

Pride and prejudice: Challenging romaphobia through political mobilisation

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Roma communities are among the most persecuted and excluded groups in Europe today. International organisations, national governments and civil society have failed to address the most pressing socio-economic concerns of this group and Roma themselves have been unable to mobilise politically to articulate their needs. I argue that policy interventions which do not address the underlying causes of stigmatisation are doomed to fail. Only by understanding the causes of Romaphobia can meaningful solutions be found. Roma are thus excluded from public life and serve as a foil for the interests of the political elite: Roma become constructed as a problem community which does not 'fit' the projection of the nation. Due to the heterogeneity of Roma communities across Europe (unique in that they lack any territorial ambitions, do not share a common religion or speak a common language, are geographically dispersed), efforts to mobilise politically have foundered. Moreover, attempts to forge a collective identity are further impeded by the myriad sub-groups and cultures which are housed under the endonym 'Roma'. Indeed, it is more accurate to conceive of Roma as a political project or phenomenon rather than as a bounded cohesive group.

This presentation explores some of the causes of anti-Roma prejudice and points to recent attempts to challenge the negative ascription of Roma identity through political mobilisation. It examines the nascent Roma Pride movement which started in 2011. Roma Pride certainly has the potential to challenge stigmatisation in the long term as it seeks to challenge prevailing understandings of Romani identity in a non-territorial space. A discussion will centre on research I conducted at the largest Roma pride protest in 2014, in Prague.