THEORIZING MARGINALITY AND IDENTITY: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO ROMANI DIASPORA

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Abstract

Historically and geographically, for Romani Diaspora has a specific meaning that of dispersed under various circumstances of marginal status and of powerlessness. It has also connoted anon-going sense of insecurity of Romani Diaspora in terms of politics, religion, culture, language, and customs, so that they have constituted convenient victims and have been subjected to minority status and subjugated in many ways. Establishing a conceptual framework for the Romany Diaspora is itself a complex task. Their Rom language is close to the oldest forms of Indian languages like Sanskrit and its Indo-European ancestors. A nother aspect of Romany people which develops to the complexity of understanding the Romany diaspora is the lack of a written history of the Romany people. In general, this lack of a written record has meant that the origin and early history of the Romani people was long a mystery. Only in the past two hundred years linguists and cultural anthropologists have properly theorized the Indian origins of the Romany people based on linguistic proof. This kind of different implication and types of the diaspora becomes challenging in defining the Romani Diaspora in the modern era of the world. This paper is an attempt to examine the various ways in which the discourse of Transnational Identity has significant implications for theorizing the Romani Diaspora in a comprehensive way. Besides, this study will also try to find out the origin of the Romani Diaspora as well as the causes of their migration to the host land.

Keywords: RomaDiaspora, Transnational Identity, Marginality.

Introduction:

Roma communities are the centre of attention from both a political viewpoint and socio-cultural one. Their bizarre way of life, the conditions in which they live, their dispersed geographical division, and their vocal and thus unofficial history have nurtured representations preserved in illustrative works, books, music, and films. "Since their arrival in Europe, they have been the object of mixed feelings of fascination and fear. Beside their romanticized existence, the discrimination which most of them usually face and their regularly conflicting contacts with majority populations concern numerous associations and international organisations." (Giordano and Boscoboinik 11). Today Roma can be characterized as a transnational community, or rather as an assembly of such communities, "structured by individuals or groups settled in different national societies who share some common reference national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and define their common interest beyond boundaries". (Kapralski 200).

A transnational cultural identity is an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in the contemporary world. People are expanding their cultural and linguistic border in many parts of the regions worldwide. Having this narrative inquiry today there is a need for Roma people to trace their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic history, it has a significant influence on the ways in which they are constructed their identities. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are misunderstood about their stereotyping and history written by various academicians and historians under so many prejudices. They must understand to move beyond misinterpretations of identity and to deny negative labelling. The complex identity of Roma has necessarily

involved negotiation and renegotiation of identities in many parts of the countries worldwide. The purpose of this study is to analyse an emerging issue of Romani Diaspora in different forms of identity. Besides, this study will also try to find out the origin of the Romani Diaspora as well as the causes of their migration to the host land.

The diaspora paradigm and the case of the Roma/Gypsies

The diaspora concept currently enjoys great popularity and has gradually established itself as a key term in both the humanities and the social sciences. Despite the proliferation of the use of the term 'diaspora' over the last twenty years a proliferation that is perceived by many as a problematic semantic drift from its original meaning that was confined to the Jewish case, scholars tend to agree on what should constitute the basic elements of a diaspora. This can be referred to as the 'classical' or 'analytical diaspora paradigm'.

1) Dispersal from a homeland;
2) Collective memory of the homeland;
3) Lack of integration in the host country;
4) A 'myth' of return and a persistent link with the homeland;

According to the widely quoted definition proposed by William Safran, the key components of this classical diaspora paradigm are (Safran 83-4). Safran has demonstrated a various collective experience of diaspora. He maintained a concept of diaspora when members of an 'expatriate minority community' share several of the following features which relates to the Romani Diaspora:

"They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original 'centre' to two or more foreign regions and retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland including its location, history and achievements" (Cohen 6). In the case of Romani Diaspora these traits are fit into the socio-political and historical consequences of Roma at larger level. They have forgotten their history and live with a bitter experience in many parts of the world. Romani Diaspora overlaps with an emerging identity which leads towards marginality in many ways and becomes a big question in socio-cultural and economic construction of identity.Romani

people are an ethnic group who originated in northern India, and 1000 years ago they migrated from India and live in the different part of the world primarily in Europe. Mostly, Romani people speak some form of Romani, a language closely related to the modern Indo-European languages of northern India. Roma people left India in repetitive migrations and deported" in Persia by the 11th century" (Britannica Inc. 2019).

Roma Origin

There is no precise explanation of how Gypsies came to exist as a mainly nomadic group within Europe, partially because different groups of Gypsies share diverse histories and there are few factual records of the introductory description of the Romani Diaspora. The most commonly acknowledged accounts advocate that Gypsies originated in northern India and deported west across the Middle East and Europe in response to incursions by Islam and the threats of war. Fraserclaimed that the Roma first arrived in Europe through the Byzantine Empire around the year 1068. (Fraser 46). Roma are called as a people without a history but the truth is that the story of Roma is a journey which has not been written down, and for that reason there exists room for speculation and myth. It is now widely acknowledged that India, specifically North India, "formed the cradle of the Gypsy nation" (Kenrick and Puxon13).

The Romani or Gypsies have hardly written their own history. They are not considered as scholar and historian they are labelled as illiterate people, so that their history is found fragmented in documents of the dominant non-Romani society in the western countries. The history of the Roma is marked by attempts to control, assimilate them in favour of the dominant form of western culture in one way or the other. There are many forms in which Romanies have been documented whether the document is a legitimate order or a folklorist's part, have depended on the broader context. The Roma arrival in the British Isles is first documented in the early 16th century of a group of people called 'Egyptians'. The word 'Gypsy' originates from 'Egyptian'. There are two broad types of archives of Gypsies: "first, the legal definitions, public statutes and later government reports;

secondly, by the nineteenth century, the literary and folklore sources" (Okely 1).In the nineteenth century, different approaches to Romani writing appear in the literature by the European scholars to suggest that the various forms of Romani's language traced to "a language of Aryanorigin connected with early Sanskrit"(Okely 6).

Socially and politically speaking Roma people are the most disadvantaged and marginalised minority group in Europe. The Roma issue has become more prominent on the global and national political agenda. Forming effective and legitimate Roma representation is making its way to the lead of national and international concerns. Roma are an applicable group for a case study because they have a legitimate claim to under-representation, "they have been historically excluded from political rights" (McGarry 33) seen as unfit to law and have qualified distrust with non-Roma.A lack of political understanding and different visions among Roma activists is a major obstacle to assert their political power.

Roma Marginality

Roma are a widespread transnational minority which has no political status thus their situation is not similar with any other minority group in Europe. Moreover, some claim that 'Roma are Europe's largest and most vulnerable minority (Ringold 3), indicating that when studying Roma representation, the transnational political perspective cannot be disregarded. The significance of transnational organizing structures of representation has become more noticeable since the 1990s when the international political community centred their attention on Roma in Central and Eastern Europe and the knowledge of their discrimination and poverty became more widespread. Roma rights have become a prominent topic for international organizations particularly the EU, the CoE, the UN and the OSCE.

The role of the transnational political context isvital and the effect of the EU as a site and partner of Romani mobilizationis evaluated in opportunity. In this respect the benefits of Roma are statedby several competing organizing structures of representationcontaining elite; ethnic political parties; and domestic and transnational civil society organizations which deal an access point for examining ethnicmobilization from lower. The analysis is based on the hypothesis that the Romani community cannot depend on the state to form organizing structures of representation(McGarry 33-34). Roman iin Europe have only encountered denial and discrimination and have been abused and victimized up to the present day. However, the settlement of Roma is far beyond disturbing almost in all European countries. They are one of the most deprived groups, often facing discrimination at the level of basic human rights such as health, education, employment, and work. They are being subjects to discrimination, racist attacks and even police abuse. In all Western European states their way of life was increasingly criminalized by the authorities, in the seventeenth century, and particularly during the first decades of the eighteenth a "radicalization of the legislation towards Gypsies and other vagrants took place, making their mere presence a crime that could result in the death penalty"(McGarry 61).

Thousands of Roma live in remote slums without access to electricity and running water. Research conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on April 2018, indicated that the gap in educational achievement between Roma and non-Roma children remains high, the number of Roma students who left education at the level of secondary school on average 68 % in 2016. In terms of direct discrimination, the overall proportion of Roma who felt discriminated has not changed since 2011 totalling 14 % in 2016. Meanwhile, the proportion of Roma early school leavers compared to early school leavers in the general population across all countries surveyed remains unsatisfactorily high. In addition, to the other issues such as discrimination, unemployment rate, poverty, and health indicate a marginal status of their life in many ways which directly disturbs their living standards at many levels. The substandard education to Roma leads to loss of opportunity of employment, community leadership at larger level. As a result, they are beyond the average on every human development indicator. (www.fra.europa.eu/en/publication).

There is an increased climate of Racism towards Roma in the UK. Such attitudes strengthen the stereotypes and biases, which play a key role in the demonstrating of anti-Roma and chauvinism within the society. Anti-Romanism is a very definite form of racism, an ideology of racial supremacy, a form of "dehumanization" and of institutionalized racism. It is driven by historical discrimination and the struggle to maintain power relations that gives advantages to majority groups. "Newspapers and Journals contain numerous stories and images of gypsy squalor, of dirty, litter-strewn sites, of ragged children running wild, and of the general nuisance caused. Written text was often accompanied by cartoons" (Mayall 203).

The complex issue of Race in the European policy in particular, the EU has had an influence of the concept of citizenship substantively. T. H. Marshall defines Citizenship extensively in his book called *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essay*. According to Marshall, citizenship is fundamentally a question of complete and active participation within the national political constructions. It is motivating that the *rights* which attended citizen ship. In this manner, Marshall essentially argues that citizenship rights are a type of alternative result for the class struggle not dramatic working-class revolution but instead the on-going amalgamation and accommodation of all social classes within the system. These rights that Marshall argued are of three categories: civil, political, and social. The civil part is consisted of the rights essential for "individual liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. The last is…the right to defend" (Marshall 10-11) and assert all one's rights on terms of equality with others and by due process of law.

Transnational Identity of Roma

A transnational social movement of Roma implies" sustained contentious interactions with opponents national or non nationalby connected networks of challengers organized across national boundaries"(Tarrow 184). Roma social movement asserton political identity. However, identity is a crucial component of all social movements, in the case of Roma it is considered to be the most important factor for ethnic mobilization and interest expression. As it is assumed that identity and interests are difficult both analytically and as social facts. Identity and interests cannot be analytically separated in the case of Roma because the interests of the Romani community are directly influenced by experiences of their ethnic identity. The EU has emerged as an important resource for transnational social movements. European integration has certainly contributed to the remobilization of ethnic minorities in western European states, 'providing them with a new interlocutor and new goals'. This means that new opportunities for mobilization and participation in the transnational political context become more readily available for social movement.

Transnational social movement organizations are 'engaged in explicit attempts to change some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution in society' thus through collective action the Roma social movement struggles for the appropriation (McGarry140)Roma are geographically disseminated and separated across religious, cultural, professional, and linguistic positions, they are integrated by their ethnic identity, nonetheless. Thus, ethnicity is not an objective given but must be assumed as a result of a social process additionally this "ethnic identity is not static but is something which is constantly shaped and reconstructed" (Guy 5) in and across socio-political circumstances. The formation of organizing structures of representation based on shared ethnicity 'enhances ethnic collective identity on a large scale insofar as they provide organizational structures, leaders, and network links between Roma communities. In the past there were "attempts to construct Roma nationalism in the transnational political context" (McGarry 141).

Romani political parties and elite do not figure prominently in the transnational political context, but civil society organizations such as the International Romani Union (IRU) and the Roma National Congress (RNC), as well as transnational advocacy network s such as the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the Open Society Institute (OSI) ensure that Roma have a voice transnationally. These established

transnational organizing structures of representation have been joined more recently by the ERIO and the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF). Transnational organizing structures of representation support to raise contact and dialogue with outside actors as well as across the broader. Through the language of equality, justice, and human rights they endeavour to address issues affecting Roma and express their shared interests.Roma are a transnational minority which has no families state thus their condition is not similar with any other minority group in Europe.Roma are Europe's major and "most vulnerableminority meaning that when analysing Roma representation, the transnational political context cannot be ignored" (McGarry 136).

The relevance of transnational organizing structures of representation has become more pronounced since the 1990s when the international political community focused their spotlight on Roma in Central and Eastern Europe and the knowledge of their discrimination and poverty became more extensive. In terms of identity, the crucial argument raises here that whether 'Identity' is essentially supportive or not when consolidating a common ground of European Romani/Gypsy groups. The question of who are the Roma? is bounded to what to call them: Gypsy or Roma or travellers. They stuck into two different angles of the identities as they have constructed themselves through their ancestors and imposed by the European historians and scholars, with this tension that they are living it. "The Romani people formed outside, rather than inside India, between the seventh and tenth centuries. Indian immigrants from various tribes intermarried and intermixed in Persia, forming into a people there with the name Dom later becoming Rom, and a large number of then moved into Europe" (Kenrick 4).

Conclusion

This paper attempts to bring the issues in light to find out practical solutions, at National and International level, to the many problems before the Roma in their everyday life. It is evident from the reading of this interrogation paper that the condition of Roma is very complex in protecting rights and their standard of living in

terms of education, health, employment, culture, identity, and housing etc. This paper tries to trace the roots of prejudice against Roma in Europe. By analysing the historical development and construction of the Roma stereotype linking with modern debates around marginality, identity, ethnicity, origin, and migration, in all its forms how a largely negative picture is emerged in the discourse of Romani diaspora in Europe. The Roma have been categorized as problematic because they have rejected to be proletarianized and have instead chosen to exploit self-employment and professional and geographical flexibility. Their professions have been exploited. The threat which the Roma or Gypsies, as a minority, perform to symbolize to the larger society is largely ideological. They are perceived to defy the dominant system of wage-labour and its demand for a fixed residence. Thus, the Gypsies have been symbolized as lawless, immoral, impure, and part of nature in opposition to others' idea of culture.

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