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**SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNIST AND CAPITALIST
POLICIES ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE ROMANI COMMUNITY
IN SOUTHERN MUNTENIA**

Miruna PANDELE

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SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNIST AND CAPITALIST POLICIES ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE ROMANI COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN MUNTENIA

Miruna PANDELE¹

Abstract

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the social policies implemented in Romania in order to manage the Roma minority issue before and after the 1989 Revolution. Its main goal is to investigate whether Romania had a better social integration system put in place as to enable addressing the Roma minority issue during communism or afterwards. Today, the Romani community is dealing with systemic ethnic discrimination that brings about issues like poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. The lack of financial resources needed in order to survive in capitalism makes it hard for low-income families to ensure decent living conditions for themselves and their children. Negative attitudes towards the Romani affect their access to healthcare, counsel, education, and housing as they become systematically excluded from the social life of the majority and are made into outsiders in their own country. Thus, this study means to show the perspective of the Romani on the issue and how they feel the fall of communism has impacted their community by further exploring certain dimensions of social life in Romania - education, housing, and labour dynamics.

Keywords: social polarization, quality of life, vulnerable groups, economic inequality, neoliberal policies, social inclusion.

¹ Research Institute for Quality of Life, National Institute for Economic Research “Costin C. Kirişescu”, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, ROMANIA. E-mail: miruna.ilinca18@gmail.com.

Introduction

My aim in this study is to examine how the Roma perceive the policies implemented during socialism and post socialism. The second objective is to determine how the Roma experienced the fall of communism and how it affected their lives. While not extensively covered here, aspects of racial capitalism suggest that capitalism can be a catalyst for ethnic discrimination. The Romani community's welfare situation in Romania is quite low, given that this population has faced and continues to face several social, economic, and cultural challenges. Romani people experience prejudice and marginalization in general, with restricted access to school, jobs, and healthcare. Furthermore, Romani people have a high poverty rate, and many live in insecure conditions, without access to safe drinking water, sanitation, or proper heating (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Several initiatives have been launched to assist Romani people with education, employment, and access to healthcare services; however, for these programs to have a substantial impact, they must be sustained and engage the Romani community. Despite efforts to ameliorate the circumstances of Romani people, they remain insufficient. The Romanian government and non-governmental groups are working to solve these challenges and improve Romani people's lives.

According to Manuela Marin, the communist party implemented initiatives aimed at integrating the Roma population into mainstream society, but these efforts were frequently hindered by deeply embedded preconceptions and prejudices towards Roma. Her research delves into the complex relationship between Roma communities and Romania's communist regime, focusing on the period from the 1950s to the 1980s and the ways in which Roma communities resisted marginalization and oppression under the communist regime, including through political activism, cultural expression, and the development of informal economic networks. (Marin, 2017) Overall, Marin provides a nuanced and complex understanding of the relationship between Roma communities and Romania's communist regime, shedding light on both the challenges and opportunities for integration and resistance during this period, as well as important insights into the historical roots of contemporary issues confronting Roma communities in Romania and elsewhere.

Another recent study the growth of Romania's social security system in the context of European integration and economic and social changes in the 2000s. The author examines how social policy changes have impacted vulnerable populations, especially the Roma community. According to the report, despite major changes in Romanian social policy, a number of issues exist that disproportionately impact the Roma minority, such as access to health care, education, and housing. The author also emphasizes that social policies should take into account the Roma community's special demands and focus on eradicating the social and economic inequities that afflict this minority. (Stănescu, 2013) The study focuses on social policies and the Roma community's access to social and health services in particular. Stănescu

dives into the disparities in living conditions and access to public services that exist between the Roma group and the Romanian majority, emphasizing that Roma face higher levels of poverty and social exclusion. The author also covers topics with poverty assessment and social injustice.

Contrary to popular beliefs, the communist government implemented certain social policies that benefited the middle- and lower-class population, and this study will show whether this is the case on the issue of the Roma minority. In order to do that, I plan to explore certain dimensions of social life in Romania. The study will examine the most important aspects of social life in order to show which regime had a successful integration policy put in place. I will start off with education as the main medium of socialization and see what makes the two regimes different in this regard. Then I will move on to wages, and explore the labor market in the two time periods. Finally, I will take a look at housing and accommodation, hoping to provide a general picture of the current situation as opposed to the situation before 1989. I consider it difficult to conduct this analysis while the Roma weren't recognized as a national minority during communism. The only purpose I hope to achieve is to gain a clearer understanding of the social standing of this ethnic minority and to analyze social inclusion policies, with the ultimate goal being to identify whether there are certain policies that worked back then and that could be reintroduced in our current society in order to combat segregation and marginalization and to move on to a more socially homogeneous society where all members have equal access to fundamental rights and equal chances of social mobility and success.

Background

Race has been a subject of sociological inquiry ever since its inception. Scholarship on racial capitalism, such as Vincze et al.'s (2023) work on the adverse incorporation of Roma and Ian Law's *Red Racisms*, highlights how economic systems can perpetuate racial inequalities. Similarly, Hage (2016) critically engages with the complexities of anti-racism within these structural conditions. These perspectives suggest that capitalism can function as a catalyst for ethnic discrimination, particularly in post-socialist contexts. Studies in our country have mainly concentrated on the socio-economic position and history of the Romani community. For example:

1. Open Society Foundations' Report on Romania: A Baseline Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion of Roma (2020):

- Provides a baseline report on poverty and social exclusion among Roma in Romania.

- Examines factors such as educational attainment, employment rates, housing conditions, and healthcare access.

- Shows that Roma have long been pushed into poverty by the unequal socio-economic structure prevailing in the country.

- Puts forward views on how to unleash their creative talents and provides policy recommendations for overcoming these problems.

2. “The Socio-Economic Situation of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe”, edited by Will Guy (2007):

- Includes a number of research essays centered on studies of the socio-economic situation of Roma throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania.

- Gives a comparative view of policies, socio-economic indicators, and historical contexts influencing Roma community status in this environment.

These studies together provide sophistication to our understanding of the complex history and socio-economic conditions of the Romani community in Romania. They show how the residues of past policies, including those during the Communist period, restrict Roma integration and impact their identity and living standards, resulting in continuing difficulties.

This body of research warns that to achieve results, operational policies must be introduced, including targeted interventions or inclusive management mechanisms.

In our country, there have been a series of studies in this area, for example:

- Open Society Foundations’ Report on Romania: A Baseline Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion of Roma (2020):

- Provides an in-depth look at issues such as education levels, employment rates, housing conditions, and medical care.

- Emphasizes that socio-economic disparities are deeply interwoven with racial discrimination, blocking the Romani community’s ability to use resources and opportunities effectively.

- “The Socio-Economic Situation of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe”, edited by Will Guy (2007):

- Compares conditions of Roma communities across the region.

- Stresses that racial marginalization has been the historical cause of Roma poverty, especially under policies that did not address their comprehensive education needs and refused them access to more mainstream systems.

In the second half of 2012, a mission by the Broadcasting Board of Governors to Romania found a politically stable country with good economic prospects.

These studies collectively provide a more subtle appreciation of how race conditions the socio-economic status of Romania’s Romani community. They expose that often the policies, especially during the Communist era, did not recognize cultural or racial dynamics of integration, leading to a legacy of poverty.

This racialized economic exclusion leads directly to academic underachievement, unemployment, and limited financial resources for health costs. The argument is

made that both targeted interventions and state-wide policies are necessary to remove both racial prejudice and unequal economic opportunity.

In Romania, we can observe how a child born in a Romani family is raised in poverty, but moreover, his chances at education are lower than those of a Romanian child despite the fact that both children were born on Romanian soil. We are reminded of what W.E.B. Du Bois called the double consciousness in his brilliant analysis of the African American community of Chicago, the “twoness” of one person. (Du Bois, 1903) Is he a Romanian? Is he of Roma ethnicity? Is he both? For example, if the child were a girl, we might assume that by the age she would be supposed to enter high school, i.e. 13-14 yo, she could already be married and with a child. Through research (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993), it was proved that the age of marriage and, tacitly, the age of birth rises proportionally with the number of graduated classes and/or with the working status of the marital couple (Burtea, V., 2016).

By not having access to education, life becomes more and more difficult. Access to high-paying jobs is lowered, and living conditions drop, thus causing limited access to healthcare, for example. My research explores the economic and cultural undertones that determine the equality of chance or the lack of it in capitalism in contrast to communism, with the ultimate end goal of identifying the causes and understanding which policies helped the communists create a somewhat homogenous working population, whereas capitalism failed and became a safe haven for racial segregation.

Cătălin Zamfir’s 2000 study explores the influence of Romania’s shift from a centrally planned to a market economy on poverty levels. Zamfir examines the role of international organizations and the government in addressing poverty and promoting social welfare policies, including the dismantling of the welfare state, the rise of unemployment, and the growing income inequality, and provides a critical assessment of the social and economic policies implemented during the transition period, arguing that many of these policies have failed. (Zamfir, 2000) His study has emphasized the Romani population’s chronic social marginalization and prejudice in Romania, notably in the fields of education, employment, and healthcare. He has also chastised the Romanian government for its insufficient policies and strategies for addressing these issues and improving the overall well-being of the Romani community, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to poverty reduction that addresses both structural and individual factors that contribute to poverty.

The idea that access to education, healthcare, and employment during the communist era was determined by the willingness and capacity to work, rather than by ethnicity, is a sentiment echoed by many Romani people in the communities I researched. During my interviews, several respondents expressed nostalgia for the communist period, emphasizing that despite its flaws, the regime offered a sense of equality and security that is absent in the current capitalist system. For example,

Elena, a retired factory worker, shared that “everyone had the same opportunities for work, regardless of background.” This perspective aligns with theories of collective memory, where marginalized groups may look back on certain aspects of past regimes more favorably due to the perceived stability they provided (Connerton, 1989). While many Romanians view the communist regime with horror, many Romani respondents, such as Vasile, a community leader, praised its integration policies, noting that “back then, we were judged by our work, not our ethnicity.” This nostalgia highlights the complicated relationship between political systems and minority experiences, as the security provided by state-run services during communism is contrasted with the exclusion many Roma face in today’s capitalist society.

The main (and, as some of my respondents dare say, the only) issue with the race problem in communism, in my respondent’s opinion, was that many traditional professions were, indeed, lost in order to make way for new industrial professions. Boot makers, horse dealers, musicians, bear leaders, sieve makers, and artisans became factory workers overnight, laboring alongside Romanians. While this shift provided economic stability and improved living conditions, such as housing and steady jobs, it also came at a significant cultural cost. The uniformization policy adopted by the state led to the erosion of traditional Romani professions, which were central to their cultural identity and community life. The loss of these professions impacted not only their economic autonomy but also their sense of cultural pride and heritage, key components of their quality of life.

Prof. Vasile Burtea wrote that the socialist government didn’t want to consider the Romanies a national minority but rather to integrate them, an action to which Romani activists agreed. To quote, “Romanies don’t want to be a national minority. First, because this is not objectively possible and second, being a national minority is not an advantage; it becomes damaging.” (Burtea, 2016). This integration policy, though economically beneficial, often overlooked the importance of preserving Romani culture. Catalin and Elena Zamfir explain, “Socialism promoted a non-discrimination ideology. Formally, antiziganism was discouraged and condemned. Economically, socially, and professionally, Romani people were given the chance to integrate into society and to adopt a modern lifestyle. Families were made to enroll their children in school, people who were able to work were given jobs, nomads were made to settle down. Many families received government homes.” (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993). However, while these policies improved material conditions, they did not account for the cultural aspects that contribute to a holistic quality of life. The forced shift from traditional to industrial work disrupted Romani culture, affecting their identity and communal cohesion.

Methodology

To see how these social phenomena were perceived by Romani, I decided to use open interviews as my instrument. For the methodological part, I did have a pre-written interview guide, but I did add and subtract some questions when I felt necessary. I wanted to hear raw stories and opinions; that is why I chose the format of open discussion. I feel that qualitative methods are a better fit in the study of race issues because they allow me, the researcher, to hear the raw facts, to hear the voice tones changing, and to see the body language of my respondents. Moreover, we already have plenty of quantitative data that measures the current situation of the Romani, and this study will complement that data with individual stories and experiences that I hope will blend into the general situation and paint a clear picture of the phenomena discussed. Poverty was a common theme for all respondents, and I managed to find a lot of voices willing to speak up and share their experiences. I conducted 15 formal interviews, but I exchanged a quick word with other villagers as well.

Several initiatives, notably the National Roma Integration Strategy and the National Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma People, have been launched by the Romanian government to improve the welfare of Romani children and their families. However, the efficacy of these initiatives has been called into doubt (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020), and many Romani children throughout Romania continue to face major barriers to receiving the care they require to grow. The “National Strategy for Roma Improvement: The Voice of Communities” by Ana Maria Preoteasa, Sorin Cace and Gelu Duminiță analyzed Romania’s national strategy for Roma improvement, focusing on the importance of community voices in policy development.

“Persecution and Politicization: Roma (Gypsies) in Eastern Europe” by Carol Silverman is another paper discussing the challenges faced by Roma communities in the post-communist transition, and new methodologies for addressing the issue - human rights movements and the formation of political and cultural organizations aimed at combating discrimination.

“State Policies towards Roma/Gypsies under Communism” by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov. The study traces communist policies and their impact on Roma communities as a historical context to understand current challenges.

This is reflected in Muntenia, where Romani endure prejudice and stigma on a daily basis, leading to feelings of despondency and poor self-esteem. The communities I studied were located in rural areas, all being in close proximity to big cities, i.e., Pitești, Ploiești, and Târgoviște. Moreover, as Southern Muntenia is a region where agriculture thrived, according to my respondents, I wanted to see how work was influenced and transformed by the transition to capitalism and how it impacted the community. As Southern Muntenia is a region where agricultural

activities remain a main source of income, according to my respondents, I aimed to explore how work was influenced and transformed by the transition to capitalism and its impact on the community.

It was obvious to me that the subject was sensitive to many of my respondents. Some started crying, and some were obviously nostalgic. Nevertheless, qualitative research allowed me to analyze the quality of life of a Roma ethnic in both time periods. That is why, when I chose my respondents, my sample consisted of people who lived, learned, and worked during both regimes. The ages of my respondents ranged between 60 and 92 years old, the minimum age being 60. Most of my respondents were born between 1930 and 1960, thus covering the entire period of the communist regime, with some respondents even witnessing the Transnistrian deportations. I decided to explore three key dimensions: Access to education, access to work, and subsequently, housing in order to measure the general well-being before, and after the 1989 Revolution. It is worth mentioning that most respondents have entered the workforce after 1960.

The communities

The Romani community in Argeș, Romania, has undergone significant changes and challenges from the 1970s to the present day, reflecting broader socio-economic shifts and historical developments in the country.

In the 1970s, the Romani community in Argeș maintained a traditional lifestyle centered around familial bonds and cultural practices. Many lived in rural settlements, engaging in agricultural work, craftsmanship, and seasonal labor. Educational opportunities were limited, and discrimination persisted, impacting access to healthcare, employment, and social services. Despite these challenges, community resilience and cultural identity remained strong, with Romani families preserving their heritage through music, storytelling, and close-knit social networks.

Following the fall of communism in 1989, Romania experienced profound political and economic transformations. The Romani community in Argeș faced new opportunities and obstacles during this period. Efforts were made to improve educational access and economic integration, supported by international aid and government initiatives. However, socio-economic disparities persisted, exacerbated by economic restructuring and privatization, which disproportionately affected marginalized groups, including Roma. Discrimination and social exclusion continued to hinder full participation in Romanian society.

In recent years, the Romani community in Argeș has seen increased advocacy and awareness efforts aimed at addressing systemic discrimination and promoting social inclusion. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society initiatives have played a crucial role in advocating for Romani rights and improving access to education, healthcare, and housing. Economic development projects and

vocational training programs have been implemented to enhance employment opportunities and entrepreneurship among Romani youth and adults.

Many Romani individuals in Argeş still face barriers to accessing quality education, healthcare, and decent housing. Persistent stereotypes and discrimination continue to hinder social integration and economic mobility. However, there is growing recognition of the Romani community's contributions to Romania's cultural diversity and the importance of fostering inclusive policies and programs that empower Roma to fully participate in and benefit from society.

In summary, up to the present time in Argeş, from the 1970s to the future, the Romani community has evolved with marked resilience and has met a variety of socio-economic challenges. In a rapidly changing Romanian society, this has included participating for greater integration.

I give the following few examples illustrating the battle, commitment, and progress of the Romani community in Argeş, with its own distinctive problems and purposes:

Advocacy and Civil Society Initiatives

- Pro Europa League (Liga Pro Europa): This Romanian NGO is engaged in defending Romani rights and holds workshops to combat prejudice and stereotypes. These initiatives have also taken place in Argeş County.

- Romani CRISS (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies): This organization has implemented healthcare programs aimed at vulnerable Romani localities, ensuring inoculation and other vital medical services.

Education Efforts

- Second Chance Education Programs: "Second Chance" programs aimed at providing literacy education and vocational training to Romani youth and adults who dropped out of school have been adopted by Argeş schools.

- Scholarships and Mentoring for Romani Students: Romani students in Argeş have taken advantage of programs sponsored by the central government to offer scholarships and mentoring, with the object of promoting college attendance and completion.

Economic Development

- Vocational Training Centers: Across Argeş, programs have been set up to teach useful skills such as carpentry, tailoring, or IT technologies to Romani adults and especially youth.

- Small Business Grants: Grants from non-governmental organizations as well as top European Union projects are providing support for Romani capitalist endeavors even in Argeş County: from sewing clothing in tailor shops to starting some handcraft businesses.

Housing and Infrastructure

- Social Housing Projects: In parts of Argeș, strides have been put together to give Romani families access to low-cost accommodation. However, it is on a small scale.

- Infrastructure Improvements: Efforts by local authorities and non-governmental organizations here in Argeș have included bringing necessary utilities such as electrification or water supply to marginalized Romani neighborhoods.

Ongoing Challenges

Segregated Education: Despite efforts, some local schools in Argeș still practice implicit segregation of Romani students, assigning them to separate classrooms with fewer resources.

Healthcare Disparities - In many Romani communities, there are those who have difficulty with access to medical care. They may be without documentation or turned away by local doctors.

Recognition of Cultural Contributions

- Cultural Festivals: Romani musical festivals in Argeș illustrate the rich cultural heritage of these people and encourage wider Romanian society to appreciate it.

- Romani Language Education: Language programs intended to nurture the Romani language have been started up inside schools and local community centers in Argeș.

Together these are examples of an advance mixed with enduring difficulties, pointing to the need for continued advocacy, investment in a more thoroughgoing manner, and policy that includes the Romani community.

As a result, the 1970s saw the continuation of a rich Romani culture in Dâmbovița, despite social and economic adversity. The vast majority of these families were living settled lives in rural locations. In terms of leisure pursuits, they engaged themselves in doing agricultural labor work at home on small farms or collecting forest produce, which they sold to others. Many older people hardly spoke Romanian at all, having been born and brought up in a society where the lot of Romani people seemed to be one of incessant poverty and constant grinding work for others without any hope that their children might escape a similar fate. In social structure, this contributed to a huge gulf between them and their non-Romani neighbors. Limited access to education and healthcare combined with officially and socially sanctioned discrimination meant that for many, breaking out of the cycle of poverty was extremely difficult.

Even under these circumstances, Romani traditions and communal links were still at the heart of daily life, enabling a stretching of cultural identities in line with overall trends within society. Recent years have witnessed a number of programs designed to improve the growth of Romani communities. Economic development projects and training schemes for young people both aim at increasing job opportunities and enterprise among Romani teenagers and young adults and among adults older than 40 who in the past may not have had any other choice than to do dirty work such as cleaning up after public lavatories or ditches.

During the 1970s, the Prahova County Romani community integrated into the roaring mechanical and industrial bird of the region. Families of Romani origin came here to take jobs in factories and manufacturing facilities because they could find employment. This period marked a significant transition from the traditional Roma lifestyle to a more urban environment in which Roma people pursued production jobs, assembly lines, and skilled trades, according to interviews. The community lived mainly on factory work. They fled to cities, no doubt because of pastoral nostalgia, which was strategic for their survival as well as that of their families, who adapted to the urban way of life and labor demand for factories following industrialization. The region found itself in dire straits after Romania became a democracy in 1989. As a result of the economic restructuring that followed, many factories laid off workers and closed.

Social and economic vulnerability among Romani workers has now risen. Communities are suffering from high unemployment, poverty, and a lack of social safety net facilities. Existing social inequalities are further exaggerated by the arrangement of state preferences. Discrimination and stigmatization prevail, making it difficult for the Roma to be fully integrated and have access equal to educational and health services as everyone else.

Civil society organizations, local initiatives, and grassroots movements have emerged to protect and promote the rights of the Romani community in Prahova. Efforts are being made to increase education, provide vocational training, and offer medical services equally to all people. This gives Romani members two practical objectives: With skills and knowledge, they can support themselves or set up their own practices; some initiatives for improving the situation in Prahova have aimed to strengthen economic bases even further by engaging individuals with economic development projects.

Despite these efforts, significant barriers still block progress. Racism and segregation cause misery, while slums “are places where what passes for homes must often be a burning tire leaning against an improvised oven,” as one Rom expresses the problem of housing in his case. Roma people are finding it increasingly difficult to make headway in the normal economy, having few means of access to opportunity. However, within these contexts, there has been an increasing appreciation for the contribution of Gypsy music and culture as well as major university attitudes which favor social cohesion and rid systemic injustices.

Work and employment opportunities

Work is the central aspect of any communist regime. The ability and willingness to work was the most important quality of a person in communist Romania. All other aspects gravitated toward the workplace and the person’s ability to provide for the state, the community, and the family. Compared to capitalist regimes where money is center stage, no matter how it is produced, in communism, hard work had

that place. Given there were no owners, people worked for the country. Imports were not popular, and the regime focused on providing for itself by itself. That is why agriculture and industry were paramount. Many cities became industrial havens where factories were being built. In all areas where I conducted interviews, there were at least 2 functioning factories that provided hundreds of jobs for the local communities, regardless of their ethnicity and sex.

When the regime fell and those factories were privatized or faced bankruptcy, those jobs were lost, and many people found themselves without the safety of a steady income. Those who were particularly affected were the less qualified workers who had difficulty finding another job and were forced to leave the country in order to provide for their families. My respondents highlighted that many Romani workers were not necessarily qualified, as the custom for them was to go to work as early as possible, and therefore their community was hit hard, with lots of members leaving to work in wealthier European countries or engaging in illegal activities in order to earn a decent income.

The essential difference in work relations was the safety aspect. While communism provided safety and a sense of security, capitalism no longer sees work as important, or at least not paramount. Many responders considered that they had it better when their living wages allowed them to buy less than now, when they have full stores but no money to buy food with. That is where the issue of capitalism lies. It is their opinion that poor people do not benefit from the diversity of products that they can access if they have no funds to access them with. She then goes on to share that it is her belief that labor security has vanished along with the communists for their community and that nowadays, finding work has become inherently more difficult:

"I can tell you that most men here (in her village) preferred having a steady income and a safe job, where they knew no one would fire them. Now, there's no more security. You never know when you'll get on the bad side of your boss and get kicked out. It was hard standing in line for hours to get food, but at least you had money to buy it. Now, if my son gets fired, my grandchildren will have to live on the money from my retirement" (Elena, retired factory worker, 76)

Working was a respected right, even more so for those who had a degree or qualification. There were even instances where this focus on work by the communists had a negative impact—that was when people were forced to take jobs, even if they didn't want to. Despite these inconveniences, however, the accentuated control over the job market proved beneficial for a lot of low/middle-class families that found stability and a steady source of income during that time. The changes that the Roma had to adapt to after the fall of the regime had a strong impact on their economic well-being. With hate crimes increasing and the state no longer having a say in who gets a job or not, many people find themselves unemployed with no hope for stability. Florinda Lucero and Jill Column explain: *"By all accounts, the change from communism to a free-market economy marked the*

beginning of a crisis period for the Roma, due to social and economic changes and the loss of social programs and initiatives upon which many may have depended.” (Lucero, & Column, 2007)

The transition to capitalism and the free labor market hit those specific categories hard. In the face of change, some Roma returned to the practice of traditional trades, some immigrated to wealthier countries, and others engaged in illegal activities in order to survive.



(Djurić, R. Becken, J. Bengsch, A. B. 1996, p. 184b)

Figure 1. The figure shows three traditional occupations in 1990s Romania: metal traders from Meteol, a horse trader, and brickmakers from Craiova, highlighting the rural informal economy

As Professor William Julius Wilson highlights, “*work constitutes a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because it imposes disciplines and regularities ... in the absence of regular employment, a person lacks... a system of concrete expectations and goals... In the absence of regular employment, life, including family life, becomes less coherent. Persistent unemployment and irregular employment hinder rational planning in daily life, the necessary conditions of adaptation to an industrial economy.*” (Wilson, 1996)

What the Romani experienced after the fall of the communist regime was a radical shift from secure and steady workplace availability to a free labor market that did not favor minorities, especially unqualified members of minorities. With no one to profit from the employment of Roma and with jobs becoming more and more scarce, many turned to other ways of providing, which contributed to their negative portrayal in the press and in the eyes of the majority population.

“After 1989, thousands of inefficient factories and enterprises were shut down or continued operations with a scaled down labor force in Eastern Europe. The resultant decline in the employment rates of the Roma has had a devastating impact not only on their living standards but also on their societal standing, prospects for the future, and general outlook on life.” (Barany, 1998)

The lack of qualifications, along with increased distrust in their community, left many Roma with no choice but to find alternative ways of providing for themselves and their families, and that often meant dealing on the brink of legality or even

breaking the law, which only made it harder for those seeking stable jobs to do so. My respondents all have their own stories regarding their former employers, but not even one of them could say they did not encounter discrimination in a workplace or when applying for jobs. It is their shared belief that the rest of the population perceives them as lazy, without moral principles, and lacking work ethic, and thus Romanian employers are reluctant to offer them jobs. Many employers avoid employing Roma, citing their fear that the Roma will steal, their distrust in their work ethic, and their “undependability” as main causes. According to an article on social inclusion of the Roma for the European Roma Rights Center: *“Discrimination is exercised at more or less every junction in the labour market, and the already serious barriers that prevent access to employment for many Roma are significantly aggravated by prejudiced behaviour and views that unemployment and worklessness are a situation that most, if not all, Roma have chosen and are happy to live with both now and in the past.”* (Hyde, 2006)

The study presents data that shows discrimination is a big factor in accessing jobs and provides two examples of the way discrimination works. We can see the impact these cultural differences have on the lives and work of Roma. Without the state granting job stability, many ethnic groups find themselves out of work, emigrating from country to country, living day by day. Despite the downsides of the communist work policy, my respondents all agreed that the job security provided by the communists helped them lead more financially secure lives and prevented them from engaging in illegal activities. I can conclude that, at least for the people I interviewed, the socio-economic standing from the perspective of work was definitely higher during communism, and the sense of security and safety of a stable workplace was ensured.

A story that I found particularly interesting is that of Florin. Florin Ionescu was born in 1948 in a small Romani settlement near Curtea de Argeș, Romania. Growing up in a tight-knit community, Florin’s childhood was filled with the rich traditions and cultural heritage of the Romani people. Despite facing systemic discrimination and economic hardships, his family managed to survive through a mix of traditional crafts and seasonal labor.

From a young age, Florin experienced the challenges of life as a Romani in communist Romania. His family, like many others, struggled to make ends meet in a society that often overlooked their contributions. However, amidst these challenges, Florin found opportunities. The communist regime, with its emphasis on industrialization and economic development, provided him with a pathway to secure employment.

In the early 1970s, Florin secured a coveted job at a state-run textile factory in Pitești. This opportunity was transformative for him and his family. The factory provided steady work, decent wages, and access to benefits like healthcare and subsidized housing. For Florin, who had faced barriers to employment due to his ethnicity, the factory job symbolized progress and stability.

Every day, Florin would wake up early to catch the bus to work. The textile factory was a bustling hub of activity, where workers like Florin operated large looms to produce fabrics for both domestic use and export. His role in the weaving department required skill and precision, and Florin took pride in his work, knowing that he was contributing to Romania's economic growth.

Communism offered Florin a sense of belonging and purpose. The state-sponsored employment meant that he could provide for his family without the constant fear of unemployment. The factory environment, despite its challenges, also fostered a sense of camaraderie among workers. Florin found solidarity with his colleagues, who, like him, were committed to the socialist ideals of equality and collective progress.

Florin's earnings from the textile factory supported his wife, Elena, and their three children. They lived in a modest apartment provided by the state, which, though simple, offered security and stability. In their Romani community, there was a sense of shared resilience. Despite the prejudices they faced, Florin and his family found strength in their cultural traditions and mutual support.

Florin's dream was for his children to have opportunities that he never had. He believed that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination. With hard work and perseverance, he hoped that his children could pursue careers that were not limited by their ethnic background.

Florin Ionescu's story is a testament to the transformative impact of communism on his life. Despite the challenges and inequalities that existed, communism provided him with opportunities that shaped his journey from a young Romani boy in Argeş to a respected worker in Piteşti's industrial landscape. His resilience and determination continue to inspire, reflecting the broader narrative of Romani individuals who navigated and contributed to Romania's socialist era.

Another story is that of Maria. Maria Dumitru's life in communist-era Romania underscored how state policies aimed at collectivization and agricultural development provided crucial support and opportunities for her as a Romani woman working in agriculture.

During the 1970s, under communist rule, Romania implemented collectivization policies that redistributed land and resources. This meant that Maria, along with other villagers, had access to collective farms where they could cultivate crops and raise livestock. This access to land provided a stable foundation for Maria's agricultural activities, ensuring a steady food supply for her large family and the community.

Communist Romania heavily invested in agriculture as a means of achieving self-sufficiency and industrialization. Maria participated in state-sponsored agricultural programs that provided training, equipment, and technical support. These programs aimed to increase productivity and efficiency in farming practices, benefiting Maria and her fellow farmers by improving their agricultural skills and output.

Working within the collective farm system offered Maria economic stability and social support. The state ensured fair wages and access to social services such as healthcare and education for her children. This support was crucial in alleviating some of the economic burdens faced by Maria's family and allowed her to focus on her agricultural responsibilities without the constant worry of financial insecurity.

Maria's contributions to agriculture were recognized within her community and beyond. As a skilled farmer and hardworking mother of five, Maria became a respected figure, admired for her dedication and agricultural prowess. Her role as a provider and nurturer within the collective farm system highlighted how communism, despite its flaws, provided opportunities for marginalized groups like Roma to contribute meaningfully to society.

Despite the challenges faced by Roma under communist rule, Maria maintained and celebrated her Romani cultural identity. She passed down traditions and values to her children, instilling in them a sense of pride in their heritage. The communal aspects of collective farming also reinforced social bonds within the Romani community, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective identity.

Maria Dumitru's story illustrates how communism, with its focus on agricultural development and social welfare, provided opportunities for Romani women like her to thrive in challenging circumstances. Through her hard work, determination, and commitment to both her family and community, Maria left a lasting legacy of resilience and strength, demonstrating the transformative impact of state-supported initiatives in improving the lives of marginalized groups in Romania's history.

Meanwhile, in the Royal city of Sinaia, during the 1970s, lived Ana Dumitru, a Romani woman whose life was intricately woven into the fabric of industrial labor and community resilience. Ana was born into a Romani family known for their craftsmanship and resilience in the face of adversity. Her father, a skilled metalworker, instilled in her a love for mechanical engineering from a young age.

At the age of sixteen, Ana began her journey as an apprentice in one of Sinaia's renowned mechanical factories, MEFIN. The factory hummed with the sounds of clanking metal and hissing steam, where Ana found herself amidst towering machines and bustling workers from various backgrounds. Despite the challenges faced by Romani individuals in securing stable employment, Ana's determination and skill quickly earned her respect among her colleagues. Ana's days were marked by the rhythmic routine of the factory floor. Ana Dumitru's story embodies the resilience, determination, and cultural pride of Romani women in 1970s Romania. Her journey from apprentice to supervisor in Sinaia's mechanical factory not only challenged societal norms but also paved the way for future generations of Romani individuals aspiring to break barriers in industrial sectors across Romania. Her legacy remains a testament to the enduring spirit of Romani communities striving for recognition, equality, and opportunity in a rapidly changing world.

Housing – marginality, gentrification, and social exclusion

Historically, the communist regime was focused on finding ways to settle the nomadic Romani in a pursuit to erase cultural differences. Thus, providing housing was deemed necessary for the integration of these communities into the general working population. Usually coming together with a workplace, such opportunities were mostly given to families with two or more working people who already had children. Workers were also encouraged to leave their rural communities in order to move closer to the cities where factories were built.

The rent was ridiculously low, and fortunately, many of these families were able to buy these apartments after the regime fell for low prices. However, the situation varies depending on the region. In regions where the government distributed nationalized houses to workers, the workers could not keep them after the Revolution, as the previous owners submitted documentation in order to regain ownership of the houses. This phenomenon saw workers relocating to poorer neighborhoods or even outside the city limits, where they were able to find an affordable housing option.

The fast development of urban areas, however, with the emergence of gentrification, caused many poor Romani to sell their apartments due to their not being able to afford living in the city anymore. As prices rose, the cost of transportation doubled, and food became more and more expensive, many struggled to make ends meet, and, with a low to average income, managing the costs of a family became harder and harder. My interviewees do not recall having these types of worries during communist rule. Many of them would have preferred safety over liberty, as they talk about many of their relatives who had to move abroad due to the harsh living conditions back at home.

“Lack of decent housing and utilities, of documents of property on houses and lands, leads to social exclusion, blocking access to social assistance, medical assistance, education, and, in general, to all citizen rights. According to the Roma Inclusion Barometer of 2006, the Roma people live mostly in peripheral areas of towns (83%), in compact communities (77%). Only 40 % of them own a house, and a quarter of them live in houses owned by parents, mainly in rural areas.” (Romania’s National Roma integration strategy, 2012-2020)

Access to housing is a key issue in low-income families. Overcrowding is common, and urban marginalization, along with gentrification, threatens Roma communities nowadays. According to Eurostat, *“It appears that for 84 % of the Roma surveyed in Romania, the basic need for electricity, water, or sewage remains unfulfilled compared to 52 % for non-Roma living nearby. In line with other studies, the survey results show that a number of Roma live in conditions more reminiscent of some of the poorest regions globally rather than 21st century Europe.”* (Eurostat, 2014)

In Romani communities, it is common to hear about entire families sharing a single bedroom apartment in the city, while in rural areas, many live without essential amenities. Moreover, almost a third of Romani households have no contract, and therefore no insurance for their homes. Should a tragedy happen, they would be left in the street. In one community I studied that was recently struck by a landfall, the regional leader told me:

“When the landfall happened last year, many of us were left to beg. We had to find places to live, as very few of us had documentation to prove we actually lived here. There were no contracts and we would gather and sleep in the train station until we could find accommodation. There was nothing we could do” (Gheorge, 71, retired factory worker)

Another woman from the community near Pitesti recalled how, when her house burned down, she had to go live with her sister, as there was no other option for her to recover:

“My old house burned down some time ago. If it burned down before the Revolution, at least we would have had help. Now, I had to move to my sister’s, as I had no insurance or contract to prove that it was my home” (Maria, 67, homemaker)

Access to electricity, water, and sewage is limited in such communities. Capitalism has isolated many low-income Romani from cities and had them relocate to poorer areas, areas that are nowadays threatened by gentrification due to their proximity to cities. The current living conditions are a threat to the health of the community, and in our day and age, access to water, electricity, and sewage should not be a luxury, it should be considered a necessity, and the state should help those in need with the necessary resources in order to live a decent life and be successfully integrated into society.

Education and access to schooling

Education is a central factor in the development and social mobility of ethnic minorities. In capitalism, children living in the same cities have completely different educational trajectories depending on their ethnicity and background. Unfortunately, the main reason for these striking differences lies in the economic dimension. Areas where minorities live tend to have high crime rates due to the very low incomes generated by their members, and as Professor William Julius Wilson indicated, the reason for this is mainly the limited access to jobs that causes them to turn to illegal activities in order to survive (Wilson, 2016). These crime rates create a stigma around the community that has children that come from them viewed in a certain way. Poverty and the poverty trap, which researchers warn of make it especially difficult for these communities to break this vicious cycle. Youth delinquency is at an all-time high, and Roma children are often at

risk of discrimination on an ethnic basis. Legal specialists, for instance, are aware of the difference in administering justice for youth delinquents depending on their ethnicity. A UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2015) mentioned an interview with a prosecutor that shows a worrying reality. The interviewee told the researchers that Roma children usually get tougher sentences in comparison with Romanian children for the same exact crime. His testimony was as follows:

“In court they (the judge and prosecutors) will see a Romani and they will sentence him to jail because they firmly believe Romanis are worse than us, the rest.” – (prosecutor specialized on youth cases, 27 February 2015)

A series of professionals spoke discriminatively about Romani youth delinquents, as the study shows, most of them having pre-formed personal opinions. Being treated differently in school and in all other state institutions, Romani children become self-aware and might choose to stray away from their educational path or stop going to school at all. Such attitudes are easily perceived at a young age, and they severely affect the child’s psychological development. A young mother from the community where I conducted the second part of my research told me:

“I expect them to treat him (her son) differently. He often cries when he comes home from school. If he gets a bad grade, the teacher acts like it was expected, and if he gets a good grade, she thinks he cheated. And I know the rules are stricter for him. If he gets in trouble, we all know they will not miss the chance to expel him. They did so with my neighbor’s daughter down the road. She skipped class with some other girls, but they only expelled her. They told my neighbor it was because she came up with the idea, but we all know it was not that. It was because she was a gypsy and they didn’t like her coming to school in our traditional skirts.” (Maria, 45, Roma, unemployed)

My study further explores the chances for education in this ethnic minority, drawing a parallel between the communist regime’s approach and the measures taken nowadays. All interviewees agreed that they had more faith in the educational system during communism, and they felt that their kids could do well in school despite their ethnicity, as opposed to now, when they feel they do not have the same chances anymore.

“We had lawyers, we had doctors, we had politicians and party members. I knew my kids could do well in life if they learned well and worked well! Nowadays, the best advice I can give them is to go abroad. Germany, UK, Spain and Italy are all better for us. Here, the system is against us” (Vasile, 63, Roma community representative, when asked about his faith in the present educational system as opposed to the communist educational system).

Migration is indeed a recurring pattern in Roma communities, and many children are being left behind to struggle with school while their parents work overseas to provide. A regional leader of Roma community told me that in communism, the state helped them, even forced them to find jobs and settle, and that now, with that security gone, parents have to leave the country to find a decent-paying job or even

break the law. *"The state makes us into criminals"* he admitted, with a certain sadness in his voice. Attitudes towards education vary from person to person, but where I was able to find common ground amongst my interviewees was the general view that communism takes education more seriously, and the approach was more formal. Also, with strict rules like uniforms and student organizations, opportunities were provided for everyone to learn and be judged on the quality of their assignments and homework. The implementation of uniforms was often cited by all of my interviewees as a successful endeavor to conceal the student's economic standing and to prevent discrimination. While the uniform was worn in school, discrimination due to economic factors was at an all-time low. The fact that uniforms are no longer worn directly affects the Roma community. Given that all children were dressed the same, had the same hairstyle, they perceived such differences with more difficulty and paid them no mind. Now, when every child is free to display their financial standing, and some wear designer clothes while others wear the same outfit for days in a row, discrimination is becoming more and more present in everyday school life. One parent told me:

"Back then, I would send my son to school, and he would hang out with everybody. Little groups were present then as well, but they were usually based on interests, some kids who liked math hung out together, the other who preferred Russian separately, the party activists separately, and so on and so forth. There were lots of collective activities provided by the state, even during the summer, that helped the kids bond. Today, we can't afford to send my nephew on those expensive school trips they organize, we barely have money to send him to school. I would love to have him go with the others, back when Ceausescu was in charge, the state paid for all the school trips, and in the summer, they would send the kids to countryside camps, now, it's just too expensive to do that." (Marilena, Roma woman, 67)

People living in the Roma communities I studied share the opinion that they had equal chances at school during that time, and that, again, discrimination was not present or, if present, it was not based on ethnic factors. **It is important to note, however, that this perspective may be influenced by nostalgia,** which often filters memories through a lens of positivity, focusing on pleasant experiences while downplaying or omitting negative aspects. **While I, as the author, acknowledge their accounts, I also recognize the potential for such recollections to overlook the systemic challenges faced by Roma communities, particularly regarding issues of integration and discrimination.**

We cannot exclude the element of nostalgia, however, as it often filters memories through a lens of positivity, focusing on pleasant experiences while downplaying or omitting negative aspects. In the context of studying historical policies, Romani individuals or community members may recall certain aspects of life under communism as beneficial or protective, such as guaranteed employment or community solidarity, while minimizing the hardships or discrimination they faced. Nostalgia may create a perception of stability and security during

historical periods, such as the communist era, despite documented socio-economic inequalities and restrictions. Romani individuals might fondly remember aspects like communal support or state-provided services that provided a sense of security, contrasting with perceived instability or uncertainty in post-communist times. Nostalgia can also be influenced by contemporary political and social contexts. As societal attitudes towards communism or specific historical periods evolve, so too can perceptions of nostalgia. Romani individuals may reflect on past policies in light of current challenges or achievements, shaping their narratives and interpretations accordingly. The prospects communism offered for the future were seen as favorable, with many people feeling that they were able to reach high-paying professions if they did well in school. Today, that confidence seems to have faded, as Roma children quit school early in order to work and provide for their families or fail to get good results because of the stigma associated with their ethnicity, which influences teachers' expectations and badly reflects on their results. Roma children are often called names by their Romanian peers, and that is taking a toll on their mental health as well. We know that bullying directly affects a kid's attitude toward school and being bullied might cause a young kid to start skipping class or avoid going to school at all.

To sum up school is the first institution in which the child socializes outside the family, and as long as discrimination remains a part of it, we cannot hope to integrate ethnic minorities and provide them with equal chances for life and work. All children need to feel safe, and school should be an accepting environment where they learn how to socialize positively and to acquire the skills needed to live a decent life. Without equal access to resources and to schooling, it is impossible for minorities to break the poverty chain and improve their living conditions.

Downsides of the communist regime

There were mixed results for the Romani people in Romania during the times of communism, both positive and negative. Of course, other sources pointed out that there were improvements in access to education and employment under communism, but systemic discrimination and socio-economic disparities continued to exist.

Educational and Employment Prospects: As Nicoleta Gagi, has stated, positive results were seen in the form of higher enrollment rates of Romani children in schools and employment opportunities in state-owned industries as a result of communist policies geared toward industrialization and education (Gagi, 2018). The goal of the initiative was to improve the socio-economic status of the Roma and to prepare them for integration into mainstream society.

Systemic Discrimination: Roma continued to face systemic discrimination in Hungary, despite this effort. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) also reports that systemic discrimination in education,

employment and access to healthcare originated during the era of the communist regime and that issues remain for Roma living in post-communist Romania (ECRI, 2019).

Cultural and Social Restrictions: According to scholars, like Marushiakova, & Popov, communism sought to integrate Roma people into the dominant culture, leading to limitations of Romani language and culture (Marushiakova, & Popov, 2008). Culturally, the historical approach towards the Roma, particularly in the form of assimilationist policies, was a contributing factor in the structural marginalization of the community and placed barriers to their cultural self-determination.

Socio-Economic Disparities: The Open Society Foundations (2020) have shown in their research that persistent socio-economic disparities are a barrier faced by Roma in Romania, including lower levels of educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and inferior health outcomes compared to the general population. These imbalances are fraught with deep historical legacies, but were also sharpened further still during the communist era, even if some access to basic services improved.

In conclusion, the era of communism in Romania did offer some advances in education and inclusion for the Romani population, albeit with a backdrop of severe institutionalized discrimination and bans on traditional Romani cultural practices. This is not to mention the fact that the legacy of socio-economic disparities still lives today and echo the struggle of the Romani population in the face of communist policies.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that deserve consideration. First, there are inherent difficulties with trying to study policies that were put in place decades ago and to measure their effects on a specific group, such as the Romani, with the kind of detailed data that would yield accurate, definitive conclusions. The historical documentation must remain sparse or biased, constraining the extent to which we can analyze direct effects on socio-economic outcomes of specific policies. Furthermore, differences between regions within Southern Muntenia in terms of local implementation of policies could result in inequalities among the Romani communities that are not fully covered by a generalized overview. The paper aims to tackle both: how respondents recall the communist period, and a comparison of Roma's situation under two different regimes.

The first focus traces the memories and narratives respondents felt bold enough to share, paying attention to the way they frame experiences of the communist era, including traits of stability, marginalization, or integration.

The second axis reviews the socio-economic, cultural and political contrasts of the communist and post-communist periods. In the process, the paper tracks changes in policies, societal attitudes and lived realities for the Roma. This report has a number of limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the retrospective nature of assessment of policies implemented decades earlier is fraught with issues of having complete and accurate data, potentially rendering it difficult to accumulate nuanced understanding of impact on the Romani community. Systems of historical documentation that were biased or incomplete kept direct analysis of specific policies on socio-economic outcomes shallow. Furthermore, the distribution of individual resources, as well as the localized nature of the implementation of certain policies in the region of Southern Muntenia may produce disparities in the outcomes for Romani communities. Such disparities may not be comprehensively documented in a generalized study.

This is a two-part paper; the first half looks at how my respondents remembered the communist period, focusing on their narratives of stability, marginalization, or integration during socialism. Secondly, it offers an examination of the socio-economic, cultural and political transformation during and after communism in comparative terms. The paper underlines the changes in policies, social attitudes and lived realities for the Roma community under these two regimes by combining these two perspectives.

Many restrictions were imposed on this paper. First, making sense of policies implemented decades earlier is retrospectively challenging for obvious reasons. Historians would have trouble getting 100% accurate and thorough data, which could make the picture incomplete about nuanced effects on the Romani community. The limitations of the historical record and evidence of bias often inhibit many aspects of the analysis of the direct impact of specific policies or state actions on socio-economic outcomes. More crucially for the present study, different areas of southern Muntenia implemented the same policies in different ways, and therefore the effects experienced by Roma people were not necessarily encapsulated in a general study taken *carte blanche*.

This paper has two themes. First, *Reconsidering the Socialist Past* is about the memories of my respondents - about how they tell and construct that period for themselves.

Second, equating stability with peace has been a comparative quarterly on the social, economic, cultural and political differences of the communist era versus the post-communist era. Taking two such opposing perspectives into account, the comparison sheds light on changes on the state front, on everyday realities, and on the morals and the mores people lived by in the two times.

Additionally, socio-cultural factors, such as changes in societal attitudes towards ethnic minorities over time, could influence perceptions and experiences of discrimination and integration, posing challenges in isolating the distinct impacts of communist versus capitalist eras on the Romani quality of life. Lastly,

the study's scope primarily focuses on economic and social dimensions, potentially overlooking other critical factors such as political dynamics and international influences that could have shaped policies and their effects on the Romani community. These limitations underscore the complexity and multifaceted nature of studying historical socio-economic policies and their enduring implications on marginalized communities like the Romani in Southern Muntenia. Furthermore, researcher bias, exacerbated by the challenges of conducting impartial research amidst global uncertainties, may have influenced interpretations of findings and conclusions drawn from the data. The inherent complexity of studying socio-economic policies, across different political regimes and their enduring impacts on marginalized communities like the Romani in Southern Muntenia, underscores the need for cautious interpretation of results and consideration of contextual factors, including those shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions

The central objective of my study was to show the differences in handling the Roma minority issue in capitalism and communism. Between the theory and the research, it became obvious to me that the words of my respondents were more than that. Each and every single story was representative of the larger Roma community, and it painted a vivid picture of their lifestyle, issues, and social standing during the different regimes in our country.

Discrimination is one of the main issues all ethnic minorities have to face. It is impossible to avoid and, as my research showed, it is present in all times and all political regimes. However, based on my research, there is no clear indication that discrimination against the Roma during the communist era in Romania was explicitly racially motivated. The regime's policies largely focused on individuals' contributions to the workforce, with any disadvantage or exclusion primarily tied to economic and social factors rather than ethnicity.

The criteria for exclusion or disadvantage during this time were largely based on willingness, ability, and qualifications to work. For the Roma, challenges often stemmed from cultural practices or community norms that led many to quit school early and enter the workforce prematurely.

As a result, many were less qualified than their non-Roma counterparts, which led to difficulties in accessing higher-paying or more stable jobs. However, this disadvantage was largely due to lower educational attainment, not their ethnic identity. That said, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that some forms of discrimination against the Roma could have existed during communism.

While the regime's official policies did not endorse racial discrimination, and my research did not uncover direct evidence of systemic ethnic bias, the complexity of individual experiences cannot be overlooked. Discrimination might

have still occurred in more subtle or indirect forms – whether through societal prejudices, stereotyping, or unequal treatment in everyday interactions.

It is possible that Roma individuals faced barriers not solely linked to work qualifications but also influenced by longstanding negative perceptions, which may have persisted despite the regime's emphasis on equality in the workforce.

Furthermore, some of the forced assimilation policies under communism – such as settling nomadic Roma, limiting traditional cultural practices, and requiring participation in state-run labor programs – might have indirectly contributed to discriminatory experiences.

These policies, while not openly racial, often failed to consider the unique cultural needs of the Roma, leading to a sense of cultural marginalization. Thus, while racial discrimination may not have been institutionalized, the Roma could still have experienced some form of marginalization based on their way of life, traditions, or perceived differences.

In contrast to the communist era, the post-communist period has seen more pronounced ethnic discrimination, particularly in areas like education, healthcare, and employment. The transition to capitalism introduced a free labor market where the Roma, as an ethnic minority, began to face overt racial prejudice and exclusion. Discrimination became more evident, with ethnic stereotyping playing a larger role in the Roma's access to social and economic opportunities.

In conclusion, while my research did not find direct evidence of racially motivated discrimination against the Roma under communism, it is important to recognize that discrimination might still have been present in more subtle ways. Socio-economic and cultural factors were the primary drivers of disadvantage during this period, but the possibility remains that some Roma individuals experienced forms of discrimination - whether through societal attitudes or cultural assimilation policies. The communist regime's emphasis on work qualifications did not entirely eliminate the potential for ethnic bias, even if it was not formally acknowledged or encouraged.

Thus, it can be concluded that discrimination was not centered around the cultural background of the worker and had little to do with the person's beliefs or ethnicity. By reducing the huge economic income gaps of the population, the regime managed to create a more uniform societal environment where workers represented the majority and non-workers the minority. Discrimination against those who preferred not to work was indeed present and the state would often intervene, even forcing people to take a job and provide for the state and for their family.

Once communism fell, attitudes toward minorities quickly changed. Socio-economic reforms that followed the Revolution had the Roma on the brink of legality and their usual activities attracted the hatred of the majority population. The ethnic majority did not like the stigma associated with Romani migration overseas, in the more developed European countries, and Romani started to be

acutely disadvantaged in the education and healthcare systems. The negative stereotypes against their community prevented them from accessing jobs and moving up the social ladder, and thus many of them found themselves stuck in poverty, living without necessary amenities and struggling to survive.

Starting with education, which sets the tone for the rest of all other dimensions, then moving on to work, the central aspect of adult life, to housing, my aim was to show if the Roma were treated best during communism. Unemployment, limited access to education, homelessness, racial profiling, and discrimination were each individually addressed and are the main intended reforms the government is currently working on, but no law or regulation has had the impact the communist reforms had, according to my interviewees, who don't look favorably upon capitalism.

They see their community as disadvantaged and despised by the rest of the population, and have the perspective that under communism, even though they were forced to settle, forced to go to school, forced to work, forced to integrate - the fact that they could do all those things, even if they had to do them against their will, still counted more. Now, when they have to fight to get access to those basic rights, they feel wronged.

The free labor market does not favor them, the institutions of the state do not favor them, and the general population does not favor them. It is up to social researchers to shed light on this issue and to find the appropriate solutions, if there are any, in order to do right by a community that has been disadvantaged all throughout history.

What was interesting to learn is how different generations perceive the same social issue. People who lived and worked in communism, for instance, were not familiar with the concept of racism. It was simply not talked about. What is remarkable is that all the interviewees agreed that they felt safer and happier back then. They were the first generation in their families to go to school; they had reliable jobs that eventually allowed them access to government-mandated housing; and what was paramount to them, they were judged by their work.

The negative attitudes towards them affect their access to healthcare, counseling, education, and accommodation as they become systematically excluded from the social life of the majority and are made into outsiders in their own country. Also, for children born into these communities, it is not uncommon to grow up with a twisted sense of right and wrong that will put them in trouble with the law later on.

In order to at least achieve relative equality, we need to assess how and why inequality makes its way into social life and thrives. Marx found capitalism to be guilty of these inconsistencies in chances and resources, while admitting that the history of humanity is in itself a history of class struggle. That struggle translates itself into the ethnic struggle minorities now face. Being deprived of the financial means needed in order to progress and move forward, they are left with little possibility of social mobility, and even if they manage, through diverse means, to

achieve the necessary capital in order to achieve a decent lifestyle, they are often put down by ethnic discrimination.

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