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## Romani Identity, Cultural Trauma, Second-Class Citizenship and the Contemporary Context for Ethnic Political Representation in Hungary

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### *Summary*

In this paper we discuss cultural trauma with regard to the Hungarian Roma. While the concept of cultural trauma is typically understood as connected to a discrete event and achieves recognition *as* cultural trauma through a process of broader social recognition, we argue that in the case of the Roma, cultural trauma is characterized *not* by a particular event but rather by a long history of exclusion, marginalization and persecution. Secondly, the cultural and discursive framing of Roma citizenship as “second-class” (and therefore as not “truly” Hungarian) operates as: 1) a causal factor in the historical trauma of the Roma; 2) a constitutive part of the trauma itself (the trauma as being “othered” while simultaneously having one’s traumatic experience denied); and 3) a barrier to the broader recognition and acknowledgment of that traumatic history and experience. We discuss data from recent fieldwork with Romani self-government leaders to discuss how these phenomena manifest themselves as Romani leaders attempt to achieve political agency in the face of contemporary far-right political movements.

*Keywords:* Cultural Trauma, Hungary, Roma, Racism, Political Agency

### **Introduction**

In the post-socialist transition within East-Central Europe, beyond the uncertainties of the economic and institutional transitions, one of the central concerns for both the countries of the region as well as for the West was how social tensions associated

with ethnic and national identity would be best managed and mitigated (Bringa, 2002; Kupchan, 1995; Perry, 2005).<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the conflict and genocide that resulted, arguably served as a worst-case scenario of national trauma from that time within the region, a trauma that continues to have social, political and psychological repercussions nearly a quarter-century after the war's formal conclusion (McDowell and Braniff, 2014).

While cultural trauma is frequently associated with a specific traumatic event, such as the conflict and genocide in the former Yugoslavia, in this article we focus on the Romani experience in the context of the post-socialist transition. In particular, we examine the Hungarian context and how historical trauma surfaces within contemporary political representation. To do this, we investigate Hungary's Minorities Law, itself a partial response to broader regional concerns over minority rights, although also a consequence of agendas aimed at nationalizing Hungarians living outside the country's borders in places like Romania, Slovakia, and the former Yugoslavian states (Majtényi and Majtényi, 2016).

With regard to the Romani experience we argue that the experience of trauma is not isolated to a *particular* traumatic event,<sup>2</sup> but rather relates to a broader history of trauma in the form of centuries of social, political and economic exclusion, as well as numerous and repeated exposures to persecution and violence. Within the context of policies established in no small part in response to *specific concerns* over the potential for regional conflict along the lines of ethnic and national identity, we ask how is the more generalized trauma that is part of the Romani living experience reflected in the experiences of local Romani political leaders? We investigate this question by first discussing conceptual frameworks for cultural trauma, relating them to the historical and contemporary experience of Roma. We then discuss the current political circumstances of minority political representation in Hungary. Finally, through interviews with Romani self-government leaders, we investigate the intersection between cultural trauma and political agency at a time of rising racism, nationalism and xenophobia, not only in Hungary, but across Europe.

This paper's contribution is thus at least twofold. First, it contributes to the scholarship on cultural trauma by elaborating on how cultural trauma is conceptualized. We argue that the incompleteness of the cultural "trauma process" for Roma

<sup>1</sup> This work was conducted while the third author was a faculty fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. We acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Rohanyi Réka in the completion of this work.

<sup>2</sup> That said, we do not in any way mean to diminish the traumatic significance of the Holocaust for Romani people, an experience that continues to reverberate to the present, as commentators have noted (Crowe, 1991; Vermeersch, 2007), and also as our own data clearly suggests, as we later show.

(Alexander, 2012) is in fact *a defining feature* of Romani cultural trauma, both in terms of the experience and identity of Roma, but also in terms of the perpetuation of social exclusion and violence. While this article's contribution is theoretical, conceptual and oriented towards the academic world, we also at the same time hope that it contributes to the broader recognition and understanding of Roma as a culturally traumatized group. As such, this work is motivated by the goal of recognizing these long-standing tensions, and therefore this latter motivation is even more critical for reconciling the lived experience of those who face systemic and pronounced social exclusion and persecution.

### **Cultural Trauma**

The scholarly literature on cultural trauma has largely been shaped by the work of Alexander (2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016), Eyerman (2002, 2013, 2015), and others (e.g., Erikson, 1976; Giesen, 2004; Smelser, 2004; Sztompka, 2000, 2004). This scholarship often tends to explicitly focus on trauma associated with a specific traumagenic event such as genocide, war and conflict, natural disasters, or acts of terrorism and social upheaval (see, e.g., Bartmanski and Eyerman, 2011; Eyerman, 2015; Sztompka, 2000). Alexander writes: "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (2012: 6).

While recognized as a theoretically distinct concept, cultural trauma nonetheless builds upon and overlaps with a number of other concepts, notably psychological trauma (Lindemann, 1944; Zulueta, 2008). However, unlike psychological trauma, cultural trauma transcends the individual level, operating instead as a collective/cultural-level phenomenon that nonetheless also has powerful *individual* impacts and consequences (Eyerman, 2013). At the same time, Alexander argues that "collective traumas are reflections of neither individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them" (2012: 4). That is, they exist and are discursively mobilized in the realm of the collective imagination, evolving from social to *cultural* crisis in which the trauma becomes in some fundamental way "the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (*ibid.*: 15).

Most commentators frame cultural trauma as originating from radical deviations from the social and cultural status quo, and in doing so examine the *social process* through which cultural traumas become recognized and discursively framed. As Alexander argues (2012), the trauma process has several key elements. These include: the claim to an injury; "carrier groups" or agents who do the work of articulating the meaning-making around the injury or event; the audience to which

discursive claims about cultural trauma are articulated; and the consolidation of a new master narrative that clarifies the nature of: (1) the pain; (2) the victim; (3) the relation of the trauma victim to the audience; and (4) the assigning of responsibility. It is this process that constructs and makes coherent the new master narrative of collective trauma which is inherently cultural in nature in the form of memory-building and routinization. Whether or not this “trauma work” is fully completed is a key determinant in the degree to which cultural traumas gain recognition (Alexander, 2004b, 2016). However, two important points emerge from the cultural trauma scholarship. First, not every trauma qualifies as *cultural* trauma, and, second, not all traumas affecting particular cultural groups “become” or are transformed into cultural traumas in the eyes of the larger society.

### **Trauma, the Romani Experience, and Political Agency**

When considering cultural trauma as such, particular groups of people are typically identified as having experienced cultural-level traumagenic events. Ready examples include the Holocaust, especially with regard to the Jewish experience (Alexander, 2004a, 2009; Alexander and Dromi, 2011), the African American experience with regard to slavery (Eyerman, 2002), and those who have lived through natural disasters (Erikson, 1976; Eyerman, 2015). In each case affected groups have experienced traumatic events that have largely shaped their identities with regard to their everyday lives, political, economic and social situation and status.

But what about those for whom trauma is a fundamental and constitutive part of identity and everyday phenomenological experience, and yet which hasn't achieved wider recognition as a “master narrative” of collective trauma? The Roma Holocaust, the exclusion of Roma, and the suffering, killing and humiliation of Roma are not experienced as the pain and trauma of the broader Hungarian society. These problems are rather understood as the problem of Romani people themselves, a perspective that both further enables and is a consequence of the *de facto* second-class citizenship of Romani people. By “second-class citizenship” we refer to the condition of not being granted full and equal rights and protections under the law, tightly coupled with the broader social perception of being “other” and not eligible for or deserving of those equal rights and protections. While citizenship, formally understood, is a *legal* status, as Reiter argues, “it needs to be a practical and practiced reality for it to have any impact on peoples' lives” (2012: 1070). That is, despite any existing and formally and legally delineated citizens' rights, “if some citizens are not treated as citizens, citizenship remains an empty concept” (*ibid.*). In the Hungarian context it is the Roma who arguably pose the most direct challenge to popular conceptions of “Hungarianness” than any other minority group, even despite Hungary's long and continued legacies of antisemitism (Kyriazi, 2012; Tóth

and Grajczjár, 2015). Hence, Roma second-class citizenship can be understood as part of a broader set of social exclusions of Roma that are not only social and political, but cultural, economic, institutional and representational (McGarry, 2014; Szalai and Zentai, 2014).

As long as a group within Hungary is not as fully “Hungarian” as others, their problems and trauma are not perceived as a Hungarian trauma. As Alexander writes, “Roma (‘Gypsies’) are acknowledged by many contemporary Central Europeans as trauma victims, the bearers of a tragic history. Yet insofar as large numbers of Central Europeans represent Roma people as deviant and uncivilized, they have not made that tragic past their own” (2012: 19). When Roma were killed in a series of serial hate crimes in 2007-2008 in Hungary, the mainstream did not consider it a trauma of the entire Hungarian society, but rather a somewhat predictable reaction to “Gypsy crime”, “Gypsy terror”, and an ethnic group discursively framed as criminals and parasites (Tóth and Grajczjár, 2015).

With regard to the “trauma process” then, the implication is that this process is incomplete because “only if the victims are represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective identity will the audience be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma” (Alexander, 2012: 19). However, in the case of the Roma of Hungary and indeed Central Europe more broadly, this lack of broader recognition of trauma is precisely a consequence and an indicator of the traumagenic “event” itself: the historic patterns of systemic, and extreme social, political and economic exclusion of Romani people. That is, the failure of the very real “cultural” trauma experienced by Romani people<sup>3</sup> to achieve full recognition by a wider social audience is at the same time perhaps paradoxically *a fundamental and constitutive part* of that cultural trauma.

Within Hungary the case of Roma is pivotal given that they are the largest, the most disadvantaged, and the most politically, socially and economically excluded minority (McGarry, 2009; Parker, 2012; Rovid, 2012; Schafft and Brown, 2000; Varadi and Virag, 2014).<sup>4</sup> The arrival of Romani people into what is present-day

<sup>3</sup> We refer to trauma which, to be clear, has repeatedly metastasized from social *exclusion* into outright violence and persecution.

<sup>4</sup> In Hungary the estimated number of Roma varies. More conservative estimates place the Romani population at 400-600 thousand, or about 4-6% of the country’s total population (Balogh, 2012; Kemény, 2005), although other estimates run as high as 800,000 (Wilkin, 2016). Across Europe the Romani population is estimated at around 12 million (Mitchell, 2005). There is significant debate regarding how ethnic identity is determined and how identity should be counted. A more comprehensive discussion of how ethnic identity is determined and counted is beyond the scope of this paper, although nonetheless directly relevant to the question of minority rights and political representation. For a more complete treatment of these issues we refer the reader to Krizsán (2012), McGarry (2014), Pap (2015), and Tremlett (2014), among others.

Hungary most likely occurred sometime around the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Crowe, 1991; Kemény, 2005). The Romani people therefore have not only had a long, unbroken history within the region but also a history marked by social stigma, exclusion, economic marginalization, and persecution (Crowe, 1991).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Roma were targeted by Germany's Third Reich, abetted by Hungary's fascist Arrow Cross party, and an estimated 30,000 Hungarian Roma died in the Holocaust out of a total estimated population of 200,000 (Crowe, 1991; Kemény, 2005). The Roma Holocaust is one of the main cultural and historical traumas experienced by Roma people in recent history (Stillmann and Johanson, 2007), and it continues to play a significant role in various aspects of group identity, collective suffering and its consequences.

In the early 1990s the social, political and economic transformations associated with the collapse of state socialism, including economic contraction and in some cases industrial collapse, left Hungarians in newly precarious circumstances (Brown and Schafft, 2002). The Roma especially, employed in state-supported industry and economic sectors, suffered from sudden job loss while the economic strains proved a fertile ground for the emergence of racism, hate crime, and nationalism, often directed against Roma. By 1993, while the national unemployment rate rose to about 14%, for Roma unemployment was 60-70%, rising to 75% by 1995, whereas the overall unemployment rate fell to about 11% (Havas et al., 1995). The further ethnicizing of poverty conditions has had the effect of strengthening racist beliefs within Hungarian society (Schwarcz, 2012).

During the 1990s and 2000s, Hungary experienced a new rise in far-right politics and nationalist movements. This included MIÉP<sup>5</sup> in the 1990s, later superseded by Jobbik, which formed as a right-wing student political organization and formalized as a political party in 2003. While Jobbik's initial influence was slight, this changed in the mid-2000s with political scandals in the left-wing government led by Ferenc Gyurcsány, and continued economic stagnation on the national level only worsened by the 2008 credit crises. Hungarian politics, as a consequence, took a sharp turn to the right as the Fidesz political party, under Viktor Orbán, assumed leadership. But Jobbik too became a legitimate political player, running on a far-right populist and nationalist platform that was also explicitly antisemitic and anti-Gypsy, popularizing the term "Gypsy crime" within the mainstream political discourse, and referring to Roma as "parasites" (Human Rights First, 2014). This rhetoric, however, was by no means confined to Jobbik and its supporters. In 2013

<sup>5</sup> MIÉP, the *Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja* (Hungarian Justice and Life Party), was a nationalist political party formed in 1993 that briefly achieved parliamentary representation after the 1998 election cycle.

Zsolt Bayer, one of the co-founders of Fidesz, wrote in a column in the *Magyar Hírlap*<sup>6</sup>:

A significant part of the Roma are unfit for existence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals and they behave like animals. When they meet with resistance, they commit murder. ... These animals shouldn't be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved – immediately and regardless of the method (Kócsé, 2015: 97).

That this type of discourse could appear in a leading national newspaper is both astonishing and an indicator of the general public acceptance for what can only be described as hate speech with the imprimatur of a major media outlet. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Jobbik won 16.7% of the vote, and by the 2014 parliamentary elections, Jobbik had won over 20% of the popular vote in the national elections (a tenfold increase in votes from 2006), pulling Fidesz even further to the right (Human Rights First, 2014; Tóth and Grajczjár, 2015).

### **Trauma and Roma Political Agency in Hungary**

Despite the history of trauma for Hungarian Roma, Hungary is nonetheless distinguished by a set of minority statutes that are unique to the region and that have created new, albeit deeply ambivalent, political and civic spaces for Romani communities. In 1993, after several years of negotiation the Hungarian Parliament enacted Act 77 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities. The legislation was notable for several reasons. First, it marked a significant shift away from the assimilationist policies of the former communist regime (Vermeersch, 2007) and instead replaced those policies with legislation that was based around the concept of “cultural autonomy” which was focused around the rights of minorities to use minority languages, exert agency over educational issues affecting minority groups, politically self-organize, and collectively participate in civic life.

Political self-organization was embodied in the legislation principally through the creation of a system of minority self-governance, unique within the region, for the 13 minority groups recognized by the Act.<sup>7</sup> At the local level, minority self-governments are formed at the municipality level and function primarily as a consultative linkage between the municipal government and the represented minority,

<sup>6</sup> *Magyar Hírlap* is a leading Hungarian national newspaper known for its general support for more conservative viewpoints.

<sup>7</sup> These groups included Roma, German, Croat, Slovak, Serb, Armenian, Romanian, Polish, Slovene, Greek, Bulgarian, Ruthenian and Ukrainian minorities. Minority status recognized in the Act as having particular protection was based upon a minority group's historical longevity within Hungary, as well as having distinct languages and cultural traditions.

although self-governments are also charged with the authority to organize local educational institutions, run enterprises and establish foundations. In practice then, if not in name, self-governments are less *representative governmental bodies* than legislatively sanctioned organizations structured around particular cultural functions, although they may take on various quasi-political roles as well.

In 1993 and 1994 the first elections for self-governments were held, at which time over 800 local minority self-governments were formed, over half of them Roma. The trend has been for an overall increase in minority self-governments, after 2011 renamed *nationality* self-governments (Pap, 2015). During the 2014 elections nearly 1,200 Roma nationality self-governments were formed, meaning that almost 40% of Hungarian municipalities contained a Roma nationality self-government. Since the enactment of the legislation, the total number of Roma nationality self-governments has also consistently been greater than the number of all other nationality self-governments of all the other minority groups combined (Schafft and Kulcsár, 2015).

The system, despite the prevalence of self-governments, has faced serious criticism since its beginning. First of all, the problems and challenges affecting Hungary's Roma are not so much "cultural"<sup>8</sup> in the sense of the need to preserve traditions and heritage (although this is a need as well), but rather social and economic. While for many Roma communities preserving and enhancing cultural traditions is a priority, the most immediate problems facing most Roma are connected to poverty, unemployment, education, housing, and discrimination. Neither the scope of the nationality self-government system nor the resources afforded to it are in any way sufficient to meaningfully address these problems (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Kóczé, 2015; Majtényi and Majtényi, 2016). Because of the minimal resources afforded to self-governments, coupled with the narrow scope of self-government as delineated by the Minorities Law, the very term "self-government" is fundamentally misleading as it not only may raise unrealistic expectations on the part of the Roma minority, but also opens the possibility for municipal governments to pass responsibility for social welfare management onto the self-government, further ethnicizing the social problems of the Roma and reinforcing the perception that Roma impoverishment is a "natural" condition (Schafft and Kulcsár, 2015; Schwarcz, 2012; see also van Baar, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> That said, as we have argued in this paper, the problems of the Roma *are* distinctly "cultural" in the sense that they are related to a broader set of cultural norms within the Hungarian society that reproduce the social exclusion of Roma. However, this is a "cultural" problem of the Hungarian society *in general*, which especially in recent years has turned increasingly towards embracing xenophobic and intolerant beliefs and attitudes (Human Rights First, 2014; Kóczé, 2015; Majtényi and Majtényi, 2016; Tóth and Grajczjár, 2015; Varadi and Virág, 2014).

Other observers have pointed to the way in which the Minorities Law was arguably motivated far less by the desire to significantly address minority rights within Hungary (especially since, with the exception of the Roma, minority national and ethnic minority populations are both relatively small and well-assimilated into Hungarian society) than by the political economic interest in the large concentrations of ethnic Hungarian minorities in surrounding neighboring countries, notably, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Schafft and Kulcsár, 2015; Vermeersch, 2007). Enclave communities of ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries are primarily a consequence of the shrinking of Hungary's borders in accordance with the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War. Many Hungarians consider this loss of territory *itself* as a "cultural trauma" (Kyriazi, 2016; Pytlas, 2016). The Minorities Law then can, by extension, be cynically read as more a reaction to the perceived trauma of the loss of "greater Hungary", than as a legitimate effort to foster an open, multi-ethnic society by creating new opportunities for political participation for marginalized and under-represented groups (much less the Roma specifically).

Cohen argues that citizenship as a status is not binary – something one either possesses or does not – but rather "exists on a continuum" (2014: 1048; see also Sardelić, 2016). From this observation that citizenship may under a variety of circumstances be only partially realized, Cohen argues that *semi-citizenship* (2009, 2014) reflects a partial granting of social, civil and political rights. Hungary's nationality self-government system represents an interesting case since, on its face, it appears to embody a positive move towards ensuring full rights and citizenship to marginalized groups. In the instance of the Roma, however, it paradoxically reinforces a *de facto* semi-citizenship by establishing a system that institutionalizes further social and political distance between minority and majority.

### **Cultural Trauma and Political Participation: The Perspectives of Romani Self-Government Leaders**

In the spring of 2015 we conducted interviews with 30 Roma nationality self-government leaders from 19 municipalities across 12 counties, sites that included villages, medium-sized towns and larger urban centers. The interviews were conducted in order to better understand how local Romani leaders themselves understood the roles, possibilities and limitations of the nationality self-governance system, how they constructed their own sense of agency, and the impact of far-right political movements on their activities and sense of efficacy.

To sample sites, we consulted media sources, Roma rights nongovernmental organizations, and from other researchers in the field in order to identify, first, places with Roma nationality self-governments where there had been a history of eth-

nic conflict or tension, including places containing Jobbik-affiliated or supported leaders in the municipal government, and second, places with Roma nationality self-governments that had a strong history of political activities and social organizing within the municipality, often including cooperative and collaborative relationships with the local municipal government and/or other key community institutions. Ten sites we characterized as having histories of conflict, while nine sites were characterized rather by collaborative activity and political participation. Each interview was conducted in person, with interviews typically lasting between one and two hours. The interviews were then transcribed, and then coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Despite our purposeful sampling, various elements of trauma and exclusion appeared in every interview. While interviewees from places marked by conflict spoke directly to that conflict, trauma was an underlying theme across all the interviews. This took several forms, including references to perceptions of second-class citizenship, being “othered” as Roma, as well as references to specific traumatic events, including the Roma Holocaust and the more recent serial murders of Roma.

Our sample only includes Roma nationality self-government leaders and so it is by no means a representative sample of Romani people in Hungary, or even within the villages, towns and cities represented by these leaders. Nonetheless, because of the status of these interviewees as public representatives of Roma nationality self-governments, they have a unique perspective on the dynamics of social and political exclusions for Romani people, and the particular challenges facing their communities. It is the particularity of this perspective that we are interested in within this article.

### *Second-Class Citizenship*

The Romani leaders we spoke with described second-class citizenship ontologically in terms of secondary status being a constitutive part of the lived experience of the Roma, but also the practical consequences of this with regard to legal protections, political representation and access to basic services and institutions such as health care and education. We frequently heard assessments of the social conditions of the Roma like the following:

The Roma are oppressed. They are oppressed... I think that the situation in Hungary actually works to push them down even more... you cannot go past this, you cannot say this is not true... The Roma have always been persecuted. They do not know us, do not know who we are. And they do not want to get close to us and to cooperate with us. (Central Hungary, town)

There are problems with discrimination because you can go anywhere in institutions and places and it's mostly Hungarian. Whenever they can they employ Hun-

garian people. They will say this is because the Roma do not have the educational attainment... but I think there is an element of being a Roma. (Southern Hungary, village)

The majority looks down on us. We are not given equal chances, equal opportunities. That's what we ask for – only equal opportunity, equal treatment; both in education and in work. (Northeastern Hungary, village)

All of these quotes speak to the experience of discrimination, especially with respect to education and employment. However, they also reveal a more fundamental experience of marginalization and social exclusion as a part of the very *identity* of being Roma. A Romani leader in central Hungary stated simply: “It’s much harder for us to receive something that would be our due because of our citizenship as Hungarians”. As Perišić and Vidojević argue, “the complexity of public opinion about the poor and the socially excluded is reflected through public attitudes that are a mixture of compassion and antagonism, frequently followed by rigid and ambivalent assumptions and stereotypes” (2015: 144). The dynamics of social exclusion frame the excluded as unworthy and in large part as the ones to blame for their circumstances. This exclusion and stigmatization itself is part of the phenomenological experience of Roma-identity-associated cultural trauma.

While the experience is phenomenological, it also has clear consequences with regard to basic life chances and social mobility. A persistent issue, especially in the last two decades, has been equal access to educational opportunities, and especially at the local level given the segregation of Romani students from ethnic Hungarian students through the establishment of privately run religious schools that are able to selectively admit students, in the process excluding Romani youth. A local Romani leader explained:

The school is a hundred percent Roma. It is more a problem that the level of education is not high enough. So even if they have marks of four and five (A or Bs) when they get out they don't perform well enough. They cannot go on to higher education. Because here at the schools they do not demand the same, or are not able to provide the same level of education as... as in other schools... private schools or not all-Roma schools in Hungary. It's... it's as if they were doing it deliberately, creating the appearance that we are really undereducated, illiterate and... and displaying improper behavior, and thereby contributing to the problem of the country even though we've been living here for hundreds if not thousands of years. Our roots are here. We are rooted here. So it is not like we are recent immigrants. That is not the case. *Our roots go back several hundred years and those people who are Hungarian now... Roma have been here longer... longer than some of them, such as Viktor Orbán, yet he is considered Hungarian and we are not. We are not asking for too much – only equality.* We are not asking to be helped by

extra help from the big budget to throw money at us. All we want is to be equal. Equal chances, equal opportunities for our kids to receive the same education. (italics ours) (Northeastern Hungary, village)

As the above interviewee suggests, education as a right is significantly violated in Hungary when it comes to Romani students, a social issue that has been well documented (Majtényi and Majtényi, 2015; Rostas, 2012; Zolnay, 2012). The problem of education of Roma is multilateral. On the one hand, there are several schools where Roma students are taught in a segregated manner. These schools can be either segregated buildings or classrooms, where only Romani students study. However, the issue of segregation does not stop at this point. As the interviewee also pointed out, the education of Romani children is not as rigorous or as high-quality as that received by their non-Romani peers due to the fact that Romani children in these schools receive substandard care, less qualified teachers are employed, and the educational methods are generally inferior to those in mainstream schools (Rostas, 2012; Zolnay, 2012).

Despite consistent patterns of exclusion, as the interviewee confirmed, self-awareness as such persists especially in terms of citizenship and affiliation. This Romani leader stated: “Our roots are here. We are rooted here.” All these claims clearly imply the issue of belonging as well as the identity of being a citizen of a given country. Despite evidence to the contrary, in contemporary Hungary, Romani people are considered to represent a part of the society that doesn’t want to belong to the greater country, that doesn’t want to claim Hungarian citizenship. However, as the Romani leader quoted above notes, the desire of Roma to be equal citizens<sup>9</sup> is in fact strong. Rather, it is the openness of the majority that is largely ambivalent or missing.

### *The Present Seen through the Trauma of the Past*

We have argued here that the trauma experienced by contemporary Roma in Hungary and elsewhere cannot be tightly connected to specific historical traumatic instances of events, but rather is a trauma that is reproduced on a daily basis through the social exclusion embodied by second-class citizenship. At the same time, there is no question that there are particular historical events that also fundamentally shape the experience of Romani trauma. Perhaps most prominent is the Roma Holocaust which came up repeatedly in our interviews, particularly as a reference point

<sup>9</sup> To become an equal citizen does not imply losing the Romani identity. Nor does it imply assimilation and loss of ethnic identity. In an open society social markers such as skin color, ethnicity, religion, and gender should not pose a barrier to the full realisation of citizenship rights and recognition.

for understanding and interpreting current political realities. One interviewee spoke to us about the difficulties and challenges of being a local leader in the twin context of economic problems and rising racism and ethnic tensions. He explained:

What percentage (of the population that) is prejudiced... the rate is shocking. Shocking. So here we are living in a period just now which displaced the same tensions and problems such as unemployment in pre-war Germany. The economic crisis... we can see the same trends. Let's take a glance back. How could Hitler affect people from exactly the same factors... economic crisis? Germany could not solve the problem. They had to find a scapegoat. It was always the given minority who they put it on, the Jews or the Gypsies... they are responsible. Even though we know it was a global problem, but they had to find a scapegoat and such a scapegoat is always the Gypsies.<sup>10</sup>

Here the interviewee clearly links the current economic and social circumstances at play at both the local and national levels with the historical referent of the Holocaust and specifically the risk of scapegoating, itself an expression of second-class citizenship. In another town we were similarly told by another Romani leader from Northern Hungary:

I cannot tell you that, but I... I assume it must generate tensions. Certainly, I also suppose that they intimidate people to such an extent. You know they come to me... in Nazi times... what they used to do when they tell their monologues, and they are doing the same thing in Hungary now on a smaller scale. But I am telling you... maybe at the next elections. It's not certain that Jobbik will not win. That we will not have to pack up and leave. Otherwise we will end up like the Jews. We will be collected in the trains.

These quotes are important because they not only speak to the Romani identity as permanently and profoundly shaped by the trauma of the Holocaust, but the ways in which those horrors are reference points for contemporary experiences with racism and exclusion. In referring to themselves as the ultimate scapegoats of social and economic crisis, the evidence is strongly suggestive of the ways in which the Holocaust, accompanied by a long history of social exclusion, has left indelible marks upon the consciousness of Romani people.

Another leader we spoke to described a series of events in his town which precipitated into a series of tense confrontations between local Romani residents and members of the Hungarian Guard. At one point during the conflict members of a non-governmental organization came to the town to meet with the Romani leaders

<sup>10</sup> The quotes here reflect the speaker's terminology. Some speakers used the term "Roma" exclusively, while some used "Gypsy" (in Hungarian, *cigány*), while others used both terms interchangeably. Our translations reflect the usage in the original Hungarian.

and witness the conflict situation firsthand. This Romani leader describes the reception and response by the Hungarian Guard even in the presence of local police who had been deployed ostensibly to prevent violence.

They came here and they said to János to take them around in the Roma inhabited sections. They want to see with their own eyes what's going on. So he took them around, guided them and when they get to the corner of Bajczi Street here, imagine: "Goddamn Jews, goddamn Gypsies, soap should be made of you in Auschwitz. Why didn't you just die?" Things like this were said in front of the policeman, because these policemen were sympathizing with these goddamn fucking Nazis.

The Holocaust is a reference point of historical trauma. But as historical trauma it is at once also immediately tangible in the form not simply of history "repeating itself", but in the form of latent racism and exclusion surfacing as actual organized racial violence and threat.

A second, and not unconnected, reference point that many leaders spoke of was the series of Roma murders and other acts of violence in the latter half of the 2000s. In 2006 in the village of Olaszliszka in Northeastern Hungary a non-Roma man was killed by local Roma after he had hit (though not seriously injured) a local girl with his car. Many in Hungary interpreted that event as a catalyst for not only inflaming anti-Gypsy rhetoric, but also for a number of ethnic conflicts and acts of violence against Roma. In 2008 and 2009 a series of attacks on Roma by a small group of militant skinheads took place over nine different municipalities involving drive-by shootings and Molotov cocktails that in total left six dead (including a five-year-old boy), and at least five people injured (Balogh, 2012; Human Rights First, 2014). Later, in 2011, 277 Roma had to be evacuated from the town of Gyöngyöspata by the Red Cross because of continued harassment by the Hungarian Guard (Human Rights First, 2014).

"I trace this back to the lynching in Olaszliszka. That's my feeling", said a prominent Romani leader in an urban area in Southern Hungary.

I have never seen this in print but we Gypsies sometimes talk about this amongst ourselves. And this has reinforced my opinion that this was the first step from which you can clearly see that prejudice against Gypsies has become more dominant. And then you have Jobbik which in order to get into power uses the negative feelings and prejudice against Gypsies and Jews.

Regardless of how and whether cultural trauma is more broadly recognized outside of the Romani experience, Romani people not only share the traumatic experiences that unify their experiences and identity, but they further reconstruct it. The remark that "we Gypsies sometimes talk about this amongst ourselves" points towards this and demonstrates that Romani individuals attempt to carry out their

own trauma process by reconstructing and giving meaning to these traumatizing events. Another Romani leader from a village in Northern Hungary not far from Olaszliszka told us:

Nobody could protect the Roma (during the peak of anti-Roma violence). Neither the Hungarian government nor the national Roma self-government could demonstrate that they are able to protect the Roma. Yes they are in small settlements... do you know what they were doing? They created guards where we had to protect the population. We went and we did not sleep for whole nights guarding the Roma quarters. Not the police, but us! And I can say this about every settlement. Why? Because we were afraid for our relatives. Nobody stood by us. Neither the national self-government, nor the county level self-government, and nor did the government, the actual Hungarian government, the state stood by the Roma at that time. What should they have done? After the first Roma murder to really stand up in the parliament and tell them to do something instead of hiding their head in the sand. Which is what they did. Which is terrible.

## Conclusions

A comprehensive list of anti-Roma incidents on the part of paramilitary hate groups, political parties and in everyday life in Hungary since the early 1990s would be long indeed. But the cultural trauma of Romani people cannot be identified or determined by a specific or discrete set of historical incidents and events. It is based instead on a much longer *history* of systematic exclusion, discrimination, and humiliation. Because of this, we argue that a fundamental aspect of Romani cultural trauma is the lived experience of second-class citizenship, punctuated by events of extreme exclusion and violence such as the Roma Holocaust and the more recent killings of Roma. Second-class citizenship for Romani people thus occupies a critical role in the dynamics of exclusion, constituting a primary mechanism for the “ethnicization” of Roma-related traumas by non-Roma (Schwarcz, 2012) – a framing of Roma *trauma* as “other” just as the Roma themselves have been framed as “other” (Perišić and Vidojević, 2015).

As long as the citizenship of Roma is considered to be less legitimate than non-Roma, the recognition of trauma will be negligible. The perception of second-class citizenship fundamentally impedes a common understanding of suffering during the Roma Holocaust or the recent killings of Roma, antigypsyism, systematic segregation and discrimination as social facts with moral and ethical implications for the entire nation.<sup>11</sup> Given this condition wherein Roma are largely left alone with their

<sup>11</sup> The same can largely be said for contemporary Hungarian attitudes towards the Jewish Holocaust given the antisemitism often expressed in Hungarian popular discourse (Human Rights First, 2014; Tóth and Grajczjár, 2015).

“own” traumas, the Romani people have had no real “audience” that can recognize, legitimate and help reconcile the traumatic pain and tragedy.<sup>12</sup> “Loneliness” in this sense functions as a further barrier that has placed Romani people at an even greater distance from non-Roma, since these traumatic problems have been ethnicized by non-Roma.

Non-Romani citizens have never widely recognized Romani trauma as a *common* problem requiring solutions through collective societal efforts. This stance of the mainstream has further deepened the traumatic circumstances of Roma, leading, as part of a vicious cycle, to ever deeper social exclusion. Despite the fact that cultural trauma as a theoretical concept does not fully accommodate the experience of Roma, at least according to some observers (Alexander, 2012), it is undeniable that Roma have endured acute discomfort, second-class citizenship and many tragic events. These experiences are not only an historical fact, but are readily apparent from the personal life experiences of Romani individuals across Hungary.

Cultural trauma does not only appear in philosophical and psychological terms, but also in the practice of politics and political mobilization. Given the second-class citizen status of Roma, their full political representation has yet to be realized. Instead they continue to contend with hatred and antigypsyism perpetrated by radical right-wing parties, as well as by increasing nationalism and populism. Despite of all these factors, Roma are well aware of their historical role in the Hungarian society, and continue to express their right of belonging to Hungary as full citizens. The altering of the political narrative and the transformation in public attitudes regarding the Roma and the secondary citizenship will be the nexus of the change.<sup>13</sup> The current political and social climate, however, provides ample evidence of the serious challenges that lie ahead.

<sup>12</sup> We refer to various nations where significant number of Romani people reside.

<sup>13</sup> Among the many measures that could be taken to address Romani exclusion and disadvantage, we argue that one of the first steps is the unconditional recognition of Romani people as full citizens.

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