

Roma Experiences Table I History and Integration

Ronald Lee, Toronto-based Journalist, Author and Roma Advocate

Mr. Lee is a Romani Canadian, born in Montreal. From 2003-2008, he has been teaching a spring seminar, the *Romani Diaspora in Canada*, at New College, University of Toronto, as part of the Equity Studies Program, Department of Humanities. He is a founding member, former executive director and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Roma Community Center, in Toronto, which assists Romani newcomers to Canada with their social integration and serves as a cultural center, which organizes ethnic Romani events for the local Romani community. They also serve to acquaint other Canadians with Romani culture, music, history and their situation in the refugee-producing countries prior to the admission of these countries to the EU. His book, *Goddam Gypsy*, was published by Tundra Books in 1972 and there have been German, Spanish and Czech translations. It was re-published under its original name, *The Living Fire*, in 2009 by Magoria Books. Ronald Lee also published *Learn Romani*, an 18 lesson course in the Romani language (Hertfordshire University Press, 2005). His Romano-English dictionary is being published in January 2011. Mr. Lee has also written numerous newspaper and magazine articles about Roma in Canada and more recently, about the Romani refugee situation in Canada. His publications in anthologies, CDs, and articles may be found on the website at www.kopachi.com.

Presentation Abstract

“Roma Refugees to Canada: 1900 – 2011.”

This lecture will give a brief overview of Roma migration to Canada from the end of the 19th century up to the massive Roma migration from the former Communist countries of central-eastern Europe. This latter period will reflect the speaker's vast experience with newcomer Roma refugees in Toronto since 1997 when the first wave of Romani refugees arrived from the Czech Republic and he became one of the founding members of The Roma Community Center in Toronto, which has been assisting Roma Convention-refugee claimants with legal advice and has also been working towards the integration of Roma newcomers into Canadian society.

Melanie Ram, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science; Director of the Masters of International Relations Program, California State University, Fresno BA, University of Southern California; MA, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University; PhD, Political Science, George Washington University

Professor Ram's research interests include European integration, post-communist politics of Central and Eastern Europe, democratization, minority rights,

nongovernmental organizations and transnational advocacy networks. Her recent work focuses on the Roma and the influence of Roma and human rights' NGOs on domestic and international policies. In 2010, she published "Interests, Norms, and Advocacy: Explaining the Emergence of the Roma onto the EU's Agenda," in the journal, *Ethnopolitics*. She also has a forthcoming article in *Comparative European Politics* entitled, "Roma Advocacy and EU Conditionality: Not One without the Other?"

Presentation Abstract

"The EU and the Roma: A Path to Social and Economic Inclusion?"

This paper will look back at the overall experience of the Roma in Europe since the mid-1990s in the context of European Union (EU) enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. How did the objective of joining the EU affect the Roma in prospective Member States—including activism by and on behalf of the Roma, national and international attention to their concerns, funding to resolve identified issues, popular attitudes and discrimination against the Roma, and the overall achievement of the EU's stated goal of social and economic inclusion of the Roma? In light of this question, I will seek to outline some key obstacles as well as positive steps, and overall lessons learned from the past two decades of transition for the Roma in Europe.

Bernard Rorke, Director of International Advocacy and Research at Open Society Roma Initiatives, Budapest
MSc, University of London; PhD, the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster

Bernard Rorke is international research and advocacy director for the Open Society Roma Initiatives. Formerly director of the Roma Participation Program, he has worked with the Open Society Foundations since 1998. Prior to this, and among many other things, he lectured in political theory, worked as a production editor, and as a university marketing and publicity officer. Currently he teaches the "Roma Rights" course at Central European University in Budapest. He has written on issues of national identity, democratic theory, and the situation of the Roma. In 2007, he contributed "No longer and not yet: Between exclusion and emancipation" to *Roma Diplomacy* (edited by Valeriu Nicolae and Hannah Slavik). In 2009, his article "Nationalist Pride and Popular Prejudice" was published in the journal, *Roma Rights*. His blog post commentary on Roma issues can be found online: <http://blog.soros.org/?s=rorke>.

Presentation Abstract

"Roma from Eastern Europe; the View from the Ground."

Over the last 10 years the calls by Roma and pro-Roma campaigners and activists for recognition, representation and respect for European's largest ethnic minority reverberate with greater impact than ever before. The demands for recognition do not imply some elaborate cornucopia of special considerations,

concessions, or group specific rights to be accorded to the Roma on the basis of purported cultural differences. Rather, what is demanded is a very basic recognition by non-Roma of Roma as fully human and intrinsically equal beings. Despite encouraging signs that European institutions and national governments are beginning to heed such calls, very little is changing on the ground for deeply impoverished and socially excluded communities. Indeed, what is most alarming is that these barely perceptible shifts from above could be stalled or indeed reversed by a rising tide of anti-Gypsism: widespread and virulent prejudice that threatens to derail progress.