

European Academic Network on Romani Studies.

Supporting Roma in Academia

Research seminar for Roma scholars

Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Roma Studies:

Whither Intersectionality?

11-14th of April 2013, Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

The seminar “Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Roma Studies: Whither Intersectionality?” organised within the frame of the Supporting Roma in Academia actions took place in Cluj-Napoca between 11 and 14 April 2013. It was organized by Iulia Hasdeu (Gender Studies Institute, University of Geneva) and Catalina Tesar (National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest). It had the logistical support of the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (<http://www.ispmn.gov.ro/>) and the Research Centre on Interethnic Relations (<http://www.ccrit.ro/index.html>), both based in Cluj-Napoca.

The seminar combined lectures delivered by four members of the Network who have long (anthropological) research experience with Romany people with presentations delivered by students enrolled in MA and PhD studies. It opened with a round table occasioned by the book launch of the Romanian translation of Martin Olivera’s *Romanès ou l’intégration traditionnelle des Gabori de Transylvanie* and it closed with a round table where local experts were invited to share experience of action research. The seminar aimed at addressing and challenging possibilities of applying the theoretical framework of intersectionality embraced by the postcolonial studies to research carried out among Romany people in CEE. Another scope of the seminar was to raise questions about modalities of linking academic research to public policy making, and to advance the relevance of the former for the latter. The working language of the seminar was English.

Participants

Eleven students with Romani background were selected to participate in the seminar. The selection was done in accordance with the assessment of the applications by the organizers. The main criterion of selection was the academic relevance of the research projects. The applications submitted were evaluated according to the delimitation of the research object, the theoretical and methodological framework, the clarity of the argument, the originality of the research, the importance of seminar for the student’s career.

Two of the students who were accepted declined their participation on the basis of personal reasons, the days preceding the beginning of the seminar. The nine students who were present at the seminar came from different countries of origin in CEE: Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia and Romania. With the exception of the three Romanian students, all the other participants were enrolled in CEU and had completed or were in the course of completion of the Roma Access Program. Iulia Hasdeu, Gergő Pulay, Elisabeth Tauber and Catalina Tesar delivered lectures. The anthropologist Martin Olivera who is a member of the Network was present during the first two days of the seminar. Stefania Toma and Laszlo Foszto (researchers in ISPMN, Cluj and members of the Network) attended the seminar and participated in the discussions. The closing round table hosted the local experts: Cristina Rat (sociologist, lecturer UBB Cluj), Enikő Vinze (anthropologist, Professor, UBB , Cluj), Zsuzsa Plainer (sociologist, researcher ISPMN, Cluj).

Description of activities

The launching of Olivera's book occasioned a discussion about alternative ways of „integrating” Romany populations to the NGO, European and national institutions' discourses and practices, i.e. the integration from below, through „tradition”. Issues such as incompatibilities between the institutional stakes and aims and the local cultural logics, and the misrepresentations of Romany people by the state, supra state and NGO actors were recurrent during the seminar discussions.

Students were allocated time for presenting their research projects and slots for discussions. The seniors advised on methodology and ethics of research, as well as on the theoretical framework of students' projects. We found the themes that came up in the students' projects to be diverse and equally relevant for the current plight of Roma. Few of them deal with public representations and self-representations of Romany women, and question idioms of collective identity, domestic violence or lesbian identity. One project tackles the theme of education, asking if the affirmative action models of African Americans in US could provide a basis for programs of integrative education for Romany people. Queries regarding self belonging of high educated Roma or of Roma converted to neoprotestantism were also addressed by students' research projects. A critical approach inspired by postcolonial studies to the Hungarian National Strategy for Roma was presented. The debates generated by these research projects conveyed the necessity to challenge or reframe analytical concepts such as gender, ethnicity, class, or the model of intersectionality (sometimes considered simply inadequate), in order to cover the multifarious social realities on the ground.

Iulia Hasdeu delivered an introductory presentation of the theoretical framework of intersectionality and its epistemological relevance in postcolonial studies. A critical approach of the articulation of Romany studies to the postcolonial paradigm was suggested. The presentations delivered by Elisabeth Tauber, Gergő Pulay and Catalina Tesar - who did long field research with different Romany people-, addressed local conceptions and understandings of the otherwise reified notions of gender, identity and class.

In the discussions carried out during the concluding round table ethical dilemma of action research were voiced: on one hand, the limits of objectification of collected data, the constraints of the research paid by international organizations, and on the other hand, the study of sensitive issues such as domestic violence and racist behavior in a highly deprived neighborhood, i.e. Pata Rat (a territorially segregated slum nearby the landfill of the town).

Outcomes

The seminar occasioned knowledge exchange between senior and junior researchers in the field of Romany studies. It opened a space for reflection both about the relevance of academic research for policy making, and about the positioning of the researcher vis-a-vis his object of study. Given that all the students who participated in the seminar were of Roma background and carrying research related to Roma issues, they voiced the tensions derived from their multiple belonging, i.e. to the academic community, to their community of origin, to the community of Roma students etc. The participants complained that there is no room for voicing these tensions in the academic programs they follow and they appreciated the space the seminar offered for self-reflection and for critical debate. For most of the MA students, this seminar was their first academic experience outside the space of the school in which they are enrolled. They appreciated the critical approach to received theoretical discourses which more often than not lacks from mainstream academic discourse in state schools in CEE.

One of the shortcomings of this seminar was the reinforcing of the division Roma vs non-Roma. In the informal discussions we had, students expressed their desire of participating in rather mixed gatherings than in exclusively Roma gatherings which limit their possibilities of networking with non-Roma peers. The CEU students, who were all ex RAP graduates, confessed that the conundrum they face during their MA studies is related to the interaction with non Roma students. They suggested that seminar such as this one should encourage the participation of Roma students without excluding the participation of non-Roma.

Overall, all participants expressed their satisfaction with the seminar and their desire of organizing a follow-up event.

The list of participants

	Surname	Name	Country	City
1.	Adăscăliței	Ana-Maria	Romania	Deva
2.	Zahariev	Atanas	Hungary	Budapesta
3.	Gheorghe	Carmen	Romania	Bucuresti
4.	Olteanu	Catalina	Romania	Bucuresti
5.	Daroczi	Anna Csilla	Hungary	Budapesta
6.	Jovanovic	Jelena	Hungary	Budapesta
7.	Ramova	Miranda	Hungary	Budapesta
8.	Fejzula	Sebian	Hungary	Budapesta
9.	Kurtic	Vera	Serbia	Belgrade
10.	Pulay	Gergo	Hungary	Budapesta
11.	Tesar	Catalina	Romania	Bucuresti
12.	Tauber	Elisabeth	Italy	Bolzano
13.	Hasdeu	Iulia	Swiss	Geneva
14.	López	Patrícia	Spain	Barcelona

Photographs









See the whole album on the Network Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.441805085905225.1073741825.171158689636534&type=1&l=66cf52ddeb>