

Gernot Haupt

Antigypsism and Social Work

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Dear participants of the conference here in Manchester!

My name is Gernot Haupt, I am from Austria and I'll talk to you today as representative of the Institute for Social Work which is a NGO institution with different social projects, one of them dealing with Roma in Romania. Last year I published a book (unfortunately in German, so only about 100 million people can read it) called "Antiziganismus und Sozialarbeit - Antigypsism and Social Work" and I will sum up some of the results and add some new findings which I collected during my last research in Romania two weeks ago.

Let's start – just like science usually starts by defining the basic terms – let's start with the question of identity: Who are the Roma? You all know the many attempts to register and to classify the Roma population by differences in their language, by their different professions, their religion, their family or even worse their tribal kinship, as it has been done by the Nazi-Regime and Robert Ritter with his genealogies. Sophisticated methods of identification have been developed recently by the Hungarian sociologists LADÁNYI/SZELÉNYI to be able to count the Roma. The purpose to have accurate numbers is honourable, the more they count the more politicians can be forced to face and to solve their problems. But numbers never are just innocent: The same numbers can be used by other politicians to give rise to anti-Roma sentiments by fomenting the fear of mass-migration, as it is done in Austria by Jörg HAIDER and Hans Christian

STRACHE and other extreme right-wing populists. And this struggle to count the Roma takes for granted that ethnic identity is like a stamp you have to bear and that you can only admit or deny your ethnic belonging, the latter should be rather typical for the lying gypsies said Mr. Günter LEWY in his last book about the Roma Holocaust.

As far as I am concerned I would be very cautious with such monolithic conceptions of identity. Following the symbolic interactionism established by George Herbert MEAD, Erving GOFFMAN, Lothar KRAPPMANN and others, I would suggest understanding identity not only as inherited feature but as result of social interaction. For me, ethnicity is only one facet of my identity, I for example am father of 4 children, I am teacher, I am Tyrolean, (one of this stubborn, narrow-minded Alpine species as my bishop once put it.) none of these facets of my identity is of great importance for this lecture.

Our identity is multiple, hybrid, and ethnicity is not always the prevalent item of my self-conception. I would even find it rather dangerous for the Roma civil rights movement to enforce a “re-ethnification”. We have seen very bad results in the Balkan wars, where ethnicity became more important than decades of neighbourhood and friendship.

If we want to understand the Roma identity, we have to look at the attitude of the majority of the population towards the Roma. I suggest to do this along the

analytical framework of Niklas LUHMANN and his theory of functional systems within the society. The analysis of inclusion or exclusion of Roma in the different social systems such as money, education, law, health and so on gives us the possibility of a better understanding of the very complex situation of different Roma communities in different regions of the world. This conception enables us to see and understand interdependencies between different social systems and – even more – to give a theoretical background for the social work to improve the inclusion into specific social systems, because general attempts at integrating Roma or global campaigns against discrimination have failed to be successful up to now, as you know.

Between the two extremes of total exclusion on the one hand and perfect inclusion on the other I found out that 4 mayor items are characteristic for the situation of Roma all over Europe and – what is even more astonishing – all over the times:

Extermination, expulsion, repression and integration

1. Extermination:

The term “extermination” means the physical annihilation, the killing. Since their arrival in Europe the Roma have always been targets of lethal violence, reaching from being outlawed by the imperial diet of Freiburg 1408, over the genocide during World War II up to the pogroms in Romania after the fall of Communism or the actual bloody riots in Bulgaria. The impact that collective remembrance of historical extermination has on the consciousness and behaviour of the second and third generation of victims is not at all analysed scientifically in the Roma case as it is done successfully with Jewish victims. The traumatic experiences have serious repercussions up to the present. The fear of registration, of being object of research and persecution marks the contact with Gadge. The implications of the deportation of 25.000 Romanian Roma to Transnistria under the regime of General Antonescu on the social and mental situation of the Roma in our village is unclear. During my last visit two weeks ago I spoke to an old Rom whose uncle was a victim of the Stalinist deportation of the alleged “rich bourgeois” to the plains of Baragan in the 1950s, where he died. The family was deprived of their landed property and struggles in vain for a restitution of these expropriated possessions. These wounds will not heal and social peace will not come as long as justice is brought to the relatives and descendants. Because – on the side of the perpetrators – missing admission of guilt leads to a prolongation of violent, racist and discriminating attitude and inhibits a new start of the relationship on the basis of human rights and human

dignity. In my opinion the importance of the experiences of extermination cannot be overestimated in all scientific and social work with Roma.

2. Expulsion:

If the majority could not kill them to solve the so-called “Gypsy-problem” and to get rid of them, local authorities pushed them beyond over the borderlines of the village, of the district, of the state. Refused entry admissions or withdrawals of permits of residence have frequently been used throughout the centuries, deportations of asylum-seekers from Germany to Romania or to the Kosovo are the actual prove of this method of exclusion. Did I already mention that I live in Carinthia, where Jörg Haider is head of the provincial government? The politicians there just re-invented expulsion as political instrument by claiming a ban on a handful of Roma-beggars coming from a small town in Slovakia called Hostiče, where they live in pure misery. I think, everyone in this room can add some more examples for expulsion.

3. Repression

The human spirit is so creative to find new kinds and methods of repression that it is quite impossible to present all of them here. This chapter is the most voluminous part of my book. It documents antigypsism and exclusion in the social systems of labour, housing, education, health, language and culture, politics and public opinion. I will explain this point with an example: Not

always have Roma been excluded from the labour-market. Some of them were reputable blacksmiths while others were enslaved almost at the same time.

Being rather well integrated into the communist farming-cooperatives in the post-communist Romania of today unskilled day-labourers in my village are exploited with a salary of 2 Lei per hour, that is less than 1 Euro and equivalent to 1 litre milk. This is why I suggest to look closely to the circumstances of exclusion and inclusion to find out possibilities of re-inclusion, which could lead to my fourth point:

4. Integration

Integration does not mean assimilation, which I would consider to be a method of repression. Integration means full participation and inclusion into the functional systems. But this is very complicated: Let me give you an example:

When we started our project, we thought: Education is the most important factor to promote integration. So we thought to start a school in Romani-language.

Then we talked a lot with the Roma there. First of all we discovered that only some old people spoke Romani, the young didn't understand a word. And then they told us, that the children would not have any chance to go to school,

because they didn't exist officially, they had no papers, no birth certificate, no resident's registration, no marriage certificate. We understood that inclusion into the political system was necessary first to be included into the education system.

So we gave up the idea for a school-project and engaged two social workers, one

Rom and one Gadje, and they helped the Roma to get their papers, to receive social security, family allowance, to be included in the basic social benefits.

Today almost all of them have regulated their papers, our village is that one with the highest rate of Roma on social security in the whole district, and that's a problem for the mayor's reputation and budget and so she has agreed to a number of measures in favour of the Roma, who are now voters in her village. She will support a day-care centre for 30 Roma-pupils, which we will open this autumn, where the children will get a warm meal and support in doing their homework to keep them in school for more years than today.

This example makes it clear, why I focus on social work as central point for the integration of Roma into society.

Roma have been objects of different sciences: Pedagogics focuses on schools and education and ignores the simple fact that the children don't have a table at home to do the homework, that they don't have shoes or that they are hungry.

Medicine focuses on tuberculosis and starts a vaccination campaign that is inefficient because it ignores the historical experiences of forced sterilization, which causes the resistance of Roma-women towards medical treatment or it ignores the poor housing conditions that are not solved. Campaigns for contraception by the way are more often motivated by antigypsism that fears the "horrible fertility" of the Roma and not by an interest in the Roma themselves.

This is how many of the great projects funded by the governments or the European Union and created by scientific experts function and fail. Each of the

scientific disciplines views the Roma as objects under their specific narrow point of view. In contrast to this procedure I plead for a social work science that gathers and processes the findings of the different special sciences and recombines them from the point of view of the Roma themselves. Let me give you an example: Unemployment of a young Rom in my village may be the result of a lack of birth certificate (legal/administrative cause), may be the result of a lack of motivation to go to school (psychological cause), because he has to sit in a segregated class (result of antigypsism in public opinion), which leads to discrimination in the community (political reasons). Or unemployment can simply be the result of a lack of workplaces after the privatisation of the collective farm cooperatives (economic reasons). And in each case the interdependence of these different causes may be different. Social work is a transdisciplinary science and can put these results of particular sciences together from the point of view of those concerned. Social work can involve the Roma into the process of inclusion on individual and local level and should empower the Roma to find or to claim their chance for integration, so that they can proudly say one day: I am from that country, I have this profession, I have that number of children AND I am a Roma.

Thank you for your attention.