Envisioning the Gypsy Question Through the Postcolonial Eye

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1. "The Gypsy Question"

The Gypsies or the Roma[i] are designations that refer to the largest ethnic groups dispersed throughout Europe. According to historical documentation, the Roma entered Europe centuries ago. Comparative linguistic studies of the Romani language with Sanskrit and Hindi yield strong evidence that the Roma migrated to Europe from the Indian sub-continent, yet numerous and often conflicting theories from various disciplines have not been able to discern their precise origins and details of their migration (Hancock, 2002).

Despite the historicity of their presence in Europe, Gypsies have been and continue to be perceived as a problem, a challenge or a sociological issue. Present-day policies continue to attempt to address the age-old question: what to do with them? On one hand, the Gypsy Question was initially posed as a form of racial discrimination rooted in "modern sensibilities" (Fraser, 1997), which created and maintained a seemingly endless trail of ambiguities. On the other hand, their survival also depended on fringed contact with dominant societies through which the Roma have been able to maintain their identity despite an extensive number of overpowering obstacles.

According to the European Commission (2004), the treatment of the Roma is one of the most "pressing political, social, and human rights issues facing present-day Europe," where between eleven and thirteen million Romani peoples reside. The same source defines as a "phenomenon of statelessness," the internal and external dynamics of dominant societies and Romani communities which work to exclude Roma people from acquiring appropriate documentation (i.e. marriage or birth certificates, residency permits and identification documents), problems accessing social services (such as low levels of access to health and education services as well as matters of accommodations). In the summer of 2010, for instance, debates and protests reverberated throughout the European Union against France's expulsion of Roma, many of whom migrated to France due to poor living conditions and a lack of opportunities in their countries of origin; mainly Bulgaria and Romania. The Roma immigrants also complained that they were unable to acquire or have access to the necessary documents to legally reside in France. The European Roma Rights Centre (2010a), or ERRC, among other entities of civil society, criticized President Nicolas Sarkozy's support of a policy that breached legal protections of the freedom of movement for EU citizens. ERRC also stated that the collective expulsion of these Romani communities was a violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. While the French government supported its policy, arguing that it was removing these communities from deplorable living conditions, ERRC noted France's failure to

adhere to national and international housing rights provisions resulted in illegal settlements, i.e. the very deplorable housing conditions and situations that the government claimed it sought to relieve. Additionally, such policies also reinforced negative stereotypes in the public sphere. The recent example of France is one of many that reveal the extent to which Europe and its supra-national political entity are inundated with visible and invisible distinctions and contradictions when it comes to the realities Roma communities confront.

Approaching the Gypsy Question (both past and present) from a different perspective entails considering the circumstances the Romani people (or peoples) have survived during centuries in juxtaposition with a knowledge system and forms of governance that have historically sought to assimilate ethnic minorities. The distance between the dominant society and this historically marginalized "Other" living in such close proximity has proliferated popular misconceptions, which, in turn, influence policy-making, academic inquiry, research agendas and, thus, knowledge production in the present (Casa-Nova, 2009). Using this approach, we can begin with the most basic question: who are the Roma and for what reason have dominant societies excluded them? Scholars such as Bárány (2002) ascertain that the uniqueness of Roma identity correlates with Romani marginality: Could they be defined as a race? Or could their nomadic lifestyle be considered a defining feature of who they are? If so, what could be said about the Roma who have (been forced to) adopt a sedentary lifestyle? If a combination of a common language, a common culture, and a common race distinguishes one people from another, the Roma as a people have become immensely diversified with the passage of time and their movements among different lands or (national) territories. This anciently expelled diaspora stands outside any normative distinctions delineated in modern definitions, or as Adrian Marsh (2007) formulates it, the problematic "promulgation of 'the nation' and ethno-nationalist ideology."

András Biró[ii] has contended that the Roma are perhaps the most European community in Europe as they are found in all European countries. According to the same source, roughly 70% of Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe and, in the case of Hungary, the Roma comprise the second largest ethnic group, falling somewhere between 4,5 - 6% of the population. As in other countries that were part of the Soviet Bloc, a long string of regime changes – including imperialism – mark Hungary's history, which has been largely under foreign control. These regime changes substantially affected how the Gypsy Question was approached over the centuries.

2. Of All Things Abyssal

Within mainstream post-colonial thought it is incontestable to say that Europe was constructed by its colonial projects inasmuch as it is incontestable to say colonial endeavors laid the foundations of the modern world-system. This perspective is prevalent in post-colonial discussions that build on foundations such as Said's *Orientalism* (1979), an early work that conceptualized how the West, as a socio-cultural paradigm, was constructed through a pre-established relationship with the East as an "Otherness." Dominant discussions in Post-Colonialism, that particularly focus on the Americas as an extension of Europe, in conjunction with World-System Theory (Wallerstein, 2004), discern a direct link between Early and Late Modernities and the present-day status quo both in post-colonial societies, or the "modern/colonial" (Mignolo, 2000) and power in these societies and in world dynamics; that is to say the "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2009). However, if we merely focus on one side of post-colonial thought, we risk contriving abyssal thinking within our field by allowing Europe to remain what Chakrabarty (2000) refers to as a "sovereign theoretical subject," i.e. an abstract and imagined entity from which profound global inequalities were contrived.

The objective of this analysis is to mainly examine the contradictions that permeate systems of knowledge and modern constructs from within Europe that mainstream Post-Colonial Theory often fails to take into consideration. Returning to Chakrabarty, this is an effort to come full circle to new, ever changing and incomplete perspectives with the telling of alternative histories, experiences and value systems of peoples who do not fall into the Eurocentricisms that Post-Colonial Theory aims to criticize – and in this way, provincialize Europe.

Building upon these post-colonial foundations, Santos (2007) argues that abyssal lines were forged as Europeans came to measure themselves against colonized peoples and/or civilizations. Abyssal thinking is therefore constitutive of modern thought and modern law, the metaphor for which Santos locates in social contract theories that developed during the 17th and 18th centuries. As the dichotomy of "regulation/emancipation" came to define political and epistemological foundations of Western civilization, it was constructed upon the savage world, or the colonial zones, where the dichotomy of "appropriation/violence" was applied. The manner in which colonizers saw themselves "not as conquerors and despoilers but as intellectual and moral liberators" of inferior races (Pagden, 2002: 52) was essential to this process. Hence Europe was imagined to be "the place of true civility of free men living under the rule of law," the rest of humanity was to serve "under tyrannies

governed according to the caprice of individual rulers, or in nomadic or semi-nomadic groups never far from the primordial 'state of nature'" (ibid). Colonies therefore provided a model for forms of radical exclusion that are elemental "hegemonic principles and practices" (to phrase Santos) which permeate Western modernity.

If one applies the concept of "abyssal thinking" to the modern nation-state as a construct it coincides with, one must refer to Anderson's (1983) hallmark concept of an "imagined community," or a political community that is "inherently limited and sovereign" (p. 6). Although members of an imagined community will never meet one another, they are naturally "tied" to one another through language, religion, shared traditions, physical appearance and other cultural factors such as a national history that give a sense of continuity and tie a people to a given territory or homeland. As Anderson argues, such a sense of continuity was essential to the creation of modern life, and ethnicized all political, social and institutional facets of the nation-state in its very construction.

Marsh (2007) contends that the "relationship between modernity, the nation-state and exclusion [of the Roma] is rarely examined as a context" in research agendas, policy-making or even in relating European or national histories. In Marsh's words, "the imaginary Gypsy and his/her connection to the wild or exotic, maintains its hold on both the European conception of Gypsy people, and the understanding of how they came to be." If we look at Romani peoples as a unique ethnic group, we can perceive how processes have been present in Europe that are similar albeit not completely comparable to those found in "colonial zones". The historical experiences of the Roma as a people who are "unclassifiable" because they have neither a homeland nor a national identity, expose how abyssal lines indeed permeate Europe. Inquiring into "the other side" of this abyssal line will serve to "defamiliarize the canonic tradition of monocultures of knowledge, politics and law" (Santos *et al*. 2007: 40) from their very origins: Europe.

The Gypsy Question in the Hungarian context will be used in this paper to reflect upon Europe as it expanded its domain across the globe and crystallized into the entity and conception that it is today, especially within discussions of post-colonialisms, which tend to focus on countries such as Spain, Great Britain, France or Portugal due to their extensive roles in shaping the modern world-system. Indeed, a direct comparison could never be made between the forms of imperialism that marked Hungarian history, as the Soviet occupation of Hungary (ideological imperialism), with imperial colonialism (characterized by expansion, exploitation, cultural imperialism, etc) that marked extra-European territories during Early and

Late Modernity. However, a post-colonial analysis of the Hungarian context will aid us in a broad or superficial exploration of whether or not Europe within itself can be perceived as an embodiment of what Santos (2007) terms "abyssal thinking" while adhering to an overarching argument that such limitations, or forms of "abyssal thinking," dominate discussions on post-colonialisms.[iii]

3. The Roma and Magyar Nationalism throughout Regime Changes

As in all European states (West, Central and East alike), Roma populations have been largely disregarded throughout the evolution of the modern Hungarian nation-state. Although never entirely "free" nor considered a part of "village society," peoples referred to as Gypsies played a considerable role in the feudal societies throughout the Carpathian Basin, which includes present-day Hungary (Kende, 2000). Hungary was the religious, cultural and political border of Europe or defense frontier against Islamic expansion. Due to constant military preparation and a lack of craftsmen, the Roma were forced to work in the kingdom of Hungary, which was constantly at war with the Turks. When the Turks were finally driven out, the area eventually came under the domination of the German-Hapsburg Empire.

The Roma had an arguably "integrated" place in society until the emergence of Industrialization. With the disappearance of traditional trades in the 20th century, many sources, including Biró, explain that much of the Roma's livelihood and trade were changed to services (rather than production) such as basket-weaving, masonry, or music and performing arts and were: "considered as attractive but not 'proper trades'" during post-feudalist eras.[iv] Greater societal and institutional prejudice created another form of Romani marginalization. Immense poverty, stigmatism and fear "was part of an explicitly hierarchical value system" that did not ideologically accept their situation (Kende, 2000). This would hardened into a continuous cycle of exclusion by which the Roma have kept their distinct identity yet have simultaneously been politically and ethnically denied of it.

On the basis of comparative studies of Romani populations throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Bárány (2002) has developed a "four-stage model" that delineates the evolution of policy throughout changing regimes: Imperial (18th and 19th Centuries), Authoritarian (interwar and World Word II periods), State Socialist, and, finally, Democratic (Post-Socialist starting in 1989). An overarching evaluation of Roma or Gypsy "solutions" will employ this four-stage model.

By the middle of the 18th century the reigning monarch, Maria Theresa, sought to eradicate Roma or Gypsies as a group through the contradictory rationality of Enlightened Absolutism, which held that education could change or civilize a people (Kende, 2000). Maria Theresa was determined to transform Romani peoples into civilized citizens by prohibiting the title "Gypsy" and instead employing the term "new peasant" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). Restrictions were placed on Gypsy marriages and the use of traditional clothing. Gypsy children were forcefully removed from their parents to be raised in the homes of peasant families while Romani communities forced to give up their nomadic lifestyles, which were perceived as loathsome vagabond tendencies (Kende, 2000). Joseph II, Maria Theresa's successor, prohibited the use of the Gypsy language. All of these measures were used to eradicate and regulate Roma populations as a people with the ultimate objective of assimilating Romani individuals into tax-paying citizens of a unified Hapsburg Empire. Romani peoples, however, relied on their culture, pollution taboos and familial solidarity from within their clan system as forms of resistance and survival.

In the 19th Century, the Hungarian (Magyar) liberal nationalism, or Magyarization, emerged as popular manifestation of a movement that used imagined communities to define itself against and break away from foreign control. Anderson (1983) emphasizes the important role that language played in the popularly imagined communities that were later used by the Hungarian nobility to promote bourgeois development. The spread of liberal nationalist ideas involving imagined communities and self-determination that instigated the 1848-1849 Revolution and the War of Independence against Hapsburg rule, began with the distribution of newspapers. The revolution only enjoyed a brief success however, as Hungary was subsequently re-conquered by the Austrian Imperial forces which established a Dual Monarchy. The Kingdom of Hungary was eventually able to gain some autonomy from the Hapsburg Empire in 1867.

The Nationalities Law of 1868 was enacted upon non-Magyar minorities therein concealing the discrepancy between the national and dynastic realm. Under the newer premise of being a liberal nation, all Magyar (Hungarian) speakers were to be considered Hungarian in terms of citizenship. Non-Magyar minorities and non-Christians were invested with the same civil rights as Magyars, although they initially could not form nations of their own because they lacked "historical personalities" within the territory. National minorities were to essentially be "Magyarized" and administered by Magyars, under this regime. Through much effort, nations such as

the Magyars, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs, Rusyns and Germans – whose territories had crossed the porous borders of the Kingdom of Hungary for centuries – were able to gain some political legitimacy. In their pursuit of what is today termed "poly-ethnic rights" (Maxwell, 2005: 406), the aforementioned nations were able to "imagine a political unit such as the Hungarian 'political nation,' or a genetic, cultural linguistic or spiritual entity" such as a "genetic nation," which resulted in some degree of multi-nationalism within Hungary. The Roma, as a diverse people traditionally organized by clan-structures, could not gain such political legitimacy however.

In the period between the two world wars, the answer to the Gypsy Question was persecution, deportation and extermination even before the Nazis occupied the government in 1944**.** Some theorists, particularly Bauman, consider the Holocaust to be a distinct feature of modernity and industrialization given the systematic forms of annihilation that took place at this point in time under the rationalization that it was necessary to eliminate a "certain category of people endemically and hopelessly resistant to control and immune to all efforts of amelioration" (Bauman, 2002: 117). At the very least 5,000 people were killed during the Roma or Gypsy Holocaust, also know as *Porrajamos,* an estimated 30,000 victims were sent to labor camps and Roma women were sterilized (As these estimates are given by Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004), they are presumably low).

Major geopolitical changes after World War II would lead to a different approach to the Gypsy Question. During Hungary's communist era, the Roma – like other minorities – were considered members of the proletariat class. Consequently they were forced into production. Biró explains that roughly 85% of the Roma population was employed, and received some income, social security, education and social housing.[v] The socialist State took responsibility to care for or "modernize" groups that, "as a result of 'capitalist exploitation' in the past, were found to live in 'social and cultural backwardness'" (Csepeli and Simon, 2003: 130). Education was considered a key "socialization agent" for non-Magyar children and different religious communities because it could eradicate these differences.

Nevertheless, according to the 1961 resolution that was introduced by the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, the situation of the Roma was considered worse than at the close of the 19th century. As they lacked a homeland, common language, and history, they were denied status as a national minority. The Gypsy Question was only answered to the extent to which they had been adapted into the dominant society (Kende, 2000). Unskilled labor equated civilized: Gypsy + Socialist wage labor = Hungarian worker + Gypsy folklore (Bárány, 1994: 328). This new form of inclusion

came with immense cultural repercussions, under which they were essentially to abandon their traditional values and their way of life. However, Romani people were no longer living on the fringes of society and were a more integral part of the socialist society, although they were never entirely accepted as a part of it. With the reduction of lifestyle differences between Roma and non-Roma, there was less tension between them. Nonetheless, negative stereotypes such as the "unworthy Gypsy" or "coddled and criminal Gypsy" were prevalent due to culture clashes and the hierarchical systems inherited from the preceding eras (Kende, 2000).

Integration policy under socialism was in some ways similar to those that came before it, yet it was also markedly different because socialist policy resulted in decreased social and economic exclusion, as well as increased education levels (according to the values of dominant society) and an improvement in living standards. Biró estimates that the communist period influenced roughly one and a half or two generations of Roma.[vi] A portion of these generations and those succeeding, who have attained higher levels of education, are using their knowledge of the dominant society to advance both their individual and community interests.

The shift after 1989 to a free market economy, based on efficiency and a skilled workforce, however, has exacerbated social disparity. While this has afflicted both non-Romani and Romani populations alike, it has hit the Roma hardest as they have been displaced from the mainstream economy, which no longer needs unskilled labor. Biró further explained that the living standards of Roma fall well below the rest of Hungarian society and unemployment among Roma people now exceeds the national average of 10% and even approaches 100% in many regions.[vii] In examining the contemporary situation, we find an assortment of historical relations that co-exist with those from the more recent era. This increase in disparity between Roma and non-Roma in Hungary has been met with a return to traditional means of survival as well as "neo-exclusion" by mainstream society, in contradiction to the present democratic constitution that, at least in theory, permits the Roma to organize on an ethnic basis and to attain full-fledged citizenship.[viii]

4. The Roma in Hungarian Minority Law: Gauging the Enigma of Identity

Through an all too brief case study of Hungary, this paper approaches the Roma as another face of Europe with which to reflect upon the imagined entity of Europe itself. Who are the Roma? Although this paper has delineated a broad and starkly abstract picture of their situation in Europe for the sake of argument, the writer has

no right to and can only offer a basic response to this question. The Roma or Gypsies are made up of diverse communities that are found in all the European countries and are also dispersed worldwide. They have resided in Europe long before Europe could be imagined or referred to as such. In Hungary, as in other European countries, we see how the question of whether or not the Roma have been "historic personalities" has served as a basis for exclusion under modern-day policy.

The Roma rights and liberation movement embodies the need to know who the Roma peoples are, both in the present and throughout their historic experiences without assuming these peoples have a single collective memory or other commonalities that modernity presumes them to have. On the one hand, such "modern frameworks" for ethnic classification have clearly served as the basis for exclusion for hundreds of years. On the other hand, countering such abyssal constructs in the present, especially in terms of research, cannot be reduced to either finding a means to classify them or academically speaking for them on the basis of having merely read a few articles and books. This question of representation and rights to integration also forces those who study post-colonialism to take a moment and ruminate on this entity called Europe, amidst our scholastic inquiries into whether or not the subaltern of its colonial projects "can speak" (Spivak, 1993) from our alternatively Enlightened civilizing missions that fail to fully interact with those we so nonchalantly refer to as "subaltern" or "subalternized." As we vacillate between dominant and suppressed perspectives, this requires that we acknowledge the limitations that such academic musings too often come to embody, especially under the dangerous notion that we are "giving voice to the voiceless" in our work.

The objective that this paper and Chakrabarty's article (2000) share is to present the "asymmetrical ignorances" of imaging Europe as a culturally specific entity thereby partaking in a project philosophically grounded in a radical critique that transcends such bureaucratic constructions of citizenship and the modern nation-state, or to provincialize Europe. From the perspective of History, which Chakrabarty recognizes as a knowledge system rooted in institutional practices that constantly invoke the nation-state "Europe remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories...as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate the discourse of history" (ibid: 27-28). Likewise, Subrahmanyam (2006) examines how Europe has been the "deus ex machina" by which "modernity" was "first a European monopoly, and then a European export to its peripheries" (p. 225). Subrahmanyan beautifully complicates this post-colonial "dogma," contending that inasmuch as we cannot assume a single imperial model based on the Early Modern World to Late Modernity, we cannot

assume a single model of transition between the world of empires and that of the nation-state. While such a concept may explain the emergence of the nation-state from colonial empires and the infinite forms of global inequalities (or rather, grave injustices rooted in colonial histories), it overlooks the many ways in which the nation-state as a formation has led to internal tensions and social exclusion within Europe – and the degree to which this perspective is rooted in modern thought and its constructs. The situation of the Roma is one of many outstanding examples.

The period of imperialism following World War II clearly marked Hungarian history until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Some ardent Hungarian nationalists even maintain the country's accession into the European Union is a continuation of a history of foreign influence. The memory of imperialism and foreign control has played an interesting role in a contemporary society that seeks to define itself as separate from outside forces – be they in the form of foreign relations, attitudes towards national or ethnic minorities, or attitudes towards foreigners. While this observation was made by the author as a foreigner, who because of only a brief residence in Hungary could never fully grasp this reality, Amnesty International (2010) has recently identified open racism, xenophobia and anti-Roma sentiments – which have led to violence acts against the Roma – as forms of discrimination that are quite prevalent in Hungarian society. Nevertheless, both ethnic Hungarians and ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, can equally express resentment towards the repressive domination of imperialism that did not recognize their sovereignty as a nation and/or as an ethnic community with the right to govern themselves according to their own values.

In emphasizing that such a history and its numerous contemporary ramifications has permeated countries in and affected peoples throughout Europe as much as in other parts of the world, how then should we conceive of Europe as we try to analyze it within its colonial legacy? Anthony Pagden (2002) asserts that Europe is an unstable term, "it has never constituted a single state, much less a single ethnic group" (p. 53). Yet having held power in the form of imperial "authority" and through the exportation of Roman law, Christianity, the (Latin) language and knowledge, Europe is regarded as the birthplace of the modern world (ibid). As illustrated throughout this paper, there is contradiction within what post-colonialism perceives to be Eurocentric concepts and constructs at the very site the modern world's birthplace. Just as Indigenous peoples throughout the world were present long before European "discoveries", and its subsequent conquests, the Roma have been in Europe long before the presence of the modern nation-state, its associated imagined

communities, and its exclusionary institutional practices. Long before Europe was self-exported as the epistemological center of world thought and is hence our point of reference in Post-Colonial Studies – like many, if not all, academic disciplines.

The Provincialization of Europe involves writing a history to unravel the "necessary entanglement of history – disciplined and institutionally regulated form of collective memory – with the grand narratives of rights, citizenship, the nation-state" (Chakrabarty, 2000: 45). It is telling a history "that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenship in assimilating to the projects of the modern nation-state all other possibilities of human solidarity" (ibid). If correlation between "history and identity is the primary means of acknowledging sameness, membership of the group and difference from others...the attempt to demonstrate the existence of direct lines of inheritance from the present-day group to the past occupation of territory" by acknowledging group sameness and distinction within an imagined community, then Romani histories, as Marsh (2007) contends, are "not secure." On the contrary, it is a dispersal of experiences that must be interpreted by Romani scholars or peoples themselves against outside, imaginative interpretations therein composing what Marsh argues to be a "rights-based" model of history and historical research. In contrast to nationalist approaches, such an approach to history can delineate parameters for discussing identity and ethnicity in a "recapitulation of the argument about origins," illustrating that the Romani peoples have been "historic personalities" in a country such as Hungary, throughout Europe, and even throughout the world (Marsh, 2007).

From a post-colonial perspective, the Roma, as peoples whose practices have not been informed by or been useful for these constructs, have been subalternized (as used by post-colonial or Spivakian-inspired nomenclature) in the imagination of Europe. Just as processes of appropriation and violence were enforced in "a-legal" colonial zones outside of Europe, we can observe that efforts to forcibly integrate Roma within the norms of the dominant society occurred in Hungary as well, starting in the latter half of the 18th Century. Such practices were widely taken up throughout Europe as a mission to civilize, assimilate or eradicate ethnic minority groups as part of an effort to create homogenous nation-states in their absence. Negating the repercussions, such a history has created a seemingly unbreakable cycle of exclusion and insufficient policy in conjunction with the perpetuation of apparently impenetrable abyssal line constructed on top of misrepresentations and the non-

dialectical absences of the Roma. Indeed, the history of the Roma has been (for all extents and purposes) a history of non-identification.

Within academic disciplines, research often seeks to identify the Roma according to long-established criteria found in previous academic work (Csepeli and Simon, 2003). Research can "confirm, create, or refute prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions" (Marsh, 2007). By continuing to rely on long-established criteria, researchers confirm and perpetuate prejudices, just as government officials and the dominant society continue to do. For instance, the notion of "Gypsy deviance" has permeated mainstream societies under the pervasive belief that the Roma population, despite being presented with long-term "conventional" employment, have persisted in "unconventional" economic activities, whereas emancipation and regulation came to mark European law, knowledge, or, quite simply, social order. The notion of "Gypsy deviance" and the perception of the Roma as savage or lawless is a consequence their fringed contact throughout the centuries, as well as sustaining alternative realities and forms of subsistence. The Gypsy Question now persists in the form of a sociological, economic, cultural and political issue.

Finally, the problems that Romani communities confront are a pressing human rights concern, many of which cannot be disassociated from increased social disparity and social fragmentation rooted within liberal idealism itself. In the case of Hungary, this situation has been exacerbated by cuts in social welfare, which followed the introduction of a neoliberal economy in 1989. Increased socioeconomic disparities afflicting Hungarian society as a whole, strongly correlates with increased violence against the Roma. The European Roma Rights Centre (2010b) reports a total of 48 attacks and 9 deaths between 2008 and 2010.

Given such realities, creating and defining change has been a slow and often ambiguous process. In contrast to top-down approaches and nationalist discourses which have subalternized or marginalized and misrepresented Romani peoples, Kovats (2003) supports the grassroots approach to the struggle that is based upon non-governmental organizations. Relying heavily on state funding, this approach is still new and quite weak. It requires creating greater political cohesion amongst Romani communities with building support for them from wider society. On one hand, such an approach requires answering questions of identity and self-definition, both individually and collectively. On the other hand, one cannot overlook how internal solidarity for self-preservation, which has been a form of defense and/or survival, is also marked with prolonged effects of marginalization that can be destructive to individuals, families and communities. Needless to say, there are many

internal and external obstacles to overcome in order for significant positive change to occur. This includes such essentials as defining what kind of change and in which direction; or rather, integration (which can be read as analogous to assimilation) or inclusion (to maintain distinct identities and communities while being active members of society)? Most significant for this cursory post-colonial discussion, however, is how Kovats conceives this grassroots approach to be part of a "historically unprecedented opportunity to overcome contemporary inequality, but also prejudices and antagonisms of the past, through a shared political struggle based on the awareness of common fate and interests," therein potentially approximating a rights-based model of history.

5. Conclusion: the Modernity Question

A post-colonial perspective can reinforce the intent of the grassroots approach on a global scale by recognizing the link between modernity, the nation-state and marginalization or exclusion. If unconfined by abyssal argumentation, it can actively deconstruct the very dichotomies (or "abyssal lines") that colonial projects have constructed and that "givens" in Post-Colonial Theory inadvertently maintain.

The perspective and argument taken in this article are not original, as it was András Biró who planted these seeds of thought through personal conversation and a lecture he gave at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest during the spring of 2007. This approach was further cultivated in an email correspondence with Biró, in spring of 2008, when this text was written in its original form. Time and time again, Biró, who may not entirely agree with the post-colonial approach of this paper, has indicated that his work with the Romani communities of Hungary was a "logical continuation" of his work in the "Third World," or what today is often referred to as the "Global South." He and his organization have gained much international recognition, receiving the Right Livelihood Award in 1995. In his own words,

> I started to work with the Roma, once the political transition took place [...] having been away from 1956[ix] to 86, having been involved in work with the [Third World] societies during that time, I perceived the situation of the [Roma] as more than similar to that [Third World] societies [...] once back home. […] I launched a foundation, called The Hungarian Foundation for Self-reliance with the purpose to reinforce the just-born [Roma civil organizations] with the objective to give voice to those who were never listened too. The ERRC [European Roma Rights Centre] came into life in 1996, I was asked to be its first chair of the Board. An advocacy and litigation practice based on [Human Rights] was unknown for [Roma] for the last 600 years. Thus the launching by non-[Roma] of such an [organization] was more than appropriate as historically the first to deal with the defense of [Roma Human Rights]. [The ERRC] has now to

> reconsider its mission and function as in the meantime many national and local genuinely [Roma organizations] have come into life and [need] professional and financial support [...][x]

The beauty of Santos' (2007) work combined with Chakrabarty's (2000) is the manner in which this combination allows us to conceptualize how modern thought, constructs, and law must be understood in terms of colonialism. The fusion of their approaches with Biró's practical approach forces us to re-conceptualize the socio-cultural paradigm within which our worldviews are constructed. Perhaps this beckons us to make a "logical continuation" between historical, and contemporary experiences, and continued struggles in a manner which forces us to re-evaluate modern political constructions and knowledge that have been exported by European expansion without simplifying them. Within the scope of Post-Colonial Theory, this requires us to question whether or not there are any grand narratives from which we can construct and defend our differences against an "Other" – or maintain such binary oppositions as Colonizers versus Colonized, Global North versus Global South, etc. Let the "Gypsy Question," even as approached within the limitations of this paper, serve as metaphor for all that we do not see when we conceptualize Europe in our dogmatic post-colonialisms. Let it then become the "Modernity Question" to illustrate that Europe can be provincialized internally from the margins of modern thought, or what Santos (2007) envisions to be "post-abyssal thinking." Through such a philosophical process, we may also "provincialize" or expose the limits within the very academic propensity of Post-Colonial Theory to do so.

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[i] The term "Gypsies" (or "Cigány" in Hungarian) is a designation that has often been used in literature, official texts, social representations and stereotypes throughout history. It will be used in this text to reflect a third party or non-Romani perspective in argumentation (i.e. "the Gypsy Question"). The term "Roma" (meaning "men" in the Romani language) relates to the communities of Central and Eastern Europe. Hence, and "Roma" and the adjective "Romani" will be used to engage in political debates regarding Romani individuals and communities in Hungary. However, self-identification as "Roma" or "Gypsy" ("Cigány") varies among individuals. For a brief elaboration between some of these terms, including "Travellers" or "Irish Travellers" (designations applied to other ethnic groups of traditionally nomadic cultures and that fall into generalizations or stereotypes as Gypsies) see citation for the Roma Rights Network's (n.d.) discussion on the "The 'G' Word" in the bibliography.

[ii] András Biró, Lecture at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, Hungary, Spring 2007.

[iii] As a small note of respect and as a scholar of Native American descent, I hold that such an argument demands this text to acknowledge its own limitations because it is written from an outsider's perspective and cannot adequately reflect the struggle of Romani peoples with an air of "expertise" or, more significantly, an insider's perspective. I wrote this paper a few years ago to begin inquiring into comparable historical experiences across time and space to overstep such generalizations as the "global North and South" or "New World versus Old

World." During the 19th century, for instance, the USA was grappling with the "Indian Problem" and undertook great efforts to fully eradicate and assimilate Indigenous peoples into dominant American society as part of its national project. Education, which was often traded with treaty provisions as Native American peoples were forced to give up their land and placed onto reservations, was one of several means so assimilate individuals, destroy communities, and rid generations of their cultural knowledge and identities. See Reyhner and Eder (2004). Additionally, systems of classification based on blood quantum were created to better manage Native American populations under the premises that Indigenous peoples would eventually dissipate into history (see Lawrence, 2004). There are also similar dehumanizing stereotypes or folkloric depictions based on dominant historical representations that, suppressing the memory of genocide, effectually legitimize the continued "subalternization" of Indigenous peoples by naturalizing forms of racism in contemporary times. For a discussion on stereotypes and contemporary Native America, see Yellow Bird (2004). For a discussion on public memory, the carnivalization of violence, and genocide see Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki (2005). It is from this historical context and its contemporary ramifications that I attempt to write about Romani peoples in Hungary, not as comparable to Indigenous peoples, but as part of an effort to criticize hegemonic discussions in Post-Colonial Theory that fail to engage with the "Global South" in the "Global North" inadvertently reinforcing the very colonial discourses and forms of domination that it aims to criticize.

[iv] András Biró, Personal Email Correspondence, 29 May 2008

[v] András Biró, Lecture at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, Hungary, Spring 2007

[vi] ibid.

[vii] ibid.

[viii] ibid.

[ix] The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which took place between October 23 and November 10, was a briefly successful revolt against the Soviet-backed government. Many fled from Hungary during this time

[x] Biró, András, Personal Email Correspondence, 29 May 2008

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