Roma in Europe and Blacks in the United States: Lazy and Irresponsible or Discriminated Against?

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1. The Plight of African Americans and Roma

1. Resentment toward Roma in Europe

The Roma immigrants have been regularly deported from France in recent years and their unauthorized shacks destroyed by the police. The Roma camps in France were portrayed in 2010 as "Sources of illegal trafficking, of profoundly shocking living standards, of exploitation of children for begging, of prostitution and crime" by the office of the then President Nicolas Sarkozy (quoted in BBC 2010, September 17). The French government justified evictions with the argument that the Roma had not work permits, imposed social burden, and engaged in begging and theft. Public opinion polls demonstrated that two-thirds of the French respondents approved the tough approach of Nicolas Sarkozy and evictions of the Roma, who were considered as nuisance (BBC 2010, Sept. 30).

Earlier, in 2007–2008, Italy initiated similar anti-Roma actions. The right-wing Italian government began to fingerprint Roma as a means to curb crime. The move has sparked heated debates in Italy and Europe. On the one hand, it is not fair to use collective responsibility and to punish a whole community for crimes reportedly committed by some of its members. On the other hand, it is argued that the Roma are disproportionately represented in some sort of crimes. Eventually, the campaign for fingerprinting in Italy has been abandoned.

A survey of the countries of the European Union has revealed that the negative attitudes toward Roma are highest as compared to any other kind of minority group. Respondents in 27 member countries were asked to range how comfortable they would be with neighbors of particular groups, using a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means "totally comfortable." Europeans seem comfortable with a neighbor with disability (9.1 out of 10), different religion (8.5), homosexual (7.9), different ethnicity (8.1) but the comfort is only 6.0 when the neighbor is Roma. There were no questions about other ethnic groups but it is striking that the negative attitudes toward Roma as potential neighbors are higher as compared to any other ethnic group (although not specifically mentioned). In total, about a quarter (24%) of European respondents would feel uncomfortable if they had Roma neighbor. The idea of having a Roma neighbor is most disliked in the Czech Republic (only 3.7 comfort out of 10), Italy (4.0), Slovakia (4.5), Ireland and Bulgaria (both 4.8). The most comfortable with a Roma neighbor are Poles (7.5), Swedes (7.1), French and Lithuanians (both 6.9). (Eurobarometer 2008: 43–45).

The attitudes toward the African Americans in the United States are very similar–American blacks are considered violent, dangerous, uneducated and many employers avoid hiring them. The African Americans are poorer, less educated, with higher rates of incarceration, female-

headed households, and unemployment as compared to the whites. The median income of blacks is 32,000 dollars compared to 54,000 dollars for non-Hispanic whites–African Americans earn only 59% of what whites earn. One out of four blacks lives in poverty compared to one out of ten of non-Hispanic whites. (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011: 6, 14). The dropout rate from public high schools for blacks is about 40% (Lofstrom 2007). Being dropout dramatically increases chances for unemployment, incarceration, and dependency on welfare money. Black families tend to be unstable, many are female-headed and this is considered as one of the contributing factors for frequent incarceration of African-American youths (Elder 2000: ch.1).

The situation of the Roma (Gypsies) in Europe is comparable to that of the blacks in the United States. Half of Roma in Southeast Europe live in poverty and more than 20% live in extreme poverty, according to a United Nations Development Program study in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. Among respective majority populations, only one in seven lives in poverty, and one in 25 lives in extreme poverty. The reported average monthly incomes of Roma households are twice as low as the incomes of majority households in the surveyed nine Balkan societies. About half of Roma ages 15–55 in Southeast Europe are unemployed, and those who work occupy low-skilled jobs, mainly in construction, trade, public utilities, and agriculture (UNDP 2006: 42-43). Two out of three Roma in the Balkans do not complete primary school, while it relates to one out of seven among ethnic majorities. Four out of ten Roma children fail to attain even elementary education compared to only one out of twenty for children from majority communities (UNDP 2006: 29). Propensity for crime is one of the most spread stereotypes about Roma. In Bulgaria, Roma are between 5 and 10% of population but from 38% to 40% of prisoners in ten prisons in Bulgaria identified themselves as Roma in 2002 (Bezlov, part 6).

2. Structural Barriers or Cultural Deficiencies?

What are the reasons for the plight of the African Americans and the Roma? Is it because they are discriminated on the basis of their race and ethnicity? Or, alternatively, is it because some traits of their communities prevent many of blacks and Roma from developing as self-supportive and law-abiding citizens? This dilemma is boiled down to two contending explanations – structural and cultural.

The Structural Explanation asserts that poverty and crime among African Americans exist because blacks are mistreated by the white-dominated society and racial barriers hinder their development. According to this line of argument, racial discrimination is not written in the law any more but it is still real and affects the lives of the blacks. Race bias in the United States is a serious factor that prevents many African Americans from finding descent employment and housing and getting education. Because of racial discrimination, blacks encounter more obstacles while trying to better their life. Some of them cannot overcome the blocking power of racial barriers and drop out school, withdraw from employment, abuse illicit drugs, and get involved in crime. Thus, African Americans are more likely to be poor, jobless, and incarcerated.

The Cultural Explanation proposes the alternative argument that it is mainly African Americans and their culture that are to be blamed for their bleak situation. This theory claims that blacks do not want to accept mainstream American values about hard work, educational attainment, self-discipline and strive to control their own destiny and instead prefer living on welfare or entering the murky world of the underground economy and dealing with drugs, prostitution, robbery, or theft. The parallel phenomena are the culture of poverty, unwillingness to take low-paying jobs, unstable families, illegitimate births, too much violence, and involvement in crime.

This view is criticized by those who prefer structural explanation as an instance of blaming-the-victim-approach, which contains racist overtones (Blauner 1989: 17).

In the same fashion, **the structural explanation** assumes that the Roma in Europe are discriminated and isolated from the mainstream society. The Roma live in ghettos with appalling infrastructure, receive meager education, and training for menial jobs. This causes poverty, unemployment, and low social status. The Roma are perceived as second-class citizens and could become victims of physical or verbal abuse. By contrast, **the cultural explanation** asserts that poverty of the Roma and negative attitudes toward them could be attributed to some traits of their culture such as (according to negative stereotypes) neglect of education, practice of begging, and preference for theft.

The aim of this paper is to explore the validity of the cultural explanation in explaining the plight of the African Americans and the Roma and how it can help efforts to improve their quality of work and life. It is known that sociological tradition of cultural explanation stems from the work of Max Weber on the impact of world religions on the social and economic development and his famous the Protestant Ethic Thesis. The theory of Geert Hofstede (2010) on cultural differences in work is one of the best known theoretical approaches of this type in recent decades. The ideas in this paper are also based on sociological field work in two ethnic ghettos: African American neighborhoods in Southeast Washington D.C. (April–June 2009) and Fakulteta, the largest Roma neighborhood in Sofia (June 2010–June 2012).

But is it fair to blame somebody's culture for poverty, illiteracy, or incarceration? There is a danger of seeking collective responsibility, collective guilt, and collective punishment. Seeking cultural explanation might look like racism and breach of political correctness.

However, people have been formed in a particular culture, cultures are different, and they do matter (Harrison and Huntington 2000; Huntington 2004). The practice of early marriages, for instance, is a cultural trait of many Roma groups. Thus, the lives of Roma girls who marry and give birth at the age of 13, 14, or 15 have been shaped before they become mature persons with the ability to take decisions. The cultural explanation does spark controversy but culture can explain some consequences.

Why are always Roma hated and not so other minority groups in Europe? Why are not Chinese immigrants in Europe, for instance, so hated as Roma? Chinese definitely are perceived as racially different, and they have distinctive language and customs as compared to those of the host societies. Nevertheless, there are no negative attitudes toward Chinese comparable to those toward Roma. Also, there are other minority and immigrant groups in Europe–Armenians, Jews, Vietnamese, and Russians–who are not perceived so negatively as the Roma. The Roma have lived in Europe since centuries–why have they not managed to integrate for so many years? (see also Barany 2002: 15–18). Why do Roma still live on the margins of society while more recent immigrants are more successful in economic and educational terms?

In the same vein, the comparison between African Americans and some immigrant groups demonstrates that immigrants, esp. those from East Asia, have been much more successful in integration and betterment in U.S. society although they had to encounter barriers of the lack of U.S. citizenship and English proficiency (the comparison between blacks and Asian Americans is also discussed by Blauner 1989: 169). If race is considered a factor that hinders betterment of a group, then, immigrants from China, Taiwan, or South Korea would encounter similar prejudices in America as blacks. Surprisingly, Asian immigrants are more successful than the African Americans.

3. The Situation of African Americans

3. 1. Income and Poverty

The blacks still have higher levels of poverty and unemployment as compared to other communities. One of the explanations of their bleak situation is that historically African Americans tend to occupy low-paying manufacturing jobs and these types of jobs have shrunk dramatically since the mid-1960s (Blauner 1989: 168; Whitehead: 2000). The blacks had abandoned the agricultural South and headed to the industrial North. They worked on assembly lines, shipyards, and steel foundries and exactly these jobs have been slashed due to the transition of the U.S. economy toward services and postindustrial businesses.

However, if manufacturing jobs have been lost, why didn't African Americans enhance their education and find jobs in service sector? If manufacturing sector has shrank, then, how to explain that millions of immigrants, mostly from Latin America and Asia but also from Africa, were able and have been able to find employment? The immigrants realize that even if they work for low wages in the United States, they can earn more than in their native Mexico, Haiti, Bangladesh, or Ethiopia. For many immigrants jobs at American farms, assembly lines, and construction sites are profitable enough because of the value of the US dollar compared to their national currencies. Moreover, immigrants are willing to accept even low-paying jobs, while black Americans can rely on welfare assistance. That is why U.S. employers often prefer hiring immigrants than African Americans (Anderson 2008). Still, as one scholar argues, "The idea that

the problem is an absence of job opportunities [for African Americans] is refuted by the simple fact that immigrants, including black ones, regularly make do" (McWhorter 2011: 2).

African Americans seem less entrepreneurial compared to immigrants. The number of companies per 100,000 population was 24 for black Americans in 2001–the lowest rate of business ownership compared to any immigrant group. Even Mexicans, the immigrant group with the lowest rate of business ownership with 52 firms per 100,000 population looked more entrepreneurial as compared to African Americans. Japanese, Chinese, Asian Indians, and Koreans had highest rates of self-employment with the number of companies per 100,000 population ranging from 247 for Japanese to 157 for Koreans (Portes and Rumbaut: 84–85).

The blacks can encounter racial discrimination in the labor market as audit study suggests. Sociologist Devah Pager instructed four college students, two white and two black, to apply for low-wage jobs with fictitious resumes, which stated earning of high school diploma and work experience with entry-level positions (2008). One of the students in both racial pairs presented himself as an ex-offender. The four students audited 350 employers in Milwaukee and results were measured in callbacks. The white student without criminal record elicited 34% callbacks from employers, more than twice as the callbacks for the black student without criminal record–14%. The white student who presented himself as an ex-offender received 17% callbacks, but the African-American ex-offender elicited only 5% callbacks. The most puzzling finding was that the white applicant with criminal background received the same share of callbacks as the black applicant with no criminal history–17% vs. 14% (this difference was not statistically significant).

3. 2. Education and Family Structure

The graduation rate in the United States is different for ethnic and racial groups. It is 83% for Asian Americans and 78% for whites but only 58% for Latinos, 57% for African Americans, and 54% for Native Americans, for the class of 2008 (Education Week 2011). Nineteen percent of blacks is without high school diploma compared to 13% of Asians. Almost a half (49%) of Asians have Bachelor or higher degree compared to 18% of blacks and 31% of non-Hispanic whites (US Census Bureau 2004).

Among non-Hispanic whites, who live in families, 10% are in families with female householder and no husband present, while for blacks this share is 45%. Many of those who live in female-headed households are below the poverty line–41% of blacks and 25% of whites (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011: 64–65). The usual narrative about negative consequences of female-headed households is that growing only with their mother, children are often raised on the streets (mothers have to work). Black youth are likely to be involved in gangs, drugs, and crime (Anderson 2008). In some cases, children are raised by a grandmother or aunt. When kids grow without perspective and ambitions, it is unlikely they to achieve something in their life. The lack of fathers as role models causes children, when become adults, to replicate the type of one-parent family.

3. 3. Crime and Incarceration

American population, around 308 million in total, consists of about 64% non-Hispanic whites, 16% Hispanics, and 12% blacks (US Census Bureau 2011). However, among male prisoners in federal and state correctional institutions, 31% is non-Hispanic whites, 23% is Hispanics, and 39% is African Americans. The rate of incarceration on the basis of male prisoners in federal and state prisons per 100,000 males of each community is 459 prisoners for whites; 1,259 for Latinos; and 3,074 for blacks. Thus, the imprisonment rate of black males is almost seven times higher than that of white males (Guerino et al 2011: 7, 27).

How to explain the disproportionate representation of African Americans among prison population? One of the answers is simple: blacks commit more crimes than whites. This conventional wisdom is questioned by the contending explanation that people in law enforcement and courts view African Americans with suspicion as potential criminals and are prone to punish blacks more severely. Thus, racial disparities in incarceration could be due to police arrests that target mainly people of color and sentencing practices that are not lenient toward minorities. Moreover, many of blacks do not have access to resources that could divert them from going behind bars, as in cases of decisions related to bail and probation. High rates of imprisonment of African Americans are not necessarily a result of conscious racism of decision makers but rather unconscious bias toward people of color (Mauer 2011: 91S), or of what one researcher of drug arrests calls "a racialized conception of who and what comprises the drug problem…" (Beckett 2004: 87).

Among drug offenders in state prisons in 2005, 45% was/were black, 29% white, and 20% Latino (Mauer 2009: 4). However, some data suggest that the use of drugs is similar among racial and ethnic groups. The share of black regular users of drugs in 1999–2005 was between 11 and 14%, which roughly represented their share in American population (Mauer 2009: 7–8). The percentages of whites and Hispanics, who regularly use drugs also correspond to their shares in American population. As Marc Mauer argues, the war on drugs leads to racial and ethnic disparities in imprisonment, which "are not a function of greater involvement in drug use or the drug trade but rather resulted from discretionary decision making by law enforcement agencies as well as enactment of harsh sentencing policies by both state and federal lawmakers" (2011: 99S).

3. 4. The Cultural Explanation of the Plight of American Blacks?

The cultural explanation is often related to the culture of poverty–a concept that has sparked heated debates. The idea behind the concept is that the poor, esp. ethnic and racial minorities such as blacks in the United States or Gypsies in Europe, do not accept the mainstream culture of their countries based on values focused on work, education, or individual effort. Instead, they develop values and attitudes opposing the mainstream culture. Initially, this theory was pioneered by sociologist Oscar Lewis to explain poverty in rural Mexico (1971).

A study based on field work among Puerto Ricans in Spanish Harlem, New York City has captured the complex interplay between social inequalities and cultural traits: "Most of the individuals in the above ethnographic description are proud that they are not being exploited by 'the White Man'… All of them have previously held numerous jobs in the legal economy in their lives… Virtually all of these street participants have had deeply negative personal experiences in the minimum-wage labor market, owing to abusive, exploitative and often racist bosses or supervisors. They all see illegal, underground economy as not only offering superior wages, but also a more dignified workplace" (Bourgois 2001: 23).

Articulation only on the cultural explanation about the plight of African Americans would be oversimplification but the culture of inner city blacks has had its role in explanation of their unemployment and incarceration. The application of the principle of self-fulfilling prophecy ("if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences") means that poor African Americans define their situation as no matter any effort they apply to better their life through education and work, it would be futile because of racial barriers. They do not strive to succeed and the prophecy is fulfilled–they stay poor. However, those African Americans who define the situation in a different way, in consistence with the American Dream, have chances to succeed and propel themselves into the middle class. Undoubtedly, there is black middle class, who dismiss the cliche of blacks as poor and prone to crime.

4. Roma in Bulgaria: Discriminated Against or Responsible for Their Plight?

4. 1. Poverty and Unemployment

A survey of nine societies in Southeast Europe, including Bulgaria, has revealed that almost half of the Roma (46%) in Bulgaria live in poverty compared with only 5% of ethnic Bulgarians (Poverty is measured as number of individuals living in households with expenditures less than USD 4.30 a day calculated as purchasing power parity). Twelve percent of Roma in Bulgaria live in extreme poverty (with less than USD 2.15 a day as PPP) compared with less than 1% of Bulgarians in the same condition (UNDP 2006: 18).

Two-thirds of Roma in the Balkans have semi- or unskilled occupation compared to only 16% from majorities. It leads to lower incomes even when Roma are employed as compared to majorities. A staggering 60% of Roma in Bulgaria are unemployed–more than twice as compared to the share of unemployed Bulgarians, who live in close geographic proximity to Roma neighborhoods, 25% (UNDP 2006: 42).

A striking observation from the UNDP survey is that even Roma with education and skills do not earn as much as majorities with similar credentials, which might indicate existence of discrimination, negative attitudes, and the lack of trust of employers toward Roma (UNDP 2006: 25). It creates a vicious circle: Roma perceive they would be discriminated even if they had sufficient education and they do not have incentive to gain education. When employers look for qualified candidates, it is not likely Roma to be among them. This peculiarity is synthesized in

the words of a Roma respondent, *"When you look for job and they see you are a Gypsy–this is the end. That's it. My granddaughter is second grade but she can't even write down her name. I tell her she should study–not because she could achieve anything later on but she should know at least how to write down her name"(Roma man, 52).*

4. 2. Education

The low educational level of the Roma keeps many of them into the trap of poverty. The Roma are the ethnic group with the lowest educational level in Bulgaria as well as in Central and Eastern Europe (UNDP 2002, 2006). Romani children often drop out school. Only 7% of Roma have high school diploma or higher degree compared to 69% of ethnic Bulgarians and 24% of ethnic Turks (Milenkova 2008). Educational underachievement of Roma has been explained with poverty, uneducated parents, patriarchal Romani culture, and educational segregation.

Poverty is one of the self-evident explanations of the high rate of dropout of Roma students. Some of the Roma families are too poor to afford textbooks and clothes for their children. Many Roma kids are required since an early age to help their parents collect metal, bottles, and paper to earn money, to explore garbage sites, to take care about siblings, horses, and carriages. These activities consume time, efforts, and attention; school attendance becomes erratic and academic performance suffers.

"My daughter is supposed to go this fall in school, first grade. She does not have [decent] clothes. I don't have even running water in my house to wash her. How could I send her without clothes and without being washed?" (Roma man, about 40)

A lot of Roma parents are poorly educated and cannot serve as role models. They do not understand the importance of education and do not motivate their children to study. The consequence is the vicious circle: poverty–poor education–poverty, in which many Roma are trapped (Ivanov 2008). However, the cultural explanation of low educational level of Roma should not be neglected. The data show that the Turks in Bulgaria, who are also a minority and generally poor, do not have such low education as Roma, although the educational credentials of the Turks in Bulgaria are not as good as those of ethnic Bulgarians.

Some authors claim that the traditional Romani culture cherishes pragmatically oriented family education aimed at practical skills but not education in official institutions considered by some Roma as too abstract and unrelated to the real life. Saga Weckman, a Roma from Finland, writes: "The traditional education which took place inside the Gypsy society and which trained the young in traditional values and activities guaranteed the possibility for a living and a position independent from the majority. Outside education was found meaningless and educational opportunities were not given to the Gypsies even when they wanted them" (1998: 4).

Roma communities are still very patriarchal and conservative and sometimes they fear that modern values, taught at school, could undermine traditional Romani values such as respect of

elders or subordination of females to males. The traditional Romani culture cherishes early marriages, which conflicts with the education of girls. Roma girls marry and give birth early, at the age of 15–18, although there are some cases of mothers as young as 12 and 13 (Bitu and Morteanu 2010). After such an early marriage and motherhood, a young Roma woman is expected to take care about children and leaves school forever. Early marriages are explained with the importance of virginity. As a Roma man, 26, elucidates, *"I don't want to offend you but your girls [Bulgarian] even young, at 16, have already had two or more [intimate] partners. Well, it happens also with our girls. That's why we marry young: the girl should be pure [virgin]." (He married at 18, when his wife was 15*).

A particular problem is that education has taken effect after secondary level, when there is noticeable increase of income. However, only about 7% of Roma in Bulgaria have completed secondary education and only 0.2% have earned college degrees (Milenkova 2008). Thus, Roma attainment of primary as compared to elementary education does not matter in terms of income or chance of employment since it is still insufficient educational level and cannot guarantee a dramatic increase of income (UNDP 2006: 38). This could be considered as a disincentive for Roma to stay at school if they perceive secondary education with its twelve years of study as too distant and unattainable goal.

Educational segregation of Roma students, similar to that of the African Americans in the United States, has also contributed for their low educational level. Roma students used to study in "Gypsy schools" in ethnic ghettos, where all students were Roma, material conditions were poor, and the level of teaching was meager. Out of 95,000 Roma students in Bulgaria in 2006–2007, 27,500 still attended "Gypsy schools" in ethnic ghettos of large cities. Other 50,000 study in schools in small towns and villages, where Roma students are the majority because Bulgarians migrated to large cities and abroad. Finally, only 16,500 Roma students attend mixed, desegregated schools with Bulgarian pupils (Nunev 2008: 221).

The objective of educational desegregation in Bulgaria is to move Roma children from "Gypsy schools" to integrated schools, where they would study with students from the majority. It is comparable to the attempts to abolish segregated schools for African Americans since 1954 and has encountered similar challenges. The U.S. educational desegregation is by no means a success story and implies that its Bulgarian version would also be painful. Educational segregation has been abolished legally in the United States but in practice it exists in many places. For instance, about 55,000 students attend public schools in Washington, D.C. and only 6% of them are white (Witt 2007) while the white population of the U.S. capital is 32% (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011: 18). The parents of white students either send them to private schools or move to white neighborhoods in Northwest Washington, Maryland, and Virginia, where students in public schools are predominantly white.

In Bulgaria, some authors have identified the process of secondary segregation: if a "Bulgarian school" starts accepting Roma students, Bulgarian parents sign up their offspring to schools that

are not integrated (Grekova 2007). Another strategy is formally integrated schools to form separate Bulgarian and Gypsy classes. The other tendency is principals and teachers to strive Roma students to be as less as possible–just to keep the minimal number required to ensure the existence of the school if the number of Bulgarian students is not sufficient for this (Grekova 2007; Nunev 2008). In such cases, teachers often do not care whether Roma students really attend classes–their presence in bureaucratic papers is sufficient enough.

Difficulties of understanding the language of the majority used in educational institutions and job training is a serious challenge for Roma. The analyses clearly demonstrate that the lack of good command of official language for Roma children is a factor they drop out school at an early stage. Pre-school education plays a crucial role for further success of Roma children in educational system. The data from Bulgaria clearly show that if Roma children do not attend pre-schools, they enter first grade without sufficient knowledge of Bulgarian language. There is a gap of understanding between them and their Bulgarian classmates and Roma students tend to be held back and drop out school.

The positive message is that this can be overcome. Non-government organizations in Bulgaria started projects that financed pre-school education of Roma in several cities. Roma children learned sufficiently Bulgarian language and later adjusted successfully to the educational environment in Bulgarian schools with negligible dropout rate. In 2002, the Bulgarian Public Education Act was amended in order to make pre-school education mandatory and financed by the state. Another interesting step was provision for Roma assistant teachers as mediators and interpreters between Roma children and the educational institution (UNDP 2002; Grekova 2007).

4. 3. Crime and Incarceration

The perception of the Roma as thieves and criminals is one of the bleakest stereotypes for them. Some data demonstrate higher rate of incarceration of Roma as compared to other ethnic groups. People who work in courts and correctional institutions estimate the share of the Roma among prison population to be between 60 and 80% (Bezlov, part 6). Crime expert Tihomir Bezlov posits that perhaps a half of the Roma males in Bulgaria in the age group 15–30 had encounters with judicial system in 1993–2003 (Bezlov, part 6). This estimate is congruent with the situation of the blacks in the United States.

This does not necessarily means that the Roma commit more crimes since the explanation would be that the courts are prone to punish Roma more severely than Bulgarians (as might be with the blacks in the United States compared to the whites). For instance, one study on the illegal cutting of timber reveals that Roma very often are those who knock down the trees and transport them with their horse-drawn carriages. The companies that buy this timber (with the knowledge of its illegal origin) are owned by Bulgarians or ethnic Turks. The owners are usually well-connected with local municipalities and/or local police and they are not persecuted. Those who are arrested are Roma, pawns in the crime, who lack political connections (Bezlov, part 4).

4. 5. Fakulteta: The Economy of Survival

Fakulteta in the largest Roma neighborhood in Sofia and the Roma there with regular jobs usually occupy low-paying positions: in cleaning, construction, maintenance of park and gardens, moving furniture, and driving taxi. Unemployment among Roma in Bulgaria is high, around 60% (Collins 2006: 42), but the situation in Sofia is not as bleak because of the employment opportunities of the largest city in Bulgaria (reason for migration of Roma and ethnic Bulgarians to the capital of the country).

Other Gypsies have already lost their regular (although menial) jobs and now strive to make both ends meet: day labor, repairs, collecting garbage, or cleaning basements. Many Roma meticulously collect garbage for recycling on the territories of the neighboring Bulgarian areas and transport pieces of metal, cardboard, and paper with horse-drawn carriages and improvised trolleys.

"How do I strive to feed my six children? I patrol garbage containers and collect cardboard and paper. It is almost impossible to find iron. I earn 5–10 leva daily, sometimes up to 20. Occasionally, I clean basements–I can get 30–40 leva. Hopefully, my wife receives social welfare for the children" (Roma man, about 45).

Another strategy for survival of the Roma families in *Fakulteta* is to raise animals. The presence of horses, pigs, hens, and geese in an urban environment creates an awkward image of *Fakulteta* as a village within the city. Many of the Roma respondents who used to raise animals now claim giving up since it is not profitable anymore: the prices of selling their meat are not sufficient enough to encourage them to maintain husbandry.

The amount of 35,000 or even more people in a Gypsy neighborhood is a critical mass sufficient to create consumer demand for goods that need to be satisfied and to pave the way to Roma entrepreneurship. All streets are dotted with tiny stores that sell bread, cheese, meat, soft drinks, alcohol, clothes, or shoes: any kind of necessities for frugal, austere living. Most of the stores have a very limited variety of goods since the owners cannot just afford buying huge quantities. However, there are Roma businessmen who have larger stores for bakery or construction materials or restaurants. Because many Roma are dark-skinned and easily recognizable as ethnically different and the stereotypes about them are negative, most of Bulgarians would not buy anything from a store or café owned by Roma. But the large amount of the inhabitants of the ghetto has allowed the development of the Roma business–with Roma owners and Roma customers.

Emigration is a survival strategy for many Roma from *Fakulteta*. Some have already left Bulgaria for good and settled in Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. Others go abroad for seasonal work. In general, the Roma emigrants abroad do the same menial jobs as they did in Bulgaria but for higher payment.

"My daughter has lived in Switzerland for four months… She used to work as a cleaning lady in [a large mall in Sofia] for 380 levs per month USD. A mop was always in her hands: when her boss would see her without the mop in her hands, he would immediately find out a new task for her. Now she earns 2300 Swiss franks. She is a cleaning lady in a hotel. She says there is a lot of work but she knows she is going to get good money. She sent money to us and her sister. Her character has also changed. Before, she was nervous and aggressive. Now, she is different: calm, uses nice words. Relations between people there are different" (Roma man, 46).

Pawn shops are numerous in the Gypsy neighborhood. The need forces the poorest Roma to borrow money and to become dependent on brokers. The loan sharks take advantage of the low educational level of many Roma: although the officially announced interest rates are 3 or 4 percent, borrowers, who do not understand the meaning of percentages, are required to pay from 15 to 60 percent interests. Usually when pawn shops loan 100 leva, they require the borrower to pay back 115 or 130 leva but only after 15 days, not a month. If indebted people cannot pay back, the pawn shops can take their TV sets, laundry machines, cars, and even houses. The loan sharks could force borrowers to work for them and even to steal and their daughters to prostitute according to some respondents.

Poverty forces some Roma to sink into the murky waters of the underground economy. Some individuals sell smuggled cigarettes and stolen goods. Others turn to prostitution. Women, who deal with commercial sex, do it outside the neighborhood and hide it. Some boys from the Vietnamese Dorms have sex with other men for money or material gains such as shoes or mobile phones.

"Years ago I visited gay clubs and had sex with men. Now I feel ashamed when I think what happened. However, I f--- them, not they– me. Old, young... But not anymore" (Roma man, 20).

The employment programs for the Roma are sometimes initiated by political reasons with zero practical effect. Some Roma from the neighborhood admit they were "employed" for a couple of months from cleaning companies, which participated in projects for Roma employment. The companies never required from them to show up for work even a single day, but only to receive their minimum-level salaries. The imitation of measures for Roma employment was enough for the government and the municipality. Such "programs" have even negative effect since they create expectations that it is possible to receive money (true, not a great amount) for nothing.

5. Blame Discrimination or Minority Culture?

The thorny dilemma is, again, how to explain the plight of a minority group. Is the cause discrimination from the mainstream society, structural barriers that hinder betterment of a minority through blocking its access to decent employment, housing, and education? Or is it the culture of the minority group itself to blame for poverty and incarceration?

5. 1. Social Barriers or "Gypsy" Mentality?

The pressure of discrimination cannot be ruled out. The Roma are certainly discriminated: their employment and educational opportunities are limited as compared to those of majorities, many of Roma live in segregated neighborhoods in appalling conditions. The alternative explanation emphasizes that some traits of the Romani culture contribute to Roma's plight–in addition to discrimination and prejudices from majorities. The matter is complicated since, as in the case of the African Americans, structural and cultural factors are interrelated: the pressure of discrimination nurtures hostility among minority group(s) and preserves or stimulates cultural practices that are regarded negative from the wider society such as petty theft, begging, and rejection of official education in the case of Roma. Thus, both structural and cultural factors are at work and they re-enforce each other. Many Roma want to gain education and useful skills but when later they encounter discrimination and unwillingness of employers from ethnic majorities to hire them, Roma tend to regard their previous efforts to educate as meaningless.

5. 2. Problematic Romani Culture?

The list of reportedly negative traits of the Romani culture comprises short-term orientation, neglect of education, early marriages, lower place of women, approval of theft, and unwillingness to integrate into the wider society.

Short-term orientation is typical for the Romani culture–a lot of Roma tend to live day by day and do not plan ahead. Short-term vs. long-term orientation is one of differences among world's cultures in Geert Hofstede's theory (2010). He finds East Asian nations such as the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, as prone to long-term orientation related to thrift, determent of gratification and, in the end, to economic growth and prosperity. The Roma would be at the opposite pole of this dichotomy: they do not use elaborate plans for future and do not plan their life and activities in a long-run. Short-term orientation is admitted by Roma respondents: *"They* [the Roma in *Fakulteta*] *are prone to eat and drink and do not think that they would be completely penniless tomorrow" (Roma woman, about 45*); *"People here* [in *Fakulteta*] *live not day by day but minute by minute" (Roma man, about 55).*

Usually Roma do not save (but it is also influenced by their low incomes) and prefer immediate consumption and indulgence. The Roma do not look favorably at activities that require long-term efforts, perseverance, and postponement of consumption. This defies attainment of goals such as high educational level, which usually requires years of study, and acquisition of skills. Again, this is consequence not only of culture but also of discrimination.

Short-term orientation in the Romani culture can be explained with nomadism in the past, lack of agricultural skills, and oral traditions. Nomadic life with its constant move from place to place had a great deal of uncertainty and made long-term planning difficult and unrealistic. Roma were not agriculturalists but agricultural life of people who live in permanent settlements required long-term planning of activities and exercising them month by month and season by season.

Thus, agricultural life has stimulated planning for future and spending constant efforts to achieve goals. Roma traditions differ from this type of cultural orientation.

The ability to read and write requires substantial efforts from individuals for a long period of time. Long-term orientation and planning as part of East Asian cultures could be influenced by their complex alphabets with many symbols, 3,000 in Chinese, whose learning requires a lot of time and efforts. The Romani culture is oral and the lack of urge to learn how to read and write has defied the ability to plan ahead and to invest constant efforts, which would bring results not immediately but in distant future.

The neglect of education exists but hasty generalizations would be wrong. The Roma with their oral traditions lived for centuries among nations with different culture and perceived attempts to educate their children as forced assimilation. Spain is a country that has done much to integrate its Gypsies and the results are mixed: many *Gitanos* drop out school. In Eastern Europe, labor discrimination (perceived and real) ruins ambitions to gain education and many Roma think, "If I would be discriminated against despite my education, then, why to study?"

The lower place of women is a trait of the Romani culture. The Romani culture is often characterized as patriarchal and it preserves traits, which in the past existed also among cultures of European nations. The tendency of early marriages and high fertility is not Roma peculiarity since these practices used to exist in many cultures, including the cultures of ethnic majorities in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and other European countries (Bitu and Morteanu 2010). But now the tradition of early marriages and early pregnancies in Europe is preserved mainly among Roma communities. Discrimination from the wider society helps preserve some conservative traits of patriarchal culture, which are hardly positive. The Romanian Roma women activists, for example, have tried to strike the balance between the respect for culture and respect for individual rights which may conflict with minority culture: "We wish to preserve our Romani culture but at the same time we acknowledge that there are practices in breach of human right in the case of Romani women. We, Romani women activists, acknowledge the fact that these practices harm both young women and men and need to be eliminated. These practices are not 'Roma practices' exclusively, but they exist and have existed in all patriarchal societies/communities… We, human rights defenders for Romani women, believe that the law should take precedence and that culture should not be used as an excuse when these practices are used" (quoted in Bitu and Morteanu 2010: 24–25). Early marriages (and early pregnancies) are considered as a questionable tradition by non-Roma and even violation of law. But if non-Roma institutions try to intervene, some Roma organizations and activists protest that this is violation of the rights of Roma to express their culture and triggers reactions such as that by the Roma scholar Ian Hancock, "Non-Romanies in their drows have decided that arranged early-teen marriage among Vlax Romanies is reprehensible, although no similar outrage has been directed at India where it is also common and where the Romany custom originated. Likewise arranged marriages amongst the European royal families have taken place for centuries without moral criticism, although ours are periodically an issue in the western press" (Hancock 2010: 18).

On the other hand, some Roma and non-Roma defenders of human rights argue that individual rights (in this case of children) should have priority over collective rights related to minority culture (Bitu and Morteanu 2010). Minors are too young and immature to take decision whether they want to marry or not, and thus marriages are arranged by parents. When married, Roma minors leave school, especially girls, and in the case of pregnancy, they must take care for a child since a very early age.

The situation is quite delicate as the Romanian report reveals that the attempts of non-Roma to criticize early marriages and to appeal to the police or courts to implement the law, jeopardize the position of Roma who are also against the practice. These Roma activists and intellectuals could be stigmatized as "traitors" by the Roma community. This is the case with Madalin Voicu, a Romanian Roma politician and musician, who stated in one of the public discussions on child marriages that "our Gypsies are stupid, primitive and irritating for everybody" (quoted in Bitu and Morteanu 2010: 82). Apparently cultural sensitivity is much needed when a questionable and potentially harmful practice of minority culture is debated. It is a very difficult issue since the violation of rights could come from minority community itself. As the statement of Roma women activists in Romania points out, "You cannot fight racism in the majority society while you are discriminating within your own community" (quoted in Bitu and Morteanu 2010: 17).

Case studies in Romania reveal that girls could be as young as 12, 13, and 14 years old at wedding and sometimes early pregnancies followed. In Ramnicelu, Bizau county, there are instances of 12-year-old Roma girls brought to the maternity ward. The most striking case in the same Roma community is the engagement of a girl aged five years and ten months to a boy of 16 years. The parents of the girl claim there would be no intimacy between the engaged, and the girl would continue to live in her parents' home at least until 12 years of age (Bitu and Morteanu 2010: 99–104).

Prostitution is another murky activity, practiced by some of Roma as well as by ethnic Bulgarians and other East Europeans. Again, it is not just culture since poverty and unemployment are heavy pressures to sell sex. However, certain cultural components should not be neglected. The tradition of the *Kalderash* to "sell" girls for bride price could lead that the family of the groom might force the girl into prostitution (with the argument that she is obliged to earn the money paid for her). In some cases, bride price is paid for Roma girls with intention by the family of the "groom" the girl to be not bride but prostitute. Such girls are often send to prostitute in Western Europe and become victims of human trafficking. In some Roma groups, even parents could send their daughters to sell sex. Thus, the organizations that battle forced prostitution should secure shelters for these girls since they cannot return to their relatives who forced them into prostitution (Kozhuharova n.d.) In some cases, if the girl is unmarried and virginity is considered indispensable for her future wedding, the relatives oblige her to practice only oral and anal sex. Or relatives of Roma girls who were engaged in prostitution, arrange for them surgical operation for restoration of hymen so they could be married as "virgins" (Pamporov 2006: 275).

The practice of stealing is usually attributed to the *Kalderash*. Some *Kalderash* groups maintain the tradition of pick-pocketing and girls are trained how to steal at the age of 10–14. The rational is that if caught, they would be too young to be persecuted by law. If girls are trained to steal from an early age, it has shaped their values and it would be very difficult to be convinced later in immorality of theft. After the removal of the requirement of Shengen visas for many of East Europeans, Roma who deal with theft prefer moving to affluent Western Europe. There is even a case that a Roma clan punishes a clumsy and unskilled in theft daughter-in-law with cutting off her fingers with an axe (Pamporov 2006: 270–273).

It is sometimes claimed that the Roma prefer living in their isolated communities and not integrating into the mainstream society. The assessment of the validity of this thesis should be very careful. The Romani culture is still very patriarchal and it shares the tendency for ethnocentrism and desire for preservation of old traditions–traits typical for all patriarchal cultures. Roma groups avoid marriages with other Roma groups and with non-Roma. Many Roma have chosen to live in their ethic neighborhoods although such choice has been influenced by economic factors and by perception that in ghettos they are more protected from hostilities of majority. The Roma often regard influences from the mainstream society as disastrous and diluting their traditions: for instance, the Roma juxtapose the requirement for virginity of Roma girls before marriage to alleged promiscuity of girls from ethnic majority.

On the other hand, the Roma want to be accepted into the mainstream society and to overcome bad stereotypes about them as irresponsible, lazy, and dishonest. They encounter hostility and discrimination in their relations with employers, policemen, or municipality officers and realize they are not treated equally with majority. This has resulted in distrust toward institutions of the wider society and unwillingness to adhere to their rules. Thus, Roma try to avoid paying of taxes, bills for electricity and water, and buying tickets for public transportation. Many of households in *Fakulteta* do not pay bills for water since they are illegally connected to the large pipes that supply water to Sofia.

Such discussions about cultural traits as problematic or negative conflict with the principle of cultural relativism, which begs the question: Should one culture impose its patterns considered as good or useful to another culture?

The East European countries are unable to cut the Gordian knot of Roma exclusion only with their own efforts: they lack sufficient resources and integration efforts are not popular among majorities. The French, Italians, and Britons have lived for centuries side by side with their Roma and Travelers without being able (or willing) to integrate them completely. How to expect this to happen smoothly in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, or Slovakia? Moreover, compared to the countries "east of Elbe," Britain, France, and Italy are affluent societies with experience with democracy. How can poorer Bulgaria, Romania, or Slovakia with their shorter experience with democracy achieve something, which is not entirely achieved in West European countries? And the share of the Roma population in West European societies is usually less than 1%, while in

East European countries the Roma are more substantial share of the population–between 3 and 10 % in some cases. Integration efforts and affirmative action policies are not popular among ethnic majorities "east of Elbe": many of Bulgarians, Romanians, and Slovaks are also poor and they do not see why the Roma should be singled out as beneficiaries. However, the Roma really should be targets of such policies since the depth of their poverty and exclusion is shocking.

5. 3. Cultural Explanation about African Americans

The culture of resistance, oppositional culture, street code, or culture of poverty–all these phenomena have their devastating impact on black lives. The negative tenets of the inner-city African-American culture are especially salient when it is compared to the culture of Asians and other immigrant groups, who are also discriminated. However, the inner-city oppositional culture of black Americans has originated as a reaction to racism, discrimination, and structural/societal barriers that block advancement of African Americans. A field anthropologist points out the link between structural barriers for minorities and their culture of resistance: "The violence, crime and substance abuse plaguing the inner city can be understood as the manifestation of a 'culture of resistance' to mainstream, white racist, and economically exclusive society. This 'culture of resistance,' however, results in greater oppression and self-destruction… [R]efusing to accept low wage, entry-level jobs, translates into high crime rates, high addiction rates and high intra-community violence" (Bourgois 2001: 23).

The oppositional culture has been an effect of discrimination but its code definitely contributes to the problems of the African-American community. An interesting strand of this culture is described by Tony Whitehead as what he calls "a cultural legend of black male incarceration"– that going to jail is a normal part of the life cycle of a black male, time spent there could be used for learning skills applicable later in underground economy and this can help him earn income, prestige, and respect. This black cultural legend "holds that those jailed are not necessarily incarcerated because they committed a crime. Instead, they may merely have acted defiantly or tough… Spending time in jail has now become for some a symbol of black male strength and defiance" (Whitehead 2000). Immigrant children who study seriously and respect their teachers are ridiculed by their African-American classmates who prefer adversarial attitudes to the educational system (Stepick and Stepick 2003). The hip-hop culture epitomizes some of the questionable values of inner city black men–the obsession with masculinity understood as aggressive behavior, glorification of violence, subordination of women.

The racial barriers in contemporary United States are subtle, even invisible, but they do exist. African Americans have lesser life-chance opportunities compared to their white peers from the same level at the socioeconomic ladder. Poor blacks have worse prospects than poor whites mainly because these blacks live in impoverished neighborhoods with meager employment options and appalling infrastructure. The middle class African Americans are worse off as compared to the middle class whites because blacks occupy positions that have no such potential for growth as those of the white middle class (Wilson 2007). Thus, "cultural deficiencies" of

African Americas have secondary nature–they have developed as a result of and reaction to racial discrimination. However, once the oppositional culture has appeared, it has had deep and devastating effect on lives of African Americans, especially of inner city young black males. The racial divide has produced the Frankenstein of the oppositional culture, which have exerted its monstrous influence on the ghetto dwellers, leading to street gangs, substance abuse, bullets, and prison cells.

5. 4. Shortcomings of Cultural Explanation

The peculiarities of the culture of Roma or African Americans can only partially explain the plight of these groups and the cultural explanation should not lead to oversimplification and sweeping generalizations. The plight of the Roma and African Americans has been a consequence of multiple factors. It has been caused not only by culture *per se*, but also by discrimination and mistrust from the majorities.

The Roma and American blacks are not communities with monolith culture. Both Roma and blacks differ internally in education, economic status, urban or rural residence. There is a layer of educated and professional Roma and blacks and also poor, illiterate, and uncultured Roma and African Americans. The Roma especially consist of a myriad of groups, which are quite different in cultural terms and sometimes feel mutual mistrust (Cvorovic 2006). This defies the attempts for establishing national or European organizations to represent Roma, Roma political parties, or to legitimize the idea of the Roma nation or state (Marushiakova and Popov 2005). The field work in the largest Roma neighborhood in Sofia has demonstrated that the local Roma there from the *Erlii* group distant themselves from other Gypsy groups considered by them as inferior or prone to crime.

The major demerit of the cultural explanation is that it slaughters the sacral cows of the respect-all-cultures principle and offends minorities. Thus, it is difficult to apply the cultural explanation to real policies. Someone cannot effect positive change saying to people with different ethnicity or race, "We want to help you but you should renounce and abolish the traits of your inferior culture, which hinder your development." Alexandra Oprea, a Roma activist, argues that she is against child marriages among Roma but if this practice is criticized on cultural grounds, as a trait of the Romani culture, she feels uneasy: "Code words such as 'culture' and 'tradition,' when used to explain dysfunctional behavior, bring to the fore the 'us' versus 'them,' 'superior' versus 'inferior' dichotomy" (2005: 1).

Concerns about possible negative traits of the Romani culture might be used by extremist groups and individuals to elegantly disguise their anti-Roma racism and prejudices. The pretext of taking care about the rights of Roma women or children could be utilized as a refined tool of expressing resentment toward the Roma (see also Magyari–Vincze 2010).

6. What Should Be Done for African Americans and Roma?

6. 1. Is It Possible to Learn Something from U.S. Efforts to Improve the Lot of Blacks?

The United States has achieved a lot in combating racism and discrimination since the 1960s:

1. Racism and discrimination are against the law: great achievement taking into account that laws in the Jim Crow Era upheld racial discrimination.

2. The mainstream media do nor revile or mock the blacks and other minorities. The media are sensitive to issues related to cultural variety and differences in cultural practices.

3. Much more blacks have access to education compared to the situation in the past. More and more African Americans are college-educated: although their share is lower compared to whites, Asians, and even African immigrants, present-day educational opportunities are unthinkable for the previous generations of American blacks.

4. In the present-day United States, someone can witness the highest number of African Americans on influential positions in business, politics, military, media, education, or entertainment industry. The election of Barak Obama as the first black President of the United States has marked unprecedented levels of racial tolerance among Americans.

Still, problems with the African Americans do exist: poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, incarceration. It is claimed that in order to improve the quality of life and work of the American blacks, a Marshal plan for American inner cities is needed: more resources for improvement of infrastructure of black ghettoes, education, job training and placement in the labor market ().

6. 2. What Should Be Done to Integrate Roma?

The situation with the Roma is somewhat more complicated since they live in different European countries and governments have different approach toward them. In countries such as Spain there are comprehensive integration models, which wield some success. In many East European countries, integration models exist mainly on paper and governments perform mostly lip service when it comes to incorporate Roma into the larger society.

The European Union and the Council of Europe have taken important steps to develop a pan-European policy for Roma inclusion. The successful projects for Roma inclusion so far have demonstrated that strong political will of national governments and cooperation of/between authorities of central, regional, and local level is needed (Guy et al. 2010). Central government structures may initiate measures aimed at Roma housing, employment, or education but local governments could resist them and even rally support of non-Roma residents. Because of popular resentment against Roma, mayors who support Roma inclusion may lose elections and be substituted by mayors who prefer segregation (Guy et al. 2010: 35).

Constant efforts to combat discrimination and build tolerance are needed to integrate the Roma into European societies. Even traditional information campaigns can be helpful. The Council of Europe's campaign "Dosta! Fight Prejudices towards Roma" has strived to change negative stereotypes since 2006. The media can play important role in shaping attitudes toward the Roma. One of the positive examples in Bulgaria is the position of the prestigious weekly *The Capital*. Its articles have emphasized that Roma inclusion is needed not just because of sympathy and compassion to discriminated Roma (the usual stance of human rights organizations) but because of pragmatic reasons–employed and educated Roma would pay taxes, would not steal, beg, or rely on welfare. Thus, this pragmatic argument can be accepted by the ethnic majority–that the integration of Roma is useful also for "us," not only for "them." Such positive attitudes grow when a "Roma project" benefits also non-Roma residents–for instance, when a new water treatment plant has been constructed in a Slovak village with money from "Roma" funds (Guy et al. 2010: 35).

But the efforts of institutions to change the real conditions in which the Roma live are much needed. The initiative of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2015, tries to improve employment, education, housing, and healthcare of the Roma.

Integration measures should be discussed with Roma communities and Roma leaders, and they should participate in these programs on all levels, including decision-making. This is not easy since the problem of Roma representation is complicated. The Roma consist of different groups, as discussed earlier, with conflicting interests, which leads that proposed Roma representatives, who are supposed to maintain the dialog with governments, are not accepted by all Roma. Rank-and-file Roma are very suspicious toward their alleged leaders and Roma non-government organizations, esp. if they are not from their Roma subgroup. Roma respondents often think that Roma organizations steal a great deal of the money allocated to help poor members of community or blame Roma leaders of nepotism.

It seems some traits of the Romani culture ought to be changed to achieve betterment of this community. But this cannot occur with giving orders "to civilize" and criticize "inferior Romani culture." Such a position offends the Roma and is counterproductive. It would also make difficult the situation of Roma activists and intellectuals who battle controversial practices of the type of early marriages. They can be perceived as traitors or "servants of the non-Roma majority" if their criticism is utilized by racist non-Roma groups. The argument of "wrong" Roma/Gypsy culture should not be overemphasized: some of these negative cultural traits existed or are preserved because of discrimination that isolated the Roma from the mainstream society and the ghettoized Roma communities preserved some characteristics from patriarchy. It should be taken into account that the Roma have experienced centuries of discrimination, which is not easy to forget. Apparently a great deal of cultural sensitivity and sincere attempts for intercultural dialogue is needed both from the Roma and non-Roma.

The attitudes of majorities are definitely anti-Roma. The Roma are the most distrusted group in Europe (Eurobarometer 2008). For instance, 96% of Romanians consider the Roma "thieves," 47% regard the Roma as "dirty," and 37% as "lazy" (Ciobanu 2008). About 63% of the interviewed Hungarians think that the "Roma inclination to commit crime" is imprinted in their genes (Hungary Around the Clock 2011).

In some places, projects for housing or educational desegregation meet with local resistance: ethnic majority residents protest against their new Roma neighbors and parents sign out their children from integrated schools, which rapidly acquire the notorious label "Gypsy" schools. Anti-Roma feelings could propel extremist politicians and parties into power. The nationalists are quick to capitalize on resentment against the Roma and to reap votes. Many of those who hate Roma justify their resentment with reference to the Romani culture–"Gypsies are lazy, dirty, beg, steal, don't want to work, don't want to study…"

The programs that help Roma employment are of crucial importance. The human rights approach to protect Roma rights or to ensure political participation is important, but ineffective without employment opportunities that can battle poverty.

The efforts to enhance education of the Roma are also ineffective without real employment opportunities afterwards. The courses for acquisition of new skills and occupational training would have zero efficiency if Roma participants would be unable to find jobs due to the shrinking of labor markets or mistrust of employers. That means the projects to incorporate Roma should be multidimensional and take into account all possible aspects that could influence practical outcomes. If Roma are trained for new occupations, there should be measures how to match them with potential employers afterwards.

The U.S. experience to overcome discrimination towards blacks suggests that this is difficult but possible and could be done for the Roma in Europe. The Roma and other European people lived for centuries in their parallel isolated universes. The time has come they have to find bridges to each other.

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