

Poverty Research Network

International, cross-institutional, interdisciplinary studies of poverty, inequality and injustice

Workshop #2: “Marginalized Perspectives from South East Europe: Between Poverty and Empowerment?”

Friday 24 November 2017

The Cultural Centre of the Romani Settlement of Kamenci, Slovenia (hosted by NGO Mission)

Regional lead: [Julija Sardelic](#), Postdoctoral Resarcher, School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool



While Europe seems to be one of the most prosperous regions in the world, there are still certain groups that have a much higher chance to be end up in a condition of absolute poverty, in particular the Romani minorities. Many Romani individuals try to solve their extremely deprived condition with migrating to other more prosperous countries in the EU, where they are then particularly considered as a problem. While the position of Romani EU citizens has been address to a great extent, this workshop will particularly focus on the position of Romani individuals coming from the non-EU Post-Yugoslav Countries, which have been formerly facing subsequent and overlapping war conflicts and are now ODA recipient countries (Serbia, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) in comparison to now EU post-Yugoslav countries such as Croatia and Slovenia.

The workshop will highlight how the patterns of poverty intersect and to a large extent define the position of marginalized Romani minorities and also their patterns of post-conflict migration. It will examine

whether their position has changed due to the latest refugee crisis (in comparison to previous refugee crises the post-Yugoslav region has faced). The workshop will be hosted in the Cultural Centre of the Romani Settlement of Kamenci in Slovenia (hosted by NGO Mission). It will include academics as well as practitioners working on the position of Roma in the post-conflict region. Holding the workshop in a Romani settlement will give Roma themselves an opportunity to speak about their own experience of poverty.

Programme

12.00-13.00 Lunch at the Roma settlement in Kamenci

13.00-13.30 Visit to the Roma Museum and Presentation of Activities in Kamenci (Mr Ludvik Levacic, NGO Romano Pejtausago)

13.30-15.30

PANEL I – Presenters:

- Dr Julia McClure (Lecturer in History, University of Glasgow)
- Samanta Baranja, (PhD Student in Romani Linguistics , University of Ljubljana + Former President of Roma Academic Club, Mentor of Multipurpose centres & Teacher of extracurricular activities, Centre for School and Outdoor Activities)
- Dr Paul Stubbs, Senior Research Fellow (The Institute of Economics, Zagreb) Agata Sardelič, (President NGO Mission *S, Lendava) & Ludvik Levačić (NGO Romano Pejtausago, Kamenci)

15.30-16.00 Coffee Break

16.00-17.30

PANEL II Presenters

- Nezir Huseini (Program Director of Roma Democratic Development Association Sonce, Tetovo)
- Jasmina Papa (Social Inclusion Advisor, United Nations Development Programme)
- Dr Julija Sardelič (Marie Curie Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Leuven)

Report of Workshop

We began with a tour of the museum at Kamenci, presented by Mr Ludvik Levačić, the informal leader of the settlement, and President of the NGO Romano Pejtausago (which means Romani Friendship in the local Romani language). The museum was developed as one of the projects by the NGOs in the beginning of 2000s and has been visited by many people including contemporary Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg, former Slovenian President Milan Kucan and many other international political representatives who supported the efforts of multiple NGOs and local authorities development in Kamenci. Beginning with this tour of the Roma museum at Kamenci was an excellent way to physically, emotionally, and intellectually experience how history can be used a tool of social justice. The museum shows that history is not monopolised by academics based at universities but is a malleable resources. The museum also aims to bring an important signal, that outside academia history should not be only in hands of museum curators, who aim to reconfirm the greatness of national heritage, but also show counter-narratives brought by people and communities, who the state positions as marginalized minorities. It showed not only the value of history for communicating cultural heritage and gaining recognition of different communities, but also the importance of historical narratives as a tool against oppression.

On the wall in the museum is a picture of Tito, and Mr Levačić recounted his experiences of being part of a Roma community in Yugoslavia and the discriminations that intensified in the breakup of this state with an official multicultural discourse in its Constitution. The museum captures the values of the community and its objects are testament to the layered meanings of what it meant to be positioned as Roma in the Yugoslav state and also in states that were established on its territory afterwards.

Mr Levačić explained in its early conception the Socialist Yugoslavia had a different perspective on freedom of movement and hence the state did not control it to such a large extent as in its later years. Levačić felt that he and also other Roma had much more freedom in Yugoslavia and were also very respected despite being a non-territorial minority. He emphasized that the non-territoriality did not come from the sense of non-belonging, but from the different connection to the territory that is non-ownership of the land. This perspective presented by Levačić is similar to those of some other indigenous tribes around the world. The display in the museum emphasises the importance of connection with the environment, displaying collections of local botanical products that have traditionally been used in local medicinal practices. The museum, and many aspects of Roma history, were brought to life by the lively tour of Mr Levačić.

The first presentation was given by Dr Julia McClure, who introduced the project and her own work on poverty and charity in the making of the Spanish Empire. McClure highlighted how there was a shift in attitudes towards poverty and strategies of poverty alleviation in the sixteenth century, which resulted in increasing criminalisation of poverty and its association with social disorder and contagion. New methodologies for managing the poor were advocated by humanists, such as Juan Luis Vives, who developed new models of ideal societies based upon the invisibility and exclusion of the poor. These humanists were the policy writers of their day and advocated new forms of poor relief based upon the institutionalisation of charity, and greater discrimination of who could receive this charity. Divisions between the deserving and undeserving poor developed, and these were linked to the capabilities of the bodies of the poor, especially their capacity to work. There was also a dramatic shift in the emphasis on caring for neighbours, the poor of local communities, and not strangers. Inclusion of citizens into new systems of charity were measured against multiple exclusions. *Los Gitanos*, as Roma communities in the Hispanic world are still known today, increasingly found themselves excluded from the forms of citizenship that were taking shape in early modern Spain, and losing access to systems of poor relief that were increasingly linked to these notions of citizenship. McClure also summarised how the legal category of the poor facilitated the construction of the Amerindians as colonial subjects, the theme of her current book project *Poverty and Charity in the Making of the Spanish Empire*. This historical example from sixteenth century Spain provided a framing for the AHRC project's aim to conduct cross-cultural and diachronic analysis.

The following presentations were given by a range of specialists on marginalised minorities and migrants in South-East Europe, especially the Roma community and also including experts from the Romani community itself. Samanta Baranja, a PhD Student in Romani Linguistics at the University of Ljubljana as well as the former President of Roma Academic Club and Project Manager at the Centre for School and After School Activities, spoke about the projects for reducing educational inequality between Romani children and their non-Romani counterparts. We discussed the problems with discourses of integration and the empowerment of Roma and the need to address the structural discriminations faced by Roma minorities. This raised lively debates about the limitations of welfare state models of social assistance, and the way in which discourses of charity have been re-conceptualised by NGO projects. A question raised from Baranja's presentation was, why it seems that Romani intellectuals are usually pushed to work with Romani populations and often do not get an opportunity that their knowledge can carry valuable lessons for the whole population. The reasons why Roma do become marginalized do not predominantly stem from the Romani community itself, but from the way the broader society positions them.

Dr Paul Stubbs, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Economics Zagreb, began his presentation by engaging with the 'local-global' framework of the AHRC project. He noted how the local and the global are not two distinct or distant levels but that in fact that the two coordinates are often in dialogue. He gave the example of Kamenci, a Roma settlement in Slovenia, which might be thought of as a hyper-local location but, in fact, intersects with global discourses and institution. The building we sat in was built with international funds, and the money of the UK's AHRC had brought us together. Stubbs then turned his example on its head to describe how we need to see the sites of global discourses, such as the World Bank, as villages. This perspective would enable us to construct ethnographies of international institutions, to assess how normative behaviours and narratives emerge. Stubbs then used this position to

reflect upon the narrative that has dominated global discourses, including trans-national approaches to poverty in the form of 'development', since, it could be argued, the fall of the Berlin Wall. Development discourses have been underpinned by neoliberal economic theory which is grounded in a notion of trickledown economics and sees the state as something which interferes with economic growth. Stubbs highlighted the narrative of de-growth, the need to increase equality and reduce poverty without increasing production which endangers the planet, and the need to acknowledge the limitations of the formal labour market to provide the means of existence for all. This led to a lively debate on the future of the Universal Basic Income Movement and the future of welfare states.

Jasmina Papa, a Social Inclusion Advisor for the United Nations Development Programme, gave an overview of her project on people's narratives of the migration cycle. Papa gave insights into the new methodologies for thinking about narratives being designed and used by NGOs today. She used the programme 'sense maker' to turn the qualitative data of micro-narratives into quantitative data that can be used to inform future policy decisions. The participants offering their stories also engaged in the deconstruction of these narratives, a method called 'framework analysis'. The data revealed the reasons why people migrated (and returned), and the obstacles they faced in terms of accessing basic resources. It showed that many people would have preferred not to migrate, but were forced by the extremely limited possibilities of employment in the formal labour market. It showed the problems people faced accessing resources both in the places to which they migrated, and the places to which [some of them] returned.

In her presentation, Dr Julija Sardelić linked together the findings on Romani individuals who became forced migrants or legally invisible during the post-Yugoslav wars to her current Marie Curie research project on broader theoretical questions on the invisible edges of citizenship and Romani minorities in Europe. She argued that to look for causes of marginalization, the researcher should look in the broader societal constellations and not simply find a reason of it in an alleged isolation of Romani community.

The final presentations reminded us again of the significance of the location of our workshop, in the Roma settlement of Kamenci, which is also the site of the two NGOs established by Agata Sardelić and Ludvik Levačić respectively. Agata Sardelić provided us with an oral account of the history of the settlement. It began as she was involved with designing the pathways for new cycle paths in the region. A. Sardelić had suggested that these cycle paths should not only tour around famous monuments, but should connect historically marginalised communities. With this in mind she designed a project of regional cycle paths which included Roma settlement of Kamenci, where she was met with the tremendous hospitality with which anyone who has visited Kamenci will be familiar. Lasting friendships were forged and the NGO of Kamenci came to be established. A. Sardelić has now been dedicated to projects at Kamenci for nearly two decades- These project have not only improved infrastructure and cross-community relations, but established Kamenci as a global meeting point. These projects have been co-designed and co-implemented both by the Romani community itself as well as the local authorities on the other side. Such equal partnership has proven to bring the most effective results not only in soft activities, but also at bringing relevant infrastructure to the Roma communities and changing their image from a segregated ghetto to international juncture where different people meet and also live. The workshop ended with the oral testimony of Levačić, who gave his own account of growing up in a Roma community, and living through the transition of the breakup of Yugoslavia. He also reflected upon his experiences of the development of the NGO.

The workshop provided the opportunity to reflect up on the structural dimensions of inequality, and the problem with empowerment discourses which don't address the systemic issues that prevent poverty alleviation, especially the limitations of the formal labour market to provide a living wage, the construction of migration cycles that are as disadvantaging as they are advantaging, the prevalence of racism, and the problems of the obstacles presented by structures of citizenships. However, what proved to be the added value of the workshop was the multitude of different voices including those that were previously silenced: that is not just from academics and representatives of different organizations, but also the lived experience of individuals who found themselves in between the narratives of poverty and empowerment.

Co-written by Julia McClure and Julija Sardelić