

Neoliberal Strategies to Defuse a Powder Keg in Europe: the "Decade of Roma Inclusion" and its Rationale

Empire is characterized by the close proximity of extremely unequal populations, which creates a situation of permanent social danger and requires the powerful apparatuses of the society of control to ensure separation and guarantee the new management of social space.[1]

THE ROMA are Europe's ubiquitous underclass, the largest ethnic minority on the continent. Its most marginalized, oppressed and alienated citizens, they have now been "targeted" for a major concerted effort by East European governments, the World Bank and George Soros' Open Society Institute. There is much hype and some hope in the air. The fanfare around the Decade of Roma Inclusion peaked on February 2, 2005 in Sofia, when it was formally launched in a high-level meeting of prime ministers from across Central and South East Europe. This multi-pronged initiative funded by European capital and the WB will span the decade 2005-2015, and is aimed at "ending discrimination against the Roma and ensuring equal access to education, housing, employment and health care." Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia are formally committed to reform in these four priority sectoral areas.

The prelude to this initiative was a 2004 EU report, "The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union," which presents an alarming picture of squalor and exclusion, a key statement on how the European plutocracy views its most

powerless citizens.[2] It is instructive to compare that assessment with the Roma National Congress "Report on the Condition of the Roma in Europe 2000," which presents the perspective of an international Roma elite on the most pressing needs of the broader Roma masses.[3]

An open letter presented to the EU by the European Roma Rights Center and other groups on International Roma Day April 8, 2005 highlighted the crisis: "anti-Gypsyism continues to be rife, is rarely punished and is often used as an acceptable outlet of racism in mass media as well as in every aspect of life," stressing "the persistent reality of extreme poverty and systemic human rights frustration or active abuse in the Roma ghettos which requires urgent concrete action." [4]

This article explores the underlying rationale of the present initiative to forge new hierarchies of control over the Roma in the light of this "persistent reality." In closing, it also suggests a potential vista for alternative pathways to self-management for Europe's Roma, social change from the bottom up, and the need for Romany intellectuals to speak the rude truth to power. Observations here are based in part on my own work in civil rights over a decade among impoverished urban Roma, all Muslim, in eastern Bulgaria.

The core thesis of this critique is that unless pervasive anti-Cyganism is rooted out, and Roma are treated as "subjects" rather than "objects," an end to discrimination, poverty and inequality, a kind of pan-European apartheid, is illusory. Their victimization is grounded both on racism and socioeconomic class antagonisms, coupled in some corners of the continent – like eastern Bulgaria where most Roma are Muslim – with an animus against Islam. Romani destitution highlights the garden of stark contradictions that Eastern Europe under neo-liberalism has become.

Their dispersion as a supra-national people "beyond territory" – and everywhere in the vortex of a dynamics of

internal colonization – suggests an ethnic micro-model for an alternative Europe of autonomous regions beyond the current architecture of the nation-state, with the potential of a transformed politics of self-organization from below. They constitute a potential transverse within the emergent "counter-Empire"[5] at the very base of European social space. In their radical oppression and exclusion, the Roma may epitomize the prospect for a kind of "regeneration of soil cultures" envisioned by Prakash and Esteva, not in Zapatista Mexico but across the expanding turf of the European Union: "Localization or relocalization, taking root again, is being pioneered by those already awake to their marginalization by the global economy." [6]

There are kernels within Roma alienation of a spirit analogous to "*ya basta!*, this is enough." That holds out the prospect of learning from the analogous experiments in the popular power of *horizontalidad* and neighborhood autonomy and solidarity now blossoming, for example, as an amazing complex of movements across Argentina.[7]

As internally dominated and heavily policed populations, the Roma constitute an ethnic archipelago of enclaves inside Europe. Under an impress of continental cultural denigration, they are now caught up in the need for "decolonizing the mind," in a society that has negated their being and "voice," perpetuated their silencing and destitution. Indeed, Roma voice has, analogous to the situation of African-Americans over generations, often been reduced to Roma "music" and "rhythmicality," or an exoticism of the Other on the most destitute internal peripheries. In their shared trans-territorial and trans-national topography and mobility, Jewish and Roma life worlds in European space and time can be illuminated in fresh ways through post-colonial prisms. But the present paper will not develop an analysis of Roma alterity seen through a post-colonial prism lens.[8]

I. The Free Market's Principal Victims: a Decade of Delusion

THE DECADE OF INCLUSION is the first cooperative international effort by Capital's elites to ameliorate the misery of the Romani masses and confront segregation and wholesale discrimination. The advent of the market-driven economies, guided by neo-liberal cutbacks in social expenditures and privatization of state enterprises, has spelled disaster for many working people in Europe's East, but it is the Roma who have been its primary victims. A decade and a half after the end of the Cold War, and prolonged pressure by the organs of the EU, Eastern Europe's emergent political cliques and power elites in Western Europe have now agreed that the plight of the Roma, hardest hit by World Bank and IMF austerity economics, can no longer be ignored. Soros has pledged \$30 million for aid to Roma education, and an entire array of new programs are on the drafting boards. New NGOs eager to get a piece of the action are sprouting by the month, attempting to literally "steal" projects from each other. It is reasonable to wonder: who will benefit? How much of this "aid" on the ground will reach the people who need it most? Experience suggests there will be much rhetoric, a veritable rewriting of the "public transcript" and little concrete change.[9] Already, Roma activists in Central Europe are pointing to the fact that the broader public has been scarcely informed about the new "Roma integration schemes" of the ruling elites, which threaten to remain more spectacle than substance.[10]

Most ordinary Roma across Eastern Europe perceive this to be a kind of cleverly engineered hype. In the Bulgarian Roma communities where I have worked for more than a decade, there is a vast disillusionment with the new oligarchies that have emerged to cement class rule since the collapse of state socialism. And they distrust the mainstream organizations and will of the government to actually implement any of the grand promises envisioned by technocratic schemes for change. Roma on the street are wary of the rhetoric of their often self-appointed Roma leaders and power brokers in Sofia. They know they are often never consulted and cannot participate. Under a

thinly disguised authoritarianism, they are turned into "clients," unable to decide any basic questions about change in their lives, and live under a tutelage of government agencies distant from their needs.

Unless they shout on the street, they are in a real sense "invisible." This is compounded by a profusion of bureaucratized and often corrupted NGO projects, designed to pad the pocket of a miniscule Romani entrepreneurial elite. The Decade of Inclusion may be another "decade of delusion" in the history of hypocrisy which Romani communities have come to know so well since 1989.

Indeed, as the official guests were delivering speeches on February 2, hundreds of Roma, most from the provinces, gathered in front of Parliament in Sofia to protest against their wretched condition. Ilia Iliev, young leader of the new Bulgarian Romani political party *Drom*, accused the government of working preferentially with select Roma organizations. He complained it was treating these as "puppets invited to applaud." Iliev stressed that the money donated to NGOs working on the Roma problems almost never reached intended recipients.[11] Over 30 Roma journalists attending the event were excluded from a key reception, and later lodged a formal protest with the Bulgarian government.

In an action emblematic of the garden of contradictions and the huge chasm between people and power that Roma perceive as their own core predicament, on August 31, 2005, the authorities in a neighborhood of Sofia ordered the demolition of 22 "illegal" homes, all of which were inhabited by Roma families. Other demolitions in Roma ghetto areas in Sofia are expected in the months to come. The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights condemned the demolition of these Roma houses. It stressed that The Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society, adopted by the Bulgarian government in 1999, requires the legalization of the Roma neighborhoods and of the property in them.[12]

Romanies in many communities across Eastern Europe are a population both *pre-institutionalized*, in the sense that were never included in institutional coverage by the State or integrated into the Market, and *de-institutionalized*, in that many with a former job, even a career under state socialism, lost it in the turmoil of the collapse of the command economy, with little hope ever to be included on a payroll again.[13] Very revealing of the extreme Roma plight in Serbia is a recent grassroots interview with a village activist.[14]

II. Why Now?

WHAT HAS BROUGHT EAST EUROPEAN POLITICAL ELITES and the World Bank to this "historic" juncture of high-profile "concern"? Addressing the opening in Sofia on February 2, Hungarian prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsany put one aspect bluntly if not cynically: "The problems of the Roma are not locked on the territory of the individual EU member states, because the free movement of people means free movement of social problems."

1. Fears of Immigration

A SPECTER HAS BEGUN TO PERTURB the corporate and ministerial halls in Western Europe: a massive influx of Roma economic immigrants, especially from the new states in the EU and those slated to join in 2007, such as Bulgaria and Romania. They are the most menacing edge of the mass worker nomadism that Hardt and Negri see as integral to a "powerful form of class struggle within and against imperial post-modernity": "A spectre haunts the world and it is the spectre of migration." So it is a desperate race against time to try to create conditions to "persuade" the indigent to stay at home, as reflected in British fears and articles in the English tabloid press about imminent waves of "ragged Slovakian Roma" descending on the country.[15]

The Decade's launching party in Sofia was followed by a "Resolution on the Situation of Roma in the European Union"

adopted by the European Parliament (May 5, 2005) stressing "the recognition of Roma rights concerns as matters of the highest political urgency in Europe," and condemning "racist attacks, hate speech, physical attacks by extremist groups, unlawful evictions and police harassment motivated by Anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia" across the continent. It decries "substandard and insanitary living conditions and evidence of ghettoisation [...] on a wide scale, with Roma being regularly prevented from moving out of such neighbourhoods" as well as "racially segregated schooling systems in place across several Member States, in which Roma children are taught either in segregated classes with lower standards or in classes for the mentally handicapped." [16]

2. A Potential Time Bomb in the Pacification of the European Poor

BEYOND LABOR MIGRATION WAVES, the Roma population is recognized by Power as a potential powder keg under Europe's New Order. Their social pacification now ranks among the imperatives of the coming decade as Europe's eastern periphery is brought under the West's iron economic and political control. The West European working classes have long since been co-opted, but an ethnic underclass spread across Eastern Europe could pose a threat to European integration at its very base. As the ever more unified and NATOized Europe enters the 21st century, it is unsettled by the prospect of a politically rebellious pan-European ethnic "pariah" population, beginning to listen to new Romani leaders like Iliev, hardened and radicalized by the economic struggle to survive over the past 15 years. Imagine a movement of mass civil disobedience, half a million Roma marching on the Parliament in Sofia or several thousand lying down on the tracks of the Bulgarian national railroad to protest their misery. Younger Roma feel cheated, lost in a jungle of doublespeak, greed and exclusion, and the growing gap between the haves and have-nots in Eastern Europe's version of the "ownership society." Now emerging from a

culture of imposed silence, the Romani "hidden transcripts" reflect pervasive cynicism and anger everywhere across Europe's East.

THE DEFUSING OF THAT ANGER, its depoliticization, is essential for the future "integration" of these societies into the periphery of the broader core EU. In February 2004, a Roma uprising over cuts in welfare benefits in Slovakia was finally quelled by 20,000 police officers and soldiers. Slovakia has the largest (nearly one half million) and most destitute Roma population in Central Europe. This "riot" is what some observers believe is a foreboding of violent protest to come. As the Roma National Congress has stated:

A restriction of civil rights in the Western democracies as a result of "refugee fighting measures" against Roma is already reality. Numerous Roma understand this refugee policy as a continuation of the "National-Socialist Roma policy by different means." The RNC fears the beginning of a race for deterrence against Roma in Europe.[17]

3. The Coopting of Roma Autonomy

ROMANI SELF-ORGANIZATION is gathering pace across Europe, exemplified in part in the work of the [European Roma Information Office](#) in Brussels, the [Roma National Congress](#), the Roma Student Network (<http://www.romastudent.net>) and the [European Roma Rights Center](#), which publishes an online journal *Roma Rights*. Though there is still no transparent Roma international representation with grassroots support, they remain a diasporic virtual collectivity. Nonetheless, through networking, bonds are being forged from Eastern Europe to the large *gitano* [Roma community in Spain](#), where violence against *gitanos* flared earlier this year. New Roma media are proliferating. In European board rooms and ministries, it is understood that this emerging leadership, demanding fresh departures and genuine change, must be brought "under

control." The Decade of the Romanies is a major strategy by the EU and World Bank to integrate, neutralize and co-opt or "clientize" this evolving grassroots Romani self-organization – while passing down some modicum of economic relief to the impoverished Roma masses in the form of handouts or jobs as street cleaners.

The Western oligarchies wish to shape emergent Romani civil society in the image of the European elite models, including a regiment of NGOs totally dependent on external capital and a leadership attuned to the values of managerialism. This is a prime example of what Arundhati Roy has called the "NGO-ization of resistance": "the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda. It turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples' movements that have traditionally been self-reliant." [18]

4. The Imperative to Neutralize

ALONG WITH NGOs, numerous Romani-built political parties are emerging. The political elites in Eastern Europe fear the potential clout that could be exercised by independent Roma parties that can organize the Roma electorate into a separate political force. Their "inclusion" means political incorporation into the existing system of capital-dominated parties. That was evident in the run-up to the Bulgarian national elections on June 26, 2005. Hopes were high in January 2005, when a number of the new small Romani parties tried to form a coalition. But that bid failed, torpedoed in part by the desire and machinations of the major parties to woo the Roma voters for themselves. Yet at the grassroots, many Roma remain alienated from the electoral carnival, certain those Romani parties are corrupted and fully co-opted, instruments to "steal even more from the people," as a senior Roma women's rights activist in Bulgaria recently put it to

me. Last December Mircea Dusa, the first Rom deputy in recent Romanian history, entered the national Parliament. In January 2004, an initiative was launched for a Europe-wide Romani party. Viewed from the cockpits of continental power, any potential trans-national dual ethnic power and its leadership must be neutralized.

5. The Dynamics of "Demographics"

ANOTHER REASON FOR ACTION now is the growing "demographic danger." Roma continue to have birth rates significantly higher than majority populations, and marry younger. The growth rate in the majority population in a number of post-communist countries has plummeted since 1990 (now 0.5 in the Czech Republic, just above zero in Slovakia and not much higher in Bulgaria), while the birth rate among the Roma population continues to rise.[19] Inclusion is a strategy for generating smaller Romani families: later marriages, fewer babies. Their mounting relative numbers are regarded as a threat to national ethnic dominance. A standing joke in Bulgaria is that pretty soon "only the Gypsies will be left" as much of the younger skilled non-Roma emigrate west to greener pastures, a brain drain of huge proportions. In numerous villages in northeastern Bulgaria, almost all younger couples and children are Roma, while many of the non-Roma villagers are well over 65.

Programs for improving the dire situation of Roma women have an inevitable demographic subtext of a scheme to reduce fertility. That complex subtext, while essential to the liberation of Romani women, also retains this alternate racist reading that should not be overlooked. In a number of countries, Romani women are still the victims of forced sterilization.[20]

In partial response to perceived "demographic" threats, a chilling result of the June 26, 2005, poll in Bulgaria was the surprising emergence of a new xenophobic nativist party

Ataka as fourth largest grouping in the parliament. Its slogan is "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians." Along with a strong anti-NATO stance that has garnered votes from the left, Ataka also appeals to a growing far-right nationalism, emphasizing a proto-racist politics against the "dangers" emanating from the Turkish and Roma minorities. Some observers regard Ataka and its leader Volen Siderov as semi-fascist in outlook, its success a backlash against an ever more militant and impoverished Roma minority. Its electoral victory points up underlying ethnic tensions in the country and the prospects for fanning them.[21] The [Ataka website](#) features a map of Bulgaria with the sign "FOR SALE" covered with Israeli and Turkish flags. The successful right-wing cable Bulgarian TV channel Skat features hyper-nationalist programming that often appeals to anti-minority sentiment.

These tensions are also rising between the Roma and the large ethnic Turkish minority, which claims the Roma are getting "preferential treatment" from the government and European institutions. Such animosity is deeply rooted in eastern Bulgaria, where Muslim Turkish-speaking Roma often attempt to "pass" as ethnic Turks. Observers claim the Ataka party is also intentionally churning inter-ethnic strife between Roma and ethnic Turks.[22]

6. The Challenge of Regenerated Ethnic Identity

A FURTHER FACTOR is linked to the politics of pluralism: in their anger and bewilderment, ever more young Roma are seeking to define themselves as a distinctive ethnic minority and culture, with a distinctive Romani language and demands for "collective rights." Such "ethnic renewal" poses a potential threat to efforts for their "integration" in societies chary of pluralist versions of multicultural national identity. What the EU does not want is a proud, culturally conscious, and ever more militant Roma minority, linking internationally across borders. While the EU and governments give lip service to some concepts of ethnic pluralism, the reality tends to be

a monocultural dominance of one elite and its narratives. The Roma contribution to the history of these nation-states in music, dance, literature, handicrafts, village life and other spheres over 600 years is everywhere suppressed – in schoolbooks, in museums, in the national memory, and the cultural engineering of heritage. That of course also has a strong class element, the pervasive 'invisibility' of the working class and ethnic underclass minorities in Europe's now profusely bourgeois national narratives.

7. The Reluctant Recognition of the Roma Genocide

A MORE SUBMERGED COROLLARY FACTOR in answering "why now?" may be entwined with the re-emergent politics of the Holocaust. In the EU narrative of the "new Europe," the Mass Murder under National Socialism has emerged in the past decade as the "negative foundational icon of unity," part of the very charter of this new Europe. Romani organizations have succeeded in placing the plight of the Roma – the only other ethnic group singled out by the Nazis for extermination – on the agenda of Europe's ruling elites. The decades-old invisibility of the Roma Holocaust (*O Porrajmos*, "The Devouring,") in European perception, and Roma demands raised for recognition as victims and financial compensation, can no longer be ignored. The multiple parallels between anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism are more clearly seen.[23] The new [European Center for the Study of Antiziganism \(EZAF\)](#) at the University of Hamburg is pursuing a program of research, publication (annual *Blackbook on Antiziganism*) and conferences, and is the first such research center established in Western Europe. In a striking volume, Sonneman provides a moving oral history of a German-Romani family and the similarities between Jewish and Romani victimization and personal experience in the Holocaust.[24] There may be a growing sense among European plutocrats that the Roma, by dint of Nazism's genocidal history, must also be incorporated, however begrudgingly, into its post-Cold War myth of neo-

liberal pan-European unity under the shadow of Auschwitz.

III. Turning the Tide of History?

COMMENTING ON THE CONTRADICTIONS of Romani squalor in the midst of European affluence, Andrey Ivanov of the UNDP in Slovakia recently stated: "These conditions are unacceptable in countries that are part of the European Union or aspire to be. [...] We need action now to close the appalling development gap that separates the Roma from the majority populations in this region." The vaunted Decade is also supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. Thus, a full ensemble of neoliberal institutions are joining hands and coffers to help Roma 'integrate.' Speaking at the Decade's gala liftoff in Sofia – home to one of the continent's largest Romani ghettos, the hellhole of Faculteta – World Bank President Wolfensohn formulated the primary neoliberal rhetoric of such "inclusion": "It is one of the great moral issues facing Europe today. If we do nothing, we will see continued disaffection and suffering. If we succeed, the decade offers an opportunity to turn the tide of history and harness the political will to include the Roma as full citizens in European societies." Yet it is *precisely* World Bank-promoted austerity and privatization programs that have plunged the Roma into such misery.

In late June 2005, Romania was chosen for the rotating Presidency of the Decade in its first stage effective July 1. In Bucharest, the Decade's veritable "godfather" George Soros intoned the agenda substantially dependent on his bankroll:

I hope that the Romanian government will rise to the challenge and work to lift Roma out of poverty and isolation, and to put an end to centuries of discrimination. [...] The launch of the Decade four months ago showed that the political will exists to enact reform. But the real work must now be done to effect concrete change to transform the lives

Yet "real work" and "concrete change" may prove elusive.

IV. "Persistent Reality": Some Grim Facts

THE ROMA ARE NOW THE LARGEST, POOREST, and geographically most widely dispersed minority in Europe, stretching from Turkey to Spain, Wales and Scotland – and across the Arab world. Originally from northwest India, they began to migrate west in the 12th century.[26] An extraordinary fact of social oppression is that Europe and much of the Arab world share a downtrodden, subaltern universally despised Other, a community known in North Africa and West Asia as the Dom or Nawar, the direct cousins of the Roma. Many Dom still speak Domari, a language related to the many varieties of Romani spoken in Europe, itself a distant linguistic relative of Hindi. In Iraq, the small Dom (Gajar) community is among the war's most desperate victims.[27] The best single resource on the contemporary Dom, a vastly unresearched minority, is the website of the [Dom Research Center](#). The Nawar also form the most internally oppressed and "silenced" pariah segment of the Palestinians.

The total European Roma population in Europe is estimated at 10 million. Accurate census figures do not exist, since Roma are fearful to identify themselves to census-takers as Roma. The two largest Roma communities are in Romania and Bulgaria. Veteran activist Georgi Parushev is certain the Romani population in Bulgaria is close to one million, more than double official government figures. Everywhere they form a "pariah" underclass, nearly totally endogamous, a contemporary pan-European lumpenproletariat, often perceived and demonized by local populations in this dialectic of Othering of the poor as "merely a residue of pre-industrial social forms, a kind of historical refuse." [28] Poverty rates for Roma range between four and ten times that of non-Roma in

Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro. Estimates are that nearly 40 percent of Roma in Romania and Bulgaria live on less than two U.S. dollars per day. Unemployment among Romani Bulgarian youth and young adults is around 85 percent. In terms of social and economic geography, rural Roma indeed form the periphery of a periphery, itself within an East European periphery, marginality raised to the third power.

A study released in mid-January 2005 indicated that that the condition of Romani Czechs is worsening, despite millions of crowns of government spending and dozens of government projects,[29] and Romani hard-core joblessness is in the range of 70 percent. Ghettoization is on the increase. In Slovakia, there are several hundred extremely substandard Romani slum settlements, characterized by extreme deprivation and often lacking electricity, provision of potable water, sewage, and solid waste removal. Such spatial deprivation amounts in many communities to a form of socially-sanctioned residential segregation, both urban and rural.

Gaps in education between Roma and majority populations are striking. Across countries, some 70-80 percent of Romanies have less than a primary school education, and often must attend segregated schools, separate and unequal. Fewer than 1 percent of Roma continue on to higher education. In a bizarre construction, between 50-80 percent of Roma study in "special schools" intended for the mentally and physically disabled, which limit their future opportunities in education and on the labor market. According to a UNDP survey released in February 2005, only 10 per cent of Roma aged 12 and above in Bulgaria had completed primary education, compared to 72 per cent of Bulgarians. The infant mortality rate among Roma in Bulgaria is far higher than that of the general population.

V. Anti-Cyganism and Romanophobia

RACIST DISCRIMINATION IS ENDEMIC across social classes. Police

harassment of Roma youth is common across Eastern Europe, their numbers in the prison population staggering. In women's prisons, many of the inmates are Roma; a recent study indicates that in Spain, 25 percent of all women prisoners are *gitanas*.^[30] Discrimination in the military is the order of the day: Roma recruits in the Bulgarian army, for example, are subject to repeated abuse and harassment, often used as veritable 'slave laborers' on construction projects. The conscript Bulgarian army has virtually no Romani commissioned officers and few non-coms, despite the fact that Roma may constitute up to 10 percent or more of the Bulgarian population.

In an article "Anti-Gypsyism: Europe's Tolerated Racism," the European Roma Information Office notes:

Surveys of opinion from a variety of old and new EU countries including the accession countries of Romania and Bulgaria show that: – Roughly two thirds of Europeans find Roma unacceptable as neighbours. – There is strong opposition to having Roma as schoolmates, as work colleagues, friends and even more strongly against Roma as family members and the idea of intermarriage. – A significant proportion of Europeans belonging to the majority population approve of radical measures against Roma including their expulsion from countries, the restriction of their civil rights and sterilisation programmes.[31]

In Kosovo, the 1999 ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Roma by Albanian militants was the worst collective disaster suffered by the Roma in Europe since WW II.^[32] A recent empirical study revealed virulent anti-Rom prejudice in the Romanian media.^[33] In Russia, anti-Romani racism is rampant and widespread. The "war on drugs" has generated the stereotype image in popular opinion and the media of the "typical Gypsy" drug dealer, and Roma are being profiled and hounded by the police: "In some instances, law enforcement officials

knowingly failed to prevent violent assaults on Romani communities." [34] In Macedonia, ever more incidents of Roma being refused service in restaurants and cafes are being reported, the tip of an iceberg of direct discrimination in public facilities. [35]

In Britain and Ireland, where some 100,000 "Gypsies and Travelers" reside, open hostility is on the rise. On International Roma Day 2005 (April 8), the UK Association of Gypsy Women called on the British government "to halt the policy of violently evicting Gypsies and Travelers from their own land and to curb hate speech against our people. These acts of physical and verbal violence are causing particular pain to our women and our families. They are poisoning relations between our people and local communities. We are convinced that they will soon result in serious injuries and even deaths." [36]

VI. Pervasive Prejudice: Bulgaria a Case in Point

UNTIL A GARGANTUAN EFFORT to confront racist anti-Cyganism is undertaken in citizenship education in the schools, neighborhood relations, the media, and many other corners, there can be little substantive change. Apartheid structures and ghettoization will remain. In Bulgaria today, Romanophobic stereotypes are so widespread in the media (the typical "fool" for stand-up comedians is almost inevitably a Rom) that to ban them would be to torpedo a main mode of Bulgarian popular humor. [37] Intermarriage between Roma and non-Roma is almost nonexistent. Due to racist bias, many employers refuse to hire Roma, part of the reason for blocked access even to low-paying service-sector jobs. Romani women are the most oppressed and marginalized segment of society across the Balkans. They are frequently abused by nursing staff in hospitals. An "identifiable" Rom female waiting on table is a rarity in Bulgarian cafes and restaurants, as are Roma shop assistants. This is what drives Romani girls to become sex workers across the EU today. Roma cleaning personnel did not exist at the

university where I taught many years in eastern Bulgaria. When I inquired why, the answer was: "How can we give a Gypsy woman the key to an office?!"

Such views and discourse are inveterate and remain conventional wisdom across Bulgarian society, even in the halls of academe. These attitudes have been exacerbated by the economic implosion throughout much of the former socialist bloc since democracy's advent. Recent surveys of Bulgarian university students show high levels of anti-Cyganism. The small number of Romani school teachers in Bulgaria who let their background be known are soon fired, due to "complaints by students and their parents," and most are too demoralized to fight back. If you want to succeed in the civil service, you keep your "origin" a secret and "pass" for non-Rom.

VII. Alternative Pathways?

THE DECADE OF INCLUSION thus needs to be watchdogged, its rationales interrogated, its concrete programs monitored for their real impact at the grassroots. And how far they openly confront the core problem of anti-Roma bigotry throughout much of Europe, East and West. Whatever NGOs do, the decisions on implementation should be made by the majority of people affected. Roma need to be "subjects" rather than "objects" or "clients" in their self-empowerment, an approach pioneered by the network of organizations from Albania to Moldova under the NGO umbrella [Spolu](#). This Dutch-sponsored initiative is an inventive model for rural Roma-run projects, as exemplified in the grassroots village work of their affiliate Integro in Bulgaria. Leida Schuringa's *Community Work and Roma Inclusion* (2005) is a Spolu-based "how-to" handbook on their approach to community-based alternatives. New more "horizontal" forms of NGO organization along these lines are badly needed. Indeed, "horizontality" rather than "verticality" should become a watchword of what is imperative. The innovations in neighborhood solidarity and microlocal *asambleas* (assemblies) described by Satrin in Argentina, "a new space outside of what

has been previously instituted or established," is directly applicable to a regeneration of Roma space and *horizontalidad* in Europe:

We have stopped being passive subjects, which is what voting, electoral politics and the system try and do to us. We have stopped being marginalized subjects, so as to be historical subjects, active subjects, participatory subjects. Actors in our own lives. [...] to expand the work in the neighborhoods. Clearly with an anti-capitalist vision of construction. Most important for me right now, as this moment of resistance, is to expand our community gardens, expand our occupied factories, expand really all of the constructive projects we are working on.[38]

Sitrin also notes: "Autonomy is a bubble that exists within the system. With autonomy what we are able to do is to construct spaces where the logic of the system does not reign. [...] What we can do is continue constructing, without falling into the logic of the system. To not think as the system thinks. Trying to make the revolution in our everyday life." After Argentina's economy collapsed in 2001, workers took control over their factories, seized the machines, and once again started to produce, without the boss. The unemployed movements continued to provide for the unmet needs of their communities, creating bakeries, small cooperatives, and community gardens to provide food and jobs.

Roma can learn from that experience in autonomy. Just as necessary are community-run educational experiments centered on enhancing Roma self-pride and identity, emulating paradigms such as the Gandhi Foundation School in Pecs in southern Hungary[39] – not mechanical "integration" into existing state school systems and their competitive structures. If "inclusion" into monolithic nation-state ideologies and their narratives means erasure of Rom identity, it must be resisted. A new school for Roma kids in Vrancea in eastern Romania, run

by Romani educators, is pioneering fresh directions.[40] More such experiments are needed. They could be free "democratic schools" modeled in part on the [Sudbury libertarian educational paradigm](#) and concepts of place-based education. And the example of the Kedvez Haz (Dear House) non-hierarchical "free" school for Roma kids in Hungary.[41]

Another option worth exploring is the application of Waldorf pedagogy to new types of alternative schools, as pioneered in central rural Romania:

Roma children from Rosia village (Sibiu county) have been studying for three years in a school where they have never been given grades, homework, or test papers. All the children graduate and are treated equally, therefore there is no reason to drop out of school. The teachers say this method attracts a lot of children and they are very diligent as far as school is concerned. This alternative education system is being implemented within a project based on Waldorf pedagogy, run by the Vasile Voiculescu Association and funded by a series of foundations from Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland. The project also facilitates access to education for children without ID papers and for those who are older than the maximum age limit allowed by standard primary education system.[42]

Roma cultural youth camps oriented to building Roma self-esteem are a further real option. Some have been pioneered in eastern Bulgaria in recent summers. Initiatives are imperative to revive and spread knowledge of the Romani language among all Roma. In Hungary, for example, only some 30 percent of Roma speak Romani. Roma cultural and language studies are being spearheaded by the new Department of Romani Studies at Veliko Turnovo University in Bulgaria and similar departments at the University of Pecs in Hungary and Nitra University in western Slovakia. Roma self-awareness and cultural pride can be coupled with practical skills for survival.

The empowerment of Romani girls and women must become a central priority. As noted in a report on the situation of Romani women in Croatia:

Discrimination in access to a range of social and economic rights – most significantly education, employment and health care – is experienced by many Romani women in Croatia – even those who have managed to secure Croatian citizenship. Romani women are often victims of violence and abuse by public officials, especially law enforcement bodies. Domestic violence as well as other abusive practices such as child marriage contribute to the social exclusion of Romani women in Croatia.[43]

New approaches to countering gendered anti-Cyganism are imperative.[44]

VIII. A Laboratory for Self-Management Beyond Borders?

THE ROMA CONSTITUTE a diasporic and "lumpenized" pariah people par excellence. Potentially, their experience in the self-organization of a supranational identity in localized communities can help point certain directions over the longer haul for a denationalizing of Europe's political structures from the bottom up: decentralized nodes of community within a transnational frame of inventive federation. For Roma, this would mean encouraging structures of autonomous self-management, mutual aid, and localized social entrepreneurship[45] – not their top-down "inclusion" into existing Procrustean corporate structures and priorities dictated by transnational capital. Local people-run initiatives and coops, grounded in local economies, are the diametric opposite of the hierarchical, corporatism-driven dynamics of the EU:

Grassroots postmodernism opens windows to the initiatives of peoples for regaining their autonomous cultural spheres from the clutches of the economy [...] the people are keeping alive

their home economics – that nurtures, nourishes, and sustains them. [...] They are recovering and protecting their own ways of teaching and learning – those that enrich and regenerate their commons and their places of dwelling.[46]

The bedrock of the Romani communities is their resilience, an extraordinary grit in the face of prolonged hardship. Romani life worlds often preserve a sense of solidarity, savvy, conviviality, humanity, and mutual aid that is unique. Roma ghettos, both urban and rural, provide a unique laboratory for experimenting with forms of communalism and cooperative living. It would mean reinventing politics at very local scales, moving toward neighborhood structures of direct democracy which could provide an alternative basis for reconfiguring Romani social, political and economic life and preserving their unique cultural universe. A venture to "regain the commons" analogous to the politics of *zapatismo*, "away from the dominant discourse of a "good life," managed and molded by the experts of the establishment." [47] In their transterritoriality and marginality to existing economies and polities, they are indeed a potential basal part of "the multitude, the living alternative that grows within empire" identified by Hardt and Negri as a counterforce to the cold logic of capital and neoliberal institutions and agendas. [48] As alluded above, that alternative can also be read in the sense of the internal colonization of the Roma in terms of an emergent post-coloniality *inside* the imperial aggregation of Europe, and their need for a radical decolonizing project, counter to the concerted efforts for a "new management of social space" (Hardt and Negri) to control and contain them.

Most Roma have little stake in the present system. By history and consciousness, they epitomize the "will to be against" integral to building a postmodern republicanism. [49] More perhaps than any other social or ethnic segment of the European population, in their primal alienation they see through the hypocrisies of the "public transcript" and are

open to ideas for fundamental radical change and self-regeneration from below.

Footnotes

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), pp. 336-337.

2. See [document](#).

3. See [report](#), accessed July 30, 2005. A solid volume of recent relevant studies is Will Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 2001). A wide range of new books on the Roma are available from the [University of Hertfordshire Press](#) in the UK.

4. See "[Open Letter](#) to the Commissioners' Group on Fundamental Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities with the occasion of 8th of April the International Roma Day," accessed July 30, 2005.

5. Hardt and Negri, *ibid.*, pp. 205ff.

6. See Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, *Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 131; G. Estavo and M. S. Prakash, *Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: ZED Books, 1997).

7. On new directions in autonomy and neighborhood solidarity, see Marina Sitrin, "[Horizontalidad in Argentina](#)," accessed September 3, 2005.

8. A stimulating classic introduction to post-colonial analysis centering on codes, structures of marginalizing and counter-discourse of ex-colonial populations is Bill Ashcroft, Garreth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), and a companion volume, *idem*, *Key*

Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (London: Routledge, 1998). See also Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Currey, 1986).

9. See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990).

10. See [here](#), accessed July 28, 2005.

11. See [here](#), accessed July 29, 2005.

12. See [here](#), accessed September 3, 2005.

13. For a comparison with the 'Two-Thirds World,' see Prakash and Esteva, *Escaping Education*, pp. 67 ff.

14. See [interview](#) in *Abolishing the Borders from Below*, No. 18 (2004), accessed December 8, 2005.

15. See [here](#), accessed July 28, 2005.

16. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.

17. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.

18. See Arundhati Roy, "[Tide? Or Ivory Snow?](#) Public Power in the Age of Empire," accessed July 29, 2005.

19. On the demographic discussion in Slovakia, see [here](#), accessed 22 August 2005.

20. See [here](#) on the debate in the Czech Republic, accessed 30 July 2005.

21. For an interview with its more 'moderate' deputy leader Petar Beron, see "[Prejudice and Pride](#)," *Sofia Echo*, 18 July 2005, accessed July 30, 2005; see also "[Roma Party Complains about Bulgarian Nationalist Siderov](#)," accessed August 27, 2005.

22. Personal communication from Roma activist R. D., 3 September 2005.
23. On the Roma genocide, see [here](#) and Brian Kenety, "[The 'Devouring'](#): a Look at the Roma Holocaust," accessed July 30, 2005. An in-depth comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Cyganism is Wolfgang Wippermann, "*Wie die Zigeuner*". *Antisemitismus und Antiziganismus im Vergleich* (Berlin, 1997); see also W. Wippermann, "[Antiziganismus – Entstehung und Entwicklung der wichtigsten Vorurteile](#)," accessed July 24, 2005. A standard study on the *Porrajmos* is Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *Gypsies under the Swastika* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 1995). A classic study in German is Tilman Zülch, *In Auschwitz vergast, bis heute verfolgt* (Reinbek: rororo 1979). The EZAF center is also linked with the [Antiziganism Society](#) based at Marburg University, accessed August 31, 2005.
24. See Toby Sonneman, *Shared sorrows: a Gypsy family remembers the Holocaust* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 2002); an [excerpt](#) is available, accessed July 30, 2005.
25. See [here](#), accessed July 29, 2005.
26. A now classic overview of Roma oppression is Ian Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1987), text [online](#); idem, *We are the Romani People* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 2002). A masterful overview informs the new volume by Donald Kenrick, *The Romani World: a Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 2004).
27. See a [recent article](#) on the plight of the Gajar in Iraq; see also Yasunori Kawakami, "[The Iraqi Gypsies](#) after the Collapse of Hussein's Regime," *Kuri. Journal of the Dom Research Center*, 2/2 (summer 2005), accessed July 30, 2005. On the history of the Dom, Donald Kenrick, *Gypsies: From the Ganges to the Thames* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 2004).

28. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 130.
29. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
30. See [here](#), accessed July 31, 2005.
31. See [here](#), accessed July 28, 2005.
32. See also "[Break Silence on Genocide](#) against Kosovo Romas," accessed August 27, 2005.
33. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
34. See [ERRC Report](#), May 2005; see also [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
35. See [here](#), accessed August 27, 2005.
36. See [here](#), accessed July 29, 2005. For an overview, see Donald Kenrick, *Moving On: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire Press, 1999).
37. See also the [questionnaire on anti-Gypsyism](#) in the EU media, accessed July 28, 2005.
38. See Sitrin, op. cit.
39. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
40. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
41. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
42. See [here](#), accessed July 31, 2005.
43. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005.
44. See [here](#), accessed July 30, 2005; Mindy Bricker, "[Roma Women Organize](#) to Fight Triple Bias," accessed July 31, 2005.

45. In part along the lines of [paradigms for creative people-generated change](#).
46. See Prakash and Esteva, *Escaping Education*, pp. 82-83
47. Ibid., pp. 132-34, quote p. 129.
48. See Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. xiii and passim.
49. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 210-214.