

# The First Sparks of Romani LGBTQ

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Although there is extensive academic literature, as well as public discussion, about Roma and LGBTQ people, the particular subgroup of LGBTQ Roma is often surrounded by a lack of awareness and taboo - and is therefore invisible. Common definitions and understandings of this social group are often includes elements which can be interpreted as unfavourable. For example, some literature and informal sources have mistakenly argued that the inherent “deviance” of these two minorities are genetically coded. In addition, it is also argued that socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, and “lifestyle” elements are what separate these groups from the majority. The study provides an overview of intersectional marginalised identities and discusses the particular oppression of Roma LGBTQ people. It analyses this topic through the lens of multiplied intersectional marginalisation by reviewing hate crimes in Hungary, the applicable court cases, Eurobarometer 2015 data, and the relevant national legislation. Specifically, I argue that Roma LGBTQ people face particular forms of oppression because they are confronted with racism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia.

## 1. Bringing Visibility

Romani LGBTQ people are faced not only with discrimination and xenophobia because of their ethnic origin but also with homophobia and transphobia because of their gender and LGBTQ identity as Female, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (Baker, 2015). They are also potentially excluded because of disability, reduced mobility (deaf, blind) position, age characteristics (elderly) or any other intersection of these (Jovanović, 2015). Indeed, research has shown that:

‘people who are prejudiced against any particular ethnic group are twice as likely as someone from the majority population to be prejudiced against gay and lesbian people, and four times as likely to be prejudiced against disabled people’ (Moon, G. 2009, p.11).

Such multiple intersectional discrimination has a negative impact of the person’s basic human rights and gives limited access to dignity, knowledge and self-development, visibility and power. These different oppressions lead the persons to block their own potential talent and identity. Despite this, this topic has been relatively understudied in the academic literature. described how:

‘neither the gender neither aspects of racist discrimination nor the racist implications of gendered discrimination have been adequately apprehended within the human rights discourse.’ (Gudrun- Knapp, A. 2011, p.187).

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The study of Romani LGBTQ people's intersectional oppressions appeared in an academic context for the first time in 2009 with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) launching a special issue with the topic of 'Multiple Discrimination'. In this journal, Djordje Jovanovic (a Gay Romani man) openly wrote about his multiplied excluded social position. He describes his intersectional marginalised positions in different spaces as insider, (Romani communities and, LGBTQ groups) and outsider (CIS - non Romani, heteronormative) status.

In 2013, Vera Kurtic, with the support of ERRC, brought her experiences into the academic context with the journal title, *Roma Lesbian Existence – Džuvljarke*. In this, Kurtic explains the patriarchal system oppressions that work in case of Romani lesbians. She describes how the powered people as white middleclass man and woman are oppressing the underprivileged people as Romani lesbians in the society. She calls attention to the majority movements, how Romani feminism, and Romani lesbians are excluded, romanticized and eroticized into main feminist and LGBTIQ movements.

In 2014, with support of the Council of Europe, one outstanding publication using case studies has been presented, with the title, '*Barabaripen - Young Roma speaks about multiplied discrimination*'. Barabaripen is an expression in the Romani language, what means multiplied and multilayered. Here a young Romani person explains their majority and minority groups' exclusion and stereotypes. In 2015 the European Roma Rights Centre launched a new journal inviting Romani researchers to share and challenge social science with their research outcomes with the topic of Romani LGBTQ oppressions and multiplied intersectional marginalisation. The title of this journal was - '*Nothing About Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production*'.

The first milestone of policy visibility for Roma LGBTIQ people was in August 2015 in Prague, where 28 country representatives (social scientists, politicians, NGO representatives, human rights activists and supporters) came together to address the different issues faced by Roma LGBTIQ people. One of the main impacts of the conference was the so-called *Prague Declaration*<sup>2</sup> where the participants gathered and listed their main challenges on their national legislations and everyday lives. These are to:

1. **'Recognise**, that LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers across Europe face multiple marginalisation and discrimination at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, an issue that has not been recognised and/or addressed yet by the international human/Roma/LGBTIQ rights community;
2. **Acknowledge**, that there is an urgent need to address the situation of LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers facing violence and ostracism by families/ Romani community members, discrimination from majority society, as well as exclusion from mainstream LGBTIQ organisations.'

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<sup>2</sup> Prague Declaration (2015) <http://www.osce.org/odihr/188136?download=true>

## 2. Challenge of LGBTQ rights - Cases

LGBTQ people's rights are still not recognised as equal fundamental human rights in Hungary (where I am from). One of the most evident facts to confirm this is The Hungarian National Constitution which states that same-sex marriage is strictly forbidden. The Hungarian Government clearly identified the meaning of family in the National Constitution as meaning an union between a man and woman, with any other relationship not recognised equally in by the Hungarian Authorities.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in Hungary until 1971 being LGBTQ was a punishable crime or was recognised as mental illness. (Takács 2011) Within the Roma community the question of LGBTQ is still also a matter of taboo and shame. The family members are not allowed to discuss about questions about sexuality or gender identity with neither the closer or larger community. (Tišer, 2015).

To exemplify the challenges faced by Roma LGBTQ people in Hungary, I will briefly mention three different legal cases from the past seven years where Roma LGBTQ people were faced with hate crime, hate speech and discrimination in different social spheres.

In 2014, a Romani gay male aged 29 suffered a public hate crime. His account comes from my own data collection<sup>4</sup>, as part of interviews conducted with Roma LGBTQ people for my doctoral studies. He was verbally assaulted and physically abused on the public transport by a neo- Nazi person. After the crime, the Roma LGBTQ person reported his case, but the police did not recognise the case as a crime and did not start the case examination. He describes this incident below:

*'It was around 11pm and I was travelling home from my workplace by trolley 85 in Budapest. That day I was wearing a pink t-shirt. In front of me was sitting one high and masculine bold male. A few times on the ride our eyes accidentally met and he probably misunderstood it. He stepped to me and he started shouting into my face. There was no chance to excuse, because in the next second the verbal attack turned into physical violation. He broke my nose which was bleeding into my mouth. I luckily jumped off from the vehicle at the next station and ran away. Right after I went to the closest police station to report the crime, but it is was useless.*

*I said to the officers, I am not sure why it is happened, because I am gay or because I am Roma. One of the main question was of the police officers how could be somebody being "Gay and Gypsy" at the same time?'*

The second case is from 2011 in which one Romani Transgender group during the Budapest Gay Pride decided to enter the pride LGBTQ after Party<sup>5</sup>. At the entrance, the security rejected their will to enter to the club stating that the party was open only for the invited guests.

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<sup>3</sup> LGBT Rights in Hungary <http://www.equaldex.com/region/hungary>,

Legal Recognition of Same- Sex Relationships

<http://www.samesexrelationshipguide.com/~media/files/ssrguide/europe/legal-recognition-of-samesex-relationships--hungary.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 20 May, 2015

<sup>5</sup> A diszkrimináció csúcsa a tolerancia jegyében

[http://nol.hu/belfold/a\\_diszkriminacio\\_csucs\\_a\\_tolerancia\\_jegyeben-1367595](http://nol.hu/belfold/a_diszkriminacio_csucs_a_tolerancia_jegyeben-1367595)

Roma transzvesztiták kirekesztése miatt büntettek meg egy budapesti melegbárt

[http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130218\\_transzvesztitak\\_kirekesztes\\_buntetes](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130218_transzvesztitak_kirekesztes_buntetes)

The rejected group stood there a while, until was clear for them that there is no any special guest invitation. They were refused entry only because of their ethnic Roma origin. This case was reported to the Equal Treatment Authority where they declared as an ethnic discrimination into the LGBTQ group.

The third case is from 2016. Here, one Transgender person applied for a woman's shop assistant position. Her qualifications were outstanding even though the shop manager refused her application, because of her gender identity. The shop manager explained that the position was open only for a 'real woman'. After all the humiliations she reported her case to the Equal Treatment Authority where her case was recognised as gender identity and sexual orientation discrimination<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Social Distance and Relationships in Hungary

The quantitative data focuses on the majority CIS heteronormative and minority Roma, Muslim, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, Transgender social distance and relationships in Europe, more specifically in Hungary. Anikó Kenez<sup>7</sup> examined the Eurobarometer 83.4 data collection<sup>8</sup> which took place in May and June 2015. The data responders do not belongs to any minority groups. In the survey the answers givers used the Bogardus scale (1-10), where they had to response for the next two questions. The total responders to the survey were 16,911.

The results showed that:

- 64.2% would not agree in Hungary the relationship with Transgender person and 51% would not agree in Europe the relationship with Transgender person.
- 58% would not agree in Hungary the relationship with Roma person and 44.1% would not agree in Europe the relationship with Roma person.
- 58% would not agree in Hungary the relationship with LGBTQI person and 39.9% would not agree in Europe the relationship with LGBTQI person.
- 49.5% would not agree in Hungary the relationship with Muslim person and 39.6% would not agree in Europe the relationship Muslim person.

What is most shocking is that:

- 91.6% does not know a transgender person
- 83% does not know a Roma person
- 48.7% of Europeans – heterosexual based on their own statement – know a gay/lesbian/bisexual person,
- 71% knows people with a different religion than their own.

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<sup>6</sup> Equal Treatment Authority: Rejection of Transgender Job Applicant was Unlawful

<http://en.hatter.hu/news/equal-treatment-authority-rejection-of-transgender-job-applicant-was-unlawful>

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<sup>8</sup> ZA6595. Eurobarometer 83.4 (2015) Country Questionnaire Hungary

<http://docplayer.hu/26818177-Za6595-eurobarometer-83-4-2015-country-questionnaire-hungary.html>

Eurobarometer Data Service

<https://www.gesis.org/eurobarometer-data-service/survey-series/standard-special-eb/study-overview/>

## 4. Conclusions

The academic, legal and statistical evidence above shows that Roma LGBTQ Roma in Hungary are faced with multiple discriminations due to multiple identities such as ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Roma LGBTQ people confronted with particular forms of oppression as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia all at one time. However this issue has not received sufficient attention. The EU and the state legislation does not prevail with multiplied intersectional marginalisation positions because the law does not recognise a person's intersectional and multiplied social status.

The main issues faced by people who are challenging this discrimination of Roma LGBTQ is a lack of understanding, material resources, data and collaborative working. Academic literature needs recognise the different oppressions and multiplied intersectional marginalisations faced by different social groups. On a practical level, academic, policy and legal divisions to work together to address Roma LGBTQ issues, with the different stakeholders (academia, NGOs, politicians, activist, the researched group) having to share their experiences. A key requirement is also more data with country and Europe wide surveys needed to map their main challenges and issues. Moreover, there is also a huge lack of sensitivity within both the mainstream LGBTQ and Romani movements to these intersectional issues with Romani LGBTQ movements still needing to bring visibility and acceptances into the main minority groups. In practice, the groups do not meet with each other or share ideas/resources because they are busy with their separate challenges and tasks. The Roma LGBTQ movement still requires acceptance and visibility from the main LGBTQ and Romani movements as having equal willingness, capacity and potential support for each other.

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### Further Reading and Resources

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LGBT Rights in Hungary <http://www.equaldex.com/region/hungary>

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