Constructing the Political Imaginary:

The Role of Competing Demands and Conflicting Agendas
in Romani Political Mobilization in Romania

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Submitted to
Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2007

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I.   Introduction

The Romani path to political mobilization challenges some of our core assumptions about social movements, particularly the nature of the collective and the assumed centrality of ethnicity, including its effectiveness as a mobilizing tool. Collective action, while not self-activating, may be triggered within a group whose members can identify shared grievances and are committed to pursuing a common strategy for combating them, yet groupness cannot be taken as a given. In the Roma case, the boundaries of the "group" are heavily debated and contested, placing the unit question at the forefront of the political process. Some individuals externally categorized as Gypsies do not self-identify as Roma at all, while others who do call themselves Roma may not acknowledge the membership of all individuals who feel that they belong to the Romani group. It is this perceived lack of unity that analysts blame for the low political participation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, there is no single, coherent Romani identity—no one voice that encapsulates the viewpoint of all Roma within its purview, no one leader that speaks with authority on behalf of the group. But these statements also hold true for the vast majority of human groups, most of which feature a wide and diverse range of opinions, beliefs, and traditions that defy any expectations of internal homogeneity. Therefore, blaming lackluster political mobilization on a lack of unity sets up a false parallel. It is misguided to base a political or social movement's potential for success on a utopian ideal of cohesion. Instead, it makes more sense to examine exactly what kind of cohesion or unity is typically needed to fuel social movements. Is it something permanent, linked to an essentialist view of identity, or is it instead a type of solidarity that can be constructed out of necessity, a temporal communal identity triggered by a certain context?

In order to analyze the efforts of Romani leaders to mobilize their constituents, we must first define and delineate the boundaries of the group itself. Yet there is no consensus—either within the global Romani community or among outsiders—on how to draw a boundary

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around who or what is *Rom(ani)*. Based on external categorization, outsiders tend to expand the boundaries of this group, stretching the label *gypsy* to include populations that may not self-identify as Roma. Yet ingroup members, relying strictly on self-identification, produce the opposite effect, constricting the boundaries of the Romani group to selectively cover only certain subgroups, sometimes only those within an immediate family or clan structure. The tension between internal and external perspectives has caused a schism between each camp's perception of exactly *who* is a member of the Romani group. Two extremes may result: on one hand, the Romani population in Europe, estimated to surpass ten million, can be erroneously analyzed and treated as a unitary actor from the point of view of outside observers, disregarding the considerable diversity within the group and neglecting the importance of self-categorization. On the other extreme, there is an internal push toward disaggregation, as some Roma see the larger group as an artificial collective. Romani intellectuals such as Ian Hancock have even argued that the group "Gypsy" exists only in the eyes of the Gadjé.[1] The problem of how to talk about a Romani collective is pivotal to the discussion of Romani political mobilization in Europe. In Romania, the Romani population is estimated to consist of as many as 2.5 million individuals (nearly ten percent of the country's population),[2] yet the large size of this group has not correlated into sizeable measures of political participation for Roma on the national level. An analysis of this population's low political participation would dutifully begin with certain questions, such as:

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[1] Ian Hancock makes the point that there is "no single, acceptable designation that [serves] to include all populations who define themselves as Romani except a foreign—and for some people pejorative—'Gypsy.'" in Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity" (*Transitions*, Vol. 4, No. 4, September 1997), 1.

[2] Because the Romanian census is based on self-declaration, it is widely believed that the official population figure for Roma (reported as 535,140 in the 2002 census) is inaccurate. Because of existing prejudice against Roma in Romania, some ethnic Roma do not identify as Romani in order to avoid potential discrimination. Additionally, some assimilated Roma may feel that their primary identity is no longer Romani, also contributing to the artificially low number.

What do Roma want? How have they articulated their demands? But this presupposes the existence of a collective, capable of thought, action, and agency. Just as it is incorrect to demand "coherence" from a human group, it is equally misguided to assume the existence of an externally-bounded collective—and neither of these things may in fact be necessary to build a social movement.

Social movements are not natural or automatic—they need to be constructed. Rather than talking about the absence of unity as if it were a primordial trait, this paper will examine Romani efforts to construct unity—through unifying rhetoric, strategy, and action—in order to analyze Romani political mobilization in Romania. My hypothesis is that this construction, the process of transitioning from an individual struggle to a collective articulation of group demands, has eluded Romani leaders. Examples of past social movements show the value of persuading one's constituents of the virtue of creating one coherent political movement, a process best articulated by Gareth Stedman Jones in *Language of Class,* who observes that*:* "A political movement is not simply a manifestation of distress and pain, its existence is distinguished by a shared conviction articulating a political solution to distress and a political diagnosis of its causes. To be successful, that is, to embed itself in the assumptions of masses of people, a particular political vocabulary must convey a practicable hope of a general alternative and a believable means of realizing it."[3] Jones's analysis of the Chartism movement of the 1830s concludes with the idea that a coherent political movement can only be cultivated out of a collective belief that there is a causal connection between political action and social solutions. Yet it is this connection, the creation of a political imaginary capable of threading together the diverse Romani groups under one umbrella movement, that Romanian Romani leaders have failed to make.

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[3] Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 96.

The next question that remains unanswered is *why* this construction has not materialized: can the political marginalization of the Romanian Roma be explained more fully as the result of an internal barrier to political engagement that is specific to Romani culture, or is it the design and structure of state minority policies that fail to meet the needs of the ethnic Romani groups in Romania? Some analysts point to the collapse of communism in 1989 as a novel opportunity for the Roma to gain a voice in Romanian politics that has simply not been seized—due both to internal and external impediments. By this view, the Roma remain economically, socially, and politically marginalized because of their inability to take advantage of the opening in the political opportunity structure. However, an analysis of their lack of success in this regard fails to paint a complete picture of why the Roma have been unable to construct a political imaginary. Does the discrepancy between the expanded opportunity structure and the lack of success betray the fragmentation of the Romani community, and a Romani paralysis in regard to political action, or does it instead reveal a flaw in the design of the political model?

Methodology

An analysis of the interplay of external and internal impediments to mobilization helps to provide a background to our problem, but the existing scholarship fails to effectively analyze the relationship between the median and micro levels, particularly the gap between the rhetoric of mobilization advanced by Romani leaders and mobilization itself. What is the relationship between the median level—the ethnic parties, networks, and coalitions—and the micro level—the individuals they seek to mobilize? How successfully, if at all, do these leaders represent the interests of their constituents, and how can we measure this? The underlying question of this paper is to identify why Romani leaders have not been able to create a language of pan-Roma politics that appeals to their constituents; why has the framing of individuals' problems failed to cloak itself in the language of the collective? Why do

Roma remain unconvinced that the process of forming a coherent collective entity could provide a solution to their individual social dissatisfactions? Political cohesion here does not mean homogeneity of opinion; instead, cohesion in the Roma case means a shared conviction that *political* solutions can ameliorate the *social* ills afflicting the Roma. My hypothesis is that Romani politicians in Romania have failed to articulate a collective political solution that resonates with the Romani community because their rhetoric does not make this connection.

My methodology for researching Romani political mobilization in Romania will include discourse and interview analysis of Romani political rhetoric, as well as a theoretical discussion of contemporary social movements and the sociology of traditional Romani society. Through interviews and an analysis of existing political statements, my goal will be to investigate two major political strands of Romani politics in Romania: the discourse of elected leaders, and the campaigns promoted by unelected activists and symbolic leaders. I will be looking specifically at what demands are articulated, how the problem is diagnosed, how the political imaginary is constructed, and how leaders articulate their vision of the future.

It is also important to analyze the role of both external and internal factors in preventing Roma from acquiring meaningful measures of political representation in Romania. While real and perceived discrimination (including forced assimilation) have resulted in Romani segregation from the majority population, there is also the problem of internal rejection. Suspicion of majority political institutions, high competition between Romani leaders, and a crisis of legitimacy in the eyes of Romani constituents (manifested, for instance, by many Roma not voting for Romani candidates), comprise another angle of the problem. These different facets can be analyzed on the micro, median, and macro levels. First, on the micro level there is the hypothesis of weak ethnic identity. Roma do not see themselves as part of an "imagined community," in which their social experiences are

mirrored by those of Roma in other regions, and for which an inclusive political project could be envisioned to address the social ills of all Romani populations within the state. The problem of identity can be extended to say that Roma do not possess the traditional defining characteristics of ethnic groups: first, the Roma lack a claim to any territory, and have a poorly articulated connection to their ancestral homeland; second, the ethnic Roma "group" consists of many diverse subgroups with divergent goals; third, the Roma have been unable to translate their history of shared oppression into a basis for unity; and fourth, even the Romany language, heralded as the one commonality of this transnational group, is subject to different spoken and written forms, thus making it an imperfect unifier. On the median level, the greatest difficulty is ineffective leadership, which includes problems of legitimacy, lack of political experience, uncertainty over what legal and factual collective entity the Roma comprise, and whom the Romani leadership represents. Lastly, the influence of the state also plays a significant role. The macro level barriers include the structure of the national electoral system, institutional discrimination, and elite manipulation (policies instigated by the majority out of fear of Romani unification or demographic threats to Romanian state). A study of these factors will help explain why Roma do not play an active and effective role in policymaking that concerns them, but by itself it is not enough. The full picture can only be captured by looking within the nascent Romani political movement, and analyzing why the diagnoses, demands, and prognoses articulated by leaders have not rallied Roma to collective political action. An analysis of the discourse of mobilization advanced by Romani leaders, specifically looking at how they diagnose the problems faced by Roma and frame solutions for the future, will determine whether or not their framing resonates with the Romani individuals they seek to mobilize.

II.   Defining the Group and the Collective

Although Roma do not constitute an internally homogenous or externally bounded group by any of the classic measures of cohesiveness (language, territory, religion, tradition, or shared history)—some analysts convincingly argue that no group does. There is a scholarly divide between those who see the kinship-based traditional Romani society as fundamentally incompatible with the demands of modern political structures, and those, like Ian Hancock, who believe that despite the differences among dispersed communities, the Roma have maintained a linguistic and cultural cohesiveness that, "as weak as it may be, it remains strong enough to identify all Romani groups as being exactly that—Romani groups."[4] Both camps agree that Romani identity is not a given or a primordial truth. But if this identity is a construction, there is no consensus as to what the salient unit of analysis is when we speak of the Roma. Does it make sense to speak of *one* Roma group, and if so, what characteristics could we meaningfully attribute to this collective entity?

Groups and Categories

Rogers Brubaker defines "groupism" as "the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis," which he deems problematic because no human groups are internally homogenous and externally bounded.[5] By this Brubaker does not mean to imply that human actors do not act based on this type of black and white categorization (in fact, it may be beneficial for them to do so), but that analysts should not fall in the same trap of attributing agency to groups. Therefore, although the Roma—for reasons stated earlier—

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[4] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity" (*Transitions*, Vol. 4, No. 4, September 1997), 6.
[5] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 8.

may not have a strong sense of common intra-group identity, it is a mistake to expect *any* group to behave as a unitary collective actor with a common purpose. This does not mean that individuals can never organize into a collective, but that there is a possibility that "groupness may *not* happen, that high levels of groupness may *fail* to crystallize, despite the group-making efforts of ethnopolitical entrepreneurs."[6] Brubaker argues that ethnic groups like the Roma should be considered a *category* and not a bounded entity with "identity, agency, interests, and will." It is a mistake to ask what Roma "want, demand, or aspire toward; how *they* think of themselves and others; and how *they* act in relation to other groups [emphasis added]."[7] However, the fact that a population is not internally homogenous or externally bounded does *not* detract from its ability to mobilize around common traits or shared experiences. But Brubaker argues that just because we can identify situations in which categories matter, we do not necessarily know anything about the degree of "groupness" associated with those categories. We cannot take as a given that people and organizations will utilize ethnic national categories to "channel social interaction and organize commonsense knowledge and judgments."[8]

Groupness is often invoked by international Romani actors determined to establish a basis for unity, as demonstrated by a passage from the *Patrin Web Journal,* which states that "although the Romani people do not formally gather to pursue an objective, their need to survive as a distinct and isolated group provides them with a common purpose."[9] Although pan-Roma activists acknowledge the deep differences and rifts among certain Romani groups, "to the point that one group may deny the legitimacy of another group," they are able to draw a firm boundary around all Roma groups by invoking the Indian-European

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[6] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12.
[7] Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.
[8] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 11.
[9] "Romani Customs and Traditions: Romani Law." *The Patrin Web Journal.* Available at: http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/law.htm.

separation, the assertion that "all groups maintain to a greater or lesser degree the barrier between who is Roma and who is not."[10] The Indian origin of Romani groups has become a critical tool for Romani activists, "as it can build and legitimize a crucial identity for a non-territorial population."[11] But this unity-boosting rhetoric cannot serve as evidence that a transnational Romani identity truly exists. As Brubaker notes, there is a difference between the way groupness is invoked by actors who *create* ethnic events, and the way analysts should treat it when attempting to explain the phenomenon from a distance. For the political elite involved in nation-building, "invoking the myth of a common, homogeneous ethno-cultural group is convenient shorthand for nationalists (from either the majority or minorities) who either presume to speak for the nation or hope to rally it behind their cause."[12] This sense of unity is crucial to the strength of the nationalist movement, and one of the most effective ways to achieve it is to invoke a shared connection to a glorious past around which to mobilize. Nations—as Hobsbawm tells it—can establish their legitimacy by forging a connection to a distant past (whether strictly real or invented), presenting this connection as inevitable, and reinforcing it through repetition of symbols, myths, and traditions. But despite the presence of language attesting to groupness, Brubaker reminds us "not to mistake groupist rhetoric for real groupness, the putative groups of ethnopolitical rhetoric for substantial things-in-the-world."[13] For the purpose of this paper it is necessary to ask to what extent—and around which symbols—Roma have developed a sense of groupness, and under what conditions they recognize, and act upon this groupness.

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[10] "Romani Customs and Traditions." *The Patrin Web Journal.* Available at: http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/important.htm
[11] Gabriel Dragomir, "Language Politics and Ethnic Mobilization: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe," 17.
[12] Walter Kemp, "Applying the Nationality Principle: Handle with Care" (*Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 4, 2002), 2.
[13] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 19.

Collective Action and Social Movements

An analysis of collective behavior is not identical to the study of groups. As explained by Turner and Killian, there is a contrast between group behavior—which the authors perceive to be tacitly governed by some established cultural rules—and collective behavior, which is "not guided in a straightforward fashion by the rules of the society."[14] In other words, a collective may form at the behest of a particular event or catalyst, while a group is more formally bound together through common traits and traditions. This point has particular relevance for Roma, who, as a collective, may be bound together by a shared objective, but, unlike a preordained group, are not necessarily connected by something concrete or formally defined.

A collective entity constitutes more than the sum of its individual parts. The interaction among its members—which spurs energy, ideas, and action—endows the collectivity with certain qualities beyond those of its separate components. However, it is important to keep in mind that a collective does not operate independently of its components; it is not a fixed "datum" or an "essence," but a system of complex interaction among its members. As Alberto Melucci writes, "what is empirically called a 'movement' and which, for the sake of observational and linguistic convenience, has been attributed an essential unity, is in fact a product of multiple and heterogeneous social processes."[15] Brubaker's argument that groups should not be taken as concrete entities, asserting that "ethnicity is not a thing, not a substance,"[16] mirrors Melucci's active questioning of the concept of a collective, which in his

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[14] Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, "The Field of Collective Behavior," in *Collective Behavior and Social Movements,* eds. Russell L. Curtis, Jr. and Benigno E. Aguirre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993), 8.

[15] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 20.

[16] Rogers Brubaker et. al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 15.

mind is too often naively viewed as a "unitary empirical datum." [17] Both authors agree that this analytical error of perceiving complex processes to be existing "things of the world" produces serious impediments to understanding the object of analysis. Melucci sustains that endowing a movement with a "quasi-substantial unity," and thus ignoring the plurality of different actors involved, ignores what is percolating under the surface: a movement is in reality contingent upon "the interaction of a multiple field of forces and analytically distinct processes."[18] Similarly, Brubaker complains that an overemphasis on groupness "conflates groups with the organizations that claim to speak and act in their name; obscures the generally low, though fluctuating, degree of "groupness" in this setting; [and] accepts, at least tacitly, the claims of nationalist politicians to speak for the groups they claim to represent."[19] Both authors reach a conclusion that analysts need to disassemble the presumed unity of these terms in order to reveal the plurality of meanings, networks, and interactions that comprise the phenomena of collective action and identity. Far from being a given, the question of how a collective becomes a collective is a critically important query.

Melucci and Brubaker both describe the biggest fallacy at the core of most theories of collective action as the tendency to believe in the 'objective' existence of the collectivity itself as if it were an actual observable datum. This view takes the formation of groups to be so self-evident as to require no further analysis; however, *how* people actually come together to form the "we" is the most interesting point of analysis. In Melucci's view, two schools of thought explaining collective action build upon this fallacy. First, there is a structural explanation for social movements, which theorizes that actors in the same social position will seamlessly come together to solve recognizable social problems. This presupposes that problems are both objective and easily identified, and also takes for granted the actors'

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[17] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 20, 69.
[18] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 4.
[19] Rogers Brubaker et. al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 9.

abilities to interpret the situation in terms of their own commonalities. This explanation leaves out the process whereby actors come to define the situation as "a field of shared action," something that is neither self-evident nor objective, but needs to be constructed.[20] Second, there is an actor-centric explanation based on the individual motives of the individuals involved, which describes collective behavior as fueled by an inherent set of shared values and beliefs held by members of the group. Here, again, "the problem of how the collective subject of action comes about and persists in time is left unresolved." Without situating the action in a larger context, "actors' motives, beliefs, discourses and individual differences again are never enough to provide an explanation of how certain individuals or groups recognize each other and become part of a 'we.'"[21] Therefore, social processes have to be understood as the product of various interactions, choices, and decisions among actors and between the group and its environment, not as the inevitable result of historical circumstances, nor as the product of the intrinsic nature of the actors.

Analyzing collective action is important because it offers clues about how people make sense of the world around them and glean meaning from it. Culture and symbols are not intrinsically meaningful, they have to be endowed with relevance and *made* salient. Roma do not automatically feel a strong connection to India, for instance. Even if a people "objectively" hail from the same territory, this homeland will not become a symbol unless the connection to it is taught and reinforced. The discussion in Chapter III on the pan-Roma movement's invocation of the Roma's ancestral homeland illustrates how these efforts can fail if not reinforced in a compelling manner. Collective identity should be viewed as a process—it has many layers that can be activated in different contexts, but it does not simply serve as an automatic springboard for action.

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[20] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 15-16.
[21] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 15-16.

Romani Identity

The ability to create a collective identity is not premised on internal homogeneity of opinion and orientation among group members, but on mutual understanding and interactions within the group. As Alberto Melucci writes in *Challenging Codes*, the "cognitive level does not necessarily imply unified and coherent frameworks; rather, it is constructed through interaction and comprises different and sometimes contradictory definitions."[22] It is important to keep in mind the element of dynamism and negotiation intrinsic to the concept of identity—it is an active process, the outcome of relationships between actors who are not always in harmony. Melucci defines identity as: "the continuity of a subject over and beyond variations in time and its adaptations to the environment; the delimitation of this subject with respect to others; the ability to recognize and be recognized."[23] So identity—far from being visible and concrete—is in fact an esoteric essence that can endure below the surface despite more visible changes to the façade. It may be coaxed to the surface based on interactions with and recognition from others. The concept of identity persisting despite instances of adaptation or change is crucial in the Roma case. As Kaminski elegantly argues, there is a continuity of Romani culture despite changes, acculturation, and instances of "passing." Although it is tempting to think of "passing" as evidence for assimilation, Kaminski urges the analyst to perceive it as a "mechanism of cultural defense," a Gypsy strategy for adjusting to a rapidly changing reality "in which there is no place for Gypsies." Therefore it is the act of passing—of being able to adapt to non-Roma environments—that actually binds together different Romani groups, and gives them a common platform: "being able to handle the instrument of *passing* without transgressing the limits set by the Gypsy group is seen as the basic means of defense that the Gypsy individual uses in order to survive as a Gypsy in a

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[22] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 71.
[23] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 71.

basically non-Gypsy world." [24] Influenced, but not supplanted, by other cultures—Romani

identity is defined here as the shared ability to adjust and adapt to a changing environment.

The Baiesi Roma depicted in the film *The Curse of the Hedgehog* illustrate how the ability to

survive in new surroundings can transform into a basis for shared identity—in this case

symbolized by the hedgehog. First, the film shows how the Roma battle stereotypes by

internalizing them: although they are viewed as "other" by Gadjé, they embrace this

"otherness" by casting their differences in a positive light. Their ability to survive

independently becomes a source of pride and shared identity. Like the hedgehog, whom "no

one can touch because of his needles," the Baiesi are resilient, independent, and will

persevere in the face of severe hardships. As one protagonist explains: "we Gypsies have

always liked thorns." Both the Roma and the symbolic hedgehog possess strong spikes to

strengthen the boundaries between the internal and the external, and to defend them against

whatever external difficulties cross their path. The Roma are proud of their thorns, which

allow them to be resilient; no matter where they fall, they will be able to bounce back

undeterred, if not unscathed.

Traditional Romani society also features certain ritualized behavior, organized around

ideas of purity, respect, gender roles, and hierarchy, that provides a basis for a common

identity. Upon first glance, this identity appears to glean its strength from the rigid separation

of the Romani world from gadjé society. Kaminski explains that "the internal Romani world

is rooted in purity," whereas "the non-Gypsy world is synonymous with pollution, which is

why it is necessary to avoid." Pollution thus becomes a means of drawing a line between

who is included and who is excluded from the group, on one hand serving "to delineate the

border between the Gypsy ethnic group and majority society by ritually determining certain

attitudes," but on the other hand serving "to isolate different dialect groups (natsia) which

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[24] Ignaci-Marek Kaminski, *The State of Ambiguity: Studies of Gypsy Refugees* (Kompendiet: University of Gothenburg, 1980), 1-2.

correspond to different concepts of ritual values."[25] This code of behavior underscores an important point in thinking about the Roma collectivity. Because purity and impurity is a way to organize thinking about "self" and "other," this means that it can be used to erect a barrier between subgroups that may follow different rules, where the deviants are "impure," and therefore untouchable—as well as to divide Roma from non-Roma. Yet, Kaminski does not believe that this wholly condemns the pan-Romani potential for groupness, as he notes that "all subgroups have to follow the basic rules for social behavior known as Romaniya which differ all Gypsies from non-Gypsies."[26] Despite the cultural distance between some Romani groups, the shared "experience of adversity at the hands of non-Romani (Gadje) society" shows that "a feeling of closeness and community does exist."[27] Melucci nicely captures this aspect of being part of a group when he discusses the importance of emotional investment in relation to collective identity, which enables individuals to feel themselves part of a common unity. Therefore, the decision to form a collectivity is never entirely based on objective evidence or a logical cost-benefit calculation; participation in collective action always mobilizes emotions as well. It is not the existence of the tabooic code and the rituals involving the human body that create a collectivity, but how it is practiced—it is the repetition of the ritual among diverse subgroups that binds the populations into a collective body. This example illustrates that there are modes of expressing pan-Romani identity in the traditional Romani world, but this mode of expressing and constructing identity is not necessarily appropriate or sufficient from the point of view of collective action.

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[25] Ignaci-Marek Kaminski, *The State of Ambiguity,* 46.

[26] Ignaci-Marek Kaminski, *The State of Ambiguity,* 47.

[27] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper" (Project on Ethnic Relations, 2001), 10.

Perceptions of the "Group" in Traditional Romani Society

There are four main concepts associated with the word "group" in the Romany language: nation, household (or an alliance of households), clan, and extended family.[28] As Marek Jakoubek explains, traditional Romani society is organized not around nationality or ethnicity, but around the principle of kinship, thus rendering some bearers of traditional Romani culture "ethnically indifferent." Similarly, Peter Szuhay opines that for the Hungarian Roma community, "integratory groupings have formed along political lines, and not along ethnic ones."[29] Paloma Gay y Blasco states bluntly that "few so-called Gypsy groups display any interest in bringing about imaginative or practical cohesion with each other," placing into doubt the success or reach of Romani activism.[30] Therefore, although Romani intellectuals as well as European leaders have attempted to build a "national" Romani culture, there is evidence that the framing of Romani rights in ethnic terms does not resonate with traditional Romani constituencies. Jakoubek makes an emphatic point that sub-ethnic affiliations form the primary identity for traditional Roma, and are strengthened further by the concept of "ritual (im)purity," which, in concert with the principle of kinship, forms the core structuring element of traditional Romani society. As discussed in the previous section, the idea that a neighboring group can be impure—and therefore off limits—further reifies the subgroups, making the borders between them more and more impenetrable. The result, in Jakoubek's opinion, is that "particular Roma groups differing from each other in acknowledged value of humanness then do not recognize each other [as equals]," resulting in a form of institutionalized inequality, segregation, and primacy of sub-ethnic affiliations that is fundamentally at odds with the pan-Roma movement's notion that "all Roma are members

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[28] "Romani Customs and Traditions: Romani Law." *The Patrin Web Journal.* http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/law.htm

[29] Peter Szuhay. "Constructing a Gypsy National Culture" (*Budapest Review of Books*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1995), 116.

[30] Paloma Gay y Blasco. "Gypsy/Roma Diasporas, A Comparative Perspective" (*Social Anthropology,* Vol. 10, No. 2, 2002), 173.

of the Roma nation and share one—Roma national—identity, as well as loyalty."[31] In order to successfully construct a sense of transnational, inter-tribal groupness, Roma need a more powerful catalyzing tool than the connection to India or a putative common non-gadjé culture.

When asked to reflect upon the Roma's ability to mobilize around common problems that cut across sub-group borders, Nicolae Gheorghe responds that "most Roma are entrenched locally—local groups, local issues," and that there have been only two events in Romania since the 1990s that have sparked national solidarity among Roma, enough for Roma "to recognize that what goes on in the next village matters." Although this shows that inter-tribal unity can be catalyzed under the right conditions, Gheorghe's conclusion is that "we are still very concerned with our own families, our own groups, our own localities, our own countries."[32] This suggests that from the ingroup perspective the "unit" question raised at the beginning of this paper regarding who is and who is not Roma can only be answered on a subgroup level. Following from this conclusion, we can surmise that the question of what constitutes the "real" Roma group and who belongs with them politically will also be answered on a community-wide, rather than nation-wide, level.

Jakoubek's arguments highlight the rift between the manifestations of traditional Romani identity and Gypsy identity as it is perceived by the outside world. There is a fundamental clash between the hierarchical structure of traditional Romani society—where the social order, much like a caste system, is premised on the substantial inequality between human beings—and the equal-rights model of European society. The 2001 Project on Ethnic

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[31] Marek Jakoubek. "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture: Definitions, Relations, Prospects (the Czech Case)" (*Project for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic,* forthcoming 2007), 5.
[32] Gheorghe is referring to the instance of violent attacks on Roma in the early 1990s and the backlash resulting from the Romanian government's attempt to impose the use of the derogatory label "tigan" on Roma in the mid 1990s. "In Search of a New Deal for Roma: ERRC Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe." *Roma Rights Quarterly* (April 2001): [4], accessed 20 March 2007; Available from: www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1284.

Relations Roundtable in Krakow quotes one Romani participant as saying that "as a result of the conflict between the traditional leadership and its more modern counterpart, Roma have been inhibited in their emergence as a politically mobilized community."[33] The question raised here is whether this clash of cultures has become an insurmountable hurdle—is traditional Romani leadership entirely at odds with modern politics? Kaminski explains that the "vitsa," or tribe, is the main political unit among Gypsies, the head of which may unite with other leaders to create the "Romani Kris," which functions as a collective body of leaders who have the authority to pass judgment on major breaches of the tabooic code and confer punishment upon those found in violation. According to Kaminski, vitsa leadership is determined by kinship as well as experience with "Romaniya" (the Romani legal code). The leader is responsible for the economic and social well-being of the members of his vitsa, but also has the additional task of maintaining the cohesion of the group "by preventing rivalries and discontent which could lead in turn to splintering."[34] Gheorghe and Mirga describe the conflict that arises when the traditional leadership model confronts its modern counterpart: on one hand there are the elders who have traditionally held the decision-making power in Romani communities, while on the other hand there is the emergence of a new, young, mainstream-educated elite who may have cultivated relationships with majority power-brokers and thus trespassed into "impure" society. While these new leaders claim to be engaged in Romani politics because they have "rediscovered their Romani identity," the traditional leadership "not surprisingly, has questioned the 'authenticity' of the latter."[35] In a separate piece, Nicolae Gheorghe touches upon this conflict between the old and new, as he sees the future of the Romani movement as dependent on cultivating strong leaders out of the

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[33] Project on Ethnic Relations. *Report: Leadership, Representation, and the Status of the Roma (*Project on Ethnic Relations, Krakow, Poland, March 9-10, 2001), 15. <www.per-usa.org>
[34] Ignaci-Marek Kaminski, *The State of Ambiguity,* 35-43.
[35] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 6.

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ranks of the young Romani elite—and not relying on the traditional power structures that underpin Romani societies. He writes that "elected Roma can have real legitimacy," therefore it is worthwhile to "devote energy to getting us out of the self-appointed leadership model."[36] There is an unresolved conflict between the 'authenticity' enjoyed by the self-appointed leadership model in traditional society, and the new legitimacy conferred upon elected leaders in modern Europe. Both types coexist and compete for ascendancy in Romania today, contributing to the lack of cohesion within the Romani movement as a whole.

The process of deconstructing the traditional images of *collective identity* and *collective action* demonstrates that there can be solidarity without homogeneity, collective purpose without identical thoughts and opinions, and collective action despite antagonistic pulses within a movement. If we look for collective action within the Romani community from the perspective of what a traditional collective actor looks like, we may not find potential for a dynamic movement. But if we approach this problem with the mindset that traditional forms are subject to modification and evolution, then we may see that there is *dis*continuity between social movements of the past and their contemporary counterparts. Modern movements in diffuse societies may not don the orthodox garb of a traditional social movement, but this does not mean that they will not be successful in chasing the same goals.

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[36] "In Search of a New Deal for Roma: ERRC Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe." *Roma Rights Quarterly* (April 2001): [5], accessed 20 March 2007; Available from: www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1284.

III.   Romani Political Mobilization in Romania

Melucci defines mobilization as "an interactive and negotiated perception of the opportunities and constraints of action shared by a certain number of people." In other words, a population develops potential for mobilization by recognizing and assessing their common position in society and their common goals for the future, and then deciding to act together to achieve their stated aims. Melucci emphasizes the importance of networks for understanding how mobilization processes are catalyzed and mature, since "isolated and rootless individuals never mobilize." Instead, individuals need a network within which they can "interact, influence one another, and engage in negotiations as they produce the cognitive and motivational schemata necessary for action." [37] Action, in Melucci's opinion, is constructed out of a negotiation among actors, who must acknowledge the elements that bind the group together and produce a common goal using these commonalities.

Historical Background

Throughout their history in Romania, the Roma have been referred to alternately as pariahs, scapegoats, and the marginal group *par excellence.* Their experience on Romanian soil has included periods of slavery, marginalization, and forced assimilation at the hands of the state, but a sub-national culture has also flourished. This historical summary will show us how different Romani populations have adapted to different environments, and how the nature and boundaries of the "group" have changed in the process. Throughout their history Roma have been divided among those who still exhibit genuine external Romani traits with a consciousness of belonging to a Romani ethnic group; those on the verge of assimilation, who are still vacillating in terms of their ethnic identity; and those who consider themselves to be assimilated, but who can still be recognized as Roma. Crowe writes of a sense of

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[37] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 64-65.

"Gypsy ethnic self-awareness" beginning to emerge in the late 19th century, developing on a parallel to the economic and social marginalization experienced by this group within mainstream society.[38] During the interwar period, the Roma experienced state-sanctioned discrimination because they were seen as having "neither a protective state, a history, nor a 'culture' and 'civilization' through written languages," to justify their claims to minority rights; yet these impediments to political mobilization did not permanently stifle the political aspirations of Roma.[39] What was novel in the interwar years was the creation of institutions dealing with Romani issues *by* Roma themselves. In 1930, Romanian Roma published the first Romani journal *Neamul Tiganesc* (The Gypsy Family), and in 1933 the General Association of Roma in Romania was founded, which published two Romani newspapers: *Glasul Romilor* (The Voice of the Roma) and *O Rom*. The Association was also involved in planning a Gypsy World Congress in Bucharest in the fall of 1933, and in 1934 the *Uniunea Generala a Romilor din Romania* (General Union of Romanian Roma) was created, which advocated increased integration into Romanian society.[40] During this period the first few non-Romani non-governmental organizations start to take interest in the plight of Roma, and some organizations were specifically created to lobby on their behalf. The external and internal dimensions of the Romani experience during the interwar period illustrate two divergent trends: in some respects the Roma experienced greater levels of assimilation (with the potential effect of eroding group identity), but in other respects the Romani national consciousness matured, as evidenced by burgeoning political mobilization. But because the Roma were not perceived as sufficiently strong to constitute a threat to the state, the Roma had one advantage over more powerful minority groups. The cohesiveness of the Jews, for instance, was seen as a menacing development, inspiring harsh views of the Jew as an "alien"

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[38] David Crowe and John Kolsti, eds, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 68.
[39] David Crowe and John Kolsti, eds, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, 69.
[40] David Crowe and John Kolsti, eds, *The Gypsies of Eastern*, 69-70.

who should not be granted citizenship. Gilbert Trond writes that the openly nationalistic policy of the Romanian government came into direct conflict with the Hungarians, Germans, and Jews, groups that were "clearly more advanced than the dominant Romanians," a fact which caused considerable friction and resentment.[41] Yet the political growth of the non-territorial, non-separatist Roma was not met with the same hostility or fear. Therefore, the increasing nationalist and anti-Roma sentiments were countered by unprecedented leaps in Romani self-organization. The Roma were spurred to collective political action, and a new Romani elite emerged.

During the post-war communist period in Romania, policies of forced assimilation and homogenization were employed to "Romanize" the Gypsies, with the aim of eradicating all distinctively Romani cultural markers that were different from the mainstream socialist culture. By abandoning their traditional lifestyle, the Roma could enjoy some measures of economic and social integration, but only on the majority's terms. A Radio Free Europe report from April 1978 captures the essence of the assimilationist communist policy toward Roma in Eastern Europe, describing that "the great majority [of Roma] have by now forsaken the tribal past for the socialist present," which was viewed so positively that the writer explained how: "the regime certainly does not discriminate against its Gypsies, and many of them have climbed from humble beginnings to high positions in local government." This same report continues to note: "the communist authorities tend to see the solution of the 'Gypsy Question' as lying in the elimination of most of what is distinctive in the Romanies' tradition."[42] These quotes suggest that assimilation under the communist system aimed at swallowing Romani culture whole, leaving no remnants, as opposed to striking a balance between the culture of the core society and that of the incorporated minority.

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[41] Gilberg Trond, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 44.

[42] "Gypsies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union," (*Radio Free Europe Research, RAD* Background Report/72, April 12, 1978), [2].

After the fall of communism, legal barriers to political mobilization were removed, but social barriers were erected in their place. On the surface, the shift from a communist system to a parliamentary democracy in Romania offered immense benefits to the Roma community, who were able to establish Romani political parties and Romany-language publications for the first time since the interwar period. However, prejudice and discrimination prevented Roma from attaining structural assimilation and freely participating in majority political institutions. During the mid 1990s—with an eye toward potential accession to the EU—the Romanian government enacted a series of bureaucratic changes that aimed to address the problems facing their Romani minority. In 1997 the National Office for Roma was created as part of the new Department for Protecting National Minority Rights. In April 2001, the Romanian government adopted Decision No. 430/2001: "The Government Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma," an elaborate document that outlined a set of objectives and measures aiming to improve the living standards and educational level of Roma while diminishing negative stereotypes about them. In 2004, Romania became one of nine countries in southeastern and central Europe to join the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015" project spearheaded by the World Bank in conjunction with the Open Society Institute, which aims to improve the socio-economic status of Roma and promote social inclusion. These initiatives represent an important step in the Romanian government's commitment to include Roma more fully into the social, economic, and political fabric of society. However, concrete results remain scarce. Before analyzing the Romani leaders' role within this framework, it is important to examine the different reasons for the stagnation of the Romani agenda. Have Romanian policymakers reached an impasse, or does the answer lie within the Romani communities themselves?

Comparative Theories for the "Failure" of Mobilization

Why do Roma not play an active and effective role in policymaking that concerns them? The perception that Roma have under-performed on the local, national, and supra-national political stages has been analyzed by scholars, debated by activists, and tackled by European Union legislation, who have all identified potential barriers to successful Romani political mobilization. While it is analytically problematic to talk about the "success" of a movement—for instance, what would be the ideal type for "success," and how would one account for structural differences between the situations being compared?—the concept of "success" will be used here to refer to more modest measures of improved quality of life in social, economic, and political spheres. While leaders and activists have had minor successes in bringing awareness to Romani problems in such areas as education, housing, unemployment, and poverty—Roma continue to represent the poorest segment of society in Romania, meaning that the majority of their social problems have remained unabated. The premise of this argument is that no political solution capable of addressing and alleviating the social problems experienced by Roma has been created, which can be attributed to a multitude of factors. The analysis of the interplay of external and internal impediments to mobilization can be divided into three categories: macro, median, and micro.

The macro level describes interactions between the state and ethnic political organizations, which can be illustrated by three phenomena: the design of the electoral system itself, particularly how it engages minority political parties; institutional discrimination affecting access to and participation in the public sphere; and elite manipulation, specifically policies instigated by the majority out of fear of political unity or demographic growth from minorities that could potentially pose a threat to the state. Since our first records of the Roma in Romania, the state has alternately enslaved, excluded, and forcibly assimilated the Roma, thus undercutting many nascent political movements that may

otherwise have developed within this population. In contrast, Romania's most recent

transition to democracy and accession to the European Union has catalyzed international

interest in the minority rights legislation and practices espoused by the Romanian

government, and demanded a new approach to minority issues. The post-communist climate

stands in contrast to the openly discriminatory practices of previous regimes, but despite

nominal changes in minority legislation, the state still plays a role in the external exclusion of

Roma from the public sphere. The new minority rights provisions in the Romanian

Constitution offer an example of this tug in both directions. On one hand, Article 62 of the

Constitution guarantees a reserved seat in parliament for each national minority party,

ensuring that minority representatives who do not meet the 5% vote threshold are still entitled

to a voice in government. But on the other hand, this creates some new problems in addition

to those it was intended to resolve. While the system ensures that the voice of the Roma will

be heard on the national level (even in cases like Romania's first free election, when the

Roma Democratic Union of Romania received less than 1% of the total votes, far below the

threshold necessary to qualify for an elected representative), it also restricts the freedom of

fledgling political parties. Article 59 of the Constitution stipulates that citizens of a national

minority are entitled to be represented by one organization only, which unnaturally channels

diverse intra-group political identities into one single outlet, and provides a major

disincentive to inter-ethnic party building.[43] While Article 40 guarantees that all citizens

have the right to freely associate with a political party, this right is contingent upon fulfilling

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[43] See Carlos Flores Juberias, "Post-Communist Electoral Systems and National Minorities:
A Dilemma in Five Paradigms," in *The Politics of National Minority Participation in Post-
Communist Europe: State-Building, Democracy, and Ethnic Mobilization,* ed. Jonathan P.
Stein, (New York: EastWest Institute, 2000).

certain conditions imposed by the state, which has made it increasingly difficult for minorities to form parties in the first place.[44]

The macro level also has to be examined with special attention to the regime change and the anarchic transition to democratic self-governance in Romania, which engendered contentiousness and difficulties not experienced under the rigid, uniform, and regimented communist system. Perhaps the first wave of Romani political organization was followed by decreased civic engagement because individuals became disillusioned with the slow progress, messy politics, and fractiousness built into the system. The transition to democracy is also seen by some scholars as a process that "unleashed ethnic tensions that had been kept under wraps by totalitarian governments" (Uslaner & Badescu 2003). Although theories of "frozen" or "sleeping" nationalisms presuppose an exaggerated constant state of ethnic conflict (the expression—but not existence—of which is dependent on context), it is important to underscore that the lifting of the taboo of ethnicity after the collapse of communism resulted in altered relations between minority and majority. On one hand, the recognition of the Roma as a legitimate minority allowed a flourishing of Romani political parties and civic organizations (PER Report 2001). On the other hand, when the majority became more aware of the Roma as a group with the potential for organized action, a surge in negative prejudice followed (Thelen 2005).

The median level refers to competition within the ethnic group, usually between subgroups who are attempting to negotiate their own power inside the group. This can be characterized by leadership struggles, problems of legitimacy, and uncertainty over whom the

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[44] The prerequisites for forming a political party grew from having 10,000 founding members from 15 counties in 1996 (Law no. 27) to a minimum of 25,000 founding members from 18 counties in 2003, causing some advocates to claim that the right to free political association has been limited. From Ana Bleahu and Valeriu Frunzaru, "Participarea Politica a Romilor din Romania [Political Participation of the Roma in Romania]," *Romani CRISS: Centrul Romilor pentru Interventie Sociala si Studii,* Draft Report (2007).

Romani leadership represents. On one hand, the new recognition of the Roma as a distinct ethnic group, the renewed interest in human rights, and a willingness to discuss collective minority rights on the supranational level has placed a spotlight on Romani identity politics. Since Romania's accession to the EU was formally contingent upon the protection of Romani rights, this created an incentive to recognize Romani leaders as legitimate and entertain the demands of Romani communities. Because the collective identity of the Roma was publicly recognized as legitimate, Romani elites were given an opportunity to articulate group demands that followed from this acknowledgement (Jenne 2000). But on the other hand, these potentially positive trends have been countered by an academic preoccupation with the unity of the Roma as a precondition for political success. The vast internal divisions within the larger Romani community lead analysts to believe that there is no *one* Romani ethnic group. Because the 'groupness' of the Romani collectivity is low, and ethnicity is not the primary source of identity for some group members, some analysts have drawn the conclusion that this 'lack of cohesion' among group members has hindered mobilization (Fox and Brown, 2000).

The increased international attention on Romani issues has brought increased potential for success, but at the same time it has also created new divisions within domestic Romani movements. Most importantly, discussions have arisen among Romani activists about who is entitled to represent the Roma in policy debates. Fox and Brown (2000) hypothesize that the problem stems from the lack of political experience and lack of strong leadership, as few Roma organizations existed before 1990, and thus have had limited time to grow. This stance reveals some naivete, however, as the contention that the Roma have no centralized organization and no authoritative leadership presumes the superiority of a western model of political organization and ignores the hierarchical structure of traditional Romani society. Additionally, divisive and contentious politics are characteristic of most social

movements, and cannot be used as proof of ineffectiveness or structural weakness. Gheorghe and Mirga (2001) offer a more measured view, saying that it is the relative absence of formal structures in the traditional Romani world that has proven to be an obstacle to participation in modern bureaucratic structures. However, divisiveness and in-fighting among Romani leaders is also cited as a clear hindrance to the growth of the movement as a whole. Fox and Brown (2000) contend that Roma "have proliferated many organizations with contentious leaders. The leaders rarely have authority outside their own community and are generally more interested in pursuing rivalries with other leaders than in working toward common goals." This view assumes an intrinsic unwillingness to work together on the part of Roma—which would be incomplete without a closer examination of the significance of both the community and the collective for Romani society—and ignores external factors at play. Also, there have been instances of alliances both among competing Romani groups (such as the Working Group of Romani Associations founded in 1999) and between Romani groups and external players (such as the electoral coalition between the Roma Party[45] and the Social Democratic Party in 2000). Yet other authors agree that despite efforts to promote cooperation among competing Romani organizations, success in these endeavors is "fleeting," and the competition over votes and financial resources means that "it is still basically a zero-sum game between the major Romani organizations" (Gheorghe 2001).

The transition to democracy did not automatically lead to a rebirth of civic engagement, as had been predicted. Although "state repression ended, the culture left by more than half a century of authoritarian government endured." (Uslaner & Badescu 2003). Because Roma had been socialized not to trust non-Roma, particularly in the wake of forced assimilation and sterilization, they had little confidence that participation in civic life would improve their quality of life. Under communism, Roma lived with the reality that strangers

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[45] Partida Romilor Social Democrata (PRSD), hereafter referred to as the Roma Party.

could betray you, which reinforced a reversion to smaller groups and clans. Yet in a situation when individuals only trust members of their own group, a "particularized trust" in one's own kind develops. This can be observed in the case of Roma on a level below that of the state, as subgroup tensions within the minority can cause the same polarizing effect, disinclining different subgroups to form a single collective (Uslaner & Badescu 2003). Vermeersch (2001) also mentions trust as a key issue. Even if Romani politicians are elected with the support of Roma from different clans, this unity is fragile, and subject to crumble if the elected politicians are unable to enact the substantive changes demanded of them. Therefore, leaders often struggle to maintain the confidence of the entire electorate.

Some Romani leaders claim that their community is as diverse as society in general, and therefore, the wish to have it unified and uniform runs counter to its reality (PER Report 2001), but this objection assumes that diversity always implies dissonance. All ethnic groups contain a range of beliefs, opinions, and traditions that contribute to the heterogeneity of the group, but this internal diversity does not de-legitimize the existence of the group as a whole. Gareth Stedman Jones (1983) offers a compelling description of the internal rifts and divisive politics that threatened to hamper the Chartism movement in 1830s Britain, but the leaders were able to overcome internal differences by creating a vision that united the masses. It was not identical experiences or beliefs, but a deft linguistic reordering of collective experience that translated people's diverse experiences into a single conviction, persuading people they were part of the same movement. Stedman Jones also stresses that more than one language is capable of articulating the same set of experiences.

The micro level refers to the strategy of the individual ethnic actors, who choose to advance certain discourses and adopt certain situational identities dependent on context. Because Roma lack the classic markers of a traditional ethnic group—shared oral and written history, language, religion, or culture—it is more difficult for the group to identify symbols

around which they could construct a strong collective identity, which analysts see as a deficit to successful mobilization. Roma have often been compared to another transnational population—the Jews—who have succeeded in mobilizing around their shared history and experiences of oppression despite their state of diaspora. Because the connection to an ancestral homeland has transformed into a powerful symbol for the Jewish collective, analysts wonder whether or not Romani mobilization has been impeded by their lack of territory—past and present. However, one can argue that it is not the territory itself but a shared attitude toward the territory that gives life to collective identity. Viewed from this angle, the concept of "homeland" can become a mobilizing tool for Roma because, as Mirga and Gheorghe explain, "Romani people expressed similar attitudes toward the territories in which they live: it was not theirs; it always belonged to Gadje (non−Gypsies)." This state of rootlessness, manifested by a "lack of attachment to a given territory and a readiness to move even from places where they had been settled for generations" *and* the ability to overcome it by adapting to their surroundings, has become "part of the Romani cultural heritage."[46]

The most persistent problem plaguing micro level politics is that Roma do not see themselves as part of an "imagined community," in which their social experiences are mirrored by those of Roma in other region, and for which an inclusive political project could be envisioned to address the social ills of all Roma populations within the state. Roma do not have a system of communication or way to disseminate information to reinforce the idea that they form part of a larger community; instead, the diverse subgroups identify principally with their families or clans and have no significant experience engaging in political or social action based on inter-familial relationships. In Romania, there are over forty different Romani populations divided by family, profession, dialect, and level of integration into majority society. The absence of a unified sense of Romani ethnicity or nationhood is

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[46] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 14.

perhaps the principal problem cited for why the Roma have been unable to translate their demographic advantages into political clout. As Istvan Pogany (2004) writes, "the Roma comprise a *multiplicity* of minorities with little sense, as yet, of a common cultural or ethnic identity. Very largely, they are a 'people' only in the eyes of Gadje." There are also practical issues that affect the individual's decision regarding identity and political inclination. Voting for the ethnic political party, for instance, may provoke fear of further marginalization, as this alliance would place Roma further outside mainstream politics (Vermeersch 2001). In a June 2004 report, the Bucharest Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center concluded that "out of all minorities in Romania, the Roma have the weakest sense of identity," justifying their claim with statistics from the 2002 Barometer on Ethnic Relations in Romania showing that 33% of Romanian Roma identify primarily as Romanian, and only 37% identify primarily as Roma—with the rest citing regional identifications.[47] When the 2007 Roma Inclusion Barometer asked their research sample the question "what kind of Rom are you?" the most common answer was "Romanianized Rom," given by 45% of the pool, followed by "I just consider myself gypsy," 23%. Only 26% of the respondents elected specific groups, divided between *rudar, caldarar, ursar, vatrar,* and *caramidar.*[48]

Yet, as Dowley and Silver (2003) note with respect to social capital, unity "does not mean that everyone has to trace their ancestry back to the same clan, nor does it mean that everyone has to speak the same language, or even practice the same religion. Instead it means that nearly everyone must believe they belong together in a single political community." Once again, Gareth Stedman Jones's account of the Chartism movement explains how

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[47] Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturala (Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center). [A Necessary Strategy Change: Report on the Implementation Status of the Government Strategy on Improving the Situation of Roma] (Bucharest: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturala, June 2004), 39-40.
[48] Gabriel Badescu et al, eds, *Research Study: Barometrul Incluziunii Romilor" [Roma Inclusion Barometer]* (Bucharest: Fundatia pentru o Societate Deschisa, 2007), 7-8.

leaders succeeded because they were able to capture the public imagination and create a shared conviction that the social ills plaguing the people could be assuaged by a political solution. One reason why Romani mobilization has faltered is because Romani leaders have failed to build the same collective feeling.

This three-pronged analysis of why efforts to increase the political participation of Roma have faltered is incomplete without an in-depth look at the relationship between leaders and their constituents. Since the lack of unity among diverse Romani communities is frequently cited as their greatest impediment to successful collective action, it is worth investigating whether or not Romani leaders are using myths or symbols in order to solidify bonds between the diverse subgroups, and if so, whether or not this tactic is successful. Can disparate Romani populations successfully create and mobilize around a communal narrative, or is the articulation of a collective unit (based on a shared past, language, or culture) an ineffective means of mobilization for Roma?

The Role of Myth-Making and Nationalist Narratives

Building upon the previous discussions of identity and unity, this section aims to introduce the theoretical underpinnings of why and how leaders invoke myths. This will introduce the discourse of national mobilization advanced by Romani leaders that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter IV. Following Brubaker's admonition to not take the use of ethnic framing for granted, we must analyze how ethnic categories are used—or not used—to "make sense of problems and predicaments, to articulate affinities and affiliations, to identify commonalities and connections, to frame stories and self-understandings."[49]

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[49] Rogers Brubaker et. al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 12.

Levinger and Lytle explain the instrumentalization of the past as part of the triadic structure of nationalist mobilization, which, based on articulations of a shared, glorious past, degraded present, and collective future, is responsible for the success of myth-makers. As Hobsbawm famously theorized in his article "Inventing Traditions," nationalist myths, symbols, and traditions serve to "establish or symbolize social cohesion or the membership of groups"—in other words, symbols, repeated through tradition, "create real or artificial communities."[50] Building upon Hobsbawm's premise of a usable past, the nationalist narrative described by Levinger and Lytle pushes a bit further, envisioning a juxtaposition of images of a primordial 'golden age' and exaggerated depictions of a degraded present that lead to the promise of a utopian future condition.[51] In the authors' view, Hobsbawm's observation of how a nation uses its rootedness to the past tells only part of the story, as the hyperbolically glorious past only appears worth recreating when presented in stark contrast to the hyperbolically degraded present.[52] The purpose of 'diagnosing' the losses suffered by a community is to chart a strategy for reversing the current degradation and modeling a future 'utopia.' Levinger and Lytle speak of various genres of loss, such as loss of language, cultural integrity, territory, or racial purity, which may result either from external agency or from internal decay, noting that it is through the process of categorizing the loss that "the nation as community is identified and demarcated."[53] Each leader attempting to invoke this rhetoric for mobilization purposes would first have to answer what the "golden age" would have been for the Roma, in contrast to some present tension, and determine whether it would work as a mobilizing tool.

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[50] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Tradition,* Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 9.
[51] Matthew Levinger and Paula Franklin Lytle, "Myth and Mobilisation: The Triadic Structure of Nationalist Rhetoric" (*Nations and Nationalism,* Vol. 7, No. 2, 2001), 175.
[52] Matthew Levinger and Paula Franklin Lytle, "Myth and Mobilisation," 175.
[53] Matthew Levinger and Paula Franklin Lytle, "Myth and Mobilisation," 181.

The Pan-Roma Movement

In order to create a communal narrative resonant to a broad swathe of transnational Romani populations, leaders and activists have invoked symbols to transcend the barriers of state and tribe. The connection to the Indian past and the importance of a common language have become the foundation upon which leaders can build the Romani *nation*. This push for a "pan-Roma" movement looks to create a medium capable of threading disparate Romani groups into one political and social imaginary. Three of the articulated goals of the World Romani Congresses speak to the desire to highlight the divide between Europe and India, based on the call to standardize the Romany language, preserve Romani culture, and gain international recognition of the Roma as a national minority of Indian origin.[54] This formulation of nationhood serves as a surrogate for a formal articulation of collective goals, as "[the Roma's] need to survive as a distinct and isolated group provides them with a common purpose."[55] The Romani connection to India formally made the transition from scholarly fact to national symbol at the first World Romani Congress in Longon in 1971, where the sixteen-spoked chakra, drawn from the national flag of India, became the international Romani symbol. The Indian government played an important role in the creation of the first Congress, and since then, Indira Ghandi has acknowledged the Roma as a diaspora Indian population. Romani scholar and activist Ian Hancock, who has written and researched extensively about the history of the Roma, explains the critical function of the connection to India, saying:

> "And we indeed speak a language and maintain a culture whose core of direct retention is directly traceable to India. The acknowledgment of that position is essential, because the alternative is to create a fictitious history and to have, again, our identity in the hands of non-Romani policy-makers and scholars."[56]

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[54] "A Brief History of the Roma." *The Patrin Web Journal.* http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/history.htm.

[55] "Romani Customs and Traditions: Romani Law." *The Patrin Web Journal.* http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/law.htm.

[56] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity," 5.

Hancock shows that the emphasis on Indian origin establishes independence from the majority, at whose hands Roma have historically suffered great injustice, and allows Roma to redefine their own identity. He continues to say that:

> "The arguments for stressing the "Indian connection" seem clear. In these times, when Europe is divided into nation-states, being identified with an actual homeland brings legitimacy and a measure of security. Furthermore, it is the Indian factors-linguistic, genetic, and cultural—that different Romani populations share; it is the more recently acquired non-Indian factors that divide us. If I want to speak in Romani to a speaker of a dialect different from my own, it is the European words we must each avoid, not the Indian ones."[57]

There are Romani groups residing in every country in Europe, including many that have been settled for centuries, and have adopted the language and customs of their host societies. In the words of the Romani National Congress, the emancipation of Roma "needs to draw on common roots and common perspectives beyond citizenship, group affiliation, or country of origin."[58] The task of uniting these disparate groups under a banner of nationhood is only conceivable by invoking something that can transcend the nation-states that divide Roma regionally, politically, and linguistically. This element is the connection to India, which unites Roma in their distinctiveness from Europeans. While "the Romani population has grown differently in different places, to the point that one group may deny the legitimacy of another group…all groups maintain to a greater or lesser degree the barrier between who is Roma and who is not."[59]

This unity-boosting narrative emphasizing the division between Roma and non-Roma can be seen partly as a reaction to forced assimilation. *The Patrin Web Journal* points to this episode in Romani history as the greatest source of tension and cause of their current degradation: "while other minorities want recognition of their cultures and integration into

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[57] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity," 6.
[58] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 13.
[59] "Romani Customs and Traditions." *The Patrin Web Journal.* http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/law.htm.

gajikane society without discrimination…the Roma are suspicious and afraid of being corrupted by gajikane influences."[60] One way to combat the effects of assimilation and potential loss of culture through integration is to emphasize distinctiveness, which can be achieved by valuing difference and maintaining tradition. Romani distinctiveness takes shape by highlighting the non-European characteristics ostensibly common to all Roma, an exercise that serves both to unite different Romani groups as well as to divide ingroup from outgroup.

The strategy of establishing a connection to India, through an emphasis on shared history and language, is dependent on symbols. The use of symbol is particularly effective for nation-building because symbolic representations (flags, anthems, myths) can be left intentionally undefined, and therefore universal. This deliberate vagueness is useful for nationalism, which, as Hobsbawm argues, owes its success not to its claim to *truth,* but in fact to imagination. The past can be repackaged to forge a political imaginary in the present, a process for which "the crucial element seems to [be] the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club."[61] An analogy can be drawn to the International Romani Union's decision to ask for non-territorial nation status for the Roma, an act that would provide symbolic membership to a transnational Roma "club," but would not purport to define a common goal for all its members. Attempts to construct a cohesive Roma group out of heterogeneous building blocks demonstrate the utility of a unifying myth.

This nation-building process, promoted by internationally-minded Romani activists and scholars, has in many ways failed to resonate with the populations it targets. First, the idea that all Roma are members of one, all-inclusive Romani nation, to which they owe their

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[60] "Integration and Assimilation." *The Patrin Web Journal.*
http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/beliefs.htm
[61] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 11.

loyalty and upon which they base their identity, is in "fundamental contradiction" with the premises of the traditional, kinship-based Roma culture.[62] Second, the unity-boosting rhetoric employed by leaders, emphasizing segregation, contradicts the economic and social rationale for integration. For instance, segregated Romani schools in Romania do not offer children a platform from which to transition into the country's labor market. There are no Romany-language universities in which Roma children could continue their education without joining mainstream, majority institutions. Placing an emphasis on the Romani connection to India is a potentially effective tool for nation-building because it defines Roma *in opposition to* Europeans. But by definition, this also creates a rift between Roma and the society upon which they depend. Therefore the segregation of Romany schools may help Roma preserve their ethnic identity through isolation—by closing them off to potential "pollution" from majority society—but in modern society it is also a serious handicap. Third, Romani political parties based solely on ethnic affiliation have performed very poorly in elections throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the efforts of the International Romani Union, which has called itself the "voice" of all Roma, and purports to represent the "political representation of all Roma in the world," there is evidence that ethnic-based movements have not actually translated into a greater share of power for Roma, whose descriptive and substantive levels of political representation in Europe remain exceedingly low.[63] Politics, unlike human rights, is a field rarely guided by universal principles. Dimitrina Petrova, former Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Center, explains that it is difficult to build a universal political strategy for Roma "that can be 'exported' to different countries because what Roma want to do in order to be politically present and fully

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[62] Marek Jakoubek, "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture, 5.
[63] Peter Vermeersch,"The Roma in Domestic and International Politics: An Emerging Voice? *(Roma Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 4, 2001), 1-5.

participating in their own country depends immensely on the political landscape in each country."[64]

While Romani ethnonationalism is sometimes effectively emphasized on the elite level, the invocation of the national past and the use of ethnically-based politics fails to resonate on the micro level, as traditional Romani society—premised on bonds of kinship and *not* nationality—is "ethnically indifferent."[65] While linguistic scholars have definitively proven the connection between the Romany language and Indian tongues, lending credence and authority to the claim that the Roma came from India, this sense of ancestry has never been the core—or even a substantial part—of Romani oral history. As Ian Hancock explains, "while early Romani populations on their arrival in Europe were able to say that they had come from India, that fact has become lost over time and is still generally unknown to the vast majority of Roma, many of whom have internalized instead the notion of an origin in Egypt."[66] Although the connection to India may be factually accurate, its importance and centrality to the Romani narrative is insignificant. Its reemergence on the agenda of Romani nationalism is a clear example of what Hobsbawm terms "invented" tradition because of the way it uses history—"not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized, and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so"—as a "legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion."[67] The unity-boosting rhetoric employed by international Romani leaders fails to reinforce—or construct—a collective identity for disparate Romani populations. The connection to India as a symbol of the Roma's ancient past does not coincide with a "golden-age" in Romani history in Europe. In other words, the Roma have no collective memory to draw upon of their

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[64] "The Romani Movement: What Shape, What Direction?" *Roma Rights Quarterly,* (April 2001), [2]; available from: www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1292.
[65] Marek Jakoubek. "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture," 2.
[66] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity," 5.
[67] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 13, 12.

connection to India, and the story of their Indian origins has not been taught in textbooks or through oral tradition. The "revival" of the glorious past is in fact a new construction, as "in the case of the Roma nation such a precursor is missing—there is nothing to revive."[68]

There is also evidence that the invocation of the past has actually backfired for the Roma. First, Jakoubek warns of the possibility of double marginalization: Roma who live at the periphery of majority society may also find themselves at the periphery of the Romani "nation," because they do not have the cultural competencies or desire to engage in the "high Romani culture" promoted by pan-Roma leaders. Jakoubek quotes Stepan Moravec to paint the following scenario: "If the Roma national ideology becomes the dominant view of the Roma, people will be checked up according to their knowledge (or its absence) of the exact time when the predecessors of the Roma left India, who was Django Reinhardt, when Rudolf Dzurko was born, etc."[69] Rather than promoting an all-encompassing inclusiveness, building a high culture around a forgotten past would exclude its target audiences. Second, Ian Hancock describes how evocations of the past can lead to a romanticization of the Romani image, serving a nostalgic function for outsiders who seek to recreate a magical, pre-industrial world that is different from the complexities of modern life: "the 'gypsy' persona has an—again unchallenged—ongoing function as a symbol of a simpler, freer time, a representation that is becoming more and more attractive in an increasingly complex and regimented world."[70] The fantastical image of the Gypsy serves as a defining 'other' for European populations, who for this reason deliberately keep the Gypsy myth alive. Hancock describes how "there have been signs of a grudging acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Romani identity and history, but a resistance to it—as though it were driving away something

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[68] Marek Jakoubek. "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture," 5.
[69] Marek Jakoubek. "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture," 7.
[70] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity," 5.

more valuable."[71] In response to this, some Roma may even invoke an anti-nationalist myth, the de-glamorization of their past. As Hancock explains: "This misleading representation from within the Romani community serves as a shield; it is believed that if inquisitive non-Roma are busy pursuing the myth, they will leave the real thing alone. The myth is a mechanism of liberation which allows a minimum of interference from outside."[72] Therefore, invocations of the *non*-glorified past may in some cases provide better protection for the minority culture than appeals to the ancient past. In the end, efforts to create a national Romani culture capable of bridging boundaries of geography, kinship, and culture solely by appealing to nationalist myths has been unsuccessful. The call for unity through ethnic segregation (in order to protect the Indian roots of Romani culture from assimilationist encroachments from the majority) fails to consider the peripheral role Romani ethnicity plays for many of Europe's Roma.

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[71] Ian Hancock, "The Roma: Myth and Reality" (*The Patrin Web Journal*, September 5, 1999). http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/mythandreality.htm.
[72] Ian Hancock, "The Roma: Myth and Reality."

IV.   Framing the Romani Movement: A Comparison of Different Narratives

Do Romani leaders use the ethnic category "Roma" to organize common-sense experiences? Are Romani social problems—and the political solutions offered to cure these social ills—framed in ethnic terms? Is ethnic framing an effective means of achieving the desired objectives of Romani leaders and activists (such as improving access to education, health-care, and adequate housing)? This chapter focuses on two loci of interaction between leaders and constituents in Romani society in Romania—government and non-governmental organizations—each instance providing a different technique of mobilization as the leaders attempt to use the past in different ways in order to create a premise for their own visions for the future. This chapter will specifically look at how leaders diagnose the problems faced by Roma and frame solutions for the future, in order to determine whether or not their framing resonates with the individuals they seek to mobilize. The assumption is that there is a gap between the rhetoric of mobilization advanced by Romani leaders and mobilization itself— meaning that the Romani movement has faltered because political elites have been unable to construct a narrative that could inspire their constituents to political mobilization. While Brubaker cautions the analyst to avoid inferring critical information about the "beliefs, desires, hopes, and interests" of ordinary people from the "nationalist utterances of politicians who claim to speak in their name,"[73] one can make some inferences based on whether or not leaders make the choice to couch their demands in ethnic terms or not.

The Romani movement has been framed by different leaders alternately as a problem of human rights, a struggle for identity, and a battle for increased political participation. Do these different angles amount to antagonistic strains within the same collective social movement, or do they instead reveal critical fissures causing a fragmentation into competing

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[73] Rogers Brubaker et. al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 176.

movements? An example of this dissonance is revealed by certain activists' emphasis on human rights as the central goal of the Romani movement, versus other leaders' exaltation of political participation as the stepping-stone to progress. Gheorghe and Mirga emphasize the allure of reframing an individual struggle in collective terms, saying that during the contemporary period "the Romani elites discovered common interests and the power of collective political action in promoting and defending their human and minority rights." However, the willingness of political entrepreneurs to make use of collective framing does not tell us anything about the receptiveness of the target populations to engage in collective action.

The Romani movement consists of multiple voices—nongovernmental organizations, elected policymakers, and unofficial advisors and advocates—who have all attempted to redefine the Romani cultural heritage and past using certain frames in order to produce specific outcomes. Identifying which social problems to recognize and how to articulate them is the essence of constructing a political or social movement. Romani political discourse is composed of many divergent ways of presenting social experience as a collective event. There are two main tactics that will be explored here. One tactic has been to try and frame the struggle as a social problem, emphasizing concrete grievances such as the discrimination faced by Roma trying to obtain legal papers, identity documents, or residence permits. Viewed in this light, the Roma lose their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic roots, and became viewed more as a social category defined in terms of characteristics such as poverty, unemployment, and criminality. This tactic has been employed by leaders who believe that campaigning primarily for tangible solutions to social and economic problems will lead to the eventual resolution of intangible grievances. On the opposite side is the attempt to frame the debate as a cultural problem. This tactic relies upon situating a group's concerns squarely in the midst of the minority rights debate, demanding full recognition of Romani linguistic,

cultural, and political rights in an effort to gain increased representation in policy-making bodies for Roma. The "language of ethnicity and cultural identity, of human and minority rights, and of nondiscrimination and equality" becomes a vehicle, a means of arriving at solutions for social and economic problems.[74] In a way, this can be seen as a strategy of putting forward a platform "dominated by ethnic thinking," rather than attempting to draw voters based on common ideological or political stances, which Gheorghe criticizes.[75] This approach is based on the conviction that it is best to start by addressing the status of Roma in society. Actions that boost the image of the population from the outside, and promote self-identity and dignity internally, will eventually lead to solutions for concrete social and economic problems. This movement is based upon redrawing the past. For those that emphasize culture, the pre-communist past is glorified and presented as a state to which Roma should return. For those that emphasize concrete policies, the past in which Roma were marginalized and referred to as *tigan* is rejected in favor of constructing a new minority identity. Mirga and Gheorghe conclude that "the Roma find themselves in transition toward becoming an ethnically mobilized group, having a common stance and interests."[76] It is the subject of this final chapter to determine what form this mobilization has taken, and what consequences have arisen for the movement as a result of the internal schisms—between external and internal perceptions, ingroup and outgroup leaders, and cultural and political frames.

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[74] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 7.
[75] "In Search of a New Deal for Roma: ERRC Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe," [2].
[76] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 6.

Elected Leaders

There is a strong tension between nationalist narratives that emphasize tradition and rootedness to the past, and narratives that elevate practicality over symbolism. As Hancock explains: "For the majority of Roma, the identity issue is overridden by the more pragmatic concerns of work, shelter, safety, and providing for the family. For the average Rom, whether we are European or Asian, or neither, or both is not a matter of much consequence."[77] For the leaders, however, it must be. But, as Peter Vermeersch explains, Romani ethnic parties have neglected to offer clear solutions to solve daily problems in education, unemployment, or poverty, and therefore do not appeal to average voters.[78] Nicolae Paun, the sole Romani representative in the Romanian parliament, epitomizes the challenging task of negotiating between practicality and symbolism. Also the president of the Commission on Human and Minority Rights, Paun is often caught between multiple frames through which he could potentially present his issues to his constituents. His parliamentary addresses provide a good example of how a leader chooses his words based on who the audience is, as few of his constituents have access to the words he utters in the Chamber. On June 5, 2006, Paun addressed the Chamber of Deputies to comment on the current situation of Roma in Romania. His speech opens with an exposé of problems facing his constituents, including: the problem of procuring identity documents and the difficulties acquiring proof of residence, inadequate healthcare and access to medicine for children and the elderly, and lack of potable water in over 500 predominantly Romani communities—all leading to the conclusion that the situation is "not at all rosy." He continues to state the "painful" truth that many Roma do not have the possibility to use soap and water, and that many social programs that aim to promote integration "do not serve the interests of Romani communities" due to their lack of

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[77] Ian Hancock, "The Struggle for the Control of Identity," 6.
[78] Peter Vermeersch, "The Roma in Domestic and International Politics," 3.

accountability and vision. Deputy Paun makes an appeal to integration as an overarching

goal, saying that "Roma in Romania have asked for nothing except to be treated as citizens of

this state…I have never heard of a Romanian citizen of Romani ethnicity asking for more

than to respect and be respected, to become a citizen of this country with full rights."[79]

Rejecting the stigma of *tigan*—and with it the baggage of belonging to a marginalized ethnic

group—Paun redefines what it means to be Rom: "Roma are Roma because they speak the

Romany language. This is how we have always been Roma. We cannot be *gypsies* except in

certain situations, when somebody wishes to make a joke at our expense."[80] He assertively

argues that "democracy does not mean the segregation and isolation of a certain segment of

Romanian society," and that this separation of mentalities would be both catastrophic to the

well-being of both minority and majority, and would run contrary to the decade-long efforts

of the Roma Party to eradicate the "us versus them" mentality of Roma. "We don't need a

small-scale Brooklyn throughout this country! Roma are Romanian citizens, of Romani

nationality and ethnicity, who are loyal to this state and desire rights and equality."[81] Paun's

repeated and belabored insistence that Roma are Romanian citizens first, and individuals of

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[79] Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Romania. *Brief Address to Members of Parliament Nicolae Paun,* 27.13, session from 5 June 2006. <http://www.cdep.ro>

[80] The Romanian word *tigan*, which, like its counterparts in other European languages—*tsigane, zigeuner, cigany, zingaro*—derives from the Greek *athiganoi,* meaning "untouchable," retains a pejorative connotation. The introduction of the word *Rom* into the political discourse represents a deliberate political strategy on the part of Romani leaders to redefine the collective on their own terms, making the use of the term *Roma* a symbol of group identity. The adoption of this term was famously stalled in Romania out of the majority-driven fear that the international community would confuse the phonetically similar *Roma* and *Romani* with *Romanian*—and thereby equate the two distinct ethnic groups. Only in 2000 did the Romanian government issue a memorandum recommending the use of Roma in official communication. But despite the use of this term in elite political and academic discourse, *tigan* still rules the street in Romania. In "Deputatul Paun vrea sa scoata "tigan" din dictionary" (Deputy Paun wishes to remove "gypsy" from the Dictionary). *Buletinul Divers*, No. 17(304), May 3, 2007. http://www.divers.ro/buletin_ro?bnr=304 (last viewed on April 3, 2007).

[81] Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Romania. *Parliamentary Debate: [Intervention from a deputy, Nicolae Paun – Recounting events that aimed to isolate or segregate Romanian citizens of Romani ethnicity],* No. 1.2, session on 15 October 2001. <http://www.cdep.ro>

Romani ethnicity second—as opposed to members of the Romani *nation* residing on Romanian soil—offers a marked contrast to the rhetoric employed by leaders engaged in the pan-Roma movement. Instead of attempting to construct a separate identity for Roma using symbols and an emphasis on a shared past, Paun's rhetoric de-emphasizes their distinctiveness. The concept of "nation" is not useful from a practical standpoint because it does not describe a legal condition; the only concrete gains that can be achieved for Roma within the government will come from the acknowledgement that they are citizens of the state, and as citizens, they deserve equal rights. For Paun, the degraded present is the result of the Roma's isolation from majority society. Subsequently, the way toward a more fulfilling future comes through integration and cooperation. However, the weakness of this approach—and one explanation for why it is not resonant with the majority of Roma—is that it presupposes the strength of majority institutions in Romania. As Mirga and Gheorghe point out, the idea of a civil state is not well rooted in the region, "on the contrary, the competing principle of the 'national' state, based upon the identity of a particular people or nation, is predominant," meaning that resources are commonly awarded along national or ethnic lines.[82] The slogan: *in slujba Crucii si a Neamului Romanesc* (in the service of the cross and the Romanian people) of the popular New Generation Party attests to the vitality of the *volk* in Romanian political rhetoric.

Dimitrina Petrova argues that sound policy issues take a backseat to political games, stating that "[political] representation is fundamentally an issue of power," meaning that whoever represents Roma is also involved in a parallel effort to exert control over the internal mechanisms of the movement and external political relationships. The executive director of the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) stated in a roundtable discussion that the outcome of dealing with the problems of Roma depends on the way in which they are presented: "Instead

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[82] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century," 11.

of presenting it as a game in which some win and others lose, it should be presented as a process in which both politicians and the wider public win."[83] Paun's relationship with other Romani leaders and organizations illustrates the delicacy of this balance. Paun's public and vehement contestation of Maria Ionescu's presidency of the National Agency for Roma (ANR)—calling the institution "dysfunctional, chaotic, lacking a strategy, and which cannot justify its existence since it has no function other than to serve private interests"—is seen as an act that compromises the integrity of programs aiming to improve the situation of Roma. Ionescu, for her turn, contends that the main victims of this dispute are Roma.[84] Similarly, a report from the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center opines that the success of Roma initiatives and projects has been compromised by the unwillingness of different actors to work together—specifically, the reticence of NGOs to collaborate with the Roma Party and vice versa.[85]

Cristian Jura, head of Romania's Department for Interethnic Relations theorizes that there is a disconnect between the different layers of the Romani movement. A Romani elite has materialized from within the ranks of the different Romani organizations, but this elite exists in a political space that is very distant from the populations on whose behalf it ostensibly advocates. The elite simply brainstorms strategies from afar, devoting most of its energy to maintaining its power, all the while failing to actually go into the communities and communicate with the average Rom—where the real need lies.[86] Jakoubek also documents the formation of a Romani "high culture" that he believes is "cast into empty space" because those who claim to be bearers of the national Romani culture do not actually have an interest

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[83] Project on Ethnic Relations, *Report: Roundtable Discussion of Government Policies on the Roma in Romania* (Project on Ethnic Relations, Predeal, Romania, January 28-29, 1999), 10.
[84] "Partida Rromilor contesta conducerea ANR" [The Roma Party contests the leadership of ANR]. *Buletinul Divers*.
http://www.divers.ro/accent_ro?func=viewSubmission&sid=3058&wid=37454
[85] Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturala, *A Necessary Strategy Change*, 51.
[86] Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturala, *A Necessary Strategy Change*, 52.

in reading the Romani newspapers or teaching their children Romany. But while this Romani culture may be a fiction, "the financial support for its promoters and for their representing institutions is real." Therefore the culture exists not because of "the number of its bearers, but by the credit paid to it" from external observers.[87] Once again, the influence of actors external to the movement can be critical, since the entire process is a result of interactions among the different internal players, juxtaposed with recognition from the outside.

Advocacy Groups

The various NGOs that work on Romani issues have contrasting visions for how best to address the problems facing Roma throughout the country. These NGOs are organized around different pivotal frames, meaning that their goals and strategies differ according to the particular lens through which they view Roma issues (culture, politics, economics, human rights). While there is some cooperation among NGOs, as well as between NGOs and state institutions, these organizations are sometimes in competition for limited resources and are struggling to remain funded. The main players in Romania are: Romani CRISS, perhaps the largest and best-known Romani organization, which emphasizes Roma's access to basic human rights and perceives the problems facing Roma to be caused primarily by the population's limited access to state-run institutions in Romania, due both to discrimination and lack of information; Amare Amentza (formerly Aven Amentza), which places the emphasis on culture, preserving and promoting Romani traditions; and Impreuna, which perceives issues through a socio-economic lens and emphasizes social development.

Identity—at once symbolic and dynamic—is an issue that is replete with controversy, subject to multiple and divergent interpretations, and victim to infighting among group representatives. In fact, there is more than one way to define what it means to "be Rom," or

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[87] Marek Jakoubek, "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture, 6.

be an *authentic* Rom. The self-titled Romani king Cioaba has defended traditional cultural practices, insisting that integration into the social and economic fabric of Romania does not mean assimilation. "We don't want to change our culture," he said in a 2004 article. "I was married at 14. This was our tradition 100 years ago. We have agreed to change, but not in one night."[88] Similarly, Delia Grigore, head of Amare Amentza, wants Roma to "reclaim their heritage" by donning traditional clothing and taking advantage of new opportunities to learn the Romany language. For her, Roma are not part of a separate "nation" on Romanian soil any more than they are for Paun, but she views them not as equal citizens but as a distinct minority, entitled to protection of their minority rights. She speaks of assimilation as a defense mechanism—but unlike Kaminski's use of this term, for her it is unauthentic and represents a process of self-rejection that should be discarded in favor of a "cultural reemergence."[89]

Dimitrina Petrova describes the human rights component of the Romani movement as the "least controversial," with the most potential for unifying divergent strains of the Romani movement, as most Roma should be willing to agree on an agenda of fighting discrimination or preventing police brutality against their coethnics.[90] Yet within the same report, Rumyan Russinov's definition of "the Romani problem" is the "problem of lack of participation in the decision-making and policy-making process, lack of participation on an equal basis."[91] Even seemingly complementary visions for the future of the Romani movement succumb to dueling definitions. Romani CRISS, perhaps the largest and best-known non-governmental organization devoted to Romani issues, has initiated several print, radio, television, and internet campaigns in order to further its goal of combating discrimination against Roma.

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[88] Sarah E. Richards, "King of Roma Everywhere," (*Slate,* November 30, 2004).
[89] Sarah E. Richards, "King of Roma Everywhere," (*Slate,* November 30, 2004).
[90] "The Romani Movement: What Shape, What Direction?" *Roma Rights Quarterly,* (April 2001): [1]; available at: www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1292.
[91] "The Romani Movement: What Shape, What Direction?" [3].

These efforts also involve redefining what it means to be Rom—not only for the benefit of the majority population, who are instructed not to discriminate against Gypsies via colorful ads in the metro, but also for Roma themselves, who are taught how to think positively as part of a collectivity. A 2004 "Guide to Positive Practices for the Education of Romani Children" attempts to redact the past, present, and future of Romani history in Romania within its pages. It includes a summary of Romani history, strategies to ensure that children are not currently being discriminated against, and tips for youth to take advantage of future opportunities, such as university scholarships. A 2007 booklet titled "Legal Protection against Discrimination and Public Politics vis a vis Roma" introduces the reader to the text with a lengthy passage borrowed from Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic *I Have a Dream* speech. Translated into Romanian but with the American references intact, the excerpt ends with the lines: "…we can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."[92] This quote is explained as the "unofficial motto of Romani CRISS." While the old view of what a social movement should look like has in many ways been supplanted by the reality of new social movements that do not follow from their predecessors, this call to action deliberately attempts to resurrect the past success of the civil rights movement in the United States. Just as creating a Romani "high culture" has the potential to alienate the average constituents, invoking someone else's past in order to mobilize a population may prove to be evidence of a lack of direction rather than an inspiring turn.

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[92] Romani CRISS, *Legal Protection against Discrimination and Public Politics vis a vis Roma,* (Bucharest: Romani CRISS, 2007), 7.

Public Opinion

The efforts outlined above do not enjoy collective or consistent support from their target audiences. The Roma Inclusion Barometer, a series of surveys conducted in November 2006 using two nationally representative populations, one Roma and one non-Roma, provides critical data on Roma public opinion, which had been lacking in previous literature. The section on political aptitude delivers some striking results regarding awareness of organizations and programs responsible for minority rights. Only 19% of Roma had heard of the National Agency for Roma (ANR), the government organism tasked with implementing programs designed to help Roma, compared to 26% of the general population who were familiar with the agency. Of the Roma with knowledge of ANR, half had a "more or less favorable" impression of the organization, but nearly two-thirds responded that they did not believe that ANR actually helps solve problems facing Roma in Romania.[93] The data shows that the organization's target population is unaware of the existence of these programs, but it does not tell us whether or not this is caused by the poor execution of the programs, or ineffective communication between the leaders and their constituents.

The Romanian government has been criticized for engaging in "selective interaction" with Romani political actors, resulting in the ascendancy of one Romani political organism— the Roma Party—to the position of being accepted by outsiders as the sole representative of the entire Romani population, despite the large concentration of expertise and experience within the ranks of Romani NGOs. Because of this lopsided equilibrium, Romani activists from the Resource Center for Roma Communities, Romani CRISS and Impreuna have accused the Romanian government of exacerbating the existing divisions in Romani civil society instead of facilitating cooperation within the community.[94]

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[93] Gabriel Badescu et al, eds, *Roma Inclusion Barometer,* 24.
[94] Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturala, *A Necessary Strategy Change*, 51-52.

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When asked about political organizations and parties, few Roma answered that they placed "very much" trust in any of the four organizations mentioned—the Roma Party, the Roma Civic Alliance, The Alliance for Roma Unity, and the Roma Christian Center. Thirty percent of Roma polled had never heard of the Roma Party, the oldest and best-known Romani political party, while over half had never heard of the Roma Christian Center.[95] Asked to name the political figure (Rom or non-Rom) who helps Roma the most in Romania, 13.1% of Roma named George Becali, the wealthy owner of Bucharest football club "Steaua" and the president of the populist New Generation Party (PNG), whose fame and popularity has been steadily rising due to his hefty financial donations across the country. Despite the notoriety earned by Steaua football fans for fanning anti-Roma rhetoric and violence, Becali's largesse and perceived willingness to help the poor "satisfies an important need in the voters…the need to denounce the whole corruption of the political system,"[96] whereas Nicolae Paun, a politician with an explicit pro-Romani mandate in parliament, gained only 5.2% of the votes from his own constituents as the person most willing to help Roma.[97] This disconnect illustrates a larger issue: traditional institutions have become ineffective vehicles for the demands of most Roma. Legislation introduced through official channels, government ordinances, and party campaigns miss the mark because today's collective actors are not wooed by traditional political structures as they were in the past.

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[95] Gabriel Badescu et al, eds, *Roma Inclusion Barometer,* 28.
[96] Oana Lungescu, "Rich Populist Woos Romanians," *BBC News,* March 16, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>
[97] Gabriel Badescu et al, eds, *Roma Inclusion Barometer,* 29.

V.   Conclusion

It is difficult to clearly draw the contour of a collective actor from the tableau of Romani politics depicted in this paper. But should we conclude that there cannot be a collective social or political movement without a traditional leader at the top presiding over a traditional collective? Melucci notes that in contemporary social movements, "leadership is not concentrated but diffuse, and it restricts itself to specific goals." While "different individuals may, on occasion, become leaders with specific functions to perform," the nature of a dynamic movement composed of networks, antagonistic conflicts, and interaction means that it is necessarily difficult to specify the collective actor.[98] While there are multiple layers that comprise the Romani political movement, each with a different perspective and agenda, this diversity does not by itself imply chaos or dissonance. It can have both positive and negative consequences. For instance, the diffusion of leadership in the Romani case— exemplified by the competition between government bodies, NGOs, and activists on the Romani political scene—has ended with mixed results. On one hand, there is a concentration of expertise, energy, and commitment in NGOs that both engages Roma in politics and spurs the creation of new projects to help this minority. But on the other hand, the propensity for one segment of this movement to restrict itself to narrow and limited goals means that the big picture is overlooked. Nicolae Gheorghe believes that this diffusion of responsibility at the top signals the "post Big Bang" phase of Romani politics. Because outside bodies like the European Union (many of whom are controlling the purse-strings) are placing pressure on Romania to adopt new policies concerning Romani rights, the focus has turned to local policy implementation rather than a proliferation of grand ideas (such as non-territorial nation status for the Roma). One possible explanation for the new form of social movements comes from Melucci, who observes that recent forms of collective action actually ignore the political

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[98] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 113-114.

system, that "the traditional goals of taking political power and gaining control over the state apparatus have given way to a desire for immediate control over the conditions of existence and to claims to independence from the system."[99] A profusion of small achievements have replaced the goal of one major revolution.

There are two sides to a movement: the way it is viewed internally, and how it is perceived externally. Melucci explains that "collective identity contains an unresolved and unresolvable tension between the definition a movement gives of itself and the recognition granted to it by the rest of society."[100] Organizations such as Romani CRISS spend time, effort, and money on public relations campaigns in order to actively change the way that Roma are viewed by outsiders, and in the process to also modify the frames used by Roma to view themselves. Government representatives spend time, energy, and political capital on the fleeting moments on the floor of parliament in order to paint the Romani political tableau the way that they want members of the majority to see it, to reaffirm an identity that has not been recognized. The work of a movement, therefore, also consists of self-reflection. This process begins with the definition of Romani culture, the precise delineation of the boundaries of the Romani group, and an explanation of the Romani collective. The previous chapters have shown that there is often a conflict between self-identification and external categorization. The different ways of negotiating this conflict result in different layers of the movement. Some actors have emphasized the solidarity within Romani society despite the differences between subcultures, using this "us versus them" platform as the critical basis for all action on Romani issues, and emphasizing the shared history of the group as a symbol of their future collaboration. This emphasis on the acute differences between minority and majority cultures forms part of a politics of difference, which can also manifest itself through the aim of preserving these distinctive elements in perpetuity in order to change the dominant

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[99] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 102.
[100] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 74.

culture. The other side of the Romani political divide involves the attempt to integrate into the existing political structures, with the hope of modifying them from the inside. This is the equal rights frame—which counts on the state as the guarantor of equal rights and freedoms for all citizens. This perspective fails to consider the role of networks, both among Romani individuals and between Roma and non-Roma, which need to be firmly in place in order to guarantee a strong civil society. This highlights the problem of conflicting loyalties and interests—is the familial structure of traditional Romani society equipped for relationships of trust between Romani individuals and the state? Can all Roma be citizens first, and members of their tribe, or even of the larger Romani group, second? Would this excessive reliance on the state backfire for those who are not perceived to be fully part of majority society? Considering the sociology of traditional Romani society, it would seem logical to pursue the strategy of emphasizing distinctiveness and advocating for "special" minority rights. A theoretical view of nationalism predicts that the growing political consciousness of Roma after the fall of communism as well as the vital international receptiveness to minority issues would bode well for the growth of an ethnonational movement, but this has not been the case. In reality, an ethnic understanding of Romani struggles fails to resonate with its target population. The disconnect between Romani actors and the individuals they seek to mobilize brings us back to the question posed in the introduction regarding the relationship between the median and micro levels. Leaders do not always choose the frame that will be most salient for their constituents; instead they sometimes opt for the package that will be most conducive to their own objectives.

Mobilization is not a self-activating phenomenon that is automatically launched when certain characteristics are in place. But while not automatic, this process can be constructed; a community *can* transform a cultural marker into a basis for communal action. The very act of speaking a language, for instance, can become a mobilizing element and a nation-building

tool. But national identity is not always the principal—or even defining—feature for every individual, therefore it is a mistake to assume that nation-building will happen on its own without a catalyst. Jajoubek argues exactly along these lines, making the point that for traditional Roma, family lineage, and *not* nationality, is the identity-defining feature. He concludes that "the separate (kin) groups of the bearers of traditional Roma culture do not form any *whole*. There exists only families with their interests, their representatives and their authorities, nothing more and nothing less."[101] Yet Melucci explains that cohesion can develop between actors and collective action can occur even if these groups do not fit the traditional mold of the politically organized actors. Movements have changed. People feel a bond with others not because they share identical interests, but because they need that bond in order to make sense of what they are doing.[102] This proves the common misconception that a successful social movement requires complete consensus. In fact, movements are not composed of like-minded clones. Instead, movements are successful because of their ability to convince *different* individuals, each with different opinions, that they *need* a common identity in order to solve certain problems. Individuals need to believe that framing a desired action using shared identity is the best way to solve the social problem they are facing.

While Roma in Romania do not form a bounded collectivity—meaning that they do not envision themselves as part of the same social and political imaginary—they do have potential to form a collective identity, and transform this into potential into collective action. Although the primacy of familial links undercuts any attempt to build a nation-wide collectivity, Roma do share something important. They share the same *experience* of networks, rituals, and hierarchical structure that ties families together, even if they do not share the precise networks themselves. However, neither a political nor a social space has been envisioned that can accommodate this new type of solidarity. An emphasis on tradition

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[101] Marek Jakoubek, "Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture," 9.
[102] Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes,* 74.

is one way of inspiring Roma to collective action. The introduction of religion into some communities has shown an alternate route. Ovidiu Voicu writes that the complex Roma "problem" is currently one without vision, strategy, or results—which is why it does not have the support of its direct beneficiaries, with the exception of a narrow tier of leaders and NGOs.[103]

We can conclude that Roma have been unsuccessful creating a political imaginary based on a glorification of the past. Leaders' emphasis on the diverse Roma populations' shared connection to India—their technical, but not spiritual ancestral homeland—has misfired because this connection is not salient for the majority of Roma. But this does not mean that Roma do not share a sense of what it means to be Rom—even if this simply means non-gadjé. Although this may be felt within the entire community, the existence of this sentiment is not sufficient to spark community-wide action. It is impossible to forcibly compel Roma "to recognize that what goes on in the next village matters" on the basis of the rhetorical devices employed by leaders today. This paper has disproved the structural explanation for social movements, which theorizes that actors in the same social position will seamlessly come together to solve recognizable social problems. This presupposes that problems are both objective and easily identified, and also takes for granted the actors' abilities to interpret the situation in terms of their own commonalities. However, the argument of this paper is that inter-tribal unity can be catalyzed under the right conditions. Therefore, the failure of ethnicity to provide a collective identity for Roma does not mean that this collectiveness is not possible.

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[103] Ovidiu Voicu, "Stare de Spirit, Institutii, Optiuni Politice ale Romilor din Romania [Welfare, Institutions, and Political Options of Romanian Roma]," in Gabriel Badescu et al, eds., *Research Study: Barometrul Incluziunii Romilor" [Roma Inclusion Barometer]* (Bucharest: Fundatia pentru o Societate Deschisa, 2007), 17.

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