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A typology of Roma misrepresentation in contemporary Europe: Marginalization, denizenship, suppression and co-option

Formas de dominación de las personas romaníes en la Europa contemporánea: Marginación, extranjerización, supresión y cooptación

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Summary: Introduction. 1. Theorizing racial misrepresentation. 2. The racialization and migrantization of the Roma. 3. Marginalization. 4. Denizenship. 5. Suppression. 6. Co-option. Conclusion. Acknowledgements. Bibliography.

Abstract: Building on David Theo Goldberg's account of the racial state and empirical research on Roma people in Europe, this article delineates various ways in which racism can undermine political representation. To that end it deploys Nancy Fraser's concepts of "ordinary-political misrepresentation" and "misframing"; the all-affected/subjected principle used to identify those entitled to influence political decisions; and Hannah Pitkin's four-dimensional conception of representation as substantive, formal, descriptive and symbolic. The article distinguishes racialized forms of misrepresentation rooted in everyday discrimination and educational exclusion (marginalization), the denial of citizenship (denizenship), the negation of subjectively held cultural identities (suppression) and the capture of minority leaders (co-option). It suggests that the first constitutes an "ordinary-political" form of inequality among citizens, whereas the latter three violate the all-affected/subjected principle through the misframing of the legitimate policymaking constituency.

Keywords: Representation, democracy, citizenship, racism, diversity, equality

Resumen: Partiendo de la teoría del estado racial desarrollada por David Theo Golberg y de estudios empíricos sobre las personas romaníes en Europa, este artículo analiza diferentes formas en que el racismo puede socavar la representación política. Con este fin, recurre a los conceptos de «dominación ordinaria» y «desencuadre» de Nancy Fraser; a la idea de que las personas «afectadas por» o «sujetas a» las políticas públicas deberían participar en su desarrollo; y a las cuatro formas de representación (formal, sustantiva, descriptiva y simbólica) identificadas por Hannah Pitkin. El artículo distingue formas de dominación arraigadas en la discriminación cotidiana y la exclusión educativa (marginación), la negación de la ciudadanía (extranjerización), el rechazo de ciertas identidades culturales (supresión) y la neutralización de los líderes étnicos (cooptación). Sostiene que la marginación constituye una forma de desigualdad política «ordinaria» entre ciudadanos, mientras que la extranjerización, supresión y cooptación infringen el principio de las «personas afectadas/sujetas» mediante la identificación errónea de aquellos con derecho a participar en determinadas decisiones políticas.

Palabras clave: Representación, democracia, ciudadanía, racismo, diversidad, igualdad

Introduction

One of the most consequential recent developments in international and comparative human rights law has been the consolidation of intertwined principles of positive state duties and substantive equality. Whereas the former creates a general obligation for public authorities to actively intervene in the protection and fulfilment of rights (Fredman 2008, 65-91), the latter specifically requires them to identify and address group-based patterns of deprivation, stereotyping, domination and forced assimilation (Fredman 2016). When using these principles in cases of alleged direct or indirect discrimination, courts are frequently required to make complex sociological judgements on the detrimental impact of policies on subordinated or “vulnerable” groups, and ways of mitigating it. By “taking minority arguments as seriously as majority perspectives and coming to a deliberative resolution based on the power to convince rather than the power to overwhelm” (Fredman 2008, 113), courts thereby allow oppressed groups to play a more equal part in deliberative and democratic processes.

Despite the considerable promise of positive duties and substantive equality, legal scholars have pointed out that these principles currently remain underdeveloped, and that judicial reasoning typically reveals limited awareness of the structural underpinnings of group vulnerability. In a thorough review of European Court of Human Rights case law on Roma vulnerability between 1996 and 2023, Khanna (2024) finds that vulnerability is rarely analysed in depth and frequently understood as a result of Roma people’s own culture and lifestyle, rather than as politically constructed through state-condoned forms of violence, exclusion, dispossession and displacement. To pave the way for more robust, transformative interpretations of the right to equality, Khanna suggests that the Court should recognize both cultural and socio-economic forms of vulnerability and acknowledge the role of legal rules, institutional action and official discourses in reproducing them.

Building on Fredman and Khanna’s seminal contributions, this article explores how racism toward Roma people in Europe has not only perpetuated their stereotyping and deprivation but also their domination or, to draw on Nancy Fraser’s terminology, their political ‘misrepresentation’ (Fraser 2009). The analysis complements Khanna’s largely bi-dimensional account of vulnerability and, therefore, provides additional reasons and ways for national and international courts to intervene in its mitigation. Importantly, the article does not attempt to

develop a critique of case law but only an empirically informed typology of racial misrepresentation that may help legal and political actors pinpoint how racism undermines the political dimension of substantive equality. In this sense, it offers a limited response to Möschel's (2011) invitation to integrate critical race theory more systematically in European legal scholarship by paying attention to lived experiences of racism. While Roma people's pervasive othering and prominence in human rights litigation makes their experience especially relevant to an analysis of racial misrepresentation, the expectation is that the typology can illuminate the situation of other racialized groups and therefore contribute to broader critical race and democratic theory.

From a methodological standpoint, the article inscribes itself in the tradition of real-world political philosophy (Zala et al. 2020) or contextual political theory (Modood and Thompson 2018), whose core aim is to expose, unpack and counter injustice by foregrounding the perspectives and aspirations of the oppressed as well as widely endorsed principles and values. The empirical data is drawn from a review of English language literature on Roma people in Europe, including national case studies produced within the Horizon 2020 project ETHOS: Toward a European Theory of Justice and Fairness (Anderson and Dupont 2018).

In line with this methodological and interdisciplinary approach, the analysis starts by situating racial misrepresentation within broader democratic theory (Section 2). The findings themselves are set out in Sections 3 to 7, where relevant passages from David Theo Goldberg's account of the racial state are juxtaposed to, and illustrated by, empirical data on the forms and drivers of Roma racialization and misrepresentation. Section 3 shows how Roma people are racialized in ways that combine ideas about their physical appearance, culture and mobility. Sections 4 to 7 demarcate four qualitatively different types of misrepresentation, namely marginalization, denizenship, suppression and co-option. The conclusion recapitulates the findings and outlines some implications for contemporary migration and cultural diversity governance.

1. Theorizing racial misrepresentation

In her influential theory of justice as parity of participation, Nancy Fraser (1995, 2000, 2009) proposes that injustices be identified and remedied by distinguishing between inequalities of material resources

(maldistribution), social status (misrecognition) and power (misrepresentation). While inviting us to keep these dimensions separate for analytical purposes and drawing attention to policies that mitigate one type of inequality while exacerbating another, Fraser also recognizes that injustices often take the form of mutually reinforcing maldistribution, misrecognition and/or misrepresentation. Within this framework, racial misrepresentation can largely be understood as a combination of the latter two types of injustice, often in interaction with economic and other issues.

Fraser (1995, 71, 77; 2000, 113-114) defines misrecognition as a cultural or symbolic injustice rooted in institutionalized patterns of interpretation and communication. It can include non-recognition (or invisibilization) and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged) and manifest in various types of discrimination. As to misrepresentation, it concerns “the scope of the state’s jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation.” It encompasses the criteria used to distinguish members of the political community from non-members, and the “terms on which those included in the political community air their claims and adjudicate their disputes”. Fraser labels “ordinary-political misrepresentation” the situation where political rules deny some members the chance to participate as peers, whereas she characterizes as “misframing” the form of misrepresentation that arises when a political community’s membership criteria wrongly exclude some people from “contests over justice” (Fraser 2009, 17-19).

In relation to misframing, two key principles have been put forward for the fair delimitation of political constituencies: the all-subjected principle and the all-affected principle (Goodin 2007; Näsström 2011; Bauböck et al. 2019). The all-subjected principle starts from the assumption of a bounded political community whose representatives make rules conferring rights and imposing obligations on members. The principle states that all members whose legal rights and obligations are shaped by a decision should have a say in its formulation. The all-affected principle comes into play when a decision does not determine on-going legal relations but has significant impact on specific people. If the impact can be foreseen with reasonable certainty, all those likely to be affected should be given a say in the decision. If the impact is unforeseen, those negatively affected should be able to secure ex post compensation from the decision-making body, for instance through the courts. Importantly, the all-subjected and all-affected principles can be violated not only by under-inclusion but also by over-inclusion, that is to say, when decisions are influenced or contested by people whom

they do not bind or meaningfully affect. In Näsström's terms, "just as there might be persons who are subject to rules without being their authors (a state of exclusion), there might be persons who author rules without being subject to them (a state of exception)" (Näsström 2011, 120-121).

Following Hanna Pitkin (1967), ordinary-political misrepresentation can be broken down into four dimensions: "substantive", "formalistic" (hereafter "formal"), "descriptive" and "symbolic". Broadly speaking, substantive representation signals acting in the interest of a constituency. Formal representation describes the procedures, such as competitive elections, by which power is obtained and lost. Descriptive representation refers to the similarity between the personal characteristics of a constituency and its representatives. Symbolic representation designates a representative's capacity to discursively generate identification and support among a constituency.

In the following sections, the all-subjected/all-affected principles and Pitkin's concepts of representation will be deployed to delineate various forms of racial misrepresentation experienced by Roma people in Europe.

2. The racialization and migrantization of Roma people

According to Goldberg, while racialization in modern states is often characterized as abnormal, states structurally participate in the construction of "citizenship as inherited or insistent belonging", portraying citizens as settled and similar to each other (Goldberg 2002, 266). In the European context, this racialized political consciousness manifests in a conflation of whiteness and civilization, casting people of color as properly belonging elsewhere or being of migrant background and a potential threat to national cultures and resources (Goldberg 2006, 352-353; see also De Genova 2016; Garner 2016).

Based on an ethnography of interactions between Roma and non-Roma in Slovakia, Grill (2018, 1139-1144) finds that the adjective "black" or "dark" tends to accompany references to Roma people, and people frequently differentiate themselves from the Roma by asserting their whiteness. Roma and non-Roma people alike express a preference for lighter complexions, and newly-born babies are praised with comments such as "Look how beautiful, how light/white he/she is" while women tease their husbands for darkening after working outside on a summer day. Similarly, Romanians who move to the United Kingdom resort to racialized markers to establish non-Roma

backgrounds (Morosanu and Fox 2013, 447). In 2010, the vice-mayor of Milan referred to Romanian Roma as “dark-skinned people, not Europeans like you and me”, a view that was widely circulated in the Italian media (Hepworth 2012, 437). A few years earlier, a far-right organization attempted to dispel Italians’ conflation of Roma and non-Roma Romanians with a poster contrasting “Gypsies (Rom)” and “Romanians”. The “Gypsies” were portrayed as dark-skinned, unlike the “Romanians”, who were light-skinned and blond-haired (Kaneva and Popescu 2014, 511-512).

Cultural markers such as language, name and dress complement skin and hair color as salient bases for Roma categorization (Csepeli and Simon 2014; Morosanu and Fox 2013; Hepworth 2012: 437; Nordberg 2006). Despite attempts by some activists and international organizations to disseminate positive discourses on Roma culture, cultural difference is overwhelmingly perceived as a problem, and the putative threat posed by Roma people to national ways of life has been at the center of anti-Roma rhetoric (Stewart 2012). Three broad problem representations underpin the vilification of Roma culture: migrancy, poverty and criminality (McGarry 2014; Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy 2012; Zolnay 2012; Leggio 2019). The logic that ties these ideas together seems to be that mobility hampers the internalization of local values, preventing Roma from becoming hard-working and law-abiding members of the community (Leahy 2014; Hepworth 2012, 2014).

The problem representation of Roma migrancy emerges in mutually reinforcing discourses of nomadism and international mobility. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of nomadic vilification is the legal and policy labelling of Roma people. In the Netherlands, they are sometimes categorized as people living in mobile homes (*woonwagenbewoners*) and seen through the prism of “multi-problem families” experiencing low educational attainment and participation in the workforce, unhealthy lifestyles, inadequate childcare and criminality (Hiah and Knijn 2018, 10, 14). In Italy, the terms “Gypsy” and “nomad” are used interchangeably, and since the 1980s regional laws have been adopted to promote settlement in “nomad” camps (Sigona 2011). Even Roma communities that are perceived as sedentary rather than nomadic are nevertheless imagined as proceeding from, and still belonging to, a place beyond the state. Yet perceived foreignness is a matter of degree, and a normative distinction is often made between long-established and migrant Roma (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2018). This distinction is sometimes taken up by “local” Roma people themselves as a way of asserting their belonging to the nation

(Margalit and Matras 2007, 114; Roman 2014, 804; Prieto-Flores and Sordé-Martí 2011, 209).

The stigma of nomadism and international mobility interact in complex ways. In countries such as the United Kingdom where some established Roma maintain a nomadic lifestyle, Eastern European counterparts sometimes foreground their sedentariness (Roma Support Group 2017). However, these nuances are easily lost in everyday discourses which blur ideas of nomadism, recent arrival on national territory and non-European origins (Grill 2018; Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). Together, these ideas have constructed Roma people as uniquely problematic European citizens or as problematic emblems of European mobility, and led to fears of “flooding” after EU enlargement (Yildiz and De Genova 2018). They have also reinforced the stigmatization of established communities lumped with recent migrants into the Roma category (Hepworth 2012, 2014; Nacu 2012).

3. Marginalization

In post-colonial contexts, people who are racialized as non-white generally occupy a subordinate position in a hierarchy of citizens. Goldberg discusses this with reference to the principle of hypodescent (the so-called “one-drop rule”) used to socially and legally segregate white and non-white people in the United States (Goldberg 2002, 190). At the same time, he acknowledges that doing away with racial categories cannot by itself eradicate white privilege, as it leaves the door open for discriminatory practices in the extra-legal space of the “private sphere” (Goldberg 2002, 149-150, 235). When it comes to politics, those who are racialized may be disadvantaged by widespread beliefs that they are unqualified to hold positions of authority. They may also be excluded from opportunities to gain formal education, and therefore from acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to persuasively intervene in public debates and defend their interests (Valadez 2001, 41-43; Patten 2014, 80-81; Gutmann 1999, 147-151).

Research has uncovered systemic discrimination against Roma people, including in the political sphere. In many European contexts, political parties view Roma candidates as risky bets, in part because they are perceived as too corrupt or ignorant to hold political office (McGarry 2010, 91; Araújo and Brito 2018, 26; Burton 2007, 76; Bacliija, Brezovsek and Hacek 2008, 239). Those who join institutional politics often need to put up with uncooperative colleagues, undermining their ability to effectively fulfil their duties (Burton 2007,

75). Similarly, Roma activists typically struggle to neutralize dominant problematizations of their group and to persuade its members to publicly mobilize on the basis of shared identities that are asserted in the private sphere (Vermeersch 2003, 897-898).

Other types of discrimination constrain Roma people's educational opportunities and, by extension, their economic and political participation. A survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2018 found "unacceptably high" proportions of Roma early school leavers and comparatively low Roma employment rates throughout Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018, 11-13). Educational inequalities have been under the spotlight due to a series of complaints brought against state authorities in the European Court of Human Rights. The cases indicate a general pattern whereby Roma children are either kept out of mainstream schools or otherwise prevented from studying alongside non-Roma. Due to anti-discrimination laws, exclusion does not take place overtly but indirectly by means of biased aptitude tests, separate language classes, harassment from other students and their families, and school sanctions (O'Nions 2015). The result is an over-representation of Roma children in special schools and classes that do not provide them with adequate literacy, numeracy and other skills (Zemandl 2018; Rostas 2009; Marusák and Singer 2009; Laparra and Macías 2009). As they enter adulthood, this curtails their capacity and motivation to critically engage with laws and policies, including through self-organization within civil society (Rostas 2009, 176; Anderson et al. 2018, 29). Segregation often has a strong territorial dimension, with Roma people clustering in deprived camps, neighborhoods and towns (Sigona 2015; Kóczé and Rövid 2012; Hiah and Knijn 2018; Zemandl 2018).

4. Denizenship

An extreme and qualitatively distinct form of political marginalization consists in stripping people of the legal rights of citizenship. In the colonial era this was done through the formal denial of legal status to people of colour, such as in the Constitution of the Carolinas which excluded "Negro slaves" (Goldberg 2002, 143). According to Goldberg, contemporary states operate similar mechanisms covertly by fashioning a space outside citizenship whose dwellers can be marginalized, expelled or removed to "institutional holding pens such as prisons" (Goldberg 2002, 152). Even when they reside within national borders and abide by the laws of the land, non-

citizens are routinely denied active and passive suffrage and access to social security benefits. They also find themselves exposed to deportation and therefore can be fearful of claiming legal rights (Bosniak 2006, 10). Michael Walzer (1983, 62) has famously argued that these circumstances place them in a caste-like position of being ruled without consent by "a band of citizen-tyrants", a situation that cannot be reconciled with democratic principles even when voluntarily entered through the decision to migrate.

Roma people who enjoy the status of European Union citizen formally have a right to freedom of movement across the Schengen area. This does not mean that they are treated as full citizens of the countries where they reside: for example, no EU country allows non-citizens to vote in national elections, although there are exceptions for specific nationalities (Arrighi et al. 2019). To gain meaningful political power, migrants must therefore fulfil various requirements for naturalization, which may include five or more years of continuous residence, income or wealth thresholds, clear criminal records and proof of "good character" (Jeffers, Honohan and Bauböck 2017, 25). Yet Roma people are frequently prevented from meeting these requirements, and confined to "denizenship" (Hammar 1990), by three interlocking forms of racialized exclusion: destitution, criminalization and threats of child withdrawal. Let us address them in turn.

Across Europe, access to benefits for EU citizens is governed by complex rules which leave public authorities a significant margin of discretion. In the United Kingdom, prior to the lifting of transitional restrictions on EU migrants from Bulgaria and Romania in 2014, welfare advisors were found to sometimes withdraw support for social security number applications (a necessary step for the claiming of benefits) due to widespread employer discrimination against Roma workers (Humphris 2018). The impact of this paradoxical reasoning was compounded by austerity measures which forced advisors to make difficult funding choices and led to the outsourcing of social services to charities (Humphris 2019). Interviews with social workers in Barcelona similarly showed how Romanian women's perceived inability to make long-term plans and train for employment was cited as a reason to withdraw welfare support (Vrabiescu and Kalir 2018, 525-526).

Denial of benefits partly comes in the form of routine evictions from emergency accommodation or social housing, as well as more punctual and mediatized collective expulsions from informal encampments. In the summer of 2010, following presidential declarations linking Roma people to violent crime, French authorities received an order to dismantle up to a hundred informal settlements

per month (Nacu 2012, 1323-1328; Kózcé 2018, 467-468; Faure-Atger 2013, 183-184). In the summer of 2009, Roma migrants residing in Berlin were successively displaced from a makeshift camping to an abandoned building, a church and an asylum seeker's shelter, and finally signed a formal commitment to return to Romania (Caglar 2016). In its 2019 manifesto, the UK Conservative Party pledged to tackle unauthorized traveller camps and give police new powers to seize the property of those who set them up (United Kingdom Conservative and Unionist Party 2019, 19).

Criminalization reinforces destitution by targeting livelihood activities such as begging, scrap metal trading and squatting, and directly blocks naturalization by leaving criminal records. Like collective evictions, laws targeting Roma people often follow moral panics, and their impact is multiplied by police profiling. Between August 2012 and February 2013, Roma people in Greece were caught in the net of Operation Zeus, during which some 85,000 suspected foreign nationals were taken to police stations. Roma settlements were portrayed as hubs of drug dealing and scrap metal pillaging, and systematically dismantled (Fekete 2014, 61-62). In Wrocław, an informal encampment which local authorities had agreed to equip with basic facilities was subsequently targeted by unscheduled controls and searches (Kostka 2019, 165).

Destitution and criminalization pave the way for allegations of inadequate parenting and subsequent child withdrawal: in Catalonia, Roma children tend to be labelled "at risk" and placed in state-sponsored centers while their parents' situation is being assessed. If parents cannot convince public authorities of their ability to guarantee adequate living conditions for the child, their main way to regain custody is to accept a one-way coach ticket to their country of origin (Vrabiescu 2017). Threats of child withdrawal therefore add to economic and legal incentives for Roma people to leave before naturalization.

5. Suppression

Goldberg (2002, 106-107) argues that racial subjection is often internalized in ways that blur the boundary between institutional power and capillary governmentality, between public and private, and that tendentially produce homogeneity. While this process may be more or less coercive (Goldberg 2002, 116-117), it is always achieved "through repression, through occlusion and erasure, restriction and

denial, delimitation and domination" (Goldberg 2002, 33). According to Kymlicka (2000, 185-186), "all liberal democracies have, at one point or another, attempted to diffuse a single societal culture", namely "a territorially-concentrated culture, centered on a shared language that is used in a wide range of societal institutions, in both public and private life (schools, media, law, economy, government, and so on)". To do so they have deployed a variety of repressive measures, such as banning minority languages in schools and publications, prohibiting associations that support minority nationalisms, promoting mass migration to areas of minority settlement, redrawing political boundaries, and requiring knowledge of dominant languages for jobs and citizenship.

Anthropological studies have shown how those who are lumped together as "Roma" often hold a wide variety of cultural identities determined by kinship, occupation, religion, language or territorial attachments. In Hungary, extended families such as the Balogh, Sasoj and Farkas have been found to provide a strong sense of belonging and solidarity, evoking positive meanings of motherhood, fatherhood, brotherhood and love (Kovai 2012). Among those living in or proceeding from the Balkans, economic activities such as junk dealing, flower making, shoe shining, cauldron making, horse dealing, mining, spook making, basket making, blacksmithing, charcoal burning and bear training provide important sources of identification (Marushiakova and Popov 2013). In Spain, the spread of Pentecostalism since the 1980s has given rise to the *Alelukas*, converted *Gitanos* who have put conflict resolution and campaigns against drug use at the centre of their social practice (Gay y Blasco 2002).

By and large, these multiple sources of identification have been overlooked by state and European institutions, including in Roma inclusion policies, which force people to assimilate into the Roma category to reap the benefits of citizenship. In the European Court of Human Rights, identifying as Roma has become a necessary tool to contest rights violations, obscuring the diversity of situations faced by those who are so labelled (Ignatou-Sora 2011). In Hungary, Roma representation mechanisms known as "minority self-governments" bring together different language groups (known as Boyash, Romungro and Olah) under a single structure. This mode of representation is widely criticized but difficult to change: the Hungarian Academy of Sciences acts as a gatekeeper of minority recognition, and new minority representation mechanisms must be approved by a qualified parliamentary majority (Krizsán 2012, 1399). In Austria, half of Roma Ethnic Advisory Board members are selected by

the Chancellor among a list of candidates submitted by Roma representative bodies. This way of proceeding is seen as entrenching government control over Roma representation and has been characterized as antidemocratic by the Council of Europe (Meier and Vivona 2018, 18-19).

The mismatch between subjectively held and institutionally represented identities is even more striking when in the cultural sphere, which is directly connected to identity formation. In the Netherlands, a national Roma NGO managing Roma and Sinti restorative justice funds was criticized by smaller grassroots organizations for disregarding their views on the use of the money (Hiah and Knijn 2018, 20). Likewise, the creation of a European Roma Institute for the Arts and Culture co-funded by the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Council of Europe raised concerns that it would “be directed from above by a political organization” and “deny the rich pluralism of genuine Roma traditions” (Magazzini 2016, 63). Plaut has pointed out how large projects of cultural Romani content, funded by international donors, can strip Roma of agency, especially where independent Romani media are scarce or absent (Plaut 2017, 1073).

As these examples suggest, attempts to impose institutionally recognized identities often breed alienation from institutions themselves. This is not only reflected in disengagement from national and local political processes but also in distrust toward Roma-specific representation mechanisms (Rovid 2011; Baclija, Brezovsek and Hacek 2008; McGarry 2009; Clough and Daniele 2014).

6. Co-option

Goldberg discusses the co-option of racialized populations in relation to colonial rule and contemporary multiculturalism. Under British indirect rule, local leaders were appointed to uphold customary laws in rural provinces while responding to the commands of colonial officers (Goldberg 2002, 126, 128). While Goldberg identifies the ultimate aim of colonial administration as the erasure of indigenous cultures, he views the project of “socially dominant conservative, liberal, and corporate versions of multiculturalism” as putting “to economic and political work the value of cultural distinction silently ascribed to racial difference” (Goldberg 2002, 219). In the same vein, Feldman (2012) has decried the influence of unaccountable and conservative religious leaders in the implementation of multiculturalism. More generally, theorists have pointed out that many

civil society organizations are structured hierarchically, and even those that strive for internal democracy are “more susceptible to autocratic takeover than governments” (Young 2000, 164). The more these organizations collaborate with the state in policymaking, implementation or evaluation, the more they risk “becoming another layer of bureaucracy disciplining citizens or insulating them from influencing the process” (Young 2000, 195-196).

Civil society organizations claiming to represent Roma people have proliferated, and Roma NGOs are regularly invited to advise governments on Roma-related strategies or policies. In Turkey, a tally found some 500 Roma associations across different cities, structured within 20 federations and two confederations (Akkan 2018, 14). Seven years of “Roma workshops” and consultations with Roma NGOs informed the first Roma integration strategy adopted in 2016 (Akkan 2018, 11). In the United Kingdom, authorities have set up temporary and permanent consultative mechanisms such as a parliamentary inquiry on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller inequalities, an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and a Gypsy Liaison Group in the Department of Communities and Local Government (Anderson et al. 2018).

However, Roma activists frequently complain that their input fails to meaningfully change policy itself. As one puts it in Portugal, “when we meet with government officials, there are many smiles and many hugs, but there is much cynicism. We know that behind those smiles and those hugs nothing is going to change” (Araújo and Brito 2018, 29). According to a counterpart in Britain, “we only have something to say when we are called upon in meetings. They listen to us to tick a box. But I have seen no change. [...] We are just being talked to and the questions are the same: where do you come from, how long are you here for” (Anderson et al. 2018, 26). A Dutch official seems to corroborate these views: “You invite them and ask about their story or just, how are you, something very basic. How are you doing, what is going well and what is not going well and I am listening” (Hiah and Knijn 2018, 33).

This powerlessness is exacerbated by organizations’ reliance on public funds. In Romania, some Roma activists expend more energy building relationships with states and international organizations than with local communities (Rostas 2009, 180-181), and Voiculescu shows how Roma mediators are often recruited by local councils after leading Roma political parties or otherwise gaining informal recognition from the community. They then find themselves tasked with the ambiguous mission of retaining this recognition while implementing government

policy (Voiculescu 2017, 92-110, 128). In Hungary, Schafft and Ferkovics (2017) have argued that local minority self-governments' limited powers and resources place their members in a position of subservience to non-Roma representatives, including far-right parties. In Rome, a local Roma representation structure was confined to advising on the management and funding of nomad camps, precluding mobilization around general housing, employment and schooling issues (Clough and Daniele 2014, 788). The structure was then used to implement and defend a local policy of demolishing settlements and moving their inhabitants to large, isolated camps (Clough and Daniele 2011, 630-632).

Conclusion

Apprehending politics from the perspective of Roma people reveals four racialized ways in which European, national and local authorities routinely undermine democratic principles. *Marginalization* is an ordinary-political type of misrepresentation that breaks the link between formal/descriptive and substantive representation. Roma people are marginalized when, despite having formal rights to vote (formal representation) and stand for election (descriptive representation), they are prevented from effectively shaping political decisions by everyday stereotyping, discrimination and inadequate formal education. *Denizenship* is a case of under-inclusive framing that undercuts even formal rights to vote and stand for election. Roma people are denied citizenship through interlocking practices of destitution, criminalization and deportation that make it impossible for them to fulfil residency and 'good character' requirements for naturalization. *Suppression* is an over-inclusive form of framing whereby Roma sub-identities are treated as illegitimate bases for rights claims, political mobilization and cultural expression, indirectly undermining all dimensions of representation. Like suppression, *co-optation* allocates decision-making beyond the communities subjected to policy (over-inclusive framing), but it does so by specifically rescuing the descriptive dimension of representation. Roma people are co-opted when their leaders are appointed by local and national governments to advise on Roma policy but do not meaningfully shape this policy, and are subsequently instrumentalized to implement and justify it.

This analysis opens fresh perspectives on persistent academic controversies around the discriminatory implications of different approaches to cultural and migration governance, with far-reaching

implications for ethnic minorities in Europe and beyond. For example, while multiculturalists argue that nation states can be reconciled with equality if and when they recognize and accommodate cultural diversity (Kymlicka 1995; Parekh 2000; Modood 2007), post-nationalists object that they are intrinsically racialized by virtue of the way in which they control access to their territory and citizenship (Anderson 2013; Sharma 2020; for a review of the debate, see Dupont 2025). Roma people's experiences of racial misrepresentation suggest that multiculturalist and post-nationalist critiques illuminate different injustices and can spur complementary types of policy change. Marginalization foregrounds the shortcomings of colour-evasive or universalist policies which, by focusing exclusively on legal rules and procedures, miss how everyday discrimination hampers political participation among racialized populations. Denizenship underscores the undemocratic nature of citizenship regimes that conceive migrants' political rights as a privilege to be earned through cultural integration, good character or other factors beyond residence and subjection to the law. Suppression exposes the inadequacy of institutionally imposed ethnic labels that disregard the complexity and dynamism of subjectively held identities. As for co-option, it problematizes versions of multiculturalism that assume the representativeness of leaders who identify with a cultural minority without ensuring that they consistently defend its interests and retain its support.

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