

(Why There is No) Solidarity with Global Strangers: The Case of Antigypsyism

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Antigypsyism is a system of structural inequalities and prejudicial attitudes. It signifies a historical process created and recreated through practices aimed at Roma people today, as well as towards their ancestors during the last 1000 years. The appearance of these dark-skinned, unusually dressed strangers also reinforced the ideas about the ‘East’ as the home of wandering tribes, heathens and infidels and the enemies of Christendom/civilization. Today, there is a strong argument that Roma people have become (or still are) ‘the marginal group extraordinaire, the quintessential strangers’ (Barany 2001: 62–3)², and that antigypsyism has a high level of social acceptance, which makes it one of the most manifestly expressed forms of racism today, or the last accepted form of racism. However, antigypsyism was never, nor is now, directed only at ethnic Roma people who originate from India. It stigmatises all those who live a ‘gypsy’ way of life, regardless of their real or fictional origin, as well as those who are perceived racially different based on their physical appearance.

My idea is to present Norbert Elias’ process of civilisation (Elias, 2000)³ as a process of creating solidarity among groups that recognise mutual respect for certain norms (uphold a ‘normal behaviour’). The opposite phenomenon represents the process of barbarisation, in which normality is denied to a certain group, and thus, distance from it is created. That distance certainly has the function of maintaining self-awareness about the reputation of one’s own group, because abnormal forms of behaviour are projected onto others – Roma. Attempts to build a nation must continually fight otherness from within and outside – what Kristeva (1991: 191)⁴ calls ‘the stranger within us’. In that sense, racism really is an expression or activation of group power (Essed 1991: 36)⁵, and antigypsyism generates a mirror image of society, based on a reverse picture of its proclaimed values and norms.

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² Barany, Z. (2001) *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Elias, N. (2000) *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

⁴ Kristeva, J. (1991) *Strangers to Ourselves*: Columbia University Press.

⁵ Essed, F. (1991) *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*: SAGE Publications.