

# Activism and War Reparations: notes from the field

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# Reworking Difference 1: State Policies

Integration

Assimilation

Multiculturalism

Recognizing the need for a  
differentiated (preferential) treatment  
among the citizens

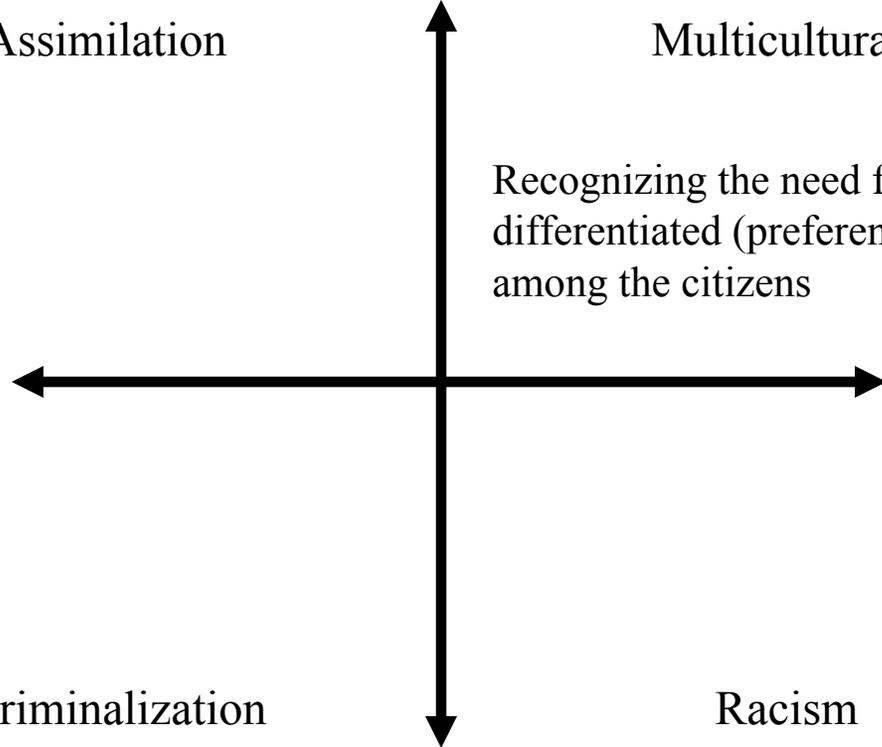
Denying Difference

Affirming Difference

Criminalization

Racism

Exclusion



# The importance of war reparations

- Moral aspects of compensation
  - reconciliation: reestablishing justice
  - recognition of individual and collective suffering
    - possibility for collective claims
    - resource for ethnic mobilization
- Material compensation
  - individual claims
    - the problem of eligibility (Who can apply?)
  - administrative problems
    - decision making (Who will decide upon the applications?)
    - how to distribute the compensation

# Historical context

- World War 2 and the Holocaust
- The socialist attempt at assimilation and integration
- The postsocialist ethnic revitalizations
- The Hungarian Status-Law
- European integration

# A case study from the field 1

*Field Notes 2004-02-14*

During January-February 2004 rumors and emotions has risen among the Roma around Cluj. Several agents (Roma themselves) are gathering compensation requests for the suffering of the Roma during the Second World War. They say that two categories are entitled to the compensation: those who were born before 1945 and are still alive and to those who can prove that they are the direct descendants of somebody recent deceased but born before 1945. The agents are not requesting other proof but a copy of the birth certificate and a copy of the personal id card of the applicant or the certificate of death if the person who seems to be entitled and is deceased. It is mentioned as a condition the Roma origins of the person, but for this no additional proof or declaration is asked. In most cases the agent knows personally the people and even she (is seems that this is a female job) is a relative. They ask instead 500.000-600.000 ROL (~12-14 Euro) for “administrative expenses”. They promise a relative big amount of money (ranging from 75 million ROL [~ 1900 Euro] to 5000 Euro) and “if the application is successful” the applicant should pay the “central agent” (who is based in Turda or Gilău, and he is said to be associated with the Roma Party) 10 to 20 million ROL from the money received. Those who apply agree that this is a fair proportion.

# A case study from the field 2

(continued)

The agents are wondering in the villages and in the city looking for old men and women in Roma communities, and persuading them to put in for money. As most of the Rom I know say, agents are quite successful gathering copies certificates of and money. The “administrative money” gathered is a rather considerable sum for an old and generally quite poor person, but other members of the family are happy to help with a hope of a share in the compensation money. As the official papers are not always at hand in Roma families additional expenses could occur because it is a fee or fine (around 1 million ROL) for asking a new certificate from the mayor’s office and some mayors have even doubled the sum in order to ”let the Gypsies pay if they want compensation”- an old Rom commented to me. The total the price of the application could be more than a monthly regular income of the applicant but most of the elder Roma are happy to make this “little” financial effort in a hope of the “Romani lové”. Some families are gathering certificates of birth and death of their ancestors in order to apply for “their money” that could mean to pay the agents up to four applications and sometimes a lot of time to travel to the place of birth or death of the ‘papu’ or ‘puri daj’ negotiating with officials and paying fees.

# A case study from the field 3

(continued)

The story of the compensation process is created with details: even if there is not a single person who had been received the money there are stories about some who already received the “green envelope” and as soon the “red envelope” arrives they can go to pick up the money. There are some inconsistencies in the stories. It is not agreed upon who is giving this compensation. Most people say that the money should come “from outside”. As the story is linked with the Second World War a part of the people believes that the Germans are paying, some others argue that it must come from the Russians. Still another variant is saying the money will come from Geneva. The excitement inside the families is producing an atmosphere of gambling and hope. In the discussions about the compensation there is a missing link between compensation and the history of the deportations. Most of the Roma in the area were not deported, but a census was made by the Hungarian gendarmes among the Roma and they would follow to be deported as the elderly remember.

Beyond the inconsistencies of the stories told by the agents and circulated among the Roma, there are more problems with the compensation. No recent law or decree was passed by the Romanian government that would make the application-fewer reasonable. The broadly defined category of those who are entitled and the lack of systematic check makes the procedure very dubious.

# Elements of a folk-model for compensation

- A distant and unpredictable decision maker
- The idea of the “Romani lové”
  - in principle all Roma are eligible
- The role of activists / middlemen
  - the apparent legitimacy of payments
  - the source of trust – (ethnicity?)
- Other “legitimate” requirements
  - the need for some kind of official document (copies of identity card, birth certificate, death certificate)
  - personal memories of persecution (?)
- The models of gambling and pyramid schemes (Caritas)
  - the bet is relatively low compared to the promised return
  - only the lucky will win

# Preconditions for the ‘Romani lové’ scheme

- the existence of the folk model for compensation
- the diffuse information from the media on compensation schemes
- the lack of public debate
  - on the legitimacy of compensation
  - on the eligibility criteria
  - on the role of the state
- the cynicism of local authorities
- the incapacity of civil organizations to counteract these abuses
- the trust in the agents (they are also Roma)
- problems related to the political representation of the Roma

# Reworking Difference 2: Social Responses and Costs

Integration

- hegemony of the majority culture  
+ “Color blind” civic solidarity

- requirement for collective action or ethnic  
mobilization  
+ Positive tolerance, valuing diversity

Denying Difference

Affirming Difference

Negative tolerance  
(Keep your differences private!)

Discrimination, segregation,  
and ghettoization

Exclusion

# Some conclusions

- there is a tension between a past oriented ('we all suffered for this') and present oriented folk-models for compensation ('only the lucky will get')
- limits of conventional mobilization / collective action in individualist/competitive social organization
- moral dilemmas on the field and beyond (What should the anthropologists do?)