

account of being one of only a handful of full-time foreign students, these were far outweighed by the benefits: the huge increase in my knowledge, connections I've made with students and professors, as well as the benefits incurred by standing out in a crowd. Regarding the Bologna Process itself, I feel that much of the changes will come down to "only time will tell." It seems unlikely that foreign-language programs will expand dramatically unless more fundamental changes take place; however, hopefully a few years' time will assuage doubts of professors regarding the new curriculum. I would like to thank several individuals in particular: Kati Vesztergombi, Gyula Károlyi, and Nina Zweig, for advising me in official and unofficial capacities; András Gács and Zoltán Kiraly, for the time they spent attempting to educate me; and the Hungarian-American Fulbright Commission for making this entire opportunity possible.

Bibliography

- Eötvös Loránd University. 17 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.elte.hu/en>>
- Gionis A, Mannila H, Mielikäinen T, Tsaparas P (2006) Assessing data mining results via swap randomization. In: Proceeding of the 2006 ACM SIGKDD international conference on knowledge discovery in databases (KDD'06), Philadelphia, PA, pp 167-176
- Netflix Prize. Netflix. 17 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.netflixprize.com/index>>.
- Zweig, Nina and Christian Groth. Experimental and theoretical analysis of the expected co-occurrence in market baskets containing single-buy items. Pending Publication.

Romani Education in Hungary: History, Observances and Experiences

Eric Lopez

Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11549-1000
www.Hofstra.edu
eric_lopez_82@yahoo.com
Advisor: Dr. Linda Longmire

Central European University
Nádor utca, 09.,
1051 Budapest, Hungary
Advisor: Dr. Anton Palinka

As a former advocate for students in Harlem, New York, I arrived in Hungary with a set of expectations regarding the educational injustices faced by the Roma. However, my experiences could not have prepared me for what I would observe and experience during my time there. Researching articles, studies, reports, and statistics has yielded valuable information on the Roma, yet it was my observations at the Dr. Ambedkar School in Sajokaza and Hegymeg that clearly illustrated the challenges and issues faced by students, parents, educators, and advocates in Hungary today. After nearly one year of observation and research on the educational inequalities faced by the Roma in Hungary, one thing has become increasingly clear; Hungary's efforts towards educational equality must rely more on Roma communities and organizations if it is to achieve harmonious integration between its Roma and non-Roma citizens. My observations at the Dr. Ambedkar School in the northern county of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, allowed me the unique opportunity to draw several comparisons between Hungary's efforts towards providing a more inclusive educational environment for its Roma minority and some of the harsh realities faced by its most economically deprived Roma communities.

Introduction

For nearly 600 years, Hungary's citizens have struggled with the integration of its Roma minority. Continued efforts at resolving issues stemming from failed attempts and flawed solutions have only recently led to a serious consideration of education as a means of achieving this goal. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies and grassroots movements have initiated projects aimed at increasing educational access for Hungary's Roma. One of the leading institutions heading this new approach is the Dr. Ambedkar School in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. In just two years, the Dr. Ambedkar School has turned itself into a major social forum for:

- a. *race issues in the Hungarian educational system;*
- b. *reflections on the Roma's migration thru Europe, particularly into Hungary;*
- c. *re-connections between the Roma and their Indian heritage;*
- d. *and the study and application of inspirational historic movements and figures.*

Though the school's work is of landmark significance, its success is dwarfed by the everyday realities of its students. Already considered "dissatisfactory" by mainstream Hungarian society, the Dr. Ambedkar students have the added disadvantage of being deprived of most forms of social mobility. The school's students (along with

most of Hungary's Roma) have been historically denied access to traditional educational resources which has fueled existing stigmas, discrimination, and prejudice stemming from a pervasive ignorance of the Roma's economic hardships, history, and aspirations to continue contributing positively to world culture. In the following pages, I will attempt to show how historical circumstances and contemporary politics have led to the Roma's current educational situation and what the Dr. Ambedkar School has done to counter some of the resulting negative trends.

Issues Within the Hungarian Educational System

On March 30th, 2008 the Republic of Hungary and its people were recognized by the Dutch civic organization "Unity is Strength" for their achievements in the social integration of its Roma minority.¹ While such international recognition for its efforts is fairly recent, Hungary's struggles, achievements and failures with Roma integration are not.

Efforts towards peaceful integration in Hungary go back as far as the Roma's first contact with Hungarians in the 15th century. They had achieved relative prosperity among their Hungarian neighbors as merchants and smiths, until

1 Roma Education Fund, Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, Hungary Awarded "Certificate For Diversity", April 16, 2008, available at <http://www.romadecade.org/index.php?content=252>

failures to reconcile differences between the two developed into cultural conflicts. Increasingly violent confrontations resulted in some of the first institutional policies aimed at social integration in the late 17th and early 18th century. Ever since, Roma integration has been a contentiously debated political issue between those defending Romani cultural autonomy and those who view the Roma as a threat to the pan-Hungarian identity. Taking center stage at many of these debates is the socio-economic gap between Hungarians and Roma, with criminality, unemployment, housing, and education often given as explanations or causes for it. Of these, education is widely recognized as an area of improvement most likely to have a greater long-term positive impact on both Roma and Hungarian communities alike. Nevertheless, Hungary's educational system still has many defects to overcome before it can take on an important role in the struggle for Roma equality.

Effects of Poverty on Equal Access in Hungary

Hungary's lack of attention and lack of governmental support for the educational needs of impoverished Roma communities highlights a systemic failure to consider how significant an impact poverty can have on equal access to education. To make matters worse, the declining socio-economic status of many Roma communities has left them politically vulnerable and unable to advocate for the educational needs that would grant them equal access.

The economic situation of Hungary's Roma has been steadily worsening since the early 90's.² Between 1991 and 2001 the percentage of Roma considered to be poor had doubled.³ In that time, the percentage of Roma living in extreme poverty had risen to approximately one-third of Hungary's total Roma population.⁴ As the number of impoverished Roma continues to grow, social welfare programs remain persistent in their focus on dependency creating assistance programs while access to quality education remains a neglected resource.⁵

Despite receiving government stipends for meals and other cost of living expenses, impoverished Roma families still struggle for access to educational facilities as early as pre-school. Inaccessibly distant schools are a financial burden for indigent families living in Roma settlements due to the high costs associated with transportation, while those with access to nearby schools are usually turned away because of overcrowding resulting from rapid over utilization of this scarce resource.⁶

2 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions, 2007*, pg 8

3 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions, 2007*, pg 8

4 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions, 2007*, pg 8

5 United Nations Development Program, *The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap, A Regional Human Development Report*, available at http://roma.undp.sk/reports.php?parent_id=1&id=182&scroll=182

6 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 88

Transportation related expenses, overcrowding issues and other access barriers disproportionately affect the number of impoverished Roma children able to attend pre-school at an early age. In most cases, children unable to attend pre-school by the age of five are automatically referred to special evaluation boards to test their school readiness and detect the presence of intellectual disabilities.⁷ Due to a lack of knowledge in the school placement process and their own educational disadvantages, Roma parents often find themselves intimidated by the expertise of evaluation board members, resulting in their decisions to send Roma children to specialized schools to usually go unchallenged.⁸ Roma children placed into these schools follow a reduced curriculum and receive an education that is, by most standards, of lower quality.⁹ The quality of education received by many Roma children in these specialized schools increases the odds that they will lack the necessary tools to achieve any socio-economic mobility and limits their chances for peaceful integration with the rest of Hungarian society.

The difficulties impoverished Roma families face attempting to gain access to fair and equal education, places them in a seemingly inevitable cycle of perpetual isolation, disadvantage

and marginalization.¹⁰ Those fortunate enough to have some access to educational resources are likely to have to struggle with segregated schools and classes, non-welcoming school management, low quality education, teachers that are untrained to work in multicultural settings, and professional committees assigned to make “special education” placement decisions, among other economic and social barriers.¹¹

School Segregation in Hungary

The continued placement of Roma children into specialized schools and segregated classrooms are additional examples of the systemic exclusion of the Roma from fair and equal access to educational resources and facilities. Roma students attending specialized schools or segregated classes are unlikely to re-enter the mainstream educational system or be prepared for competitive jobs in Hungary's labor market.¹² To break the cycle of exclusion created by institutionalized forms of segregation and improve the socio-economic situation of the Roma, the Hungarian educational system must make provisions for the elimination of the systemic causes leading to racially based discrimination by including Roma

10 Maxine G. Sleeper: *Anti-Discrimination and integration of Roma in Hungary*

11 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, 2007, pg 9

12 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, 2007, pg 32

7 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 88-89

8 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, 2007, pg 31

9 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 88-89

children in mainstream education from the very beginning.¹³

Unfortunately, not all forms of segregation in the Hungarian educational system are as overt as its specialized schools and classes. It is also common for Roma children to be designated as private or study-at-home students should teachers and administrators deem their behavior to be a disruption in their classes.¹⁴ While study-at-home students are able to take the examinations required of them to obtain their secondary school diplomas, few of them do, since academic performance decreases dramatically once they no longer have access to traditional educational resources and facilities.¹⁵ A disproportionate number of Roma students do not obtain their diplomas due to the prohibitive study-at-home designation. Albeit, while some of these students may be classified as study-at-home for reasons arising from a genuine concern for unaddressed behavioral issues, others may be victims of a discriminatory and corrupt financing system that facilitates educational segregation.

Some of Hungary's schools currently operate on a system of financing known as per-capita funding.¹⁶ In this system,

financial incentives are given to schools that practice strategies of retention that may maintain segregated and specialized schools disproportionately populated with Roma students.¹⁷ As a means of financing fair and equal education, per-capita financing has already proven to be ineffective.¹⁸ Several political and grassroots movements have tried to reverse the effects of this system but to no avail. Since there is currently little oversight of the enrollment procedures practiced by schools, and the collection of information based on ethnicity has been officially prohibited by the government since 1993, collecting the necessary data to effectively combat the trends created by this form of funding has been difficult.¹⁹

Nonexistent or flawed systems for monitoring and evaluating the enrollment in and financing of Hungary's schools have led to the current crisis in Hungary's educational system.²⁰ Realizing this, Hungary's lawmakers have attempted to create new laws or make changes to existing ones, in order to help bring about educational equality for Hungary's Roma. Since 2002, most reforms to the Hungarian educational system have too narrowly focused on the elimination of

based on the number of students attending. Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, Chapter 5: Barriers to Quality Education*, 2007

17 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, Chapter 5: Barriers to Quality Education*, 2007

18 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, Chapter 5: Barriers to Quality Education*, 2007

19 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I*, 2007, pg 187

20 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I*, 2007, pg 276-277

13 United Nations Development Program, *The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap, A Regional Human Development Report, Chapter 5: Education* available at: http://roma.undp.sk/reports.php?parent_id=1&id=182&scroll=182

14 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, 2007, pgs 11, 45

15 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I*, 2007, pgs 230, 281

16 Per-capita financing determines the amount of aid a school gets,

school segregation so that individual remedies provided by Hungary's judicial system have proven unlikely to lead to major systemic changes.²¹

In 2003 several amendments were added to the Act on Public Education that would allow financial incentives to be given to schools for the desegregation of their classes. However, "[i]t appears that closing down segregated schools brings about political liabilities that are greater than the financial burden of maintaining them."²² Some independent reports even suggest that there are schools receiving funding for the desegregation of their classes and facilities, yet they are actively maintaining them segregated.²³ These findings bring to light the growing resistance with which Romani fair and equal access movements and initiatives are faced. Despite new and existing legislation²⁴ and the continued filing of suits against discriminatory practices in towns and villages, segregation will continue to be a major barrier against educational equality and justice for Hungary's Roma.

Roma children who are not designated as study-at-home students, not placed into segregated classes, or into specialized schools, are still likely to face many challenges in obtaining fair and equal educational access. Many of these

21 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 88

22 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 89

23 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Page 89

24 Act on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities (2003), Public Education Act of 2003, & The Civil Code

students will be encouraged to attend vocational schools which provide little to no preparation for competitive jobs in the Hungarian workforce.²⁵

Regardless of its many educational issues, there are perhaps just many dedicated and compassionate men and women (Hungarian and Roma alike) working tirelessly to correct the inherent flaws of the Hungarian educational system. Yet, despite all that is being done to improve Romani education in Hungary, little has been done to educate the Hungarian public on the Roma's historical origins and their migration into Hungary.

A History in Brief

The importance of understanding our collective experience has long been acknowledged. In ancient Rome, historical knowledge was praised as divine medicine by both Cicero and Livy while contemporary thinkers like African American historian and activist, John Hope Franklin, likened it to enlightenment. For the Roma, whose already painful history continues to be smeared and tainted by slanderous myths and legends, history has taken on a different meaning. Their tumultuous journey across several continents has been transformed into "a nightmare from which [they] are trying to awake" (James Joyce, *Ulysses*).²⁶ Yet, the importance of

25 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I*, 2007 pg 208-211

26 I quote Joyce here not because he is speaking of the Roma in this line (in fact he is certainly not speaking of them). My intention here is

understanding their journey cannot be ignored. In fact, the persistence of several derogatory stereotypes, myths, and legends in popular circles requires a more careful investigation into the Roma's origins if an understanding of their plight is to be truly attained.

Romani history and culture is not taught to most children in Hungary. Those who are exposed to it in schools are likely to get most of their information from textbook chapters titled "Roma lifestyle, education, and criminality"²⁷. While textbooks and other media encourage prejudice and feelings of otherness, the Roma's Diaspora out of the battle fields of northern India and into the rest of the world is not unlike the voyages taken many times before by people searching for freedom and prosperity.

Out of India

Based on available resources, knowledge of the Roma's origins is speculative at best; however, it is now generally accepted that the Roma migrated out of India around the 11th century A.D.

During this time the Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu kingdoms of northwestern India were at war with the Islamic Empire of the Ghaznavids, centered in modern day

to recall in the readers' mind a picture of a journey whose beginnings were difficult and the continuity of this difficulty is something that some Roma are, only now, able to confront and liberate themselves from.

27 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I*, 2007 pg 239

Afghanistan.²⁸ India's conflict with the Ghaznavids resulted in major territorial losses, forcing its rulers to quickly assemble armies to defend its borders. These armies were primarily composed of non-Arian (non-Brahmin) citizens, settlers and mercenaries who had been promoted to the Kshatriya warrior caste in exchange for their military service.²⁹ Through a unique set of circumstances, combining both triumphant and failed military campaigns, the newly inducted Kshatriya armies spread further west through the Middle East and Turkey. Evidence of their westward journey is illustrated in an ancient Persian text written in the mid 10th century:

Hamza of Isfahan describes the arrival of 12,000 Zott³⁰ musicians in Persia. The story may be to a large extent legendary, but it informs us that there were many Gypsies from India in Persia; they were already noted as musicians, allergic to agriculture, inclined to nomadism and somewhat given to pilfering.³¹

Waves of westbound migratory groups continued to depart from India through the 11th century. Evidence of their arrival

28 Berzin, Alexander, *Berzin Archives, The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire, Part III: The Spread of Islam among and by the Turkic Peoples (840 - 1206 CE)*

29 Gypsypirit.org, Hancock, Ian F. *Origins of the Romani People, July 26, 2009 available at <http://gypsypirit.org/pages.php?menuid=7>*

30 Arabic word for Gypsy

31 UNESCO Courier, October, (1984) deVaux de Foletier, Francois *The World Their Homeland – Gypsies July 26, 2009 available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1984_Oct/ai_3455603/*

in Europe by the 12th century appears in a mention by canonist Theodore Balsamon of Trullo who wrote of the Athinganoi (Roma) in a cannon to the council of Trullo in Italy.³² Romani families already residing in Europe along with those that continued to pass into Europe through the Ilkhanid Empire³³ in the mid-13th century were eventually challenged to undergo changes that would forever transform them from India's warrior caste into Romani wanderers.

Into Europe

Romani customs and practices have developed into their present forms over centuries of change and adaptation. While some of these traditions have become hallmarks for a variety of regional and cultural differences, many have been used by non-Roma to formulate simplified and standardized conceptions of the Romani way of life. One of the most significant and prevalent stereotypes has been the Roma's adaptation to a nomadic lifestyle. Learning to survive while constantly moving towards or away from conflict meant learning trades and customs that were mobile and adaptable. Adaptation soon led to synchronization and the eventual incorporation of a variety of skills and customs from the various regions which the Roma temporarily called home. As they moved further west, Romani dexterity aided their survival

32 Fraser, Angus *The Peoples of Europe: The Gypsies*, (1995), pg 46

33 "The Ilkhanids were originally the Mongol governors of Iraq and Iran. They established their independence from China in 1295, when they finally converted to Islam." *Information taken from: http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1342_islamic_middle_east/map/*
176

in hostile and warring regions, while simultaneously allowing them to maintain cultural autonomy. Unfortunately for the Roma, their impressive skill set could not replace their inability to quickly adapt to cultural norms; leaving them vulnerable to dehumanizing victimization throughout the next stage of their historic journey: enslavement.

Before making their way through Europe, the Roma split and parted ways near the Caspian Sea.³⁴ Two main migratory routes resulted from this separation; one route took the Roma north and west into Eastern Europe while the other took them in a south easterly direction. The first Roma traveling along these two routes are believed to have arrived in Southern and Eastern Europe through the Ottoman Empire as free metal workers, rug makers, and entertainers in the late 13th century.³⁵ When the Roma arrived in Moldova and Wallachia (modern day Romania) they formed loose relationships with feudal lords, providing them with crafts and entertainment in exchange for the right to live on their property.

By the early 14th century, Roma who had associated themselves with certain estates were being sold as part of those estates.³⁶ Shortly after, laws were enacted to prevent Roma inhabitants living on

34 UNESCO Courier, October, (1984) deVaux de Foletier, Francois *The World Their Homeland – Gypsies July 26, 2009 available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1984_Oct/ai_3455603/*

35 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

36 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

these estates from leaving their new masters' property. These institutional measures enacted to prevent their escape did not deter many of the Roma living on these estates from attempting it, despite the harsh penalties faced by the many who would come to try. Some of the penalties a Roma slave could be faced with as a runaway included flogging, falague³⁷, cutting off of the lips, burning with lye, and wearing a cangue.³⁸ In the 16th century, Romani children were often separated from their families and sold at auction houses and lots for as little as 48 cents.³⁹ By the 19th century, all Roma born within the borders of Moldova and Wallachia were simultaneously born into a life of perpetual slavery.⁴⁰

Like slaves in the Americas, Romani slaves were divided into field slaves and house slaves. Field slaves were seldom visited by their masters but were under the strict supervision of a sometimes brutally cruel vata⁴¹. House slaves (some were the property of land owners and others of the church) were forbidden to speak Romani and female slaves were often used as sexual entertainment for guests. Any children born out of such

37 Shredding the soles of their feet with a whip

38 Three-cornered spiked iron collar

Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

39 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

40 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

41 Overseer

Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

unions were automatically considered slaves as well.⁴²

After years of enslavement, torture, and dehumanization, Romani slaves were finally freed in 1856 in Moldova and Wallachia to which Romanian activist Jean Alexandre Vaillant commented:

"...those who shed tears of compassion for the Negroes of Africa, of whom the American Republic makes its slaves, should give a kind thought to this short history of the Gypsies of India, of whom the European monarchies make their Negroes. These men, wanderers from Asia, will never again be itinerant; these slaves shall be free."⁴³

But, despite Vaillant's kind words, the Roma are still subject to prejudicial racism and discrimination in Romania and Hungary to this day.⁴⁴

While Romani enslavement in the Balkans is the most extensively documented, their Diaspora spans all of Europe and "the New World":

"Spain sent a number of Gypsies across the Atlantic, followed by Portugal which, from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, deported large numbers of Ciganos to Angola, to Sao Tome, to Cape Verde, and above all to Brazil."⁴⁵

42 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

43 Vaillant, J.A., (1857), *Histoire Vraie des Vrais Bohémiens*. Paris: Dentu & Cie.

44 Hancock, Ian F. *Roma Slavery Excerpt from The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)

45 UNESCO Courier, October, (1984) deVaux de Foletier, Francois *The World Their Homeland – Gypsies July 26, 2009 available at [177](http://findar-</i></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)*

Louisiana and Virginia in the U.S., England, Cuba, Russia, Scotland, Jamaica, and even their native India have also had their share of Romani slaves. Yet, while slavery remains one of the key ways through which the Romani Diaspora spread throughout the world, it was not the only way it did. There were also many that traveled through the various migratory routes created out of their separation near the Caspian Sea. For the branch of Romani wanderers that traveled southeast through the Middle East, getting to Western Europe was a slightly more pleasant voyage.

Greece is a significant place in the migratory history of the Roma. The Greeks were the first to assign the Roma the name "Atsinganos", where modern names like the Hungarian "Cigány" are derived. From the Greek port of Modon, known in the 15th century as "little Egypt", modern names like "Gypsy" and "Gitano" were also first coined.⁴⁶ The Roma also came to learn the importance given to special groups of travelers known as pilgrims from the Greeks. Realizing that calling themselves pilgrims would get them better treatment allowed this group of Roma smooth passage north and west into Europe.

[ticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1984_Oct/ai_3455603/](http://www.unesco.org/courier/1984_10/ai_3455603/)

46 UNESCO Courier, October, (1984) deVaux de Foletier, Francois *The World Their Homeland – Gypsies July 26, 2009 available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1984_Oct/ai_3455603/*

Into Hungary

One of the main routes through which the Roma arrived in Hungary passed through its southern borders. One of the earliest mentions of the Roma in Hungary is a 1416 Brasso municipal accounts record for a certain Mr. Emmaus and his fellow "Egyptians" and the donation of food that was given to them.⁴⁷ The following year (1417) Holy Roman Emperor and Hungarian King, Sigismund I, welcomed a group of Roma "pilgrims" seeking a letter of safe passage to travel across his empire. Unbeknownst to him at the time, Sigismund's signature on a decree guaranteeing safe passage for the Roma throughout his imperial domain was also an unintended institutional authorization for the establishment of some of the first Hungarian Roma settlements. While many did continue west and north, those that stayed underwent cultural changes that, over time, transformed them from Pharaoh's People or "Athingani" into Hungary's "Cigányok." Unfortunately for those that stayed, the new name came with its own set of troubles.

Persecution of the Roma began as early as 1479 in Germany, followed by virtually every European country with the exception of Hungary, Transylvania, and Russia.⁴⁸ Both the Hungarians and the Transylvanians were too preoccupied with the invading Ottoman-Turks to bother with expulsion of their Roma populations. In fact, when the Ottoman-Turks invaded Nagyszeben in 1476, the town employed its Roma to strengthen its municipal fortifications and to manufacture and

47 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 1

48 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 3

repair its arms. "Eleven years later, in 1487, King Matthias promised in writing to protect the freedoms of the Roma of Szeben."⁴⁹ Matthias' document, addressed to the voivode of Transylvania, István Báthori, outlined the protections to be granted to the Roma of Szeben as follows:

We hereby order and command that you at all times refrain from pestering, inciting or burdening the aforementioned Roma, that is, the Egyptians, and from extracting taxes or other dues from them...⁵⁰

In 1502, King Ulászlo II offered similar protections and freedoms to a group of four wandering Roma in the service of Koloszvár in Transylvania.⁵¹ Eight decades later (1583), Zsigmond Báthory, Prince of Transylvania, reaffirmed Matthias' document.⁵² Rákóczi I (1643), Ferdinand I, and Palatine Miklós Esterházy (1630) are among the many kings, emperors, voivodes, lieutenants, princes and feudal lords that followed Matthias' example in granting freedom and protection to Hungary's Roma in exchange for their valued service.

There was a growing demand for Roma labor in both the military and peaceful civil services during the 16th century. In the city of Brassó, the Roma had been documented as having repaired the city's gates and bridges, manufactured arms and cannons, kept the streets clean, swept the market, cleared the sewers, dug the graves, caught stray dogs, and carried

49 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 4

50 Pál Nagy as cited in Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 5

51 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 5

52 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 5-6

out the city's executions.⁵³ They were also known for their manufacturing of iron tools, horseshoes, and nails as well as their locksmithery, blacksmithery, and gold washing.⁵⁴ While documents show that the Roma were somewhat acknowledged and respected for these and a variety of other skills and services during the late 15th-early 16th centuries, only the memory of their musical acumen continues to survive to this day.

Late 15th – early 16th century documents show us the kinds of venues the Roma were requested to play at:

- 1489 – the archbishop of Esztergom pays Roma lute players
- 1525 – Roma were paid to play the cithara in front of the queen at the royal horse races
- 1532 – a request was made for Roma violinists by Pál Bakýth chief captain of the hussars
- 1543 – a letter was sent to Vienna by the court of Queen Isabella telling of the "Egyptian" violinists playing in the Hungarian court⁵⁵

Hungarians were not alone in recognizing the value of Roma skills in this era. From 1541 to 1699, The Ottoman Empire occupied large portions of Hungary's southern territories. During this 158-year occupation, the Roma enjoyed relative freedom among their Ottoman and Hungarian neighbors.⁵⁶ In the regions occupied by the Ottoman-Turks, the

53 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 6

54 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 6

55 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 7-8

56 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 1

Roma served as musicians, blacksmiths, firemasters, bullet casters, nailsmiths, swordsmiths, gunpowder producers, weapon polishers, hangmen, surgeons, soldiers, and guides.⁵⁷ Rapid population growth in the occupied regions in central and southern Hungary supports the claim that the Roma thrived in these trades. Ottoman sources tell us that the Roma population was relatively numerous in these five sultanic municipalities of Hungary: Tolna, Pécs, Ráckeve, Esztergom, and Buda.⁵⁸

By the time the Ottoman-Turks were ousted in 1699, the Roma had reached all parts of Hungary. Documentation from this era tells us that there was still a growing demand for Roma crafts and services. However, despite the demand, there were regions that had decided to expel their Roma population due to growing accusations of destitution and vagrancy.⁵⁹ Though the Hungarian aristocracy was sympathetic to the Roma, incidents of violence and persecution became more and more frequent. Hapsburg rulers Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II enacted policies partly aimed at integrating the Roma into mainstream society and curbing some of the hostility being expressed against them. Some of these policies, “provision of residency and trade permits (1760), provision of land plots (1761), forced adoption of Roma children by non-Roma families, prohibition of a nomadic lifestyle, etc.” were, unsurprisingly, more harmful

57 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 9

58 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 9

59 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 13

than they were helpful for the Roma.⁶⁰ Part of the reason for this outcome can be attributed to the motivation behind passing these decrees to begin with.

Maria Theresa and Joseph II were not just altruistically motivated when they passed many of these decrees in the 18th century. The true purpose of the policies of this period was:

...to count, record, and monitor everything and everyone, to classify the population and subordinate it to the purposes of the state, to settle all unsettled issues, and to regulate anything that was still unregulated. Maria Theresa’s decrees were clearly impossible to implement. Landowners were reluctant to grant land to Roma and guilds had no wish to accept Roma artisans as their members.⁶¹

These decrees even prohibited the Roma from playing their music as a way to administratively acknowledge the significance of the changes being made from “Cigány” to “New Magyar.”⁶² But the Romani spirit and culture could not be extinguished so easily. By the 19th century, Bálint Sárosi writes, “the public saw them [Roma musicians] as the representatives of [Hungarian] national music, welded to the Hungarian

60 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 1-2

61 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 15-16

62 Cigány, the Hungarian equivalent for Roma, represented a set of ideas and customs that many thought were the source of the intolerance and violence against the Roma at the time. For this reason a new identity, that of the “New Magyar”, was created by Austria-Hungary’s rulers.

national movement.”⁶³ Roma musicians even accompanied their Hungarian compatriots in the War of Independence of 1848.⁶⁴ In fact, after the Hungarian defeat, Roma musicians were in great demand for the plaintive merriment of their music.⁶⁵ It was through this passion for both their music and freedom that the Roma were able to gain the respect of at least some of their Hungarian neighbors. However, Romani participation in the War of Independence of 1848 was not an indication of their general discontent with the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Within Royal Hungary the Roma are said to have found several ways to carve out a relatively comfortable living.⁶⁶ Then again, an 1893 census initiated by Minister of the Interior, Károly Hieronymi, revealed that of 7220 communities with permanent Roma residents 3750 were segregated.⁶⁷ Of the 275,000 Roma recorded in the 1893 census, 13,000 were said to be unemployed and making a living through begging, soothsaying, fortune telling, quackery, theft, and loafing.⁶⁸ Based on the data collected in the 1893 census, it seems like, however “comfortable” their living conditions may have been, the Roma lived in a separate and unequal society worthy of their contempt and protest.

During the period between the first and second World Wars, the Roma faced great challenges in trying to keep pace with the

63 Sárosi, Bálint as cited in Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 18

64 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 18

65 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 18

66 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

67 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 28

68 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 32

rapidly changing political, technological, and economic climate in Hungary.⁶⁹ One of the only ways the Roma had to make a living during this time of economic crisis was through their music. Of the 100,000 Roma living in Hungary in 1927, it is estimated that most of the approximately 30,000 working age males were raised in musical homes.⁷⁰ For many of Hungary’s Roma, music embodied the only possibility for social and economic advancement and few took this reality for granted. Yet, social mobility at the time depended on more than the desire to play. Unfortunately for many Roma musicians, noblemen with a passion for their music and prosperous peasants who had once invited them to play at their weddings had fallen victim to the economic troubles affecting post-Trianon Hungary.⁷¹ At the same time, Hungary’s middle classes had become less receptive to Romani music, turning instead to jazz and modern dance for entertainment purposes.

Hungary’s Roma also made a living providing public services and crafts unrelated to music. One of the most respected Roma services was that of the blacksmith. There were also adobe makers, agricultural day laborers, basket weavers, wooden spoon makers, and tin smiths.⁷² But, despite all they had to offer, Hungary’s Roma “experienced a painful

69 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

70 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 44

71 The treaty of Trianon signed after World War I was responsible for the substantial loss of territory to the countries surrounding the then Kingdom of Hungary (Slovakia, Romania, Austria, the former Yugoslavia, and Poland)

Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 44

72 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*

deterioration in their situation. They were simply too numerous for the professions that constituted their livelihood.”⁷³ Blacksmiths were completely pushed out of the economy by Hungary’s rapid industrialization and modernization while the demand for adobe makers and day laborers was outpaced by their growing numbers.⁷⁴ Yet, as if the Roma’s dire economic situation was not enough to worry about, the prevailing political ideology of the interwar period and its application would soon come to threaten their very existence as well.

The deportation of Transdanubia’s Roma was ordered by Adolf Eichmann and Ferenc Szálás in the latter months of 1944.⁷⁵ Originally, the Nazi and Hungarian Arrow Cross parties had planned on simply deporting all of Hungary’s traveling Roma bands, but their search turned up very few of them. Instead, entire communities were uprooted and sent to concentration camps.⁷⁶ “During the [transportation] process, some Roma were murdered close to their homes by Hungarian military police and Arrow Cross party officials.”⁷⁷ The “Victims of Nazism Commission estimated the number of Roma victims to have been 28,000”, but the exact number that died during the Holocaust (Porrajamos) may never be known.⁷⁸ For a brief time after the war, the Roma were able to have some semblance

of normalcy. The limited democracy available immediately after the war extolled the principles of equality and prohibited racial or ethnic discrimination.⁷⁹ This return to traditional living conditions and lifestyles was, however, cut short and drastically altered in socialist Hungary.⁸⁰ Zsolt Csalog writes of this period as follows:

The disappearance of the former consumer groups in society resulted in the end of the age-old market for musicians, and the remains of the other traditional forms of employment were swept away by the tide of history. The colossal and hard-won historical capital of the Roma was thus destroyed...A strange contradiction was that while the end of the second world war had brought emancipation and removed the immediate danger of extermination, it had failed to establish opportunities for making a living.⁸¹

The post-war socialist regime regarded the kind of private enterprise pursued by the Roma as “pernicious, a threat to public welfare, and a public foe. Yet they were left out of the land distribution process, were refused employment by many farm co-operatives, and were left out of the participative process in many other sectors.”⁸²

While socialism had its faults, it also

created some opportunities for Hungary’s Roma. Northern Hungary experienced a period of rapid industrialization so quick that it resulted in labor shortages.⁸³

Thus the 1960’s brought great changes to the lives of Roma families: full employment was almost achieved among adult Roma males. Roma families witnessed a dramatic improvement in terms of their livelihood, standard of living, job security, and general welfare. Such progress enabled many Roma families to build “reduced-value” houses or to buy old peasant houses and thus to move away from the isolated Roma settlements to other towns and villages.⁸⁴

While many Roma did find employment in the industrialized factories built throughout Hungary, some sociologists believe that the rapid modernization characteristic of this era had counter-productive effects on the integration of the Roma.⁸⁵ As a result of the forced settlement, forced indoctrination into unskilled labor, and dependency on government assistance created during this period, the Roma experienced further losses of their traditional crafts and services.

Today, in the north-central county of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, there is a line of former industrial cities and towns

known as “the rust belt.” Given this name because of the now abandoned and rusting industrial factories found throughout the region, the rust belt is also home to some of the poorest Hungarian and Roma communities in all of Hungary. It is here, perhaps, more than any other place in Hungary, that the effects of forced settlement and dependency are most vividly experienced. However, the rust belt is not a lone example of the failures of the forced indoctrination into an unskilled labor force.

When the Roma entered, or in some cases forced to enter, into cheap agricultural and industrial jobs, they were also unknowingly entering into an impoverished and segregated social class.⁸⁶ The privatization of state owned companies after 1989 led to the closure of many factories throughout the country; and the first to become unemployed during this time were unskilled workers dependent on the factories for their employment.⁸⁷ Disproportionally, the majority of those laid off were Roma.

The political shift of 1989 did not just mark a new beginning for the economic and educational impoverishment of Hungary’s Roma, it also marked a political awakening for the Roma community in Hungary as well. It was the beginning of political organization and self-awareness for the Romani community in Hungary. A process that started the discovery of a rich and unique identity rooted in the ancient past.

73 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 45

74 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 45

75 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 47-48

76 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

77 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 48

78 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 49

79 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 48

80 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

81 Zsolt Csalog, “A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1980 előtt” [The Roma Issue in Hungary Prior to 1980]. In: *Bibó Emlékkönyv* (Budapest, 1979), II: p. 291.

82 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 49

83 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 52-53

84 Kemény, István *History of Roma in Hungary*, pg 53

85 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

86 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 2

87 Blénesi, Éva *The Roma of Hungary Case Study, 2002*, pg 3

Hindupen

Through European Eyes

For centuries the Roma were regarded by Europeans as an enigmatic people. Few Roma knew the far distances their ancestors had come, making their presence in Europe all the more mysterious. Not knowing their place of origin, the Roma took creative license over their identities, becoming Egyptians, pilgrims, Greeks or whatever else suited their immediate survival needs. This strategy allowed the Roma to migrate unimpeded throughout Europe and the rest of the world, though not without its own consequences. While the Roma's unknown history may have gained them the freedom to migrate throughout the world, it also empowered others to create harmful origin myths about them as well. At first glance, it may seem like the Roma were simply being deceitful liars when they called themselves pilgrims, Egyptians, or any of the other names and nationalities with which they associated themselves, but a closer examination of their intentions reveals that they were just telling people what they wanted to hear. Early Roma were more concerned with finding profitable markets for their trades than squabbling with the locals regarding their place of origin. The resulting ambiguity over their existence led to historic and systemic stereotyping by many of the cultures they came into contact with.

The Roma have gone by many names since their first mention in Hamza al-Isfahani's *History of Kings* in the tenth

century. Unfortunately most of these names: Tartars, Heathens, Saracens, Greeks, Turks, Jews, Jats, Athingani, Atzinganoi, Romiti, Bohemians, 'Fools Styled Greek Bohemians', Pharaoh's People, Egyptians, Luri, Zingari, Zigeuner, Zotts, etc., were given to insult and derogate them.⁸⁸ In his book, *Die Zigeuner* (1783), Heinrich Grellman explains how from the many names the Roma were given, many places of origin were assumed. Grellman himself outlines a theory for Roma origins based on the German "Zigeuner":

Perhaps a mixture of all kinds of rascally people gathered together having collectively no certain country, as their name Zigeuner indicates, signifying, "to wonder up and down," for which reason, it is said, our German ancestors determined every strolling vagrant Zichegen...⁸⁹

Grellman establishes several other Roma stereotypes in his book. Of these he pays particular attention to their supposed taste for human flesh. Grellman explains in detail how in 1782, the year before his book was published, 150 Roma were accused of cannibalism in Hont County (then part of Hungary and now part of Slovakia). Of the 150 Roma, "fifteen men were hanged, six broken on the wheel, two quartered, and eighteen women were beheaded."⁹⁰ The Roma of Hont County were treated so brutally that Hapsburg monarch and son of Empress Maria Theresa, Joseph II, was compelled

88 Fonseca, Isabel "Hindupen" in *Bury Me Standing*(1996)

89 Grellman, Heinrich *Die Zigeuner* (1783)

90 Fonseca, Isabel "Hindupen" in *Bury Me Standing*(1996)

to become involved. It did not take long after the emperor ordered an investigation into the validity of the accusations to discover that the alleged victims of the Roma's cannibalism were still alive.⁹¹

Of course Grellman is not the first, or the last, to attempt to establish a connection between the origin-less Roma and the macabre. In 1929 the Roma were still being accused of cannibalism in Slovakia, while in 1897 Bram Stoker made them the servants and guardians of Dracula. Even Christianity has had its share of "Gypsy myths." To some Christians the Roma were the descendants of Cain, cursed to forever roam the earth. To others, 1) they were the people that denied Joseph and Mary assistance on their way out of Egypt; 2) the ones that told Judas to betray Christ; 3) the descendants of the murderers of the children of Bethlehem; 4) and the ones who forged the nails used in the crucifixion.⁹² The Orthodox Greeks called them "Athinganoi" derived from an already existent group of heretics known for their fortune telling.⁹³ Yet, despite the names people came to call them, whatever the history they decided to give them, one truth would ultimately come to reveal itself about the Roma. In due course, their true ancestry, their place of inspiration, empowerment, and origin would come to light.

Through Romani Eyes

For the Roma, ancient history used to be the oldest memory of the oldest person

among them.⁹⁴ Today a growing awareness and pride in their origins has led to a liberation movement some have dubbed "Hindupen" (Hindu-ness). In some ways, reconnecting with India highlights the differences between the Roma and their western hosts, but, more importantly, it dispels long-existing stereotypes that have been the basis for centuries of discrimination and fear.

The fact that the Roma are ancestrally connected to India has been known since the mid 18th century. Hungarian pastor Istvan Vali first made the connection in 1753 while at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. While there, Vali met three students from Malabar, India, and through them began to collect a list of about a thousand words in their native language. When Vali returned to Hungary, he discovered that the local Roma population understood them.⁹⁵

It was later discovered that the names they had been calling themselves for centuries – "Rom", "Dom", and "Lom", phonetically correspond with Sanskrit and modern equivalents which refer to a tribe of Indians called the "Dom." In Sanskrit "Dom"/ "Domba" means "man of low caste living by singing and music." Music plays an important role in Roma communities across the world today and, according to Roma historian and activist Ian Hancock, its importance serves as further evidence for their Indian origins.⁹⁶ Hancock points out that the Roma still use the Indian bhairavi musical scale "as well as a type of 'mouth music' known as bol, which consists of rhythmic

94 Fonseca, Isabel "Hindupen" in *Bury Me Standing*(1996)

95 Story of Vali's discovery taken from Fonseca, Isabel "Hindupen" in *Bury Me Standing*(1996)

96 Fonseca, Isabel "Hindupen" in *Bury Me Standing*(1996)

syllables that imitate the sound of drum strokes.”⁹⁷ In Hungary, the Roma have a dance called *roviliako khelipen* which also has Indian parallels. It comes as no surprise, based on all the linguistic and cultural evidence discovered thus far, that many experts have concluded with confident certainty that the Roma are the descendants of India. In the past, not knowing their origins has had an alienating effect on the Roma; today, however, connections with their Indian heritage have shed light on their customs and practices, while simultaneously providing them with a source of pride, community and inspiration.

Dr. Ambedkar and the Buddha

The Roma have expressed pride in their Indian heritage through identification with India’s public and historical figures. About four years ago, a group of Hungarian Roma began to seek information on the Indian nationalist, jurist, political leader, and Buddhist revivalist, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. In their search for more information on Dr. Ambedkar, they discovered many parallels between Hungary’s Roma and the Dalits⁹⁸ of India. The group became inspired by Dr. Ambedkar’s story and his struggle for Dalit equality. They were convinced, just as Dr. Ambedkar had been seven decades earlier, that Buddhism offers a unique approach to issues faced by the oppressed as a theology

97 Fonseca, Isabel “Hindupen” in *Bury Me Standing* (1996)

98 Hindi word that means “the oppressed”. Also known as the Untouchables.

of liberation.⁹⁹ Through their discovery of Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement many Roma today identify themselves as the Dalit of Europe.

Born the 14th child in an Untouchable, or Dalit, family, Ambedkar faced many challenges growing up in a time when untouchability was both religiously and legally sanctioned in India. Like many of Hungary’s Roma, Ambedkar had to attend segregated government schools where he could not even sit in the same class with upper-caste children. As a Dalit, he was viewed as an object of horror, disgust, contempt, and loathing by teachers and classmates alike.¹⁰⁰ Though there were many obstacles before him, Ambedkar eventually graduated secondary school. He went on to earn a law degree and multiple doctorates in law, economics, and political science from Columbia University in New York and the London School of Economics.

Although a Dalit, Ambedkar was considered to be one of India’s foremost scholars by the time he returned from England in 1917.¹⁰¹ When he returned, he recorded his impressions in the following way:

My five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped

99 Ambedkar Studies in Heidelberg by Maron Bellwinkel-Schempp, available at http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/saireport/2003/pdf/1_ambekar.pdf

100 Many of the Roma I have interviewed have told me tales of experiencing these same kind of attitudes from their teachers and classmates today.

101 A Timeline of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by Professor Frances Pritchett – Columbia University available at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambekar/timeline/index.html>

out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station (located in Vadodara in the state of Gujarat), my mind was considerably disturbed by a question, ‘Where to go? Who will take me?’¹⁰²

His return and subsequent reminder of the harsh reality faced by all Dalits living in India were the driving forces behind the political career he would come to develop. For years he fought the social,¹⁰³ religious,¹⁰⁴ economic,¹⁰⁵ and educational¹⁰⁶ oppression of the Dalits but by 1935 he had realized that the only way out of the caste system was through its elimination. It was then that he publically announced his condemnation of Hindu philosophy and his decision to convert to another religion.

Before he formerly converted to Buddhism on October 14th, 1956 Ambedkar had founded the Independent Labour Party, had several books and pamphlets published, was appointed chairman of the Indian constitution

102 A Timeline of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by Professor Frances Pritchett – Columbia University available at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambekar/timeline/index.html>

103 ex. Dalits are at times forced to live outside city walls near sewers

104 ex. Dalits are not allowed to step foot inside of temples and are not allowed to hear the holy scriptures (Vedas)

105 ex. Dalits are traditionally not paid for their work. Their occupations are considered by many to be a religiously sanctioned form of slavery.

106 ex. Many Dalits are barred from going to school creating generations of ignorance and illiteracy.

drafting committee, and became independent India’s first law minister.¹⁰⁷ Each of these accomplishments saw an increase in his popularity and following. By the time he formerly converted to Buddhism, Ambedkar was able to call together an estimated 500,000 of his supporters to convert with him in solidarity.

From an early age Ambedkar knew the importance of education as a tool for liberation among the oppressed. His father, seeing the unique opportunity his children could have, used his unique position in the Indian army to obtain access to schools his children could not have attended otherwise. As a student at Columbia University he was inspired by one of his professors, John Dewey, who is quoted as saying, “Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself”. Ambedkar seems to have taken Dewey’s words to heart and dedicated the rest of his life to the improvement of India’s “depressed classes.”

Today, Hungary’s Roma have taken to Ambedkar’s message to “educate, agitate, and organize.” They too have taken on Buddhist philosophy as liberation theology and have started several schools in the hopes of giving Roma children their lives back through their right to education. Decades after his death, Dr. Ambedkar’s life and legacy live on in the dreams and aspirations of a new generation of Hungarian Roma.

107 A Timeline of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by Professor Frances Pritchett – Columbia University available at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambekar/timeline/index.html>

The Dr. Ambedkar School in Sajokaza, Hegmegy, and Ozd

Today's Romani students, like Ambedkar himself decades ago, face prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives. It is within this modern reality of oppression that the Dr. Ambedkar School was founded. Located in a region of northern Hungary popularly known as the 'rust belt', the Dr. Ambedkar School provides educational services to a population that sees less than 1% of its high school students pass their matriculation examinations.¹⁰⁸ In some areas, such as Sajokaza, Lak, Alsovadasz, and Homrogd, Romani residents have no other access to secondary education.¹⁰⁹ The school aims to raise the percentage of matriculated students in these areas through the application of a culturally-receptive pedagogy that prepares them for the challenges and discipline essential in today's job market.

Another of the school's goals is to show its students that education is an effective, enjoyable, and fulfilling means out of poverty. By raising their standards and expectations, the school hopes to see significant changes in the confidence and lifestyles of its students. Ultimately, the school hopes that some of these changes will lead to a more integrated, more understanding, and more evolved community for both Roma and non-Roma residents.

108 Statistics obtained from "Our School" available at <http://www.ambekar.eu/our-school/>

109 Obtained from "Our School" available at <http://www.ambekar.eu/our-school/>

Unfortunately, if some of the school's students' stories are any indication of how close they are to achieving these goals, then it appears that they have a long way to go. Take Jozsef Nagy, one of the school's students, for example. Born in the northern Hungarian town of Kazincbarcika in 1987, Jozsef has known segregation all his life. While he was lucky enough to attend integrated classes growing up, being in the last age group of integrated students in the entire village always kept segregation present as a reminder of his second class status.

Jozsef's luck seemed to have run out when he, along with 29 other students in integrated classes, were chosen to be evaluated in order to determine if he was mentally capable of staying in an integrated class or if he belonged in a 'C' class.¹¹⁰ Jozsef was aware of the fact that he would not be taught the same way in a 'C' class, and that the text books would be entirely different. With this in mind, Jozsef nervously went to the evaluation. At the evaluation, a psychiatrist asked Jozsef a series of questions on several topics. Fortunately for Jozsef, the psychiatrist eventually asked him about the kinds of food that he ate. He told the psychiatrist about noodles and beans being a common meal at his home. The psychiatrist did not understand how this could be a meal, but since it was a common dish in poor Roma households, Jozsef was able to give a detailed explanation of what it was and how it was served. Jozsef explained his favorite dish so well that it convinced his evaluator that he was intelligent enough to stay in the integrated class.

110 'C' is short for Cigány. Hungarian for Gypsy.

Out of the 30 students that were evaluated, only five returned to the integrated class with Jozsef. The realization that a lesser fate had befallen his former pupils had a negative impact on Jozsef. He had all but given up on education when a teacher, seeing his promise, began to question him on his goals. She re-invigorated Jozsef's desires to excel. He began to take extra classes afterschool and saw his grades improve significantly. One day, his teacher brought in a Roma educator from a neighboring village to give a talk to her students. Seeing what he had never seen before, a well educated and successful Roma, changed Jozsef's perspectives on his possibilities.

By the time the Dr. Ambedkar School founders and activists, Janos Orsos and Tibor Derdak, visited the school Jozsef was attending, Jozsef had become determined to continue his education and not be just another statistic in his community. Noticing that Jozsef was driven and determined encouraged Janos and Tibor to take him under their wings. Since their first encounter, Jozsef has received several grants to attend vocational schools; he is now a student at the Dr. Ambedkar School where one day he too may obtain his matriculation certificate and perhaps even attend university.

Though Jozsef has been successful, his success was earned in a difficult environment, unfriendly to his pursuit for fair and equal access to education. His latest challenge involves the Roma population of his village experiencing an increase in conflicts with their Hungarian neighbors due to the rise of the Roma

population there. But challenges like these are not limited to Jozsef's experiences. Students attending the Dr. Ambedkar School face many tribulations few students in cities like Budapest have to even consider. Statistics coming out of the Dr. Ambedkar School demonstrate that there are certain hardships their students must overcome to reach their goals. Of the 61 students that registered into the school in 2007, 19 were entitled to an orphans' annuity, acknowledging that approximately one-third of that year's students had no parents. Many of the students at the school have children of their own at an early age, but the lack of prenatal, pediatric and other healthcare services in Romani villages is a major problem. Eight percent of students attending the school have experienced the added challenge of child mortality to obtaining their matriculation. In one of the neighborhoods within the catchment area of the school the child mortality rate is as high as Africa's poorest nations.¹¹¹ It is this reality that has brought Janos Orsos to say that Hungary is only a western country if Romani villages are not counted and, based on my experiences at one of these villages, he's right.¹¹²

My observations and experiences

Since 2007 the Dr. Ambedkar School has set out to do the impossible; to

111 Obtained from "The Brutal Reality" available at <http://www.ambekar.eu/the-brutal-reality/>

112 Statistics obtained from "The Brutal Reality" available at <http://www.ambekar.eu>

provide educational opportunities to young Romani men and women after a lifetime of denied fair and equal access to educational resources. Most of the school's students come from families living in dire circumstances, in neighborhoods with inadequate housing conditions, without running water, and economic situations that don't allow them to own a pair of shoes to call their own.¹¹³ Romani advocate and one of the founders of the Dr. Ambedkar School, Janos Orsos, knows the situation his students are coming from all too well.

Like most of the students at the school, Janos grew up on a poor Gypsy street. Growing up, he shared a house about 27 square meters with eight other family members where only Beas (a Romanian dialect) was spoken. At age six Janos began learning Hungarian in a local elementary school where he also discovered that most teachers focused their efforts on students based on their ethnic origins. Janos was continually discouraged by his teachers. They told him that he had no real chance at continuing with his studies so there was no point in teaching him, a Gypsy, who'd never amount to anything anyway. At age 15, after years of having his spirit continually broken, Janos dropped out of school and went to work in a factory.

Up to this point Janos' story is typical of what most Hungarian Roma experience early on in schools. Research suggests that up to 10 per cent of Roma children do not continue with their

studies in the secondary level.¹¹⁴ Many others get screened out as "unwanted" children during the application process or wind up attending vocational schools that provide virtually no prospects for further educational opportunities.

To better understand the circumstances, people, and communities where Hungarian Roma face these adversities, I spent several weeks over the past six months living in one of the Dr. Ambedkar School buildings in the town of Sajokaza just a few kilometers from the Slovakian boarder. In this time, I was able to observe some of the challenges faced by the school and the success it has had in bringing educational opportunities to the Roma communities surrounding the towns and villages of Sajokaza, Hegymeg, Ozd, Lak, Alsovadasz and Homrodg.¹¹⁵

Challenges

Five thirty in the morning on the very first day I was to observe classes, I was still a little tired from staying up the night before discussing some of the school administrators' concerns about their budgetary issues. By six I was in the back of a small European van with several tools strewn around but no seat. Making myself comfortable for the half hour ride on top of the van's wheel, I began to consider how it might be to have a job as a teacher at the school. Judging by the van's conditions and its contents,

113 FWBO, *Following in Babasaheb's Footsteps: Janos Orsos Tells of His Life and Struggles as a European Dalit*, pg 9, available at www.fwbo-news.org/features

114 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, 2007*, pg 208

115 List of villages available at <http://www.ambedkar.eu>

teaching was clearly not the van owner's only job. I knew how common it was for Hungarians to have more than one job to help make ends meet especially since taxes withheld from an average paycheck can be as high as 36 percent.¹¹⁶ But what is not so common is having a job on the margins, one that commands little respect from the rest of society and one in which you are almost certainly not prepared to provide a desperately needed service.

Like Janos did over a decade ago, many of the school's students were forced or encouraged out of Hungary's mainstream educational system. According to Janos, a prejudicial attitude toward their mental capacity is just one of the reasons why Roma children are often not accepted in mainstream Hungarian schools, "We can't learn properly, they think, because we have less mental capacity..."¹¹⁷ A 2004 survey conducted in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (where the Dr. Ambedkar School is located) confirms Janos' suspicions:

In a school in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, which 19 Roma students attended altogether, every single Roma student was placed in remedial classes. Only one student in the remedial classes was non-Roma. This research clearly indicates that remedial

classes are one of the most pervasive forms of segregation in Hungary. (pg 218)

Havas and Liskó observed that the higher the proportion of Roma students in a class is, the more likely the class is to follow a catch-up curriculum, or to be a remedial class teaching an inferior curriculum, thereby enhancing the relative educational disadvantages of children attending.¹¹⁸

An earlier survey by András Kádár explains to what extent this form of segregation has caused access issues for Borsod County's Roma:

A 1998 survey in Borsod County showed over 90 per cent of students attending schools with special curricula to be Roma. Most experts agree that a good number of Roma children attending special schools are not even slightly mentally disabled and are only relegated to such institutions due to the negligent failure to take into consideration their specific socio-cultural characteristics and owing to – conscious or unconscious – discriminatory considerations.¹¹⁹

118 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, 2007*, pg 218

119 András Kádár, *Legislative Review for the Hungarian Roma Education Policy Note*, available on the OKI website at <http://www.oki.hu/oldal.php?tipus=cikk&kod=eselyaz-kadar-legislative> (accessed on 24 February 2007) as cited in Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I, 2007*, pg 220

116 Tax and Finance Control Administration (APEH), *Short summary on the taxation of individuals, July 1, 2009*, available at http://en.apeh.hu/taxation/summary_individuals.html

117 FWBO, *Following in Babasaheb's Footsteps: Janos Orsos Tells of His Life and Struggles as a European Dalit*, pg 2, available at www.fwbo-news.org/features

Knowing this, it was unsurprising to find out that many of the children coming to the Dr. Ambedkar School who had begun their educational careers in this hostile environment lacked the foundation to succeed in Hungarian secondary schools. Once the van had arrived in Hegymeg, we hurried into the school. I thought we were late and that the students had been waiting for us, but I noticed that only teachers and administrators were present. In the school's main office teachers hurried themselves about, trying to come up with comprehensive lesson plans that would be receptive to all of the students. A challenging task since each student has been denied equal access in ways that require individualized plans that address each of the students' needs. Once a lesson plan was decided on, keeping it challenging for the students was the next challenge teachers would be faced with.

After introducing myself to the class, I sat in the back of the classroom and observed how some of the lesson plans went. In just a few minutes of observing, one thing clearly stood out to me. My first encounter with actual Roma children and I did not see the stealing, lying, cheating, smelly, dirty Gypsies so many people warned me about.¹²⁰ What I saw were reflections of my own experience as a teenager. Kids being kids. I almost felt like I was in the Bronx again, but was brought back by a combination of strange sounding Hungarian words and

120 FWBO, *Following in Babasaheb's Footsteps: Janos Orsos Tells of His Life and Struggles as a European Dalit*, pg 2, available at www.fwbo-news.org/features

the realization that, unlike me, many, if not all, of these young men and women will not have the same opportunities I had growing up.

As the teachers tried to go through with their lesson plans, I noticed the different levels of educational preparedness and development in each of the students' faces. Some were confused and lost, some were paying close attention and participating, while others were acting out because the lessons were not challenging enough for them. As all these emotions played themselves out in a small countryside classroom, I remembered what Janos had said about the students in the school:

...most of them know virtually nothing – most of them cannot read or write or calculate. Some of them have been declared mentally handicapped on the basis of their social situation. Those who were considered normal were usually in segregated classes for gypsies with very inadequate teaching. Even those in normal unsegregated classes could not learn because the teacher made no effort to understand them or to appreciate the situation from which they came. The gypsy children are taught by teachers who are not properly trained, with educational programs that are very dated. What they are taught, even at best, doesn't touch them because it isn't aimed at them. It is education designed for the middle classes given to students from the under-class...¹²¹

121 FWBO, *Following in Babasaheb's Footsteps: Janos Orsos Tells of*

Because the communities surrounding the school are primarily segregated due in part to the labeling of the Roma as, among other things, mentally handicapped, the school has made it one of its objectives to act as a platform from which to integrate these communities. However, recent events foreshadow challenging setbacks for the school's vision of a multicultural community. In just over one year, at least seven Roma have been killed in Hungary; violent acts widely suspected to have been committed by extremist groups "...playing on old stereotypes of Roma as petty criminals and drains on social welfare systems at a time of rising economic and political turmoil."¹²² Earlier this year I attended a funeral for Robert Csorba and his five year old son in Tatarszentgyorgy (approximately 60 Kilometers southeast of Budapest). Both father and son had been gunned down after trying to flee their home that had been deliberately set on fire.¹²³

From that grey and solemn day when I attended a funeral in March to last month's European Parliament elections, I have noticed an increase in the fear and sense of urgency among the Roma in and around the Dr. Ambedkar School. The school is located in a county with one of the largest

His Life and Struggles as a European Dalit, pg 2, available at www.fwbo-news.org/features

122 New York Times, Kulish, Nicholas "As Economic Turmoil Mounts, So Do Attacks on Hungary's Gypsies" April 26, 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/world/europe/27hungary.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Robert%20Csorba&st=cse

123 Budapest Times, "Roma Man, Son Murdered", February 23, 2009, available at <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/11096/219>

Roma populations in Hungary and the most supporters for the extreme right wing political party, Jobbik. I remember the shock Janos expressed once news of the election results began to trickle in. In his face I could see the defeat, the fear and the anger that came with the realization that their fight for equality was not getting any easier. To him the news was a reminder of just how difficult integration will continue to be for the Roma students of the Dr. Ambedkar School.

During my last week of observations at the school I noticed some efforts being made to strengthen the school's relationships with its political friends and supporters. In one of my last conversations with a teacher at the school, we talked about the possibility that the school may have to put metal bars on its doors and windows for the safety of those inside. The surmounting issues faced by administrators, teachers and students (pedagogical problems stemming from a lack of the students' educational foundation, prejudice, segregation, violence, inadequate funding and child mortality among many other issues) will truly be a test for the hope that one day the Roma will be seen as equals in Hungary.

Successes

I recently interviewed one of the Dr. Ambedkar teachers on what are some of the school's successes. First, he pointed out the uniqueness of the school's relationship with the members of the community it serves. The school's

leadership has successfully combined their roles as respected and accomplished members of the Roma and non-Roma communities, with an open door policy that allows Romani women's association meetings, internet access for students and other community members, and even infrastructure projects in the Roma settlement to be easily organized. On one of my visits to the Roma settlement, I was shown a recently cleared patch of land leading out to the main road. Turns out it is the settlement's first semi-paved road. The road's construction was made possible by funding provided by friend of the school and consultant for human rights advocacy and community organizing, Michael Simmons. More important than the money the school was able to raise for this project was its use of the opportunity for community building. Bringing the community together for projects is not difficult for the school. Major projects are being worked on that will teach community members construction skills while, at the same time, providing them with the opportunity to give back to their community.

But the most important opportunities provided by the school are to the Roma children living in and around Sajokaza. Students at the Dr. Ambedkar School, regardless of their socio-economic status, decisions to drop out of mainstream educational institutions, classification as mentally challenged, or any of the other prejudicial labels that have been attached to them over the years, are accepted as equals and treated with the confidence creating dignity that will allow them to

be what many consider them incapable of being. School director Tibor Derdak told me once that each student's education is the equivalent of the education of the entire community, Roma and non-Roma alike. I believe their success will be Hungary's success.

Conclusions and reflections

Today, as Romani advocates, non-profit organizations and community representatives continue their centuries old struggle for equality and access to educational resources, there are those working just as hard to deny them of these rights. This hostile social, political, and economic climate has been a threat to organizations like the Dr. Ambedkar School and is responsible for creating a culture of fear and existential uncertainty. Yet, despite these challenges, the school continues to be a beacon of hope and opportunity. For those young men and women attending, the Dr. Ambedkar School is a place of preparation and awareness. Through its ability to give Romani educational issues a historical perspective that both empowers and inspires its students, it is also able to equip them with the critical skills they'll need to be competitive participants in Hungary's labor market.

Their added ability to bring international attention to the lack of educational resources that has fueled existing stigmas, discrimination, prejudice and ignorance of the Roma's economic hardships, history, and aspirations to

contribute positively to society makes the school, and organizations like it, invaluable resources in the fight for equality and educational justice. Like Dr. Ambedkar decades ago, Hungary's Romani Dalit have fought long and hard for the educational rights they currently have. Through the efforts made by Hungary's educators the Roma may one day have the tools to break the painful cycle of ignorance surrounding their existence.

Bibliography

- Act on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities* (2003)
 Bellwinkel-Schempp, Maron, "Ambedkar Studies in Heidelberg", available at http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/saireport/2003/pdf/1_ambedkar.pdf
 Berzin, Alexander, *Berzin Archives. The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire, Part III: The Spread of Islam among and by the Turkic Peoples (840 - 1206 CE)*
 Blénesi, Éva, "The Roma of Hungary Case Study" (2002)
 Budapest Times, "Roma Man, Son Murdered", February 23, 2009, available at <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/content/view/11096/219>
 Csalog, Zsolt, "A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1980 előtt" [The Roma Issue in Hungary Prior to 1980]. In: *Bibó Emlékkönyv* (Budapest, 1979)
 deVaux de Foletier, Francois, UNESCO Courier, October (1984), "The World Their Homeland – Gypsies" July 26, 2009 available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1984_Oct/ai_3455603/

- Dr. Ambedkar Gymnázium, "Our School" available at <http://www.ambedkar.eu/our-school>
 Dr. Ambedkar Gymnázium, "The Brutal Reality" available at <http://www.ambedkar.eu>
 Fonseca, Isabel, *Bury Me Standing* (1996)
 Fraser, Angus M., *The Peoples of Europe: The Gypsies*, 1995, Wiley-Blackwell
 FWBO, *Following in Babasaheb's Footsteps: Janos Orsos Tells of His Life and Struggles as a European Dalit*, available at www.fwbo-news.org/features
 Grellman, Heinrich, *Die Zigeuner* (1783)
 Gypsypirit.org, Hancock, Ian F., *Origins of the Romani People*, July 26, 2009 available at <http://gypsypirit.org/pages.php?menuid=7>
 Hancock, Ian F., "Roma Slavery" Excerpt from *The Encyclopedia of Slavery*, Paul Finkelman and Joseph Miller, eds. (Macmillan, New York 1997)
http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1342_islamic_middle_east/map/
 Kádár, András, "Legislative Review for the Hungarian Roma Education Policy Note", available at <http://www.oki.hu/oldal.php?tipus=cikk&kod=eselyaz-kadar-legislative>
 Kemény, István, "History of Roma in Hungary"
 Kulish, Nicholas, New York Times, "As Economic Turmoil Mounts, So Do Attacks on Hungary's Gypsies" April 26, 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/world/europe/27hungary.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Robert%20Csorba&st=cse
 Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume I* (2007)
 Pritchett, Frances, "A Timeline of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar" – Columbia University available at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/index.html>
 Public Education Act of 2003
 Roma Education Fund, *Advancing Education of Roma in Hungary: Country Assessment and Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions* (2007)
 Roma Education Fund, *Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, "Hungary Awarded 'Certificate For Diversity'"*, April 16, 2008, available at <http://www.romadecade.org/index.php?content=252>
 Roma Education Fund, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2006)*

Sleeper, Maxine G., Fulbright Student Conference Papers: Academic Years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004, "Anti-Discrimination and integration of Roma in Hungary", (2004) (Budapest, Hungarian – American Commission for Educational Exchange)

Tax and Finance Control Administration (APEH), "Short summary on the taxation of individuals", July 1, 2009, available at http://en.apeh.hu/taxation/summary_individuals.html

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *The Roma in Central*

and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap, A Regional Human Development Report, available at http://roma.undp.sk/reports.php?parent_id=1&id=182&scroll=182

Vaillant, J.A., *Histoire Vraie des Vrais Bohémiens* (1857) (Paris, Dentu & Cie.)

Back to Basics: The Social and Cultural Implications of Hungarian Modern Classical Composers and Their Music

Randall Scotting

University of Colorado at Boulder
Boulder, Colorado
www.colorado.edu
randall.scotting@gmail.com

Liszt Ferenc Academy/Independent Research
1061 Budapest, Liszt Ferenc tér 8
www.lfze.hu
Adviser: Eva Marton

Introduction

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." -Anais Nin

Living in Hungary has allowed me an insight into better understanding Hungarian composers and their world. This, in turn, has given me a more complete comprehension of their music. My original goal was to better grasp what I perceived to be a sense of honesty in Hungarian classical music, an immediacy and direct purpose that classical music from some other areas of origin does not often display. I found that this honesty does indeed exist in the works of many varied Hungarian composers, and I began the interesting process of trying to determine why. Why did these composers search for a direct means of expression and unusual uses of instruments and the voice to display with greater accuracy the exact mood they meant to communicate? Not a simple question to answer and one which I will continue to explore; however, I have learned that the musical exploration of these composers is tied largely to the political and governing history of Hungary. The changing borders and shifting governmental structures led many to look inward for a sense of defined purpose and personal clarity.