

SEZIONE TEMATICA

Critiquing stereotypes

Research engagement with UK local authority supporting Roma migrants

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ABSTRACT: The Council of Europe definition of anti-Gypsyism focuses on the role of stereotypes and violent practices in the exclusion of the Roma. Research has shown that authorities have a tendency to embrace anti-Gypsyist attitudes and to implement overtly securitising policies that further entrench the exclusion of the Roma. Research has also shown that, besides established stereotypes, new ones are emerging. Drawing on our experience as observing participants in the development and implementation of Manchester City Council's Roma Strategy, we will show how the strategy was aimed to prevent violent anti-Gypsyism, but how stereotypes nonetheless infiltrated its implementation and, finally, how the mobilisation of the Roma successfully challenged these stereotypes. The paper argues that current definitions of anti-Gypsyism are unable to capture instances of essentialist and pathologising discourses that inform interventions aiming at Roma inclusion but which may in fact perpetuate their marginalisation. The paper therefore challenges the notion that stereotypes only inform exclusionary or securitising interventions. The paper will show how academic research can be mobilised to dismiss stereotypes and to inspire the Roma to take action and challenge benevolent but nonetheless stereotyping interventions.

KEYWORDS: ROMANIAN ROMA, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, EQUALITY POLICIES, MOBILISATION, RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

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2017 | ANUAC. VOL. 6, N° 1, GIUGNO 2017: 119-140.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-2928



Introduction¹

The Council of Europe, recognising the adverse effects of discriminatory discourses and practices on Roma inclusion, recently declared its intention to tackle anti-Gypsyism², which it defines as

a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination (General Policy Recommendation No. 13 CRI(2011)37)³.

The emphasis here is on the way in which dehumanising images underpin overtly exclusionary practices. Research has so far focused primarily on these aspects of anti-Gypsyism. However, little has been said about the role played by similar images in interventions purportedly aimed at the inclusion of the Roma.

Based on research with a community of Romanian Roma in Manchester, UK, this article therefore intends to show how stereotypical images can infiltrate policy discourses beyond overtly exclusionary or securitising interventions. After a review of literature on anti-Gypsyism and the role of stereotypes in Roma policies, I will present the context and methods of the research. In this section, I will briefly clarify how the engagement between the research team, Manchester City Council (MCC) and the Roma community emerged. I will also clarify how the research team approach to participation should be regarded as a form of process pragmatism (Harney *et al.* 2016) rather than as participatory action research in the Freireian (1970) tradition (cf. Cameron, Gibson 2005; Cahill 2007; Torre 2009). In the following section, drawing on ethnographic observations, interviews with members of the Roma community and analysis of documents produced by MCC and voluntary sector agencies working with Roma, I will reconstructs the development

1. The research leading to the present publication results from MIGROM, *The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies*, a project funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme under the call on *Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union* (GA319901). I am grateful to Yaron Matras for the substantial help in revising the earlier drafts of this article and to Anuac reviewers for their precious advice on the version submitted.

2. See the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers [SG/Inf(2015)38], Priority 1: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680684b5e>. Accessed 11/09/2016.

3. www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/GPR/EN/Recommendation_N13/e-RPG%20-13%20-%20A4.pdf. Accessed 11/09/2016.

of MCC's Roma Strategy. I will show how an effort to confront hostility and to promote the inclusion of Roma was not immune to the replication of stereotypical images, which some authors might classify as a form of anti-Gypsyism. The section will also highlight how the research team's critique of some of MCC's strategies and the effort to create spaces for the invited participation (Cornwall 2000) of the Roma in public discussions around them challenged such stereotypical images. In the conclusion, I will argue that the focus of current definition of anti-Gypsyism on the usage of negative images to exclude the Roma has prevented researchers to identify cases of benevolent, yet conceptually flawed interventions that have *de facto* marginalised the Roma. The conclusion will also show how researchers, through forms of *process pragmatism* combining public engagement, partnership with non-academic stakeholders and the dissemination of insights from research can help dismiss negative images and inspire the Roma to take action to challenge interventions that risk reproducing stereotypes.

The role of stereotypes in Roma policies

Clough Marinaro and Sigona (2011) noted how in Italy stereotypes have been used by politicians to build on people's fears about migration and «to advance increasingly xenophobic discourses and discriminatory practices with little opposition» (2001: 586). More specifically, Sigona shows how stereotypes that associate Roma with crime inspired a shift in the view of Roma as a social policy problem toward the view that Roma constitute a security threat, resulting in the transformation of nomad camps into «Guantanamo-like enclosures for latent criminals» (2011: 603). Clough Marinaro and Daniele note that while Italian local authorities purportedly attempted to promote Roma participation, associating Roma culture with nomadism has led them to limit opportunities for Roma to exercise their citizenship and representation right to «the exclusionary spaces of "nomad camps"» (2011: 788).

The contributions presented in Stewart (2012b) note how in various countries increasing xenophobia, a feeling of loss of sovereignty and disillusion with political elites are fuelling populist movements that «turn the Roma into a suitable "target population"» (Stewart 2012a: xxxviii). These developments are linked to the rise in ethnic violence and hate crimes targeting Roma and the increasing acceptability in public discourse of depictions of Roma as a public menace. In this climate, both national and local governments have directed restrictive policy measures at the Roma, often overtly.

A similar role of public discourses in pressuring governments to take radical measures against the Roma has been also observed by Clark and Campbell (2000). The authors noted how the media depicted the arrival in the UK of Czech and Slovak Roma asylum seekers in 1997 as an invasion of fraudsters and criminals attempting to take advantage of the British asylum system. As a consequence, they argue, the then Labour government proposed far-reaching policy changes to the British immigration and asylum system. The representation of Czech Roma as organised criminals taking advantage of British migration law even featured in a private letter by the British Prime Minister warning the Czech counterpart of the consequences of continuing migration of Roma from the then EU candidate state (Sobotka 2003). Furthermore, Clark and Taylor (2014) have noted how the association between Roma and crime dates back to the depiction of English Gypsies and Travellers since the Victorian period and how it has underpinned a number of legislative interventions aimed at the removal of these populations.

Similarly, van Baar shows how the views that Roma have a cultural predisposition to criminal activity such as trafficking and child exploitation serves to legitimise policies that «act against the Roma and treat them differently» (2014: 29). Like Sigona, he notes how such attitudes accompany the spread of securitarian ideologies that magnify public fears in order to justify increased control measures. In this context, policies and police practices such as ethnic profiling and the expulsion of EU citizens have reinforced rather than contested negative images of Roma.

While these authors have regarded anti-Gypsyism as the historical continuation of negative stereotypes⁴, Marushiaakova and Popov note a recently emerging discourse in Central and Eastern Europe that depicts Roma as a community that enjoys «special privileges» (2016: 159). They link this image of the “privileged Gypsy” to integration policies that are promoted and funded by EU institutions and which were introduced into these countries as part of their accession process to the EU. Popular perception, regards such policies as privileging the Roma but not benefiting the majority, giving a new contextualisation to the older stereotype of “Gypsy parasites”. The authors question the effectiveness of “affirmative action” in fighting anti-Gypsyism since «the more policies [...] aimed at Roma are realized, the more aggravated are the anti-Gypsy/anti-Roma public attitudes» (Marushiaakova, Popov: 2016: 163).

4. See Vitale 2009 on the analytical and policy problems of the belief in the historical continuity of anti-Gypsyism.

Timmer (2010) had already noted a similar vicious circle in which inclusion projects lead to the entrenchment of Roma marginalisation. She has shown how well meaning NGOs mobilise stereotypical images about the Roma, presenting them as «needy subjects» whose behaviour must be changed in order to facilitate their integration. Similarly, Matras (2015) describes Europe's «neo-traditional policy on Roma» as one that incorporates tightly entrenched images and ideologies into a strategy of «marginality management» which views Roma as perpetually in need for support and mediation.

All these studies looked at how the exclusion of the Roma is perpetuated, however there are relevant differences among them. Those that focused explicitly on anti-Gypsyism, and followed definitions akin to that of the Council of Europe, highlighted how authorities have often actively mobilised stereotypes in order to justify exclusionary measures. Those that instead looked at inclusion measures and policies seem to suggest that acts or expressions of anti-Gypsyist prejudice might surface not only in exclusionary practices. This contradiction calls our attention on situations in which stereotypes might be mobilised in order to justify interventions for the inclusion of the Roma.

Method

In order to assess what could be the consequences of policy approaches to Roma inclusion in which stereotypical images are nonetheless mobilised, I will present the case of Manchester City Council (MCC) Roma Strategy. Implemented between 2009 and 2014, the Roma Strategy saw the City Council collaborating with third sector agencies and the Romani Project at the University of Manchester in order to tackle the inclusion of a small community of Romanian Roma.

Since the early 2000s, prior to our involvement in the Roma Strategy, the Romani Project had been working on various aspects of Romani language and culture⁵. Our engagement with the local community of Romanian Roma began in 2008, when, following an increase in the number of Roma pupils, a local primary school invited us to provide training sessions to teachers. In 2009 we were commissioned by Manchester City Council (MCC) to carry out a survey of Romanian Roma migrants in the same district. This resulted in a research report (Matras *et al.* 2009), which also contained recommendations for an engagement strategy (see below for further details). Building on this

5. <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk>. Accessed 15/03/2017.

experience, we launched the MigRom consortium in 2013. Led by the University of Manchester in partnership with four other research institutions, it included MCC as well as a European Roma NGO as full partners. The project's main objective was to produce an ethnography of Roma migration and to assess policy interventions that targeted Roma migrants, taking into consideration the views and practices of both Roma migrants and local authorities⁶. The project's goals for Manchester also included a pilot engagement scheme to

introduce measures for capacity-building within the community, provisions for advice and support services and the creation of a consultation forum that will allow Roma migrants to take part in planning and decision-making processes affecting their community⁷.

Through simultaneous involvement in ethnographic research, training of community members as outreach workers and research assistants, and assessing policy interventions while also advising policy makers, the MigRom research team took on roles akin to what Bernard (2012: 313-314) defines as *observing participants*, or insiders in the development and implementation of the policies that we were studying.

Furthermore, the project's explicitly aimed at encouraging the participation of Roma migrants both in the research and in public debates. As argued by Cornwall, however, the term participation «has become mired in a morass of competing referents» (2008: 269) and it is therefore necessary to clarify what “participation” meant for the MigRom team.

We were not militant researchers (cf. Mason 2013; Halvorsen 2015). While some members of the team had previously engaged in pro-migrants activism, none of us had any links with movements or associations when we first engaged with Roma migrants in 2008. Similarly, while we are all critical of the excesses of capitalism, none of us had any commitment to anti- or post-capitalism. For this reason, we were sceptical about embracing models of participatory action research inspired by the work of Freire (1970) and calling for engagement that can lead to the re-subjectification of participants in order to create alternatives to capitalism (cf. Cameron, Gibson 2005; Cahill 2007; Torre 2009). Even if we had subscribed to such approaches, however, we would have not known from where to start. In 2008 we barely knew anything about the Roma community in Gorton South in terms of what their previous experiences had been, what issues they were facing in Manchester and what their expectations for the future were.

6. <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/objectives.html>. Accessed 15/03/2017.

7. <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/strategy.html>. Accessed 15/03/2017.

We were thus not starting with a set of pre-determined problems we wanted to tackle based on strong ideological commitments. Rather, we assumed that problems existed and aimed at identifying those that mattered to the Roma and, together with them, find potential solution to these issues. Our approach was thus similar to the idea of communiversity proposed by Kindon, Pain and Kesby (under the joint pen-name of mrs kinpaisby) and characterised by activities «that supports the joint construction and conduct of [...] research [...] with the goal of pursuing social change» (mrs kinpaisby, 2008: 292) by «empowering agents to bring about transformations in their own lives» (Kesby 2005: 2050). We were also persuaded that, if the Roma intended to achieve this kind of change, they needed to build up alliances with other local actors and therefore set ourselves the task to facilitate dialogue between the Roma, local politicians and associations.

Our idea of participation was, in sum, articulated around the joint conduction of an open inquiry into social problems and the development of participants into actors for change through the strengthening of their relations with other local actors. These characteristics closely match the forms of engaged research underpinned by *process pragmatism* proposed by Harney *et al.* (2016). According to them «the “process pragmatist” is [...] skilled in the art of relationship building, listening, collaborating and acting with others» (2016: 318) and the embedment of researchers «in strong reciprocal relationships [...] allow[s] us to ask genuinely challenging questions and produce new ideas by working as part of an alliance of active citizens and institutions» (*ibidem*: 329). In the following section I will show how this approach was concretely put into action in our involvement in the development of MCC Roma Strategy.

Manchester City Council’s Roma Strategy

Roma from a variety of countries including Latvia, Poland, and the Czech and Slovak Republics had settled in Manchester since the mid-1990s, some of them initially as asylum seekers, and following the EU accession of their countries of origin, as EU migrants.

It is important to consider that, just like there was no targeted approach to any migrant group, local authorities did not establish any special framework for Roma migrants. Within MCC, a dedicated Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee, comprising elected representatives and unelected official, is explicitly tasked with ensuring that «services are equally easy for all Manchester’s diverse residents to access»⁸ through the implementation

8. www.manchester.gov.uk/info/100004/the_council_and_democracy/5157/communities_and_equalities_scrutiny_committee. Accessed 15/03/2017.

and monitoring of standard protocols for equality. In fact, since the mid 1990s the city of Manchester has been flagging its commitment to multiculturalism and celebrated the diversity of its population. This is, in no small part, connected to MCC's regeneration policy, which utilises the city's multiculturalism as a trademark and a token of its global orientation (Dicken 2002; Sassen 2005), manifested through the presence of an active and well integrated second generation of immigrants (cf. Glick Schiller 2010).

Given this background, public services interacted with the first groups of Roma to settle in the city following standard procedures and no negative reactions from Manchester residents toward the Roma were recorded. However, between 2009 and 2014⁹ a coordinated institutional engagement targeted a relatively small community of mostly Pentecostal Roma originating from Tăndărei in South-Eastern Romania. They had settled in the multi-ethnic Gorton South area of the city, some arriving as early as 2000, most of them, however, after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007.

In 2009, the community comprised around 300-400 individuals, some two thirds of them children (see Matras *et al.* 2009). In the spring of 2009, the local police had recorded isolated acts of violence against Romani homes. At the same time, an opposition Councillor submitted a petition to MCC on behalf of residents. The petition accused the Roma of littering, truancy, tax avoidance, anti-social and criminal behaviour and asked the Council to take action in this regard. These allegations coincided with national press coverage¹⁰ of the London Metropolitan Police's Operation Golf, which investigated allegations of child trafficking by Roma from Tăndărei¹¹. The residents' petition can thus be regarded as a claim that the city's normal policy of migrant integration could not be applied to the Roma. MCC found itself under political pressure to show that the Roma could, in fact, be treated just like any other group. Furthermore, following a series of violent attacks against Romanian Roma in Belfast¹², MCC officers had serious concerns over a possible es-

9. This engagement ended before the Council of Europe Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues changed the definition of Roma in its Terms of References (see [https://cs.coe.int/team20/cahrom/10%20CAHROM%20Bureau%20meeting/Item%2003%20%20CAHROM%20\(2015\)%20EN%20Revised%20CAHROM%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%202016-2017.docx](https://cs.coe.int/team20/cahrom/10%20CAHROM%20Bureau%20meeting/Item%2003%20%20CAHROM%20(2015)%20EN%20Revised%20CAHROM%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%202016-2017.docx)). Accessed 15/03/2017). This change therefore did not affect policy in Manchester.

10. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1208445/Romanian-fraudsters-use-trafficked-babies-children-multi-million-pound-UK-benefit-scam.html. Accessed 09/09/2016.

11. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-projects/operation-golf-%E2%80%93-uk-and-romanian-joint-investigation-tackling-romanian-organised-crime_en. Accessed 09/09/2016.

12. www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/jun/18/belfast-romanians-moved-race-attacks. Accessed 09/09/2016.

calation of anti-Roma tensions into violence. A Roma Strategy Group (RSG), consisting of middle-level management from various services who reported to elected members through Council Committees, was therefore established. As far as we are aware, this was the first time that a dedicated strategy was ever set up by MCC to address the integration of a specific ethnic or migrant group.

Ensuring community cohesion

The RSG's remit was to remove any cause of tension while ensuring that the Roma accessed mainstream services or, in the terms used by officers and councillors, to ensure "community cohesion". To this end, it was interested in learning about the community in order to put residents' discourses into context, while making an effort to ensure equal access and Roma's active engagement with services:

53 Roma households have been identified [...] If overcrowding is not an issue within the Roma community, this needs to be appropriately communicated back to the wider public [...] Local schools may be a way of disseminating information to Roma families as might be Roma residents if they can be employed through M4 [MCC's translation and interpreting service] (RSG, 21/09/2009).

Efforts were also made to encourage Roma to attend neighbourhood events and to access local youth activities.

Although the RSG deliberately attempted to counter the stereotypes used by residents against the Roma, images connected to nomadism and concerns about the welfare of children continued to appear in the RSG minutes. These images were often accompanied by suggestions to contain and control the Roma:

[we] need to understand the transient nature of the Roma community and the impact on children. Families move and we lose track of them [...]. We can track children once they are in the system; however we need to establish a process whereby other services can link their intelligence with children's services (RSG 21/09/2009).

In late summer 2009 MCC commissioned us to compile a report on the community. In informal conversations, representatives of the local authority asked for our assessment as to whether Roma intended to stay in Manchester or "move on", and if they stayed, whether we would anticipate a continuous "influx" of Roma who would come to join them. To inform our report, we carried out interviews in the homes of community members and presented the consultation as an opportunity to have the community's voice heard. Our re-

port, published in October 2009, concluded that a significant increase in numbers was unlikely and that Roma intended to stay in Manchester (Matras *et al.* 2009). It cited the Roma's concerns over insufficient school places and cases of schools refusing to take in Roma children, as well as language problems and restrictions on employment (imposed at the time on Romanian and Bulgarian nationals). The latter, combined with low levels of education and lack of English skills, meant that most adult Roma were limited to self-employment as scrap-metal collectors or vendors of the Big Issue, a magazine published by the Big Life Group, a nationally active charity. This self-employment, however, allowed the Roma to access welfare support. Our report also identified a group of young people who could take on a mediating role. Based on the issues identified by the Roma themselves, we recommended a short-term investment in capacity building to train some of these young Roma to act as interpreters for the older members of the community and as "role models" for the younger. We also recommended targeted outreach work to actively remove barriers to school admission and various other procedures.

This strategy was by and large adopted and implemented. MCC gave priority to school inclusion, delegating the implementation to its International New Arrivals team (INA), part of the Children's Services already entrusted with supporting migrants and ethnic minorities. They signalled to schools that denying places to the Roma was not acceptable and assisted parents in the school registration process. MCC also drew on government funds for the inclusion of Eastern European migrants to introduce a temporary outreach programme. That work was outsourced to a local NGO, the Black Health Agency (BHA). Drawing on close links and some personnel overlap with the INA team, the BHA also launched an intervention in local schools to raise awareness among teachers about the Roma. At this stage, however, MCC decided not to invest in the training of young Roma.

Appeasing local residents

Parallel to efforts to actively engage with the Roma, measures were carried out by MCC that might be seen as an attempt to appease local residents who were hostile to them Roma. Since the submission of the residents' petition, MCC officers had held regular meetings with residents to reassure them that their concerns were being addressed. These meeting continued until 2011 when the opposition councillor backing the residents lost his seat. From our conversations with the officers, it emerged that openly racist accusations and violent threats were levelled at the Roma. The officers therefore deemed it unsafe for the Roma to attend. This decision, however, meant that the Roma were left out from the public discussions about them.

Other “appeasing” measures included a police raid following allegations of child trafficking and a door-to-door campaign to collect council tax specifically from the Roma. However, the RSG minutes emphasise that these measures proved most allegations to be baseless:

No evidence of crime or child trafficking found [...] there was a positive response to Epee from the host community; however, some anxiety was expressed by the Roma community (RSG 04/12/2009).

The Council Tax recovery operation so far has visited 66 properties [...] Some have paid their new bills up to date. [...] The operation collected about £3.5K as part of this exercise. Non-Roma families were happy to see the operation taking place (RSG 20/03/2010).

The RSG’s approach was also contradictory in relation to Roma employment:

The issue of benefits policy remains a major concern [...] [We] need to consider whether the self-employment being declared can be considered genuine work (RSG 22/01/2010).

According to MCC officers, pressure from the opposition councillor that forwarded the petition led the RSG to ask the Big Life Group to exclude the Roma as vendors of the Big Issue. In a letter sent to the Big Life Group in February 2010, MCC reported that research that it had commissioned had shown that Roma used the Big Issue to establish themselves as self-employed in order to be able to claim state benefits, but that they did not intend to seek alternative employment. This was a reference to our report, which in fact emphasised that all Roma we interviewed expressed their ambition to find employment and not to have to rely on selling the Big Issue.

The Big Life Group learned, from University of Manchester students who were carrying out research work on Roma vendors, that the RSG’s letter had misrepresented our report. The organisation then took legal advice from Cherie Blair, human rights lawyer and wife of former Prime Minister Tony Blair. In a statement from March 2010 she wrote:

In my opinion, this attempt to use the public order powers of the Council to achieve a reduction in the benefits given to Roma only vendors is both for an improper purpose and discriminatory and therefore void and the Big Issue is entitled to refuse to comply.

Training and education interventions

Having read our report, in May 2010 the Big Life Group decided to implement the recommendation for capacity building by organising a Roma training programme drawing on its own funding and staff. We were invited to

contribute to the programme design and to the delivery of some of the sessions. The INA team supported the recruitment of candidates for the programme, launched in October 2010 with around eight participants. Following the jointly developed model, the trainees were employed on a part-time basis as interpreters and classroom assistants by the INA team, which sub-contracted the work via the BHA. In this way, the involvement of Roma role models became part of MCC Roma Strategy and, except for the provision of training for professionals working with Roma, we withdrew from active engagement with the RSG.

Thanks to the involvement of the Roma trainees as classroom assistants, the INA-BHA partnership was able to expand their engagement with schools, up to that point limited to teachers, to pupils. In their first publication, they acknowledged that Roma parents value formal education and observed that «most young people are excited, proud and motivated by school» (Davies, Murphy 2010: 7). Yet, some months later a toolkit about Roma culture (BHA 2011) depicted the Roma as a magical people, stating that Romani children received a name that is «whispered by the mother, which remains secret and is used to confuse supernatural spirits». The team also produced a “Network Learning Book” (Murphy 2013), which drew on the image of Roma as illiterate to claim that they possess «the ability to negotiate the world without need for reading and writing» (*ibidem*: 34). The publication advised teachers that «most Roma are highly skilled at talking and listening at the same time» and that «teachers need to be aware that if a Romani child is not talking, it is likely they are not listening!» (*ibidem*: 81). Nomadism also featured in learning resources for primary schools, which included a “Roma Box” with stories that focused on travel, caravans and horses and an exercise called «We are riding on a caravan» (*ibidem*: 84).

This targeted approach was promoted as an inclusion strategy and the involvement of the Roma classroom assistants landed it a façade of cultural appropriateness. Thus, a secondary school, which between 2010 and 2014 worked in close cooperation with INA-BHA, implemented a designated Roma “pathway” which in effect created a segregation mechanism. Roma pupils who attended the school often felt that they were treated differently to the school’s majority population, as this interview with a 17 year old Roma boy reveals:

when the picnic happened in year 7, I went with Miss E. and Mr M. to Alton Towers, so I didn’t go with the rest of the class to the picnic. We went only the Roma people [...] when the other guys had to go to a normal class, maths, the other teacher took me and some other Roma guys to another classroom, to teach us like step-by-step. Because the other class was a higher level than us (17/07/2015).

The emergence of two strands of intervention

In early 2013, following a successful application for EU funds, we resumed our collaboration with MCC as part of the MigRom consortium. Willing to give the Roma a voice in the research, we recruited two former trainees of the Big Life Group programme as fieldwork assistants. They were also tasked with the implementation of the project's pilot outreach scheme. Following our idea that research and interventions should tackle «priorities and needs of communities as they define them» (mrs kinpaisby 2008: 294) outreach work, was organised as weekly drop-in sessions. The Roma were invited to attend whenever they had an issue in accessing services and, in response to their requests, the Roma outreach workers offered advice and support, in Romani and Romanian, under strict instructions to observe data protection and not to discuss clients' circumstances with other institutions without explicit permission from the clients. The requests and problems presented by the service users were, however, recorded anonymously in order to supplement the ethnographic observations and interviews we were carrying out at the same time.

With the launch of MigRom, MCC also produced a document evaluating its Roma Strategy¹³. The document clarified that many of the tensions around the Roma community were the result of residents' perceptions of Roma, and that where progress could be measured indicators of success had been met. It announced the intention to downscale and abandon the Roma Strategy, arguing that it had served its purpose by alleviating tensions and showing that mainstream services were able to engage with Roma. The evaluation, however, noted that a dedicated effort was still required in order to prepare the Roma to access the job market once employment restrictions on Romania citizens were lifted. The document also flagged the persistence of concerns about "early marriage" and "early pregnancy" and the need to ensure the "safeguarding" of young people.

These conclusions reflect the emergence of two opposing strands of intervention within MCC Roma strategy. We had argued that, since other issues in access to services had been solved, the priority was to favour Roma inclusion in the job market. We had even started using the drop-in sessions as a way of disseminating information and putting Roma in contact with potential employers. On the other hand in January 2013 BHA had successfully applied for a grant from MCC's Equalities Funding Programme¹⁴.

13. <http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MCCRomaReport2013.pdf>. Accessed 15/03/2017.

14. http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/08/BHA_equalities_application-Jan-2013.pdf. Accessed 15/03/2017.

In the application, they had argued that statistics indicated a rise in teenage pregnancy in the Gorton South area coinciding with the arrival of the Roma. The application also stated that «[t]he main factors attributing to disengagement of young girls from education are early marriage and teenage pregnancy» and that there is a need to understand «how drop-out is influenced by gender and cultural expectations». BHA offered to «develop protocols [...] which will identify and track hard to reach girls» and allow to «share information regarding “at risk” young people in relation to criminal activity, school drop-out» and proposed to set up a «Romani Wellbeing Strategic Group» to «implement actions to support young girls to engage in available opportunities».

These interventions were to be complemented by what BHA defined as “assertive outreach”: home visits to Roma families to establish trust in order to ensure school attendance while also monitoring the family situation and, where needed, offer support or signal the family for child protection intervention. The premise of BHA’s intervention was thus that Roma had a cultural pre-disposition to disengage with mainstream services (cf. also Matras 2015), and that Roma cultural practices put young people within the Roma community at risk.

We took issue with that position. In August 2014 we published an evaluation of BHA’s interim project report¹⁵. We warned about the risk of perpetuating stereotypes, and argued that the arguments put forward by BHA to justify its interventions lacked evidence in actual community practices. Our own reports, based on the data collected through the drop-in sessions and through a survey of the community conducted by the Roma assistants themselves, produced alternative statistics on birth rates and access to mainstream services, which contradicted the conclusions put forward by BHA (Mi-gRom 2015: 18-22, 42-47).

In summer 2014 we also started a series of conversations with a group of young Roma to establish a consultation forum that will allow Roma migrants to take part in planning and decision-making processes affecting their community. During these conversations, we shared our arguments and our evidence with the young Roma. They too objected to the way in which their culture and community had been depicted. At the same time, they were concerned that despite the declared success of the Roma Strategy, other residents still harboured many prejudices against the Roma and that these prejudices stood in the way of their desire to be treated like everybody else.

15. <http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/bha/>. Accessed 15/03/2017

Together we decided that they should approach local councillors and confront them with the documents. At the same, we suggested, they needed to build up relations with other groups active in the neighbourhood both to tackle the persisting prejudices they faced and to acquire the *relational power* needed to engage with «existing forms of power (policy-makers, business leaders) if they want[ed] to make change» (Harney *et al.* 2016: 325, emphasis in original). Since prejudices revolved around the idea that Roma were responsible for irregular waste dumping, we suggested the group should join, and possibly lead, on citizens-led clean-up activities supported by MCC¹⁶. After joining one such activities organised by local residents, the group organised their own in November 2014. Involving their younger relatives, they used a multilingual leaflet, designed together with university student volunteers we had involved, to address all different communities of the neighbourhood. By inviting their neighbours to join them to clean the streets we wanted to show that Roma, like everybody else, cared for their neighbourhood, in turn challenging prejudices about waste dumping without naming them. The initiative received support from local community organisations and schools. Local councillors joined the activities, which, following an official University of Manchester press release, received coverage in the local press¹⁷.

At the same time, the young Roma started to meet the local councillors and asked about MCC's sources of information and priorities for the Roma community. The councillors, although happy to meet the Roma, were unable to answer their questions. However, after the success of the clean-up activities, they organised a meeting at Town Hall in December 2014 to address the issue. The meeting, attended by MCC officers and elected councillors, was pitched as a discussion on how the Roma community had been represented and how they wished to be treated like everybody else. Although the young Roma's questions were again not answered, they were offered the opportunity to provide input into future reports. In an account of the meeting, produced with our help and sent directly to the participants¹⁸, the young Roma stressed how disappointed they were at not receiving answers and how the representation of the Roma to which they objected was «creating a bad im-

16. www.manchester.gov.uk/directory_record/110955/community_clean-ups. Accessed 15/03/2017.

17. www.mancunianmatters.co.uk/content/261171825-roma-youngsters-clean-longsight-streets-attempt-sweep-away-prejudice. Accessed 15/03/2017.

18. <http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Consultation-Forum.pdf>. Accessed 15/03/2017.

age among our neighbours». They also announced their intention to set up their own community group.

Over the following months we supported them in the formal registration of their association, Roma Voices of Manchester, and in building up a reputation for it by engaging with social media and organising public events. We also circulated further research reports to MCC, highlighting the inconsistencies in the Roma Strategy and providing evidence to dismiss BHA's claims about the rates of school drop-out by Roma girls (MigRom 2015: 56-61). Meanwhile the Roma that run the drop-in sessions held discussions with officers to provide information to MCC Communities Scrutiny Committee, responsible for equality and minority communities. For their part, BHA, whose project was planned until 2016, ceased their engagement in the spring of 2015, as MCC funding was not renewed.

In June 2015 the Communities Scrutiny Committee presented a report on the Roma community at a public meeting attended by around two dozen Roma. In the report, MCC recognised Roma Voices of Manchester as a channel for direct dialogue with the Roma community. Furthermore, it distanced itself from the representation of the Roma in the contested reports and declared that it would not publish "unsubstantiated information" in the future¹⁹.

Concluding remarks

MCC Roma Strategy emerged as a response to the politicisation of some residents' stereotypical discourses that might be classified as a form of anti-Gypsyism. Unlike in the cases described in the literature, MCC did not embrace these discourses. Yet, in implementing a dedicated strategy, it created an unprecedented organisational framework to deal with the integration of the Roma. In retrospect, however, the Roma Strategy can be regarded as an effort to gather information about the community in order to tackle negative perceptions about them and to withstand the pressure to exempt them from the city's equality and inclusion routine (MigRom 2015: 24). At the same time, negative images about the Roma infiltrated the Strategy, particularly in the fields of education and child protection. Contrary to what has been observed in the literature, these policies underpinned not securitising and exclusionary interventions, but rather projects for Roma inclusion. However, these interventions resulted in the *de facto* exclusion of Roma pupils in school and in the presentation of Roma girls as victims of their own culture.

19. http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/5._Roma_engagement_report.pdf. Accessed 15/03/2017.

The contradictions in MCC's Strategy thus show how expressions of anti-Gypsyist prejudices can surface not only in exclusionary practices. In these cases, negative images are used to essentialise Roma culture by offering a fixed image of the Roma which pathologises them (cf. Sayer 1997) and implicitly denies them control over their own lives (cf. Herzfeld 1996). As we have argued elsewhere (Matras *et al.* 2015), this leads to the implementation of inclusion programmes that, by creating special procedures for the Roma, further entrench their exclusion.

Much of the literature on anti-Gypsyism, relying on definitions that focus on the use of negative images to justify exclusionary and securitising practices, has so far failed to capture these cases. More attention needs to be given to how essentialism and pathologising discourses are successfully mobilised to justify inclusionary interventions that result in forms of covert discrimination.

Our experience also highlights how engaged research informed by process pragmatism can lead to genuine forms of empowerment. First of all, this approach to engaged research does not start from pre-conceived assumptions about the problems to be investigated and tackled. Rather, problems are identified in a constructive dialogue between researchers and researched, through the research process itself. This dialogical construction of shared knowledge around issues and the ways to tackle them is another important characteristic of process pragmatism. It can help avoiding the risk of interventions which, like ours, can be characterised as invited participation, «orchestrated by an external agency» (Cornwall 2000: 281), namely that the agendas of the promoters overshadow the real concerns of the communities invited to participate. Even more importantly, through the encouragement to build relations with other local actors, process pragmatism can help to turn forms of invited participation into spaces more akin to spontaneous, genuinely bottom-up initiatives in which people «can gain confidence and skills, develop their arguments and gain confidence from the solidarity and support that being part of a group can offer» (*ibidem*: 275).

In our case, the inclusion of two members of the community in the research team was the first step in involving the community in the research process. We further strengthened the dialogue with the Roma community through the creation of spaces (the weekly drop-in sessions, the meetings with young Roma) in which members of the community were able to offer their point of view on the issues that they faced. These invited spaces allowed us to generate knowledge about the community based on their real concerns and that was crucial in latter correcting the position of MCC in re-

lation to the safeguarding of Roma girls. This, however, would have not been possible if, again within these spaces, we had not shared information about the community depiction with the young Roma. As argued by Cornwall, «keeping a flow of information going is in itself important» as it «opens up the possibility of collective action in monitoring the consistency of rhetoric with practice» (2000: 272), as clearly shown by the young Roma decision to publicly challenge MCC on the depiction of the community. Finally, these invited spaces were also the site from where the young Roma started to build relations with local politicians and other community groups, in turn giving them an opportunity to voice their desire to be treated like everybody else. Their successful building of alliances and subsequent mobilisation proved how process pragmatism could be an effective approach in identifying and breaking potentially vicious circles of exclusion created by benevolent but nonetheless stereotyping interventions.

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