nation? Are they merely a collection of fragmented groups with no connection at all? Or are they merely a criminal fringe group, as the wider European community often perceives them? This chapter will discuss the tremendous diversity of the Roma community and argue that this heterogeneity has thus far hindered substantive Roma political mobilization. I will begin with an account of Roma history and the development of the group’s nationalist movement. I will then provide a brief review of the existing literature on Roma nationalism, suggesting that the intensity of disagreement between the different authors demonstrates both the ambiguity and contested nature of Roma nationalism. This debate provides the best frame for understanding the emerging Roma nationalist project.
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Before continuing with my discussion of Romani history it is important to first offer a brief note on terminology. “Roma” is the word for *man or husband* in most dialects of Romani language. (Note however, that non-Roma are described by a different word—*gadjie* which translates literally as “unclean.”) “Roma” is a name traditionally used by many Eastern European subgroups that was adopted at the 1971 First World Romani Congress as a replacement for the derogatory exonym “Gypsy.” Some consider the name problematic because as an umbrella term it includes a number of diverse groups—Roma as well as Sinti, Romanichal, Manoush, Kale, Ashkali, Romanisæl, Travellers, Gitanos and many others, some of whom identify more strongly with their particular subgroups. For the purposes of this thesis I will use the terms “Roma” and “Romani,” while acknowledging that there is some disagreement about both their linguistic correctness and appropriateness.

ROMA HISTORY

Roma history is often described as “mysterious” despite relatively concrete linguistic and genetic evidence that Romani groups originated in Northern India. Linguistic studies suggest that groups began migrating westward in several waves beginning in the 11th century (Hancock, 1998, 15). The major mystery surrounding Romani origins is not where Roma came from, but rather why they left.¹

¹ Roma historian Ian Hancock argues that Roma were originally an Indian military caste forced to migrate for political reasons. “If we look at the vocabulary of Romani, we find indications of a specifically military history. For example, the most common word for someone who is not Rom is gadjio, and this comes from an old Indian word ‘gajjhi,’ meaning ‘civilian.’” Hancock states that the Romani words for spear, sword and battle cry can all be clearly lined to 11th century Indian words (Hancock, 1998, 15). He claims that Roma came from “the Rajput population in northwestern India a millennium ago; the Rajputs themselves were composed of a number of different non-Aryan peoples
Most accounts of the Romani path through the Middle East and into Europe are speculative. Records suggest Roma entered Europe in the 14th century; the earliest groups are reported in Greece in 1322 and Serbia in 1348 (Hancock, 1998, 27). By 1500, Roma groups had spread across Europe, reaching the continent’s most western and northern points. Along their journey, Roma split into hundreds of groups and subgroups. Most retained elements of their Indian origins while also acquiring new linguistic and cultural traits – eventually developing a unique Romani identity, distinct from its Indian progenitors.

In Europe Roma were initially thought to be Egyptian religious exiles fleeing persecution. The English word “Gypsy” and its different regional versions: cigány, Tigani, Tisigane, Gitano, Zigeuner, Sığöynere, Cikáni and Çingene are all variations on an abbreviated form of “Egyptian.” Historical accounts suggest that early Roma groups were welcomed and admired for their abilities as musicians, soldiers, and metal workers (Crowe, 2007, 70). However, during the 16th century, as Europe fell under threat from the Ottomans, Roma were increasingly identified as “other” and often believed to be Turkish spies. This shift in popular opinion led to growing discrimination and restrictions, which encouraged many Roma to maintain an itinerate lifestyle.

out of whom the state created a military society consisting of several interrelated families” (Hancock, 1991, 252). The group also attracted a number of followers, mostly “entertainers, porters, cooks and so on, they moved out of India at the time of the incursions against the Ghaznavids about the year 1000 and continued to move westward” (Hancock, 1991, 252). This hypothesis is more fully explained in Hancock’s 2005 “We are the Romani People” pages 9-13.

5 Some Roma groups are thought to have broken off and been absorbed during journey across the Middle East. Today there is still a distinct group of Indian origin, called the Doms or Domari, living in Israel.

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Without protection from a home state, Roma—with their distinct appearance and traditions—were clear targets of persecution. Many European nations passed laws banning Romani entry and began efforts to deport settled Roma groups. Roma in Wallachia and Moldavia were enslaved until the mid-19th century and Austro-Hungarian rulers issued a series of aggressive assimilation and Christianization decrees (Crowe, 2007, xviii).

As discrimination and violence against Roma became increasingly prevalent, their “survival rested upon separating into small groups and living as unobtrusively as possible at the edges of gadje society” (Hancock, 1991, 252). Faced with violence and exclusion from the outside, Roma turned increasingly inwards, creating an enduring legacy of protective separatism and distrust for non-Roma institutions.

Violence against Roma continued during the 20th century when Roma were targeted for extermination in the Nazi genocide. Nazi racial scientists labeled Roma an “inferior alien race” and argued Romani blood was linked to criminality and asocial behavior (Frasier, 1992, 2 57-60). The Roma holocaust is often called the Porajmos meaning, “the devouring” in Romanes. “German authorities murdered tens of thousands of Roma in the German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union and Serbia and thousands more in the killing centers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka” (US Holocaust Museum, 2011). Roma were often separated into “Gypsy barracks” and forced to wear an inverted brown triangles. The number of Roma killed during the Holocaust remains uncertain. Scholars’ estimates range between 220,000 and a million. (Sigona and Trehan, 2009, 97) (USHM, 2011).
The former Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary are thought to have had the most casualties.

The communist period in Eastern Europe had an ambiguous effect on the region’s Roma. Communist governments were somewhat protective and supportive of their national minorities while at the same time discouraged group affiliations that hindered identification with the workers’ state. These governments were determined to assimilate Roma in order to harness their full labor potential and these efforts led to full Roma employment and stability. Steady incomes helped Roma integrate and gain access to education, and as the region transitioned to democracy a small, educated elite emerged to lead the attempted Roma political movement.

THE FAILURE OF ROMA MOBILIZATION

The transition to democracy created new potential for Roma political participation. The period saw a rapid expansion of ethnic activism and the proliferation of Roma parties and organizations. The conditions for mass Roma mobilization looked favorable. Other Eastern European minority groups like Albanian minority in Macedonia, Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia and Bulgaria’s Turks created successful unified political movements (Barany, 2002, 277). Roma parties, however, failed to attract voters or garner support proportionate to their demographic strength, leading to pervasive and continuing political underrepresentation. Additionally, during the 1990s, despite overall economic successes, conditions for most Roma actually deteriorated. There are a number of theories as to why Roma political mobilization failed. Poverty, illiteracy, the relative
youth of the Roma constituency, competition, and limited access to resources have all been identified as factors (Vermeersch, 2005, 120). In “The Romani Movement” Peter Vermeersch concludes that the failure to mobilize was largely due to fragmentation, disagreement about strategies, and “competition among actors for symbolic and material resources”(149).  

Aidan McGarry (2009) addresses the same question and argues that the Roma’s continued political underrepresentation is due in part to the absence of a strong and unified vision of Roma nationalism.

The failure of Romani parties leads to one of the major recurring problems in Roma politics –the pervasive lack of legitimate leadership. Without even moderate political participation, Roma have few representatives who are accountable to specific constituencies. As a result it is often unclear who has the authority to speak for Roma and what the demands and needs of the community even are.

ROMA DIVERSITY

What then is Roma identity? How do we define it? Roma, by all accounts, are a unique and varied group. Often in fact, Roma are so diverse that many experts argue that they should not be categorized as a group in the first place. Roma communities live spread across more than fifty countries. Their exceptionalism is rooted in the fact that unlike virtually all other groups, Roma lack the traditional foundations of communal identity. They do not share a common territory; they have no kin state or homeland. While Roma share common Indian origins, after hundreds of years this history was widely forgotten. Roma have never been united under a common

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6 Peter Vermeersch’s 2005 “The Romani Movement” provides an excellent account of the development and subsequent failure of Romani political mobilization in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
government. They do not share a common religion, language or even to some extent, a culture.

As Roma groups settled throughout Europe, they often adopted regional languages and religious practices. Roma are Orthodox Christian, Catholic, Muslim and increasingly Pentecostal Evangelists. They speak everything from Hungarian to Norwegian to Turkish and so on. Language is often seen as one of the key elements of group identity, however use of Romani language is steadily decreasing and the number of worldwide speakers is currently thought to be between two and four million. Many of the more assimilated groups, most notably the Spanish Gitanos, have stopped speaking Romanes altogether. Mirroring the Romani diversity, Romanes language branched into more than 60 often mutually incomprehensible dialects, the largest of which are Vlax Romani, Balkan Romani, Sinti Romani and Carpathian Romani (Romany Language: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011).

In addition to different territories, religions and languages, Roma culture, arts, and traditions are equally diverse. Many Romani communities maintain practices derived from Indian origins. Much of the traditional scholarship on Roma focused on tracing musical and dance traditions to India. Cohn (1993) and Barany (2002) identify certain Indian cultural practices – purity laws, ritual feasts, family structures, and bride

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7 Conversion to Pentecostal Evangelism is an interesting emerging trend in the Roma community. Evangelical churches have been seeking out Roma followers and several mass conversions have been documented in Romania, Hungary and Spain. See: Trevor Persaud, “Christianity Thrives Among ‘Gypsies Despite’ Prejudice” 2010, ChristianityToday.com and “Romania’s Evangelical Romanies” The Economist, Eastern Approaches Blog, January 17th 2011.

8 The loss of Roma languages is an important issue for Roma nationalism. Roma elites have been working encourage the use and standardization of Romani language. The deterioration of Roma vocabulary and the decline of Romanes speakers is also the subject of the upcoming documentary “The Flames of God.” Interestingly, the film’s trailer includes a scene in which the Roma national anthem is sung: (http://www.flamesofgod.com/trailer.html)
price—as being at the heart of Roma identity (Cohn, 1993,4). However these customs also vary by subgroup and degree of traditional orthodoxy. Contrary to Cohn’s argument, many self-identified Roma do not observe traditional purity rituals and bride price traditions.

COMPARISONS

Because of their remarkable diversity, Roma are entirely unique. The extent of their exceptionalism can be further illustrated through comparison with the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the Jewish Diaspora.

The Bulgarian Turks are a longstanding minority with a history of discrimination and attempted assimilation similar to that of the Roma. During the Communist period, the government placed restrictions on the use of Turkish language and required the adoption of Bulgarianized names (McGarry, 2009, 115). After the transition to democracy the Turkish population experienced conditions similar to Roma. While EU expansion made Sofia more interested in minority protection, the Bulgarian government maintained a lukewarm relationship with minority groups. President Boyko Borisov once “complained about the ‘human material’ of his country (i.e., too many gypsies, Turks and pensioners)” (Right on Down, 2009). Meanwhile a right-wing movement, led by the radical nationalist Ataka Party actively targeted the Turkish minority. However, Turkish political mobilization stands in

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9 The National Union Attack, more commonly called the Ataka Party, is an extreme Bulgarian nationalist organization similar to the Hungarian Jobbik (discussed in Chapter V). Ataka is virulently anti-Turkish and anti-Roma and has experienced a rapid increase in popularity, winning 9.4% of the vote in 2009 elections and 12% of the vote in the recent European parliament elections. (For more information see The Ataka Party’s official English website: http://www.ataka.bg/en/)
sharp contrast to Roma. Turkish Bulgarians successfully mobilized and gained representation proportional to their population. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) represented Turkish minority interests and eventually became the nation’s third largest political party.10

The MRF’s success was based on clear objectives effectively communicated to the voters. The party’s mobilization was strengthened by “the presence of a kin state, the territorial concentration of the minority, and clearly defined interests which are almost exclusively linked to the protection of culture” (McGarry, 2009, 107). These interests were mainly linguistic, educational, and religious provisions. In contrast, the Roma are not geographically concentrated, they have no common religion, and no kin state. Instead of advocating for specific language policies, Roma parties attempted to run on vague socio-economic platforms, which were not clearly formulated or articulated.

Perhaps the closest comparison to the Roma is the pre-1948 Jewish diaspora, a similarly dispersed diasporic group living throughout Europe. Like Roma, Jews were victims of violence and pervasive marginalization. The Jewish diaspora has similar linguistic and cultural diversity and varying degrees of orthodoxy. There are substantial differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic populations, however both strongly identify as Jewish. The major difference of course is that the Jewish diaspora was bound by a strong religious and cultural identity, a distinct language

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10 Since its creation in 1990, the MRF has gained a solid base of political support, catering not just to the Turks but also to Bulgaria’s other Muslim minorities. Turks, who make up 9.4% of the total Bulgarian population allied with other groups like the Pomak minority (roughly 3.5%) allowing the MRF to become Bulgaria’s third largest political party after the 2005 elections where they received 13.3% (McGarry, 2009, 115).
tradition (Yiddish and Hebrew) and clearly defined original homeland. While the Bulgarian Turks and the Jews “maintained identification with their homeland through their religion and traditions, the vast majority of Roma today have no idea where their ancestors came from” (Barany, 2002, 9).

WHAT IS ROMA IDENTITY?

As I have shown, Roma identity is both varied and contested. It would be negligent to present any paper on transnational Roma politics without first discussing the full complexity of Roma groups; however I believe that Romani difference is often overemphasized to the point of equal negligence. To write about Roma identity is inevitably to generalize (this perhaps accounts for much of the scholarly paralysis on Roma issues) but well-founded fear of generalization should not lead us to dismiss the similarities and linkages between Roma groups.

Acknowledging Roma complexity, for the purposes of this thesis I will take Ian Hancock’s definition of Roma “as a continuum of distinct ethnic groups constituting a larger whole” (Hancock, 1998, 18). I suggest that this continuum is linked through the vestiges of Romani language, Indian tradition and the generative legacies of marginalization.

Diverse Roma groups share a legacy of being defined by their external society as “Gypsies.” This imposed identity brought with it discrimination, a set of pervasive stereotypes and expected societal roles: fortuneteller, musician, thief etc. Roma often took on the roles they were expected to fill by the majority society. There is an
extensive “Gypsy Witch” industry\(^\text{11}\) and “Gypsy bands” are common at restaurants and weddings throughout Central Europe. Many Roma groups absorbed stereotypes and myths and incorporated them into their culture; to some degree, Roma identity has been shaped by the legacies of marginalization and stereotype.\(^\text{12}\)

Roma identity can also be understood through opposition to non-Roma identity. Hancock argues, “to understand what it means to be Gypsy, it is less productive to ask one what he is than to ask him what he is not.” Despite substantial group differences, Roma groups consistently identify themselves as separate and distinct from non-Roma. “The world is divided into Roma and gadje, and it is this above all else, which has ensured the perpetuation of Romani people” (Hancock, 1991, 252).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMA NATIONALISM

The Roma have long been a puzzling exception in studies of nationalism. Roma lack all the foundations of the traditional nation: common territory, religion, language, and culture yet still miraculously retain a deeply felt identity. Though still in the proto-national stages Roma nationalism is a burgeoning phenomenon.

The first ideas of Roma nationalism emerged in the late 19\(^\text{th}\) and early 20\(^\text{th}\) century, largely inspired by Jewish Zionism. “Roma looked to European Jews and

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\(^{11}\) There is a substantial and lucrative “Gypsy Witch” industry in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania. Television commercials advertising different witches became so frequent on Romanian television that the Romanian government recently banned all TV advertising of “occult practices.” Aljazeera English’s produced an informative 2007 report on this topic: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTJpaAlk9VQ)

\(^{12}\) Many Roma perpetuate myths of Egyptian origin and claim that Roma identity is defined by nomadism and criminality. Many adopt variations of the myth that during the crucifixion, a Roma man stole the fourth nail intended for Jesus’ heart and in gratitude God gave Roma across the world permission to steal.
Zionism as offering the most promising source on which to model their own political strategy” (Jenne, 2000, 206). During the 1920s and 30s, a number of Central Europe’s self-proclaimed “Gypsy kings” began to promote the idea of establishing a “Romanestan” – a territorial Romani homeland. Members of the Polish Kwiek “dynasty” were the most active in the search for Romanestan. In 1934, King Jozef Kwiek asked the League of Nations for the territory of present-day Namibia in which to create a Roma state. His rival, King Michal II Kwiek traveled to India to look for territory to create a Roma homeland in on the Ganges; later, he abandoned this search, deciding that a state should instead be set up in Uganda. Jozef’s heir, King Janusz Kwiek sent a request to Benito Mussolini, asking for Italian occupied Abyssinia (Rövid, 2005) (Jenne, 2000, 197). These dreams of a Romanestan were never realized as Janusz Kwiek and his family were killed during the WWII. It would take Roma elites years after the war to regroup and continue to advance the group’s nationalist claims. But the experience of the Holocaust made it clear for many elites and intellectuals that Roma, like the Jews, needed the protection of a more organized political authority.

THE FIRST WORLD ROMANI CONGRESS

The First World Romani Congress was one of the most pivotal events in the timeline of Romani nationalism. The Congress was held in 1971 in London; delegates from 23 countries, including India, attended although the meeting was

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13 The astonishing number of historical and contemporary “Gypsy Kings” speaks to the Roma’s ongoing issues with finding legitimate political leaders. This 2007 news report follows the conflict between a “Gypsy King” and a “Gypsy Emperor” both living in the same Romanian town (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2TBMeHyEMY).
primarily led by Western European activists. The Congress’s aims were to consolidate the Roma community politically, standardize Romani language and demand repatriations for the Roma victims of the Holocaust (Jenne, 2000, 198). The meeting took on a distinctly nationalist agenda but deviated from the earlier movements by abandoning any territorial aspirations. “The leading concept was based on the principle of amaro Romano drom or “our Romani way” and the phrase “our state is everywhere where there are Roma because Romanestan is in our hearts” (Rövid, 2005, 10). The Congress created an official Roma flag, national anthem, and decreed that the term “Roma” should be used to describe the transnational group.

The Roma flag created by the Congress was based on a blue and green crest used by a 1930s Romanian Roma organization. The congress added a sixteen-spoked red chakra, a reference to the Roma’s Indian origins is also thought to resemble a wheel, signifying the Roma’ migratory history.

![International Romani Flag](image)

*Gelem, Gelem* was also adopted as the official Roma national anthem. The anthem was based on a poem written by Yugoslav Roma poet Jarko Jovanovic after

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14 The legitimacy of the congress is frequently questioned, as most of the delegates were not elected or accountable to any constituency.

15 Spellings may vary: Dzelem Dzelem, Gyelem Gyelem, Dželem, Dželem etc. The anthem is also sometimes called “Romale Shavale” (Roma Brothers) or “Opré Roma” (Roma Arise).
the Roma holocaust and set to a traditional melody. The words go as follows:

“I went, I went on long roads, I even met happy Roma. Oh Roma where do you come from, with tents on happy roads? Oh Roma, Oh Brothers. I had a great family; but the Black Legion murdered them. Come with me Roma from all the world, for the roads of the Roma have opened. Now is the time, rise up Roma now, we will rise high if we act. Oh Roma, Oh Brothers.”

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the congress created the term “Roma” to describe the diversity of transnational groups. The creation of the term was generative; in creating a name for the group the congress also created the space for its future development. The term was intended to be an empowering an endonym, a name that Roma gave themselves, rather than the “gypsy” exonym. While the First Congress established the basic trappings of nationalism, these symbols were not effectively communicated to the Roma community and remained obscure into the 1990s.

The Second World Romani Congress was held in Geneva in 1978 and established the International Romani Union (IRU). The IRU was conceived of as the representative body of the Romani nation, intended to speak for the transnational Roma and protect their rights and cultures. The IRU has been a major advocate of the Roma nation and has issued series of articles and statements advocating Roma representation as a stateless nation with in the European Union and other Intergovernmental organizations. The IRU has created a parliament and court and presented itself as a Roma political entity at the international level, however it maintains NGO status and has failed to garner a wide base of support in the Roma community. Critics argue that IRU members are not elected by any Roma

16 “Gelem, Gelem” performed by The Roma Gandhi School Choir in Pécs Hungary [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9webTBSuRz8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9webTBSuRz8) and at the Second European Roma Summit in Cordoba, Spain by Paco Suarez [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTf6VyKVabs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTf6VyKVabs).
constituency and thus the organization lacks both accountability and legitimacy
(Sigona & Trehan, 2009, 99).

DECLARATION OF NATION

While the First Congress advanced the Romani nationalist project, the official Roma Declaration of Nation was not issued until Fifth World Romani Congress held in Prague in July 2000. The document calls for official recognition of the Roma non-territorial nation while continuing to dismiss claims to territory. The Declaration begins:

“Individuals belonging to the Roma Nation call for a representation of their Nation, which does not want to become a State. We ask for being recognized as a Nation… We, a Nation of which over half a million persons were exterminated in a forgotten Holocaust, a Nation of individuals too often discriminated, marginalized, victim of intolerance and persecution, we have a dream, and we are engaged in fulfilling it. We are a Nation, we share the same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation. We have never aimed for creating a Roma State. And we do not want a State today”(Declaration of Roma Nation, 2001)

The document outlines the primary aim of securing representation on the international level to assist in the fight for Roma rights. In addition to asserting nationalist claims, the document suggests that the Romani stateless nation offers a precedent for a new, more globally oriented international order and can “be read as a rejection of the basic unit of the international system: effective control of territory”(Goodwin, 2004).

At the seventh Congress in 2009, delegates released “The Roma Nation Building Action Plan” which outlined plans for the development of Romani nationalism and representation between 2009 and 2019.17

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of Roma nationalism has sparked fierce disagreement among scholars. Recent literature on the topic has debated everything from when and where the movement originated, to whether or not it is positive or negative development, to whether Roma nationalism exists at all.

Many Roma scholars view Roma nationalism as a curious emerging phenomenon and are not entirely sure what to make of it. In Between Past & Future: Roma in Central & Eastern Europe Will Guy says that Roma nationalism, “as twentieth century phenomenon, is the most recent development trend in the Roma community.” Guy notes that while the future of the Roma nationalist project remains uncertain, it appears to be led by members of the emerging “Gypsy Industry,” or the International Roma elite, and focuses primarily on the standardization of language and circulation of the term “Roma” (Guy, 2001, 49). “It is impossible to predict what might be the outcome of this embryonic global nationalism but there is no doubt that its relative overall importance will continue to grow in the foreseeable future” (Guy, 2001, 49).

Ian Hancock is one of the primary advocates of Roma nationalism. His foundational article, “The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism,” argues that the nationalist movement has clear roots in the 1930s quest for a Romanestan and has developed into a contemporary concept of Jekhipe, the Romanes word for “oneness,” within the current Roma community (Hancock, 1991, 266).
Most scholars tentatively observe Roma nationalism from a distance, pointing out its elite driven and slightly disorganized character while identifying it as a possible frame of political mobilization (Vermeersch, 2005). Others, like Rövid (2009), discuss the prospect of Roma representation as a stateless nation with interest, but question “how realistic is it to use the concept of a community (let alone ‘nation’) for a group of people whose mother tongues are not only various dialects of Romanes but also Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Romanian, Hungarian, Spanish and others” (Rövid, 2009, 13).

Other scholars sharply dismiss Roma nationalism as the fabrication of a small self-interested elite, arguing that the movement has no legitimacy because it has no base in or connection with local Roma groups. Writing on the Spanish Gitano community, Paloma Gay y Blasco argues, “for five-hundred years, the Gypsy Diaspora has been characterized by its extreme political and structural fragmentation, and by the weakness of any overarching Gypsy imagined community.” She goes on to claim that most Spanish Gitano individuals lack any frame of external reference outside their own community (Gay y Blasco, 2002, 184).

Werner Cohn more dramatically contests the concept of Roma nationalism. Cohen’s 1993 article “The Myth of Gypsy Nationalism” was written in response to Hancock’s “The Eastern European Roots of Romani Nationalism” and aggressively refutes Hancock’s account, claiming instead that Roma nationalism is overwhelmingly confined to “a few individuals who have no meaningful contact with actual gypsies”(Cohn, 1993, 2). Romani nationalism, he argues, is just another installment in the long held tradition of misinformation about the Roma community.
Cohn challenges the reader to prove him right by “finding the nearest fortune teller” and ask her what Jekhipe is, what the Roma flag looks like, and what happened at the World Romani Congresses. “Can any of your Rom consultants, even under offer of reward, give reasonable details of these alleged happenings? Can any of them produce the names of even a single one of the alleged Gypsy leaders listed by Hancock?” (Cohn, 1993, 8). Cohn wagers that the Roma nationalism is confined solely to the elite and will be seen as humorous by local Roma communities.

Others suggest that Roma nationalism is “regressive” and potentially deleterious. In “The Politics of Roma Identity: Between Nationalism and Destitution” Martin Kovats argues that “Roma is simply the political replacement for ‘Gypsy’ which covers a huge number of diverse communities with different political needs, aspirations and interests” (Kovats, 2003, 4). “Roma” flattens and generalizes, and in doing so dismisses different groups’ individuality. Kovats says Roma politics, in its early stages, is prone to being “manipulated by established interests” (3). Most of post-transition Roma organizations and political parties have no real connection with the Roma people. “Roma nationalism is not a product of, but predates the emergence of grass roots Roma politics…as a statement of fact the nationalist claim is then the most amazing nonsense” that has been constructed “to secure the interests of an unaccountable elite” (Kovats, 2003, 4).

While these authors raise many valid points about the character of Roma nationalism, I suggest that these arguments are somewhat out of date and often emphasize the wrong issues. Roma nationalism is only beginning to develop. Mirga

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18 It is unclear whether Cohn himself or anyone else actually carried out this exercise; still the authors point is well taken.
& Gheorghe (1997), Cohen (1993), Jenne (2000), and Kovats (2003) criticize the lack of grassroots participation in the emergence of Romani nationalism and question its legitimacy as an elite construction. This seems an incorrect way of approaching the issue since it is common for new nationalist movements to be dominated by small groups of intellectuals during their early stages. The suggestion that Roma nationalism is illegitimate because it is elite-generated seems to be drawn from a primordial conception of the nation as inherent and naturally occurring. Germany and Italy are not viewed as illegitimate nation states because they were forged by elites; the difference with Roma nationalism (aside from territory) is that elites are currently in the process of nation building. Common identity is created, not inherent, especially for a group as diverse as the Roma.

Aidan McGarry’s 2009 article “Ambiguous Nationalism? Explaining the Parliamentary Under-Representation of Roma in Hungary and Romania” provides the most nuanced approach to the nationalism debate. McGarry suggests that the Roma’s poor showing in post-transition political mobilization is largely the product of the failure to devise a clear vision of Roma nationalism. McGarry describes Roma nationalism as “ambiguous” because it is vague in terms of both its demands and platform. Unlike the Turkish minority in Bulgaria or the Hungarian minority in Romania, Roma elites have failed to develop a solid nationalist platform and have failed to effectively communicate with the Roma community. Scattered local Roma groups thus have had “no clear understanding of what Roma nationalism actually is, never mind that it exists in the first place” (McGarry, 2009, 110).

19 McGarry’s point appears to be illustrated by the vague and almost polemical nature of the 2009 Nation Building Action Plan, however this may also be an issue of poor translation.
CONCLUSION

The dispute between authors like Hancock, Cohn, and Kovats can help us to understand the ambiguous character of Roma nationalism in its current early stage. Roma have a flag, an anthem, and a national name, however they are not widely recognized. Roma have a declaration of nationhood, but their principles and demands are unclear and have yet to be communicated effectively to the Romani public. Roma nationalism remains vague because Roma identity itself is vague and –like all national identities– very much in flux.

In the coming chapters I will argue that the primary project of current Roma nationalism is to construct, standardize, and define what it means to be Roma, and in doing so, unite dispersed Romani groups both politically and culturally. With the rise of new media and support from IGOs, Roma elites have new tools to advance their nationalist project. The next chapters will discuss the ways in which Roma elites are using new mechanisms to construct a unified positive vision of Roma identity, while growing threats from the extreme transnational right push Roma together on the international, national, and local levels. These interrelated trends encourage the imagining of a more coherent nationalism.
CHAPTER THREE
EUROPEAN ENLARGEMENT & ITS CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION

The fall of communism and rise of the European Union have transformed the international political landscape and with it, the character of Romani nationalism. The number of Roma living inside EU borders more than doubled after the 2004 and 2007 expansions. The majority of the world’s Roma are now EU citizens, and as such, guaranteed basic rights and freedoms under European law. However, despite EU ideals and rhetoric, the political, economic, and social exclusion of Roma remains widespread.

This chapter will explore the effects of Roma on EU politics and the effect of EU politics on Roma. I will frame my arguments by first examining the gradual development of European Roma discourse and policy. After commenting on the effectiveness of these programs, I will note that Roma expose deep and unresolved EU problems related to immigration and inconsistency. As evidenced by recent events in Italy and France, Roma issues can spark major EU conflict and Brussels is thus eager to integrate European Roma. I argue that in attempting to promote Roma inclusion, the EU has fostered increased Roma unity and group identification. This chapter will establish that the Union has bolstered the Romani elite and legitimated the term “Roma” at the international, national, and local levels while also providing new possibilities for Roma representation. European integration has established a
new set of conditions—namely an empowered Roma elite and a growing anti-Roma threat—that have become key elements in the recent development of Roma nationalism. I will explore both of these trends more fully in the coming chapters. First however, this chapter will describe the multifaceted effect of the Union on Roma politics and demonstrate that the process of European integration has legitimated, circulated, and directed Romani nationalism.

THE EU & ROMA POLICY

The EU is a new type of political entity, a supranational union that provides a new model of governance and authority in the international state system. Under the motto “United in Diversity,” the EU promotes a common European identity based on equality and rights, which aims to transcend national affiliations. Now comprised of 27 member states, the EU originated with the European Coal & Steel Community, a six state pact formed in 1951 by the Treaty of Paris. After the devastation of two successive world wars, it was hoped that uniting European states (particularly France and Germany) in a close economic relationship would produce stability and make future conflict “materially impossible” (Kesselman & Krieger, 2009, 479). The gradual development and expansion of the European alliance assisted the recovery process and brought with it new ideas about sovereignty and the nation state. The fall of the Iron Curtain had tremendous implications for the EU, which chose to fully integrate Europe by extending membership to the eastern nations.

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20 The agreement was proposed by France’s Foreign Minister Robert Schuman who stated that the ECSC would make “war not only unthinkable but materially impossible.”
Gypsies, Travellers, nomads and itinerant peoples emerged as a topic of occasional debate in the European Parliament beginning in the 1970s. As Brussels contemplated eastern expansion in the 1990s, these groups became increasingly significant. During the transition period conditions for Eastern European Roma rapidly deteriorated. Without the communist guarantees of full employment, Roma were generally among the first to lose jobs. Bleak portraits of Roma poverty sparked increased media interest and a proliferation of EU branches dealing with Romani inclusion. During the early 1990s, the Union adopted the term “Roma” and increasingly characterized the group as an “European minority” and issue of serious concern with eastern expansion (Simhandl, 2004, 11).

There was some uncertainty about how best to integrate with the East. Brussels eventually devised an admission policy which required applicant states to fulfill a certain set of pre-requisites before obtaining membership. The Copenhagen Criteria were established in 1993 and stipulates that applicants must achieve

“stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union” (European Council, 1993, 12: Quoted in Spirova and Budd 2008).

The provisions for minority rights presented a major problem for many applicants and the Criteria led to an increase in Roma-friendly policy across Eastern Europe.

The single largest Union expansion took place in 2004. Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia –in total ten countries with more than 100 million citizens were
admitted. Three years later in 2007 Romanian and Bulgaria were also given EU membership. With these expansions the number of Roma in the EU more than doubled. Despite the provisions of the Copenhagen Criteria, Roma exclusion continued in all member states, both eastern and western. The persistence of a marginalized trans-European ethno class became a source of continued embarrassment and chaffed at the EU’s core democratic ideals. Brussels began to more actively promote Roma rights, producing more reports, resolutions, recommendations, and rhetoric. Roma increasingly appeared in EU discourse as “a true European minority,” a “special minority with transnational character” (Rövid, 2009, 11).

In 2007, the European Council called on member states “to use all means to improve Roma inclusion” (quoted in Sigona and Trehan, 2009, 42). The European
Commission stated “European institutions and member states have a joint responsibility to improve the social inclusion of Roma by using all the instruments and policies for which they have the respective competence” (European Commission: Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion website).

SUMMITS & FUNDING

The EU backed its rhetoric with increased funding for Roma inclusion programs. The European Commission established biannual Roma Summits intended to bring European institutions, Roma activists and national governments together to effectively coordinate Roma strategy. European Commission President Barroso expressed his hope that the meetings would push “the problems of the Roma higher on the agenda” (EC: RS, 2011). The first Roma Summit took place in 2008, the second in 2010. The meetings developed a ten-point platform for addressing the Roma inclusion process.

Additionally, EU provided increased funding to Roma projects. Brussels partnered with NGOs like the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) and international projects like the Decade of Roma Inclusion (DORI), a 2005 initiative launched by IGOs, NGOs and twelve governments aimed at improving status of Roma in the four priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing (DOI Website, 2011).  

21 The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 –2015) is a coordinated initiative to improve the conditions of Roma. Twelve nations –Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain- are participating. The DORI is funded by numerous International partners including the World Bank, OSI, UNDP, The Council of Europe, OSCE and in cooperation with numerous Roma NGOs.
Many other EU organs provide funding to Roma programs and organizations. Euroma, “the European Network on Social Inclusion & Roma Under the Structural Funds” uses the European structural funds to improve Roma targeted initiatives and policies. The European Social Fund (ESF) invests in projects and NGOs that work to provide education and skills for Roma. The European Regional Development Fund supports projects for economic development and the PROGRESS Program funds NGOs and awareness campaigns and encourages NGO networking. Numerous other programs fund Roma targeted projects across Europe. 22 (European Commission ESAI: Funding & Projects website, 2011).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EU ROMA POLICY

Much of the recent scholarship on Roma has focused on how effective these inclusion policies, from the Copenhagen Criteria to the DORI, have in fact been. Looking at Eastern Europe after expansion, Spirova and Budd suggest “the EU accession process seems to have narrowed the gap between Roma and the majority in several areas, while not achieving the expected result in a few others.” and as of yet the results remain largely inconclusive (Spirova and Budd, 2008).

Others are more critical. Looking at pre-accession Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, Peter Vermeersch (2003) notes some correlation between Copenhagen pressures and changes in minority policy, but ultimately argues that pending integration has had only minor effects on the status of Roma. He suggests

22 There are many other EU programs which create Roma targeted policies; for example, the Culture Programme (2007 – 2013), Life Long Learning Programme, Public Health Programme (2008-2013), Youth in Action Program, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, (European Commission ESAI: Funding & Projects website, 2011).
that many Copenhagen-focused policy changes were half-hearted and largely motivated by the need to keep up appearances. McGarry (2010) argues that EU policies are “based on unstable foundations” and have yielded no substantive improvements for the majority of Roma (McGarry, 2010, 4) while Sigona and Trehan argue that the EU’s approach to Roma has been “undeniably fumbling” (Sigona and Trehan, 2009, 25).

Roma elites are similarly critical. At the December 2008 EU Strategy Meeting Roma in Brussels the two Roma MEPs, Livia Járóka and Viktória Mohácsi, voiced strong criticism of European progress. Járóka argued that the process of Roma inclusion had “ground to a halt …although member states have indicated in the plans submitted to the EU their intentions to integrate the Roma within their borders, their nationally adopted budgets and the results to date do not support these declarations” (EU Roma Debate, 2008, 3). She was followed by Mohácsi, who sharply criticized the EU’s claims of progress saying, “honestly, I am eerily reminded of the propaganda statements of Eastern European socialist dictatorships. As in those days, so today we hear of nothing but success, development and other positive messages, while in reality the Roma are still living in camps and ghettos, are daily confronted by humiliation, discrimination and in the worst case racist attacks.” (EU Strategy on Roma Debate, 2008, 4). Despite EU programs and rhetoric, Roma continue to live far below European standards of income and access to healthcare, housing and employment.

23 Livia Járóka and Viktória Mohácsi are Roma members of the European Parliament, both from Hungary. Mohácsi lost her seat after the 2009 elections, leaving Járóka as the sole Roma in the European Parliament. (A parliamentary group of 22 would more accurately reflect the Roma population.) Livia Járóka was elected on the center right Fidez party list. (Dowling, 2010, 2)
INCONSISTENCIES & TENSIONS

There are a number of reasons why the EU is eager to promote greater Roma inclusion. The situation of European Roma is not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a consistent source of embarrassment for Brussels. As The Economist noted, “Europeans would be swift to condemn the plight of Roma were they in any other part of the world” (Hard Traveling, 2010). The European Charter of Fundamental Rights grants certain immutable rights to all citizens, but in the face of flagrant abuses of Roma rights the EU has consistently failed to take substantive legal action.

Article 20 of the Charter for Fundamental Rights protects “human dignity” by stipulating “everyone is equal before the law,” while Article 21 prohibits discrimination “based on any ground such as race, sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features…(etc)” (Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2000, 13). Article 45 states that “every citizen of the Union has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States”(CFR, 2000, 19). In the next section I will examine two recent cases in which established western European member states flagrantly abused the fundamental rights of Roma citizens while Brussels took no unified or substantive legal action. These cases expose the inconsistencies of EU Roma policy and demonstrate the ways Roma have emerged as an explosive issue for the union, bringing to the surface unresolved problems with immigration.

2008 ITALIAN FINGERPRINTING
An estimated 150,000 Roma live in Italy; this community is primarily comprised of Italian Sinti Roma, undocumented Roma refugees from the former Yugoslavia and an increasing number of migrants from new EU accession states. In 2007, The Berlusconi government declared a “national emergency” claiming that crime caused by “irregular third-country citizens and nomads” was out of control and needed to be stopped (Goldston, 2010). Italian authorities set into motion a series of “security” programs, which specifically targeted and disproportionately effected the country’s Roma population. These policies were accompanied by blatantly racist rhetoric from government officials and the largely Berlusconi owned media. Newspapers ran sensational stories about Roma violent crime and alleged cases of child stealing which sparked popular outrage. In a 2008 campaign speech, the Mayor of Rome called Roma unwanted “scum” (Lashi Vita, 2008). In May, after a group of radical nationalists attacked a Roma camp outside Naples with Molotov cocktails, Roberto Maroni, the Interior Minister stated “that is what happens when gypsies steal babies, or when Roma commit sexual violence” (Goldston, 2010).

Later that month, the Ministry of the Interior announced it would carry out a “census” to collect data and fingerprints from all Roma in Italy, regardless of age and nationality. Fingerprinting Roma, the government claimed, would cut crime and reduce prostitution and begging (Amnesty International Roma Report, April 2009). The campaign sparked a wave of domestic and international criticism. Various NGOs, UNICEF, and the European Parliament condemned the program as an act of

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24 Mayor Gianni Alemanno’s full quote, March 8, 2008: “Rome is full of scum! Are they nomads or not? Why don’t they just take their scum and go away? They won’t stay here for 20 years because we want them out!” Mundi Romani’s 2008 episode Lashi Vita which details the fingerprinting and overall situation of Italian Roma.
blatant and targeted racial discrimination. The European Parliament adopted a resolution, which called on the Berlusconi government “to refrain from collecting the fingerprints from Roma, including minors, as this would clearly constitute an act of discrimination based on race and ethnic origin” (Italy Rebuke on Roma Finger Prints, 2008). But no action was taken after the EU commission ruled the selective fingerprinting of Italian Roma had been within EU law (Owen, 2008, 1).

2010 FRENCH EXPULSIONS

A similarly heated situation emerged in France during the summer of 2010 which brought Roma to the forefront of European debate. Suffering from diminishing popularity, French President Nicolas Sarkozy attempted to rally popular support by beginning to deport Roma migrants from Romania and Bulgaria. The initiative led to the demolition of more than 100 Roma camps and the deportation of more than 1000 Roma immigrants to Romania and Bulgaria over a period of several months (Saltmarsh, 2010).

Scandal erupted after leaked documents showing that the French Interior minister ordered the French police to target Roma surfaced (Samuel, 2010). The expulsions became a topic of heated European debate, and were criticized by the UN, the Vatican, scholars, NGOs and members of the EU, who claimed that the expulsions constituted explicit targeting of a specific ethnic group and violated the EU directive of free movement. The issue came to a head in September of 2010 when Viviane Reding, the European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights &
Citizenship called the French actions “disgraceful” and “shocking,” claiming that she was:

“Appalled by a situation which gave the impression that people are being removed from a Member State of the European Union just because they belong to a certain ethnic minority. This is a situation I had thought Europe would not have to witness again after the Second World War” (Quoted by Lungescu, 2010).

The French government took offense, calling the comment “inappropriate” and “scandalous” and the debate devolved as President Sarkozy responded by suggesting that Roma should settle in Luxemburg, Reding’s home state. The disagreement continued, as other leaders entered the fray and EU meetings “degenerated into open disorder over how to handle unwanted migrants” (Daley, 2010). Roma groups in France and abroad began to protest the expulsions. The Commission took the preliminary steps for bringing legal action against France, but suspended them at the last minute in October, saying that Paris had effectively revised the problems with the law. The case’s quick suspension became yet another example of the Union’s unresolved tensions and legal impotency.

Migrant Roma at 2010 protest in France. Photo by Eric Roset.

Boyko Borisov the Prime Minister of Bulgarian described the incident as “big argument — I could also say a scandal — between the president of the European Commission and the French president,” said, (Quoted by Daley, 2010).
DISAGreements AS A MAJOR EUROPEAN PROBLEM

These incidents demonstrate that the EU has yet to resolve both the situation of Roma and issues regarding immigration. “Over the decades, questions of migration and immigration have become more and more politicized in Europe and the EU” (Risse, 2010, 220). As globalization spreads, immigration to Europe has become an increasingly prevalent trend; this influx of migrants has sparked increasing anti-immigrant sentiment. Many support the establishment of a “fortress Europe” with borders closed to the outside (Risse, 2010, 221). Roma of course, are still widely imagined as a group outside the European community, so Roma migration becomes a controversial issue.

Roma bring Article 45 and foundational European values of equality and citizenship into tension while also demonstrating major inconsistencies in the standards of minority protection for new and old member states. As Spirova and Budd (2008) observe, “some older member states have a long way to go to satisfy the criteria imposed on the candidate states.” While new Eastern applicants must prove their commitment to minority rights, influential Western members like France and Italy flout Articles 21 and 45 with no substantive EU penalty. The Italian fingerprinting and particularly the French expulsions were public relations disasters, which made the EU look inconsistent and impotent in the face of disagreement with prominent member states. These incidents speak to unresolved tensions between the autonomy and sovereignty of member states and the authority supranational of European law.
I suggest that Brussels is eager to resolve Roma issues because serious disagreements have the potential to fray the fabric of European unity. Previous conflicts between major member states have crippled and incapacitated the EU. Examples include the 1965 “Crisis of the Empty Chair”\(^{26}\) and inaction during the breakup of Yugoslavia when the EU was unable to mount a cohesive response to ethnic cleansing because France sided with the Serbs and Germany with the Croats (Kesselman & Krieger, 2009, 488).

Major disagreements, especially ones involving prominent western members are dangerous for the EU. Immigration and what to do with the Roma are interwoven issues that the EU has failed to resolve. Roma are thus an European issue that Brussels is keen to solve.

Thus far, I have reviewed the history of Roma as a EU issue, describing the development of EU discourse on Roma, Romani policies, the implications of Roma issues for the EU. I have established that Roma represent a major tension within the EU, and the unresolved issues of Roma inclusion and immigration expose the EU’s impotence. I will now shift my focus and discuss the effect of this developing EU discourse on the development of Roma nationalism.

EFFECT OF THE EU ON ROMA

In this section I will demonstrate that in attempting to bring about Roma

\(^{26}\) The “Crisis of the Empty Chair” occurred in 1965 during negotiations for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). France objected to proposals to make decisions by qualified majority rather than unanimity. After intense disagreement, Charles De Gaulle withdrew the French delegate for seven months; the crisis was not resolved until the 1966 Luxemburg compromise.
inclusion, the EU has established a set of conditions that encourage and strengthen Romani nationalism. I will begin by demonstrating that the European initiatives have been instrumental in the creation of Roma as a political category and then go on to argue that Union funds and recognition have bolstered and legitimated the primary drivers of the Romani nationalist project – the Roma intellectual and NGO elite.

EU CONSTRUCTION OF ROMA AS A POLITICAL CATEGORY

Perhaps more than anything else, by officially adopting the term “Roma” the EU created, circulated and legitimated “Roma” as a political category at the international, national and local levels. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Roma identity is ambiguous and contested because it lacks the conventional foundations of communal affiliation. Without a common territory, religion, language or historical narrative, Roma have not traditionally identified as members of a community beyond their regional or linguistic subgroup.

The term “Roma” was created at the 1971 World Romani Congress, however for more than twenty years it was not widely used or known outside the intellectual and activist elite. Katrin Simhandl (2004) suggests that by officially adopting “Roma” in the early 1990s, the EU effectively constructed “Roma” as a political category in popular discourse.

The significance of naming and language in identity formation should not be underestimated. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in *On Certainty* “to imagine language is to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1953). What is not named cannot be
thought and thus cannot be created. The act of naming is thus highly generative and the language used is never neutral. Foucault argued that discourse—or ways of speaking—create identities, behaviors and institutions. “A specific discourse does not operate in a void, it is part of the system of discourses that forms an overall societal discourse… A discourse shapes institutional structures and is at the same time shaped by them in a circular flow of perpetual exchange” (summarized in Simhandl, 2004, 2).

The act of naming works to bring groups into existence, and does so in a very “specific way” (Simhandl, 2004, 3). So to some degree creating a term creates a group, even if that group is not yet fully constructed. While the 1971 Congress deserves credit for creating “Roma,” the term’s adoption by the European Union was what made the Roma a legitimate political category in international discourse.

EU recognition also empowered the concept of Romani nationalism. “Roma” is an endonym, or a term that a group uses to describe itself. “Gypsy” could be said to describe the same category of groups, however “Gypsy” is an exonym, a name imposed on a group by external society. Romani elites created the endonym in “an attempt to break away from social stigma and produce more positive images of… a single ethnic group occurring in different countries” (Vermeersch, 2001, 3). The “Roma” label was conceived as an expression of both agency and nationalism and by recognizing this self-given name rather than the externally given one, the EU also recognized Romani agency and nationalism.

By establishing “Roma” as official and politically correct, the EU spread and legitimated the name on the international, national, and local levels. Other IGOs, governments, and the international media began to use “Roma,” strengthening the
term’s place in international discourse.

As I have explained in Chapter Two, scholars have debated the linguistic correctness and applicability of “Roma,” arguing that the name lumps and homogenizes a diverse array of groups. Official European recognition, however, has encouraged increased use among the diverse array of emerging Romani parties and organizations. Associations that may have previously identified by “Gypsy” or subgroup are increasingly adopting Romani and Roma. Scholarship has also mirrored this trend.

Finally, the EU has helped to encourage identification as “Roma” on the local level. Critics of Romani nationalism like Werner Cohn argued that most Roma individuals are either unaware of or do not identify with the Roma category. But in standardizing the use of “Roma” as a term and perusing widespread inclusion initiatives, the EU has done more to spread and encourage Roma identification at the grassroots than the Romani Congresses ever could have imagined.

Brussels funds a plethora of programs aimed at providing rural Roma communities with basic amenities. In giving aid to small, impoverished, and often poorly connected communities, the EU distributes the concept of Roma as a group and the term Roma at the local level. For example, the European Social Fund supports many small scale “Roma Offices,” in Greece, including the Movri Roma Office in a predominantly Roma village outside Patras. The office provides basic healthcare and social work services for the community (European Social Funds in Action website video, 2010). In providing these services, the Office is also bringing the term “Roma” to a small and disconnected Roma village that may not have previously been
aware of its placement within the “Roma” category. To benefit from the services provided at the “Roma Office” members of the community must on some level identify themselves as Roma. The “Roma Offices” and similar EU projects thus introduce the concept of “Roma” to small communities and often reinforce the idea of Roma as a larger political group by providing information about Roma rights on the European level and displaying symbols like the Roma flag.²⁷

In conclusion, the adoption of the term “Roma” by the EU and other IGOs has advanced the Romani nationalist project by creating and legitimating Roma as both a group and a political category while spreading the designation on international, national, and local levels. By establishing “Roma” as the accepted term at all levels of discourse, the EU has created the space for the continued construction of the Romani group.

EU LEGITIMATION OF THE ROMANI ELITE

The EU has advanced the Roma nationalist project by strengthening and legitimating the Romani elite. It has done so in two primary ways: first, Brussels has bolstered the Roma elite financially. Through its various Roma inclusion programs, the EU has provided substantial funding to Romani organizations throughout Europe, while the Copenhagen Criteria has spurred many Eastern European governments to

²⁷ It should be noted that while directed at Roma, most of these programs are not exclusively for Roma. The 10 Common Principles on Roma Inclusion, developed by the European Roma Platform stipulate the “explicit but not exclusive targeting” of Roma (EC:ESAI, Roma Platform). So from a legal standpoint, these programs cannot be provided exclusively for Roma, however providing service to the Roma community is their clear political aim.
increase funding of Romani organizations. This financial support has helped to strengthen and expand the capabilities of the Roma NGO elites allowing them to peruse more projects and programs.

Second, EU recognition has helped to make Roma elites internationally legitimate. The lack of valid Roma political leaders is an ongoing problem for the Roma community. Without a strong elected leadership, it is difficult for Roma to express needs and lobby international organizations. Brussels frequently invited Roma NGO elites to participate in the European Roma Summits and advise EU organs on Roma policy. Peter Vermeersch suggests that the “actions of IGOs and NGOs in this field were mutually reinforcing.” Activists assisted with EU human rights monitoring while the EU gave NGO elites “an international profile” (Vermeersch, 2005, 212). This newly empowered Roma elite has begun to use both EU funding and new media technology to create new kinds of Roma advocacy that I will argue take on distinctly nationalist tones in the next chapter.

EU AS A SOURCE OF POTENTIAL REPRESENTATION

Thus far, I have established that the EU has encouraged Romani nationalism by creating and legitimating Roma as a unified political category and strengthening the Romani elite. I will now discuss the ways in which the EU creates new possibilities for Roma representation and offers a palpable goal for the Roma nationalist project. Roma activists, led by the International Romani Union, have increasingly begun to advocate for the representation of Roma as a stateless nation within the European Union. They argue that the best way for Roma to secure rights,
recognition, and substantive inclusion is through creation of a legitimate transnational Romani government with full representation in various intergovernmental organizations.

Demographers estimate that there are between 12 and 15 million Roma in Europe, a combined population larger than many European states and comparable to mid-sized European nations like Portugal or Sweden. The IRU and its group of affiliated intellectuals argue that Roma are,

“The first Europeans to be only Europeans” and thus ideally suited for European citizenship. “While a French individual is French by nationality and citizenship, a Romani individual living anywhere in Europe is Romani by nationality and Spanish, Hungarian, Italian or whatever else, by citizenship. The citizenship that would better fit a Roma is the European one.” They suggest that “full European citizenship…[is] best not only for the Roma, but for all European citizens” (Pietrosanti, 2004)

Paolo Pietrosanti, the IRU’s former Commissioner of Foreign Affairs explained the argument in his 2004 article “The Romani Nation: Ich Bin Ein Zigeuner” which was circulated by NGOs like the ERRC and various other Roma information sharing websites sites. Pietrosanti argues that existing Roma inclusion policies have clearly failed as Roma throughout Europe continue to face active exclusion. He suggests these problems cannot be solved until Roma have proper representation. He dismisses the common practice of Roma NGOs speaking for the Roma community by arguing,

28 Paolo Pietrosanti was an Italian activist and leading advocate for Roma representation at the European level. He died in January of 2011 at the age of 50 after suffering from complications related to a brain tumor. In addition to serving as the IRU’s Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Pietrosanti was an leader in the Transnational Radical Party and an active opponent of capital punishment.
“No non-Romani Europeans would entrust their voice or their interests to bodies that they have not been able to choose directly through an electoral procedure based on universal suffrage. No non-Romani Europeans would agree to be represented by a coalition or committee of existing NGOs or associations” (Pietrosanti, 2004).

Pietrosanti says that Roma inclusion can only come about when Roma have a strong and legitimate voice to speak for the Romani nation. He demands universal suffrage of Roma and “organs representing Roma, starting at the European level” while also laying out the idea of a Roma legislature, a EU Roma Commissioner, and Roma quotas in the European parliament. Pietrosanti suggests that a true Roma stateless nation would change the face of Roma politics and make it so that no Roma citizen would ever be “afraid or ashamed of being Roma” (Pietrosanti, 2004).

Roma scholars watch the development of these claims with interest. Rövid (2009) suggests that the claim is strategic, “by raising the ethnic status of Roma from minority to nation, with its own parliament the IRU aims to increase its power of leverage with both national governments and international bodies. The hope is that this strategy will lead to increased funding to improve the material conditions of Roma, thus strengthening their social identity”(Rövid, 2009,15). The claim is also interesting in that it challenges the Westphalian nation-state system and contemporary international political order. In Ich Bin Ein Zigeuner, Pietrosanti consistently repeats the following paragraph:

“Do we still need to point out that nation does not necessarily mean state? Do we still need to point out that politics has a duty to make clear and give concrete form to the profound difference between the juridical concepts of “state” and “nation?” Shall we repeat that it is precisely the tendency to make these concepts converge that has brought about the worst massacres, genocides and acts of cruelty in European and world history?” (Pietrosanti, 2004)
Pietrosanti firmly asserts that this is the best political path not just for Roma, but also for Europe as a whole. He calls statehood an “anachronism” and argues, “The whole of Europe can and must benefit from an intelligent policy that concerns a whole European people.” These ideas, while seemingly radical, are in keeping with EU descriptions of Roma as a “true European minority” and consistent with core European values of transcending territorial sovereignty and embracing of European identity. The European Union represents a new vision of international organization and citizenship, a vision that the transnational Romani community may be ideally suited to. Additionally, the creation of unified and legitimate Romani political entity might make Roma more manageable for Brussels. While Roma representation as a stateless nation within the EU is unlikely to occur anytime in the near future, the prospect gives the Romani nationalist project direction and a set of clear aspirations.

THE EU & THE RISE OF THE RIGHT

The core values of the European Union create new potential and opportunities for Roma representation that have helped direct the Romani nationalist project. I will now suggest that the establishment of these common values through European integration has also contributed to the development of a transnational and virulently anti-Roma far right, which has had serious implications for the development of Roma nationalism.

Extreme right wing activity in Europe is of course not a new phenomenon and the recent growth of far right parties is the product of many factors and cannot be
attributed solely to European expansion. The development of what Montserrat
Guibernau (2010) calls the “new right” is the result of the large scale changes in the
European political and economic system and sparked by the 2007-2008 economic
crisis, increased immigration, and the perceived threat to national identities posed by
European integration.

Many scholars are concerned that Europe as a whole may be moving right.
Looking at the uproar caused by the Sarkozy’s Roma scandal, Slovenian intellectual
Slavoj Zizek suggests that the French expulsions are “just the tip of a much larger
iceberg in European politics” (Zizek, 2010). Zizek notes that recent electoral trends
throughout Europe have shown a shift in the former polarity of two main parties, a
right of center party and a left of center party – with smaller ecologist or communist
parties. Recent years have seen the development of a “predominant centrist party”
and “opposing this party is an increasingly strong anti-immigrant populist party
which, on its fringes, is accompanied by overtly racist neo-fascist groups” (Zizek,
2010). Zizek offers the examples of Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and
Hungary and suggests that the European continent is now experiencing a serious
rightward shift in which blatant racism has seeped into European political and public
discourse and become increasingly acceptable.

The proliferation of extreme right parties has many causes, among them
increased immigration, multiculturalism and the expansion of the EU. New far right
parties feel that these trends pose a serious threat to the power and essential character
of their respective nations. They fear that with globalization, their national cultures
and languages are being lost. Jean Marie Le Pen of the French far right party the
National Front summed up this opinion by stating that “the most serious danger for France is losing its independence for the sake of Europe and losing its identity for the sake of immigration” (Quoted in Guibernau, 2010, 14)

Anti-immigrant feelings have been exacerbated by the financial crisis. The huge social and economic changes have benefited elites, but many nations are experiencing growing trends of unemployment for low and medium skilled workers (Guibernau, 2010, 5). The anger of this demographic has found a scapegoat with Roma and immigrants and a perceived defender in the far right.

This new right is present throughout Europe, but takes on slightly different targets as The Economist observed in 2009. The far right “in the west thrives on immigrant-bashing. In the east it dwells on more atavistic grievances: ethnic minorities, old territorial disputes, homosexuals, international financiers and, naturally, Jews. Hatred of the Roma has become a defining issue” (Right on Down, 2009).

While these parties generally do not represent serious political threats, their increased popularity speaks to deeply felt anger and resentment in Europe. In recent years Austria’s Freedom Party, Italy’s Northern League, Hungary’s Jobbik, Bulgaria’s Ataka Party, The Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, The Flemish Block, The Swiss People’s Party, The Danish People’s Party and the Slovak National Party have become increasingly influential. In “Migration & the Rise of the Radical Right,” Montserrat Guibernau warns,

“Political parties and the wider public not to dismiss the new radical right as fanatical parties operating on the fringe of politics…. By combining strong anti-establishment rhetoric with potent demands for democratic reform and identity politics, the radical right is managing to
overcome the traditional split between left and right, with potentially serious consequences for the future of our body politic” (Guibernau, 2010, 2).

In my fifth case study chapter, I will argue that the threat posed by the emerging far right has worked to unite transnational Roma groups and in doing produced increased Roma solidarity and nationalism.

CONCLUSION

When considered as a whole, European integration has helped to legitimate, circulate and direct Roma nationalism. As I have argued, Roma represent a major issue for the EU and Brussels is thus keen to oversee greater Roma integration. In actively pursuing Romani inclusion, the EU has legitimated “Roma” as a category while also strengthening the Romani elite. European core values have provided a coherent goal for the Roma nationalist project, while as I will go on to demonstrate in my final case study chapter—the threats from the far-right has sparked more unified political action.

First however, I will discuss the ways in which the newly strengthened and empowered Roma elite has used EU funding and new media to imagine new visions of Roma Identity.
CHAPTER FOUR

IMAGINING ROMA: ELITES & THE RECLAIMING OF IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

In the European popular imagination, Roma have always been defined by the representations of the non-Roma. Until very recently, Romanies lacked access to the public space to create their own self-representation and circulate it to the public at large. The image of “the Gypsy” is created through characters like Carmen and Esmeralda, stock thieves and fortunetellers, and Borat’s insistence on the magical properties of “gypsy tears.” These representations create widely recognized, longstanding, and highly static perceptions of Roma, which fuel stereotypes, perpetuate exclusion and in turn feed back and shape Romani’s own self-identification. “While we suffer physically on the streets of Europe, we are targeted in a different but just as significant way in literature” says Roma scholar Ian Hancock (Hancock 1998, 20).

Traditionally, scattered Roma groups have been unaware of the size and geographical span of the larger Roma community. Without connection, groups often developed their own distinct cultures and lost the common Roma historical narrative. However, with the development of new media technology and an activist Roma elite, patterns of Roma representation and identification stand at a crossroads. In Imagined Communities Anderson argues, the spread of print capitalism was an essential component in national identity formation. This chapter will examine the effects of the Internet on Romani nationalism. I will suggest that new technologies have allowed
the Roma community unprecedented access to represent themselves and in doing so redefine and reclaim what it means to be Roma.

This Chapter will contextualize the tremendous significance of Internet technology by first describing traditional patterns of Roma representation. I will use Edward Said’s 1978 *Orientalism* to argue that popular stereotypes have shaped Romani identities and group Roma divisions by obscuring historical narratives and connection. I will then observe how Roma elites, now strengthened and legitimated by the EU, are working to challenge this situation by positively framing Roma ethnicity. New media technology has provided these elites with new tools to construct a new vision of Roma identity by challenging stereotype, creating information flows, standardizing culture and historical narratives and encouraging Romani pride. This new imagined conception of identity celebrates the diversity of Romani traditions while reconciling them with visions of modernity. I will argue that these efforts to redefine what it is to be Roma have also taken on clearly nationalistic tones, often emphasizing the unity of Roma and alluding to the Romani people, flag and anthem. While using new media to constructing a new Roma identity, elites have circulated the idea and symbols of Roma nationhood and laid the foundation for increased nationalist identification.

**ORIENTALISM & REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ROMA OTHER**

**TRADITIONAL STEREOTYPES**
Traditional representations of Roma in European popular culture have been inaccurate, abstract and problematic. These representations have created ingrained stereotypes, which perpetuate patterns of exclusion and inform anti-Roma prejudice.

From their arrival in Europe, narratives about Roma have been constructed on the basis of mistaken assumptions about their origins and identity. Early Europeans created many fantastical accounts of Roma origins, presenting them variously as fleeing religious exiles from Egypt; the surviving members of the lost city of Atlantis, or an ancient tribe of itinerate horsemen (Crowe, 2007) (Hancock, 1998). Roma groups often manipulated these misconceptions to their advantage and in some cases incorporated these constructed histories into their own group narratives. The word “Gypsy” is itself a misrepresentation, coming from an abbreviation of “Egyptian.”

While scholars like David Crowe (2007) believe that Romani groups claiming to be religious exiles may have initially been welcomed into Eastern European societies, Roma were increasingly distrusted and seen as “other” as the region came under threat from the Ottoman Empire. Romanies were thought to be Turkish spies and presented as dangerous throughout the region. Roma were increasingly subject to restrictions and exclusions and came to be seen as malevolent outsiders in European society. Even after the Ottoman threat receded with the failure of the siege of Vienna in 1683, Roma continued to be presented as “other.”

Roma appeared in plays, novels, poems, and operas and later in film and television. These representations were almost entirely created by non-Roma, very few of who had any significant knowledge or interaction with the Roma community;
“This has resulted in the emergence, over the years, of a literary, fictitious “Gypsy”
image and an equally unreal history” (Hancock, 1998, 9).

Images of Roma in European popular culture took three distinct but often
overlapping forms, which using Said’s theory of Orientalism, I will break into three
categories: the Dangerous Gypsy, the Romanticized Gypsy and the Gypsy victim.

1) The Dangerous Gypsy: characterized as dirty, violent, lustful, and
untrustworthy. Often presented as a thief, murderer and sexual
predator.

2) The Romanticized Gypsy: characterized as exotic, musical, lazy,
undisciplined, untamed, and magical. This stereotype mixes images
of the “noble savage,” the carefree wanderer with ancient traditions
and the mystical fortuneteller.

3) The Gypsy Victim: characterized as helpless, uneducated, and dirty.
This representation has emerged recently and is mostly used by news
organizations and NGOs. Often despite good intentions, the Gypsy
Victim is presented as weak, devoid of agency, and incompatible with
the modern world.

These patterns of representation are widespread in European literature, arts
and popular media. They have flattened and essentialized Roma identity and came
together to create the image of the Roma as an “internal other” in the European
collective imagination.

ORIENTALISM & EDWARD SAID

Edward Said’s 1978 Orientalism suggests that all representations inform and
reflect power dynamics. This argument offers a useful lens for examining patterns of
Roma exclusion. Said defines Orientalism as “a distribution of geopolitical
awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and
philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, orient and occident) but also of a whole series of interests by which… it not only creates but also maintains a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate and even incorporate, what is manifestly different” (Said, 1978, 12). Orientalism then is a style of knowledge production based on the ontological and epistemological differences between east and west.

Said draws on Foucault, arguing that ideas about “the East” are not organic, naturally occurring phenomenon, but rather constructed academically through Orientalist discourse. Literature, art, and poetry create concepts of the easterner and these constructed textual representations eventually come to trump the material reality and even to shape material reality itself. The discourse is thus extremely generative as it creates identities and influences perceptions, behaviors, and institutions.

Said argues that Orientalist discourse has been essential to the European self-definition. The Orient comes to represent the West’s “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said, 1978, 2). It becomes “the other,” the thing that the west is not. In “Orientalism: A Black Perspective” Ernest Wilson, lists characteristics of representing the Orient which place it in absolute opposition to the West:

1) “Absolute and systematic difference between the West and the Orient. The West is rational, developed, humane, superior, while the East is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior.

2) Abstractions about the Orient are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern oriental realities.

3) The Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself,
4) The Orient is to be feared.” (Wilson 1981, 63).

THE EFFECTS OF STEREOTYPE ON SELF IDENTIFICATION

Orientalist discourse is extremely generative; creating systems of knowledge, which in turn create perceptions of both the self and the other. There is some scholarship on Romani Orientalism in 19th century literature, but the theory has not yet been applied to Roma politics and nationalism. I will now argue that Said’s framework can be used to more fully understand the historical position and current development of Romani politics in Europe.

As I have already suggested, patterns of Roma representation can be broken down into three distinct but overlapping categories: Dangerous, Romantic, and Victim. Often these stereotypes contradict each other; “The Gypsy” is at once irrational, weak and female while also being lusty, dangerous, and male. “The Gypsy” has ancient traditions but is simultaneously child-like and without agency. Said explains that when representing the other, the West maintains “flexible positional superiority” meaning that any way the discourse is flipped, the non-western subject is always presented as inferior.

Representation of Roma is generally abstract and uninformed. Despite linguistic and genetic evidence that Roma originated in Northern India, Roma are consistently described as having “mysterious origins” or “allegedly from India.” They are consistently described as a people without a history.

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29 See Nicholas Saul’s 2007 Gypsies and Orientalism in German Literature and Anthropology of the Long Nineteenth Century.
These stereotypes not only inform majority perceptions of Roma culture, but also influence Roma self-definition. I suggest that these problematic representations have had three major effects. First, the fragmented Roma community traditionally had no conception of its relative size and scope. If Roma knew about other groups, their knowledge was usually informed by the majority societies’ representations and thus other Roma were viewed as fundamentally different. Ken Lee, a British Romanichal, writes in the forward of *We Are the Romani People*, that as a child he was unaware that there were other Roma outside his community. Gradually, he developed a vague understanding of foreign Romanies through popular “gadjo stereotypes,” and subsequently thought of other Roma as “strange” and “separate.” It was only after meeting Hungarian Roma refugees fleeing the 1956 revolution that Lee realized foreign Roma groups were similar to his own; “They were not what I imagined Hungarian Romanies to be like –no velvet waist coats, no violins– they looked to me not much different from the Romanichals I knew… and the reality of common ground amongst Romanies suddenly struck me” (Hancock, 2002, X).

Second, Roma had no accurate account of their history and origins. “Roma who know any history at all have acquired it from books written by the gadje… the notion of an origin in Egypt, once widespread in Europe, is still found amongst Roma. The story of being obliged to keep on the move because of having forged Christ’s nails, obviously a myth of non-Gypsy origin, is everywhere repeated in Romani populations”(Hancock, 1998, 13).

Finally, these largely negative and problematic representations have influenced Roma self-identification. Often these stereotypes are internalized and
Roma identity becomes a source of shame. In many nations, Roma attempt to conceal their heritage and “pass” for non-Roma. In some cases we see Roma internalize prevalent stereotypes in different ways, taking on roles prescribed by the majority culture.

NEW MEDIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The advent of new media technology has revolutionized minority self-representation. While in previous eras, Roma and other marginalized groups did not have access to the worlds of journalism, print and publishing; today the Internet has sparked a rapid democratization of media. After generations of being represented by outsiders, Roma now have the ability to represent themselves. This development has tremendous implications for the Romani nationalist movement.

I will now offer a review of the existing scholarship on the Internet and nationalism followed by a brief summary of several cases in which the Internet has connected and consolidated stateless nations and diasporic groups.

INTERNET THEORY REVIEW

The United Nations estimates that Internet access has doubled in the last five years and that there are now more than 2 billion Internet users worldwide (PhysOrg, 2011). The Internet has sparked an international transformation, changing patterns of human interaction, communication and information distribution. The implications of this technology for government and mobilization are tremendous. During the 2006 Ernest Gellner Lecture at the London School of Economics, Thomas Hylland Eriksen
explained that the Internet has opened new possibilities for national affiliation and “brought into tension” the “two main principles of belonging in human societies: kinship and territory” (Eriksen, 2006 14). With greater transnational movement, economic exchange, and information flow, Eriksen suggests that the primacy of territory in national identification must now be questioned. “It can no longer be taken for granted that people who identify with a given nation inhabit the same space, nor can it be assumed that cultural homogenization takes place at the level of the nation through mass media” (Eriksen, 2006, 1).

Initially, many scholars speculated that the Internet would lead to the weakening of cultural bonds and encourage more cosmopolitan global affiliations in lieu of national ones. Eriksen however, suggests the opposite, arguing instead that, “nations thrive in cyberspace” and that the Internet can be “instrumental in creating and re-creating a shared, collective past among its users. Examining the role of the Internet in building and maintaining national identities may thus enhance our understanding of the character and enduring power of national myths and symbols” (Erikson, 2006, 1).

The Internet has the potential to transform modern conceptions of the nation. However, with the newness of this technology, there is not yet a substantial literature updating nationalist theory for the Internet age. Most of the existing studies have focused on diaspora nationalism and argue that the Internet can be used to strengthen, expand, and generate national identities.
DIASPORA & MIGRANT NATIONALISM

Ananda Mitra’s 1997 “Virtual Commonality: Looking for India on the Internet” analyzed online message boards created and used by the Indian Diaspora. The paper found that these sites worked to both strengthen and diversify the ways in which Indian migrants imagined the nation. Mitra also commented on the generative potential of these new mediums, explaining that “with the emergence of media technologies, nations and communities could be imagined around other central popular cultural formations, for instance those of broadcast media and film… a new set of possibilities for community and nation formation have emerged” (Mitra, 1997, 56).

Brenda Chan’s 2005 “Imagining the Homeland: The Diasporic Discourse of Nationalism” discusses the role of the Internet in linking Chinese migrants and strengthening their connection with China. Chan studied several popular expatriate websites and discussion forums and found that these web sources were used by migrants “in the construction of their national identities, particularly in their self-imagining and their imagining of the homeland” (Chan 2006, 337).

In addition to strengthening diasporic nationalism, Erikson’s 2006 “Nations in Cyberspace” lecture suggests that the Internet can also be used to generate new composite national identities. Eriksen looks at a community of Moroccan economic migrants living permanently in the Netherlands. He examines www.Maroc.nl and several other websites, which offer helpful information including recommendations for Dutch language classes and advice about housing and employment. In this case Eriksen suggests that the Internet can also be used to generate a new hyphenated
community of Dutch-Moroccans (Eriksen, 8, 2006).

The state can also use the Internet as a tool to circulate certain nationalist narratives. As Internet use increased, many scholars speculated that this new technology would pose a serious danger to authoritarian regimes as dissenting opinions and anti-regime information could be circulated more easily. While the Chinese government censored and monitored online activity, Kalathil and Boas (2001) found that China also “guided the development of the medium to promote their own interests and priorities” (Kalathil and Boas, 2001). In the case of contemporary China, the government has used the Internet to promote a specific state approved model of Chinese nationalism.

STATELESS NATIONS & NEW MEDIA

The Internet has also become an important tool for stateless peoples; Kurdish, Tamil and Palestinian Diasporas have increasingly used new media to connect, spread information and advocate for territorial nationhood.

Eriksen argues that despite being factionalized, Kurdish national identity is being built on the Internet. The Kurds are a stateless people with a population spread throughout Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Without a strong Kurdish-language media in their countries of origin, “Kurds in exile have developed a variety of media—magazines, satellite TV and internet resources—to build a shared identity and make themselves known as a nation without a country to the outside world” (Eriksen, 2006, 5). Recent years have seen a proliferation of websites celebrating Kurdish language and culture and presenting the group’s claims to nationhood. Eriksen identified
The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has also used the Internet for nation building. Like the Kurds, the Tamil Diaspora has developed www.Tamilnet.com, www.Tamilnation.org and a range of smaller websites, discussion boards and blogs, which distribute information about Tamil identity and claims to statehood.

The Internet has changed perceptions of the nation and nationalism. Community and identity can now have no relationship with physical proximity. As the number of Internet users continues to grow, these trends may become increasingly significant. The meaning of community, nation and nationalism will evolve with new technologies. These findings are highly significant for the Roma community. Like the Indian migrants in Mitra’s study, the Internet has worked to strengthen the imagining of the Romani nation and like the Kurds and Tamils, Roma have been using the Internet to assert ethnic pride and advance their claims as a “stateless nation.” Given the tremendous impact of the Internet on Roma representation and connection, it is remarkable that as of this writing, no Roma scholars have explored this topic.

ROMA ELITES, THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF MEDIA & NATIONALISM

The emergence of the Internet is highly significant for the Roma community and has wide ranging implications for Romani nationalism. For hundreds of years, Roma groups have been scattered across Europe with limited contact and awareness of each other. The Internet creates unprecedented potential for connection. For the
first time, Roma from Turkey to Spain can interact.

Traditionally, it was extremely difficult for Roma to gain access to journalism and printing. These enterprises were expensive, exclusive, and required a critical mass of readers to become economically viable. Today new media has led to a rapid opening of the press. Anyone with access to the Internet and a computer can create a website, write a blog or join a Facebook group. Anyone can edit Wikipedia, upload a Youtube video or participate in an online discussion forum. Digital video technology makes film easy to produce and distribute. Online news sources can be created no matter how small the readership. These changes allow Roma to interact and create resources made by Roma and intended for a Roma audience. The internet is thus an important tool for Romani nationalism. As I have suggested in Chapter Two, for the Roma, the Internet acts as a modern version of Gellner’s printing press and has the power to standardize and unify conceptions of Romani culture.

NGO ELITE NATIONALISM

In arguing that nations are not naturally occurring, but rather constructed, Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983) note that small groups of elites are often the primary drivers and builders of nationalist movements. This has long been the case with Romani nationalism, and so it is significant that now during the post-transition period a new variety of Romani NGO elite has emerged. This new group made up of Roma NGO workers and activists, sometimes referred to in the literature as the “Gypsy Industry” (Guy, 2001) (Rövid, 2009) (Wojciechowski, 2010). As I have explained in Chapter Three, the EU has legitimated these elites with official
recognition and strengthened them by with funding. Roma nationalism has always been elite driven, but now both the shape of the Romani elite and the tools available to them have changed. In Between Past & Future: The Roma of Central & Eastern Europe, Will Guy observes that the Roma nationalist movement seems to be driven by “professional Roma” constructing “a new national ideology” (Guy, 2001, 49). However, Guy is uncertain what to make of this “professional Roma nationalism” and offers no explanation of the ways elites are constructing national ideology. The ability of Roma to represent themselves using the Internet has opened new possibilities for Roma nationalism. I will now expand Guy’s explanation by describing current new media elite programs that construct a new national ideology.

NGOS & THE NEW IMAGINING OF ROMA IDENTITY

As I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, traditional Orientalist representations made Romanies across Europe unaware of the larger Roma community, misinformed about the group’s historical narratives and ashamed of Roma identity. NGO elites are working to counter the accumulated effect of these representations by creating a new vision of Roma identity, which emphasizes history, connection and pride. These programs use the Internet to link and inform the transnational Roma community while constructing a more accurate historical narrative, which emphasizes Indian origins and homeland. At the same time Internet sources celebrate the diversity of Roma tradition and culture, working to present Romani heritage as a source of pride. In advocating for history, connection and
pride, these online NGO web sources also circulate and strengthen symbols and conceptions of the Roma nation.

I will preface this section by saying that as of this writing, there are no statistics about Roma Internet usage. Even the group’s total population is unknown and only estimated with a margin of millions. The Internet, however, has arguably become a transformative force for Roma political mobilization and merits serious study. Certainly Roma intellectuals and leaders see it in this light. While we can only speculate about how many Roma are now using the Internet, we can analyze the implications of the websites, list serves and digital videos Roma elites are creating and distributing.

CONNECTION & NEWS

Online journalism and Roma centered news has been one of the most important new trends to emerge. The following websites work to share Roma news from around Europe in a variety of languages, establishing a broader sense of the size, scope, and common plight of the transnational Roma community. By disseminating information and “articulating shared interests, activists –whether consciously or unconsciously –contribute to the understanding that Roma are an internally homogeneous group with fixed meanings and clearly defined needs” (McGarry, 2010, 5).

The Roma Virtual Network:

The Roma Virtual Network (RVN) is an online news distribution service that
collects news stories about Roma and distributes them daily via email and Facebook. Founded in 1999, the RVN focuses on creating awareness about cases of abuse and exclusion and providing a “strong media response to the growing challenge of anti-Gypsism in European countries” (RVN, 2010). The network currently has several electronic mailing lists which distribute stories in twenty languages, including Romanes. The RVN works to connect and inform Roma populations across the world and aims to actively “facilitate the cooperation and exchange of information within Roma organizations and individuals, between Roma and non-Roma organizations and individuals and also between Roma NGOs and official institutions.” (RVN, 2010).

**The Roma Buzz Agitator**

Similar to the RVN, Idebate’s Roma Buzz Aggregator (RBA) is an online source that provides a range of news and information about international Roma. Updated daily since its creation in 2006, “Idebate’s RBA automatically collects and links all news, blog posts, photos and other online materials about Roma issues” (RBA website, 2010). The site shares both news and a broad range of information about Roma arts, culture, activism, conferences and job openings. Its aim is to provide Roma with a unified transnational voice,

“In the past, the authorities were slow to act because of the lack of a strong united Roma voice. These days the Roma concerns are convincingly communicated through Roma media channels, and this webpage is now one of them… IDEA’s Roma Webpage alone will not solve the problems facing the Roma people. However, it can provide a place for others to see the

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30 See http://www.valery-novoselsky.org/romavirtualnetwork.html

31 The Roma Buzz Aggregator is a project of IDEA the International Debate Education Association, an online information organization that promotes international understanding through discussion and information sharing.
realities of the Roma situation in Europe and other parts of the world” (Novoselsky, 2010, 65).

The site suggests that if small Roma communities recognized that the exclusion and hardship they face is not unique, they would be motivated to connect with the larger community and politically mobilize.32

*The Roma Rights Network:*

Similarly the Roma Rights Network (RRN) provides updates on Roma rights and news using email, Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin. Members have access to human rights information, discussion boards and links to NGOs.33

**YOUTUBE & ROMA PRIDE**

Like the news networks, the following online film and video campaigns use multimedia to circulate information, debunk stereotype and promote Roma pride. Film and video often celebrate the diversity of Romani cultures while emphasizing the fundamental unity of the Roma community.

*The Romedia Foundation:*

The Budapest based Romedia Foundation works to establish a niche for Roma in the popular media by creating film and television made by Roma journalists. The

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32 See http://www.idebate.org/roma/

33 See http://www.romarights.net/v2/
The Foundation’s mission is to

“Use media as a tool to bring about societal change, by giving a voice to Roma throughout Europe [and] breaking the cycle of fear by creating a space for Roma to share their stories and culture, allowing them to present themselves in a balanced way that combats static conceptions of Roma culture” (Mundi Romani, 2010).

One of Romedia’s main projects is the Mundi Romani: World Though Roma Eyes Series, which began in 2007. Mundi Romani creates a monthly documentary series circulated online and aired on Duna Television. It is currently the only minority program on Hungarian primetime. Mundi Romani reports that between Duna television and circulation on the Internet each episode gets more than half a million viewers.

To date, there have been 32 Mundi Romani episodes filmed in eighteen countries. The show’s name, “Mundi Romani” means “Roma World” and the program stresses connections between international Roma without flattening and generalizing their identity. Each episode focuses on a different Roma community and stories alternate between Roma exclusion and celebrations of Roma culture and art.

Mundi Romani has covered the toxic Roma refugee camps in Mitrovica, selective government fingerprinting in Italy, extremism in Czech Republic, school segregation in Ukraine, street children in Albania, and the destruction of Sulukule, a thousand year old Roma neighborhood and UNESCO world heritage site in Istanbul. Other episodes have explored important elements of Roma culture –topics including: the traditional Roma pilgrimage to Saint Marie de la Mer for the festival of St. Sarah, Gitano Flamenco in Spain, the Guća Trumpet Festival in Serbia and the Roma
musicians Robby Lakatos and Ferenc Snétberger.\textsuperscript{34}

Mundi Romani episodes have also stressed the Roma origins in India. The first two films were shot in India and attempted to demystify Roma origins. The episodes explored the similarities between Roma and Indian culture by comparing both groups’ wedding customs.

\textit{The Roma Woman Project}

The “I’m a Roma Woman” project is another Romedia campaign aimed at challenging stereotypes. The project consists of two 4-minute commercials featuring female Romani activists sharing their stories. The first video was released in 2009 and funded by Amnesty International and the Decade of Roma Inclusion. It features five women from Romania, Hungary, Spain and Bulgaria telling stories of their personal experiences with discrimination and discussing the importance of education and cultural identity. The testimonies are interspersed with images of Roma communities throughout Europe and paired with a song in Romanes. The activists appear in both traditional Roma outfits and western dress. “Identity is a complex thing, mine has many sides” says Ostalindia Maya, a Spanish lawyer and human rights activist. The film ends with the words “I’m a Roma woman. I’m A European Woman. I’m a Woman.”\textsuperscript{35} As of this writing, the video received 18,000 views on youtube and has also been featured on the websites of the Care International and the

\textsuperscript{34} The series has also explored other Roma communities outside Europe, filming episodes in Turkey and Israel and planning future projects at the Romen Theater in Moscow and tracing the historical Romani migration from India to Europe.

\textsuperscript{35} See: I’m a Roma Woman Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mI_RWXwbFqI
Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The Roma Woman Regional Campaign—released in 2010 focuses on Roma women in the former Yugoslavia. The film featured interviews with women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. The format mirrors the first video with the women telling their stories and saying, “I’m a Roma Woman.”36 Both videos emphasize the multifaceted nature of Roma identity and address the common problems of discrimination and Roma-phobia. They clearly articulate Roma pride and commonality while also celebrating the international and diverse nature of the Romani community.

There are several other similar online video campaigns that aim to challenge stereotype by creating international Roma-made Internet short films. Examples of these projects include the Typical Roma? video campaign, which featured young Roma from five countries questioning the concept of “typical” Roma behavior and the Colorful but Color Blind video project which created 25 online videos about different international Romani groups. [For further detail, see Appendix 1]

ARTS AS ACTIVISM

A number of web sources share information about Roma history, arts, and culture online, similar to the news networks but sharing culture. These projects link activism and artistic traditions and work to spread and standardize ideas of tradition and identity.

36 Roma Woman Regional: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgWMj5ULJmw&NR=1
The Gypsy Chronicles

The Gypsy Chronicles uses different web mediums to celebrate international Romani arts and culture. The Gypsy Chronicles has a blog, website, Facebook page and Youtube channel that spread Roma arts, music, film and photography while also publicizing Roma events and activism. The Gypsy Chronicles provide daily links about everything from a Roma fashion company to new Roma bands and painters. The facebook page links stories to members mini-feeds and is an important place for Roma in the arts to share their work.37

The Voice of Roma:

Another website which links Roma arts and activism is The Voice of Roma. The site’s banner reads: music, Dance, film, culture, human rights and its mission is to “promote and present Romani cultural arts and traditions in a way that counters both romanticized and negative “Gypsy” stereotypes, and in so doing, to contribute to the preservation of Romani identity and culture” (VoR, 2010).

NGO USE OF THE ROMA FLAG & ANTHEM

Anderson argues that the development of “print capitalism” was essential to the creation of national identities, as it opened publishing and allowed for the proliferation of printed material. Widely circulated newspapers and novels created frameworks for individuals to view themselves as members of a larger group with a

37 See http://thegypsychroniclesbyalisonmackie.blogspot.com/
common history and common symbols (Anderson, 1983, 36). I have argued that for Roma today, the Internet mirrors print capitalism in that it allows Roma access to represent themselves, and in doing so circulate the foundations of a Romani imagined community. In spreading news and culture, these programs have constructed new models of Roma identity and reinforced the idea of the Romani group category. I will now show how these programs have also begun to circulate the symbols of Romani nationalism.

In “The Myth of Gypsy Nationalism” Werner Cohn challenges the reader to find the nearest Roma individual and ask them to “give a description” of the Romani flag (Cohn, 1993, 8). Cohn predicts that virtually no respondents will be able to do so. While in 1993 this claim may have been valid, today the image of the Romani flag has increasingly been circulated on the Internet as fundamental a symbol of Roma identity. Of the NGOs I have above discussed, the following use the Roma flag in their logos: The Romedia Foundation, Typical Roma, Voice of Roma, Roma Virtual Network, Roma Rights Network and Colorful but Colorblind.

There are many other small scale Roma NGOs and groups not discussed in this thesis who also use the flag, including: the Regional Roma Educational Youth...
Association in Macedonia, The National Romany Rights Association in the UK, Integro Association Bulgaria, Roma Together from Bulgaria, Porojan in Moldova, Verveipen, Rroms por la Diversidad. The use of the logo by small Roma NGOs and projects suggests that the symbol is beginning to circulate at the grass roots. [See Appendix Two for more Roma flag logos.]

Additionally, the Roma national anthem Gelem Gelem, often appears in NGO films and promotional videos. A recording of the anthem is the first thing to appear on the Voice of Roma Youtube page and is used as the soundtrack in the Mundi Romani episodes: Faces of Change (2008), Lashi Vita (2008), Hate on the Rise (2009) and Albania: Children of Shatelia (2009).

The creators of these websites are often self-proclaimed Roma nationalists who use discussion boards and forums to discuss the Roma nation. Valery Novoselsky, the activist who runs the RVN wrote on an RBA online discussion board in 2007 responding to a thread about the Roma non-territorial nation. He said that, “Romanistan already exists on a virtual realm (i.e. on-line) and, at least, in the sphere of electronic communications we have our territory…OPRE ROMA!

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38 Valery Novoselsky is a Ukrainian Roma activist. He is the founder and editor of the Roma virtual Network and works frequently with the RBA and the Romedia Foundation. Novoselsky is a consultant for the European Roma Information Office and the Open Society Institute.
Novoselsky also advocated for a “.rom” domain name in the internet and the creation of a Romani passport.

THE ARTS & THE IMAGINING OF ROMA IDENTITY

Having explored the ways Romani elites are using the Internet to reconstruct Roma identity, I will now examine corresponding trends within the Roma artistic and intellectual elite. Just as NGO programs emphasize historical narratives, challenge Roma stereotypes and advocate Romani pride on websites, blogs and youtube, Roma Artists address the same issues through visual arts, music and poetry.

VISUAL ARTS: THE VENICE BIENNALE

The Venice Biennale one of the world’s most prestigious contemporary art fairs. The Biennale includes artists from around the world and is organized into national pavilions. For the first time in 2007 there was a Roma pavilion at the 52nd Biennale, with Roma artists from around Europe. Before “Paradise Lost” the first Roma pavilion, no Roma artist had ever been featured at the Biennale.

Tímea Junghaus, the Pavilion’s curator, explained that the exhibit creates a new space for Roma artists to “embrace and transform, deny and deconstruct, oppose and analyze, challenge and overwrite the existing stereotypes…reinventing the Roma tradition and its elements as contemporary culture.” The work she states, is a “new interpretation of Roma identity”(Junghaus, 2007). The participating artist Daniel Baker echoed Junghaus’ explaining that his work, which involves images of caravans superimposed on mirrors, “engages with the representation of Gypsies by themselves
rather than the representation from the majority societies… my work engages with issues of new Gypsy identity” (Mundi Romani, 2007).  

Other pieces dealt with Roma history and memory. Hungarian artist Tibor Balogh created an instillation called “Rain of Tears,” which addressed Roma collective memory and the legacy of the Holocaust. Balogh created an intense instillation featuring images and documents about the Porajmos. When Roma from around Europe visited the exhibit, they were given test tubes to collect their tears; “Gypsy Tears” references old stereotypes about the medicinal qualities of Roma tears. The test tubes were then hung from the ceiling and created a three dimensional instillation which explored communal remerging (Mundi Romani, 2007).

MUSIC

Roma have long been renowned throughout Europe for their musical abilities. Music is one of the few employment niches Roma have consistently occupied, traditionally playing at weddings and in restaurants throughout Eastern Europe. Today a new group of Roma musicians is melding genera to create a new vision of “Gypsy music.” Through successful music careers, many Roma elites have gained a strong platform to promote pride in Roma identity.

Connect R:

Connect R is the stage name of a Roma hip-hop performer who has recently risen to stardom in Romania. Roma identity is highly stigmatized in Romania and

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39 Mundi Romani filmed an episode at the Roma Pavilion and interviewed many of the artists, organizers, and financial contributors. The episode included an interview with George Soros, who attended the Pavilion’s opening.
many Roma attempt to conceal their origins. Connect R’s music does not discuss Roma themes or include traditional Gypsy music cords; initially the rapper never publically acknowledged his background. In 2010, Connect R won “Best Song” at the Romanian Music Awards for his single “Burning Love.” As he climbed the stage to accept his award, Connect R removed his leather jacket to reveal a shirt, which read “Sunt TIGAN” or “I am GYPSY.”

While the crowd cheered him, Connect R’s “coming out” was a risky move. Only several months earlier a crowd in Bucharest booed Madonna after she made a statement at a concert condemning discrimination and violence against Roma (Murray, 2009).

**Gogol Bordello**

Gogol Bordello is a popular self-described “Gypsy Punk” band led by Ukrainian Roma front man Eugene Hütz. The band’s mission is to circulate Gypsy music and combine it with other musical genres and forms. Hütz is an outspoken Roma activist who grew up in an assimilated community and has been interested in rediscovering his own Roma identity. Gogol Bordello incorporates the Roma flag into its merchandise and the band usually performs with the flag, for example, on the David Letterman Show in July of 2007.

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40 Connect R at Romanian music video awards: ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBH14JUvIEM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBH14JUvIEM&feature=related))

41 Gogol Bordello on David Letterman: ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWYTyfQe-o8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWYTyfQe-o8))
Musicians and performers have a unique platform to assert Roma identity and spread Roma symbols. The Letterman performance had millions of viewers and Gogol Bordello shows frequently sell out. [For more on Hütz and Gogol Bordello see Appendix 3]

_Gipsy.cz_

_Gipsy.cz_ is a popular Czech Roma rap group that the mixes Romanes lyrics and traditional riffs with hip-hop and R&B. Radoslav ‘Gipsy’ Banga, a former street child from Prague founded the band (Gipsy.cz Bio, 2011). Their first hit “Romano Hip Hop,” asserts Roma pride, saying, “I want everyone to know that ‘Rom are here! That this is a gypsy band, dark… Roma hip hop in the house!” The video engages with tradition and stereotype, featuring a stereotypical Roma band playing conventional melody and mixing it with hip-hop dance moves and rap.42

Roma Poetry

Roma poetry has emerged as another artistic genera in which Roma identity is reassessed and positively re-imagined. The 1998 anthology *Roads of the Roma* compiled a new body of contemporary poetry by Roma. The collection was edited by Ian Hancock, Siobhan Dowd, and Rajko Djuric and included contributions from prominent Roma poets, intellectuals, and historians from across Europe. In the introduction, Hancock explains that the collection’s intention is to challenge the “unreal history” of Roma that has been constructed by outsiders (Hancock, 1998,10). The anthology includes a timeline of events and dates in Roma history, which appears across from the poems.

The collection’s’ title, *Roads of the Roma*, quotes a line from the Romani national anthem. Many of the poems stress clear nationalist themes and emphasize the oneness and connection of international Romani groups. “Gypsy Soul” by Czech poet Nadia Hava-Robbins reads, “My sprit sails into the unknown with no land/ no home to call my own/ hopelessly searching through the past/ to find my people/ who scattered like glass that shattered long ago (Hancock, 1998, 42).

“New Rom” by Jimmy Story asks, “Who are we? Roma without Romanes/ Who must read our own history/ In another tongue/ Follow the butterfly of our being/ Across maps of the imagination—trying to recreate the lost structure of our soul…we will read the future/ from a fax machine/ not a crystal ball (Hancock, 1998, 105).

\[
\text{Come with me Roma from all the world, for the roads of the Roma have opened, now is the time, rise up Roma.} \]

43
The anthology as a whole asks what is Roma identity and seeks to define it against
the timeline of history. Story’s poem, written in the late 1990s, seems to recognize
that the future of Roma is “from a fax machine,” that the answer to the question of
modern Roma identity can be found in technology, connection and unity.

CONCLUSION

For seven hundred years since Romani arrival in Europe, Roma identity has
been co-opted and defined by the non-Roma majority. While many small Roma
groups’ maintained oral narratives and traditions, they had no sense of their
connection with the larger scattered Roma. The Roma have long been considered the
exception in studies of nationalism; they lack common territory, language and
religion – all the traditional foundations of common identity. Miraculously, despite
hundreds of years of persecution they maintained a strong and deeply felt identity.
The Internet revolution has tremendous implications for Roma. While traditionally
Roma were denied access to media outputs, the Internet has led to a tremendous
democratization and opening.

Roma now have the ability to represent themselves and can connect across
continent. In conjunction with the transition to democracy and the rise of the
European Union, this new technology is doubly significant. In the past Roma
survived by remaining apolitical and silent at the social margins. Now democratic
participation is the surest way for Roma to improve their international situation. The
Internet provides a medium through which Roma can learn about the size and
common exclusion of the Roma community and it creates a sense of shared threat and

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possibility. It allows Roma to see the diversity of Roma traditions and feel pride in their identity. Finally it becomes a medium through which the idea and the symbols of the Roma nation are circulated. Elites have been increasingly using the Internet and the arts to redefine what it is to be Roma. In constructing this new identity, elites have laid the foundations of Romani nationalism.

In the next section, I will explore interaction of elite activism, the Internet and Roma communities as they respond to the growing threat of far-right violence.
INTRODUCTION

Nationalist movements often develop in groups that perceive a serious external threat to their existence. A shared danger can unify formerly factious communities and organize them against a common adversary. The Jews and Tamils provide strong examples of this type of nationalist mobilization.

How then do external threats affect Roma nationalism? Violence against Roma is of course not a new phenomenon and Romani communities have historically been victims of tremendous persecution without any corresponding national consolidation. However, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the situation of European Roma has recently undergone large-scale changes. Romanies are now beginning to perceive of themselves as members of a coherent transnational “Roma” political category; they have new capabilities for connection and information sharing and are now guaranteed basic rights under European law. With these new conditions, Roma reactions to external dangers have changed. This chapter will discuss the ways Roma communities have responded to the new threats posed by right-wing extremism and the effect of this response on Romani nationalism.

As I have observed in Chapter Three, contemporary Europe has been experiencing a rightward shift accompanied by the emergence of far-right parties that explicitly target Roma. To illustrate the effect of these groups on Roma nationalism, I will provide a case study of Roma responses to right-wing violence in Hungary. In
the past ten years, Hungary has joined the EU, seen an explosive increase in Internet usage, and witnessed the rise of the radical Jobbik Party and their paramilitary wing the Magyar Gárda. These far-right organizations gained popularity by explicitly scapegoating and demonizing Roma, leading to an environment of heightened ethnic tensions, which exploded in a wave of more than 50 hate crimes during 2008 and 2009.

The Hungarian Roma community is substantial, but geographically dispersed and divided into three factious subgroups. While Roma are roughly 9% of the total Hungarian population, their post-transition mobilization was hindered by infighting and failure to devise a unified platform. This chapter will demonstrate the ways in which Hungarian Roma have begun to come together and mobilize as a unified group in response to hate crimes and right-wing violence.

I will contextualize my argument by first providing a brief description of the diversity and situation of the Hungarian Roma community. I will then describe the meteoric rise of Jobbik and the Magyar Gárda and offer an account of the events, which led to the 2008-2009 hate crimes. I will continue by explaining how Roma responses to the incidents demonstrate the interaction of themes discussed in the previous chapters at the national and local levels. In the wake of violent and geographically widespread attacks, the Roma community was terrified but had few legitimate leaders to speak for them. Romani NGOs soon took up this role and were the first to investigate and publicize the incidents. They sought help from Intergovernmental organizations and used the Internet to circulate information about the attacks to both Hungarian Romanies and the Roma community as a whole. This
activism encouraged Roma unity and emphasized the fact that right-wing violence was not unique to Hungary, but rather a common problem for Roma across Europe. Elites organized protests, which often affirmed and embraced Romani identity and symbols. Finally, Roma on the local level began to organize and participate in unprecedented ways. The external threat provided a unified platform where none existed previously.

The Romani response to the 2008-2009 Hungarian hate crimes illustrates the relationship between IGOs, elite activism, the Internet, violence, and the spread of Roma nationalism. The case demonstrates that the threat posed by the far-right aids and expedites the development of Roma unification and national identification.

ROMA IN HUNGARY

Roma in Hungary have a long and complex history characterized by an enduring legacy of marginalization. As a result, Hungarian Roma have a tense and sometimes ambiguous relationship with their home nation. While they occupy several distinct niches in Hungarian culture, Roma are at the same time identified as belonging somewhat outside the Hungarian nation. After hundreds of years of exclusion and violence many Roma groups have withdrawn from the majority society to the extent that they do not identify themselves as Hungarians; however it should be noted that given the tremendous heterogeneity of Hungarian Roma groups it is difficult to generalize. [See Appendix 5 for more background on Roma in Hungary.]
Roma are Hungary’s single largest minority group with an estimated population of just under one million, roughly 10% of the total population.\(^4\) Even after the application of the Copenhagen Criteria, their situation remains precarious. As communism fell, employment opportunities disappeared and Roma were generally among the first to lose jobs. This trend has continued and today unemployment in the Roma community is thought to be roughly 70%, more than ten times the national average (Amnesty International, 2010, 9). The income of the average Roma household is significantly lower than the national average and a disproportionally high percentage of Roma families have incomes below the subsistence level. A 2005 World Bank report stated that 27% of the Hungarian Roma population lives in extreme poverty compared to 3% of the non-Roma population (Amnesty International, 2010, 9). The condition of the Roma community is a serious source of embarrassment for the Hungarian government. As Hungary assumed the rotating EU presidency in January 1, 2011, it pledged to make Roma a priority.

ROMA POLITICS

In keeping with international post–transition Romani trends, Hungarian Roma failed to successfully mobilize after the collapse of communism. Despite the relative size of the community and the strength of the country’s NGO elite, Roma mobilization was hindered in large part by the group’s heterogeneity.

\(^4\) While the Hungarian population as a whole has been declining, the Roma community has experienced substantial growth, and many demographers believe that by 2050, over half the Hungarian population will be Roma (Hungary Puts Roma High Up in EU agenda, 2011).
Hungarian Roma are geographically dispersed and spread across the country in both urban and rural areas. There are three primary subgroups: “Hungarian speaking Romungro (70%), the Romani speaking Olah (22%), and the Romanian speaking Béas (8%). The relationships between these subgroups are often contentious due to differences in income, language, and specific cultural history, all of which conspire to impede their ability to organize into a coherent political platform” (McGarry, 2009, 111). Two Roma political parties, Lungo Drom and the MCF Roma Union emerged in the mid 1990s however both failed to attract a solid support base: “Attempts to foster unity have floundered because of the contested group identity which characterizes Roma in Hungary” (McGarry, 2009, 112). Additionally, these dispersed Romani populations had weak communication networks and were prone to infighting. Gyula Vamosi, a Roma activist in Pécs explained, “in order to unite people, you need to articulate a common goal, but this is missing” (quoted in McGarry, 2009, 111). As I will argue later in this case study, the development of an extreme anti-Roma right-wing provided a clear communal threat, that encouraged Romani activism and strengthened group identification. In the future, this newfound unity may help Roma parties unite their heterogeneous constituencies.

OVERVIEW OF HUNGARIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Hungary has major center right and center left parties and several other smaller parties.\(^\text{45}\) For many years the Hungarian Socialist Party or Magyar

\(^\text{45}\) These include the Christian Democratic People’s Party, the environmentalist Party Politics Can Be Different and the liberal conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum. All have at least one seat in the Hungarian or European parliament.
Szocialista Párt (MSZP), was dominant, however the party’s popularity rapidly declined in 2008 after recordings of MSZP Prime Minister Gyurcsány Ferenc admitting that he had lied to Hungarian voters leaked to the public. The MSZP suffered in the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections and received a record low of only 19.3%. The 52.7% majority went to their center right rival The Hungarian Civic Union or Fidesz. The most dramatic development of the 2010 elections, however, was the astounding success of “The Movement for a Better Hungary” or Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, a radical nationalist party formerly at the Hungarian political fringe. Jobbik finished just behind the socialists, winning 16.7%46 of the vote and subsequently becoming the country’s third largest political party. In the next section I will describe Jobbik’s meteoric rise and illustrate the ways in which the party’s politics represent a serious threat to the Roma community.

THE RISE OF JOBBIK & RIGHT WING NATIONALISM

The extreme right in Hungary is not a new phenomenon. Paul Hockenos observed the resurgence of radical nationalism his 1993 book Free to Hate, which argued that frustrated Eastern European constituencies were increasingly turning to old symbols of nationalism and fascism. While since transition these groups have consistently been at the political fringes, the rise of Jobbik is alarming and different because it marks the movement of radical groups into the mainstream.

Jobbik, which means “better,” was founded in 2003 by 32-year-old Gabor Vona. The party runs on an unabashedly nationalist platform and presents itself as a

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46 Jobbik’s 16.7% in the April 2010 elections was seen as particularly alarming because a 2/3 parliamentary majority is enough to amend or even overturn the Hungarian constitution.
protector and redeemer of the Hungarian nation. Jobbik believes that the EU threatens Hungarian sovereignty and minority groups threaten the country’s fundamental character. The party actively targets and scapegoats groups it views as outside the nation, particularly the Jewish, Roma, immigrant, and LGBTQ communities.

Jobbik began at the radical fringe of the Hungarian political spectrum. In the 2006 elections the party won just over 2% of the vote and did not receive a seat in parliament. However, three years later during the European Parliament elections of 2009, the party won 14.8%, just behind the Socialists 17.3% turnout. The election sent Krisztina Morvai, Vona’s inflammatory second in command and three other Jobbik representatives to Strasbourg and set the stage for Jobbik’s continued success in the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections.

REASONS FOR JOBBIK’S SUCCESS

A number of factors contributed to Jobbik’s rapid political ascent, namely, the Ferenc political scandal, the world financial crisis, use of new media, and the party’s clever manipulation of national frustrations.

Jobbik’s rise took place in the context of the 2007 world financial crisis, which hit Hungary particularly hard.47 Jobbik sharply criticized the MSZP government’s management of the economy, citing excessive spending on welfare and

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47 The Hungarian economy was among the hardest hit by the crisis: “In late 2008 [Hungary] was forced to approach the International Monetary Fund for $25 billion in emergency financing. Unemployment soared to 11.2 percent, and the economy contracted in 2009 by 6.3 percent. The Socialist government raised taxes and slashed spending, stabilizing Hungary’s finances but alienating many voters” (Bilefsky, 2010). The government was running a massive deficit and there was talk of a Greek-style default.
programs for national minorities. The party called for massive reform and social welfare cuts (Bilefsky, 2010).

These demands resonated deeply with the frustrated Hungarian population. Jobbik soon developed a solid following in both urban and rural areas. Their chief demographic was middle and working class “ethnic Hungarian” males between the ages of 20 and 40 (ODHIR, 2009, 32). The party’s youthful leadership promised broad change and cleverly used new media to communicate with a younger generation of voters, who were suffering from a 16-year high in unemployment. The party created an informative and polished website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and a "jobbikmedia” channel on Youtube (Jordan, 2010).

Jobbik effectively used both new and traditional media to harness deep seated currents of discontent and direct it towards palpable targets. Hungarians were disappointed that democracy and EU accession had not fixed the country’s economic problems and felt that the nation had become weak. Jobbik channeled this popular anger by promising to return Hungary to its former greatness. The symbol of Nagy-Magyarország or “Greater Hungary,” the nation’s significantly larger pre-WWI borders resurfaced as a powerful Jobbik symbol.

TRIANON & GREATER HUNGARY

No event looms more significantly in the Hungarian collective memory than the loss of WWI and the resulting Treaty of Trianon, which dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The treaty resulted in a loss of 72% of Hungarian territory, 60% of its population, and 28% of its Magyar speakers (Crowe, 2007, 86). Borders were
effectively re-drawn, leaving thousands of self-identified Hungarians living abroad in Transylvania, Slovakia, Austria, and the former Yugoslavia. 90 years later, the treaty is still viewed as a tragedy and remains highly relevant in Hungarian popular discourse where it is often referred to as the “dismemberment” or “the greatest tragedy to befall the Hungarian nation.”

By adopting the discourse of Trianon, Jobbik struck a powerful national chord. In 2010, Jobbik’s official website published an interview with party founder Gabor Vona who claimed that “For Hungarians, Trianon is the synonym for an attempt of liquidating the Hungarian nation… that our country feels even today” (Vona 2007).

48 This widespread attitude is perhaps best described in The Sprit of Hungary: a Panorama of Hungarian History & Culture, by Stephen Sisa, who explains that until 1920, Magyars believed that the Mongol invasion in 1241 and the 150 years of Ottoman rule that followed Hungarian defeat in the 1526 Battle of Mohács were “the darkest events” in Hungarian history. “The Treaty of Trianon became the third, and worst catastrophe to hit thousand year old Hungary” (Sisa, 1995, 233). His chapter on the “dismemberment of the Hungarian Kingdom” claims to offer “glimpses into that diplomatic cauldron whence the baleful spirt of Trianon emanated with Hungary as its principle victim” (233). Sisa goes on to claim that the treaty triggered an “ongoing political holocaust that dismembered historic Hungary and left it like a torso without limbs” (237). Sisa’s hyperbolic rhetoric once considered fringe, has been resurrected by Jobbik and increasingly entered the mainstream.
Vona pledges to return Hungary to its pre-Trianon power and protect the 2.5 million self-identified Hungarians living abroad. Hungary continues to have tense relations with many of its neighbors, particularly Romania and Slovakia because of their alleged mistreatment of Hungarian minorities. 49

The map of “The True Hungary” or “Greater Hungary,” became increasingly widespread as Jobbik mobilized Hungarians around the symbol of Trianon. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson says that the “logo map” can be a potent tool for nationalist mobilization. The map is “pure sign … available for transfer to posters, official seals, textbook covers… Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem”(Anderson, 1983, 175). While the image of “Greater Hungary” was rare in the 1990s, it experienced a tremendous Jobbik-led revival and now appears on

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49 In addition to scapegoating Hungary’s minority populations, Jobbik also blames Slovakia and Romania for any number of the nation’s social and political ills. For example, after the 2008 and 2009 hate crimes against Roma, Jobbik and the Magyar Garda were widely criticized for directly and indirectly contributing to the violence. Zsolt Varkonyi, a Jobbik party spokesman, denied involvement in the attacks, arguing that they were carried out by “foreign enemies” of the Hungarian nation, “These killings were done so professionally, that it could not be the guy next-door. The members of the Magyar Garda are the guys from next-door. The professionalism is a sign that it is a secret service. We suspect people in the Slovak Secret Service” (NPR: Wave of Violence, 2009).
everything from T-shirts, posters and flags, to bumper stickers and key chains. “Greater Hungary” has emerged as a popular tattoo and is frequently used at Jobbik rallies.

The symbol has increasingly moved into mainstream politics. When Hungary assumed the rotating EU presidency in January of 2011 it installed a giant carpet depicting significant events in Hungarian history at the EU offices in Brussels. The carpet sparked controversy as it included a map of “Greater Hungary.” An MP explained that the map was a symbol that showed the Orban government’s intention to finally “overcome the Treaty of Trianon” (Hungary in EU Presidency History Carpet Row, 2011).

This emerging far-right nationalism draws on feelings of insecurity and impotency in the world system. It resurrects the Hungarian imperial past and presents a national narrative that asserts Hungarian strength and power. This new nationalist movement imagines a return to “True Hungary,” but in reconstructing the Hungarian

50 In fact, the image of “Greater Hungary” is also immortalized in a 30 pound Marzipan sculpture at the Szentendre Marzipan Museum.
nation minority groups are presented as serious internal threats.

JOBBIK RHETORIC ON ROMA

Jobbik has taken up the role of protecting and cleansing Hungary by explicitly scapegoating the nation’s ethnic minority groups. The Hungarian Roma, Jewish, immigrant, and LGBTQ communities have all been explicitly targeted.\(^5^1\) The party plays on nationalist sentiments and popular discontentment, identifying these groups as threats and burdens while using campaign slogans like “Hungary belongs to Hungarians.”

Jobbik’s rhetoric toward Roma takes two primary forms: first, the party claims that Roma are a financial burden and drain Hungarian resources. Second, Jobbik argues that Roma pose a threat to public safety. This two-pronged attack has proven to be an extremely effective political strategy that has allowed the party to channel popular discontent and direct it toward a visible target. I will now offer examples of both forms of Jobbik rhetoric.

Jobbik has increasingly characterized Roma as a burden to the nation’s economy because of their excessive use of social welfare. In a 2010 interview, Vona

\(^{51}\) Jobbik’s extreme rhetoric extends beyond the Roma population. The Hungarian gay community is frequently targeted and the Jewish population is regularly accused of buying up all of the nation’s land. Jobbik’s rhetoric toward the Jewish minority has also been harsh, particularly in 2009 when Krisztina Morvai, the party’s second in command, wrote an open letter to the Israeli Ambassador to Hungary criticizing Israel’s actions in Gaza. Morvai is an influential politician in the Jobbik Party; a human rights lawyer and former lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She represents Jobbik at the European parliament in Strasbourg. Morvai’s letter to the Israeli ambassador stated, “The only way to talk to people like you is by assuming the style of Hamas. I wish all of you lice-infested, dirty murderers will receive Hamas’ ‘kisses’”(quoted in Jordan, 2010). The letter sparked criticism and anger from the Hungarian Jewish community, to which Morvai responded to by saying, “I would be glad if the so-called proud Hungarian Jews would go back to playing with their tiny little circumcised tail rather than vilifying me” (Lahav, 2009, 1).
stated that the root of Hungary’s problems was “a sizeable portion of the Gypsy minority… parasitically living off the hard-working Hungarian majority” (Jobbik Chairman Hits Out, 2010). This charge has become increasingly effective as the country’s financial situation worsens and unemployment rises. Jobbik initially proposed sweeping welfare reform and then moved to cut welfare programs entirely.

Jobbik has also characterized Roma as inherently dangerous criminals. After the party’s poor showing in the 2006 elections, fighting Cigánybujözés or “Gypsy crime” became a major party platform. Jobbik sensationalized the Roma threat, creating popular panic, and then promised to take decisive action to address the “the Gypsy problem.”

In 2006 several Roma were convicted for the murder of an ethnic Hungarian schoolteacher in the town of Olaszliszka. Jobbik vigorously publicized this killing along with several other similar incidents where Roma were alleged to have committed violent crimes. Their rhetoric reinforced old fears and prejudices, and the party gained support by promising to restore order, pledging the help of their newly created paramilitary wing, the Magyar Gárda. An example of this strategy came in early 2009 after a series of violent crimes in the northeastern town of Sajóbánya. Csanád Szegedi, a Jobbik politician and member of the European parliament stated that,

“The unfortunate and tragic Gypsy terror in Sajóbánya proved that the parties of the parliament have eroded the police and the law-enforcement bodies to such a degree that they are unable to protect the Hungarian population from Gypsy criminality. Contrary to the information provided by the media, the truth is that Gypsy criminals have attacked peaceful Hungarian citizens yet again. The issue today is not only the isolated actions of Gypsy criminals in different settlements but, unfortunately, we have to say, the fact
that the Hungarian population in North-Hungary is being terrorized by the Gypsies.” (Quoted in “Jobbik Steps Up,” 2009)

Ádam Mirkóczki, Jobbik's spokesman for religious affairs explained that Jobbik was the only party brave enough to tackle the very real Roma problem, saying:

“In the last 20 years the gypsy question was a taboo…We are the only ones who say that the gypsies are one of the biggest problems…We say this is gypsy criminality because, apart from the Roma, no one else carries out this kind of crime… Of the worst brutal criminal acts of the past few years, 100 percent were carried out by Roma” (Dowling, 2010, 3).

While Jobbik’s rhetoric is extreme and ridiculous, these statements become difficult for activists to refute, because under Hungary’s Data Protection laws, police are prohibited from recording ethnic data while processing crimes and thus there is no actual information on how many Roma have been arrested or are currently in jail (Balogh, 2009, 3).

Jobbik embraced the role of national protector and promised to fight the Roma threat by strengthening the police force, reintroducing the death penalty, ending affirmative action for Roma students, and segregating “unruly” Roma children in Hungarian schools (ODIHR, 2009, 31). The party ran a series of controversial anti-Roma advertisements and in September of 2010, a Jobbik MEP called for the mass internment of Roma (Hard Traveling, 2010). However, the real weight behind Jobbik’s promises lay in their paramilitary wing, the Magyar Gárda.

52 During the October 2010 municipal elections, Jobbik aired a controversial campaign commercial that featured a non-Roma woman walking home at night with a hooded figure lurking behind her and the words “Gypsy Crime” written above (Dowling, 2010, 3).
THE MAGYAR GARDA

The *Magyar Gárda Mozgalom*, or the Hungarian Guard Tradition Protection and Cultural Association was an essential element of Jobbik’s plan to defend Hungary. Jobbik leader Gábor Vona founded the Gárda in 2007. He registered the group as a cultural organization and claimed that its primary aim was to prepare “youth spiritually and physically for extraordinary situations that might require the mobilization of the people” (ODIHR, 2009, 32). The Gárda actively recruited both children and adults and provided intensive military style training. At the group’s first swearing in ceremony, Vona declared the organization’s aim was to “carry out the real change of regime…and to rescue Hungarians” (Jordan, 2010). Certain areas of the country, he said, had become “unlivable” because of crime and the Gárda offered additional defense where law enforcement failed.

The group began to lead protests and demonstrations across Hungary, focusing on areas where Roma were alleged to have committed violent crimes. Roma
communities found the Gárda’s activities extremely threatening. As a representative of the Roma community in Kisléta told Amnesty International, “fear spread to other villages and other counties. Roma were afraid everywhere, they felt that the police are not able to protect them” (AI, 2010, 15). The organization’s official outfit mixed traditional Hungarian folk costume with the Nazi-affiliated 1940s Arrow Cross Party uniform. The early Gárda wore black army boots, pants, and vests with the Arpad stripes, an element of the Hungarian coat of arms generally associated with the Arrow Cross Party. Both Roma and non-Roma Hungarians found this resurrection of fascist symbols disturbing. “Though I was only six years old in 1944 when the Arrow Cross came to power…The Hungarian Guard and Jobbik, the uniforms, the language and rhetoric all remind me of the Arrow Cross and that era.” Said Budapest resident Maria Juhasz in an interview with the Telegraph (Day, 2010).

In addition to the implicit threat associated with wearing a uniform derived from the symbols of a party that had overseen the genocide of Hungarian Roma, the Gárda began to “patrol” Roma communities claiming that they were preventing crime. This intimidation was coupled with more demonstrations and the organization’s rhetoric also took on explicitly violent tones. On March 1, 2009 at a joint Jobbik-Hungarian Guard rally in the village of Sarkad, Jobbik’s regional leader promised the crowd that “the party would provide the Hungarian Guard with firearms and get rid of the “thief Gypsy leaders” (ODIHR, 2009, 33).

Other radical neo-fascist groups like the Gój Motorosok (Goy Bikers) and the Nemzeti Êrzelmû Motorosok (Nationalist Bikers) frequently attended Gárda
demonstrations. In November of 2008, after a 14-year-old non-Roma girl was raped and murdered in the town of Kiskunlacháza, Jobbik publicized the incident as a case of out-of-control gypsy crime and called for counteraction. Shortly afterwards, over 3,000 Magyar Gárdá and bikers demonstrated in Kiskunlacháza and marched through its Roma neighborhoods. The town’s mayor was cheered after making a speech stating that he had had enough of “Roma violence.” Eventually however, a non-Roma man was arrested for the murder (ODHIR, 2009, 13). Magyar Gárda activism created an environment of heightened fear and tension that led to extremism. In several towns where the Gárda demonstrated –Tatárszentgyörgy, Fadd, Kiskunlacháza and Tiszalök– hate crimes later occurred (ODIHR, 2009, 33)

BANNING OF THE MAGYAR GARDA

In December of 2008, Budapest’s Municipal Court ordered the dissolution of the Gárda, claiming that the organization was based on discrimination and functioned as a “means to create a climate of fear, while its activities – marches by its members in Roma populated settlements and the speeches of its leaders – constitute a breach of the rights of other citizens by violating their right to dignity and equality” (ODIHR, 2009, 34). Despite this ruling, the Gárda remained active and continued to recruit members. The government responded in July by decreeing that “participating in the activities of a banned social organization” was a punishable offense and faced a fine of up to 100,000 Hungarian forints (just under 400 Euro): in November they issued a fine of 50,000 forints for wearing the uniform of a banned organization. Shortly after these decisions, the Gárda and its sympathizers held a protest rally in Szentendre,
where 176 Gárda members were arrested for wearing the outlawed uniform (ODIHIR, 2009, 34).

Despite the potential fines the organization continued to challenge the ruling, but began to wear black shirts and military fatigues to avoid arrest.\(^{53}\) [For more on continued Magyar Gárda Activities see Appendix 6]

HATE CRIMES

During 2008 and early 2009, a series of more than 50 hate crimes\(^{54}\) took place.

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\(^{53}\) The original uniform became an important symbol. During the 2010 Hungarian elections, Gabor Vona promised that if elected he would report to the opening session of parliament in the outlawed Magyar Gárda uniform. True to his word, Vona took the oath of office with the Gárda’s black vest under his suit. After he was finished he revealed the uniform and avoided arrest by claiming parliamentary immunity. He later told the Hungarian News Network MTI “that if wearing the vest was illegal, he would consider it an act of civil disobedience and was willing to face the consequences” (Lawmaker Wears Outlawed Outfit, 2010).

\(^{54}\) According to OSCE, incidents understood as hate crimes are “criminal offences, including offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises, or target of the offence are selected because of their real or perceived connection, attachment, affiliation, support or membership of a group” (“Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region” OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw, 2005. p. 12)
across Hungary. The attacks resulted in the destruction of Roma properties, dozens of injuries, and nine deaths. Investigators have found no evidence that directly links Jobbik or the Hungarian Guard to the crimes; however their activities and rhetoric created an environment that heightened tension that emboldened extremists. Tara Bedard, a programs officer at the European Roma Rights Center explained both groups “contribute to a climate in which people feel more empowered to act out on negative feelings that they might hold, frustrations that they might have” (Dowling, 2010, 4).

Most of the attacks were carried out over an eighteen-month period and displayed similar trends typically they involved firearms, incendiary devices, and targeted Roma homes on the outskirts of towns. The attacks created a tremendous amount of fear and uncertainty within the Hungarian Roma population. Hungarian authorities and law enforcement were slow to respond to the crimes and in some cases showed serious negligence. It was only after the crimes continued and began to receive attention from the international community that the government responded more vigorously.

After the incidents came to the international foreground, the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions & Human Rights (ODHIR) assembled a delegation to investigate the hate crimes. They conducted a thorough study, interviewing government officials, law enforcement, victims’ families as well as NGO and civil society representatives. In July of 2009 the delegation published the “Field Assessment of the Violent Incidents Against Roma in Hungary.” Below is a summary of seven of the hate crimes taken from pages 11-14 of the delegation’s
Fényeslitke:
On June 15, 2008 a man in Fényeslitke stabbed a 14-year-old Roma boy to death and seriously injured his older brother. The man had been vocally anti-Roma and repeatedly voiced threats against the Roma community.

Nagycséc:
On November 3, 2008 a Molotov cocktail was thrown into a Roma home in Nagycséc, a small village in northeastern Hungary. The occupants, a middle aged Roma couple were shot as they tried to escape the building. A firebomb was thrown across the street into another nearby Roma household, but failed to explode.

Pécs:
A Roma woman and her partner were killed on the night of November 18, 2008 when a hand grenade was thrown into their home in the southern city of Pécs. The explosion injured two of the couple’s children, aged three and five.

Tatárszentgyörgy:
One of the most widely publicized attacks occurred in the village of Tatárszentgyörgy, incidentally also the location of the Magyar Gárda’s first march. On the night of February 23, 2009 a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the Csorba household at the edge of the village. Robert Csorba and his five-year-old son were shot as they tried to escape the fire. His wife and daughter were also seriously injured. When law enforcement and forensics arrived at the scene they initially ruled that an electrical fire caused the deaths.

Fadd
In the southern city of Fadd on April 13, 2009 a property where a Roma family was planning to move was vandalized. Molotov cocktails were thrown inside, destroying the structure. The family later moved into a different house in the same area and five days later it was also destroyed by Molotov cocktails. The Magyar Gárda and Goy Bikers had demonstrated in the village a few months before the attacks.

Tiszalök:
On April 22, 2009, a middle aged Roma man was shot while leaving his place of work in northeastern Hungary.

Kisléta
On the night of August 3, 2009 a Roma home in Kisléta was broken into. A Roma woman and her 13-year-old daughter were shot. The woman died instantly and the girl survived despite serious gunshot injuries to her neck and arms.

55 For a full list of 2008-2009 hate crimes see ODHIR’s *Field Assessment of the Violent Incidents Against Roma in Hungary* Appendix 1: Incidents and Violence against Roma in Hungary in 2008-2009 Pages 56 -64.
In total there were more than 50 recorded hate crimes throughout Hungary. Roma across Hungary in several different communities belonging to several subgroups were targeted. Initially these incidents were not identified as ethnically motivated or treated seriously by investigators. Both government and law enforcement were criticized for handling the crimes unprofessionally and inadequately. The murders in Tatárszentgyörgy provide a particularly dramatic example of police negligence. Despite the fact that neighbors had reported hearing gunshots and the bodies were found eight meters from the house with multiple bullet wounds, police and forensic experts who arrived at the scene ruled that the deaths were caused by an electrical fire, blaming illegal connection to a nearby power grid (ODHIR, 2009, 18).

On August 21, 2009 Hungarian police arrested four men for the murders in Nagycsécs, Tatárszentgyörgy, Kisléta and Tiszalök. Almost a year later the men were charged with multiple counts of robbery, vandalism, and coordinated homicide for “base reasons” (Amnesty International, 2010, 14). In most of the other cases, perpetrators have not been apprehended and the Roma community remained frightened and insecure.

56 Additionally, despite the fact that there was a hospital less than five minutes away, it took the ambulance more than an hour and a half to arrive. “I would like to report the police, the firemen, and the hospital because they didn’t do their jobs,” said Robert Cosora’s mother in a 2009 interview with EUTV. “That a leading member of the homicide department with the rank of captain, when he sees the child with eighteen bullets in his body is not able to confirm that he was killed with a gun, its beyond my imagination. This was a racist attack!” (Distressed Roma in Hungary, 2009).
ROMA RESPONSES

Having demonstrated that an extremist anti-Roma threat has developed in Hungary, I will now discuss the ways in which this threat has brought Roma together and encouraged Romani activism and nationalist affiliation.

Jobbik’s racist rhetoric, the presence of the Magyar Gárda in Roma neighborhoods, and the violent attacks created a tremendous amount of fear and uncertainty. Roma throughout Hungary felt vulnerable and abandoned by the Hungarian government, which did not initially treat the crimes very seriously.57

Hungarian Roma needed representatives to advocate for their interests, but few legitimate authorities existed. In this crisis environment, Roma NGO elites took on new roles, providing information, investigation, and advocacy. They were among the first to link and document the attacks, demanding greater transparency and more robust investigation. To fill the void left by the government, elites worked to provide information to Roma communities and brought the incidents to the attention of the international media, United Nations, European Union, and OSCE. Elite activism emphasized that violence against Roma was not limited to Hungary and promoted solidarity with the transnational Romani community. In protesting the crimes, Roma groups asserted Romani identity and pride, often using the symbols of the nationalist movement. The trends of connection and positive identification discussed in Chapter were intensified and spread in response to the attacks.

57 After the group of four men were arrested and charged it was leaked that the Hungarian National Security Office (NSO) had been monitoring one of the perpetrators for known extremist anti-Roma activity, and that he had a history of making violent threats against the community. The NSO had received information that he purchased weapons shortly before the attacks began (ODHIR, 2009, 19).
INFORMATION SHARING

The Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center was one of the most active organizations. The ERRC interviewed victims, collected information and spread it to the international and Roma communities. The center sent out a quarterly electronic newsletter that provided information about the Hungarian crimes and investigations, while also reporting similar incidents across Europe (EERC, 2009).

The Open Society Institute’s Roma Initiatives publicized the crimes online and blogged about Jobbik activities and Roma responses. The Roma Virtual Network and the Roma Rights Network also played an important role in circulating information by linking stories about the attacks to their websites, list serves and Facebook pages. These online information programs informed the larger Roma community and galvanized Roma activists. With online news networks, Roma became increasingly aware of external threats. Groups who may not have formerly identified as Roma now began to recognize that regardless of their affiliations, they were being targeted as a coherent group.

PRESENTATION OF CRIMES AS COMMON PROBLEM

Roma elite activism often more explicitly emphasized the fact that the extreme right and hate crimes were not unique to Hungary, and urged greater unity with the Roma community as a whole. Bernard Rorke, the Advocacy Director of OSI Roma Initiatives blogged about far-right violence against Roma steadily increasing across Europe (Rorke, 2009). Mundi Romani aired an episode about the international extreme right in 2009 in the midst of the hate crimes. The episode, named “Hate on
the Rise” was aired on Hungarian public television and later released on the Internet. It linked the violence in Hungary to similar incidents occurring in the Czech Republic.

Czech Roma interviewees explained that they also live in “daily fear,” describing assaults and Molotov cocktail attacks similar to those in Hungary. The episode outlines the rise of the Working Party, an extreme right group similar to Jobbik and explains that Czech neo-Nazi groups also march through Roma neighborhoods. The episode follows a group of Roma NGOs who decide to mobilize and lead a counter protest. The tense encounter is caught on film: the counter-protesters stand in front of the Roma housing complex where the neo-Nazis are planning to march. The skinheads arrive wearing black clothing and chanting, “The Czech Republic belongs to the Czechs.” The police create a barricade separating the groups while the Roma protesters join hands and make a line around the buildings chanting, “stop fascism.” Gelem, Gelem is played and the camera cuts to shots of linked hands. Radek Grunza the protest’s organizer and president of the Romany Christian Association gives an interview saying,

“Romale, my message to you back in Hungary is to stick together. Because unity is power… if the Roma don’t act together, if you’re divided, you won’t be able to keep living as you do now or improve your situation right where you live. Be patient with each other, hold out and help each other. That’s the only way to be able to live in peace” (Hate on the Rise, 2009).

The episode ends with a young Czech Roma student saying that she is proud to be Roma. Other NGO projects took on a similarly international flavor. The Common Action To Build Hope – Against Hate Crimes project, organized by the Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti Und Roma, The Internationaler Bauorden and the
Phralipe Independent Roma Association worked to create international solidarity after the hate crimes and rebuild the homes of the victim’s families. Volunteers from Hungary, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria came together in June of 2010 and rebuilt the Csorba family household in Tatárszentgyörgy. The group has made plans to renovate homes in Kisléta and Tiszalök (Daroczi, 2010).

The international tenor of these responses is significant. They clearly emphasized the need for transnational Romani unity and stressed Roma pride. By highlight the commonality of right wing violence they stressed common action.

PROTESTS

Stirred by knowledge of the incidents, Roma groups from across Hungary began to protests on both large and small scales. This represents a relatively unprecedented phenomenon for the historically factious community. On July 20, 2008, over 1,000 Roma protested Magyar Gárda recruitment in the town of Szikszó. On May 14, 2009, a group of 200 Roma staged a counter demonstration at a Gárda march in Hajdúhadház (ODHIR, 2009, 37).

NGOs partnered with other national human rights groups and organized larger demonstrations to protest the hate crimes. On May 16, 2009, the Hungarian Democratic Charter and the Roma Civil Rights Movement organized the “Together Against Violence” rally in Budapest, which protested the hate crimes and violence toward minorities (TAV Protest invitation, 2009). The Movement of Citizens Against the Far Right organized another large-scale demonstration on August 15, 2009. Many
human rights groups and NGOs participated, including the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, the Roma Self Organization, and the Gypsy Association for the Protection of Dignity. Protesters carried Roma flags with the word Összetartozunk or “together” displayed in the center. The demonstration included performances from the Szilvássy Gipsy Folk Band and several other Roma performers who sang the Roma anthem Gelem Gelem (CAFR Protest Invitation, 2009).58

These demonstrations were significant; first in that Roma began to protest violence perpetrated against members of the Roma community beyond their subgroup—demonstrating broader identification with the Romani community. And second, in opposition to the avowedly anti-Roma rightwing, Romani groups often protested by embracing Roma identity and pride. Roma flags were present at protests and the Roma anthem was sometimes sung, demonstrating that asserting the symbols of the Roma nation became a way of countering the violent attacks.

CIVILIAN GAURDS

This thesis has repeatedly emphasized the absence of grass roots participation as a problem for Roma nationalism. However with the threat posed by the Hungarian hate crimes, Roma at the local level began to organize in unprecedented ways.

58 Activism eventually attracted the attention of the international community and media. They provided interviews and information to the press, which began to report on the financial crisis, right wing and violence against Roma in Hungary. As international attention and pressure mounted, the Hungarian government took more robust measures to address the crimes and relegated more manpower and resources to the investigation, eventually offering an 100 million forint reward, interviewing more than 200 witnesses and enlisting Europol, Interpol and the FBI to help with profiling and investigation (ODHIR, 2009, 16). NGOs and activists however criticized these statements for coming too late and “only very reluctantly” saying that the government still failed to address the larger problems of violence and minority exclusion in Hungary.
The hate crimes occurred across Hungary and affected a range of small communities, creating intense anxiety. In an entirely new development, Roma in local communities across the country began to organize themselves into associations of civil guards. The tradition of civil guard associations has existed in Hungary since the early transitional period in the 1990s, when crime rates tripled in some areas of the country (ODHIR, 2009, 27); however, this kind of local organization had never occurred within the Roma community.

“Neighborhood watches” were composed of unarmed civilian volunteers who attempted to stop further attacks by patrolling Roma neighborhoods, checking identification, stopping cars and setting up road blocks. After the April 2009 murder, Roma in the small town of Tiszalök set up a neighborhood watch group of 72 volunteers including children patrolling the town every night. There were larger patrols in communities where Magyar Gárda events or hate crimes had taken place, particularly in Győr, Zala and Vas counties (ODHIR, 2009, 38). However, Civilian Guards were set up in villages where no hate crimes had occurred, demonstrating that local Roma were aware of the danger to the Roma community as a whole. This type of local activism might signal the beginnings of grass roots Romani mobilization.

CURRENT SITUATION

As international scrutiny prompted more robust law enforcement, violent attacks against Roma began to decrease in late 2009. Magyar Gárda activity and Jobbik’s anti-Roma rhetoric were toned down before the 2010 elections, however this lull did not last for long.
In March of 2011, far right vigilantes and thinly disguised members of the Magyar Guard began another campaign to fight alleged Roma criminality. On March 6, 2011 Jobbik organized a march in the village of Gyöngyöspata and announced its intentions to “end the Gypsy terror” and “restore law and order.” The demonstration grew 3000 participants, and afterwards Gárda members remained in Gyöngyöspata to “protect public safety.” Roma residents reported that they were harassed and afraid to leave their homes. The vigilantes wore military uniforms, carried whips and axes and prevented Roma from entering stores. (Amnesty International Urgent Update, 2011)(Cain, 2011). The vigilantes then held a similar march in Hajdúhadház, another small Hungarian town where they claim “Gypsy crime” is rampant.  

As this threat has developed, the Roma are beginning to organize. Members of the Hajdúhadház Roma community plan to organize a counter demonstration (Thorpe, 2011) and Roma NGOs in Budapest have been working to publicize the events and organize larger counter protests. This recent vigilante activism indicates that the right wing intimidation will continue to threaten the Hungarian Romani community and it seems likely that more robust activism will develop in response to right wing danger. 

CONCLUSION

The 2008 and 2009 Hungarian hate crimes demonstrate the ways in which the threat of right wing extremism has begun to push Roma together and create a common platform where none existed previously.

59 Mundi Romani raw footage of vigilantes in Hajdúhadház on April 2, 2011
http://www.youtube.com/user/mundiromani
Traditionally, Hungarian Roma have been infamously factious. The Romungro, Olah, and Béas subgroups historically lacked connection and organization. The Roma parties that emerged in the 1990s failed to garner support bases and were prone to infighting. They were caught in what Aiden McGarry calls a “catch 22 situation,” because Hungarian Roma need Roma representatives so their interests can be heard in the Hungarian government, but are traditionally so “heterogeneous that any political program which emphasizes the importance of the Roma nation serves to highlight the lack of unity across three diverse communities in Hungary” (McGarry, 2009, 111).

The violent incidents have led Hungarian Roma to begin to find a common platform. The crimes sets into motion the conditions discussed in the previous chapters. Elites use media networks and connect and inform Roma about the events while also stressing that violence from the right-wing was common to Roma across Europe. Members of the Hungarian Roma community from all three groups began to mobilize and protest. Meanwhile, Roma at the local levels organized themselves into civilian guards, even in communities that had not experienced attacks. This grassroots mobilization showed an unprecedented degree of connection with the larger community.

Response to a perceived communal threat is a common catalyst of nationalist mobilization, even in dispersed groups like the Roma. “Extreme forms of segregation and oppression might generate in such dispersed ethnic groups a sense that independent nation building is their only hope for protection or even sheer survival.
This explains the attraction of the Zionist response to European anti-Semitism in the first half of the 20th century” (Rövid, 2009, 12).

The response to the hate crimes may well be the beginning of larger mobilization. The results are not conclusive, but this chapter serves to illustrate an emerging trend in Roma identity politics and mobilization.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Many scholars writing on the Roma have dismissed the idea of Romani nationalism as the illegitimate fabrication of a small and self-interested elite. Kovats calls it “amazing nonsense,” while Cohn claims that “the myth of Gypsy nationalism is only the latest of fictions that are spread about Gypsies” (Cohn, 1993, 5).

In this thesis, I have challenged these views and expanded the existing literature on the Roma nationalist movement by demonstrating the ways in which European integration, the Internet, and the threat of extremist violence have strengthened and expanded the foundations of the Roma stateless nation. Of course, Romani nationalism is still in its infancy, but these factors have helped it to grow and develop. In 1970, there was no concept of a unified transnational Roma group. In 1990 the name Roma and the symbols of the Roma nation were still virtually unknown. Today, “Roma” is increasingly recognized as a political category on the international, national and local levels. As this category has been legitimized, elites have created new conceptions of Roma identity and in doing so, circulated the idea and symbols of Romani nationhood.

This thesis provides an account which seeks to explain the still developing process of Roma nationalism. The historical fragmentation that began with the scattering of Romani groups as they migrated out of India produced a set of transnational Roma communities, which were incredibly diverse in terms of religion, language, culture and geographical location. The Roma nationalist project began
during the 1930s with an elite-driven search for “Romanestan” - a territorial homeland. World War II and the division of Europe during the Cold War interrupted this endeavor and it took Romani elites until the 1970s to regroup and continue the nationalist project.

The 1971 First World Romani Congress abandoned the search for a territorial state and focused instead on the construction of a stateless Romani nation. The Congress began by establishing a national anthem and flag and creating the name “Roma.” For many years these symbols were not known outside the small Romani elite. This led scholars like Cohn (1993) and Kovats (2003) to argue that Romani nationalism was illegitimate and others like Gay y Blasco (2002), Barany (2002), and Vermeersch (2005), to be skeptical of the phenomenon.

It seemed impossible that a community spread from Turkey to California, speaking many languages and practicing many religions could realistically imagine themselves to be a unified nation. However the political and technological developments of the past fifteen years have led to significant changes, in the way that social groups interact and represent themselves, which have served to strengthen the Romani nationalist project.

As the EU contemplated eastern expansion, Roma became an increasingly important issue in European politics. The continental exclusion of Romani communities presented a serious challenge to the EU’s perception of itself as a defender of democracy and human rights. In attempting to stimulate wider Roma inclusion, the EU legitimated and circulated “Roma” as a political category at the international, national and local levels. At the same time, the EU directed the Romani
nationalist project by giving it a clear goal: representation with in the union as a stateless nation.

The EU strengthened the Romani NGO elite by providing it with legitimation and funding. These activist organizations then worked to improve the situation of Roma by connecting transnational Romani groups through new media technology. Romanies were traditionally excluded from expressing their own views in popular publications, leading to inaccurate and problematic representations of Roma in the popular media. The Internet is revolutionary for Romani nationalism because it allows Roma unprecedented access to represent themselves. Elite online projects reconstructed Roma historical narratives, celebrated Roma unity in its diversity and reframed Romani identity as positive. These activities were complemented by artistic elites who also began to publically assert Romani pride. Both NGO and artistic elites constructed new visions of Romani identity and linked the idea of Roma unity to the symbols of the Romani nation.

As the EU expanded and the Internet developed, Europe experienced a rightward shift. The strength of formerly fringe radical parties increased in response to the perceived threats of EU domination and the dilution of national character through growing immigrant and minority populations. Nationalist movements are often sparked in response to communal danger. The case of Jobbik and the 2008-9 Hungarian hate crimes serves to illustrate the ways in which the Roma communities can come together and begin to mobilize in response to violence. The traditionally factious Hungarian Roma started to recognize their commonality and protest. While the case requires more study, it demonstrates the ways in which a violent threat can
work to unify Roma together and create common platforms where none previously existed.

In short, the recent development of the Romani nationalist movement can be characterized by the strengthening of “Roma” as a transnational political category and the construction of a Roma group identity linked to the idea and symbols of Romani nationhood. This trend can be observed in the increased use of Romani national symbols as synonyms for Roma identity. While forty years ago the Roma flag, name and anthem did not exist—today they are beginning to circulate as signifiers of Romani identity. While Roma nationalism remains in its infancy, it has begun to grow and develop. As Gellner suggests, it is “nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round” (Gellner, 1983, 54). This may be the case with the international Romani community, for as nationalist activity increases, the nation is increasingly imagined.

GAPS IN THE RESEARCH

This thesis is by no account an exhaustive study of the Romani nationalist movement. Roma nationalism is a broad topic and there are many ways to address the questions it raises. This project has tracked the development of the Roma group identity in response to the European integration, the Internet and the extreme right. This thesis has however, not measured the effect of these developments on Romani political mobilization. Citing Vermeersch (2005) and McGarry (2009), the thesis notes that the weakness of Romani identity and nationalism have contributed to the failure of Post-transition Romani political mobilization. The thesis does not address
the question of how new international and technological developments have affected Romani voting patterns and the political party platforms. It is perhaps too soon to fully gauge and measure the result of these changes, but this is a topic for future research.

IMPLICATIONS

The potential development of the Roma stateless nation has tremendous implications for both European communities and international politics as a whole.

For Roma, the maturation of the Romani nationalist project would likely produce substantial changes in traditional patterns of political mobilization and majority relations. I have avoided framing the question of Roma nationalism in terms of right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, and positive or negative. Many scholars who write on this topic have done so and it clouds their objectivity. However, in these concluding remarks I will outline the potential positive and negative effects of a Romani stateless nation.

A stronger and more developed Roma nationalism has the potential to unify Romanies politically and give them a more powerful voice in European democracies and, perhaps someday, the European Union. With the development of nationalism, Roma may finally harness the rights formally granted them by democracy and, after seven hundred years, live more equally in European societies.

However, there are concerns that Roma nationalism might also prove to be a negative phenomenon. As I have explained, the Romani nationalist project works to standardize and unite Roma identities. Groups who prefer to maintain identification
with their regional subgroup, see this as a reductive process of homogenization. Some groups may even feel that the development of the Romani stateless nation might change and destroy the essential character of Romani identity, as many Orthodox Jewish communities felt after the creation of the state of Israel.

Additionally, some scholars suggest that there may be dangers in Romani nationhood. Mirga & Gheorghe (1997), Kovats (2003) and Rövid, (2009) argue that the strengthening of a Romani stateless nation might be used as an excuse to exclude Roma from citizenship in the states where they live and that states might use Romani nationhood to shirk their duties and obligations to the Romani population. Kovats even suggests that the presence of a Roma nation could further embolden the right wing to attack the perceived internal threat of a Romani nation.

Additionally, for hundreds of years, Roma have been nonviolent and there are virtually no cases of large-scale Roma uprisings (Vermeersch, 2005, 2). Increased levels of nationalism may also work to increase Romani violence. Nationalism can be defined as the privileging of members of the nation over all other groups. To some degree, nationalism can also be seen as the willingness of people to die, and sometimes even to kill for the nation (Anderson, 1983, 7). Rövid suggests that developed Romani nationalism might also entail radical Roma nationalism (Rövid, 2009, 15). While Roma nationalism has the potential to increase Romani participation and secure Romani rights, it may also change the traditionally peaceful character of Romani relations in Europe.

The development of Romani nationalism may also have serious implications for both European and international politics. As Roma lack all the traditional
foundations of statehood, their nationalist project is developing in unique and unprecedented ways. Rövid argues that Roma have the potential to be “an exceptional, avant-garde nation” (Rövid, 2009, 14). The Romani nation represents an entirely unique model: a transnational nation not based on common territory, language or religion. What are the implications of this new vision of nationhood? As the 2000 Romani Declaration of Nation suggests, the Roma nation builds the foundation of a new, more globally oriented international order. As Goodwin (2004) suggested, the Romani stateless nation should be seen as a fundamental rejection of the territorially based international system. The development of Romani nationhood thus “challenges the principle of territorial democracy and the Westphalian international order” (Rövid, 2009, 11). As a result, the continued development of the Romani nationalist project may have implications for the future of international politics as the world becomes increasingly cosmopolitan and globalized.

For seven hundred years, Roma survived in Europe by remaining far outside of the political realm and at the social margins. Perhaps it is then ironic that now, as Roma begin to enter politics, they mount a fundamental challenge to the international nation state system.
APPENDIX 1
ROMA YOUTUBE PROJECTS

Typical Roma?

Another similar online video campaign is the “Typical Roma?” project, started in 2009 by the European Roma Grass Roots Inclusion Project (ERGO). Roma NGOs and volunteers from Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova cooperated and produced a series of online videos “intended to promote a positive image of Roma and to strengthen the Roma voice in order to stand up against discrimination and stigmatization” (ERGO, 2010). The videos were distributed on Youtube and by ERGO affiliated websites and email list serves. The films show a group of young Roma activists doing various everyday activities and ask, “typical walking? Typical sleeping? Typical Roma?” The campaign shows that “young Roma want to stand up and have their own say” says Mustafa Jakupov an activist from Macedonia said during a 2010 press conference.60

Colorful but Color Blind

“Colorful but Color Blind: Beyond Roma Stereotypes” is another project which uses the Internet and digital video to tell Roma stories. The project is funded by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency & Citizenship Program and filmmakers work in collaboration with the University of Miami’s School of Communication. “Colorful

60 Typical Roma: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9S0zciiAwo&feature=player_embedded).
but Colorblind, uses multimedia storytelling to promote social integration of the stories of Roma life in some of the newest EU member states, exploring contemporary Roma identities and culture and obstacles that Roma communities face in achieving equality” (CBCB, 2010). The project teamed up Roma and non-Roma journalists and who created 25 short videos about Roma in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The videos tell stories about different Roma communities in these countries.  

APPENDIX 2  
ROMA FLAG NGO LOGOS

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61 Colorful but Colorblind: http://roma.glocalstories.org/
Colorful But Colorblind Logo. Photo from website. 2010

Typical Roma Logo. Photo from ERGO network 2010

Mundi Romani logo. Photo from Mundi Romani Website

Voice of Roma logo. Photo from Voice of Roma website. 2011
Hütz has begun to publicly explore and reclaim his Roma identity. In 2006 he was featured in the documentary “The Pied Piper if Hützovina” which followed his journey home to Ukraine to explore his Romani roots. Before moving to the US as a teenager, Hütz grew up in an integrated family and did not speak Romanes. After visiting his family and a nearby Roma camp, Hütz explains that though “the passion of my life is Gypsy music” saying he grew up not speaking Romani and rarely visited the Roma sections of his hometown. “I’m coming from punk rock and trying to work my way back into Gypsy music… the more I track things down, the more it falls into place” he says (TPPH, 2006).

Despite not growing up speaking Romanes, Hütz has been working to learn and sing in Romani language. In 1999 he wrote the song Baro Foro in broken Romanes; Ian Hancock later translated the song into English. The lyrics, broken, describe traveling “Oh Roma, what am I to do? …Only that family lives well, where the brothers love each other”(GB, 2010). While Hütz claimed that he intended the song to be an anthem for all peoples, the song does bear some similarities with Gelem Gelem, which asks “Oh, Roma where do you come from, with tents on happy roads? Oh Roma, Oh Brothers.” Gogol Bordello’s music uses gypsy conventions to create a new transnational musical form.
APPENDIX FOUR
KERIEVA

Kerieva is a Scottish Romanichal singer who wrote a Romani language anthem to encourage young Roma to become politically active. “It’s important to me to sing in Romanes... I think it would be very shallow of me with these roots to just use the music” Kerieva told the Travellers Times Blog (Bowers, 2008). In the summer of 2008 Kerieva wrote Dikhen Ande Italia or “Look to Italy” for young
Roma. “The song was inspired by a visit in August to my friend and famous Romani Holocaust survivor Ceija Stojka in Vienna,” said Kerieva. Stojka told Kerieva of her fear that “Auschwitz is only sleeping” (Bowers, 2008). After the visit, Kerieva looked at rising extremism in Eastern Europe and the Italian Government’s selective fingerprinting of Roma and started to believe that Stojka might be right. She wrote Dikhen Ande Italia to show Roma the connections between past and present, with the intention of encouraging pride, unity, and action. The song cautions:

“Romalen listen: this is a message just for you. Keep your eyes open, your ear to the ground, your hands ready – Can you hear them? Sharpening their knives once more... Something sinister is awakening that only played dead. The monsters’ gut rumbles, waking, it is hungry. It wants to devour us again. Romalen listen: the black legion has woken from a 60 years slumber and is conquering Europe- Look in Italy... Young Romalen, don’t sit on your asses. It’s time for action— to be loud and proud of who we are, not live in fear of who might know... We need to be ready – they are coming. Together we must fight the black legion for our right to live without fear or shame- by any means necessary” (Bowers, 2008).

Kerieva’s music video for the song continued to emphasize her point, juxtaposing images of the Holocaust with contemporary Europe.  

The song asks all Roma to come together and be proud of identity. It features the Rom flag and the lyrics clearly reference Gelem Gelem, using the same direct address to the Roma people and the same references to the “black legion.”

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62 Video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWgjGmWzeuQ).
APPENDIX FIVE
HUNGARIAN ROMANI HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Roma have a long and complex history in Hungary. Their history mirrors that of the larger Romani population in several respects. Roma groups first appeared in the region during the late Middle Ages and early accounts suggest that they initially thought to be religious exiles and admired for their abilities as musicians, soldiers and metal workers (Crowe, 2007, 70). Roma were increasingly distrusted and seen as “other” as the region came under threat from the Ottomans. After the Hungarian defeat in the 1526 battle of Mohács, Roma were increasingly seen as Turkish spies.

This shift in popular opinion led to growing discrimination and restrictions. Austro-Hungarian rulers issued a series of anti-Roma decrees and by 1710, Joseph I proclaimed that all Roma who illegally entered Hungarian territory should be hunted down and visibly branded (Crowe, 2007, 73). In 1761 Empress Maria Theresa took a softer approach, issuing decrees that aimed to Christianize and assimilate Roma populations into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her son Joseph II continued this policy by outlawing the use of Romani language and replacing the name “Gypsy” with “new citizens” or “new Hungarians” (Vermeersch, 2005, 47). While these laws disrupted traditional Romani practices and lifestyle, they did not prevent discrimination and rarely resulted in successful integration into Austro-Hungarian society.

The 20th century was turbulent for both the Hungarian nation and its Roma population. No event looms more significantly in the Hungarian collective memory than the loss of WWI and the resulting Treaty of Trianon, which dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The treaty resulted in a loss of 72% of Hungarian
territory, 60% of its population and 28% of its Magyar speakers (Crowe, 2007, 86). Floors were effectively re-drawn, leaving thousands of self-identified Hungarians living abroad in Transylvania, Slovakia, Austria and the former Yugoslavia. More than 90 years later, the treaty is still viewed as a tragedy and remains highly relevant in Hungarian popular discourse.

During the postwar period, popular anger with the treaty and desire to regain the lost territories contributed to the rise of conservatism and helped push Hungary toward fascism. The 1930s saw a proliferation of extreme rightwing groups, the Hungarian National Socialist Party and the Arrow Cross Party particularly influential among them. These hyper nationalist “Hungarianist” parties soon forged close links with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. After the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia, the Hungarian government officially allied itself with Germany and came under increasing pressure to “deal” with the Jewish and Roma populations. While the Jewish round-up was given priority, the focus fell on Roma by autumn of 1944.

The Hungarian government, Arrow Cross Party, police forces, and various other far right groups assisted the Nazi genocide, rounding up and deporting Roma. Scholars continue to debate the numbers of Roma killed during the Porajmos. The Hungarian War Victims Association claims that 28,000 Roma were deported (Crowe, 2007, 91) while other scholars claim that as many as 50,000 Hungarian Roma perished in the concentration camps (Dowling, 2010, 2).

The Soviet Army occupied Budapest in February of 1945, leading to more than 40 years of communist rule. Most Roma scholars note the ambiguous nature of Soviet policy toward minority groups and its interesting consequences for Roma.
“On the one hand, these regimes condemned all forms of national loyalty and regarded “ethnic nationality” as epiphenomenon of the capitalist society. On the other hand, they reified nations and national minorities as “naturally” occurring entities, supported their cultural development, and institutionalized boundaries between them” (Vermeersch, 2006, 49). Socialist policies tended to be quite protective of national minorities, however, Roma represented a unique problem because Soviet theory was predicated on national groups being territorially concentrated and given autonomy on that basis. Roma however, tend to be relatively dispersed.

The Hungarian Communist régime viewed Roma as a population excluded from capitalist society, believing that class-consciousness and proletariat identity would eventually transcend ethnic affiliation and Roma would eventually integrate into the worker’s state. In the meantime, the Hungarian Socialist government was intent on integrating Roma as much as possible, in order to finally utilize the group’s labor potential. Although they generally worked low-level and unskilled jobs, Roma were consistently employed under communism. This steady income helped to settle and ground the Roma community however, despite inclusion programs racisms and discrimination continued in Hungarian society (Dowling, 2010, 2).

During the post-Soviet period, Hungary successfully transitioned to democracy, still throughout the 1990s Roma remained at the fringes of government and society. During the early years after transition, the government generally ignored Roma. The 1990 census report on Hungarian minority groups did not even mention
Roma (Kamusella, 2009, 706) and it was only after negotiations for EU membership began that the government took a more active interest in the Roma population.

Even after the application of the Copenhagen Criteria, their situation remains precarious. As communism fell, employment opportunities disappeared and Roma were generally among the first to lose jobs. This trend has continued and today unemployment in the Roma community is thought to be roughly 70%, more than 10 times the national average (Amnesty International, 2010, 9). NGOs believe that while 30% of Hungarian Roma are well integrated, the rest live in severe poverty. The income of the average Roma household is significantly lower than the national average and a disproportionally high percentage of Roma families have incomes below the subsistence level. A 2005 World Bank report stated that 27% of the Hungarian Roma population lives in extreme poverty compared to 3% of the non-Roma population (Amnesty International, 2010, 9). Roma in Hungary have a significantly poorer quality of life and their average life expectancy is about ten years lower than that of non-Roma (ODHIR, 2009, 47). These conditions within the Roma community are a serious embarrassment for the Hungarian government. As Hungary assumed the rotating EU presidency in January 1, 2011, it pledged to make Roma a priority.
APPENDIX SIX
CONTINUOUS JOBBIK AND MAGYAR GARDA ACTIVITY

Even after the banning of the Magyar Garda in 2009, the organization’s activities continued. Jobbik and the Garda continued to hold rallies and demonstrations, for example on July 4, 2010 the groups staged a joint demonstration Ferenc Deacter, in the center of Budapest. Members of the guard can be seen in black shirts and military fatigues. Photographs by author.
Members of the Garda guard the perimeter of the square as police attempt to break up the rally
REFERENCES


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