

**Slawomir Kapralski**

## **THE ROMA (GYPSIES) OF CENTRAL/EASTERN EUROPE**

### **Academic Aims and Learning Outcomes.**

In the course students will get acquainted with various theoretical and methodological approaches to the Roma, the history of the Roma in Europe, their traditional culture(s) and forms of social organization. However, since the perception of the Roma by their environment, including the academic attempts, has been marked by several misconceptions and stereotypes, students should become familiar with the ways in which the pictures of the Roma have been created in several European discourse, the expert and the everyday ones. This will help to understand not only the attitudes of dominant populations towards the Roma but also the defensive strategies of the latter. An overview of the situation of the Roma in Central Eastern Europe will be presented then, to familiarize students with the economic, political, cultural, and legal contexts of their existence as well as with different aspects of the process of marginalization they experience. A large part of the course will be devoted to the issues of contemporary Romani identity. The main focus will be on the one hand on the process of decomposition of the traditional Romani identities and, on the other, on the attempts by Romani elites to find new forms of self-organization and to create viable, modern forms of common Romani identity which would be able to help many otherwise very different Romani groups to produce satisfactory strategies for survival and development, together with the preservation of their group distinctiveness. An important aspect of the process of identity formation is a re-examination of the Romani history and an attempt to find a “usable past” which would foster modern identity and include the Roma into one of the most important narratives of modernity: that of the Holocaust.

From the theoretical point of view, the course will give students a chance to see and to make practical applications of different theories of ethnicity and nationalism both on the general level and in relation to specific problems of the Roma. With regard to the first group of problems, we will examine a possibility of transforming Romani ethnicity into national identity and on this occasion we will re-examine the controversy between different standpoints in theory of nationalism (primordialism/perennialism and modernism) with special emphasis being placed on Smith’s conception of ethnosymbolism, Anderson’s imagined communities, and Hobsbawm’s invented traditions. The analysis of the second group of problems will introduce students to the contemporary debates among the Romani intellectuals about the possible development of the Roma from a marginalized population, sometimes granted a status of an ethnic group, to a more respectable, nation-like status. The conceptions of politicization of ethnogenesis, minoritarian nationalism, transnational group, and legal-political nation, among others, will be analyzed here.

### **Requirements:**

**Final essay: on one of the topics given by the lecturer. 3,000 words, deadline to be determined later.**

### **Attendance.**

**There will be 4 meetings, 5 hours each. One can miss one meeting without any problems. With two meetings missed, one has to write a penalty essay on the topic given by the lecturer to be delivered together with the final essay. If one misses more than two meetings, regardless of the reason, one is not allowed to complete the course.**

### **Syllabus.**

#### **Meeting 1.**

**1. Who are Roma? Defining the field. About whom are we talking and how?**

Here we focus on two main approaches to Romani identity: traditional (“primordialist”) and modern (“constructivist”). We review a list of characteristics attributed to Romani ethnicity in the traditional approach as well as modern attempts to deconstruct such a concept of ethnic identity. We also discuss various discourses which attempt to conceptualize/problematicize the Roma and, eventually, we focus on the very concept “Roma” to see different contexts of its functioning and different problems associated with it.

Literature:

Willems, Wim 1997 *In Search of the True Gypsy. From Enlightenment to Final Solution*. London—Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass. *Introduction, Conclusions*.

Marushiakova, Elena and Vesselin Popov 2001 *Historical and Ethnographic Background: Gypsies, Roma, Sinti*. In: Guy, Will (ed.) *Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

## **2. The history of Roma in Europe. How the history of Roma is being written, by whom and why?**

Here we discuss the origins of Roma. We examine the theory of their Indian origins. Then, chronologically we discuss the following topics: early migrations, the interactions between Roma and their environments, strategies of survival in medieval Europe, institutional persecutions (16-17 centuries), Enlightenment and Romanticism as two different approaches to the Roma within European thought, new strategies in the period of industrialization, changing social status, new migrations, different Romani groups in Central/Eastern Europe: similarities and differences.

We will discuss the concept of Roma as “people without history” and we will try to place it within the European strategies of obliteration of history of the dominated or marginalized peoples. We will analyze some aspects of the attitude to time and history, which have been present in the traditional Romani cultures and we will try to answer a question to what extent that attitude may have been an “ethnographic creation.” Eventually, we will discuss the role of “invented traditions” and the role of Romani and non-Romani intellectuals and activists in the search of an alternative approach to the history of Roma.

Literature:

Kate Trumpener, *The Time of the Gypsies. A ‘People without History’ in the Narratives of the West*. “*Critical Inquiry*” 18 (Summer 1992).

Fraser, Angus 1992 *The Gypsies*. Oxford UK and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell. Chapter 7.

Hancock, Ian 1991 *Gypsy History in Germany and Neighboring Lands. A Chronology Leading to the Holocaust and Beyond*. In: David Crowe and John Kolsti (eds.), *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, Armonk, New York, and London: M.E.Sharpe, Inc.

## **Meeting 2.**

### **3. Traditional culture(s) and identities of Roma. The essentialist standpoint.**

Here we discuss the conception of the universe and the concept of pollution as the main categories of *Romanipen* (“the Romani way”). We will then analyze the hypothesis of pollution taboos as protecting ethnic distinctiveness (Okely-Stewart). We will discuss language and linguistic differentiation of Roma, nomadism and the issue of territoriality, structure of the Roma communities, intergenerational and family relations, oral tradition and transmission of knowledge, attitudes to death, time and history, ceremonial aspects of life.

Literature:

Okely, Judith 1996 *Own or Other Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. Chapter 4.

Acton, Thomas 1997 The Theory of Gypsy Law. In: Acton, Thomas (ed.) *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

#### **4. Roma identities: the constructivist/relationist approach.**

Here we will discuss the criticism of traditional “Gypsy Studies” by the younger generation of scholars who claimed that Roma identities are formed not by cultural values but by the nature of the relation of Roma groups with their environment.

#### **Literature:**

Stewart, Michael 1997 *The Time of the Gypsies*. Boulder, Colorado (US) and Oxford (UK): Westview Press. Chapter 12.

#### **Meeting 3.**

#### **5. In the center of world history: Roma and the Holocaust. Towards the historical identity.**

Here we explore the attempts to develop within the Roma a conception of their history in which the crucial point would be the Holocaust. We discuss the history of the Nazi persecutions of the Roma and then we focus on the ways in which this history is used as the stuff of the collective memory and modern Romani identity. We also explore the practical functions of such a conception of Romani history (de-legitimation of violence, acceptance of the Romani presence in the symbolic and political space of the Holocaust) as well as the practical actions and “rituals of memory” which foster the conception of Romani history based on the Holocaust.

#### **6. From marginalization to modern self-organization. Constructing Contemporary Romani Identities.**

Here we focus on the recent developments in the Romani elites to construct a modern identity, which would unite different Romani groups. We analyze different identity constructs discussed recently: the Roma as nation, as national minority, as transnational minority, and discuss different strategies of Romani elites: minority nationalism, autonomy within broader political organism, integration and preservation of difference, politicization of ethnogenesis, symbolic construction of community, inventing tradition and imagining community. We also discuss spontaneous processes of traditional identities’ adaptation to contemporary challenges and processes of hybridization of Romani identity.

#### **Literature:**

Hancock, Ian 2002 *We Are the Romani people/Ame sam e Rromane dzene*. Hatfield: Centre de Recherches Tsiganes. University of Hertfordshire Press. Chapter 4: O Baro Porrajmos—The Holocaust.

Kapralski, Slawomir 1997 Identity Building and the Holocaust: Roma Political Nationalism. “*Nationalities Papers*” Vol. 25, No. 2.

Gheorghe, Nicolae 1997 The Social Construction of Romani Identity. In: Acton, Thomas (ed.) *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Guy, Will 2001 Romani Identity and Post-Communist Policy. In: Guy, Will (ed.) *Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Mirga, Andrzej and Nicolae Gheorghe 1997 *The Roma in the Twenty-first Century: A Policy Paper*. Princeton: Project on Ethnic Relations.

#### **Meeting 4.**

## **7. Us and Them. How European societies misrepresented and stereotyped the Roma. The issue of contemporary 'antigypsyism' or 'Romaphobia'.**

Here we deal with the conception of Roma as European "Other." Among others, we analyze early conceptualizations of Roma "otherness" and their religious dimension, strategies of exoticization and romanticization, the attitudes of modernity to nomadism, racist ideologies, gendered stereotypes, the Roma as "social problem," stigmatization and labeling, criminalization of the Roma. Eventually, we discuss the Roma strategies concerning stereotypes. We also focus on the public opinion research that present changing attitudes towards Roma in different countries as well as on the way Roma are (mis)represented in the media. Finally, we will debate the concept of 'antigypsyism' and various aspects of the phenomena it describes.

Literature:

Heuss, Herbert 2000 *Anti-Gypsyism Research: The Creation of a New Field of Study*. In: Acton, Thomas (ed.) *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle. Commitment in Romani Studies*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

## **8. The Problems of the Roma in contemporary societies after the fall of communism.**

Communist strategies towards the Roma. The Roma in the economies in transition. Political mobilization of the Roma in CEE. Human rights and violence. Assimilation and marginalization. Open borders and new migrations. Governmental strategies towards the Roma. Changing attitudes to the Roma in CEE societies. Legal situation of the Roma in particular countries. The consequences the collapse of communism had for the Roma. Poverty and unemployment among Roma. The problems of education of Romani children. Development of Romani media. European policies towards Roma.

Essential literature:

Acton, Thomas (ed.) 2000 *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle. Commitment in Romani Studies*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Barany, Zoltan 2002 *The East European Gypsies. Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crowe, David M. 1996 *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Guy, Will (ed.) 2001 *Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Fraser, Angus 1992 *The Gypsies*. Oxford UK and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Hancock, Ian 2002 *We Are the Romani people/Ame sam e Rromane dzene*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Mayall, David 2004 *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000. From Egyptians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany*. London and New York: Routledge.

Mirga, Andrzej and Nicolae Gheorghe 1997 *The Roma in the Twenty-first Century: A Policy Paper*. Princeton: Project on Ethnic Relations.

Stewart, Michael 1997 *The Time of the Gypsies*. Boulder, Colorado (US) and Oxford (UK): Westview Press.

Tcherenkov, Lev and Stephane Laederich 2004. *The Roma*. Vol. 1: *History, Language, and Groups*. Vol. 2: *Traditions and Texts*.

Willems, Wim 1997 *In Search of the True Gypsy. From Enlightenment to Final Solution*. London—Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass.

**Websites:**

Patrin Web Journal [www.geocities.com?paris/5121/patrin.htm](http://www.geocities.com?paris/5121/patrin.htm)

ERRC [www.errc.org](http://www.errc.org)

The Gypsy Lore Society [www.gypsyloresociety.org/journal.htm](http://www.gypsyloresociety.org/journal.htm)

PER <http://www.per-usa.org>

OSI [www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org), [www.soros.org/initiatives/roma](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma)

OSCE/ODIHR [www.osce.org/odihr](http://www.osce.org/odihr), [www.osce.org/odihr/cprsi](http://www.osce.org/odihr/cprsi)

UNDP [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

Legislationline <http://www.legislationaline.org>

RNC [www.romnews.com](http://www.romnews.com)

The World Wide Web Virtual Library [www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/veib](http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/veib)

Romnews Network Community [romnews.com/community](http://romnews.com/community)

EUMAP [www.eumap.org](http://www.eumap.org)

Roma Rights <http://list.errc.org>

ERTF [www.ertf.org](http://www.ertf.org)