

Introduction

I was very grateful to be invited to write an introduction for this special edition journal dealing with the history of the Roma. I am a trained historian who became a sociologist and then became a political scientist but as a critical scholar an appreciation of the value of history never left me.

Through a study of history, we can identify patterns of behaviour, the way and manner, in which those patterns evolve or occasionally abruptly end are valuable not just in understanding the present but also changing it.

The Roma have often been described as a litmus test of society's civility and sadly for the Roma society has tended to fail in that test. As a nomadic and marginalised community, the Roma started a migratory journey from India entering not only into Europe but also the Middle East. They left no records of their story and history; we are unclear precisely who these Roma were and why they felt a need to migrate. Of course, the Romani language has been an important source of information indicating points of time in their travels through linguistic analysis but there are still many gaps and unanswered questions.

Many have come to know the Roma through the eyes and records of their oppressors, shortly after their arrival in Europe in the Middle Ages a spate of laws was introduced seeking to proscribe and sedentarise the Roma. A monocultural Europe was clearly hostile to difference and fearful of those not tied to the land and under the direct control of elites. Later bouts of persecution and assimilation reflected the rise of the nation state and a desire for control but also projections of national or political identity that deemed the Roma as outsiders at odds with new identities and in need of change, hence the assimilation drives of Hapsburg rule and communism. Tragically the Nazis and their supporters were to take such thinking to the extremes in policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Sadly, the traces of such patterns of historic behaviour are evident in the present. The promotion of insular and nostalgic forms of identity and exclusion as promoted by forms of political authoritarianism that vilifies the vulnerable and marginal, makes the Roma justifiably apprehensive about the present and future. History can and does repeat itself and sadly society does not have a propensity, it seems, to learn from past mistakes; this needs to change and that is why this special edition has value.

János Bársony, a tireless worker for the cultural and historical promotion and memory of the Roma encourages us to reflect on how the Roma, through a pride in their identity, create a means of resistance and resilience.

György Majtényi encourages historians to reflect on the internal and external pressures they may be placed under in a depiction of Roma history but how through reflexivity and integrity the historian might get closer to the truth and in the process deconstruct and challenge centuries of misinformation and the centuries old and deep-rooted demonisation of the Roma long evident in the European mindset.

Burak Akın explores the situation of the Roma under Ottoman rule, underscoring the largely untapped potential of relevant archival sources. His historiographical analysis shows how Ottoman records can offer fresh insights into the intricate socio-economic and legal frameworks that governed Roma lives across six centuries of imperial rule, ultimately challenging and reshaping our understanding of their history in this era. Zsuzsanna Mikó explores the experiences of migrant Roma groups in socialist Hungary during the 1950s, examining recent interpretations of state socialist Roma policies, emphasising the persistent marginalization of Roma communities despite official rhetoric promoting integration. The authorities constructed the image of Roma lifestyle and criminality, blending ethnic and social prejudices. Attila Márfi discusses *Roma Colonies in Pécs in the State Socialist Era, 1950–1990*, providing further insights of statist assimilation which actually accentuated marginalization.

Diana Aburas' paper highlights the educational exclusion of Roma communities, and shows how their limited access to higher education reinforces broader social inequalities. After providing a historical overview, this study also focuses on the recent situation and argues that Roma participation in academia is vital for fostering social justice, inclusion, and equal opportunity.

Overall, it is commendable that the inaugural English issue of the historical journal *East Central European Historical Studies* is devoted to the study of East Central European Roma history. The volume's articles and reviews uniformly concentrate on this subject, while the *Workshop* section features Éva Antal's analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's perspectives on the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft's works, as those of a seminal figure in feminist thought, offer critical insights that contribute significantly to broadening our understanding of history through diverse minority perspectives. History needs to change and atone itself for its role in the past of contributing to Roma exclusion either by ignoring the Roma or deeming them a minor footnote or by bolstering exclusionary and nationalist thinking. In the process historians can not only help the Roma in understanding who they are through understanding their past but also help the non-Roma to question and challenge notions of who they are, notions which have tended to rely on forms of 'othering' and scapegoating. The dark moments of history must not be allowed to repeat themselves.

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