

The Roma in Europe Today: Patterns of Discrimination



Roma camp off the Highway 65, Greece, Allison Redman

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Introduction

This paper explores the complex and challenging situation of the Roma people in Europe today. It examines stereotypes and historical patterns that have afflicted the Roma for centuries. The unique nature of Roma life and culture has created particular problems and burdens for this ancient and misunderstood people with other European citizens. Many of these issues came to a head with an incident in Southern France that brought worldwide attention to the Roma situation.

The Incident

July 2010 brought complicated human rights issues to the forefront of the world's attention. France began to deport the Roma, sometimes known as the Gypsies, to Romania and Bulgaria, which have large Roma populations. According to French officials this was an attempt to cut down on "crime." The spark of the incident was the murder of a twenty-two year old Roma, named Luigi Duguenet who was shot by police when the car he was in ran through a roadblock and "allegedly hit an officer" (Crumley, 23 July 2010) On July 16th, a group of about fifty Roma "rioted" and ransacked a police station along with local businesses in the village of Saint-Aignan located in Central France. In response France's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, responded by announcing the French government would "round up and expel illegal Roma immigrants and destroy hundreds of their encampments" (Guardian.co.uk, 30 July 2010). France's actions upset the European Union members and triggered wide spread reaction

throughout the world. Between July 28th and September 7th, over nine hundred Gypsies were deported out of France.(Guardian.co.uk, 7 Sept. 2010).

Additionally, in 2009, France already deported 9,875 Roma out of the country.

The number of deportations from January 2009 until September 7, 2010 make the event a dramatic mass expulsion of a minority group. The French argued that their actions were not targeting a specific ethnic group, but according to a Turkish Newspaper, a leaked internal French memo from August 5th, 2010 contradicted their argument. It stated that “three hundred camps or illegal settlements must be cleared within three months. Roma camps are a priority”

(Hurrityetdailynews.com, 15 Sept 2010).

The dispute, according to the *Hurrityet Daily News and Economic Review* (2011) brought forth old feelings from World War II. According to EU Justice Commissioner, Vivian Reding:

She was ‘appalled by a situation which gave the impression that people are being removed from a member state of the European Union just because they belong to a certain ethnic minority. This is a situation I had thought Europe would not have to witness again after the Second World War.

Hurrityetdailynews.com, 15 Sept 2010

France defended their actions to the Union making it a focal point of discussion throughout the world. In the same article, Pierre Lellouche, Secretary of State for Foreign Trade, explains that the deportation was “a cash handout, a plane ticket to the EU country of origin” and not the same as the mass deportations during World War II (Hurrityet Daily News and Economic Review, 15 Sept 2010). This was not the first time France deported Roma; it occurred during the second

World War when they expelled thousands of Gypsies to Nazi concentration camps along with Jews and homosexuals, political activist and other vulnerable minorities (Hurrityetdailynews.com, 16 Sept 2010).

On September 16th, when the European Commission met for its session, France's actions dominated the agenda. The *Hurrityet Daily News* reported that "the dispute threatens to undermine the EU's effort to present a unified foreign and economic policy." The journalist continued to explain that in order to make an impact on the world they have to handle issues in their own backyard (Hurrityetdailynews.com, 16 Sept 2010). The EU has made it their main concern to effectively eliminate discrimination and unite all human beings and countries in a healthy and constructive way. The conflict required the Union to examine France's actions and legislation. Viviane Reding broadcast on French TV that "France did not transpose proper guarantees (to ensure freedom of movement) into its national legislation" (Hurrityetdailynews.com, 29 Sept 2010). Not only did France not write EU rules regarding freedom of movement into their national law, but now it also faced charges of discrimination based on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Thesis

In my research I wanted to understand the policy implications of the conflict that arose between the Transnational European Union and France, one of its national member states. In this jurisdictional context, the Roma present difficulties for both the EU and individual states on economic, social and political

levels. Ten weeks of travel, interviewing and researching in Europe revealed more about the Roma and European history. The pattern that unfolded involved a dark history. I began to see that Commissioner Reading's statement referring to World War II was appropriate looking into the events that brought about Hitler's power and ability to cause such destruction. History is full of repetitions and patterns that hopefully can be changed through proper policies and knowledge of the issues. Discrimination can only be tackled by shedding light on the problems in society and having a willingness to address and overcome these obstacles. As the abundant literature on the origins of the Holocaust demonstrates, awareness is essential in order to avoid the discrimination that can lead to horrific human rights abuses. One of the purposes of this paper is to explore some of the parallels between World War II and today's situation in respect to discrimination towards the Roma. In order to do so I will explore some of the basic history of Roma's origins and culture. Then I will conclude with an examination of some of the current human rights legislation that is designed to address the situation of Roma today.

Narratives of Roma Origins

Home could be anywhere, and everywhere was home. Maybe beginnings didn't matter much. With their almost mythical presence, these were people who had always been around but had always had to begin again, wherever they found themselves. And getting there had always been a long, hard journey.

Fonseca, 1995, p. 85

For much of their history, the Roma travelled as nomads throughout Europe. Each caravan recognized themselves as their own small Gypsy

community different from the other. The common nickname Gypsy, developed from the belief the Roma were from Egypt, due to their dark skin and the fact they moved throughout the world (Goldston, 2002, p.148). Their travelling descendants may have long since settled, but their stereotype still lives on in the minds of the masses. History has forged their position in society, which is often one of misconception and imposed inequality. In order to understand their position and discrimination in society, the masses must understand their “long, hard journey” into the modern world.

The Roma’s journey begins over a thousand years ago, when “ancestors of Romani-speaking peoples [who] left India” traveled along trade routes coming in contact with other migratory nations (Acton, 1974, p.1). Isabel Fonseca (1995), author of Bury Me Standing, provides an ethnographic study of Gypsies throughout time. In her book, she explains that:

Gypsy migration has been likened to a fishbone spread over the map of Europe... with two main lines indicating the human trek: India to Persia to Armenia – and then a fork to Syria and what would become Iraq in one direction, and in the other Byzantine Greece, the Balkans and on into Western Europe and the New World.

Fonseca, 1995, p.83-84

The roots of Roma culture are complex and somewhat mysterious. They have often been simply seen as the exotic or dangerous other. Their title only changed during the 18th century when a Hungarian pastor recognized similarities with Indian and Romani languages. According to Thomas Acton,

The Roma are believed to be ancestors of the Romani-speaking peoples [who] left India some one thousand years ago,

moving along trade routes trodden over the centuries by countless other migratory nations.... Some two to three hundred years later, contemporary documents attest their arrival in Eastern Europe.

(Acton, 1974, p.1)

Stories throughout history have documented the existence of the Gypsies and reinforced their position as the “other.”

Historically, the image of the Roma has been created by stereotypes developed by the majority. Catholicism documented Gypsies in history through legends connected with the Bible, securing their position as wanderers through time. According Fonseca (1995), legends connect the Gypsies as the “cursed descendants of Cain, condemned to wander the world. (In Semitic languages- Hebrew, Aramaic, and others- *cain* means “blacksmith,” perhaps the profession with which gypsies are most closely associated)” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 88). For centuries, the Bible provided a source of knowledge for people. The Church preached messages which encouraged xenophobia, fear of the other. Fonseca quotes Genesis 4:12, “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; *a fugitive and a vagabond* shalt thou be in the earth.” The author continues to analyze this image of fugitives and vagabonds by explaining that the Gypsies have never been “attracted to cultivation of the land—which they themselves may (disingenuously) refer to as their “curse”” (Fonseca, 1995, 88).

Another tale, written down in 1920, by Konrad Bercovici, from Macedonia, coincides with the death of Christ, connecting a Gypsy to the forger of Christ’s nails. In Fonseca’s book (1995) she relays the story that was translated from centuries of “tale-telling” (Fonseca, 1995: 89) (See Appendix). The story

demonstrates the marginalization and demonization of the Roma. In the story Roman soldiers are sent to obtain four stout nails for the crucifixion of Christ, known to the Gypsies as Yeshua ben Miriam. The Roman Soldiers spend half of the Kreutzers on alcohol. Afterwards they search for a blacksmith. First the men stop at a Jewish blacksmith, who refuses to do the nails that would crucify Christ. The soldiers move on to another Jewish blacksmith who refuses for the same reason. After murdering a total of three blacksmiths, the soldiers desperately seek another blacksmith, finding a Gypsy who set up on the outside of the town. After taking the money the Gypsy starts on the task. When the soldiers mentioned Yeshu ben Miriam, the ghosts of the three tradesmen warn the Gypsy not to complete the nails. The frightened soldiers run with the three completed nails, while the Gypsy continues to complete the fourth. Upon completion the nail stayed hot sending the Gypsy into the desert frightened. The nail he left behind outside the gates of the city followed him to his camp in the desert and for the rest of his life. The last paragraph of the story speaks to the curse.

And the nail always appears in the tents of the descendants of the man who forged the nails for the crucifixion of Yeshua ben Miriam. And when the nail appears, the Gypsies run. It is why they move from one place to another. It is why Yeshua ben Miriam was crucified with only three nails, his two feet being drawn together and one nail piercing both of them. The fourth nail wanders about from one end of the earth to the other.

Fonseca, 1995: 89-92

In many stories we can see the pattern of discrimination against marginalized minorities. In a similar way that anti-Semitism was fueled with the accusation that Jews killed Christ, so too anti-Gypsyism was and is fueled by the same

projections of blame for Christ's death. These ancient fears and projections create stereotypes that affect the relationships between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. Fonseca (1995) notes, "during most of the story not one Gypsy appears (and when he does he is a figure of last resort, an after thought pitched up outside the gates of Jerusalem)" (Fonseca, 1995 p. 89). The station outside of the gates denotes their position in society, one that is paralleled today where Roma community resides on the outskirts of cities, along the highways and out of the sight. It portrays the Roma as a last resort, one that people only look to in desperate times. They are simply there when the unfortunate twist of fate occurs causing the fearful Gypsy to run into the desert. Without any comprehension of the implications or consequences, the Gypsy takes the money and does his job, suffering discrimination for eternity.

Some would argue that it is just a tale, but for the Roma, the oral tradition documents history. The fact the legend has lasted over the centuries demonstrates the ability for a story to maintain some unhidden explanation for the Roma's position in society. Since traditional Roma culture is predominately oral, their perspective has not been documented in history, just shared from generation to generation. Fonseca makes a good point:

Gypsies have no myths about the beginning of the world, or about their own origins; they have no sense of a great historical past. Very often their memories do not extend beyond three or four generations—that is, to those experiences and ancestors who are remembered by the oldest living person among them. The rest, as it were, is not history.

Fonseca, 1995, p. 243

Gypsies have a living history. In some cases, stories are forgotten with a person, but the ones that survive are altered as if the generations are playing a game of “telephone” as children.

Roma in the Middle Ages

Fonseca examines another narrative dealing with the Gypsies’ origins. Historical documents show that Gypsies migrated to Europe a little more than a thousand years ago, but Fonseca (1995) notes that evidence points out that Roma arrived in Persia earlier than that. She refers to a Persian historian, Hamaza (who wrote in Arabic). He notes that Bahram Gur, the Shah of Persia, between 420 and 438 AD, “imported twelve thousand ‘Zott’¹musicians for their listening pleasure” (Fonseca, 1995, 93). She backs this finding with a poet who wrote *Shah Nameh*, or the *Book of Kings*, describing Bahram Gur in 1011 AD. The poet explains that the drastic discontent between the rich and poor laid in the fact the rich could play music. The ruler wrote to his father in-law in India to send ten thousand Luris, men and women who were experts in playing the lute. When they arrived he provided each of them one donkey and an ox and the whole group a thousand donkeys loaded with corn so that they would settle and farm his kingdom. The Luris ate their ox and corn and left the capital. The poet ends noting, “These Luris even now wander through the world, begging a living, sleeping alongside wolves, living like dogs, always on the road, stealing day and night” (Fonseca, 1995, 93). Again, stories, which document history point out that Gypsy ancestors were wild, living along the road like animals. As of 1011 AD

¹ Zott is an Arab word for Indian (Fonseca, 1995, 93).

their stereotype was already created, they were to be feared by the settled population as wild creatures.

Fonseca (1995) explains that some scholars believed that circa 700 AD the Gypsies arrived in Persia via the Arabian Sea and up the Persian Gulf. They settled along the Tigris River as captives but within a century the Zott community were perceived as a threat by Baghdad. They managed to levy their own taxes on their merchants who passed through. The threat became so large that the caliph sent troops against them from 820 until 834 AD, when the next Caliph succeeded in damming their canals and flooding their feeds wiping out "Zottistan." Fonseca states, "they resisted for fourteen years: perhaps the only time in history when the Gypsies (or proto-Gypsies) have had their own mini-kingdom or even independent colony" (Fonseca, 1995, 94). She further references Donald Kennrick and explains that some of the displaced Zotts would eventually move into Armenia, and later into the Balkans and Europe. They joined forces with other Indians traveling from Persia and traditional traders, becoming in the process the European Romanis (Fonseca, 1995, p.94).

Roma in the Modern World

The Fifteenth and sixteenth centuries becomes a demarcation point as history documents a demand for the gypsies. Slavery, which was occurring throughout the world, most commonly associated with the Africans in the Americas, was also occurring with many minorities including the Roma. The

feudal system is a medieval social system defined for its characteristics “in which land was granted by a lord to a vassal in exchange for military service... or the nature of the land held under this system” (Feudal, 1975, p. 361). The feudal system encouraged social class organization both geographically and socially, putting nobility first and peasant and slaves second. In the case of the Gypsies this enforced their position because it required them to settle on the outskirts of villages” (Ioviță and Schurr, 2004, 276). Though the Gypsies lived at the margins there was a demand for their talents. Europe needed labor to maintain a feudal organization. Fonseca (1995) writes, “ The Gypsies were wanted, and detained not for their crimes, but for their talents. Tinsmiths and coppersmiths, locksmiths, blacksmiths especially, as well as the esteemed musicians among them, were valued and even fought over” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 97). This is important to note because their diverse quality created a niche that provided a competitive advantage for them throughout Feudalism, but later created a less desired position in society.

According to the article, “Reconstructing the Origins and Migrations of Diasporic Populations: The Case of the European Gypsies,” there were three types of Gypsies. The first type of Gypsy was connected to the home and “directly enslaved by the nobility.” The second belonged to monasteries while the third were classified as the free Gypsies who belonged to the state. They were free to travel but still “paid tribute” to the lords or princes. The distinctions were relevant until the mid nineteenth century when intellectuals began to debate

emancipation (Ioviță and Schurr, 2004, p.276). No matter whether the Gypsies belonged to nobility or free to wander, Gypsies answered to someone.

With the rise of industrialism, there was little need for the specialized works of the Gypsies. The group that traveled between the classes providing work slowly became casted out by machines. Earlier the Roma had an advantage and ability to maneuver their way of life on the outside by working on the inside. They had a diverse function that provided need for their specialty and labor. Kings desired Gypsies for entertainment and work in order to stimulate kingdoms. Ironically the end of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century marks the beginning of a great wave of unwanted migrations west, which ushered in new forms of discrimination. With the turn of the century, the Gypsies found themselves wandering into an undesired future as capitalism and political ideologies affected the landscape.

The Uproar of the Twentieth Century

While the growth and expansion of the nineteenth century lead to important turning points in history, it also produced new dimensions of discrimination. Major cataclysmic events affect the Roma population even though they dwelled in the margins of European life and culture. The century began with the roar of the great arms race between major European countries, most notably France, Germany and Russia. During this time major powers grew into alliances causing a split in Europe leading to World War I in 1914 until 1918. World War I

not only brought about new warfare tactics and new political ideas, but the Great Depression that roughly began in October 1929. Until the late 1930's and the start of World War II people around the world felt the economic crunch causing hostility allowing Hitler's Nazism to thrive. Precarious economic times often foster prejudice xenophobia and discrimination.

The Nazi Party used the Jewish population and other minorities as a scapegoat for all the economic stress occurring after the First World War. While Hitler strove for the greater Aryan Race, all non Germans felt the impact. Hitler attempted to address the "Jewish Problem" and expanded the campaign of hatred to include the Gypsies. A Holocaust definition is "a sacrificial offering consumed by fire" (Holocaust, 1975, p. 458) For the Roma the term associated with World War II and the holocaust is the Romani word *porraimos*, (spelled *pharrajimos* by the European Roma and Travellers Forum, (European Roma and Travellers Forum)) "the devouring" (Fonseca, 1995, p. 253). The term not only refers to the moment in time, but the time after. According to Fonseca (1995), "the devouring usefully describes the continuing suppression or denial of the Gypsy case. (Appropriately, *porraimos* is a term even less well known among Gypsies than 'Holocausto')" (Fonseca, 1995, p. 253). Signs of Gypsies devouring developed at the end of slavery when Germans began to record the undesirables.

As early as 1899 the Roma had a record in Germany. The Weimar Constitution guaranteed equality before the law and kept a central register. Later

the Munich police began to commission action against Roma. Starting in 1911 these files included “fingerprints and photo ID’s not just for criminals but for all Gypsies over the age of 6. As of 1925, Bavarian Law for Combating of Gypsies, Travelers, and the Work-shy, empowered Bavarian police to send Roma and Sinti to workhouses for two years. In 1933 enforcement against the Roma increased and the label “Gypsy” became “undesirable.” Fonseca (1995) quotes Holocaust Historian Lucy Davidowicz, “only in the last year of the war did Nazi ideologues begin to regard the Gypsies not only as an undesirable social element, but also as an undesirable racial element” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 257-258).

The Nazi’s felt the need to identify Romani people. In order to determine physical characteristics, Dr. Robert Ritter, a child psychologist at the University of Tuebingen, became the head of the study. According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, Ritter’s specialty was criminal biology; “the idea that criminal behavior is genetically determined” (Persecution of Roma (Gypsies) in Prewar Germany, 1933-1939, 2011). Ritter located and classified an estimated thirty thousand Roma living in Germany. Often his team would make their rounds with eye charts, pots of wax to take masks of Gypsy faces along with other tools to understand the race. After an encounter with Ritter an “interviewee and sometimes the entire family would be removed to a camp (Fonseca, 1995, p. 258). By using force he was able to threaten the Roma into identifying relatives and their last known residence. His studies concluded that the Roma originated from India and “were once Aryan but had been corrupted by mingling with lesser

peoples during their long migration.” The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Encyclopedia says “Ritter estimated that some ninety percent of all Roma in Germany were of mixed blood and were consequently carriers of “degenerate” blood and criminal characteristic” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Persecution of Roma (Gypsies) in Prewar Germany, 1933-1939*, 2011).

According to Fonseca (1995) Dr. Robert Ritter’s assistant Eva Justin influenced action by noting that all “full and part-Gypsies, including the educated and assimilated be sterilized; education of Gypsies was fruitless and should be stopped” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 258). As a result of their “social deviant” classification the Roma faced involuntary sterilization under the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring in July of 1933, followed by the Regulations for the Security and Reform of Habitual Criminals and Social Deviants in November of 1933 (Fonseca, 1995, p. 255). Ritter defined a Gypsy, if “two out of sixteen of a person’s great-great-grandparents were Gypsies, that person was classified as part Gypsy, and so later would qualify for admission to Auschwitz” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 258). Fonseca (1995) continues to note that by 1937 the Roma fall under “the Laws Against Crime” among “those who have shown that they do not wish to fit into society: beggars, tramps (Gypsies), prostitutes, persons with infectious diseases who do not follow treatment, etc” (Fonseca, 1995, p. 255). Once Ritter’s studies released their conclusion the law became backed by “scientific research,” followed by the deportation of German

Gypsies after the start of the war in 1939. The Nazi's branded the Gypsies as "criminals" by genetic disposition, further "othering" the race. Fonseca (1995) continues to note that although the Gypsies were not mentioned in major legislations, measures were taken to deal with the racial problem. Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsfuhrer of the SS, a man most associated with the rise of the Holocaust said:

Experiences gained in the struggle against the Gypsy Plague and knowledge derived from race-biological research have shown that... the final solution of the Gypsy question... must be approached with the basic nature of this race in mind.

Fonseca, 1995, p. 261

Himmler backs the scientist by acknowledging their research as proof of negative aspects of the Roma population. What was once opinion turned politically and scientifically backed discrimination. The Gypsy plague needed to be cured.

Laws developed to persecute the other. Gypsies were placed in Gypsy camps, known as Zigeunerlager as early as 1934, before Hitler's regime knew what the Gypsies were by science. In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws began to affect the Gypsies. Like the Jews, the laws prohibited "marriage or sexual relations between people who could produce 'racially suspect' offspring." (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Nuremberg Race Laws, 2011). That following year, just before the Olympics were held in Berlin, Germany, the chief of police was authorized to arrest all Gypsies in Prussia. Six hundred arrested Roma were corralled like animals with their wagons to a sewage dump next to a cemetery at Marzahn. All this was not an order by law but by a circular (Fonseca, 1995, p.

257). The Zigeunerlager resulted in a massive loss of life due to disease from poor sanitation. In the end the Gypsies were a problem just like the Jews. The majority had the racial need to separate the oddities from society.

The horrors of World War II resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent people. The terrifying aspect is that the majority managed to create the fates of undesired people through what the government told them. Yet when it came to the Gypsies the misunderstanding and the fear of their criminal genetics, threatened the German Populations. The fear of the “other” and marginalizing propaganda made Gypsies an easy target for Hitler’s hate machines. An Israeli scholar estimated anywhere from 5.7 million to 5.86 million Jews died in concentration camps. Some estimate about five hundred thousand Gypsies died in the camps. The resulting numbers do not show the catastrophic toll it took on the Roma population (R. Rustem, personal communication, May 4, 2011). During a meeting with Robert Rustem, the Head of Secretariat in the European Roma and Travellers Forum, he explained that the number of Jews who died in the death camps was large, but the devastation for the Roma, percentage wise, was even greater because the Roma population was so much smaller (r. Rustem, personal communication, May 4, 2011).

Roma: Back to the Future

While in Europe, I observed that Roma live in the shadows. In major cities Roma beg for money on the street and live on the outskirts. While driving on the

high ways, the Roma settle outside the cities, such as in Greece between Athens and Metora, or in the middle of nowhere behind shrubs in the Czech Republic. Throughout Europe, especially during an unstable economic period in history, minorities are left searching for a better life. They become the scapegoats for the fears of the time like the Jews during World War II. In The European Dream by Jeremy Rifkin (2005), he explores a change in perspectives towards immigration and migration. Since the time of Nation-States Europe has moved its concern from class struggles of “possession, distribution of capital, and the protection of private property rights” to a broader “struggle over diversity and centers more on preserving one’s cultural identity and enjoying access rights in a densely connected, interdependent world” (Rifkin, 2005, p.248). The change in discriminatory perspectives came about with a growing globalized world. As the world became more interdependent due to technology immigration became easier and more threatening. Rifkin (2005) acknowledges that, especially in an unstable world market economy with high unemployment, “Europeans worry that immigrant groups will grab the few available manufacturing and service jobs, at the expense of their native born” (Rifkin, 2005, p.248). As long as insecurity exists in the lively hood of the native born there will be distrust and discrimination toward the threat of the new comers. During the interim of the World Wars, the dislike towards Jews grew especially through the Great Depression. There is pattern repeating with migration groups during the first great economic recession

in history since the 1930's and with it comes resentment and the anti-immigrant parties of the extreme right.

Today, history repeats itself in France with the Roma, which is described in the section titled "The Incident." President Sarkozy, a Nationalist, belonging to the French National Front, attempted an Operation National Identity, in order to define "what it means to be French in the 21st century" (Crumley, 12 February 2010). Crumley (2010) continues, " Many observers saw the exercise as a political ploy—an effort by the conservative government to seduce extreme right-wing voters by fanning nationalist flames ahead of regional elections [March 2010]" (Crumley, 12 February 2010). It's important to note the need for political popularity. In order for Sarkozy to gain points with the public he has to perceive and reflect the population's fears. He uses the political tactic of solving a problem that affects the lives of many individuals. Yet Sarkozy fails to address the issue of migration and even the national identity successfully. Conservative parliamentarian, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, mentioned that the operation missed the point; instead of focusing on national unity he focused on national identity, a concept that goes against the globalizing world. According to Crumley's article, polls showed that initially people supported the idea of exploring France's identity, but numbers reversed quickly after the media "attacked the debates for stigmatizing foreigners and their children and as conservative politicians participating in the town hall meetings made what many considered to be racist or xenophobic comments" (Crumley, 12 February 2010). Ironically France has

over ten million immigrants so what is a French identity today and what constitutes a threat to it?

In the case of the Roma being excluded from France one must note that their movement has occurred since the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Union allowed cultures and people to experience each other through an “East-West Migration.” Adrian Favell says, “East European migrants are in fact regional ‘free movers’ not immigrants and, with the borders open, they are more likely to engage in temporary circular and transnational mobility, governed by the ebb and flow of economic demand, than by long-term permanent immigration and asylum-seeking” (Favell, 2008, p.703). East Europeans, some of Roma background gained mobility when the wall came down. The minority in Europe exemplifies the new migration patterns forming in recent years. The new systems allow citizens to move freely between states no longer requiring long-term settlement. People are allowed to move in temporary circular migration within a region (Favell, 2008, p. 706). Freedom of movement is defined by policies created by the European Union and Member Nations.

After World War II, the atrocities that occurred were vowed not to occur again. Men and Women responsible were punished and preventative action occurred with the creation of the United Nations. In 1945, fifty-one nations committed to maintain international peace and security, developing friendly relations, promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. The United Nations provides a forum for countries to respond to matters

efficiently and to follow fundamental guidelines through the UN Human Rights Charter (About.com, 2010).

In many ways the United Nations served as an example and authority to multiple organizations. There are two major governmental organizations in Europe monitoring Human Rights, the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Council of Europe, founded in 1950 worked to guard human rights under the protection of forty-seven countries. The European Union, which was originally known as the European Community signed their future with the Treaty of Maastricht on February 7, 1992. That day marked the collaboration of eleven western nations. The treaty unified under one currency, foreign and security policies, and justice and home affairs. By the beginning of 1993, the four freedoms of the Union were established, “free movement of goods, services, people and money” (Europa, 2010). In 1995, ten more countries joined the EU. Two years later the Treaty of Amsterdam built in areas of employment and rights to citizens of the European Union. The European Union consisted of 25 countries as of May 2004 and by October of that year the 25 countries signed a “Treaty establishing a European Union” (Europa, 2010). Today there are over 27 countries in the European Union working to unite Europeans under a central institution.

Another organization is the European Court, an institution to provide legal support in order to protect the Nations of Europe after World War II. The European Court of Human Rights wrote the

Aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity between its members and that one of the methods by which that aim is to be pursued is the maintenance and further realizations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

European Court of Human Rights, 2010

As three major institutions in the European political arena they are responsible for overseeing and protecting human rights of the Roma communities.

The Council of Europe outlines the basic rights such as “Right to Life, the “Right to Liberty and Security” and “Prohibition of Discrimination” in the treaty.

According Article 14, the “Prohibition of Discrimination”, states:

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

European Court of Human Rights, 2010

The French actions of July 2010 need to be interpreted in the context of Prohibition of Discrimination. France fails to protect human rights according to European Union policy and Article 4 of Protocol No, 4 that prohibits the collective expulsion of aliens (European Court of Human Rights, 2010). France’s announcement of the deportation of a specific ethnic minority is vulnerable to claims of racism.

France’s actions towards the Roma have deeper roots. The country’s policies towards human rights have been a consideration of the country since the French Revolution with the *Declaration of the Rights of the Citizens* of August 26, 1789. The first *Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted in Paris. It has been a major player in international human rights since 1948 with the beginning of the

European Committee. The country's national policy reflects their firm belief in human rights in all spheres. With a history of two hundred years constructed from the fight for human rights during the French revolution, the deportation of Roma seems unjust. Yet, in 2003, Prime Minister of France at the time, Dominique de Villepin, spoke to the Commission of human rights. He said:

This struggle for Human Rights is difficult. It entails an ongoing tension between unity and diversity, between affirmation of that which is universal and the respect of uniqueness. By denying that which is unique, we might fall into standardization and the denial of others. But by denying that which is universal, we could be led to accept that which is irreparable. We must also be able to establish the bounds between sovereignty and the imperative of Human Rights: how can the sovereignty of nation-states be reconciled with the duty to ensure that Human Rights are upheld, when minorities are being oppressed, even massacred?

Villepin 2003, in French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2008

Dominique de Villepin presents the difficulty and the importance of upholding human rights towards minorities. Over five years later there is a change of tone concerning the protection of human rights. Perhaps Villepin's statement hints towards the future. The question he asks in the final lines of the statements presents an uncertainty towards the minorities of Europe, which should be addressed by France along with other European countries.

European policies fail to address issues with the Roma. Roma fall through the cracks of policies. According to the statistics of the situation of the Roma in the European Union, eighty percent of Roma are unemployed and tend to live in sub standard accommodations. The United Nations need to create policies that incorporate Roma into the society while member nations need to recognize the Roma as an ethnic minority and remove discrimination. It is

necessary to understand the situation occurring with the Roma. The European Union attempts to raise awareness and change, while the Union fails to produce policies specifically made for the minority.

The European Council's Commissioner of Human Rights, wrote a memorandum of his visit from May 21st to the 23rd in 2008. Part of his report focuses on the impact of immigration, removal and in particular Travellers and Roma. From Section V.2a, he reported that starting in 2005 French authorities had to "specify, at the beginning of each year, the number of foreigners irregularly present who were to be removed, voluntarily or not, by 31 December" (Hammarberg, 2008). The French focus their attention on the illegal immigration of foreigners because their legal status makes it easier to take actions. Like most countries France documents the number of people in the country. In Section VI.1, Hammarberg reports that there are about three hundred thousand Travellers in France. It's important to note that in 2005 the French implemented the Besson Act, requiring municipalities with over five thousand people to provide facilities with basic needs such as electricity and water to travelers. The French only allow allotted time for specific sites; the summer is only authorized for up to a month while in the winter the longest stay could be five to six months (Hammarberg, 2008). Hammarberg's report also suggests that there is an estimated 10,000 Roma who may or may not have residence, living in shanty conditions. France has different rules for Roma depending on their origins. For EU nationals, the principle of free movement is acceptable with an identity card if they are not

involved in paid employment. For Non EU Roma, they are required to have a “Schengen visa,” a valid passport, and sufficient funds (Hammarberg, 2008).

A major program the European Commission encourages throughout Europe is the Decade of Roma Inclusion that began in 2005. The program came about after twelve European governments agreed to improve the Roma socio-economic status and social inclusion. The initiative’s priorities focus on education, employment, health, and housing and have participating governments to address issues of “poverty, discrimination and gender mainstreaming.” Major funding partners consist of the World Bank, The United Nations Development Program, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the European Roma Information Office and the European Roma and Travellers Forum. (Open Society Roma Initiatives, 2011).

The Decade of Roma Inclusion has had limited success in raising awareness of Roma issues. In May 4, 2011 I met for an interview with Robert Rustem, Head of the Secretariat in the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), an organization within the Council of Europe. As an advocate in a major institution that strives to effectively address anti-Gypsism, the organization hopes to create opportunities that only resources and education can provide. During an interview Rustem demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the past and current situation in Europe along with possible solutions to be implemented in the future. Rustem explains that the forum, along with other institutions throughout the Union, provide a venue for Roma to have a voice. He works to mainstream

the Roma issues and correct the discrimination so it does not reoccur. While the Decade of Roma Inclusion brings attention to the issue of discrimination it continues to be incapable of actively addressing the problems that it notes (personal communication, May 4, 2011). Although the concept is positive it appears to be unsuccessful. According to the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC):

Although we welcome the European Commission's direction to tackle Roma exclusion by defining concrete targets and timelines, the commission was silent on the critical impediment to Roma inclusion: anti-Gypsyism, which manifests itself in intimidation, harassment and violence against Roma... Unless states take forceful action against anti-Gypsyism, Roma will continue to be second class citizens in Europe."

(Hurriyet Daily News, April 7, 2011)

The report from the ERRC provides the disturbing notion that countries involved are failing to provide the protection desired. During an interview on the European Council blog spot one man explained, don't just say your going to fix housing or camps for Roma or attempt to provide education. If people realize education is the reason for poverty, the country should provide a venue for schools to take on education Roma. For schools to take on educating the Roma, they provide better opportunities and better jobs, breaking the cycle of poverty (European Council Blogcast, May 3, 2011).

Rustem mentions another program initiated in schools to create a level of equality between Roma and Non Roma students. By being in an after school program students learn to work together and learn about each other. The program promotes understanding not fear (R. Rustem, personal communication,

May 4, 2011). By addressing the problem and promoting the idea of change in a younger generation, the institution believes it can change the mentality of discrimination in the future.

Conclusion

The ERTF's mission according to President Kawczynski, says:

Today, despite the commitments and good intentions... the picture is far from rosy. Roma and Travellers are regularly deprived of access to the basic human rights that most European citizens take for granted. Further more those same European citizens cannot imagine that nowadays such a situation exists within their liberal, democratic and social political system. It is scandalous to find that, within one of the richest regions of the world, people continue to suffer just because they belong to a minority group.

European Roma and Travellers Forum, 2010

The president of the ERTF makes the same point the European Commissioner; Vivian Redings discusses less then a year later. In a first world country there are people living in third world conditions and instead of tackling the issues, countries are deporting their problems outside the border or out of site within.

While speaking to people throughout Europe I had a general negative reaction from tourists and locals alike; they perceived the Roma as stereotypes defined. I heard antidotes of misunderstandings that escalated into altercations and warnings to protect your purse while walking in the street. These generalized stereotypes create fear, making it very difficult to move forward. The negative images of Roma, probably sensationalized by the media meant that some people looked favorably on the deportation. These opinions are reflections of societal norms and distortions that need to be changed. Governments should act to

correct the problem, not dismiss it.

Both the Nazi Party and the French National Party attempted to dismiss the Roma in order to solve the problem. Out of sight out of mind. Once the Germans truly understood “the genetic make-up” of the Gypsies as criminals, Gypsies were placed into an undesired category. No one really took initiative to solve the problems the Roma faced. One man in Carcassonne, France, argued that some Gitan², are good and have been settled here for decades while others have come recently. His opinion was that the European Union gives money to countries that can't pay themselves and yet the country never solves the problems. French citizens do not want the shantytowns so get rid of Gypsies. My question is what does the country do to correct the problem? The European Union promotes free movement. Gypsies can move freely over the borders. What stops them from coming back to the same city months later? Even if they do not come back, what prevents other Roma migrants to come and settle that area? How does France eradicate the problem? Perhaps the answer is mainstreaming through education as the ERTF and Robert Rustem argue. Perhaps the answer is looking at other major minorities and hurdles they have faced, such as the Jews during World War II or maybe the African Americans since the end of slavery. In comparison with the Jews, the Roma are poor, migratory and searching for economic livelihood, while most Jews were settled, had money, and were envied for what success they had during the Great Depression. The Roma will always have the connotation of thieves and murders to contend with along

² A common term for Gypsy in France.

with a developing identity. With institutions such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the European Roma Rights Center, Roma are developing a voice and strength. Earlier, the Roma were just nomadic caravans travelling unaware of others such as themselves. Just recently, all Roma have united under the name. They connect through the celebration of International Roma Day on April 8th, and commemorate the Pharrajimos during World War II on August 2nd. It is only a matter of time for the frustrations of the past to begin to reflect in the actions of the future. As acts of the Union, Council and foundations throughout Europe make headlines; the Roma will not be forgotten. Ignorance of an issue cannot result in any action; only awareness can result in a change. The events leading up to World War II, are repeating today. The world suffers from economic crisis. There is high unemployment, and high migration. In difficult times there is greater risk for scapegoating. People are becoming hostile towards strangers due to the combination of global and local, “glocal”, issues. Nationalistic governments are promoting national identities instead of national unity. Annette Groth, a member of the United European Left Group states,

I am a little bit ashamed that we have produced so many papers, so many reports for so little results’... In order to move forward, ‘we need to explode some myths and deep rooted prejudice...especially those asserting that ‘Roma are all nomadics,’ that ‘they are all from abroad, and that ‘all Roma migration is illegal.’ ‘This is simply not true.

(European Roma and Travellers Forum, n.d)

She proclaims the truth. While the world is multiplying, people attempt to quantify. Everything is documented, but papers fail to produce action in order to change

centuries of prejudice.

At Terazen, a concentration camp in the Czech Republic, the tour guide said, "History is sad because humans are the cruelest of animals and we never learn." Life is a collection of stories that we too often fail to understand deep enough. The events of war, pain, discrimination, and development recycle and can occur again if not understood and challenged. We must learn to embrace and accept the other in this complex and multicultural world if we're all to survive. Capra argues that life consists of multiple turning points, moments that changed human thought process, but only in terms of development. Not only do external institutions need to change but we need to have a turning point in our hearts and minds as well. We need to address the fear of the other and fear of the unknown if we are to create a more just and stable world. Our thought process changed in order for humans to take advantage of the resources the world offered. It never truly examined the fear of the unknown. It exacerbated that fear by conquering the unknown. Minority groups are incriminated because of the lack of understanding between cultures. They threaten the norm. Globalization, a time of blending, movement and interconnectedness may be the time to question the distinctions between people. Either there is room for the "other" in society, or in time we will see more hostility, as people want to protect their own culture.

Rudko Kawczynski warned, "A growing militancy among jobless Roma youth from impoverished 'townships' could explode into violence" (The European Roma and Travellers Forum, 2011). He continues to note that segregation is a

major cultural demarcation of position and claims “governments pursuing policies of ‘dis-integration’ had alienated Roma youth living in some ‘15,000 ethnically cleansed slums.’” Contradictions between institutions need to decrease in order to gain results. In times of radical changes youth challenge structure. In the case of the Roma, the youth feel that Roma leaderships serve more as “‘decoration,’ who worked with European institutions but could not deliver change or improvement” (European Roma and Travellers Forum.) While forces of revolution promoted by youth throughout the world attempt to address the problems they face, the institutions and governments are left with a decision. Kawczynski ends, “We have to decide what kind of Europe we want to live in. A Europe where Roma are considered third class citizens or outlaw? Or do we want to create a Europe where everybody lives under the same law and living conditions. This is a task for all of us to take into our hearts” (European Roma and Travellers Forum, 2011).

Appendix

The forger of Christ's nails

When the Roman jailers were given the person of Yeshua ben Miriam, whom the world later called Jesus, that they should crucify him, because he had talked ill of the Emperor of Rome, two soldiers were sent out to get four stout nails. For every man to be crucified, the soldiers were given eighty Kreuzer to buy nails from some blacksmith. And so when these soldiers were given their eighty Kreuzer with which to buy nails, they first tarried at an inn and spent half of the coppers drinking the sweet-sour wine the Greeks then sold in Jerusalem. It was late in the afternoon when they remembered the nails again, and they had to be back in the barracks by nightfall....

Soon they stumbled out of the inn hastily, not altogether sober, and coming to the first blacksmith, they said to him loudly, so as to frighten him into doing the work even if there was not enough money to pay for the iron and the labour:

“Man, we want four big nails made right away, to crucify Yeshua ben Miriam with...”

The blacksmith was an old Jew who had seen the long pale face and the light brown eyes of Yeshua ben Miriam, when he had once looked into his shop. So the man steeped out from behind the forge at which he had been working, and said:

“I will not forge nails to crucify Yeshua ben Miriam.”

Then one of the soldiers put down the forty kreutzer and yelled loudly:
“Here is the money to pay for them. We speak in the name of the Emperor!” And they held their lances close to the man.... The soldiers ran him through with their lances after setting his beard on fire.

The next blacksmith was a little farther away. It was getting on in the afternoon when they arrived there, so they told the man:

“Make us four stout nails and we shall pay you forty kreutzer for them.”

“I can forge only four small nails for that price. I have a wife and children.”

“Jew,” the soldiers bellowed, “make us the nails and stop talking!” Then they set his beard on fire.

Frightened out of his wits, the Jew went to the forge and began to work on the nails. One of the soldiers, who tried to help at the forge, leaned forward and said:

“Make them good and strong, Jew; for at dawn we crucify Yeshua ben Miriam.”

When that name was mentioned, the hand of the Jew remained poised high with the hammer... “I cannot forge the nails you want to crucify Yeshua ben Miriam with,” the Jew cried out, and stretched himself to his full height. “I cannot. I cannot.”

Both soldiers, furiously, drunkenly, ran him through with their lances again and again.

The sun was low behind the hills and the soldiers were in great haste.

They ran to a third blacksmith, a Syrian. They entered his shop while he was getting ready to leave off work for the day. Their lances were still dripping blood when they called to that man:

“Khalil, make us four stout nails, and here are forty Kreuzer to pay for them. And be quick about it!”

The Syrian looked at the bloody lances and returned to his bellows... The man cast his hammer aside. And he, too, was run through with the lances.

....

Had the soldiers not drunk forty of the eighty kreutzer, they might have returned to the barracks and told what had happened, and thus save Yeshua's life. But they were short of forty Kreuzer so they ran out of the gates of Jerusalem, where they met a Gypsy who had just pitched his tent and set up his anvil. The Romans ordered him to forge four stout nails, and put the forty Kreuzer down.

The Gypsy put the money in his pocket first, and then set to work. When the first nail was finished, the soldiers put it in a bag. When the Gypsy had made another nail, they put it in the bag. And when the Gypsy made the third nail, they put it in the bag. When the Gypsy began to forge the fourth nail, one of the soldiers said:

“Thank you, Gypsy. With these nails we will crucify Yeshua ben Miriam.”

He had hardly finished speaking, when the trembling voices of the three blacksmiths who had been killed began to plead with the Gypsy not to make the

nails. Night was falling. The soldiers were so scared that they ran away before the Gypsy had finished forging the last nail.

The Gypsy, glad that he had put the forty pieces of copper in his pocket before he had started work, finished the fourth nail. Having finished the fourth nail, he waited for it to grow cold. He poured water upon the hot iron but the water sizzled off, and the iron remained as hot and red as it had been when held between the tongs in the fire. So he poured some more water upon it, but the nail was glowing as if the iron was a living, bleeding body, and the blood was spurting fire. So he threw still more water on it. The water sizzled off, and the nail glowed and glowed.

A wide stretch of the night-darkened desert was illumined by the glow of that nail. Terrified, trembling, the Gypsy packed his tent upon his donkey and fled.

At midnight, between two high waves of sand, tired, harassed, the lone traveler pitched his tent again. But there, at his feet, was the glowing nail, although he had left it at the gates of Jerusalem. Being close to a waterwell, the Gypsy carried water the rest of the night, trying to extinguish the fire of the nail. When the last drop had been drawn out of the well, he threw sand on the hot iron, but it never ceased sizzling and glowing. Crazy with fear, the Gypsy ran farther into the desert.

Arriving at an Arab village, the blacksmith set up his tent the following morning. But the glowing nail had followed him.

And then something happened. An Arab came and asked him to join and patch the iron hoop of a wheel. Quickly the Gypsy took the glowing nail and patched with it the broken joint of the iron hoop. The he saw with his own eyes how the Arab drove off.

The Arab gone, the Gypsy drove away without daring to look around. After many days, still not daring to look around, afraid to open his eyes when night fell, the Gypsy reached the city of Damascus, where he set up his forge again. Months later, a man brought him the hilt of a sword to repair. The Gypsy lit his forge. The hilt began to glow, from the iron of the nail upon the hilt. The Gypsy packed, and ran away again.

And that nail always appears in the tents of the descendants of the man who forged the nails for the crucifixion of Yeshua ben Miriam. And when the nail appears, the Gypsies run. It is why they move from one place to another. It is why Yeshua ben Miriam was crucified with only three nails, his two feet being drawn together and one nail piercing both of them. The fourth nail wanders about from one end of the earth to the other.

Fonseca, 1995 p. 89-92

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