

**Distinction, Domination, and Ethnic Politics: A Theoretical Inquiry  
into Hungarian Roma Mobilization**

by

**T. Grant Lovellette**

Advisers:

Dr. Alexandra Kowalski

Dr. Anton Pelinka

Dr. Michael Stewart

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When attempting to write about the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, the words of King, Keohane, and Verba provide a wise reminder of the need to be aware of the boundaries of scholarship: “It is pointless to seek to explain what we have not described with a reasonable degree of precision.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I am greatly indebted to those authors whose descriptions of the Roma minority in Europe have enabled me to make my attempt at explaining Roma mobilization. I particularly want to single out and praise the work of Peter Vermeersch, whose recent, excellent, and under-reviewed<sup>2</sup> book, *The Romani Movement: Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe*, provided the inspiration for this essay.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 44.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I am aware, not one academic journal has reviewed Vermeersch’s book as of the time of writing; only *Transitions Online* has published a cursory review of it.

## 1. Introduction

After centuries of alternating policies of neglect, persecution, genocide, slavery, forced assimilation, and expulsion, three converging processes have led to an increase in the visibility of the Roma minority and Roma minority politics in Europe: the collapse of communism, the process of democratic state consolidation, and the expansion of the European Union. In Hungary, the transition from communism to democracy has proven a mixed blessing for most members of the Roma minority. On the one hand, they continue to experience widespread discrimination, social exclusion, and injustice,<sup>3</sup> and market rationalization has led to massive unemployment and economic marginalization among the Roma, since their jobs as unskilled workers in agricultural cooperatives and factories were mostly expendable in the new economy.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the liberalization of the political arena has created unprecedented opportunities for the Roma to petition the government with grievances, to participate in public life, and to mobilize for political engagement.<sup>5</sup> As Roma elites experiment with different ways to take advantage of these new opportunities, analysts and theorists are also experimenting with theoretical models to understand and explain this new phenomenon of Roma mobilization.

Since the advent of this new mobilization, only two authors, Zoltan Barany<sup>6</sup> and Peter Vermeersch,<sup>7</sup> have attempted to give comprehensive theoretical accounts of Roma mobilization in Europe. Barany anchors his account to the concept of “marginality,” using what he sees as the Roma’s shortcomings in leadership abilities, accomplishments in identity politics, organizational strength, experience, group cohesiveness, and financial resources to explain patterns of Roma ethnic mobilization. Vermeersch applies new social movement theories – “ethnic competition,” “political opportunity structure,” and “framing” – to the phenomenon of Roma ethnic

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gábor Kertesi, “The Employment of the Roma: Evidence from Hungary,” Budapest Working Papers No. 1, Institute of Economics, HAS, Department of Human Resources, Corvinus University, 2004, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 356.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Barany, 49-80.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Peter Vermeersch, *The Romani Movement: Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 28-44.

mobilization. Each approach has its own limited explanatory usefulness, but each theoretical model is severely limited by its avoidance of a theoretically problematic, yet critical topic: power.

Although neither theorist addresses power directly, both authors adhere to and inscribe into their theoretical frameworks a strategic understanding and operationalization of power, which greatly hinders the explanatory capability of their theoretical frameworks. Their implicit understanding of power is the “classic,” strategic understanding of power, as developed in the writings of Robert Dahl, Nelson Polsby, Peter Bachrach, Morton Baratz, and Steven Lukes. While these authors have presented their different approaches to power as theoretical set(s) of binary opposition, a critical reading of their works demonstrates that the common theme running through their literature is an essentially strategic understanding of power that reduces the exercise of power to little more than strategic resource mobilization. In other words, the effective use (by individuals or social classes) of influence, political favors, force, blackmail, patronage, money, jobs, etc. determines the outcome of power relations. This approach to power leads down the theoretically and empirically stagnant route of instrumentalism. The inscription of this instrumentalist mode of thought in Barany’s and Vermeersch’s approaches prohibits them from answering the most pressing questions concerning Roma mobilization: why are Roma elites so divided? In spite of increased Roma mobilization and political participation in Hungary, why have the living standards of Roma steadily declined?

In opposition to the strategic understanding of power inscribed in Barany’s and Vermeersch’s theoretical frameworks, this essay proposes to operationalize an alternative structural theory of power as practice based on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu in order to explain Roma ethnic mobilization. The National Roma Self-Government of Hungary, which is often praised as the most successful example of Roma mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup> and which Vermeersch analyzes at length using new social movement theory, provides

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Project on Ethnic Relations, “Self-Government in Hungary: The Romani/Gypsy Experience and Prospects for the Future,” *Project on Ethnic Relations*, November 1997, <[http://www.per-usa.org/self\\_gov.htm](http://www.per-usa.org/self_gov.htm)> (20 November 2007).

the most suitable case study for testing a structural theory of power as practice in relation to Roma mobilization. A structural understanding of power, built upon Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, sheds light both on the ongoing, reciprocal process of marginalization (or, more accurately, domination) in which the Roma and the majority population are engaged and on how the structure of the Hungarian domestic political system ensures the Roma's fundamental dependence on the political and institutional *status quo*. Lacking these insights, theoretical frameworks with a strategic understanding of power ignore the patterns and currents of structural domination that must be exposed and corrected if the situation of marginalized Roma is to improve.

## 2. The Classic Understanding of Power: Strategic Resource Mobilization

In spite of the obvious and intuitive relevance of the topics of power and domination to the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, theoretical discussions of power and domination in relation to the Roma rarely play any role in scholarly works about the Roma. The dynamics of power and domination are fundamental determinants of the shape of Roma mobilization, i.e. the interaction between Roma elites and the non-Roma majority society, yet neither Vermeersch nor Barany addresses this topic directly. Instead, they both assume that power functions in a particular fashion, i.e. in the strategic manner at the collective core of the models proposed by Dahl, Polsby, Bachrach, Baratz, and Lukes.<sup>9</sup> These strategic, rational models may indeed be able to explain certain phenomena within a bounded set of circumstances, but they are inapposite to the phenomenon of Roma ethnic mobilization. Consequently, new social movement theory's assumption of this certain model of power relations has negative consequences for its ability of to explain Roma mobilization.

### 2.1. The Pluralist Challenge to Marxist Instrumentalism

One of the earliest challenges to the instrumentalist and structurally determinist Marxist understanding of power (often referred to by the pluralists as “stratification theory” i.e. that dominant elites [or classes] collude to control political systems, though the theory failed to explain how this process actually functioned) was the “pluralist” understanding of power, largely developed by Robert Dahl<sup>10</sup> and Nelson Polsby.<sup>11</sup> The pluralists’ main criticism of stratification theorists’ approach to power is that the stratification theory’s approach is circular, i.e. that it presupposes the existence of “power elites” in every community and that it therefore always finds evidence of the existence of a power elite. In Polsby’s words, stratification theory

<sup>9</sup> This essay neither aspires nor claims to be a comprehensive discussion of theories of power, as it does not address several important theorists in the field, such as Talcott Parsons, Anthony Giddens, Michael Foucault, C. W. Mills, Michael Mann, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas; rather, it focuses on how the assumption of a certain model of power relations limits the ability of new social movement theory to explain Roma mobilization.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961); and Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” *Behavioral Science* 2 (1957), 201-215.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Nelson W. Polsby, “How to Study Community Power: The Pluralist Alternative,” *The Journal of Politics* 22, No. 3 (August 1960), 474-484.



“encourages research designs which generate self-fulfilling prophecies, and ... leads to the systematic misreporting of facts and to the formulation of ambiguous and unprovable assertions about community power.”<sup>12</sup>

According to the pluralist approach, on the other hand, “nothing categorical can be assumed about power in any community,”<sup>13</sup> and “‘false class consciousness’ does not exist, because it implies that the values of analysts are imposed on groups in the community.”<sup>14</sup> Pluralists exchange the structural determinists’ language of structure for the language of action, emphasizing the importance of behavior, i.e. of studying observable, concrete “actual behavior” and “outcomes of actual decisions” within a community. They determine who holds power by observing who makes decisions concerning “significant” policy issues pre-selected by the researcher.<sup>15</sup> The pluralists’ conception of power is obviously strategic: Dahl’s “intuitive idea of power” is that “*A* has power over *B* to the extent that he can get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise do,”<sup>16</sup> and in order to accomplish this, he discusses the importance of “allocating rewards,” “building coalitions,” recruiting “subleaders,” and “resource use.”<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2. Another Face of Power: “Mobilization of Bias” and “Nondecision-making”

In spite of the pluralists’ contribution to the theorization of power through insisting that researchers not build their own biases into their research, their approach faced heavy criticism from a number of authors. Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz point out the two central flaws in the pluralist approach:

The [pluralist] model takes no account of the fact that power may be, and often is, exercised by confining the scope of decision-making to relatively “safe” issues, ... [and] the model provides no *objective* criteria for distinguishing between “important” and “unimportant” issues arising in the political arena.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Polsby, 475.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>16</sup> Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” 202-203.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dahl, *Who Governs?*, 94-96 and 273-275.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *The American Political Science Review* 56, No. 4 (December 1962), 948; emphasis in original.

Bachrach and Baratz acknowledge that “of course power is exercised when *A* participates in the making of decisions that affect *B*.”<sup>19</sup> They see a “second face” of power, however, which is exercised “when *A* devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to *A*.”<sup>20</sup>

To account for this shortcoming in the pluralist framework, they add into the theorization of power the concept of “mobilization of bias,” which consists of “the dominant values and the political myths, rituals, and institutions which tend to favor the vested interests of one or more groups, relative to others.”<sup>21</sup> This “mobilization of bias” results in “nondecision-making,” i.e. “the manner in which the *status quo* oriented persons and groups ... limit the scope of actual decision-making to ‘safe’ issues.”<sup>22</sup> For Bachrach and Baratz, “nondecisions” are as observable as community decisions are for the pluralists, and these “nondecisions” may concern issues of much greater importance in a given community than the decisions made by political actors.

Regardless of this expanded conceptualization of power, the reformists’ basic understanding of power remains strategic, but instead of strategically mobilizing resources only to effect certain policy decisions, political actors (whether individuals or groups) mobilize resources to prevent discussion of certain issues as well. Similar to Dahl, Bachrach and Baratz’s conception of power attempts to operationalize a “conflict of values,” but their understanding of power rests on the fear of sanctions to be applied:

A power relationship exists when (a) there is a conflict over values or course of action between *A* and *B*; (b) *B* complies with *A*’s wishes; and (c) he does so because he is fearful that *A* will deprive him of a value or values which he, *B*,

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 950.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 952.

regards more highly than those which would have been achieved by noncompliance.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.3. Lukes's Three-Dimensional View of Power

Steven Lukes praises Bachrach and Baratz for incorporating “into the analysis of power relations the question of the control over the agenda of politics,”<sup>24</sup> but in his opinion, they retain some of the problems of the pluralist approach by being overly committed to behaviorism, i.e. the observation of “actual behavior,” whether that behavior consists of decisions or nondecisions. Conflict, he states, is not the only situation in which power is exercised, but “[A] also exercises power over [B] by influencing, shaping, or determining [B's] very wants .... The most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place.”<sup>25</sup>

To complete his theoretical framework, Lukes adds a third dimension of power, an analysis of “*latent conflict*, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude.”<sup>26</sup> To accomplish this, powerful actors direct their resources to shape “socially structured and culturally patterned behavior” through “collective forces and social arrangements,”<sup>27</sup> thereby preventing the subjects of power from recognizing its effects on them. Lukes thus reframes Bachrach and Baratz’s “conflict of values” (researchable via observable [non]decision-making) as a “conflict of [real] interests.” Essentially, Lukes tries to operationalize a pragmatic reformulation of the Marxist conception of “false class consciousness.” The central problem with this approach is Lukes’s “irreducibly evaluative notion”<sup>28</sup> of “interests”: interests are morally irreducible to a liberal, reformist, or radical perspective, each of which generates a different conception of power (one-, two-, or three-dimensional, respectively). On account of individual moral choices, persons are destined to

<sup>23</sup> Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, “Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework,” *The American Political Science Review* 57, No. 3 (September 1963), 635.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25; emphasis in original.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

be liberals, reformists, or radicals – a process that remains beyond the realm of Lukes’s analytical explanation. He offers no analytical, non-normative justification for the radical perspective over either the liberal or reformist perspective.

Additionally, Lukes’s “radical” perspective proposes to theorize and evaluate actual behavior by reference to a model of what a Lockean ideal-type, autonomous individual would do if he or she knew what his or her real interests were, but this kind of rational choice theory is triply problematic in Lukes’s account. In addition to facing the standard criticisms of rational choice theory (i.e. that it assumes that the actor has perfect information about all factors affecting a particular decision and about all consequences of all potential decisions), Lukes can be criticized for paradoxically and rather convolutedly trying to operationalize rational choice theory to explain non-action in a situation where the actor is not even aware that he or she has a decision to make (or, conversely, that he or she made a nondecision). In doing so, Lukes stretches the applicability of rational choice theory past the point of usefulness. Lukes himself admits (and subsequently underplays) the difficulty of “justifying the relevant counterfactual” when attempting to explain the non-occurrence of an event.<sup>29</sup>

Lukes is careful to avoid the moral absolutism of traditional Marxism, but his account of power falters precisely because of its cacophonous juxtaposition of rational choice, moral relativism, individual agency, and structural forces. Lukes gives no justification for choosing the radical moral perspective over either the liberal or reformist perspective; indeed, he seems resigned to the fact that many people will not opt for the radical perspective and does not offer explicit argumentation in favor of the radical perspective. Individual agency (or, in the terminology of this essay, strategic resource mobilization) remains central to his theoretical framework; he admits that his “underlying concept of power” is the same as the pluralists’ and reformists’ concept: “*A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*’s

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 46.

interests.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, although Lukes attempts to integrate structural factors into his framework, he fails to resolve the tension between individual agency and structural power, choosing instead to marginalize structural power and make it into a tool of individual actors:

To use the vocabulary of power in the context of social relationships is to speak of human agents, separately or together, in groups or organizations, through action or inaction, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others (specifically, in a manner contrary to their interests).<sup>31</sup>

#### 2.4. Summary

A critical reading of the works of this diverse set of authors – Dahl, Polsby, Bachrach, Baratz, and Lukes – demonstrates that, despite their different approaches and emphases, they all privilege a strategic understanding of power, subordinating structure to agency. The consequence of this approach is the reduction of the analysis of power and social relationships to an account of the resources available to a given actor in a social relationship and of his or her rational mobilization of those resources in an attempt to secure domination over the other actor(s) in the relationship. Power (i.e. access to and rational deployment of resources) determines action. This understanding of power does not offer a consequential improvement, either theoretical or empirical, over Marxist structural determinism; it merely substitutes “rational choice” for “class” as the determining factor of action, power, and social relationships. This strategic model assumes a certain standardized type of social relationship, but an almost infinite number of (according to this model “atypical”) alternative possibilities for social relationships exists – for example, individuals might choose to come together and cooperate based on common interests and goals, or a larger group (for example, the majority ethnic group in an ethnically defined country) might collectivize a smaller group (for example, an ethnic minority in the aforementioned country), thereby confounding the theoretical choice between “rational choice” and “class” posited by these theorists. The multiplicity and variety of types of human relationships are not reducible to this dualism, however. Furthermore, these strategic models render the study of historically

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 54.

variable, contextualized power relationships difficult, as resources are always quantifiable, but their relative worth is often difficult to determine and difficult to place in the proper cultural context.<sup>32</sup> A strategic, reductionist understanding of power has serious implications for the usefulness of social movement theory, as is argued in Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, in Lukes's terminology, it is difficult to justify the relevant counterfactual.

### 3. New Social Movement Theory: A Theory of Ethnic Mobilization?

A central problem concerning a theoretical inquiry into the ethnic mobilization of marginalized groups such as the Roma is the lack of a comprehensive analytical framework. The problems that the Roma face are undoubtedly multidimensional – economic, political, cultural, educational, social, medical, etc. – making the set of problems difficult to encompass within the framework of one specific academic discipline, or for that matter, within the framework of one government policy or program. In the face of these complex problems, marginalized groups often have little or no political power. Even the national representative body of the Roma in Hungary (the National Roma Self-Government, or NRSG), the organization recognized by the Hungarian government as the legitimate, democratically representative body of the Hungarian Roma, is only nominally empowered within the cultural and educational spheres, and even that power is often merely “advisory.” This limited capacity further complicates the theoretical situation; considering the multifaceted problems that the Roma face and the concomitant multifaceted demands (which go far beyond the realm of culture) made by the Roma whom the NRSG supposedly represents, what theoretical framework is appropriate to apply to an organization that can only respond to these demands with circumscribed cultural tools?

Two authors have proposed theoretical explanations of Roma mobilization: Peter Vermeersch and Zoltan Barany. While Barany’s theoretical framework has little explanatory capacity, Vermeersch’s creative application of new social movement theory to Roma ethnic mobilization has considerable explanatory potential, drawing on broad base of theoretical literature to elucidate the shifting, amorphous subject of Roma mobilization. Nonetheless, a careful reading of Vermeersch’s theory and its application to Hungarian Roma mobilization demonstrates that his framework, while a significant improvement over that of Barany, still bears a number of theoretical shortcomings and fails to answer some of the most basic questions about Roma ethnic mobilization.

### 3.1. Barany's Easily Dismissible "Concept of Marginality"

Barany quite blatantly integrates a theoretically stagnant and empirically suspect strategic understanding of power and marginalization in his theoretical framework, which consists primarily of "the concept of marginality."<sup>33</sup> According to Barany, the failure of Roma mobilization is a consequence of the convergence of a number of strategic shortcomings: the weakness of Roma identity, lack of past mobilization experience, lack of a common language, lack of ethnic solidarity and social capital, lack of symbols, lack of financial resources, and lack of leadership and organization.<sup>34</sup> Other reviewers have criticized Barany because he tends to "blame the victims," i.e. the Roma, for their own problems<sup>35</sup> (which is obvious from the above summary) and because he has no sympathy for his subjects and shows no interest in understanding their values.<sup>36</sup> For example, Barany callously dismisses the problem of unemployment among Roma women, a problem explored in detail by a number of sociologists,<sup>37</sup> with the rather incredible statement that "the types of income-generating activities that Gypsy women are often involved in – begging, fortune telling, prostitution – do not show up in statistics."<sup>38</sup> Barany's framework is pessimistic and deterministic, describes the characteristics of "the Roma" in absolute, essentialist terms, and disallows any possibility for change or progress, rendering it almost useless as an analytical tool.

### 3.2. An Inquiry into Vermeersch's Application of New Social Movement Theory

A much more sophisticated, ambitious, and comprehensive model for explaining the structure and functioning of political mobilization among marginalized ethnic groups is the "political process" model developed by Peter Vermeersch, which draws extensively from the theoretical literature on political mobilization and new social movements and from the

<sup>33</sup> Barany, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> Colin Clark, Book Review of *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* by Zoltan Barany, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, No. 4 (2003), 762.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Kenrick, Book Review of *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* by Zoltan Barany, *Slavic Review* 61, No. 3 (Autumn 2002), 591.

<sup>37</sup> For an in-depth discussion of unemployment among Roma women in Hungary, cf. Kertesi.

<sup>38</sup> Barany, 175.



theoretical literature on identity and ethnic politics.<sup>39</sup> Vermeersch defines political mobilization as “the process by which political actors organize collective efforts in order to attempt to bring about political change.”<sup>40</sup> His definition is quite broad, encompassing far more than the mere electoral participation of ethnic minorities. In doing this, he tries to avoid representing the Roma as a homogeneous group seeking “representation through established channels.”<sup>41</sup>

### *3.2.1. Two Theories Considered and Rejected*

Before elaborating on his model, Vermeersch considers and dismisses what he calls the “cultural perspective” model and the “reactive ethnicity” model. The “cultural perspective” model is unsatisfying for him because of its primordialist assumptions, i.e. that “ethnic mobilization is the reflection of cultural structure,” which he finds both logically and empirically suspect.<sup>42</sup> The “reactive ethnicity” model posits that “economic competition between ethnically differentiated segments of the working class” causes ethnic mobilization, but Vermeersch rightly points out that straightforward “economic disadvantage is clearly not a sufficient condition for the occurrence of ethnic mobilization.”<sup>43</sup> Vermeersch then describes his own model, the “political process” model, which is an adaptation of new social movement theory derived from theories on ethnic competition, political opportunity structure, and framing.

### *3.2.2. Ethnic Competition*

Vermeersch’s first set of elements comes from the “ethnic competition” model, in which he combines the insights from a number of social and political theorists, such as Marx, Barth, Crowley, and Bell. This model actually begins from a similar standpoint as the “reactive ethnicity” model that Vermeersch dismisses – i.e. the Marxist claim, in the words of Sidney Tarrow, that people “engage in collective action ... when their social class comes into fully

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 28–43, especially 39–43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 35.

developed contradiction with its antagonists.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, according to Vermeersch, “solidarity occurs in relation to [scarce] resources,”<sup>45</sup> but membership in a particular ethnic group forms the basis of this solidarity instead of membership in a particular socioeconomic class. Different ethnic groups coalesce and then compete with each other over the resources available in a particular area, geographical region, or political unit.

Vermeersch points out three differences between the “ethnic competition” model and the dismissed “reactive ethnicity” model. First, the “ethnic competition” model does not claim that economic disadvantage causes people to mobilize; rather, “economic advancement of previously disadvantaged groups” results in increased mobilization and interethnic conflict, which is consistent with Marxist theory.<sup>46</sup> Second, marginalized groups do not mobilize spontaneously; leaders within the ethnic group must capitalize on political and economic circumstances and provide leadership and direction for the burgeoning movement.<sup>47</sup> This insight is actually a part of Leninist theory, which saw the need for an elite “vanguard” to structure mobilization attempts, lest the energy and effectiveness of the movement dissipate into a myriad of trifling claims.<sup>48</sup> Third, ethnic identity is not primordial. Participating in ethnic competition with other groups helps define group identity, and group leaders play an instrumental role in articulating that identity.<sup>49</sup> Gramsci recognized a similar need among workers in the West, in particular for an increased understanding of collective worker identity arising from competition with other economic classes and centered on the communist party’s goals.<sup>50</sup>

The “ethnic competition” theory avoids many of the problems that plague the “cultural perspective” and “reactive ethnicity” models. These two theories are instrumentalist, assuming the existence of coherent, homogeneous ethno-cultural groups, the composition of which

<sup>44</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Vermeersch, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Vermeersch, 36-37.

<sup>50</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 13.

determines the ethnic mobilization pattern of each group. Anthropologists have criticized the idea that a shared culture necessarily characterizes an ethnic group,<sup>51</sup> and social movement theorists repeatedly emphasize importance of leaders, rational decision-making, and rational action (as opposed to reactive action) in political mobilization.<sup>52</sup> Borrowing largely from Marxist and Leninist theory, the “ethnic competition” model emphasizes the fluidity of group identity, the need for self-awareness as a group, and the importance of leadership in the process of mobilization.

Nevertheless, the “ethnic competition” model largely ignores the role of politics in ethnic mobilization and the ability of the state to shape mobilization processes. For example, E. J. Hobsbawm concludes that the USSR created “ethno-linguistic territorial ‘national administrative units’, i.e. ‘nations’ in the modern sense, where none had previously existed or been thought of, as among the Asian Moslem peoples – or, for that matter, the Bielorrussians.”<sup>53</sup> Rogers Brubaker concurs with this assessment:

The Soviet state not only passively tolerated but actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental constituents of the state and its citizenry. It established nationhood and nationality as fundamental social categories sharply distinct from the overarching categories of statehood and citizenship .... [T]he institutional crystallizations of nationhood and nationality were by no means empty forms or legal fictions ....<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet state apparatus was central both to the creation of these various ethnically based nations and to the mobilization of these ethnic groups, but the “ethnic competition” model has little to say regarding the state’s role in these processes.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little Brown Co., 1969); and cf. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 8; and cf. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 166.

<sup>54</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.

### 3.2.3. Political Opportunity Structure

Vermeersch solves this dilemma by introducing the “political opportunity structure” element from new social movement literature. This perspective emphasizes the state and its role in shaping patterns of political and ethnic mobilization.<sup>55</sup> Tarrow defines “political opportunity structure” as “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.”<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the “ethnic competition” model, “political opportunity structure” emphasizes the dimensions of mobilization that are external to the mobilizing group and the rational, conscious choice-making of social movement actors in response to those external (political) dimensions.

Vermeersch adopts Kriesi and Guigni’s four-point typology of “political opportunity structure,” dividing it into (a) national cleavage structures (“the established political conflicts in a country, which arguably impose important constraints on newly emerging movements”), (b) formal institutional structures (the stable institutional arrangements of the political system), (c) “prevailing informal strategies in dealing with social movements,” and (d) alliance structure (“cyclical elements of change in the political system, such as the availability of influential allies or the shifts in ruling alignments”).<sup>57</sup> Although Vermeersch bases his typology on established social movement literature, the typologies offered by other authors differ in certain respects both from each other and from Vermeersch’s.<sup>58</sup> For example, Tilly and Tarrow’s typology of political opportunity structure encompasses

the multiplicity of independent centers of power within [a political system], [the system’s] openness to new actors, the instability of current political alignments, the availability of influential allies or supporters for challengers, the extent to

<sup>55</sup> Vermeersch, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Sidney Tarrow, “States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>57</sup> Vermeersch, 39-40.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Doug McAdam, “Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26-31; Tarrow 71-90; and della Porta and Diani, 193-225.

which [the political system] represses or facilitates collective claim making, [and] decisive changes in [the above factors].<sup>59</sup>

For McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, political opportunity structure consists of

the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, the stability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird [*sic*] a polity, the presence of elite allies, [and] the state's capacity and propensity for repression.<sup>60</sup>

A broad consensus can be found in the literature, but the exact variables and the relative influence of these different variables remain points of disagreement among different theorists.

Most critically, Vermeersch deemphasizes the state's ability and propensity for oppression, although this consideration is central to most other authors' typologies. As quoted previously, Tilly and Tarrow and McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald list repression among their research variables. One prominent theorist, Donatella della Porta, suggests that research on new social movements should not focus on the multiple variables of the political opportunity structure framework, but rather on "an in-depth analysis of *one single variable*, ... a variable which has *a most direct impact on social movements*":<sup>61</sup> the policing of protest (often called "repression" by protesters and some theorists and "law and order" by the state). Tarrow does not focus exclusively on the state's policing of protest, but he does stress the importance of examining the threat or use of violence by both protesters and the state and the "interaction between protesters' tactics and policing."<sup>62</sup>

In spite of its potential usefulness, Vermeersch's "political opportunity structure" typology is not without its problems, some of which Vermeersch concedes. Vermeersch recognizes the validity of the criticism that internal formal and informal organizational processes within a particular social movement can lead to certain strategic choices, but these dynamics

<sup>59</sup> Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 57.

<sup>60</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Donatella della Porta, "Social Movements and the State: Thoughts on the Policing of Protest," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63; emphasis in original.

<sup>62</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 95.

often remain invisible if a theory only considers the institutionalized processes of mobilization.<sup>63</sup> In addition, Vermeersch recognizes that opportunities “have to be perceived as opportunities first before they will be able to function as such,”<sup>64</sup> but he fails to address exactly how this process of opportunity recognition occurs.

Vermeersch seemingly overlooks a number of other problems with “political opportunity structure” theory, some of which might have a great impact on the cohesion of his theory. As mentioned earlier, Vermeersch’s typology of “political opportunity structure” is one of many; no consensus on what exactly constitutes *the* “political opportunity structure” yet exists. The extent to which it is defined or used in different ways threatens its usefulness as a conceptual tool because the concept’s dimensions grow as each author adds his personal interpretation.<sup>65</sup> Some authors mix cultural or framing components into their definitions of “political opportunity structure,” blurring important analytic distinctions.<sup>66</sup> For instance, Vermeersch’s third element of his “political opportunity structure,” the “prevailing informal strategies in dealing with social movements,” begins to obscure the boundary between structural (or even observable) political opportunities and a more vague understanding of “political culture” or “political custom,” which is much more difficult to assess empirically. Another difficulty is demonstrating exactly which independent variable among the “political opportunity structure” components has what effect on the outcomes of political mobilization: multiple variables are often inextricably interlinked, and the independent variables can be so greatly removed from the social movements they supposedly influence that causality becomes exceedingly difficult to demonstrate.<sup>67</sup>

#### 3.2.4. *Framing*

In considering how to mitigate some of the shortcomings of the “political opportunity structure” approach, Vermeersch claims that

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 42; and cf. della Porta and Diani, 223.

<sup>65</sup> della Porta and Diani, 223.

<sup>66</sup> McAdam, 25-26.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 31; and della Porta and Diani, 223.

many authors on social movements agree that to some extent the problems associated with [political opportunity structure] studies can be avoided when the [political opportunity structure] perspective is integrated with insights that have been developed in the so-called “framing” literature.<sup>68</sup>

Like most political sociologists, he traces the history of the concept of “framing” back to the writings of Erving Goffman, particularly Goffman’s 1974 book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Goffman conceptualized frames as “schemata of interpretation,”<sup>69</sup> which enable individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” events both in their lives and in the wider world.<sup>70</sup> Goffman himself states quite clearly, however, that he is not discussing “the core matters of sociology – social organization and social structure” in this work, but rather “the organization of experience ... that an individual actor can take into his mind,” i.e. “the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives.”<sup>71</sup>

Goffman’s basic argument is that the fundamental importance of frame analysis as a means for “the organization of [mental] experience” is as an instrument to transform events that have already been interpreted, which “utterly changes what it is a participant would say is going on.”<sup>72</sup> Problematically, Goffman never elaborates on the process or organization of this transformation, instead blurring the separate concepts of “frame” and “transformation.” In addition, most of the examples he uses in his book – pornography, TV commercials, hoaxes, animals playing together, etc. – would probably count as decidedly peripheral to the lives of most individuals. Attempting to use Goffman’s theories about framing to explain and interpret collective ethnic political mobilization would be a serious cognitive stretch indeed; his theories are, at best, only obliquely connected with collective mobilization and usually refer exclusively to the level of the individual. Superimposing his theories onto a social movement would risk the kind of collectivizing theoretical determinism that characterizes the rejected “reactive ethnicity”

<sup>68</sup> Vermeersch, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (London: Harper & Row, 1974), 45.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>71</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Goffman Reader*, eds. Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 157.

<sup>72</sup> Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 45.

model described in Section 3.2.1, as Goffman meant to explain the behavior of individuals, not collectives.

Though Goffman himself probably would not have applied his theories towards collective entities such as social movements, his theories became important sources of inspiration for social movement theorists, who codified the concept of “framing” and applied it to the collective, interactive cognitive processes of mobilization.<sup>73</sup> Vermeersch reviews the writings of Robert Benford, David Snow, and Doug McAdam, remarking that they “shifted the focus away from frames as pure cognition and started to concentrate on the power of deliberate framing within the organizational and collective processes that are part of mobilization.”<sup>74</sup> Citing Benford and Snow, he defines framing as “the generation and diffusion by movement actors of mobilizing and counter-mobilizing ideas and meanings, a process which is facilitated or constrained by the cultural and political context, including the framing/counter-framing of the elites in power.”<sup>75</sup> Defined in this way, the process of framing can also be understood as the process of producing the identity of a social (or ethnic) mobilization movement.

Although the problem is not quite as severe, the concept of “framing” suffers from a similar limitation previously discussed in relation to “political opportunity structure” theories: different authors emphasize different approaches, and no consensus yet exists on which approach is best.<sup>76</sup> Some scholars admit that “a lack of conceptual precision in defining what we mean by ‘framing processes’ has handicapped efforts to study this important aspect of collective

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 42; and cf. William A. Gamson, “Goffman’s Legacy to Political Sociology,” *Theory and Society* 14, No. 5 (September 1985), 605-622.

<sup>74</sup> Vermeersch, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>76</sup> Currently, the writings of David Snow and his collaborators seem to be regarded as the most authoritative in this field. Some authors even give him the majority of the credit for adapting the concept of “framing” to social movement theory: “Indeed, not only did Snow coin, or more accurately, modify and apply Erving Goffman’s term, to the study of social movements, but in doing so helped to crystallize and articulate a growing discontent among movement scholars over how little significance proponents of the resource mobilization perspective attached to ideas and sentiments. In reasserting their importance, Snow and his colleagues drew not only on Goffman’s work, but ironically on the collective behavior tradition which resource mobilization had sought to supplant as the dominant paradigm in the field.” McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 5.



action.”<sup>77</sup> McAdam et al. distinguish between two temporal stages (framing early v. late in the movement) and five “related, but clearly distinct, topics” (cultural tool kits, strategic framing efforts, frame contests, structure and role of the media, and cultural impact), for a total of ten potential analytical categories.<sup>78</sup> Similarly (but not identically), Zald finds six basic topics “in the interplay of movements, framing, and the larger society”: the cultural construction of repertoires of contention and frames, cultural contradictions and historical events, framing as a strategic activity, competitive processes, mass media, and outcomes.<sup>79</sup> Tarrow describes “collective action frames,” “injustice frames,” “emotion cultures,” “consensus formation,” “media framing,” and “frames of contention,” and he emphasizes the role of movement leaders in transforming common, but benign, cultural symbols into mobilizing collective identity and frames of contention.<sup>80</sup> Diani and della Porta categorize framing in terms of “antisystem frames,” “realignment frames,” “inclusion frames,” and “revitalization frames.”<sup>81</sup> Vermeersch himself adopts Benford and Snow’s explanation of framing in terms of “diagnostic framing,” “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing.”<sup>82</sup> The theorizing on framing, still evolving, has yet to reach an internal consensus, consisting instead of several taxonomies of relevant variables, each of which has its own analytical advantages and drawbacks.

### 3.2.5. *Conspicuously Absent? Resource Mobilization*

Rather puzzlingly, Vermeersch omits resource mobilization theory from his theoretical framework, although together with “political opportunity structure” and “framing,” “resource mobilization” is usually described as one of the three pillars of new social movement theory.<sup>83</sup> In the words of della Porta and Diani, “The capacity for mobilization depends either on the

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 16-19.

<sup>79</sup> Mayer N. Zald, “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 261-262.

<sup>80</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 106-122.

<sup>81</sup> della Porta and Diani, 80-81.

<sup>82</sup> Vermeersch, 43; and Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), 615.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. the following: della Porta and Diani, 7-9; Tarrow 123-138; and McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 3-4.

material resources (work, money, concrete benefits, services) or on the non-material resources (authority, moral engagement, faith, friendship) available to the group.”<sup>84</sup> According to McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, in addition to resources, a movement needs mobilizing structures, “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.”<sup>85</sup> In Tarrow’s opinion, “what underlies the most successful [social movements] is the role of informal connective tissue operating within and between formal movement organizations.”<sup>86</sup>

As a group, the Roma have few internal resources available for movement mobilization. As discussed in the Sections 6.2.2-6.2.3 and 7.1, they lack both economic and social resources, particularly when compared with the majority population. Members of the Roma minority generally do participate in many informal, extended networks at any given time, but Roma networks tend to be exclusive rather than inclusive and generally follow the contours of extended families, business acquaintances, and personal affinities. The bonds forged in these networks are generally not suitable for the promotion of mass mobilization along ethnic lines. As a result both of the exclusion of the Roma from the informal economy under socialism<sup>87</sup> and of the post-communist welfare policies designed to “divide and pacify” the new masses of unemployed<sup>88</sup> (in which the Roma were dramatically overrepresented<sup>89</sup>), the Roma have few national (or even regional) informal, internal networks, which form a critical component of mobilization.

Consideration of a movement’s resources usually plays a central role in new social movement theorists’ analyses of social movements, so why would Vermeersch omit a central component of new social movement theory? Perhaps he is attempting to avoid accusations of

<sup>84</sup> della Porta and Diani, 8.

<sup>85</sup> McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 137.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Júlia Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition: Clashing Interests of Gender and Ethnicity in Contemporary Hungary,” in *Recognition Struggles and Social Movements: Contested Identities, Agency and Power*, ed. Barbara Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195-200.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Pieter Vanhuysse, *Divide and Pacify: Strategic Social Policies and Political Protests in Post-Communist Democracies* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Barany, 172-180.

being overly committed to rational choice theory. If this is the case, he fails to avoid this criticism (discussed in Chapter 4), since the rest of his theoretical framework is overwhelmingly strategic and rational in nature. More likely, however, is that he avoids discussing resource mobilization theory because he rejects economic marginalization as a cause of Roma ethnic mobilization and instead emphasizes the role of rational choice in Roma mobilization:

Those [Roma activists] who did attempt to mobilize an ethnic movement did not spontaneously react to marginality or deprivation, but rather made rational calculations about ways to communicate with the state.<sup>90</sup>

In doing so, he is probably attempting to shun all intimations of Marxist economic or structural determinism. When analyzing Roma ethnic mobilization, however, refusing to address the economic deprivation of the Roma seems staggeringly naïve – perhaps the marginalization of Roma is not the immediate cause of Roma mobilization, but, as is argued in Chapter 4, the marginalization of Roma is a (if not the) primary influence that determines the shape and direction of Roma mobilization. Within the context of Vermeersch's larger argument, his omission of resource mobilization as a component of the Roma movement appears to be a colossal oversight.

### 3.3. Vermeersch's Application of New Social Movement Theory to Roma Mobilization in Hungary

Vermeersch's model is quite complex, drawing on the works of a number of social movement theorists and attempting to unify their theories into a single cohesive analytical model in order to explain ethnic mobilization, particularly Roma mobilization. Most of the theoretical work he cites is rather young and is somewhat open to interpretation, potentially leading to problems with both evaluating his theory and using it as an explanatory tool, as many of his concepts can be widely and divergently understood and applied. Moreover, his model draws on theoretical literature that seeks to describe social movements that generally organize themselves around particular issues and then search for opportunities to engage politically, usually against

<sup>90</sup> Vermeersch, 219.

the government or institutions of power. Conversely, the Roma movement is less a grassroots social movement and more a construction of the Roma elite, who are practically always dependent on rather than in conflict with the majority government. Given these potential problems and the other points of theoretical contention discussed in Section 3.2, how does Vermeersch actually apply new social movement theory to the Roma mobilization in Hungary?

The first half of Vermeersch's book offers a comprehensive overview (perhaps the most comprehensive overview available in English) of the development of Roma participation in Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak politics. Although Vermeersch derives most of his text from preexisting surveys or secondary works, he synthesizes this disparate collection of largely specialist works and augments them with a number of interviews with key players, thereby creating an accessible narrative of "The Development of Minority Policies in Central Europe" (the title of his second chapter) and "Ethnic Politics from Below" (the title of the third chapter). In the second chapter, he discusses the assorted decisions made about Roma by the various authorities in the three countries, mentioning the origins of "the Roma" but spending most of his time recounting the evolution of minority policy since the advent of communist rule.

### 3.3.1. Roma "Activism" Under Communism

In the case of the Hungarian Roma, what is truly striking in Vermeersch's account is the "subjectness" of the Roma, both under communist rule and, more surprisingly, since the transition. "Progress" (or change, at least) in policy towards the Roma has rarely been the result of Roma mobilization; rather, it practically always occurs due to some top-down decision, which some Roma elites subsequently endeavor to leverage in their favor. The first Gypsy Council (*Cigányszövetség*),<sup>91</sup> a consultative body formed in 1974, was a government creation that lasted only

<sup>91</sup> A note on the use of "Roma" and "Gypsy": this essay follows the emerging convention of using the term "Roma" instead of "Gypsy" when referring to people of Roma origin. In Hungary, however, the use of *cigány* remains widespread and is often used without any pejorative connotation by the Roma themselves. Therefore, this essay uses the term "Roma" except where the name of a particular organization or institution includes *cigány* in its name. For a discussion on the self-definitions of different groups of Roma in Hungary, cf. Peter Szuhay, "Self-Definitions of Gypsy Ethnic Groups," in *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian Society*, ed. Ernő Kállai (Budapest: Regio – Teleki László Foundation, 2002), 24-27.

a few years, and the final assessment of the body said that its only impact was to “draw more attention to the plight of Hungarian Rom.”<sup>92</sup> During the relaxation of totalitarian control in the mid-1980s, the government again experimented with establishing Roma organizations, setting up the National Gypsy Council (*Országos Cigánytanács*) in May 1985 and the Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association (*Magyar Cigányok Kulturális Szövetsége*) in June 1986.<sup>93</sup> The limited success of these groups in establishing a couple of small cultural centers, organizing folklore programs, assisting children from needy families, and organizing a few cultural festivals had the perverse effect of strengthening prejudice against Roma and left them exposed to increased discrimination, as the non-Roma majority population greatly resented investment in Roma cultural projects during a time of considerable macroeconomic uncertainty and instability.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, this development reflected a substantial change in the government’s attitude toward the Roma, a group that the Hungarian government now considered a “nationality.” This new outlook was a striking divergence from the government’s 1961 declaration that “despite certain ethnological traits, the gypsy population does not constitute a national minority.”<sup>95</sup>

### 3.3.2. Roma Mobilization During and After the Transition

In commenting on the transition to democracy, Vermeersch notes that an initial and lasting rift formed between those Hungarian Roma elites who had been participants in the government-led organizations of the mid- and late-1980s and those elites who had deliberately abstained from allying themselves with the communists.<sup>96</sup> He then focuses his discussion on the institutional development in post-transition Hungary, describing at length the establishment of the minority self-government system through Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (hereafter, Act LXXVII), the National Roma Self-Government (*Országos Cigány Önkormányzat*), the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities (*Nemzeti és Etnikai Kisebbségi*

<sup>92</sup> David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996.), 99; cf. Vermeersch, 54; and cf. Barany, 147.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Crowe, 99-100; and cf. Vermeersch, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Crowe, 100-101.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 61-62.

*Hivatal*), and the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights (often called the Minority Ombudsman).

Vermeersch fails to articulate the most interesting and important point illuminated by his narrative: the essential “subjectness” of the Roma in the sphere of minority policy did not change after the transition. Few Roma have been elected or appointed to important government positions.<sup>97</sup> Instead, Roma have historically been “represented” by members appointed to consultative “minority roundtables” and similar bodies. Actions of Roma, whether individual elites or participants in mass movements (though evidence of the existence of the latter is somewhat lacking), continued to have virtually no effect on the policy-making and decision-making processes of the Hungarian government. The Hungarian Parliament determined the content of Act LXXVII, the piece of legislation that became the foundation of minority rights law in Hungary, practically without the input of the Roma minority. When Act LXXVII passed in 1993, only three members of the Hungarian Parliament were Roma,<sup>98</sup> and one of them even voted against Act LXXVII,<sup>99</sup> though the Hungarian Parliament passed it with an overwhelming majority of 96.5%.<sup>100</sup> Act LXXVII was not written with the needs of the Roma in mind (the first draft of Act LXXVII did not even include the Roma<sup>101</sup>); rather, it was written to promote the cultural identity of Hungary’s other, small, well-integrated minorities and to further two foreign policy objectives – to advance Hungary’s integration into European supranational institutions and to strengthen the position of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary’s borders.<sup>102</sup>

Instead of being empowered (either by the Hungarian government or by themselves) to participate proactively in the political process, the Roma were instead relegated to a subordinate,

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 68-69; and cf. Balázs Wizner, “The Development of the Romany National Movement in Hungary,” MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 1999. One exception to this trend is the recent election of Ernő Kállai, a Roma who frequently refers to his ethnicity, to the position of Minority Ombudsman.

<sup>98</sup> Vermeersch, 113.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>100</sup> Ferenc Eiler and Nóra Kovács, “Minority Self-Governments in Hungary,” in *Minority Governance in Europe*, ed. Kinga Gál (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2002), 175.

<sup>101</sup> Kai Schafft, “Local Minority Self-Governance and Hungary’s Roma,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 40, No. 155, <<http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no155/091.html>> (17 December 2007).

<sup>102</sup> Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 201.

reactive position. As Vermeersch claims, Roma elites certainly “did not spontaneously react to marginality or deprivation, but rather made rational calculations about ways to communicate with the state.”<sup>103</sup> Their rational calculations, however, rarely rose above the level of rather basic, hasty reactions to policies imposed upon them from above – a comparatively dismal and stagnant situation. Vermeersch invokes new social movement theory to explain this “mobilization,” but new social movement theory seeks to describe a far richer “cycle of contention”<sup>104</sup> between social movements and their targets (usually state institutions), and its explanatory power falters when one party “non-participates” to the extent that the Roma “non-participated” in the Hungarian political process. Chapter 4 details the theoretical shortcomings of new social movement theory regarding the case of the Hungarian Roma, while Chapter 6 recounts the history of the National Roma Self-Government, an institution that Vermeersch also analyzes. The NRSG provides a case study that illustrates both the “subjectness” of the Roma in Hungary (even of Roma elites) and the shortcomings of new social movement theory in explaining the case of the Hungarian Roma.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Vermeersch, 219.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 141-160; and cf. Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Although this essay focuses on Hungary, its argument about the applicability of new social movement theory would be applicable to the situation of Roma in any Central and Eastern European country.

#### 4. The Need for a New Understanding of Power in Relation to the Roma

As demonstrated by the review of scholarly literature on power in Chapter 2, the common element in the models of Dahl, Polsby, Bachrach, Baratz, and Lukes is a conception of power that revolves around a particular conception of agency – i.e. strategic mobilization of resources to achieve goals and domination within the sphere of social interaction. Without addressing power specifically, both Barany and Vermeersch integrate this strategic understanding of power within their theoretical frameworks, which greatly detracts from their explanatory capacity. Examined through the lenses of their frameworks, social interaction becomes little more than the rational, strategic mobilization of resources by an individual or an ethnic group in order to achieve strategic goals and domination.

Vermeersch's theoretical framework is more sophisticated than Barany's, but his application of social movement theory to the case of Roma mobilization shares Barany's fundamental strategic bias. For Vermeersch, "society revolves around a struggle for scarce resources, and solidarity occurs in relations to these resources;" "economic advancement of previously disadvantaged groups can result in an escalation of inter-group conflict;" and "emphasis is placed on the ability of political entrepreneurs to respond to economic and political circumstances."<sup>106</sup> Mobilization leaders make rational decisions in response to the prevailing political opportunity structures. Vermeersch's typology of political opportunities consists of the four strategic spheres discussed in Section 3.2.3: national cleavage structures, formal institutional structures, prevailing informal strategies, and alliance structures.<sup>107</sup> Actors mobilize in response to these political opportunity structures, "calculat[ing] the costs and benefits of their collective action in relation to the limited material or nonmaterial resources available."<sup>108</sup>

Vermeersch thus inscribes a strategic concept of power into his theoretical framework, but this strategic understanding of power severely limits its explanatory capability, particularly

<sup>106</sup> Vermeersch, 36.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 40.



when studying the mobilization of the Roma minority. The consequence of his approach is the reduction of the analysis of power and social relationships to an account of the resources available to a given actor in a social relationship and of his or her rational mobilization of those resources in an attempt to secure domination over the other actor(s) in the relationship. Although Vermeersch's oft-repeated assertion that the Roma in any one particular place did not spontaneously mobilize in reaction to marginalization is accurate, the dynamic of power relations (in the form of marginalization or, more accurately, domination) is central to understanding the general patterns and outcomes of Roma mobilization in Hungary, and to understanding the NRSG in particular.

The great flaw in Vermeersch's theory and social movement theory in general is that they assume some kind of relative (but not absolute) power parity between social movements (or their members, organizations, etc.) and the states, organizations, corporations, etc. against which the movements mobilize. No matter how many resources a state or other entity has at its disposal to suppress or subvert a social movement, social movement theory assumes that a social movement has resources to mobilize against the state. Even the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a group of mostly poor and powerless (in the conventional sense) women who protested against the Argentinean military dictatorship (1976-1983) in order to be reunited with (or at least find out the fate of) their "disappeared" children,<sup>109</sup> had "moral capital" (in Bourdieuan terms, discussed in Section 5.1) to mobilize against an oppressive military regime.

New social movement theory may indeed be a suitable theoretical framework for explaining Roma mobilization on the international level, as there is a tiny group of international Roma elite who engage with international bodies and organizations in the way predicted by the

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Borland, "The Mature Resistance of Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayo," in *Latin American Social Movements: Globalization, Democratization, and Transnational Networks*, eds. Hank Johnston and Paul Ameida (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 115-130.

social movement model (excepting a mass constituency component).<sup>110</sup> These discussions remain rather abstract, usually focusing on matters of human rights, non-discrimination, and promotion of Roma culture. At this abstract, international level of discourse, some semblance of power parity (in the form of universalistic rhetoric) exists between the Roma elite and the international bodies at which this discourse is directed, but practically no “material spoils” are at stake.

Nevertheless, any truly useful explanatory framework for Roma mobilization must engage the topic on the national (i.e. domestic) level, as the capacity for economic redistribution rests in any meaningful way only with national governments.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, Vermeersch is quite correct to approach Roma mobilization by examining it in different national contexts. On the domestic level, the abstract concerns deliberated on the international level (human rights, non-discrimination, and promotion of culture) become concrete and material. Instead of debating ideals, the objects of contention become economic redistribution, welfare policy, housing subsidies, access to education, etc., and any veneer of power parity between the contesting parties, i.e. the Roma minority and non-Roma majority, disappears, thus destroying the explanatory capacity of the social movement model. Researchers cannot simply assume that members of the Roma minority have access to the kind of capital needed to create a power parity between themselves and the organizations, institutions, societies, etc. against which they might mobilize. As attested to by numerous anecdotal and statistical studies, the Roma are practically always the poorest and least educated members of the societies in which they live.<sup>112</sup> The

<sup>110</sup> For a description of Roma mobilization on the international level, cf. Ilona Klímová-Alexander, *The Romani Voice in World Politics: The United Nations and Non-State Actors* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> For discussions of the need for redistribution in the promotion of normative justice, cf. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking Recognition: Overcoming Displacement and Reification in Cultural Politics,” in *Recognition Struggles and Social Movements: Contested Identities, Agency and Power*, ed. Barbara Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-32; and cf. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (New York: Verso, 2003).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. the following: Kertesi; Éva Havasi, “Poverty and Exclusion in Contemporary Hungary,” *Review of Sociology* 8, No. 2 (2002), 54-74; Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 188-214; European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*; Ivan Szelényi, “Poverty Under Post-Communist Capitalism: The Effects of Class and Ethnicity in a Cross-National Comparison” (Paper presented at the workshop “Culture and Poverty,” Central European University, 14 October 2001); István Kemény, *A romák/cigányok és a láthatatlan gazdaság* [The roma/gypsies and the invisible economy] (Budapest: Osiris, 2000); UNDP, *Avoiding the Dependency Trap: Roma in Central and Eastern Europe* (Bratislava: UNDP, 2002); Robert Koulisch, “Hungarian Roma Attitudes on Minority

prospects for “identity capital” or “solidarity capital” are slim, as many Roma are inclined to view Roma groups other than their own with as much suspicion as they view non-Roma.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, many Roma refuse to identify themselves as Roma at all, out of fear of stigmatization or exploitation.<sup>114</sup> Vermeersch notes “the inability of activists to use Romani identity, with all of its stigmas, and turn it into a mobilizing identity,”<sup>115</sup> meaning that Roma activists concomitantly have difficulty turning discrimination against Roma into “moral capital” for the purposes of mobilization.<sup>116</sup> Finally, Robert Koulish has found that self-identification as Roma decreases with educational and economic achievement,<sup>117</sup> which has critically important implications for Roma mobilization – precisely those Roma individuals most valuable to the Roma social movement are the least likely to participate in such an ethnic movement, except for those elites directly vying for the spoils of ethnic politics in Hungary.

Consequently, the truly bizarre and paradoxical characteristic of Roma mobilization is that rather than furnishing their own capital to mobilize in a movement, Roma activists receive the vast majority of their capital from the very systems, institutions, and societies that oppress them and against which they attempt to mobilize – i.e. the state and the majority societies in which they live. Attempting to reconcile this fact with the rational, strategic understanding of power inherent in social movement theory causes the explanatory model of social movement theory to break down and leads to unsatisfying answers for some of the most basic questions about Roma mobilization: why have Roma activists across the political spectrum continued to

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Rights: The Symbolic Violence of Ethnic Identification,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, No. 2 (March 2005); and Ernő Kállai and Erika Törzsök, *A Roma's Life in Hungary: Report 2000* (Budapest: Bureau for European Comparative Minority Research, 2001).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Paloma Gay y Blasco, “Gypsy/Roma Diasporas: A Comparative Perspective,” *Social Anthropology* 10, No. 2 (2002), 173-188; Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Post-Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and cf. Marek Jakoubek, “Traditional Roma Culture and National Roma Culture: Definitions, Relations, Prospects (The Czech/slovakian Case)” (Paper to be presented at the conference “The Causes and Mechanisms of the Creation of Educational Barriers of Different Sociocultural Background Members,” Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic, May 6-7, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Project on Ethnic Relations, “Roma and Statistics,” *Project on Ethnic Relations*, May 2000, <<http://www.per-usa.org/reports/PERStrasbourg.pdf>> (12 March 2008), 17.

<sup>115</sup> Vermeersch, 226.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Nicolae Gheorghe, “The Social Construction of Romani Identity,” in *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997), 153-163.

<sup>117</sup> Koulish, 316.

focus on current institutional arrangements in the face of overwhelming evidence that since its establishment more than a decade ago the current system has done “nothing to improve the fundamental life prospects of those in the Roma community in general; indeed, if anything, those prospects have gone on deteriorating”?<sup>118</sup> Why do the Roma elite not unite on the domestic level to improve the situation of the constituency they claim to represent? If, as Vermeersch asserts, “competition among elites for particular [economic and political] rewards” leads to mobilization,<sup>119</sup> why have the current elites achieved so little, and why have the “rank-and-file” members of the mobilization movement not replaced them with leaders who are able to accomplish more? If there are not a significant number of “rank-and-file” members, why do Roma choose not to mobilize, or if non-mobilization is not a conscious choice, why is it an unconscious choice? If “economic advancement of previously disadvantaged groups” results in increased mobilization, interethnic conflict, and claims making as Vermeersch claims,<sup>120</sup> why are wealthier and more educated Roma less likely to identify themselves as Roma?<sup>121</sup>

Vermeersch’s theory has little to say about these fundamental questions, other than the rather unsatisfying answer that “Romani mobilization was geared to the institutions introduced by the authorities.”<sup>122</sup> Yet, if Vermeersch’s Roma elites are rational actors, why do they participate in a system that reproduces Roma marginalization? How does this process of reproduction function? A non-reductionist, contextualized conception of power as a social relationship, mediated by culturally relevant structures that constrain actions, would provide a far sounder foundation to explore the currents of power, domination, and systemic reproduction that shape Roma ethnic mobilization.

<sup>118</sup> Kállai and Törzsök, 85.

<sup>119</sup> Vermeersch, 220.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>121</sup> Koulish, 316.

<sup>122</sup> Vermeersch, 223.

## 5. A Bourdieuan Structural Theory of Power as Practice

This essay proposes that many of the fundamental questions raised in Chapter 4 could be much more thoroughly answered through a Bourdieuan structural theory of power as practice, rather than the rational, strategic understanding of power implicit in Barany's and Vermeersch's theoretical frameworks. A theory of power based on Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field<sup>123</sup> would enable researchers to overcome the agency-structure dualism so prevalent in the social sciences and avoid the pitfalls inherent both in structural determinism/instrumentalism and in strategic agency theories.

### 5.1. Capital

Bourdieu's reconceptualization of the Marxist idea of capital is the starting point for a theory of power that transcends the agency-structure dualism. In contrast to Marxism's purely economic understanding of capital, Bourdieu extends the idea of capital to all resources that could potentially be mobilized for the purposes of exerting power: types of capital can include cultural, economic, family, intellectual, linguistic, moral, personal, political, professional, religious, social, state, and symbolic capitals. For Bourdieu, these resources "only function as capital" when they function "as a social *power* relation," i.e. when people struggle over them because of their value as resources.<sup>124</sup> The Marxist focus on economic capital is incomplete and cannot adequately explain the complex dynamics of social life, hence Bourdieu's call "to abandon the economic/non-economic dichotomy."<sup>125</sup>

This reconceptualization is revolutionary because it enables researchers to extend economic analysis to non-economic resources, labor, goods, and services. "Cultural capital" (or,

<sup>123</sup> This essay follows the interpretations of these terms provided in Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu: Agent Provocateur* (London: Continuum, 2004); Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002); and David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>124</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 264; emphasis in original.

<sup>125</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 122.

more generally, “informational capital,” as he reformulates the term in later analyses<sup>126</sup>) becomes a source of power that is not theoretically subjugated *a priori* to economic considerations, as opposed to the conceptualization of “culture” in orthodox Marxist theoretical frameworks. The relationships between all of these different kinds of capital are quite complex, however; Bourdieu notes that capital is an “energy of social physics,” multifaceted, interdependent, and interconvertible.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, Bourdieu still gives primacy to economic capital, claiming that “economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital,” i.e. informational, social, symbolic, etc., and that these other forms of capital are “transformed, disguised forms of economic capital.”<sup>128</sup> Bourdieu thus turns everyone into a capital holder; the questions become “what kind” and “how much.”

By broadening the applicability of Marxism’s economic understanding of capital, Bourdieu introduces the importance of symbolic forms of capital in processes of control and domination. Indeed, “symbolic forms of domination,”<sup>129</sup> whether they consist of art and literature, legal institutions, or the state itself, play a central role in maintaining inequality:<sup>130</sup> “The most brutal relations of force are always simultaneously symbolic relations.”<sup>131</sup> These symbolic systems become “structuring structures,”<sup>132</sup> which determine how individuals are able to understand and communicate with and in the social world. Perhaps most importantly, symbolic systems also become politicized by transforming into systems of domination through the promotion and legitimization of the dominant group, culture, language, and hierarchy.<sup>133</sup> Culture, therefore, is not innocent and cannot be divorced from politics or economics, but through

<sup>126</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 119; and Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field,” *Sociological Theory* 12, No. 1 (March 1994), 7.

<sup>127</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 122.

<sup>128</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 252.

<sup>129</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 133.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 122-134.

<sup>131</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State,” 12.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 13; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 164.

<sup>133</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State,” 8.

Bourdieu's classification, its effects can be empirically studied, both independently from and in relation to politics and economics.

Consequently, symbolic capital is central to the maintenance of systems of domination through its power to legitimize these systems, as the exercise of power generally requires some form of justification.<sup>134</sup> Systems of domination exercise symbolic power “only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.”<sup>135</sup> Bourdieu's concept of “symbolic violence” emerges from this acceptance of domination as legitimate; he defines “symbolic violence” as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity.”<sup>136</sup> Symbolic power legitimizes the *status quo*, leading to intergenerational reproduction of social inequality:

Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e. every power which manages to impose meaning and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations.<sup>137</sup>

Similar to Marxism's understanding of superstructure, Bourdieu sees symbolic power as legitimizing economic and political power, but unlike superstructure, symbolic power is not reducible to either economic or political power. As is the case with Bourdieu's other forms of capital, symbolic capital can also be accumulated and then exchanged for other forms of capital.<sup>138</sup>

## 5.2. Habitus

Bourdieu states, “I can say that all of my thinking started from this point: how can behavior be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?”<sup>139</sup> Social life is more than an aggregation of individual human decisions, but it is not reducible to autonomous structures either. This is the essence of the agency-structure dualism, and as outlined in Chapter

<sup>134</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 9-10.

<sup>135</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 164.

<sup>136</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 167.

<sup>137</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 122.

<sup>139</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 65.

2, the “classic” understanding of power prioritizes agency over structure. Habitus is one of the two central concepts that allows Bourdieu to explain how human action follows patterns without being subjugated entirely either to structures or to individual agency and that enables him to integrate the seemingly conflicting perspectives of social scientists, who detect patterns in human behavior, and of self-aware, rational actors, who from their perspective make conscious decisions incessantly.

He defines habitus thusly:

systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*,<sup>140</sup> structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.<sup>141</sup>

Habitus is thus a structured structuring structure, which causes actors to internalize behavior to the degree that the behavior, whether beneficial or detrimental to the actor, becomes unquestioned in the mind of the actor. Habitus thereby perpetuates the current “opportunity structures,” whether political, economic, or social. Individual actions shaped by habitus reinforce the structure and strength of habitus itself in a “system of circular relations that unite[s] structures and practices; objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn tend to reproduce objective structure.”<sup>142</sup> Habitus recreates the conditions of its own perpetuity by recasting social, economic, or political “necessity ... [as] a virtue.”<sup>143</sup> These dispositions are the historical products of early socialization

<sup>140</sup> Bourdieu additionally notes that “the word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*.” Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 214; emphasis in original.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 72; emphasis in original.

<sup>142</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron, 203.

<sup>143</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 77.



into particular classes through such banal factors as “division of labor between the sexes, household objects, modes of consumption, [and] parent-child relations.”<sup>144</sup> These

social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a “sense of one’s place” which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places, and so forth from which one is excluded.<sup>145</sup>

Habitus reproduces and legitimizes social inequality by structuring people’s unconscious calculations of what is possible and impossible (which differs greatly according to class/social position) through

dispositions which are so many marks of *social position* and hence of the social distance between objective positions, that is, between social persons conjuncturally brought together (in physical space, which is not the same thing as social space) and correlatively, so many reminders of this distance and of the conduct required in order to “keep one’s distance” or to manipulate it strategically, whether symbolically or actually, to reduce it (easier for the dominant than for the dominated), increase it, or simply maintain [it] (by not “letting oneself go,” not “becoming familiar,” in short, “standing on one’s dignity,” or on the other hand, refusing to “take liberties” and “put oneself forward,” in short “knowing one’s place” and staying there).<sup>146</sup>

Because of its integration into an individual’s being at an early age, habitus is resistant to change and encompasses “an agent’s whole set of practices,” i.e. an agent’s “life-style,” not just particular behaviors.<sup>147</sup> For Bourdieu,

marriage strategies are inseparable from inheritance strategies, fertility strategies, and even educational strategies, in other words from the whole set of strategies for biological, cultural, and social reproduction that every group implements in order to transmit the inherited power and privileges, maintained or enhanced, to the next generation.<sup>148</sup>

By emphasizing the adoption of an entire set of practices in response to the limited opportunities available to them, Bourdieu offers a chance to avoid falling into the most common debate among commentators on the situation of the Roma, i.e. whether particular deviant behaviors have cultural or structural origins. The explanatory potential of habitus is particularly great

<sup>144</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 54.

<sup>145</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 471.

<sup>146</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 82; emphasis in original.

<sup>147</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

<sup>148</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 160-161.

regarding the relationship between the Roma and the majority, as habitus tends to be especially influential in “the areas that are apparently ‘freest’” and lacking “ritual prescriptions,” as these areas are most often “given over in reality to the regulated improvisation of the habitus.”<sup>149</sup>

### 5.3. Field

If capital determines individuals’ positions in the social hierarchy and habitus is the structure that patterns individuals’ actions in order to perpetuate their place in the social hierarchy, then “field” defines the social setting in which actors, capital, and habitus operate. Bourdieu defines a field as

a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents, or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).<sup>150</sup>

In other words,

Fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital. Fields may be thought of as structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital.<sup>151</sup>

Each field, whether the field of power, art, science, education, politics, religion, housing policy, etc., functions as a “relatively autonomous social microcosm” with its own “logic and ... necessity that are *specific and irreducible* to those that regulate other fields.”<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, Bourdieu does not strictly delineate boundaries between different fields (“the limits of the field ... [are] always at stake in the field itself”<sup>153</sup>), nor does he characterize them as systems or institutions; rather, “the field is the locus of relations of force – and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed at

<sup>149</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 20.

<sup>150</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 97.

<sup>151</sup> Swartz, 117.

<sup>152</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 97; emphasis in original.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 100.

transforming it.”<sup>154</sup> A field is, therefore, simultaneously a site of domination and of resistance, each “relationally”<sup>155</sup> connected with the other.

David Swartz isolates four universal structural properties present in any field. First, “fields are arenas of struggle for legitimization,”<sup>156</sup> i.e. sites of struggle over the right to exercise a legitimate monopoly of symbolic power over the capital(s) central to particular fields (e.g. scientific capital in the scientific field or economic capital in the business field). Second, “fields are structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital.”<sup>157</sup> The unequal distribution of capital(s) determines individuals’ positions in the field, and those in subordinate positions struggle against those in dominant positions, forcing the dominant to defend their positions and privileges. Third, “fields impose on actors specific forms of struggle,”<sup>158</sup> meaning that both the dominant and the dominated agree “that the game is worth playing ... in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes;”<sup>159</sup> even if the dominated protest the legitimacy of the field’s hierarchy, their participation in the field reproduces the field’s structure. Fourth, “fields are structured to a significant extent by their own internal mechanisms of development”<sup>160</sup> and are, as quoted previously, “relatively autonomous.”

Each field has the potential to (and usually does) develop its own hierarchy of capitals, its own rules, its own experts, its own organizational logic, and its own interests, largely independent of external influences, interests, or fields. Bourdieu thus emphasizes the need to analyze fields according to their own internal logic (as the field mediates “between the practices of those who partake of it and the surrounding social and economic conditions”<sup>161</sup>), and each field becomes a potential, concrete target for research. Bourdieu characterizes relationships between these

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>156</sup> Swartz, 123.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>159</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 98-99.

<sup>160</sup> Swartz, 126.

<sup>161</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 105.

relatively autonomous fields as “homologies ... [i.e.] a resemblance within a difference.”<sup>162</sup> In other words, actors tend to share both their relative positions in hierarchies and their functional strategies (both of which connect back to habitus) across the different fields in which they compete.<sup>163</sup> habitus thus becomes “the unifying principle of practices in different domains.”<sup>164</sup>

#### 5.4. Summary: A Strategy for a Research Program

Bourdieu offers a concise methodology for conducting research based on his concepts of capital, habitus, and field. “First, one must analyze the position of the [particular field being studied] vis-à-vis the field of power.”<sup>165</sup> Bourdieu considers the field of power to be the principle field structuring social life and interaction, and it serves as an organizing principle of (and often entirely subsumes) other fields.<sup>166</sup> “Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field [is] the site,”<sup>167</sup> i.e. who is dominant and who is dominated according to the capital(s) important to this particular field, and what is the distribution of the capital(s)? Third,

one must analyze the habitus of the agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized.<sup>168</sup>

In other words, who brings what kind of habitus into the field, and what are they pursuing in the field of struggle? By seeking answers to these questions, a researcher can give a comprehensive account of the nature of a field, of the power relations within a field, and of the motivations and constraints driving the actions of the actors in the field.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>163</sup> For an example of how homologies function with respect to law and social classes, cf. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field,” *The Hastings Law Journal* 38 (1987), 822.

<sup>164</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 83.

<sup>165</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 104.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 264-272.

<sup>167</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, 105.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

## 6. Case Study: The National Roma Self-Government of Hungary

The National Roma Self-Government (hereafter, NRSG) provides an excellent case study in order to explore the potential of a Bourdieuan structural theory of power as practice for elucidating the phenomenon of Roma mobilization in Hungary. After discussing why this essay prioritizes the NRSG over other forms of Roma mobilization in Hungary, the record of the establishment and growth of the NRSG under its various chairmen is recounted. Chapter 7 then combines the structural theory of power as practice with the empirical findings in this chapter to explain why Roma mobilization in Hungary has developed into its current form.

### 6.1. Why Examine the National Roma Self-Government?

Admittedly, the National Roma Self-Government is only one aspect of Roma ethnic mobilization in Hungary. Roma activists have attempted to mobilize within electoral politics (in Roma and mainstream political parties) and outside of both the established political system and the minority self-government system (as discussed briefly in Sections 6.2.4 and 6.6).<sup>169</sup> This inquiry focuses mainly on the NRSG because of two major considerations:

First, the NRSG is to a large degree constituted separately from Act LXXVII that founded the minority self-government system. Act LXXVII is a so-called “skeleton law,” the applicability of which “depends on the numerous other specific laws that it refers to in several places.”<sup>170</sup> The powers of the NRSG depend largely on the interpretation of these other laws, as well as the customary behavior of the state organs that interact with the NRSG, since the legal rights and responsibilities of the NRSG are so vague. In fact, there is no mandated structure for the NRSG, just a set number of representatives (fifty-three). This implies that the Hungarian government, with relative ease, could alter the system to improve the balance of power in favor of the Roma without drastically altering either Act LXXVII itself or even the composition and competencies of the other minority national self-governments. This also implies that effective Roma mobilization could substantially influence the structure and functioning of the NRSG,

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Vermeersch, 102-149.

<sup>170</sup> Eiler and Kovács, 175.

either by forcing the government to interact with the NRSG differently (thereby granting it new or different powers and competencies), or by forcing the NRSG itself to behave differently (as the NRSG itself wields considerable influence over its own structure and functioning because of the vagueness of Act LXXVII). This potential institutional flexibility, in law if not always in practice, makes the NRSG a good litmus test for the effectiveness of Roma mobilization in Hungary, both in the present and in the past, by examining the NRSG's receptiveness to change on account of mobilization by Roma activists, leaders, and pressure groups.

Second, although the legal mandate of the NRSG is rather limited and vague – it is charged with “protect[ing] the rights of the minority it represents on the national level” and “oversee[ing] the activities of minority institutions such as television and radio stations, secondary education institutions, theatres, museums, libraries, and publishing houses,” as well as “consenting” to legislation that affects the Roma minority<sup>171</sup> – it has become the *de facto* legitimate representative body of the Roma on the national level, at least as far as the Hungarian government is concerned.<sup>172</sup> Thus, Vermeersch calls the NRSG “the centerpiece of the Hungarian Romani movement.”<sup>173</sup> If the NRSG is central to Roma mobilization in Hungary, then it is an optimal subject to examine the suitability of both Vermeersch's application of new social movement theory and a Bourdieuan structural theory of power as practice in the Hungarian context.

<sup>171</sup> National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “The Hungarian Minority Self-Government System as a Means of Increasing Romani Political Participation,” *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, October 2006, <<http://osce.org/item/25447.html>> (31 October 2007), 19.

<sup>172</sup> On July 3, 2003, Hungarian government spokesperson Zoltan J. Gal said, “The government views the [NRSG] as a special partner in helping to improve the living conditions for the Roma of Hungary and promoting their advance in the social mainstream.” Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Gov't Says National Gypsy Authority Is Special Partner” (3 July 2003).

<sup>173</sup> Vermeersch, 129.

## 6.2. The Communist Legacy and the Transition: “State Desertion” and Loyalists v. Radicals in the Roma Elite Stratum

### *6.2.1. Communist Policy Towards the Roma: Assimilation Through Economic Redistribution*

After the communists’ ascent to power, one of the first acts of the new socialist government was to dismantle the pre-WWII system of social institutions and social policies. The communist party assumed that the socialist political and economic mechanism would solve all social problems automatically, rendering separate “social policy” superfluous;<sup>174</sup> therefore, social work and social policy were officially abolished in the 1950s. Paradoxically, “every segment of economic and society, of private and public life, became imbued with ‘social’ considerations as the central intention .... [T]he elimination of social policy was accompanied by ‘injecting social policy’ into the entire system.”<sup>175</sup> Far from eliminating social policy, the Hungarian communist party gradually broadened its scope, and policy administration became increasingly centralized.<sup>176</sup>

Membership in the Hungarian social collective was redefined as (compulsory) participation in regular, socialized labor. The maintenance of this collective required a precarious balancing act between maintaining a centralized economic surplus on the one hand (the most important source of which was the preservation of artificially low wages<sup>177</sup>) and providing people with a decent enough lifestyle as to avoid rebellion.<sup>178</sup> One important component of providing a decent lifestyle was the provision of a number of collective benefits through the socialist system: food subsidies, price regulation, subsidized housing, minimum wage guarantees, assured (if underpaid) employment, health care, and other (usually employer-administered) benefits.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Dorottya Szikra, “Family and Child Support in a Postcommunist Society: Origins of the Mixed Hungarian Welfare Capitalism,” in *Fighting Poverty and Reforming Social Security: What Can Post-Soviet States Learn from the New Democracies of Central Europe?*, eds. Michael Cain, Nida Gelazis, and Tomasz Inglot, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 33.

<sup>175</sup> Júlia Szalai and Eva Orosz, “Social Policy in Hungary,” in *The New Eastern Europe: Social Policy Past, Present and Future*, ed. Bob Deacon (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 149.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Zsuzsa Ferge, *A Society in the Making: Hungarian Social and Societal Policy, 1945-1975* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979).

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Szalai and Orosz, 150.

<sup>178</sup> Szikra, 134.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Guy Standing, “The Folly of Social Safety Nets: Why Basic Income Is Needed in Eastern Europe,” *Social Research* 64, No. 4 (1997), 1339-1349.

In relation to the Roma, this system translated into a rather forcible attempt at assimilating the Roma into the institutions of the mainstream, centrally planned Hungarian society. The communist government implemented policies aimed at quickly ending centuries of Roma isolation through bringing Roma workers into the wage economy, mandating school attendance for Roma children, and generally dismantling the historical Roma survival mechanism of limiting contact with non-Roma authorities:

In order to secure those resources necessary in modern society (work, welfare entitlements, housing, education, health care, legal protection, and so on) it has become necessary for Roma people to engage with those authorities from whom these goods and services can be obtained.<sup>180</sup>

Another important component of providing a decent lifestyle was the communist government's tacit acquiescence to people's participation in the informal economy, in which household resources could be used to generate capital that could then be accumulated, traded, or reinvested. The informal economy became an important source of income for many Hungarians and was one of the key mechanisms for economic advancement under socialism.<sup>181</sup> The Roma were largely excluded from this second, informal economy, however, and as explained in the following Section 6.2.2, this exclusion played a large role in the precipitous decline in Roma living standards during and after the economic transition.

#### *6.2.2. The Collapse of the Socialist Welfare State and the Impact on the Roma*

Socialism failed as a result of the complex interaction among a number of converging factors. The combination of irresistible pressures from the world market from the mid 1970s onwards (especially the sharp rise in oil prices, imprudent borrowing by socialist governments, and the inability of socialist economies to adapt to the "information technology revolution), the increasing unwillingness of the U.S.S.R. to support communist puppet states with its military might, the passing of leadership to a new generation of liberalizing elites, and the "silent

<sup>180</sup> Martin Kovats, "The Political Significance of the First National Gypsy Minority Self-Government in Hungary," *Contemporary Politics* 6, No. 3 (2000), 248.

<sup>181</sup> For a detailed account of this process, see Júlia Szalai, "Power and Poverty: Socialist Second Economy and Self-Protection Against Poverty in Hungary," Paper presented at EURESCO conference, 2001.



revolution” of participation in Hungary’s second economy proved too great for the socialist system to bear.<sup>182</sup> The subsequent transition to a market economy corrected the artificially high employment in the former socialist system and caused serious inflation, a potent combination that led to a decrease in available jobs (and a concomitant rise in unemployment)<sup>183</sup> and to a decline of real wages<sup>184</sup> in Hungary. Predictably, these corrections caused an increase both in actual poverty<sup>185</sup> and in perceived poverty (perhaps better called “impoverishment” – e.g. in Hungary in 2000, only 14.2% of Hungarians declared that they had never been poor<sup>186</sup>). Access to the informal economy proved to be central to successfully weathering the economic transition and finding new employment in the burgeoning post-socialist service-based economy:

The informal economy built up a whole system of new occupations and services while at the same time, without even realizing it, the participants acquired new knowledge and skills that in practice could not be learned in the institutions of the formal [socialist] economy .... [T]hose who did not participate were excluded from an entire culture, and no formal schooling or training program could give them the hope of catching up.<sup>187</sup>

During the socialist period, both racial discrimination and their own lack of resources had excluded the Roma from participating in the informal economy.<sup>188</sup> Roma had been disproportionately employed as unskilled laborers in factories or agricultural cooperatives; therefore, when market rationalization dictated that these enterprises become more efficient, the jobs occupied by Roma were the most expendable.<sup>189</sup> The socialist system had also segregated

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Ivan Szelenyi and Balazs Szelenyi, “Why Socialism Failed: Toward a Theory of System Breakdown – Causes of Disintegration of East European State Socialism,” *Theory and Society* 23, No. 2 (April 1994), 211-231.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Kertesi, 8-13.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Havasi, 54-57.

<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, measuring the exact increase in poverty has proven difficult for a number of reasons: (1) poverty was a taboo topic under socialism (resulting in a lack of reliable data from that time) [Yogesh Atal, “Introduction,” in *Poverty in Transition and Transition in Poverty*, ed. Yogesh Atal (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 14]; (2) governments have occasionally manipulated statistics to demonstrate that poverty did not increase after the transition [Standing, 1342-1343]; and (3) social scientists and economists still do not agree on a “universally valid, all-inclusive definition” of poverty [Havasi, 60], necessitating that each researcher establish his or her own standards and methodologies.

<sup>186</sup> Havasi, 71.

<sup>187</sup> Szalai, “Power and Poverty,” 12.

<sup>188</sup> Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 198.

<sup>189</sup> Kertesi, 25.

the Roma in lower-quality educational facilities,<sup>190</sup> so they were the least likely to have the education needed to transition into the knowledge-based jobs of the new economy. In other words, most Roma were completely invested in the socialist system and had no access to the informal pillar of economic existence. Consequently, they were completely unprepared for a transition into a market-based economy, and most Roma remain excluded from the new economy to this day. Researchers have come to the general conclusion that the Roma are the poorest members of Hungarian society, that poor Roma are poorer than the non-Roma poor, and that poor Roma are less likely to escape poverty than the non-Roma poor. Nonetheless, low educational levels, lack of access to the informal economy, lack of capital, and the regional backwardness often characterizing Romani settlements do not entirely account for the differences between current Roma and non-Roma unemployment rates:

The crisis of the local economy hit the employment of the Romany population much harder than the employment of non-Romany people with the same gender, age, schooling, and family background .... It is hard to interpret this phenomenon as a sign of anything other than discrimination in the labour market.<sup>191</sup>

### 6.2.3. *“State Desertion” or “the Dismantling of the State”*

Unsurprisingly, the violent changes in the socioeconomic system led to radical changes in policies towards Roma, which can only be understood within the wider phenomenon of “state desertion” (in the words of Guy Standing<sup>192</sup>) or “the dismantling of the state” (in the words of Guy Will and Júlia Szalai<sup>193</sup>) in post-communist Hungary. Communism left behind a “service heavy, transfer light” welfare system,<sup>194</sup> a model that was quickly abandoned in favor of providing far fewer services while not providing a proportional increase in government transfers (or actually decreasing transfers). Towards the beginning of the transition process, the Hungarian government established a complex institutional system to cushion the shock for the “losers” of

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Claude Cahn et al., “Roma in the Educational Systems of Central and Eastern Europe” (Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre, 1998).

<sup>191</sup> Kertesi, 43.

<sup>192</sup> Standing, 1340.

<sup>193</sup> Júlia Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” *Review of Sociology* 8, No. 2 (2002), 38.

<sup>194</sup> János Mátyás Kovács, “Approaching the EU and Reaching the US? Transforming Welfare Regimes in East-Central Europe,” EUI Working Paper RSC No. 2000/50, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Badia Fiesolana, San Domenico (FI), Italy, 2000, 11.

social and economic restructuring: unemployment benefits, early retirement (voluntary and coerced), and disability pensions (again, voluntary and coerced).<sup>195</sup> As the economy continued to contract and the numbers of unemployed, retired, and “disabled” rose, the real value of these benefits declined dramatically. The tactics through which this value reduction occurred fell into five general categories: (a) narrowing the size and period of eligibility of benefits, (b) setting minimum wages or pensions too low and linking benefits to these impossibly low levels, (c) lowering the quality of the public services that were still given, (d) introducing private insurance schemes, and (e) refusing to make government benefits inflation-proof, thereby allowing their real value to evaporate.<sup>196</sup>

Unemployment benefits in Hungary provide a particularly illuminating example of how this process worked.<sup>197</sup> In 1991, a registered unemployed person received unemployment benefits for twenty-four months, the minimum amount of which was the official minimum wage. Eighty percent of the registered unemployed received these benefits. By 1995, the real value of per capital unemployment benefits had eroded to less than half of their 1992 value. From 1992 onwards, unemployment benefits were only paid for twelve months, and consequently, by 1995 only forty percent of the registered unemployed received any benefits whatsoever, as most of the long-term unemployed had already exhausted their period of eligibility for benefits.

Private initiatives, whether non-profit or for-profit, have not been able to obviate the damage caused by the loss of enterprise- and employer-administered services and the subsequent state abandonment of a number of social spheres. The non-governmental organizations (or, perhaps more accurately, “neo-governmental organizations”<sup>198</sup>) that have proliferated across Hungary since the transition are usually low-quality or low-capacity substitutes for previously

<sup>195</sup> Otto Czúcz, “The Social Consequences of the Transition in Hungary and Methods for the Early Recognition of Social Tensions,” in *Social Justice and the Welfare State in Central and Eastern Europe: The Impact of Privatization*, ed. Demetrius S. Iatridis, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 172.

<sup>196</sup> Kovács, 11.

<sup>197</sup> The data for this example are taken from Vanhuysse, 74-76.

<sup>198</sup> Martin Carnoy and Manuel Castells, “Globalization, the Knowledge Society, and the Network State: Poulantzas at the Millennium,” *Global Networks* 1, No. 1 (2001), 14.

public services, or they favor the rich.<sup>199</sup> Privately funded social policy schemes (pension systems foremost among them), often implemented at the insistence of international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,<sup>200</sup> have tended to privilege the already-privileged through the individualization of social risk. To a significant extent, social policy in Hungary has degenerated into poverty “relief,” composed largely of social assistance and “workfare,” linking the payment of benefits with performance of hard labor for public works. The metaphor of a new “social safety net” is an apt one: the government is no longer interested in offering its citizens safety belts or ropes while performing acrobatic stunts in the “circus of life.”<sup>201</sup> Instead, society should merely prepare to catch some of people (the “deserving poor” or “truly needy”) who stumble during their performance, while others (the “undeserving poor,” i.e. the homeless, the long-term unemployed, the disabled, the elderly with no family, ethnic minorities, the chronically ill, inhabitants of declining regions, etc.) are allowed to fall through the holes in the net. This new system rests on the principle of “targeting,” the idea that “since universal benefits do not diminish inequalities of take-up and access, there should be more concentration of the (scarce) resources on those really in need.”<sup>202</sup>

This new system had a significant negative impact on members of the Roma minority. It effectively racialized welfare in Hungary, creating a system that traps members of the Roma minority in a vicious cycle of institutionalized poverty and dependence from which it is nearly impossible to escape – but the exact consequences of this new system are not essential to this essay’s argument. The key point demonstrated by the preceding review is that the government reached an internal “new consensus” in post-socialist policy towards the Roma, the aim of which

<sup>199</sup> Kovács, 13.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Mitchell A. Orenstein and Martine R. Hass, “Globalization and the Future of Welfare States in the Post-Communist East-Central European Countries,” in *Globalization and the Future of the Welfare State*, eds. Miguel Glatzer and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 130-152.

<sup>201</sup> Kovács, 13-14.

<sup>202</sup> Szalai and Orosz, 158.

was shifted away from equalizing the circumstances of Roma people with those of other citizens and towards the less ambitious (and cheaper) one of creating a formal relationship with (representatives of) an ‘ethnic’ group.<sup>203</sup>

The initial mechanism for the implementation of this “new consensus” was the National Gypsy Council (*Országos Cigánytanács*) mentioned earlier. After the transition, the Hungarian Parliament assimilated Roma policy into a broader minority policy based on the minority self-government system. The purpose of this new minority self-government system was not to support the equality of Hungarian citizens who happened to belong to a minority or to pursue expensive and politically unpopular policies that would stop and reverse the precipitous decline in the living standards of the ever-poorer Roma minority. On the contrary, the purpose of the minority self-government system was, in the words of Csaba Tabajdi (MP and Political State Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister in 1995), “to stop the already [largely] assimilated national and ethnic minorities in Hungary from further losing their identity, and to attempt to make a change starting with education all the way from [kindergarten] to higher education.”<sup>204</sup> The central institutions in the post-socialist implementation of this new consensus were the minority self-governments, of which the National Roma Self-Government was the largest and most important.

#### 6.2.4. *Division Among Roma Elites: Loyalists v. Radicals*

In contrast to most other countries in Central and Eastern Europe during the transition, no unified opposition to the socialist regime emerged on the Hungarian political scene to demand a fundamental revision of the Hungarian political system – largely because the Hungarian communist party itself was not unified in the late 1980s.<sup>205</sup> Some post-Kádár communist politicians were open to radical changes in the system, meaning that Roma elites could choose from a number of potential allies, some from the reformist strand of the communist party and others from the democratic opposition.<sup>206</sup> The loyalists<sup>207</sup> (often called

<sup>203</sup> Kovats, 250.

<sup>204</sup> Csaba Tabajdi, translated by and quoted in Wizner, 107.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Robert Jenkins, “Stabilizing the Democratic Transition: The 1990 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections,” *Szelenyi* 60, <<http://hi.rutgers.edu/szelenyi60/>> (17 December 2007).

<sup>206</sup> For detailed accounts of these debates, cf. Vermeersch, 123-129; and cf. Wizner, 66-78.

“moderates” by the government) cooperated with and participated in the various state-led initiatives for Roma during the late 1980s and 1990s, such as the National Gypsy Council (*Országos Cigánytanács*), and consequently, they were assisted by and had access to state funds. János Báthory, the prime advisor on Roma affairs to the pre-1990 Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party and later the principle advisor on Roma affairs to the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Deputy Chairman of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities under János Wolfart, proposed to channel exclusive state support to the loyalists among the Roma elite in order to control them as much as possible so as to “avoid a violent ethnic upsurge by Romani ‘radicals.’”<sup>208</sup> Báthory planned to recognize this group of Roma loyalists, united under Gyula Náday’s Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies and legitimized by their election to and control of the NRSG, as the representatives of all Roma in Hungary.

The loyalists were opposed by a diverse group usually called the “radicals”<sup>209</sup> (though they actually belonged to a variety of political persuasions). The radicals unified themselves under an alternative Roma organization, Phralipe, which aimed to be a truly independent Roma organization in Hungary and which, rather significantly, did not claim to represent all Roma in Hungary, but rather only its members.<sup>210</sup> Both the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies and Phralipe participated in the sessions of the Nationalities Board (June 1989-March 1990), which met to discuss the features of Hungary’s transition and post-transition minority policies. The main outcome of these discussions (in which the influence of the Roma participants is difficult to discern) was the legal framework for the minority self-government system of Hungary. The structure of the minority self-government system set the stage for a dramatic series of

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<sup>207</sup> Key figures (and their respective organizations and supporters) in this group of Roma elite include Menyhért Lakatos (the Cultural Association of Hungarian Gypsies), Choli Daróczi, Gyula Náday (the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies), József Raduly (the 100 Member Gypsy Orchestra, supported by the Independent Smallholders’ Party), Attila Mohácsi (the Roma Forum, supported by the Socialist Party), Kálmán Farkas (the Cultural Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies), György Rostás-Farkas (the Interest Alliance of Gypsy Organizations, supported by the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities), and, most importantly for this essay, Flórián Farkas (Lungo Drom). List provided in Wizner, 67.

<sup>208</sup> Vermeersch, 124.

<sup>209</sup> The key figures in this group were Ágnes Daróczi, Aladár Horváth, Béla Osztojkán, and Jenő Zsigó. List provided in Wizner, 67.

<sup>210</sup> Vermeersch, 124.

showdowns between the loyalists and the radicals in which the loyalists, supported by the governments of both the center-left and center-right parties, succeeded in marginalizing the radicals for almost a decade.

### 6.3. The Structure of the NRSG: Hungary's Act LXXVII of 1993 and the 2005 Reform

The Hungarian government laid the foundations for the Hungarian minority self-government system as early as 1989 with the addition of Article 68 to the Hungarian Constitution. Article 68 acknowledges a set of relatively comprehensive (particularly when compared to Hungary's neighbors in 1989) rights for minorities living in Hungary:

1. The national and ethnic minorities living in the Republic of Hungary participate in the sovereign power of the people: they represent a constituent part of the State.
2. The Republic of Hungary shall provide for the protection of national and ethnic minorities and ensure their collective participation in public affairs, the fostering of their cultures, the use of their native languages, education in their native languages and the use of names in their native languages.
3. The laws of the Republic of Hungary shall ensure representation for the national and ethnic minorities living within the country.
4. National and ethnic minorities shall have the right to form local and national bodies for self-government.<sup>211</sup>

This was a marked change from the approach of the Hungarian communist government, which had implemented a policy of forceful assimilation for most of its rule.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, Article 70/A provides for equal human and civil rights and their implementation, as well as outlawing discrimination:

1. The Republic of Hungary shall respect the human rights and civil rights of all persons in the country without discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origins, financial situation, birth or on any other grounds whatsoever.
2. The law shall provide for strict punishment of discrimination on the basis of Paragraph 1.
3. The Republic of Hungary shall endeavor to implement equal rights for everyone through measures that create fair opportunities for all.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Hungarian Parliament, "Act XX of 1949: The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary," *The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Hungary*, <<http://www.mkab.hu/en/enpage5.htm>> (10 May 2008).

<sup>212</sup> Barany, 121-122.

<sup>213</sup> Hungarian Parliament, "Act XX of 1949."

The legislative implementation of the principles contained in Articles 68 and 70/A of the constitution came in the form of Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities. Act LXXVII has been widely praised because it guarantees a variety of rights to the thirteen recognized “historical” minorities in Hungary,<sup>214</sup> such as the right to use minority languages, the right to political representation, the right of contact with kin states, the right to organize their own educational activities, and the right to organize both local and national self-government structures.<sup>215</sup> The Council of Europe has even recommended Act LXXVII as a model to be implemented in all of Europe.<sup>216</sup> Unlike many Europe-wide conventions, such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,<sup>217</sup> Article 3(2) of Act LXXVII recognizes these rights as collective rights belonging to ethnic groups, not just as rights belonging to individuals of ethnic groups.

Compared with the relatively detailed description of the structure and competencies of the local minority self-governments,<sup>218</sup> Act LXXVII’s provisions for the national minority self-governments are conspicuously vague.<sup>219</sup> Regarding a national minority self-government, Paragraph 4(36)1 says, “With a view to the establishment of the cultural autonomy of the minority it may establish institutions and co-ordinate their activities.” Article 4(37) grants a national self-government the authority to decide on such matters as its budget, the nation-wide feasts of the minority it represents, “the principles and means governing the utilisation of the radio and television channels at its disposal,” “the establishment of its institutions, their organisational structure and mode of operation, as well as their maintenance,” and “the

<sup>214</sup> Cf. the following: NDI and OSCE/ODIHR, 24; Ulrich Schneckener and Dieter Senghaas, “In Quest of Peaceful Coexistence: Strategies in Regulating Ethnic Conflicts,” in *Radical Ethnic Movements in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Farimah Daftary and Stefan Troebst (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 176-177; Barany, 326; and Vermeersch, 67.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Hungarian Parliament, “Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities,” *Hungarian Helsinki Committee*, <<http://www.helsinki.hu/docs/Act%20LXXVII%20of%201993.pdf>> (20 November 2007).

<sup>216</sup> Barany, 269.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Council of Europe, “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,” *Council of Europe Treaty Office*, <<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=157&CL=ENG>> (16 November 2007).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Hungarian Parliament, “Act LXXVII,” Articles 4(21-30).

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Articles 4(31-39), especially Articles 4(35-39).



performance of other duties which legally fall within its authority.” Article 4(38) establishes the limits of a national self-government’s authority: a national self-government may “state its opinion on bills concerning the minority represented by it,” “seek information,” “co-operate with public bodies,” and “agree” to legislation concerning minority education and the preservation of the minority’s monuments.

On October 17, 2005, the Hungarian Parliament passed Bill No. T/9126, the first successful attempt at reforming Act LXXVII of 1993.<sup>220</sup> The most important reforms concerned the electoral process; the reforms were an effort to ensure that local minority representatives were actually members of the minority they supposedly represented. Prior to the reforms, any Hungarian citizen could vote for minority representatives, which led to some spectacular abuses of the minority self-government system.<sup>221</sup> The reforms clarified and strengthened the relationship between the local minority self-government and the local municipality government.<sup>222</sup> This clarification was critically important because local government authorities, as Barany mentions, “play a crucial role because for ordinary Roma they personify the state on a daily basis as council members, aid administrators, policemen, and social workers.”<sup>223</sup> In spite of the importance of these various reforms, almost all of the reforms pertain to local minority self-governments; the provisions regarding the national minority self-government remained largely unchanged and unclear.

<sup>220</sup> For a description of the failed attempts between 1993 and 2004, see Ferenc Eiler, “Efforts Made Between 1998-2004 To Reform the Minority Self-Government Electoral System,” *Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities*, <[www.mtaki.hu/docs/eiler\\_ferenc\\_reforming\\_the\\_minority\\_self\\_gov\\_system\\_1998\\_2004\\_eokik\\_2004.pdf](http://www.mtaki.hu/docs/eiler_ferenc_reforming_the_minority_self_gov_system_1998_2004_eokik_2004.pdf)> (20 November 2007).

<sup>221</sup> Cf. the Jászladány case, described in Andrew Burton, “Minority Self-Governance: Minority Representation in Flux for the Hungarian Roma,” *Ethnopolitics* 6, No. 1 (March 2007), 74; and cf. BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary: Roma Leaders Call for Help to Stop Abuse of Minority Election Law” (22 October 2002), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (21 October 2002).

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Hungarian Parliament, “Revised Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities,” *Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour*, <<http://www.szmm.gov.hu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=14123>> (20 November 2007), Articles 4(21-30).

<sup>223</sup> Barany, 296.

#### 6.4. The First NRSZ Election and the Development of the NRSZ, 1995-2003: Attempts at Empire Building Under Lungo Drom

Perhaps the most surprising element of the Roma political scene in the post-transition period was its uncanny similarity to the pre-transition Roma political scene. The state functionaries who continued to direct the state's minority policies after the transition were the same people who had been responsible for minority politics before the transition. The key figure during these years was János Báthory, who maintained amicable contacts with the Roma elites who had been members of the loyalist Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies. Báthory feared that a radical national Roma movement, fueled by the resentment and anger caused by the rapidly deteriorating living conditions of most Hungarian Roma, could destabilize the country, so he advocated a cooperative relationship between the Hungarian state and loyalist Roma leaders in order to marginalize the influence and message of radical Roma leaders.<sup>224</sup> Even though a center-left government led by the Hungarian Socialist Party replaced the post-transition Hungarian center-right government in 1994, the Hungarian state's approach to Roma politics remained the same – i.e. co-opt the loyalists and marginalize the radicals.

The most obvious example of this state support of the loyalists was before and during the election of the first NRSZ. The National Election Office, once again under the authority of the Socialists, stipulated that the first NRSZ election would not take place in Budapest, but rather in Szolnok, the stronghold and headquarters of loyalist Flórián Farkas's Lungo Drom coalition.<sup>225</sup> The decision to hold the elections in Szolnok sent a powerful message about which faction the government favored. Additionally, the electoral system used in this election was a modified first-past-the-post (FPP) system, rather than a proportional representation (PR) system. Consequently, the Lungo Drom coalition won all fifty-three NRSZ mandates,<sup>226</sup> effectively shoving the radicals out of the Hungarian political arena. The overwhelming dominance of the

<sup>224</sup> Wizner, 75.

<sup>225</sup> Vermeersch, 73.

<sup>226</sup> Kovats, 251.

NRSG by one political faction created “the danger that the [NRSG] might be used as a tool for the promotion of one faction in Roma politics rather than acting as the representative body of the Roma population as a whole.”<sup>227</sup> In spite of this obvious danger, the Hungarian government subsequently christened the NRSG as the “legitimate” representative organization of the Hungarian Roma, while deeming other Roma organizations, advocates, and pressure groups “non-representative.”<sup>228</sup>

After coming to dominate the NRSG through the patronage of the Hungarian government, Flórián Farkas and Lungo Drom faced the problem of creating an institutional system out of the nebulous, opaque legislative framework established by Act LXXVII. Rather predictably, Farkas consistently demanded that Act LXXVII, which was in his words “not the most successfully constructed piece of legislation ever,”<sup>229</sup> be revised, but the anomalies and lack of clarity in Act LXXVII, particularly those pertaining to the NRSG, remain unresolved. In the absence of legislative clarity, the NRSG under Farkas had to establish its own institutional structure from nothing. Using resources out of its own budget, the NRSG established twenty-three regional offices across Hungary to maintain and improve its relationship with local Roma self-governments.<sup>230</sup> Although Act LXXVII gives the NRSG the right to establish its “own” kindergarten(s), school(s), theater, museum, and library,<sup>231</sup> Act LXXVII does not stipulate the provision of funds for the establishment and maintenance of these institutions; the minorities must finance all of these institutions with their own resources. As the NRSG spent the majority of its state-provided income on administering the NRSG itself and the remainder on supporting specific organizations and projects, the NRSG was *de facto* excluded from exercising its right to establish cultural autonomy under Act LXXVII.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Vermeersch, 129.

<sup>229</sup> Flórián Farkas, quoted in Kovats, 252.

<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, by 1998, less than half of local Roma self-governments approved of the work of the NRSG, and forty-five percent claimed to have “no” or “a bad” relationship with the NRSG. Kovats, 252.

<sup>231</sup> Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 203.

Elections to the NRSG have been and remain contentious not because of the access to the limited resources of the NRSG itself, but rather because of the (perceived, if not always actual) influence of the NRSG over other sources of public funding. During Flórián Farkas's term in office, the NRSG strove tirelessly to increase its control over ever-greater sums of public money. Using its representation on the Board of Trustees of the Public Foundation for Hungarian Gypsies (*Magyarországi Cigányokért Közalapítvány*) and the Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities (*Nemzeti és Etnikai Kisebbségekért Közalapítvány*), the NRSG lobbied for a greater role for itself in the nomination of trustees and resource allocation,<sup>232</sup> which would have also greatly strengthened the position of Lungo Drom against its rival Roma organizations.

Particularly spectacular was the 1998 declaration by the NRSG that “we must move towards creating welfare autonomy.”<sup>233</sup> With this announcement, Farkas's NRSG seemed to be colluding with the Hungarian government in permanently ethnicizing Hungary's welfare system. After the advent of the Roma minority self-government system, many local (i.e. municipal) self-governments attempted to transfer welfare tasks involving members of the Roma minority to these new Roma minority self-governments, thereby turning welfare into a purely ethnic issue.<sup>234</sup> In spite of the fact that Act LXXVII explicitly states that “powers and duties in the field of public utilities and those connected to the functions of an administrative authority *may not be transferred* [from a local government to a minority self-government],”<sup>235</sup> which include health and welfare services,<sup>236</sup> some Roma minority self-governments and the NRSG supported this transfer of power. Rather than improving the relationship between Roma and welfare administrators, however, “the creation of a ‘distinct’ [welfare] scheme for the Roma poor has sped up and

<sup>232</sup> Vermeersch, 75.

<sup>233</sup> Lungo Drom, quoted in Kovats, 254.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 207-210; and cf. Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 50.

<sup>235</sup> Hungarian Parliament, “Revised Act LXXVII of 1993,” Article 30/B(1); emphasis added.

<sup>236</sup> Jenő Kaltenbach, “From Paper to Practice in Hungary: The Protection and Involvement of Minorities in Governance,” in *Diversity in Action*, ed. Anna-Maria Biro and Petra Kovács (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2001), 183.

pushed forward the processes of segregation,”<sup>237</sup> seriously endangering the rights and status of members of the Roma minority as equal Hungarian citizens. In addition, the transfer of welfare tasks to the Roma minority self-governments leads to a number of problems similar to those that Guy Standing enumerates as consequences of allowing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take over social service functions: perpetuation of clientelism and dependence on the NGO; empowerment of private, unaccountable bureaucracies; disenfranchisement of the most vulnerable; and increased potential for corruption and financial “leakage.”<sup>238</sup> Indeed, Kovats concludes that

the [NRSG’s] attempts to reorganize government structures in a way which would increase its influence over Roma affairs and the money allocated for Roma programmes had little to do with the perception of being excluded from the policy-making process. Instead, it had its origins in the desire by the [NRSG] leadership to enhance its political status in the eyes of the Roma population through extending its ability to offer patronage to potential supporters.<sup>239</sup>

Under Farkas, the NRSG also sought to establish similar control over the education of Roma students. Act LXXVII grants minority communities

the right to initiate and take part in the creation of the necessary conditions for minority kindergarten-, primary-, secondary- and higher education, and initiate and take part in the creation of the necessary conditions of complementary minority education through their national minority self-governments.<sup>240</sup>

Jointly with Lungu Drom, the NRSG established the Roma Chance Foundation (*Roma Esély Alapítvány*) and school in Szolnok, but after public support for this initiative floundered, the NRSG (unsuccessfully) demanded that the much more prestigious (and publicly well-funded) Gandhi Foundation and Grammar School in Pécs be brought under its control.<sup>241</sup> In 2001, Farkas went much further and expressed his support and “enthusiasm” for the establishment of a system of separate schools for Roma children.<sup>242</sup> His support drew much surprise and criticism from both Roma and non-Roma commentators, as separate educational facilities for Roma have

<sup>237</sup> Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 209.

<sup>238</sup> Standing, 1369-1370.

<sup>239</sup> Kovats, 255-256.

<sup>240</sup> Hungarian Parliament, “Revised Act LXXVII of 1993,” Article 18(3).

<sup>241</sup> Kovats, 253.

<sup>242</sup> Greg Walters, “Separate, but Equal Education for Roma,” *The Budapest Sun*, March 1-7, 2001, 3.

historically served to segregate Roma students in inferior educational facilities, not to promote a national Roma culture.<sup>243</sup>

During its eight-year reign, the Farkas-Lungo Drom-NRSG alliance announced a number of relatively high-profile projects, most of which foundered shortly after they were proposed. In October 2000, Lungo Drom distributed questionnaires in 1,500 towns and villages to gauge the extent of support for an “anti-poverty” party (Farkas did not want the name of the party to include “Gypsy” or “Roma,” as he wanted to indicate that “eliminating poverty is not an exclusively Gypsy affair”<sup>244</sup>). Despite the initial support indicated by the questionnaires, the party failed to field any candidates in the 2002 national election and subsequently vanished from the Hungarian political scene.<sup>245</sup> In a March 2002 meeting with Wilfried Martens, who was then the president of the European People’s Party (EPP), Farkas suggested establishing a “European Gypsy House” – an idea greeted by enthusiasm by Martens, who asked Farkas to draft a detailed concept for such a House.<sup>246</sup> Farkas never drafted a concept for the House, and the proposal was never mentioned again. In February 2002, Farkas and Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary’s center-right Fidesz-led government, agreed on a comprehensive package of grants for Roma students and job creation programs for adult Roma,<sup>247</sup> but nothing came of this agreement, as the center-left coalition (of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats) defeated Fidesz in the April 2002 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, Farkas did often draw attention to the fact that Fidesz continually offered more support (and more seats on the party

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Cahn et al.

<sup>244</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Hungarian Gypsies to Establish Party” (26 October 2000).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. *Országos Választási Iroda* [National Election Office], <<http://www.valasztas.hu/>> (12 May 2008).

<sup>246</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “European People’s Party Welcomes Fidesz-Lungo Drom Agreement” (6 March 2002).

<sup>247</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary: Premier, Romany Leader Agree on Gypsy Student Grants, Job Creation” (28 February 2002), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (28 February 2002).

list) to Roma parliamentary candidates than the Socialists,<sup>248</sup> a trend that continued in both the 2002 and 2006 elections.<sup>249</sup>

Farkas also seemed to be oblivious to some of the more central policies of the Hungarian government towards Roma. In 1997, the Hungarian government passed what became known as the “medium-term program” for Roma, which underwent a number of revisions under different Hungarian governments, but which always remained one of the Hungarian government’s most important policy statements about the improvement of the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of Hungarian Roma.<sup>250</sup> At a press conference in October 2002, Farkas announced that he was awaiting a reply from the government as to whether “there was a clear blueprint for improving the Gypsies’ lives, and if so, why it was not generally known.”<sup>251</sup> László Teleki, who was then the political state secretary at the Prime Minister’s Office in charge of Roma affairs, countered by saying,

I regret the fact that [Flórián Farkas] does not recognize the medium- and long-term action plan, on which members of the National and Ethnic Minorities’ Office have held consultations in every region. I also regret the fact that the chairman of Lungo Drom has not expressed an opinion on any of the state secretariat’s submissions, although I have sent the proposals to [him] in every case.<sup>252</sup>

The NRSG under Farkas and Lungo Drom focused its energies almost exclusively on itself, its own structure and functioning, and its own projects, making few efforts to reconcile the loyalist and radical factions of the Roma elite or to cooperate with most other Roma civil society groups. Demonstrating his lack of sympathy for the radicals, Farkas remarked in 1995 that “in

<sup>248</sup> Cf. BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary: Socialists Have No Romany Policy, Need New Face – Gypsy MPs” (26 April 2002), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (26 April 2002).

<sup>249</sup> In 2002, three Roma were elected on the Fidesz-MDF list (Flórián Farkas, József Varga, and Mihály Lukacs), while only one (László Teleki) was elected on the Socialist Party list. In the 2006 election, Teleki lost his seat, meaning that the Socialists did not elect a single Roma candidate, while Fidesz again elected three Roma candidates (Farkas and Varga were reelected, while István Racz took Lukacs’s place). Cf. Vermeersch, 113; and cf. Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Three Roma Politicians Win Mandates in New Parliament” (26 April 2006).

<sup>250</sup> For a description of the evolution of the medium-term program, cf. Vermeersch, 77-79; and cf. Ernő Kállai, “Legislation and Government Programs Relating to the Roma Population in Hungary Since the Political Changes of 1989-90,” in *Roma of Hungary*, ed. István Kemény (Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc., 2005), 311-314.

<sup>251</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Romany Leader Accuses Press of Ignoring Minority Election Results” (28 October 2002), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (28 October 2002).

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

the past, there have been some who have sought to make things impossible; if that happens, we will not bother with cooperation.”<sup>253</sup> In April 1996, forty Roma and non-Roma leaders (including seven members of the NRSG) sent an open letter to Prime Minister Gyula Horn, complaining that the NRSG “maintains no links whatsoever with the overwhelming majority of Roma civil organizations or local self-governments.”<sup>254</sup> The Office for National and Ethnic Minorities subsequently hosted some meetings between the NRSG and other Roma organizations in an attempt to rebuild friendly relations between the different Roma political factions, but little progress was made, as Farkas preferred to use the NRSG to exclude those Roma activists he saw as rivals.

#### 6.5. The Development of the NRSG, 2003-Present: More of the Same, Or a Different Track?

##### The Democratic Roma Coalition/The Forum of Hungarian Gypsy Organizations

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the events that led to the dispossession of an organization as entrenched in a position of privilege as Lungo Drom was in the NRSG were rather dramatic. The first sign of trouble for the Lungo Drom coalition was the election of the center-left Socialist-Free Democrat coalition to the Hungarian Parliament in April 2002. The Socialists wasted no time in declaring their support for the leftist Democratic Roma Coalition/Hungarian Gypsy Forum and pledging their assistance to the leftist Roma coalition in the upcoming minority self-government elections.<sup>255</sup> The presence of support from the Hungarian government combined with mounting dissatisfaction with the manner in which Lungo Drom ran the NRSG led to the first serious political contest in Roma politics since the enactment of Act LXXVII.

As prescribed by the rules for the election of the NRSG, those electors entitled to vote for the NRSG (almost four thousand people) gathered in one place on January 11, 2003, and none of them were supposed to leave until the election had concluded.<sup>256</sup> After several hours of

<sup>253</sup> Flórián Farkas, quoted in Kovats, 259.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Socialists Back Left-Wing Romanies in Local Elections” (28 July 2002), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (27 July 2002).

<sup>256</sup> Kállai, 328.



arguing and speechmaking, the ruling Lungo Drom coalition realized that a complete victory, such as those to which they had become accustomed, was impossible – so they left the election hall and boycotted the vote. Consequently, only candidates from the Democratic Roma Coalition ended up on the ballot, giving the DRC an overwhelming majority of NRSG mandates (i.e. fifty-two of the fifty-three available mandates).<sup>257</sup> Aladár Horváth, one of the newly elected NRSG members, hailed the vote as a victory for democracy and promised a democratic system based on communication and compromise, as opposed to the leadership style of Lungo Drom, which was, in his words, “based on a one-party system and personal power.”<sup>258</sup> Farkas’s Lungo Drom coalition rejected the results of the vote and lodged an official complaint with the Hungarian Supreme Court. Jenő Kaltenbach, who was then the Minority Ombudsman, conceded that the vote had been controversial but sided with the National Election Committee in declaring the election free of fraud.<sup>259</sup> In spite of both Kaltenbach’s testimony and the fact that this election had been conducted according to the same rules as the previous two NRSG elections, the Supreme Court sided with Farkas, nullified the vote, and ordered that a repeat election be held.<sup>260</sup>

In the repeat election held on March 1, 2003, the DRC repeated its earlier victory with surprising ease, garnering all but two of the NRSG mandates (Farkas was elected in 52<sup>nd</sup> place).<sup>261</sup> Aladár Horváth received the most votes and was elected NRSG president. Farkas did not contest the results of this election and conceded defeat,<sup>262</sup> but he did not abandon his hopes of controlling the Roma minority self-government system: on March 27, 2003, he established the

<sup>257</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Romas’ National Body Controlled by Leftists After Vote Boycott” (12 January 2003), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (12 January 2003).

<sup>258</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Central Europe/Former Yugoslav Media Roundup on Romas: 18 Dec. 02 - 14 Jan. 03” (14 January 2003), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (12 January 2003).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. Kaltenbach did not blame the Roma politicians for the confusion, however; he laid the blame squarely at the feet of the legislators who originally drafted Act LXXVII: “Under the current election rules, it is impossible to elect the national minority self-governments more fairly. The scandal that erupted at the National Gypsy Electoral Assembly was not the mistake of those present but of the electoral system. The fact that the election ended up in chaos is a shame on the legislators and those drafting the minority election law.” BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Ombudsman Blames Law for ‘Chaos’ at Gypsy Minority Body Election” (13 January 2003), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (13 January 2003).

<sup>260</sup> Kállai, 329.

<sup>261</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Left-Wing DRC Wins National Gypsy Self-Government Election” (2 March 2003).

<sup>262</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary: Defeated Romany Leader Accepts Repeated Minority Election Results” (2 March 2003), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (2 March 2003).

National Federation of Roma Local Governments in Szolnok (the headquarters of Lungo Drom) as a rival umbrella organization to the NRSG.<sup>263</sup> Lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the Hungarian government and the financial support that such legitimacy confers, the new umbrella organization swiftly folded.

Horváth, newly installed as the first leftist president of the NRSG, declared that “a new era has started in Romany politics ... with a new, modern approach, responsible attitude and new style.”<sup>264</sup> One of his “new era” proposals was to implement a proportional representation (PR) electoral system for minority self-governments in Hungary in order to reflect the pluralism of Roma politics in Hungary.<sup>265</sup> The implementation of such a PR system would have put an end to the kind of spectacular super-majority electoral victories enjoyed first by Lungo Drom and then the DRC; as a result, some of Horváth DRC allies were skeptical of this proposal, seeing as they were currently the beneficiaries of this electoral system.

Much more problematic in the eyes of Horváth’s allies were his frank assessment of the NRSG’s dismal financial situation and his radical suggestions for resolving the problems. According to Horváth, the NRSG had wasted many millions of forints building houses on marshland that were not fit for human habitation, and the NRSG leadership had funneled large sums of money into their own pockets, into the pockets of their friends and family members, and into the coffers of the city branches of Lungo Drom.<sup>266</sup> He admitted that the NRSG could never repay the debt it now owed and asked for the Hungarian government’s assistance in repaying the debt and in restructuring (or even liquidating) the NRSG.<sup>267</sup> Horváth’s political philosophy was that separate institutions for Roma only institutionalized segregation; the

<sup>263</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “National Federation of Roma Local Governments Founded” (27 March 2003).

<sup>264</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Roma Self-Government Leader Announces New Approach” (31 March 2003), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (31 March 2003).

<sup>265</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Gypsy Self-Government: Horváth Backs Proportional Representation” (13 January 2003).

<sup>266</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Gypsy Body Insolvent Due to Corruption, Incompetence” (20 May 2003), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (20 May 2003).

<sup>267</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary’s Gypsy Self-Government Wants Government to Pay Off Accumulated Debt” (20 May 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (20 May 2003).

solutions to the problems of the Roma lie in better integrating them into mainstream society and mainstream institutions, not establishing special, separate institutions for Roma.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, the crux of this restructuring would be the systematic elimination of differentiated institutions for Roma in Hungarian society. The NRSG would no longer have influence over separate development funding, and it would no longer make claims to ever-greater influence over public spending for Roma; rather, it would be an institution of interest representation and cultural autonomy.

On June 25, 2003, Orbán Kolompár, Horváth's deputy chairman, presided over an emergency plenary session of the NRSG that dismissed Horváth and elected Kolompár as his replacement.<sup>269</sup> Kolompár claimed that Horváth had been sacked because the NRSG had expected him to be a uniting, integrating personality, but he was actually dividing Hungarian Roma by treating the various Roma groups in Hungary (Olah/Vlach, Beash, and Romungro) differently.<sup>270</sup> Kolompár also made the dubious accusation that Horváth was paying exorbitant salaries to a private thirteen-member presidential cabinet.<sup>271</sup> Horváth summarized his removal from office by the "Gypsy nationalists," as he called Kolompár's group, in these terms:

The bone of contention is this: they would like a separate Gypsy institutional system, the state would give the money and they would spend it, build their own organizational clientele and continue where the previous ones stopped, while the Romanies continue to slide down to the world of ghettos. I formulated my political strategy against this, which was about one country and one nation – and not two – and a need to return to normal social life. This is contrary to the existential and political interests of Kolompár and his supporters. The other reason for this coup is that I did not want the self-government to continue where the previous one stopped, with handing out and stealing money. Publishing the facts about the previous self-government's finances violates the interests of a large number of people, as does the fact that I do not want public funds to make their way to private pockets.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>268</sup> World News Connection, "Hungarian Daily Criticizes Power Coup in Roma National Self-Government" (26 June 2003), source from *Magyar Hírlap* (26 June 2006).

<sup>269</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Hungarian Gypsy Self-Government Leader Ousted" (25 June 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (25 June 2003).

<sup>270</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "New Hungarian Roma Leader Slams Predecessor for 'Dividing' Gypsies" (26 June 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (26 June 2003).

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Hungary's Roma Leaders Explain Political Aspects of Leadership Dispute" (26 June 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (26 June 2003).

The Hungarian government avoided commenting at length on the struggle between Horváth and Kolompár, as it was seen as an internal NRSG struggle, but a number of Horváth's fellow "radical" Roma activists vocally supported him. For example, Ágnes Daróczi, an internationally known Roma activist and scholar, roundly condemned Kolompár's actions as shortsighted, petty, selfish, and corrupt, accusing him of supporting the institutionalization of Roma ghettoization so that he could have his own little "empire of dwarves" over which to rule.<sup>273</sup> In October 2002, Kolompár had criticized Farkas for building a personality cult out of the NRSG and advocated a restructuring of the NRSG to ensure the participation of all fifty-three elected members,<sup>274</sup> but as soon as he took control of the NRSG in June 2003, he began to consolidate his power over it.

Kolompár's NRSG succeeded in one major area where Farkas's NRSG had failed; Kolompár was able to bring the other national minority self-governments together to settle on a draft of the long-needed revision of Act LXXVII, which the Hungarian Parliament adopted in 2005 as described in Section 6.3. Although the revision did not do a great deal to "create the basis for the genuine equal opportunities and social integration of the Gypsies," which was Kolompár's stated goal for the reform,<sup>275</sup> and although it failed to address most of the problems concerning the NRSG, the revision was a positive first step, eliminating some of the loopholes that had led to the most egregious abuses at the level of the local minority self-governments. The most important reform was the establishment of a minority register separate from the day of electing the minority self-governments in an attempt to prevent non-members of the minority from voting for minority representatives.<sup>276</sup> The drawback of this reform has been that fewer Roma have participated in the minority self-government elections, perhaps because they are wary of registering themselves as Roma in a government database, as similar records collected under

<sup>273</sup> Ágnes Daróczi, "Empire of Dwarves," *Magyar Hírlap* (26 June 2003), English translation from World News Connection, "Hungarian Daily Criticizes Power Coup in Roma National Self-Government" (26 June 2003), source from *Magyar Hírlap* (26 June 2003).

<sup>274</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Hungary Romany Union Outlines National Integration Programme" (8 October 2002), source from Hungarian Radio, Budapest (8 October 2002).

<sup>275</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Eight Nationalities Want Draft Text for Minority Law Amendment" (15 October 2003).

<sup>276</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Roma Body Accepts Roma Register for Self-Government Elections in Hungary" (29 November 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (29 November 2003).

the Austrian-Hungarian Empire were used by the Nazis to expedite the identification and murder of Hungarian Roma during World War II.<sup>277</sup> Horváth's comment on the reform was that "the minority self-government system is unsuitable for reform; it only institutionalizes exclusion."<sup>278</sup>

Under Kolompár, the NRSG underwent further institutional expansion. In 2004, the NRSG greatly expanded the number of people working both in its Budapest office and in its provincial institutions. Seventy-nine Roma young adults graduated from a six-month training course in state administration, human rights, and communication, and they were subsequently deployed to these various offices by the NRSG.<sup>279</sup> Kolompár's NRSG has been successful in securing employment for at least some Roma outside of the NRSG as well. In September 2007, the NRSG signed an employment promotion agreement with three of the biggest Hungarian road construction and maintenance companies that pledges the companies to increase the percentage of Roma employees working for the companies.<sup>280</sup>

Once again in contrast to the NRSG under Farkas, the NRSG under Kolompár was able to begin taking advantage of the cultural rights granted to it by Act LXXVII. In an effort to raise public awareness about contemporary Roma art, the NRSG established an art gallery in its headquarters in Budapest in April 2005, and it regularly gives both established and unknown Roma artists the opportunity to display their works there.<sup>281</sup> Shortly after the establishment of the art gallery, the NRSG also established a non-lending library on its premises. The NRSG recently announced plans to create a center of information and culture in its headquarters,

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Crowe, 83-91.

<sup>278</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Hungarian Roma Leader Questions Minority Election Law Clause" (16 June 2005), source from Duna TV satellite TV, Budapest (15 June 2005).

<sup>279</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Group of Young Hungarian Roma to Start Work in Gipsy Self-Government" (20 July 2004), source from Duna TV satellite TV, Budapest (20 July 2004).

<sup>280</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Roma Advocates Sign Employment Agreement with Road Builders" (6 September 2007).

<sup>281</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Roma Council Headquarters Opens Art Gallery" (13 April 2005).

centered on a television studio to document the activities of the NRSG and an Internet information clearing house connected with all of the local Roma minority self-governments.<sup>282</sup>

The NRSG under Kolompár has made several efforts to raise public awareness about a number of different issues concerning the Roma. For example, the extermination of Roma during the Holocaust remained largely unmentioned under communism, and the NRSG under Farkas exerted little effort to make the Holocaust a topic of public discussion. Phralipe, together with Horváth, began to commemorate the Holocaust shortly after the fall of communism, but these events did not gain “official” status until Kolompár’s NRSG began to participate in them as well. Under Kolompár, the NRSG has hosted and participated in a number of annual events both in Hungary and abroad to commemorate the Roma victims of fascism and to raise awareness about fascism’s attempts to exterminate the Roma.<sup>283</sup> The NRSG also supported the Hungarian Roma’s claims for reparations for the crimes committed against them during World War II,<sup>284</sup> but it refused to get involved in a disagreement over the number of Hungarian Roma Holocaust victims.<sup>285</sup> The NRSG was a leading opponent of the segregation policy of the village school in Jászládány, which attempted to segregate the Roma children into inferior educational facilities and separate them from the non-Roma children by partially privatizing the village’s public school.<sup>286</sup> In December 2004, the NRSG convinced the Hungarian Parliament to hold a “Roma Day,” an entire parliamentary session devoted exclusively to discussing issues facing

<sup>282</sup> “Hungarian Roma Government Plans TV Studio,” *Caboodle.hu*, 7 December 2007, <[http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news\\_archive/single\\_page/article/11/hungarian\\_ro/](http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/article/11/hungarian_ro/)> (14 May 2008).

<sup>283</sup> Cf. the following: Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Holocaust Victims Remembers in Commemoration Ceremony” (30 July 2003); Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Officials Speak at International Romany Holocaust Remembrance” (2 August 2003); BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Roma Victims of Holocaust Remembered in Budapest” (31 July 2004) source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (31 July 2004); Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Citizens Remember Holocaust Victims on Anniversary of Nazi Takeover” (14 October 2007); and Xinhua General News Service, “Hungary Remembers Holocaust Victims” (14 October 2007).

<sup>284</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Gypsy Authority Demands that WWII Restitution Be Continued” (28 January 2005).

<sup>285</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Roma ‘Oversubscribes’ Holocaust Compensation Claim” (14 November 2003), source from Duna TV satellite TV, Budapest (14 November 2003).

<sup>286</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Romanies Appeal to Premier over ‘Segregation’ Policy in Village” (27 August 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (27 August 2003).

Roma in Hungary.<sup>287</sup> The NRSG was the central organization behind a series of protests against the high-profile stabbing of a fifteen-year-old Roma boy in a parked bus at a Budapest public square on May 8, 2005.<sup>288</sup> Kolompár has even tried to raise the profile of Roma in the Hungarian and international Catholic Church, leading a pilgrimage of 180 Roma to Rome in 2003 and presenting Pope John Paul II with a intricately carved crucifix and a parchment with blessings in Romanes.<sup>289</sup>

Under Kolompár, the NRSG also began to reach out and show solidarity with Roma communities in other countries, which was another marked departure from Farkas's unwavering focus on only the situation and politics of Hungarian Roma. When hunger riots broke out in some Slovakian Roma communities shortly before Slovakia's accession to the EU on May 1, 2004,<sup>290</sup> the NRSG organized a demonstration at the Slovak embassy in Budapest to protest "not against the incident itself, but against the situation which has developed in Slovakia."<sup>291</sup> Rather than getting bogged down in the back-and-forth blaming among the Slovak Roma (who blamed the Slovak government), the EU (which said that privatization, price liberalizations, reductions in social security, etc. were necessary structural adjustments<sup>292</sup>), and the Slovak government (which blamed EU pressure for the reforms of the welfare system<sup>293</sup>), the NRSG encouraged all participants to examine the structural problems that had led to this "rebellion of the poor" in

<sup>287</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Parliament Holds Roma Day" (14 December 2004).

<sup>288</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Anti-Racism Demonstrators Protest Stabbing of Roma Boy" (15 May 2005). The news eventually emerged that he had been stabbed by a seventeen-year-old Roma boy.

<sup>289</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Hungarian Roma Pilgrims Appear at Papal Audience – Extended" (19 November 2003).

<sup>290</sup> Spolu International Foundation, "Case Study Slovakia: Labour, Equality and Bread," *Spolu International Foundation*, <[http://spolu.nl/m3c5\\_casestudy\\_sk.html](http://spolu.nl/m3c5_casestudy_sk.html)> (23 November 2007); and BBC News, "Slovak President Alarmed at Riots," *BBC News*, 24 February 2004, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3518347.stm>> (23 November 2007).

<sup>291</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Hungary's Romanies to Hold Rally to Show Solidarity with Slovak Romanies" (29 February 2004), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (29 February 2004).

<sup>292</sup> Cf. European Commission, "Opinion on Slovakia's Application for Membership of the European Union," *European Commission*, July 1997, <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/dwn/opinions/slovakia/sk-op\\_da.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/dwn/opinions/slovakia/sk-op_da.pdf)> (16 November 2007), 26 and 41-42; and cf. European Commission, "Progress Report," *European Commission*, November 1998, <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/1998/slovakia\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/1998/slovakia_en.pdf)> (16 November 2007), 18.

<sup>293</sup> RomNews, "Unrest by Hungry Slovak Roma May Spread," *RomNews Network Community*, <<http://romnews.com/community/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=1343>> (23 November 2007).

Slovakia, requested the legal rehabilitation of those Roma who had participated in the riots, and stressed the need for “joint forces and ... a long-term perspective” to solve these underlying problems and integrate the Roma into Slovak society.<sup>294</sup>

The NRSG under Kolompár has also had its share of failures and nonstarters in terms of legislation and programming. The NRSG has attempted (with little success) to leverage the position of the Roma members of the Hungarian Parliament in order to force the Hungarian government to give members of the Roma community guarantees in several areas:

starting up job-creation programmes, tearing down segregated slums and providing decent housing, integrating all schools, offering more scholarships to Roma children, making health care equally accessible throughout the country, establishing cultural institutions including Roma radio and television programming, and passing stronger antidiscrimination laws.<sup>295</sup>

At the end of 2005, Kolompár announced the NRSG’s intention to establish a “Central and Eastern European Roma Information and Coordination Centre” in Budapest the following year, but no such institution ever materialized.<sup>296</sup> In the same announcement, he declared his vision to unite the Roma of Europe under a single cultural and political banner, a lofty goal that remains elusive.

Similarly, the NRSG in 2003 outlined an unrealistically ambitious building, relocation, and integration program that aimed to liquidate all segregated Roma settlements in Hungary by 2006. This would be accomplished by mandating that local governments provide “free-of-charge building plots complete with infrastructure,” and the work itself “should be carried out mainly by Romany small and medium-size entrepreneurs.”<sup>297</sup> Additionally, Kolompár declared,

The [NRSG] also considers it important from the point of view of integration, that the houses should not be built on the place of the earlier Gypsy colonies on

<sup>294</sup> Czech News Agency, “Hungarian Romanies Demonstrate Outside Slovak Embassy in Budapest” (1 March 2004).

<sup>295</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “National Gypsy Authority Lobbies Parliament for Guarantees” (31 January 2006).

<sup>296</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Council to Put Anti-Poverty, Anti-Segregation Aims In” (23 December 2005).

<sup>297</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungary’s Romani Body Outlines Ambitious Building Programme” (12 September 2003), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (12 September 2003).



the edge of towns [author's comment: where there might actually be unoccupied land to build on], but spread around inside the towns and villages.<sup>298</sup>

In spite of the NRSNG's insistence that it would continue this project even if the Hungarian government refused to help,<sup>299</sup> the project proved financially, logistically, and politically impossible, and was abandoned shortly after it was proposed. If the NRSNG had attempted to implement the project, the lack of resources available to the NRSNG would have probably meant that new homes would have been used to reward those loyal to the NRSNG leadership, as was the case with the NRSNG's/Lungo Drom's 1997-1998 housing project.<sup>300</sup>

Kolompár has also had his share of political gaffes, though the Hungarian news outlets sometimes seemed determined to make his statements appear far more outlandish than they actually were. For example, during an April 2008 speech at a Budapest conference, Kolompár said that implementing special education programs that target Roma children and youth is pointless if the children's parents are too poor to provide the children with proper food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>301</sup> Most academics and development experts agree with this assessment, adding that governments often prefer to implement education programs while neglecting economic development in Roma communities because education programs are cheaper and less dangerous politically.<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, the Hungarian media was quick to publish sensationalistic headlines such as "Roma Leader Calls for Jobs rather than Schooling."<sup>303</sup> Hungarian President László Sólyom jumped on the sensationalist bandwagon, dismissing Kolompár's remarks and declaring that "the surest way to close the gap between the Roma minority and the rest of society is

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Gypsy Authority Determined to Eliminate Ghettos" (28 January 2005).

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Kovats, 253.

<sup>301</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Roma Leader Calls for Jobs rather than Schooling" (8 April 2008).

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2007). Few non-Roma complain about giving Roma children extra educational support, but if a government proposes an economic development or redistribution program (which is usually much more expensive), it often faces serious backlash from those who protest against giving anything more to "undeserving" Roma adults.

<sup>303</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Roma Leader Calls for Jobs rather than Schooling" (8 April 2008).

through education rather than assimilation.”<sup>304</sup> The Hungarian media continued its frenzy, contrasting its earlier headlines with new headlines blaring “Roma Minority Should Be Educated, Says President Sólyom.”<sup>305</sup>

In spite of the Hungarian media’s occasional sensationalism, it usually faithfully reports the NRSNG’s consistent criticism of government policy (or the lack thereof) towards the Roma in Hungary. In December 2003, Kolompár pointed out that the living standards of Roma in Hungary were far lower now than they were in 1990, and he placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Hungarian government, saying, “Since the change of regime there has been no genuine Roma policy.”<sup>306</sup> Seven months later, Kolompár tempered his criticism, announcing that the NRSNG agreed with many of the details of the Hungarian government’s (inexplicably now-existent) Roma integration action program, but that he considered the rate of progress too slow and the amount of financial support too small.<sup>307</sup> He soon sharpened his criticism again, warning in July 2005 that Roma were “disillusioned after a string of unfulfilled promises over the past fifteen years,”<sup>308</sup> and he began musing publicly about establishing a Roma party to run in the 2006 national elections.<sup>309</sup> In October 2005, Kolompár terminated the Forum of Hungarian Gypsy Organizations’ (*Magyarországi Cigányszervezetek Fóruma*, or MCF) partnership with the governing Socialist Party, accusing the Socialists of making false promises: “We have had enough of the promises by other parties before each election never to be fulfilled after the vote.”<sup>310</sup>

As a consequence of his break with the Socialists (and again in contrast to Farkas’s Lungo Drom in 2002), Kolompár’s MCF was able to field a list of candidates in the 2006

<sup>304</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Minority Should Be Educated, Says President Sólyom” (11 April 2008).

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Gypsy Self-Government Leader Says Roma Living Standard Reduced” (21 December 2003), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (21 December 2003).

<sup>307</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Roma Body Slams Hungarian Government’s Integration Action Programme” (5 July 2004), source from Duna TV satellite TV, Budapest (5 July 2004).

<sup>308</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Need to Speak Clearer About Needs, Says Minority Leader” (22 July 2005).

<sup>309</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Community Disappointed With Parties, Says Leader” (16 July 2005).

<sup>310</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Party to Set Up National List” (18 March 2006).

national election, which was a unique event in both Hungarian and Roma politics.<sup>311</sup> The need for this party, according to Kolompár, stemmed from the lack of tangible plans in the political programs of either of the major Hungarian political parties; both parties' platforms contained a few generalities about Roma development, but nothing substantive about Roma integration. Calling the Roma "a force to be reckoned with in politics,"<sup>312</sup> Kolompár claimed that MCF had 16,700 members and tens of thousands of sympathizers, and he displayed great confidence at the party's chances of success: "I think that an unstoppable avalanche has begun and I trust that our children, our grandchildren and the coming Roma generation will continue what we have now started. To put it in plain language, we have now laid down the basis of Roma politics."<sup>313</sup> To enter the Hungarian Parliament, Hungarian parties have to receive at least five percent of the votes cast. Ethnically based parties are not exempt from this rule (as they are in some countries, such as Poland). In 2006, MCF would have needed to garner approximately 270,000 votes to earn mandates in Parliament, which turned out to be an impossible feat.

In March 2007, Kolompár was almost ousted from his position as chairman of the NRSG. As opposed to the previous landslide NRSG elections, the NRSG election on March 3-4, 2007, resulted in a near-tie between the two main Roma factions: twenty-five mandates for Kolompár's left-leaning MCF and twenty-eight mandates for Farkas's right-leaning Lungo Drom coalition. Kolompár even officially conceded defeat, and most commentators expected Farkas to return to the top leadership position of the NRSG.<sup>314</sup> At the inaugural session of the new NRSG, Lungo Drom nominated Farkas for the position of chairman. Instead of nominating Kolompár for the post, MCF instead nominated Janós Kozák Sr., a member of the Lungo Drom faction, as

<sup>311</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Roma Party Has Its National List in Hungarian Election – A First" (22 March 2006), source from Hungarian television M2 satellite TV, Budapest (22 March 2006).

<sup>312</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), "Forum of Hungarian Gypsy Organizations Decides to Go It Alone" (22 October 2005).

<sup>313</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Central Europe/Former Yugo Media Roundup of Roma Related Issues 1-31 Mar. 2006" (31 March 2006), source from Hungarian TV2 satellite TV, Budapest (22 March 2006).

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Hungary Business Newswire, "Hungarian Press Review 06/03/2007 – Government & Economy" (6 March 2007), source from *Népszabadság* (6 March 2007).

their candidate for chairman.<sup>315</sup> Following a rather tumultuous uproar by the other Lungo Drom members, the meeting was officially adjourned and all but two members of the Lungo Drom coalition left the hall.<sup>316</sup> Kolompár called the meeting to order again, and the MCF coalition, joined by Kozák and his son, Janós Kozák Jr. (also a member of the Lungo Drom coalition), now formed a voting quorum (i.e. a majority of the NRSG, or twenty-seven members) and elected Kozák to the position of NRSG chairman by a vote of 27-0.<sup>317</sup> Thus, Kolompár was able to maintain control of the NRSG, and he was later reinstated as NRSG chairman. Unsurprisingly, Lungo Drom subsequently made accusations of vote buying against the MCF.<sup>318</sup>

Recently, the NRSG has been an outspoken opponent of the increase in neo-fascism sentiment and activism in Hungary. This increase coincided with the highly publicized alleged killing of a non-Roma geography teacher (who was also a local Hungarian Democratic Forum politician) by three Roma in Olaszliszka, Hungary. On October 15, 2006, the teacher ran over an eleven year-old girl with his car while driving through the “Roma district” of the village.<sup>319</sup> According to the Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “although the girl was only slightly injured, locals pulled him out of the car and beat him to death in front of his two daughters sitting in the car.”<sup>320</sup> The local mayor identified a newly elected member of the local Roma minority self-government as one of the attackers.<sup>321</sup> Though Kolompár repeatedly stressed throughout the ordeal that “what has happened in Olaszliszka is not a Roma affair but a criminal one,”<sup>322</sup> the Hungarian news outlets frequently and emphatically referred to the ethnicity of the alleged

<sup>315</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Paper Looks Into Conflicts Within Roma Self-Government” (28 March 2007), source from *Magyar Nemzet* (27 March 2007).

<sup>316</sup> “Hungarian Gypsy Authority Meeting Ends in Disarray,” *Caboodle.hu*, 14 March 2007, <[http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news\\_archive/single\\_page/article/11/hungarian\\_gy/](http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/article/11/hungarian_gy/)> (14 May 2008).

<sup>317</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Hungarian Paper Looks Into Conflicts Within Roma Self-Government” (28 March 2007), source from *Magyar Nemzet* (27 March 2007).

<sup>318</sup> Lucia Curejova, “Hungary: Self-Abusive Governance,” *Transitions Online*, 22 August 2007, <<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=232&NrSection=2&NrArticle=18943>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>319</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Update – Village Shocked After Local Teacher Beaten to Death” (16 October 2006).

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Romanies Lynch Hungarian Politician for Lightly Injuring Girl in Car Accident” (16 October 2006), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (16 October 2006).

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

attackers and gave considerable airtime to political figures from the Hungarian far-right. For example, MTI interviewed Tibor József Bíber, deputy chairman of the far-right Jobbik party, who said in response to the incident that “Hungarian laws should be changed to identify Gypsy crime,”<sup>323</sup> a statement that could be interpreted as advocating the collective punishment of a community because of the crimes of a few individuals. In response to threats from the far-right that made them fear for their physical safety, members of the Roma community in Olaszliszka barricaded themselves in their homes after the event.<sup>324</sup>

The combination of several impetuses – the killing in Olaszliszka, the concomitant rise in anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary, the riots on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 uprising against the Soviets, the concomitant rise in anti-government sentiment following the rather heavy-handed government approach to those riots, and the general dissatisfaction at both the discomfort caused by economic reforms and the Prime Minister’s misrepresentation of the state of the Hungarian economy before the 2006 elections – led Jobbik to establish a pseudo-paramilitary wing called the *Magyar Gárda* (the Hungarian Guard) on August 25, 2007, the goal of which is ostensibly to provide for the “physical, mental, and spiritual self-defense” of Hungary.<sup>325</sup> The uniforms of *Gárda* members are reminiscent of the Hungarian Nazi era, integrating a red-and-white striped flag linked to the Arrow Cross regime, which sent hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews and Roma to death camps.<sup>326</sup> Most analysts believe that the *Gárda*’s main target is not the resurgent Jewish population of Hungary, but rather its Roma minority. Anecdotes from *Gárda* members support this conclusion: “In Hungary, everyone who wants order is labeled a racist ... [the Gypsies] live with filth and dirt and if anybody wants to do away with this then

<sup>323</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Update – Village Shocked After Local Teacher Beaten to Death” (16 October 2006).

<sup>324</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, “Romanies Lynch Hungarian Politician for Lightly Injuring Girl in Car Accident” (16 October 2006), source from Kossuth Radio, Budapest (16 October 2006).

<sup>325</sup> “Alapító nyilatkozat és az Eskü szövege [Articles of Incorporation and Oath],” *Magyar Gárda*, 17 July 2007, <[http://magyargarda.hu/alapito\\_nyilatkozat](http://magyargarda.hu/alapito_nyilatkozat)> (14 May 2008). A full English translation of the Articles of Incorporation and Oath is provided in the Appendix.

<sup>326</sup> “Hundreds Join Hungary’s Far-Right ‘Guard,’” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 October 2007, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/they-are-dangerous/2007/10/22/1192940933468.html>> (14 May 2008).

they are labeled a racist.”<sup>327</sup> *Gárda* rallies that are supposedly “against crime” frequently degenerate into overtly anti-Roma demonstrations.<sup>328</sup>

The largest right-leaning party, Fidesz, was extraordinarily slow to criticize the *Gárda* (and initially outright refused to condemn the *Gárda*<sup>329</sup>), leading to accusations from the Socialist government, political think tanks, and some Jewish and Roma activists that the (in their view, neo-fascist) *Gárda* enjoys Fidesz’s tacit support.<sup>330</sup> International news outlets noted the potential political significance of the *Gárda*’s foundation ceremony:

The Hungarian Guard didn’t just fall from the sky. It was founded by the far-right Jobbik ... a party that governs in some regions together with Fidesz, the biggest opposition party. It is no coincidence that a Fidesz representative made a speech at the founding ceremony on Saturday, that the defense minister from the first free government swore an oath, and that flags from associations linked to the Catholic and protestant churches were flown .... This is the nucleus of a racist paramilitary army. With its declaration that it will train its members to use weapons it is openly challenging the state’s monopoly of force.<sup>331</sup>

The Hungarian media has also played an important role in promoting the *Gárda*. Less than one month after the *Gárda* was founded, Jobbik chairman Gábor Vona estimated that the Hungarian media had provided the *Gárda* with publicity worth at least 100 million forints (approximately €400,000).<sup>332</sup> The most recent induction of new members took place on March 29, 2008, bringing the total membership of the *Gárda* to over one thousand.<sup>333</sup> Jobbik has not been entirely unified concerning the *Gárda*, however; three founding members of Jobbik quit the party because of the *Gárda*, declaring that the party and the *Gárda* had become too extreme.<sup>334</sup>

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Tracy Wilkinson, “Far-right Band in Hungary a Symptom,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 2008, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-guard13feb13,1,4188870.story>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>329</sup> “Governing Party Condemns Far-Right ‘Hungarian Guard,’” *Caboodle.hu*, 7 August 2007, <[http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news\\_archive/single\\_page/article/11/governing\\_pa-1/](http://www.caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/article/11/governing_pa-1/)> (14 May 2008).

<sup>330</sup> Wilkinson, “Far-right Band in Hungary a Symptom.”

<sup>331</sup> Siobhán Dowling, “Neo-Fascist Magyar Garda Is ‘Hungary’s Shame,’” *Spiegel Online International*, 27 August 2007, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,502184,00.html>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>332</sup> “Fidesz-Owned Youth Centre Bans Far-Right Magyar Garda,” *Caboodle.hu*, 20 September 2007, <[http://caboodle.hu/nc/news/news\\_archive/single\\_page/article/11/fidesz\\_owned/](http://caboodle.hu/nc/news/news_archive/single_page/article/11/fidesz_owned/)> (14 May 2008).

<sup>333</sup> “Incidents at Hungarian Guard Inauguration Ceremony,” *Politics.hu*, 31 March 2008, <<http://www.politics.hu/20080331/incidents-at-hungarian-guard-inauguration-ceremony>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>334</sup> “Founders Quit Far-Right Party Jobbik Over Hungarian Guard,” *Politics.hu*, 11 March 2008, <<http://www.politics.hu/20080311/founders-quit-farright-party-jobbik-over-hungarian-guard>> (14 May 2008).

In November 2007, the *Gárda* started to organize weekend marches through provincial towns and villages (usually in the poorer northern, eastern, and southern parts of Hungary, where Jobbik enjoys substantial support),<sup>335</sup> railing against “Gypsy criminality” and vowing to “defend rural Hungarians who say they are often victims of theft and violence.”<sup>336</sup> Not content with limiting its activities to the outlying provinces, however, the *Gárda* decided to hold marches in two towns on the outskirts of Budapest (Tatárszentgyörgy and Kerepes, both of which have large Roma populations) in early December 2007. The NRSG organized counter-demonstrations in both towns, and Kolompár strongly denounced the *Gárda* and its intentions:

We have had to come here because the murderous ideals of Nazism exist in Hungary today and are being manifest on the streets of Tatárszentgyörgy. We have to act together for we cannot allow an extremist group to inspire fear in any minority group inside Hungary.<sup>337</sup>

In response, Jobbik vice-chair Tibor József Bíber called for a restoration of “law and order” in Hungary, the restoration of the death penalty, and a new “Gypsy program” that would end affirmative action, restrict social assistance, and halt integration efforts. He said that this new “Gypsy program” was needed because “the problems of the Gypsies can only be resolved through segregation.”<sup>338</sup>

The NRSG and the *Gárda* have settled into a cyclical pattern of vicious rhetorical attacks that, while often aggressive, have yet to escalate into serious physical violence. In January, Kolompár took the fight to the far-right itself, announcing from the steps of the Jobbik headquarters in Budapest that Hungary could not tolerate neo-fascist paramilitary parades throughout Hungary and that the NRSG would begin collecting signatures in order to force the

<sup>335</sup> The *Magyar Gárda* website proudly lists all of these marches, beginning with a march through Nagybánhegyes in Békés County on November 3, 2007. Cf. *Magyar Gárda*, <<http://www.magyargarda.hu/>>.

<sup>336</sup> Michael J. Jordan, “Hungary: On Guard,” *Transitions Online*, 21 March 2008, <<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=261&NrSection=3&NrArticle=19471>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>337</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Update – Roma Hold Solidarity March Preceding Right-Wing Demonstration (Adds Details of Right-Wing Demonstration)” (9 December 2007).

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

Hungarian Parliament to debate a ban on such paramilitary organizations.<sup>339</sup> With tensions mounting on all sides, Kolompár warned of potential clashes between Roma and members of the *Gárda*, saying that he might not be able to “hold back” all members of the Roma minority if the racist provocations of Jobbik and the *Gárda* continued.<sup>340</sup> He also appealed to a number of foreign ambassadors and embassies (particularly of other EU countries) to support the Hungarian Roma in their fight against extremism.<sup>341</sup> In six weeks, the NRSG collected 68,000 signatures in support of a ban on extremist groups in Hungary. Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány expressed his support for the NRSG’s efforts against the *Gárda* when he received the NRSG’s petition and signatures: “We will not tolerate uniformed semi-fascist or fascist organizations and plan to use the full power of the law and our democratic convictions to combat them.”<sup>342</sup>

In recent months, the altercations between the *Gárda* and the NRSG have become increasingly physical, though not yet violent. On March 2, 2008, five *Gárda* recruiters went to the village of Pétervására in northeastern Hungary. Much to their surprise, Kolompár, leading a group of over two hundred Roma, greeted them upon their arrival.<sup>343</sup> The incident was without violence, as Kolompár forbade the Roma from getting into any kind of physical altercation with the *Gárda* members. Upon meeting the welcoming party, the *Gárda* recruiters fled the scene.

The NRSG is attacking the *Gárda* on a second front as well. Unrelated to the previously mentioned petition, the Hungarian Chief Prosecutor Tamás Kovács began a series of legal proceedings against the *Gárda* because of its marches through Hungarian Roma settlements. Hungarian civic organizations (the technical legal status of the *Gárda*) should not impinge upon

<sup>339</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Roma Council Collects Signatures For Banning Far-Right Militia” (23 January 2008). Any Hungarian individual or organization can force the Hungarian Parliament to discuss an amendment to the law if they collect 50,000 signatures in support of an issue.

<sup>340</sup> BBC Monitoring Europe, “Round-Up of Developments in Hungary 25 Feb. – 2 Mar. 08” (2 March 2008), source from *Magyar Nemzet* (29 February 2008).

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “PM Voices Support for Roma Anti-Violence Petition” (6 March 2008).

<sup>343</sup> “Elkergették a Magyar Gárdát Pétervásáráról [Hungarian Guard Shooed out of Pétervására],” *Index.hu*, 3 March 2008, <<http://index.hu/politika/belhirek/344758/>> (14 May 2008).



anyone's rights and freedoms, but Kovács said that the marches had demonstrated that the goals of the *Gárda* are "incompatible with a democratic state."<sup>344</sup> He went on to say that the *Gárda* was "guilty of racial discrimination" and had created "a climate of fear among Hungary's Roma community."<sup>345</sup> The NRSG has been an outspoken supporter of this trial, in the hopes that the government will declare the *Gárda* illegal and force it to disband.

The trial about the legality or illegality of the *Gárda* began in March 2008, and the strategies of the *Gárda* before and during the trial proved that Kovács's concern about the *Gárda*'s incompatibility with the democratic process is undeniably justified. Before the opening March 12, 2008 proceedings began, members of the *Gárda* seemed to be vetting the people allowed to enter the courtroom. Video of the incident shows *Gárda* members blocking reporters from entering the court and saying, "*Sajto nem megy be* [Press may not enter]" and "*Csak gárdisták mehetnek* [Only members of the *Gárda* can enter]."<sup>346</sup> The *Gárda* members formed a barrier with their bodies when reporters tried to push their way through into the courtroom, which led to much shoving and shouting. What remains unclear is why the Hungarian court was allowing a private organization to "provide security" and screen the observers of a public, official trial. When Kolompár arrived to attend the opening proceedings and statements, members of the *Gárda* also attempted to prevent his entry, which led to angry exchanges and shoving just outside the courtroom.<sup>347</sup> Video taken from inside the courtroom shows that members of the *Gárda* filled an overwhelming majority of the audience seats.<sup>348</sup> After the prosecution and defense made their opening statements, the case was adjourned until May 19.

In a related matter, the NRSG under Kolompár has consistently advocated for more stringent hate speech laws in Hungary, describing the current anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary as

<sup>344</sup> Deutsche Presse-Agentur, "Court Meets to Decide on Banning Extreme Right Hungarian Guard" (13 March 2008).

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> "Tudósítás a Gárda-tárgyalás I. felvonásáról [Coverage of the First Gárda Hearing]," *barikad.hu*, 13 March 2008, <<http://barikad.hu/node/12357>> (14 May 2008).

<sup>347</sup> Deutsche Presse-Agentur, "ROUNDUP: Court Case on Banning Far Right Hungarian Guard Adjourned" (12 March 2008).

<sup>348</sup> "Tudósítás a Gárda-tárgyalás I. felvonásáról [Coverage of the First Gárda Hearing]," *barikad.hu*, 13 March 2008, <<http://barikad.hu/node/12357>> (14 May 2008).

an “intellectual Holocaust.”<sup>349</sup> Nonetheless, most anti-hate-speech legislation has been nullified by the Hungarian Constitutional Court as unduly infringing upon the freedom of speech.<sup>350</sup> The Hungarian Parliament most recently passed a revised hate speech bill on February 19, 2008,<sup>351</sup> though it remains unknown if the Constitutional Court will find this bill unconstitutional as well.

## 6.6. Postscript: Roma Mobilization Outside the Minority Self-Government System – The Systematic NGO-ization (and Privatization) of Collective Claims Making

### *6.6.1. The Failure of the State to Protect its Roma Citizens: Economic and Institutional Discrimination and Exploitation*

As discussed in Sections 6.2.2-6.2.3, huge numbers of Roma fell into poverty (or fell deeper into long-term poverty) during and after the transition, which led large numbers of them to turn to the newly retooled, localized, and “targeted” welfare assistance systems. These new systems were allegedly designed and implemented “to rid the system of the rigidity and inescapable waste of central distribution.”<sup>352</sup> The new system failed to achieve these results, however. Because of the need for an army of social workers to distinguish the “deserving poor” on a case-by-case basis, the welfare system itself mushroomed to industry-like proportions,<sup>353</sup> eating up a sizable chunk of public revenue in order to provide jobs for the predominantly middle-class women who filled these caseworker positions.<sup>354</sup> This new army of caseworkers, working from the principle of targeting, redistributes most welfare assistance not to the poorest members of society, but rather to members of the middle class, “to compensate [the middle class] for losses in relative income.”<sup>355</sup> Each locality develops its own rules and criteria for welfare eligibility and distribution, which creates serious potential for abuse, administrative opportunism, clientelism, *quid pro quo* favors, corruption, and ethnic discrimination.

<sup>349</sup> Hungary Business Newswire, “Hungarian Press Review 05/02/2007 – Government & Economy” (5 February 2007), source from *Magyar Hírlap* (5 February 2007).

<sup>350</sup> Hungarian News Agency (MTI), “Gypsy Authority Urging Hate Speech Law” (1 February 2007).

<sup>351</sup> “Hate Speech Proposal Passed by Hungarian Parliament,” *Politics.hu*, 19 February 2008, <<http://www.politics.hu/20080219/hate-speech-proposal-passed-by-hungarian-parliament>> (13 May 2008).

<sup>352</sup> Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 41.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Cf. Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition.”

<sup>355</sup> Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 41.

On the societal level, the decentralized welfare system in Hungary is institutionalizing a sharp division between the poor and no-so-poor by segregating the poor into an entirely separate set of welfare institutions with its own rules, logic, experts, and entrenched interests.<sup>356</sup> The non-poor have no interaction with or stake in this system, other than keeping the clients of this system from interrupting their own comfortable existences. The poor, on the other hand, have no way of escaping this system and (re)integrating into the majority society. A huge percentage of Roma (sixty to eighty percent of the Hungarian Roma population<sup>357</sup>) are trapped in this system.

The decentralization of welfare in Hungary has also decentralized the problem of poverty. Each local government has now established its own definition of poverty, and “with that, a society-wide problem was automatically demoted into a *local community matter*, which in turn meant that conflicts between the poor and non-poor appeared to be disturbances in the internal operation of a given community.”<sup>358</sup> Local governments were quick to manipulate this to their own advantage. By making unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed contingent on performing public works, local governments were able to exploit the local long-term unemployed (primarily Roma) as sources of cheap labor for public projects. These welfare policies are not designed to reintegrate the Roma into the labor market; instead, they are “poverty traps”<sup>359</sup> that keep the Roma dependent on the whims and charity of the local government and provide cheap labor for resource-strapped local governments’ hardest, dirtiest public works. Additionally, these policies established the framework for an automatic and ongoing battle for support between Roma and non-Roma poor within a particular locality, a situation that strengthened local prejudices and provided further excuses “to exclude ‘parasitic’ and ‘overconsuming’ [i.e. of public resources] Gypsies.”<sup>360</sup>

<sup>356</sup> János Ladányi, “The Hungarian Neoliberal State, Ethnic Classification, and the Creation of a Roma Underclass,” in *Poverty, Ethnicity, and Gender in Eastern Europe During the Market Transition*, eds. Rebecca Jean Emigh and Iván Szalai, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 73-75.

<sup>357</sup> Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 35.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 41; emphasis in original.

<sup>359</sup> Standing, 1362.

<sup>360</sup> Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 50.

Localizing welfare empowered local governments to “increase efficiency” by, rather perversely, limiting access to and uptake of welfare services, while the cost savings incurred through these exclusion errors are interpreted as “success.”<sup>361</sup> In Hungary, large numbers of poor people are excluded from assistance through a variety of mechanisms: (a) the local government refuses to reach out to or assist people seeking aid; (b) people are ashamed and do not apply (a problem compounded by the oft-humiliating “means-testing” that applicants must endure to secure assistance); (c) people eventually abandon applying for aid after they are repeatedly refused; and (d) the local government uses arbitrary rules, prerequisites, or bureaucratic regulations to exclude applicants, e.g. a local government might require “proof” of unemployment (i.e. a letter from a company stating that a person was fired, which might be impossible for the long-term unemployed to provide) or “proof” of low income (i.e. a pay stub, which is impossible for an unemployed or informally employed person to provide) in order to receive benefits.

If a Roma person succeeds in securing social aid, a system of perverse incentives (in addition to the institutionalization and the exploitation of Roma by local governments discussed previously) locks him or her into this system instead of promoting reintegration into the labor market and majority society. In spite of majority prejudices to the contrary, the unemployed generally work very hard, but the places they work are “outside the socially recognized world of organized work,”<sup>362</sup> meaning that they survive through a combination of social assistance and informal work. Taking a regular job would mean an automatic end to welfare benefits, which could seriously jeopardize a poor person’s income security, as the employer could terminate the regular job at any time.

<sup>361</sup> Standing, 1365-1366.

<sup>362</sup> Szalai, “Social Outcasts in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungary,” 47.

### 6.6.2. *An Institutional Response: The Growth and Problems of the NGO Sector*

Roma in Hungary have not been forced to endure the level of racist violence that Roma in other countries have endured during the post-transition period.<sup>363</sup> As described in Sections 6.2.2-6.2.3 and 6.6.1, the discrimination faced by the Roma in Hungary has been largely economic and institutional in nature. A variety of factors – the need for services once (but no longer) provided by the state, the desire to mobilize institutionalized resistance against institutionalized discrimination, an influx of Western ideology about the necessity of privatizing and decentralizing the state, a new freedom for Western NGOs to establish subsidiaries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and increased availability of funding from both Western donors and decentralizing CEE governments – has led to a huge increase in the number of NGOs and in the size and scope of NGO activities in Hungary.

Although it is dwarfed by the mountain of self-praising assessments published by NGOs about their projects, social programs, and impacts, some scholarly research exists about the impact of these NGOs on the Roma in Hungary, so there is no need to discuss the matter at length here.<sup>364</sup> Rather, the relationship between NGOs and the NRSG is the important theme within the context of this essay. In most CEE countries, post-transition NGOs enjoyed levels of legitimacy and status of which no pre-transition civil organization could have dreamed.<sup>365</sup> Regarding Roma NGOs in Hungary, however, the existence of the elected (and, according to the Hungarian government, legitimately representative) NRSG has complicated the situation for

<sup>363</sup> In this regard, the experience of Roma in Hungary has differed dramatically from that of Roma in Slovakia, who during and after the transition suffered an increase in racially motivated attacks, lack of police protection, segregation in the education system, unequal treatment in the justice system, and unequal access to public services. Cf. European Roma Rights Centre, *Time of the Skinheads: Denial and Exclusion of Roma in Slovakia* (Budapest: ERRC, 1997).

<sup>364</sup> Cf. the following: Nidhi Trehan, “In the Name of Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs,” in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 134-149; Lisa M. Mootz, “Steps to an Ecology of ‘Roma’: The Role of the Hungarian Non-Profit Sector in Developing Roma Ethnic Groupness and Creating New Patterns in In-Group/Out-Group Relations,” MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2005; and Wizner.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. Danny Siegal and Jenny Yancey, *The Rebirth of Civil Society* (New York: The Rockefeller Brothers’ Fund, 1992).

NGOs, especially domestic Roma NGOs, which are the kind most likely to lead to ethnic mobilization among Roma. Vermeersch remarks,

The [NRSG] was seen by the [Hungarian] government as the exclusive partner for dialogue, and thereby it largely [illegitimized] the alternative Romani advocacy organizations that sought to influence policy but were not engaged in the self-government system.<sup>366</sup>

Functionally, the NRSG and the NGOs are involved (at least nominally) in many of the same spheres of activity – health care, social services, education, legal protection, libraries, museums, exhibitions, archives, theaters, music, dance, promotion of artists and the arts, job training, and job placement<sup>367</sup> – the list of which reads like a laundry list of those duties “deserted” by the state during the transition. Trehan lists a number of reasons why non-state institutions, whether the NRSG or NGOs, are unable to supplant state support towards Roma communities in Hungary in these policy spheres:<sup>368</sup>

1. NGO entrepreneurs and donors often subscribe to naïve ideological agendas based on popular concepts, for example, “empowerment,” “human rights,” or “sustainability,” without connecting them to the real needs of local communities.
2. NGOs ultimately cannot be held accountable to citizens as can the state, since only the state has the power to legislate socio-economic policies.
3. NGOs generally do not possess the large-scale institutional resources that are at the disposal of the state.
4. NGOs [have] neither the need nor the responsibility to ameliorate the deep socio-economic problems that Roma face.<sup>369</sup>

The current system of funding places the NRSG and NGOs in direct competition with each other. The Hungarian government provides a modest budget for the NRSG, but as most of that money is spent on the infrastructure of the NRSG itself, the NRSG must apply for funding

<sup>366</sup> Vermeersch, 210.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. Siegal and Yancey, 27-28.

<sup>368</sup> The intention is not to disparage the work and contributions of NGOs in post-transition Hungary. Unfortunately, the work of NGOs has gone much further than “reminding the state of its obligations” (Trehan, 137) to its Roma citizens; NGOs have taken over a number of responsibilities from the state. In this context, Carnoy and Castells’s use of the term “neo-governmental organizations” in place of “non-governmental organizations” to describe this phenomenon seems quite appropriate.

<sup>369</sup> Trehan, 137.

in order to implement projects and programs.<sup>370</sup> The state remains one of the central sources of project grants, as well as public and private foundations.<sup>371</sup>

When examining this situation, a pattern of dependency emerges in which both the NRSNG and other NGOs in Hungary face a similar set of problems: the state is attempting to divest itself of its expensive social responsibilities by handing them over to unaccountable, under-funded, private (or, in the case of the NRSNG, semi-private) organizations, sometimes with the complicity (and even collaboration) of the NRSNG or NGOs themselves. The NRSNG maintains a slight advantage in this milieu, however, because the Hungarian government recognizes the NRSNG as “the” legitimate Roma institution in Hungary. As outlined in Sections 6.4-6.5, the NRSNG has often “played favorites” among the NGOs in Hungary, rewarding the few NGOs with close relationships to the NRSNG leadership to the virtual exclusion of all others from the political process.

Perhaps the biggest problem caused by the dual factors of the exclusive legitimacy of the NRSNG and of the explosive growth of the NGO sector is the near-complete delegitimization of non-institutionalized mobilization and claims making. Popular protest, informal forms of political engagement and expression, and non-institutionalized claims making, usually important components of mobilization, are practically unknown in Hungary, particularly among the Roma. The Hungarian state prefers to interact with the NRSNG, while international actors, organizations, and donors prefer to deal with professional NGOs (usually staffed by “younger, degree-holding, English-speaking Roma”) while often ignoring or marginalizing the traditional leaders in Roma communities, the “veterans of Romani emancipation.”<sup>372</sup> NGO “brain-drain”<sup>373</sup> thus effectively separates educated, internationally experienced, and well-connected Roma with access to international resources, media, and organizational skills from those traditional Roma leaders who

<sup>370</sup> Barany, 327.

<sup>371</sup> Mootz, 38.

<sup>372</sup> Trehan, 139.

<sup>373</sup> Cf. Eva Sobotka, “The Limits of the State: Political Participation and Representation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 2, No. 1 (2001), 1-23.

might be able to bring together and mobilize mass constituencies of Roma for the purposes of political engagement.



## 7. Reflections on Roma Mobilization as Capital, Habitus, and Field: Directions for Future Research

Offering a comprehensive analysis of Roma mobilization in terms of the multiplicities of capitals, habituses, and fields suggested by this framework lies beyond the scope of this essay. Each field requires its own separate inquiry to describe and explain fully. Nonetheless, this essay will offer extremely preliminary sketches of some fields of struggle as potential targets of future research. Future research should attempt to answer in depth the questions outlined by Bourdieu: what is the field's position within the field of power, who is dominant, who is dominated, what capital(s) is/are most important in the field, what habituses do the dominant and dominated bring to the field, what are the actors in the field pursuing, and why? Once these questions have been satisfactorily answered, examining where and how the different fields intersect with each other would offer a truly comprehensive explanation of the dynamics of Roma mobilization in Hungary.

### 7.1. The First Field of Struggle: Who Are the Roma?

A prerequisite for discussing “the Roma” is deciding exactly who composes this group, but even a question as basic as this one is a serious field of struggle. “The Roma” do not comprise a homogeneous group, as many policies, reports, and clichés would suggest. Is belonging to “the Roma” a matter of self-identification, is it a socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, racial, or linguistic category, or is it something else? As with any field of struggle, serious consideration of these issues would require an entirely separate essay, but it is a question that cannot be ignored entirely. According to the laws governing minority rights in Hungary, a person belongs to a national or ethnic minority (*nemzeti vagy etnikai kisebbség*) if they self-declare membership in a national or ethnic minority.<sup>374</sup>

<sup>374</sup> The Roma and Ruthenian minorities are the only recognized “ethnic” minorities in Hungary; all of the other recognized minorities are “national” minorities (i.e. the Bulgarian, Greek, Croatian, Polish, German, Armenian, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Ukrainian minorities).

When governments try to gather statistical data, implement development or social welfare policies, or redistribute resources, on the other hand, the question of “Who are the Roma?” becomes much more complex. In practice, identification as “Roma” in Hungary, to a significant extent, is ascribed rather than self-identified; individuals are identified (if not officially categorized) as Roma by external actors on the basis of either socioeconomic position or status position, regardless of their own self-identification. In a survey conducted by Ivan Szelenyi in 2000, 80% of those who self-identified as Roma in Hungary earned less than the average Hungarian per capita income.<sup>375</sup> In another study published in 2000, Istvan Kemeny concluded, “Unemployed Roma workers have dramatically fewer chances than non-Roma workers for entering or reentering the Hungarian labor market.”<sup>376</sup> The Roma consistently rank “unemployment,” “economic hardship,” and “lack of education” as among the most difficult problems they face.<sup>377</sup> Membership in the Roma minority often correlates with having a low socioeconomic status; consequently, many people who are poor are also identified as being Roma, regardless of their own self-identification.

Perhaps the more important external identification is that of status position. Some Roma consider themselves Hungarian, but external actors (neighbors, local authorities, etc.) identify them as Roma. Perhaps even more commonly, Hungarian Roma consider themselves both Roma and Hungarian, though the possibility of this dual identity is often not recognized by members of the majority community and is frequently contradicted by the Roma’s own habitual speech patterns.<sup>378</sup> As cited in Chapter 4, Robert Koulish has found that self-identification as Roma decreases as educational and economic achievement rises.<sup>379</sup> Nevertheless, the Roma

<sup>375</sup> Szelenyi, 73.

<sup>376</sup> Kemény, 12.

<sup>377</sup> UNDP, 96.

<sup>378</sup> For example, when an Olah/Vlach Roma (who speaks both Hungarian and Romanes) is speaking Hungarian and wants to differentiate between Roma and non-Roma in Hungary, he or she usually refers to Roma as *cigányok* (Gypsies) and non-Roma as *magyarok* (Hungarians), implying that there is some fundamental irreconcilable contradiction between the two. When speaking Romanes, on the other hand, this contradiction does not appear so strongly, as he or she usually uses the terms *roma* and *gadje* (literally, “stranger” or “foreigner,” i.e. a non-Roma person), respectively.

<sup>379</sup> Koulish, 316.

continue to be identifiable as a group largely because external actors collectivize them as such. Even the Regular Reports issued by the European Union during Hungary's accession process are rife with collectivizing constructs like "the situation of the Roma," "the Roma minority," and so on.<sup>380</sup>

In addition to individual members of the Roma minority (through self-identification) and the majority society (through economic categorization or external identification), Roma elites also compete in this field for the right to classify who belongs to the Roma community. As a consequence of the constraints placed upon them by the self-identification clause in Hungary's minority rights laws, their contestation usually manifests itself as attempts to get more Hungarian Roma to self-identify as such. A central component of their struggle is the attempt by some members of the Roma elite to construct a "national" Roma culture or identity with which all Roma in Hungary can identify.<sup>381</sup> In 1995, Peter Szuhay argued that "the Gypsies of Hungary are now at a phase in their social development when their intellectuals are formulating the need for the cultural integration of the various Gypsy ethnic groups, and have set about the task of 'creating' a Gypsy national culture."<sup>382</sup> His article offers a snapshot of the positive developments towards, the potential for, and the serious challenges to constructing a national Hungarian Roma identity. Szuhay raises a number of questions that the Hungarian Roma elites faced in 1995, most of which, as mentioned in Chapter 4, have not been resolved: is Roma identity ascribed or self-identified? Is Roma culture an ethnic culture or a culture of poverty? Can the Roma present a united national identity to the non-Roma, and if so, will articulating this common identity change

<sup>380</sup> Cf. the following: European Commission, "Progress Report," *European Commission*, November 1998, <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/1998/hungary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/1998/hungary_en.pdf)> (16 November 2007), 7 and 11; European Commission, "Progress Report," *European Commission*, 13 October 1999, <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/1999/hungary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/1999/hungary_en.pdf)> (16 November 2007), 15; and European Commission, "Regular Report," *European Commission*, 5 November 2003, <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/2003/cmr\\_hu\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2003/cmr_hu_final_en.pdf)> (16 November 2007), 36.

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Helsinki Watch and Human Rights Watch, *Struggling for Ethnic Identity: The Gypsies of Hungary* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993); for a discussion on the constructed nature of identity, cf. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 6-12.

<sup>382</sup> Peter Szuhay, "Constructing a Gypsy National Culture," *Budapest Review of Books* 5, No. 3 (1995), 111.

“one of the most fundamental of social relations: the mutual prejudice between the Gypsies and the majority”<sup>383</sup>

Szuhay describes how Roma intellectuals are trying to respond to these questions by attempting to inculcate in the various Roma groups of Hungary a unitary national Roma culture (or identity), which “is conditional on the creation of a more or less unified literary language and a cultural idiom acceptable to all.”<sup>384</sup> In spite of the linguistic and cultural differences between Roma groups, Roma intellectuals are trying to “create a mythology of their own [and] invent a genealogy.”<sup>385</sup> The “created” cultural ideal is “rooted in folk culture,”<sup>386</sup> and is often skewed in favor of those practices that are considered more “traditional,” even though many of the Roma in Hungary strive to assimilate into the majority culture, not differentiate themselves from it. Szuhay sees the arts as offering the strongest potential force for cultural integration, while the question of language is the biggest potential problem. Since 1995, little further consensus on a national Roma identity, i.e. on who is Roma and what it means to be Roma, has been reached, but as discussed in Section 6.5, the NRSZ recently began to participate actively in the articulation and dissemination of a national, unified Hungarian Roma culture.

This short discussion demonstrates several issues concerning the field of Roma identity. No standard method of categorization of Roma identity has been defined. Members of the Roma minority and the majority community do not agree, at least officially, on who belongs to “the Roma,” although individuals who publicly deny belonging to the Roma minority because of a fear of discrimination, stigmatization, etc. might privately acknowledge belonging to the Roma minority. Non-identification by Roma individuals causes difficulties in gathering reliable statistical data and in distributing resources allocated for the Roma minority. Most importantly for this paper, non-identification undercuts the potential support base of an ethnic mobilization movement, particularly if the wealthier and more educated individuals (precisely those who are

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 120, quoting Zsigo and Horvath.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 116.

most valuable in such a movement) are the least likely to self-identify as Roma. Therefore, the fundamental question of “Who is Roma?” becomes a critically important field of struggle, with different actors attempting to gain a monopoly on the power to classify members of the Roma minority in order to advance their own interests – a textbook example of a contest over a field’s symbolic capital.

## 7.2. The NRSG as the Field of Struggle?

When reviewing the history of the NRSG, the NRSG itself emerges as an apparent field of struggle. Different actors with different strengths, weaknesses, and allies (all of which are different forms of capital) vie for control of the field and the rewards offered by it. Roma mobilization (and internal contention and competition) quickly crystallized around the political and financial rewards offered by the NRSG and the self-government system.<sup>387</sup> Up until now, the conflict between Flórián Farkas’s right-leaning Lungo Drom coalition and Orbán Kolompár’s left-leaning MCF coalition has dominated this ostensible field. Neither faction is homogeneous, however, and both Farkas and Kolompár have faced challenges from within as well as outside of their ranks. In spite of the seeming reality of the NRSG as a field of struggle, conceptualizing the NRSG as a field of struggle is actually a form of symbolic violence (as argued in the following Section 7.3) because the attempt to limit Hungarian Roma politics to the struggle over the NRSG is actually a central conflict in the field of Roma politics.

## 7.3. Roma Politics as the Field of Struggle

Within the field of Roma politics in Hungary, the NRSG appears to be the dominant actor, but more accurately, it is the dominant reward of the field of Roma politics, which is a field itself largely defined by the Hungarian government, not by the Roma themselves. Whichever major coalition is not in power in the NRSG remains a significant influence in the Roma political scene, although the importance of the “opposition” coalition outside the field of Roma politics is negligible. Nevertheless, the fact is that whoever controls the NRSG controls

<sup>387</sup> Vermeersch, 220.

the legitimate political voice of the Roma in Hungary. The Hungarian government, by recognizing the “legitimacy” of only the NRSG in the field of Roma politics, is attempting to make these two fields, the NRSG and Roma politics, difficult to separate in reality. In doing so, the Hungarian government marginalizes the voices of “non-legitimized” activists and parties, which was the original stated goal of Báthory when he wanted to create a group of government-sponsored “loyalist” Roma elites (cf. Section 6.2.4). Therefore, one of the most crucial, and often unmentioned, conflicts in this field is between legitimized and non-legitimized actors (and also between institutionalized and non-institutionalized actors, though these two sets of groups are largely, but not entirely, congruent) over the symbolic capital of legitimacy. The entrenched powers that favor the NRSG structure and the stability it provides have marshaled considerable resources to channel all political legitimacy to legitimized, loyal, controllable actors, while non-legitimized actors have struggled to change the rules of the field – to little avail thus far.

Other important but slightly less central conflicts in the field of Hungarian Roma politics emerge from the chronicle given in Sections 6.4–6.5. For example, the saga of the NRSG rarely mentions explicitly the conflict between urban and rural Roma and between the Roma politicians who represent these different groups’ interests, but Kállai mentions this conflict as a potential explanation for Kolompár’s triumph over Horváth within the NRSG:

Aladár Horváth, supported by Roma and non-Roma intellectuals in Budapest, was forced to give way to the successful businessman from the provinces, Orbán Kolompár, who enjoyed the support of Roma politicians and leaders in rural Hungary.<sup>388</sup>

Another conflict is the center-periphery conflict between those Roma elites and organizations with access to political influence and resources and those elites and organizations trying to gain access to these resources. Again, because of the Hungarian government’s patronage of the NRSG, this conflict in practice is usually reducible to the conflict between who controls the NRSG (and their allies) and who does not. If the field of Hungarian Roma politics could escape

<sup>388</sup> Kállai, 330.

the symbolic violence inherent in this dualism, then this field could come to encompass a democratic system that represents the true pluralism of Roma politics in Hungary. As Bourdieu predicts, the boundaries of this field are at stake in the field itself, however, and the powerful combined interests of the government and the current leaders of the NRSG are striving to keep the boundaries of this field static.

#### 7.4. The NGO Sector as the Field of Struggle

As discussed in Section 6.6.2, the NRSG has an ambivalent relationship with the NGOs, both Roma and non-Roma, that involve themselves in the lives of Hungarian Roma. On the one hand, only the NRSG can claim to be the authoritative representative voice of the target group that these NGOs aim to assist. On the other hand, professionalized NGOs have access to far greater financial resources from private grants and foundations than the NRSG does. The NRSG competes with the NGOs for access to these funds, but it garners only a relatively small portion of the available funding. Although the NRSG may enjoy the perception of significant legitimacy in the eyes of the Hungarian government, non-state actors often view professionalized NGOs (particularly those NGOs with an international presence) to be as or even more legitimate than the NRSG in terms of fighting for Roma rights, helping with Roma economic and educational development, etc. Therefore, this field involves a significant amount of struggle, especially over access to financial resources, but the structure of the field also encourages some moderation, lest both the NRSG and the NGOs lose legitimacy in the eyes of either the Hungarian state or private donors and foundations, the support of which is critical to the continued existence of both the NRSG and the NGOs.

#### 7.5. International Politics as the Field of Struggle

The most striking feature of both the NRSG and Hungarian Roma politics in general is the extent to which Hungarian Roma do not participate in the field of international politics – neither through the NRSG nor Roma NGOs. This nonparticipation is particularly remarkable considering that Hungary has the fourth largest Roma population in Europe and the fifth largest

Roma population as a percentage of the total population of the country as a whole.<sup>389</sup> In the (admittedly scant) literature about Roma activism in international politics, the NRSG appears to play no role, except for Kolompár's recent participation in occasional international Holocaust commemorations. In 2001, Kofi Annan visited Hungary and learned about the situation of Roma in Europe, but no record exists of a meeting between him and the NRSG or Flórián Farkas, who was the chairman of the NRSG at the time.<sup>390</sup> In Vermeersch's and Klímová-Alexander's accounts, two of the most comprehensive discussions of Roma participation in international politics, Hungarian Roma only appear as the subject of reports. No Hungarian Roma activists are counted among the small circle of internationally active Roma elites who regularly participate in World Bank and United Nations conferences; indeed, the only mention of a Hungarian Roma activist in Klímová-Alexander's recent book, *The Romani Voice in World Politics*, concerned Ágnes Daróczi's 1990 refusal to consider becoming the General Secretary of the International Romani Union (IRU) because the organization at that time had "no office, no money, and a largely unwieldy international committee."<sup>391</sup> Hungary did not even have a representative or participant present at the 2000 IRU World Congress in Prague, a truly baffling omission, considering the geographic proximity of Hungary and the Czech Republic.<sup>392</sup>

A few non-Roma NGOs that work on issues concerning Roma have become important players in the field of international politics, but most of these are international NGOs that happen to be based in Budapest (such as the Helsinki Watch and the European Roma Rights Center [ERRC]), and none of them are Roma-run NGOs.<sup>393</sup> These kinds of organizations are (or are often perceived by the Roma to be) disconnected from the everyday lives of most members of the Roma minority. For example, Alfonz Zsiga, one of the coordinators of Radio C (the Roma-run radio station in Budapest), said of the ERRC:

<sup>389</sup> Vermeersch, 17.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Klímová-Alexander, 80.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>392</sup> "Are They a Nation?," *The Economist*, 25 November 2000, 61.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. Mootz, 44-69. She also proposes guidelines for what constitutes a "Roma" and a "non-Roma" NGO, and this essay follows her classification.



It's a joke. What can 20 non-Roma sitting in front of a computer understand about the Roma society when they make \$2000 a month? ... My problem with ERRC is that they don't do anything .... They work a lot, but no one sees any benefits. Go into the country and ask the Gypsies what is ERRC. No one has ever heard of it.<sup>394</sup>

Vermeersch notes that this is a problem not only for non-Roma NGOs, but for Roma activists as well: "Many of the Romani activists who became progressively more successful on the European level experienced more and more difficulties in gaining support from Romani communities at home."<sup>395</sup>

One of the central problems that emerges in this field of struggle is that of legitimate representation of the Roma at the international level. On the one hand, few NGOs (especially international non-Roma NGOs) intend or claim to act as "representatives" of the Roma.<sup>396</sup> On the other hand, governments, international governmental organizations, and foundations are often "more willing to view these advocates as credible critics of the situation of the oppressed than they are prepared to accept the criticisms that are formulated by ethnic representatives."<sup>397</sup> At the international level, there is no legitimate political entity representing the Roma; for example, of the hundreds of delegates that participated in the 2000 IRU World Congress, few were democratically elected.<sup>398</sup> In a 1999 open letter of resignation from the IRU, Ian Hancock, an internationally renowned Roma activist and scholar, condemned the body as "an anachronism, a dinosaur" that is almost entirely subject to "the whim of the President."<sup>399</sup>

In Hungary, this situation is further complicated at both the national and international levels by the presence of the NRSG as the recognized legitimate representative body of the Hungarian Roma. Because the Hungarian government recognizes the NRSG as the legitimate representative body of the Hungarian Roma, the government feels little pressure to take the

<sup>394</sup> Alfonz Zsiga, quoted in Mootz, 50-51.

<sup>395</sup> Vermeersch, 195.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>398</sup> Barany, 259.

<sup>399</sup> Ian Hancock, "Statement Regarding My Position with the International Romani Union," *RomNews Network*, <<http://www.romnews.com/a/hancock.html>> (14 May 2008).

opinions of other Roma advocacy organizations, either domestic or international, into account.<sup>400</sup>

Given the powerlessness of the NRSG, however, this arrangement potentially silences the voices of an important segment of the wider Roma movement, rather than empowering the Hungarian Roma minority through legitimate democratic representation.

Additionally, the NRSG often is not invited or does not choose to participate in the political process, particularly at the international level. Perhaps this nonparticipation stems from as basic a problem as the relative lack of foreign language speakers among the employees and representatives of the NRSG; perhaps the NRSG does not see much potential benefit in expending its energy in the field of international politics; perhaps the existent players in this field of struggle (most of whom have been present since at least the 1980s) are working to keep a new player from gaining a foothold in the field; or perhaps there are other explanations. Future research may shed light on this perplexing lack of Hungarian Roma engagement in the field of international politics.

#### 7.6. National/Domestic Politics as the Field of Struggle

As can be inferred from the record of the NRSG, the field of national or domestic politics is the field in which the NRSG expends the vast majority of its energy and resources. As argued in Chapter 4, the domestic field is the most important field concerning economic justice and redistribution, which also means that it is the most important field for Roma mobilization. The history of the NRSG will not be repeated here in detail, but the narrative of the NRSG lends itself to initial hypothesizing. The reactions to Act LXXVII have ranged from almost unbounded praise as the best hope for Roma integration into modern society to denunciations of it as an ingeniously insidious “divide and conquer” policy designed to “promote as many Roma NGOs and associations as possible and switch financial support from one to the other without apparent reason” in order to cause “utter chaos and division among the Roma community – for obvious reasons of money and influence” and to “prevent the establishment of a powerful Roma lobby in

<sup>400</sup> Vermeersch, 129.

the country.”<sup>401</sup> The struggles over the control of the NRSG have indeed proven divisive, and perhaps a united front of Roma politicians would have a bigger potential impact upon policy-making in the Hungarian Parliament, but little evidence exists to support the argument that the Roma elites in Hungary would be more united today if the Hungarian Parliament had never passed Act LXXVII.

When reviewing the NRSG in the field of domestic politics, a kind of pattern does emerge. First, the NRSG’s political fortunes seem directly tied to the relationship that the NRSG leadership has with the Hungarian government. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the fact that almost all of the NRSG’s capital – economic, symbolic, informational, etc. – is bestowed on it by the Hungarian government. Farkas’s right-wing Lungo Drom coalition won the NRSG election in 1995, largely because of the support of the left-leaning Hungarian government, which was far more fearful of Farkas’s radical opponents than his personal political persuasion. Lungo Drom won again in 1999 with the support of the governing right-wing coalition. By 2003, a mainstream left-wing Democratic Roma Coalition (DRC) had emerged, and the newly reelected Socialist Party threw its support to this left-wing coalition, resulting in an overwhelming win for the DRC. By 2007, the DRC (now the MCF) had officially split with the Socialists but still maintained their support, while Fidesz (still the opposition in government, but far more popular than the Socialists because of a series of Socialist Party scandals and unpopular reforms) supported Lungo Drom, which resulted in a near-even split in the NRSG, similar to the near-even split in the Hungarian Parliament.

Second, the NRSG seems to be undergoing a gradual shift in its priorities. Initially, the NRSG was concerned with its own institutional development and rarely participated in activities that did not directly perpetuate its own existence or extend its institutional influence. Though still concerned with its own institutional development and reform (and, quite notably, ejecting a chairman that wanted to stop and reverse many of the increases in institutional strength that the

<sup>401</sup> Lev Tcherenkov and Stéphane Laederich, *The Roma*. Vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2004), 215.

NRSG had won for itself over the years), the NRSG is increasingly focusing on the creation of moral and symbolic capitals to use for leverage in its interactions with the Hungarian government and with Hungarian society in general. In the past few years, the NRSG has markedly increased its public awareness campaigns, attempting to engage not only the Roma but also the wider Hungarian public in discussions about Roma persecution under the Holocaust, hate speech and hate crimes, and neo-fascism – a significant departure from its initial rhetoric about economic disadvantages and the need for economic justice. Most recently, the NRSG has entered into serious conflict with Jobbik and the *Magyar Gárda*, a perversely symbiotic relationship that has drastically raised the profile of the three organizations relative to the other actors in the field of domestic politics and given the three organizations access to considerable sums of capital. How effectively they are able to mobilize this newfound capital against each other and the other actors within the boundaries of this field of struggle remains to be seen.

## 8. Conclusion

In summary, the current theories of Roma ethnic mobilization as posited by Barany and Vermeersch lack explanatory power because they inscribe into their theoretical frameworks a particular conceptualization of power that is singularly unsuitable to explain the phenomenon of Roma mobilization. This understanding of power is the “classic,” rational understanding of power that seeks to explain power and power relations by examining how actors strategically mobilize resources in pursuit of certain goals. Although taking the opposite route, this strategic approach leads to the same destination as structural determinism: the attempt to operationalize theoretically and empirically stagnant instrumentalist concepts as explanatory tools.

A Bourdieuan structural theory of power as practice, describing agency mediated by the constraints of capital, habitus, and field, offers a promising method to overcome the classical approach’s agency-structure dualism. Instead of placing actors in a social relationship with each other, which almost certainly prioritizes agency over structure, Bourdieu proposes to place agency and structure in a relationship with each other, as opposed to isolating them from each other and invoking them as mutually exclusive explanatory approaches. Bourdieu thus connects agency to structure, culture, and power, enabling researchers to determine meaning from the huge constellation of possible actions without lapsing into the determinism of either structuralism or rational choice theory. Instead, actions between actors in a social relationship unfold as a play performed from a script – in a way that is rehearsed, but never fully predictable, always contextually bound to a certain time, place, and situation. These actions make sense at a particular time, but they are always made within the framework of a broader repertoire bound by a set of symbolic meanings particular to the field in which the actions take place.

Regarding Roma mobilization, the distribution and acquisition of capital, particularly symbolic capital, is central to the Roma minority’s ability to struggle in various fields. After ignoring the need to acquire symbolic capital for most of its existence, the NRSG has finally recognized the importance of obtaining, accumulating, and deploying symbolic capital in the field

of domestic Hungarian politics. Simultaneously, the NRSB continues to conform to the strategy of the Hungarian government by monopolizing the symbolic capital of the field of Roma politics, thus insidiously making the NRSB into a perpetrator of symbolic violence in that field.

Furthermore, a Bourdieuan structural theory of power as practice allows for the pursuit of different research programs about different fields of struggle instead of collectivizing all forms of struggle within a single, all-encompassing social space. The need to address separately the inequalities present in each field becomes apparent when examining the paradoxical functioning of the NRSB, an emerging agent promoting Roma interests in one field and perpetuating symbolic violence against a number of Roma activists in another field. Roma leaders struggle in a number of fields simultaneously (the field of Roma identity, the field of Roma politics, the field of NGOs, the field of international politics, the field of national/domestic politics, and certainly others), and as discussed in Chapter 7, the strategies and outcomes of these struggles differ wildly. Attempting to study these struggles as if they were all occurring in the same social space is uninformative and irresponsible. Only through considering each field individually can researchers, activists, and policy makers discover practical techniques for correcting the discrimination, unfairness, and symbolic violence present in each field. If researchers, activists, and policy makers continue to approach the problems facing the Roma as if they were all solvable within the confines of a single field, these different injustices will continue to reproduce themselves while remaining hopelessly intermingled and thus impossible to rectify.<sup>402</sup>

<sup>402</sup> For an account of how this “intermingling” has impeded the improvement of the Roma’s social, economic, and political situations in Hungary, cf. Szalai, “Conflicting Struggles for Recognition,” 195-205.

## Appendix

Hungarian Guard: Articles of Incorporation and Oath, July 17, 2007<sup>403</sup>

The Hungarian Guard commences on August 25, 2007. 1,100 years after the victorious Battle of Bratislava and 300 years after the Diet of Ónod. At a moment when Hungarians were lacking physical, mental, and spiritual self-defense. At a moment when our nation had no other corner to back into. At a moment when we can only rely on ourselves.

The Hungarian Guard stands above parties and borders. The commonwealth [i.e. the Hungarian Guard – translator's note] wants to become a community of power and common interests. It wishes to be the creator and supporter of all notions that point the way to the awakening and advancement of our nation, but at the same time, it strongly opposes the weakening of the physical and mental state of the Hungarian nation.

The Hungarian Guard wants to be an exclamation mark! It has a message to everyone, both inside and outside the country, who are interested in our brokenness and destruction: *We will not let it happen!* It has a message to all who are lethargic, aimless, or cowardly concerning the fate of our nation: *Wake up!* Lastly, it has a message to all who have long yearned for a better Hungarian future: *The time has come!*

The Hungarian Guard assigns itself the following tasks:

- The physical, mental, and spiritual education of the enrolled and sworn Guardians so that they can complete their duties with exemplary effectiveness, due strength, purposefulness, and humbleness.
- The cultivation of Hungarian culture and our history's commemorations, and the passing on of these to the upcoming generations.

In response to the opposition of the Budapest District Court, the founding members of the Hungarian Guard have temporarily suspended the following tasks:

- Active participation in disaster prevention and aid, protection of property, and civil defense.
- Organizing and supporting social and charity missions.
- Strengthening national self-defense in case of emergency.
- Taking part in or forming the core of the yet-to-be-established National Guard.

In the event that it is needed, the association asks the members of the Hungarian guard to serve as private persons in the activities listed here: disaster prevention and aid, civil defense, social aid, charity work, etc. The suspension is in force until such time as the revised constitution of the Association is legally registered with the Court.

Oath of the Hungarian Guard:

"I, ..., guardian of Hungarian Guard, swear an oath to be faithful to my homeland and my nation, the Hungarian nation, now and forever. As long as I live, I regard our great forebears in history as examples to follow, and I will make the progress and freedom of my homeland and nation and the protection of its values and traditions my life's work.

"I will never abandon our banners and fellows, and I will honorably persist in the execution of the tasks given by the Guard. I accept the statutes that govern service in the Guard and recognize that my observance of them is obligatory.

"If I break my oath, let the contempt of my superiors and fellows fall upon me, and let me be forever excluded from the Hungarian Guard.

"So help me God!"

<sup>403</sup> Translated from "Alapító nyilatkozat és az Eskü szövege [Articles of Incorporation and Oath]," *Magyar Gárda*, 17 July 2007, <[http://magyargarda.hu/alapito\\_nyilatkozat](http://magyargarda.hu/alapito_nyilatkozat)> (14 May 2008).

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