

The Power of Self-naming: Between Denial and Political Identity

The First World Romani Congress

By

Rufat Demirov

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Supervisor: Andreea Nicutar

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07/06/2020

Rufat Demirov

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rufat', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Abstract

The First World Romani Congress, 1971, fulfilled three main aims that Roma had in that time. Firstly, Roma became people with the ‘right to have rights’ (Hannah Arendt), and people with a meaningful voice. Secondly Roma resisted the position of a subordinate ‘other’ in the orientalist relation Roma – non-Roma (Edward Said). And finally, Roma took in their hands the power of naming themselves, and from a nameless population of bodies over which the states exercise violence (Michel Foucault), they became a political, meaningful group called ‘Roma’ (from Romanes ‘*Rrom*’ = Human). The argument that this thesis provides is that the First World Romani Congress succeeded in: 1) building a terrain for Roma to become people with a voice, and 2) taking the power of naming from the nation-states in the hands of Roma themselves. Furthermore, the main importance of the Congress I see in transforming the perception of Roma as a nameless population of bodies in a political and recognized group. During the discussions on the Congress one of the main speakers, Vanko Rouda, problematized the position of Roma as nameless and non-defined group saying “*One difficulty is that Gajo official circles have not yet decided who or what we are.*” (*Race Today* 1971,193). Rouda inspired my thesis which elaborates the dilemma of the reality of not being named was whether a problem or an opportunity for Roma to name themselves.

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I dedicate this thesis to Raymond Gureme (1925-2020), a Roma Holocaust survivor and great Romani resistance fighter from France. I am grateful that I had a chance to meet him and have a cigarette with him at the Holocaust commemoration, 2nd of August in Auschwitz in 2018. His words 'résistez, résistez, résistez!' will always be my highest motivation for whatever I do in the Romani movement. Rest in peace, Raymond!

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Introduction

Nowadays Roma across the world celebrate 8th of April as the International Romani Day in commemoration of the day when the Romani nation was established. On 8th of April, 1971, in Orprington, Great Britain (near London) the Romani nation was established while primarily the political aspect of the Romani identity was defined based on few decisions that were made then. Among the first of these decisions figured the motion to designate the term 'Roma' as the only acceptable term for naming Roma people. Secondly, the song "*Gjelem, Gjelem*" was chosen as the Romani anthem. Thirdly, the Romani flag was selected and designed to depict a red wheel that symbolizes the traveling aspect of Romani culture against a blue (the sky) and green (the grass) background. Further decisions regarding the Romani language and alphabet were also made. Although these things are reason enough for this day to become a national holiday of Roma, I nonetheless contend that the largest reason for celebrating 8th of April lies in the fact that the Congress was also when Roma were declared as a nation. At a time when communism, socialism and capitalism were struggling for power throughout Europe, Roma made progressive steps that went further in interpreting the concept of a nation's relationship to territory.

Beyond the visible and formal decisions made by the Congress, the motivation for organizing the Congress adds another dimension to the value of this event. The Congress's cure purpose was the aim of ending the misery of Roma. To do so Roma firstly had to become political organization possessing a meaningful voice. Secondly, Roma needed to have the opportunity to escape the orientalist relation between Roma and non-Roma by wresting the right to name themselves based on the knowledge they had of their own identities. Finally, Roma had to end the kind of treatment by the state which resulted from the state's perception of Roma as a nameless population of bodies over which violence can be practiced. In other words, the main reason for organizing the Congress was for Roma to be a group worthy of governance, whether leading themselves or under the governance of states as rightful agents. Although the dilemma surrounding the issue of governing themselves or being governed as people with 'the right to have rights' is still actual, the need for governance remains crucial in times when political and legal protection plays a critical role in the lives of Roma.

Before these issues can be further discussed, a general an overview of the problems that Roma face nowadays must be provided. Many Roma across Europe are still subjected to violence and racism while some Roma still live on the margins of society without access to proper housing, drinkable water or other basic commodities. In many member states in the EU, Roma are treated as a rightless, nameless, non-deserving and "non-civilized" group. Attacks against Romani segregated neighborhoods still occur, just as EU representatives commonly express hate-speech towards Roma. The political institutions of the nation-states in Europe still discriminate against Roma, therefore anytigypsyism remains a relevant topic of discussion among Roma activists and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg, where Roma can sue their states for structural discrimination. It can therefore be stated that being Roma remains a reason for suffering and being seen as the subordinate, the 'other' one. After observing the disappointing and devastating political scenario in which Roma live, I ask what celebrating 8th

April actually means. How can Roma continue to celebrate this day when many amongst them still live on the margins of society?

In this paper I contend that 8th April remains a significant day for commemorating the heroic actions taken by the members of the First World Romani Congress in 1971. I will assess the importance of the Congress by arguing that it was an event when Roma built their platform for performing as meaningful political agents. The Congress fulfilled the aim of Roma to be recognized as nation with 'the right to have right'. I assume that the main value of the Congress lies in reminding Roma of the actions that were taken in the interest of ending their struggles. Consequently, the Congress is a perfect reminder of the resistance that needs to take place in periods when Roma face problems similar to those which motivated them to organize the Congress in the 1970s. Since I claim that Roma continue to experience similar struggles as in the 1970's, a similar ideological framework should be followed just as similar actions should be taken. At the very least, Roma must view the Congress as resistance to the treatment that they had been receiving from hegemonic nation-states. A historical understanding of the present situation of Roma is crucial for overcoming the discrimination that Roma face, following the example of the First World Romani Congress. Summarized, Roma nowadays still lack governance, so I view the Congress and the motivation for organizing it as a good reminder of the place where Roma were, and still are, made to be.

Mainly inspired by a speech held at the First World Romani Congress by Vanko Rouda, I will focus my thesis on the importance of the following three main aspects. By stating that "*One difficulty is that Gajo official circles have not yet decided who or what we are.*" (*Race Today* 1971, 193), Vanko Rouda problematized the position of Roma, thereby introducing a discussion that encouraged me to give my overview on the Congress from three aspects. Firstly, the importance of having Romani political organization. Secondly, the need Roma to be named as 'Roma.' Finally, Roma must not continue to be treated as population of bodies over which states can exercise violence. The main question I will explore in my thesis is whether the First World Romani Congress, 1971, Oprington, succeeded in transforming Roma from a nameless population of bodies to international Romani political group with a power to name themselves. I will divide the thesis in two main sections. In the first section I provide a theoretical framework that serves as a useful tool for interpreting the second section which will elaborate the Congress in the same order and follow the same three concepts written in the theoretical framework.

The main three concepts I am going to use, in the theoretical framework as well as for explaining my view on the Congress are the following: firstly, I am going to use Hannah Arendt's explanation of 'stateless people' and 'the right to have rights' in order to show the awareness of the need for having a political organization and the motivation for Roma to consolidate in a group which they call a Romani nation. Secondly, having Vanko Rouda's sentence as a tool of thinking, I am going to use Edward Said's explanation of the knowledge as a source of power for the superior agent to name the inferior agent in an orientalist relation. I will use Said's understanding of the knowledge and the power of naming the "other" to open a discussion about Rouda's state that the non-Roma officials had not decided who or what Roma were, emphasizing that the non-Roma had the power to name the Roma and asking either it was a problem or an opportunity for Roma to get the power of naming in their hands. And finally,

going through Michel Foucault's concepts of biopolitics, body politics and necropolitics, I am going to examine the question why the "Gajo officials" did not use their power to name the Roma and rather preferred Roma to be a nameless population of bodies.

SECTION ONE: Theoretical framework

To begin, I am going to introduce conversation three names and theories in the political theory and international relations. Firstly, I am going to examine Hannah Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" about which she writes in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Secondly, I am going to dig into Edward Said's explanation of the orientalist relation West-East and the power to name the subordinate subject, about which he writes in his book *Orientalism*. And finally, I will explain Michel Foucault's concept of body politics that he explains in his book *The History of Sexuality*. The reason for choosing those three concepts is to give a clear scope of thinking that will be crucial for understanding the second part of this text where I explain the importance and my view of the success of the First World Romani Congress (1971).

1.1.The 'right to have rights' through political organization

In the twentieth century nation-building process, the nations were constructed in a hegemonic way because of the chaos that the wars caused in Europe. Namely, the hegemonic nations were meant to offer security while being shelter after the wars. The hegemonic way of building the nations brought a danger of exclusion of the minorities that were not perceived as part of the nation, either because they had never been seen as such or they became minorities after they settled in the territory where the nations were being built.

While elaborating the nation-state building in the twentieth century in post-war Europe, Hannah Arendt explains the way the hegemonic nations swallow the states and their legal institutions. Namely, while the balance between the hegemonic construct of the nation and the legal institutions of the state was being destroyed, the nation swallowed the state which became its tool of power operation and oppression. (Arendt 1968, 275-79).

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt pays attention to the war refugees who became stateless while leaving their homelands and settled in other European countries. The war refugees were denationalized, which meant that they did not have a legal status either in their homeland or in the states where they arrived. The denationalization made the refugees rightless and voiceless in front of the legal institutions that were already operated by the hegemonic nations. The term 'stateless' referred to people who lost the protection of their nation-states' governments, so they were meant to relay on protection by

the international legal framework. Another term that was used after the first World War was ‘displaced persons’. (Arendt 1968, 275-79).

The statelessness created a chaotic political scenario in Europe; therefore, two options remained applicable: to send the refugees to their countries of origin and give them reparations, or to let the refugees stay in the countries where they settled. Furthermore, Arendt illustrates the situation of the stateless people in Europe during the two World Wars, which culminated in denying the existence of the stateless people to the extreme of elimination. (Arendt 1968, 275-79).

Hannah Arendt distinguishes *de jure* stateless and *de facto* stateless people. Namely, the *de jure* stateless were recognized as stateless, and the *de facto* stateless were not legally recognized as stateless but they were treated as such. (Arendt 1968, 275-79). In her texts Arendt often mentions the Jews and the Armenians as example of stateless (rightless) people; however, following her logic, I would add Roma to the category rightless, both *de jure* and *de facto* stateless. In the twentieth century Europe Roma might have been legally part of some states as citizens and as such became stateless when they moved to another country as refugees. But whether they were sent to the country of their legal citizenship or were kept in the countries where they settled, in both cases Roma would be *de facto* stateless since they were not perceived as belonging to the nations which in that time were operating and governing the states and their legal and institutional systems. Roma were absolute stateless and rightless in the time of domination of the hegemonic nations over the states.

Following Arendt’s arguments on stateless in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, I assume that one thing was crucial: the fight of the stateless people to become people with – what Arendt calls – “the right to have rights”. The *de jure* stateless people firstly needed to have their rights guaranteed and then to have the right to have the written rights. The *de facto* stateless (they might have legal status of citizens) needed to fight for their right to have their written rights. Consequently, I see Roma being part of both categories. Some were *de facto* stateless (citizens, but not part of the nations) and some were *de jure* stateless (the ones who moved to other countries as refugees). The *de jure* stateless Roma faced double stateless.

1.2. The power to name the subordinate other

In his well-known theory on orientalism, Edward Said examines the power relation between the West and the East. According to this theory, the East is often orientalist and exoticized by the Western world that forms rather stereotypical and oppressive knowledge about the East. The relation West-East, or Us-Them, can be freely used for understanding any power relation that includes a subordinate position of the “non-civilized” to the “civilized”, “knowledgeable” and “superior” agent. The position of Roma *vis a vis* the hegemonic European nations can be elaborated using Said’s orientalist scope. The “non-civilized” Roma are often treated as inferior by the “civilized” nation-states.

I am going to focus on one point of Said's orientalist approach: the power of naming the subordinate subject; therefore, I am bringing an example that Said writes about. In the first chapter of his book *Orientalism* Said recounts a conversation in the British House of Commons (June 13, 1910) between Lord Balfour and Robertson. In that occasion Robertson asks Lord Balfour: "*What right have you to take up airs of superiority with regard to people whom you choose to call Oriental?*" (Said 1979, 31). Balfour's argument relies on the knowledge that Britain had about the history of Egypt; a knowledge which legitimizes the governance of Egypt by Britain. Furthermore, Said explains that the choice of the West to call the East 'Oriental' shows the hierarchical relation between the "superior" West and "inferior" East. The name 'Orient' as well as the subordinate relation West-East (Us-Them) highlights the power relation from which can be seen the power of naming the 'Oriental' by the West. (Said 1979, 32-3).

Furthermore, Said shows the legitimization of the colonial aspirations that Britain had towards Egypt according to Balfour: "*We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country.*" (Said 1979, 32). Balfour denied admitting that Britain had superiority, saying that the right to occupy Egypt arises from the "facts" and the knowledge they had about Egypt, and a knowledge which is deeper than Egyptians have about their own history. Balfour's argument on legitimization the colonization of Egypt was based on the knowledge of the Western subject as a source of legitimacy and power. It seemed that the power of knowledge was the argument that the West operates with during setting subordinate power relations with the ones who they see as not knowledgeable. (Said 1979, 32-3).

The logic that operates is "*we (the West) know you (the East) more than you know yourself, because we observe you and we study you, so we can define you better than you can define yourself*". With this logic the power of naming and defining the inferior, "primitive" East by the superior, "civilized" West becomes one of the main sources of power that are used in a oppressive and colonial way. (Said 1979, 32-3).

The relation between Britain and Egypt that Said mentions can be seen in other 'orientalist' relations as well. I see that relation between any two subjects between which one is superior, "knowledgeable", "civilized", and the other is inferior, "non-knowledgeable", "non-civilized". In such a relation the superior agent often legitimizes its right to define and name the other, inferior agent with the knowledge that the first has about the second. In this relationship of subordination, the Orientalized, inferior subjects are denied to have a right to practice their own culture or modes of knowing. Often the Western subject do not consider the Eastern subject's knowledge as knowledge. In the eyes of the West the only knowledge that counts is the Western knowledge.

The example of orientalist relation between Egypt and Britain, in terms of power of naming the subordinate, resembles to many other relations, among which Roma – non-Roma relation is the one I am going to use. Roma are often in a relation where the "civilized" and "knowledgeable" non-Roma legitimize themselves using statistical "facts" when naming the observed "non-civilized", orientalist Roma. Consequently, Roma were often labelled as the

“others”, the “non-deserving”, given names as ‘*Cigan*’ (dirty, unteachable). It seems that in the case of Roma the nation-states did not fully define or name Roma, but only treated them as subordinate other.

1.3.The biopolitical power over a nameless population of bare bodies

When the body of a person, or bodies within a population, are a subject of political power, the states aim to keep that pure and violent power relation. In his book *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault explains this aspect of the sovereignty of the states. Using the ancient patriarchal concept of the sovereign (*patria potestas*) Foucault attributes it with the power of the one who decides who to live and who to die. Foucault compares the sovereign to the omnipotent father in the ancient Roman families. I assume that as the father in the Roman families could decide about the life or death of the other family members and his slaves, in modern times the states still have the desire to decide about life and death, but in more complex and hidden form. (Foucault 2009, 136).

The states nowadays indirectly make decisions about who to kill and who to die. Foucault connects that part of the sovereignty with the concept of necro politics. Through the history the power of the sovereign directly to kill transformed into a power of the sovereign to let people die; and the power of the sovereign to decide not to kill transformed into a power of the sovereign to make people live through improving the quality of lives. Foucault calls this power of the sovereign ‘the power to make live or to let die. (Foucault 2009, 136-47).

Since the states kept the part of the sovereignty that includes necro politics (‘power over life and death’) they need terrain where they can exercise the violent aspect of their sovereignty. Because the power over the life of individuals became power over the lives of populations, in modern times the sovereign aims to decide about the lives of bare bodies (Doty 2007. Mignolo 2009) that consist the nameless populations. (Foucault 2009, 136-47).

Being aware of its power, the sovereign often desires to have power over the lives of populations; therefore, any non-defined and nameless group within the borders of the nation-state is an opportunity for the sovereign to practice its power and violence over it. Furthermore, the sovereign would rather try to keep that position of the nameless a population of bodies as long as possible. Therefore, every attempt of the populations to become a defined, named, meaningful political organization might be a danger for the part of the sovereignty of the nation-states that still aims to keep the power over lives.

The Holocaust during the second World War perfectly illustrates the power over lives of people who were seen as bare bodies. The relation between the victims of the Holocaust and the state illustrates a relation between bare bodies (Doty 2007. Mignolo 2009) and the sovereign who claimed to have the right to decide who to live and who to die. Furthermore, the murders were not done to individuals, but to big populations of people that were dehumanized to the extreme. The Holocaust went to the extreme because the victims were not only denied to be a meaningful named group, but they were also denied to be viewed as humans. While being

dehumanized and perceived only as population of bare bodies, Roma were one of the groups that were brutally killed during the second World War.

SECTION TWO: The First World Romani Congress – 08.04.1971 - Orpington (near London)

The years before 1971 Romani caravans on the European roads were under police attack, which culminated in brutal murdering of three Roma children by police officers during forced displacing the British “Gypsy” camp in Cherry Orchard, Great Britain. This murder was embodiment of the treatment that Roma were receiving by the states in Europe, which has its historic background. That murder, and the state’s violence in general, made Roma understand the need for international political organization in order to end their struggles on the national and local level.

On 8th of April 1971 in Orpington near London, England, the First World Romani Congress was organized as an attempt to build a nation of people who share the same struggles. It was organized mainly by members of the Romani Council which had existed since the 1960’s. The main figures and speakers on the Congress were Grattan Puxon, Slobodan Berberski, Vanko Rouda and Faik Abdi. The Congress’s work was divided between an education commission, a social commission, a war crimes commission, a cultural commission and a language commission. Representatives from the UN, UNESCO, Council of Europe, UN Commission on Human Rights and European Commission on Human Rights attended the Congress, which gave serious and international meaning to it. The main outcomes of the congress were: recognition of the Romani nation, the Romani anthem “Gjelem, Gelem”, the Romani flag, the Romani language, and the term ‘Roma’ as an official name of Romani people.

During the Congress Vanko Rouda said “*One difficulty is that Gajo official circles have not yet decided who or what we are.*” (Race Today 1971, 193). In those words, I find a dose of optimism when it comes to Roma deciding on their own who they are. One thing was certain – Roma were perceived as the “others”, the ones that did not fit the hegemonic image of the nation. In the culmination during the Romani Genocide during WW2, Roma were “otherized” to the extent that they were not counted as human beings, they were dehumanized by the ones who claimed they were the “humans”.

I will focus the following text on elaborating the discussion that Vanko Rouda, problematizing the nameless position of Roma, recounted at the Congress. The reason for focusing on this exact sentence is that it carries many questions that need to be answered in order to understand the aim of the Congress to: 1) consolidate Roma from all over Europe in one international political organizations (nation), and, 2) give Roma opportunity to take the power of naming by the states that decided not to name them, and Roma to name themselves. Furthermore, I see valuable the moment of understanding the importance of having Romani international political formation and having the power of naming in the hands of Roma.

2.1. Understanding the importance of having international Romani political organization

Left on the margins of the nation-states and inhumanly eliminated during the second World War, the lives of Roma during the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's was a real suffering. Roma could still feel the consequences of the war. The guarantees for protection of the rights adopted after the wars did not seem to protect Roma. *"The fact that since the war declarations concerning the rights of man and laws banning racial discrimination have proliferated. But for us they will remain a dead letter unless we can act together and make our voice heard in world affairs"* (Race Today 1971, 192) – said Grattan Puxon at the First World Romani Congress in 1971 in Orpington. After all, the Congress was imagined as a project that would give Roma people a voice and build a terrain from which they could speak and be heard as people with a meaningful voice.

The Congress was an attempt for the international Romani political organization to be built. To some extent it was successful. The main aim for Roma from Europe was to unite in a supranational ethnic group. The struggles and the discrimination were the main points that brought togetherness among Roma from around Europe. The struggles were the main determinator of the Romani identity as international ethnicity. Therefore, the Romani identity would not be what it is today if the struggles, the discrimination, the *"samudaripen"* (Romani holocaust) had not happened.

Roma identity was historically formed as a product of the treatment that Roma were receiving from the states. Consolidation and emphasizing the characteristics of the Romani ethnicity is seemed to be resistance to the hegemonic way of political organization in the nation-states where Roma were not treated as equal agents. Roma needed to organize themselves as a political group in order to attain equality and obtain their dignity.

At the First Romani Congress in 1971, the first president Slobodan Berberski said *"Our people must combine and organize to work locally, nationally and internationally. Our problems are the same everywhere..."* (Race Today 1971, 192). This implies that the Romani nation should be built as an international ethnicity whose members share the same struggles, and the actions should be taken on a national and local level. The fact that today many countries in Europe have national and local plans for inclusion of Roma indicates the success of the Congress in terms of advocating for the nation-states to include Roma in their national politics. However, although in many European states ethnic politics are present, Roma still face struggles and unjust treatment by the national political institutions. The motivation for adopting ethnic politics might rather be more pragmatical than ethical. The states, recognizing the political potential of the international Romani nation, artificially perform inclusion of Roma. I argue that the states in Europe do not fulfil their protective role when it comes to Roma and that Roma naively believe that the states have intentions to protect them by inclusion through directed ethnic politics. I imply that the real intention of the states is rather to protect their sovereignty and legitimacy. Re-examination of the protective role of the nation-state might be possible through remembering the importance of having an international Romani political organization.

Saying “*Yet the truth is we are still surrounded by the Gajo (non-Gypsy) world. They regard us as a romantic curiosity, a criminal element or as social misfits who must be made to conform their norms*” (Race Today 1971, 192) Grattan Puxon argued that the need for emphasizing the specific needs of Roma is crucial for resisting the norms of the non-Roma that Roma never actually agreed on. Those norms were criminalizing, dehumanizing and discriminating Roma. That was another motivation that brought the members of the Congress together.

A crucial moment that gave serious note to the Congress in 1971 was the presence of representatives from international political organizations such as the UN, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the UN Council of Human Rights and European Commission of Human Rights. The cooperation that the Congress had with those organizations was embodiment of the recognition that Roma obtained. Three things were achieved: 1) building an international Romani nation, 2) recognition of Roma by the ‘world’, and 3) displacing the power of naming Roma from the hands of the nation-states to the hands of Roma themselves. The First World Romani Congress successfully accomplished the mission for getting what Arendt would call “the right to have rights”. Roma finally decided to build a terrain for them to be people whose voice would have a political meaning and will be heard by the international community.

Before further elaborations of the importance of having a Romani political organization, it is important to locate the place of Roma during the nation building process in Europe. Roma were living in the territories where the nation-states were being built. They did not take part in deciding what the nations would look like and what the rules in the nation-states would be. Additionally, not all the nation-states were open to Roma for cohabitation. While some states let the Roma be part of the nations, but only as inferior national minorities, others let them live on their territories, but only by the roles that Roma never actually agreed on.

As I already mentioned, a crucial segment of Hannah Arendt’s theoretical work is the concept of “the right to have rights”. The Congress perfectly depicts the fight of Roma to become people who will have a right to use their rights that consisted in the international conventions and declarations, and the national laws, after the war period. Although Roma needed to be viewed by the states as holders of human rights, they could not have the opportunity to react when some of their rights were under attack of the nation-states. It was necessary for Roma to unite themselves in a political organization that would give them a voice to speak about the injustice and violence towards them.

2.2. The Roma – non-Roma orientalist relation and the power to name Roma

In his work, Edward Said gives an overview on the knowledge and the power of naming as a tool of oppression. Said’s Orientalist power relation can be used as a scope for understanding the dilemma that arises from Vanko Rouda’s sentence “*One difficulty is that Gajo official circles have not yet decided who or what we are.*” (Race Today 1971, 193). This sentence has

three segments that need to be elaborated. Firstly, why Gajo (non-Roma) are the ones who decide? Secondly, why such a decision must be done? And finally, is that position of not being defined really difficulty for Roma?

2.2.1. Does a decision on naming Roma have to be done?

Although during the First World Romani Congress (1971) Roma united themselves in an international political body which was recognized by the international community, they were still not fully recognizable as political actors. The reason for that was that – as Vanko Rouda underlined – it had not been decided yet who belonged to the category Roma and what the name of the new-formed group was. With bringing this to the table, Rouda encouraged the members of the Congress to focus on deciding ‘*who and what Roma are*’. For them it was important the decision on who Roma are to be made. Saying that the Gajo officials had not decided yet (they did not want or they could not – I will explain my view in the next section) the opportunity for deciding was open, and Roma took the power of deciding in their hands. Although the nation-states had the actual power of deciding who are Roma, they did not do so, and Roma used the opportunity to decide for themselves. However, I claim that the nation-states did not miss the opportunity to use their power of naming and let Roma name themselves, but they rather decided Roma to be nameless, undefined population (in the next section I will elaborate the reasons for that).

2.2.2. Can the Gajo say who are the Roma?

Following Said’s logic, Roma and non-Roma had an orientalist relation of superior, knowledgeable, civilized Gajo versus non-deserving, otherized, “uncivilized” Roma. In that relation Roma were not only perceived as the ones who do not have the knowledge to define themselves, but also were viewed as inferior to the oppressive nation-states which had the full right to decide everything concerning Roma. That orientalist Relation made the ‘Gajo officials’ (nation-states) the ones with power to name Roma; to name ‘who and what Roma are’. Although the nation-states had such a power they seemed to decide not to define and name Roma.

In Said’s the knowledge and the power of naming are important characteristics of every orientalist power relation. The non-Roma seemed to be the ones who have the knowledge about: 1) who and what Roma are, and 2) how to count Roma (statistics). The superior position of the non-Roma made them able to decide if they want to count Roma as a common group, and if they decide to count them – who will be part of that group and who will not. Additionally, the diversity of the Romani identity was a mitigating circumstance that encouraged the Gajo’s decision not to count Roma as a common group saying that it is difficult to say who and what Roma are.

But on the other hand, we have a paradoxical situation of labelling Roma: although Roma are not defined as Roma by the Gajo, they still were treated like the ‘others’, non-deserving “criminal” group that does not deserve to receive any protection, but only violence.

Through the practice of the institutions we might see the ‘otherness’ of Roma in the eyes of the Gajo officials. The logic of the ‘Gajo officials’ simply can be put in the following words: *for us you are the non-deserving ‘others’, but we will not count you, because that way you will not be perceived as a common group which might be a platform for you to unite. We want to keep you under our monopoly over the knowledge about you (that knowledge is not precise for the same reason); we just want to keep the orientalist relation, but we do not want to say what we know about who you are because: 1) our knowledge about you might question our sovereignty and right to exercise violence on you, 2) it might empower you to resist to the actions we take following the logic of the knowledge we have about you, and 3) it might encourage you to see your unity through the struggles you survive because our violence that arises from our knowledge about you.*

2.2.3. Is it difficulty that Gajo did not decide who Roma are?

The fact that Roma were not defined as a group brings a dilemma between anxiety and freedom. On the one hand, anxiety of not being named, on the other hand freedom to take the power of naming in the hands of Roma. While the first perception brings a pessimistic view, the other perception shows an optimistic view and chance that Roma had. It is possible -or not - that Roma recognized the chance of not being defined (only treated as the non-deserving others) by the non-Roma and used the opportunity to construct a political international umbrella identity and name it as Roma. Faik Abdi during the Congress announced the term ‘Roma’ as only mutually accepted name that would be used for naming the group of people which often was named with different pejorative names. Faik Abdi’s presentation of the term ‘Roma’ received the biggest applause by the audience during the Congress, says Grattan Puxon.

Since the Romani language is my mother tongue, I know the translation of the term ‘Roma’. Translated from Romanes, ‘*Rrom*’ means ‘human’. This gives an interesting social aspect to the etymology of the word ‘Roma’ (human). A possible explanation of this choice of Roma to be named ‘Roma’ is the fact that Roma through the history were often not treated according the understanding of what is human in different historic periods. In other words, Roma were often dehumanized, so the name ‘Roma’ might mean “*treat me as a human*” and “*my name should remind you that I am a human*”. Again, the name Roma depicted the attempt of Roma to organize themselves in an aterritorial nation which was an embodiment of the resistance of Roma towards the hegemonic, dehumanizing treatment by the nation-states. Namely, Roma said ‘stop’ to the dehumanization with their will to be called ‘Rom’ (human).

2.3. Why Gajo did not use their power to name the Roma

Although the nation-states had the power to name and define Roma, they did not use their position in the orientalist power relation Roma – non-Roma and decided not to define Roma. I assume that this decision of the states to leave Roma to be nameless population was thoughtfully made. Obviously, one can ask what the reason for the states was to decide not to define Roma.

One potential – for me very relevant – explanation can be found in the theories on biopolitics and body politics. Michel Foucault writes about the power of the states over bodies.

The 1960's and 1970's was a period of body-politics. The nation-states focused their sovereignty on control over population of bodies. In that machinery there was no space for emphasizing the ethnic political identity of Roma. Therefore, the Gajo officials did not perceive Roma as a political entity, but only as part of a nameless and voiceless population over which the national sovereignty legitimated exercising power and violence without offering protection. No one was there to protect Roma; therefore, they decided to organize themselves in a political organization which would give them space to become people with 'the right to have rights', and as such to ask for protection by the states.

When people become numbers in statistics, they are counted bodies that are part of a population. When the state does not want to decide in which group Roma will belong it seems that there are two reasons for that: 1) Roma are not be perceived as members of a politically organized group, and 2) Roma are not perceived as deserving to be governed and protected by the state. Not receiving protection was one of the main motives for organizing the First World Romani Congress in 1971 – the intention was Roma to become people with a right to have protection by the states.

Roma were (are) perceived as only a biological human (in some parts of the history even inhuman) population. The logic that simply operates within the nation-states is: *I do not see you as a political actor (sometimes not even as a human); therefore, I do not name you as one; you remain to be just a biological collective organism over which I can easily exercise my power and violence. I need you to be a nameless apolitical population.*

The states aimed to keep their sovereignty in terms of having the right over life and death (killing and letting die); therefore, a political identity of common groups was dangerous for this classical understanding of the sovereignty. The states wanted Roma to be just population (bodies) for which they can decide about life and death (protecting Roma life or letting Roma die). That is the reason why the 'Gajo officials haven't decided yet' who and what Roma are. As long as Roma are not defined as a politically meaningful group, they remain to be just a population.

The aim of the Congress was to displace this position of Roma as just a nameless population and become a politically organized group with its name, symbols, language and anthem. The recognition of Roma as a political organization needed to be fulfilled through symbols that would make Roma recognizable as a group. The need for that common belonging was Roma to become a political group which would make them people with 'the right to have rights' and to stop the violence by the states. When Roma faced the reality that the Gajo officials had not decided who Roma were, Roma took the control and they aimed to decide for themselves.

Conclusion

On 8 April, 1971 in Orprington, Great Britain, a Congress occurred that should be used as a reminder for how Roma resisted the violent treatment by the hegemonic nation-states and consolidated themselves into a nation. This historic event can be used as an example or pattern for resisting the structural discrimination and violence by the states which instead of protecting often oppress Roma. Once Roma became a self-named, politically meaningful group with ‘the right to have right’, the dilemma of: 1) being governed by the state, or 2) Roma to govern themselves; remains to be a question that needs to be taken into account when political decisions about Roma are being made. My assumption is that Roma nowadays rely on the protection by the states and the national strategies for “inclusion” of Roma. This thesis is a reminder of the danger of the states to oppress Roma, therefore Roma should question more frequently the legitimacy of the states when it comes to offering protection to Roma. Finally, the most important is that this thesis might remind Roma of their potential to take the political power in their hands every time they see that the states fail in offering them protection.

This thesis offered a theoretical framework as a tool of thinking. It began with Hannah Arendt’s concept of the need for a political organization for the stateless to attain ‘the right to have rights.’ Next, it engaged with Edward Said’s critique of Western power and knowledge, with a thought on the power to name the subordinate agent in an orientalist relation. Then, with Michel Foucault’s work on body politics, this thesis questioned power, violence and emancipation in relation to the sovereign when practicing violence over nameless populations.

After offering the theoretical concepts, I elaborated upon the success of the First World Romani Congress. Firstly, the Congress successfully constructed for the Romani political actors a platform from which they could perform as a politically meaningful common group with ‘the right to have rights’. Secondly, the Congress helped Roma escape the orientalist relation between Roma and non-Roma through taking the power of naming in their hands. Finally, Roma transformed themselves from a nameless population of ‘bare bodies’ into a common group named as ‘Roma’ (human). After highlighting the success of the Congress in terms of building Romani nation, 8th April, it is worth remembering as the day when the ‘fathers’ of the Romani nation stepped out of the box of the territorial understanding of a nation in times when in Europe the socialism, communism and capitalism were operating with the understanding of the nation-state.

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