

Claims-Making Activities by Minority Ethnic Groups – an Empirical Example of Bottom-up Negotiations of Citizenship

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Claims-Making Activities by Minority Ethnic Groups – an Empirical Example of Bottom-up Negotiations of Citizenship

Summary

Various transformations brought about a discursive change around the whole idea of welfare stateism, of citizenship rights and obligations, although the actual implication of such a re-evaluation is disputed. Previous struggles for equality and redistribution have increasingly been accompanied by demands for recognition of a plurality of cultural, ethnic, regional, gendered and sexual identities. Nonetheless, scholarly work on citizenship has to a surprisingly small extent engaged in empirical studies. We know little about how different people understand their own citizenship. In this paper I want to explore the articulation of citizenship, identity and belonging among a minority ethnic group known as the Finnish Roma. While the Roma in Finland share history and national myths with the majority population, they have maintained their particular sense of identity. In spite of increasing recognition their socio-economic position is still poor. The study is based on conversational-like interviews with Romani activists. Recognising the marginalised position of Finnish Roma, the interviews are seen as a form of claims-making. A focus on claims-making conceptualises citizenship as agency, giving a sound role to the citizen's participation in defining the common good.

Keywords: Claims-making, Ethnic Diversity, Roma, Finland, Citizenship

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Introduction

Citizenship is broadly conceptualised as membership in a political community, here the nation-state. An increased Nordic interest in citizenship debates can be traced to the years after the early 1990s recession. Firstly, various transformations brought about a discursive change around the whole idea of welfare stateism, of citizenship rights and obligations, although the actual implication of such a re-evaluation is disputed (Hvinden, Heikkilä and Kankare, 2001; Nygård, 2003). Secondly, previous struggles for equality and redistribution have increasingly been accompanied by demands for recognition of a plurality of cultural, ethnic, regional, gendered and sexual identities (Fraser, 1997; Lister, 2003; Siim, 2000; Stevenson, 2003; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1998).

Scholarly work on citizenship has to a surprisingly small extent engaged in empirical studies. While the theoretical contribution has been extensive, we know little about how different people understand their own citizenship (Jones and Gaventa, 2002; Lister et al., 2003). In this contribution I want to explore the articulation of citizenship among a minority ethnic group known as the Finnish Roma. The study draws on conversational-like interviews with Romani activists. While the Romani population in Finland is rather small, comprising approximately 10 000 people, it has become a symbol of the lately successful minority policies of a country with a less impressive reputation in terms of immigration policies (see also Nordberg, 2003).

After their arrival in Finland in the 16th century, the Roma faced centuries of harsh legislation and assimilationist strategies. During the 19th century and the rise of the nation-state, vagrancy was no longer seen as a strictly moral issue. It also became a national issue (Pulma, 2006). During this time the first governmental Gypsy Committee was established. Through forced education and the exterminating of Romani language, Romani children would internalise civic virtues and nationalist values. After its independence from Russia in 1917, Finland was traumatized by a civil war dividing the nation. Not until after the Second World War, in the 1950s, was the “Gypsy issue” reintroduced at the agenda. The main target of the re-established Gypsy Committee was – again - the children. Through forced settling and the establishment of Children’s homes the Roma would be integrated or rather assimilated (Pulma, 1999; Vehmas, 1961). A new era started at the late 1960s when radical movements brought different excluded groups in society to public attention. For the first time in Finnish history the rights of the Roma to participate in discussions regarding their own matters were stressed. The Roma got their own representation at the reformed Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs. The board stated that Finland, during a period of transition, needed to obtain special measures regarding social, economic and educational issues in order to enable the Roma to have equal opportunities with the majority. From the 1970s onwards the welfare state contributed to an improved social situation even though the dependency on the state increased (Grönfors,

1977; Pulma, 2006). Nonetheless, the socio-economic situation of the Roma is still very poor compared to the rest of the population. The low level of education and the difficulties in entering the labour market have caused a disproportionately high level of unemployment among the Roma. There is also a strong historical stigma attached to Romani identity.

In 1995 the reformed Finnish constitution recognized the right to use and develop Romani language and culture. This was largely a result of the internationalisation of Finnish politics and human rights legislation. What has been important alongside with legislation is also the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs with representatives from different ministries and Romani organisations. While being closed out from traditional political claims-making, state officials and majority politicians have played a significant role in been the defining of Romani citizenship (see also Suonoja and Lindberg, 2000). In spite of the harsh policies and a strong historical and institutional anchorage in the Finnish nation-state, the Roma have not assimilated, but managed to survive as a distinct group with specific cultural markers.

Two aspects of citizenship identity are examined in this research. The personal content, which is the main focus, relates in this particular context to people's claims of being recognised as citizens or not and in which context. Yet, this dimension is intimately linked with the national model or the particularity of the Finnish history and language of citizenship. National models of citizenship, however, change slowly and embody certain formal and discursive structures, which enable or constrain citizenship agency and the full participation and inclusion of all citizens (Siim 2000; Turner 1992). Whereas the national political culture has to be accounted for in claims-making practices, we can consequently learn about the national model of citizenship through exploring citizenship claims-making on a micro level.

Dilemmas of citizenship, identity and belonging

Citizenship may be understood as the core institution of the nation-state, fundamental for democracy as well as national identity. The history of citizenship is a narrative of an increasing amount of individuals who came to enjoy more and more rights and freedoms as part of being a citizen. Civil rights first emerged, then political and finally social rights (Marshall, 2000). In the early days, these citizen rights belonged to a small group of men of noble decent, later expanding to include most men, and eventually including everyone, regardless of race, gender or social position (Goodin, 2003). Citizenship is more than rights and responsibilities. It is also about experiences of belonging and recognition. Yuval-Davis (2004: 215), referring to the communitarian understanding of citizenship as a way of belonging to a community, suggests that 'belonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties ... Nor can it be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of

people'. The egalitarian objectives of the welfare state seem, however, to have failed to respond to the differentiated needs of a heterogeneous population.

Young (1998: 265) has argued that 'where differences in capacities, culture, values, and behavioural styles exist among groups, but some of these groups are privileged, strict adherence to the principle of equal treatment tends to perpetuate oppression or disadvantage'. A group is understood as being oppressed when one or more of the following occurs: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and random violence and harassment motivated by group hatred. Young calls for explicit representation and specific rights for oppressed groups to undermine oppression. This suppression of the other has arguably been supported by the traditional division between the public and the private. 'In the private sphere, individuals were free to remain faithful to their specific historical origins or religious beliefs. The public sphere was a unified and universal space where individuals acted as citizens' (Schnapper, 2002: 5). Multicultural politics or a politics of recognition propagate a public account of differences, institutionalised in legal instruments, policies and practices (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994).

Several scholars have, however, raised critique against the essentialist stance on collective identities as a prerequisite for a politics of recognition (e.g. Benhabib, 2002). Fraser (1997: 185), in a response to pluralist multiculturalism, concludes that it 'tends to substantialize identities, treating them as given positivities instead of as constructed relations. It tends, consequently, to balkanize culture, setting groups apart from one another, ignoring the ways they cut across one another, and inhibiting cross-group interaction and identification'. It is also being questioned whether claims for recognition are efficient enough means to counteract inequality and oppression. A politics of recognition potentially 'diverts attention from the struggle for economic inequality and social justice', leaving the prevailing social order intact (Parekh 2004: 202; also Fraser, 1997; Lister, 2003).

While each individual might possess different subject positions, Isin and Wood (1999: 21) conclude that each individual simultaneously might possess different types of citizenship. Citizenship then is understood as an ensemble of different forms of belonging such as sexual, cultural or diasporic citizenship (also Yuval-Davis, 2004). Critique has also been raised against a devaluation of identity-interests and an affirmation of subject positions at the level of multiple belongings. The latter stance risks losing an identification for collective mobilisation. This dilemma has been dealt with through an emphasis of the right to democratic pluralism or participation of all within a 'differentiated universalism' (Lister, 2003). A way out of the tension within identity politics is to emphasise not the identity categories as such but the process or practice of struggle and claims-making, a form of cultural democratisation. Scholars such as Pakulsi (1997), Turner (1994) and Stevenson (2003), assert that any attempt to rethink models of citizenship would have to problematise questions of 'culture' in ways that are not evident

in Marshall's initial formulation of citizenship. Pakulski (1997: 80) suggests that cultural citizenship should be viewed in terms of satisfying demands for full inclusion into the social community. Cultural rights, in this sense, herald 'a new breed of claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without "normalising" distortion'. Stevenson pushes these arguments further by suggesting that 'ideas of 'cultural' citizenship need to be able to define forms of 'inclusive' public space so that 'minorities' are able to make themselves and their social struggles visible, and open the possibility of dialogic engagement, while offering the possibility of deconstructing normalising assumptions' (Stevenson 2003: 333). Consequently, an emphasis on citizenship as a practice requires a national political model or culture which enables rather than constrains claims-making by different groups with different positions and identities. Also, through an emphasis on the content of citizenship as transformative and contested, a sense of participation and belonging for all can be promoted.

Conducting interviews

Rather than assuming that citizenship identity is given, I want to address how citizenship is articulated and legitimated from below. The interviews are seen as narratives of belonging and exclusion and as instances of claims-making for full citizenship. Recent scholarly debates on citizenship support a shift in analytic focus towards an emphasis of practices. Isin and Turner (2002: 4) charge that citizenship should be seen as a social process 'in which the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities'.

The participants in the interviews undertaken for this study are ten Romani activists, all of whom can be defined as being political in a broad sense or as representing or making claims on behalf of the Roma in the public sphere. The attachment to the public may be through civic organisations, the public sector or party politics on different levels. The participants are both men and women of different ages and regional backgrounds.¹ They were contacted by telephone or e-mail.

The interviews were conducted between December 2003 and June 2004. A guide which covered the relevant themes and research questions was used for the conversational-like interviews.² Next to posing direct questions, it was a deliberate choice to allow myself as an interviewer to actively participate with comments and claims in order to promote a more in-depth discussion. An active interview can be regarded as a form of collaboration towards producing a narrative, whereby the interviewer helps the interviewee to use all her interpretive resources and experiences to deliver nuanced and complex answers (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997). The interviews were recorded and the time of the interviews varied between one hour and two and a half hours.

Research goals and analytical strategy

The following questions governed the analysis: When is a certain notion of belonging and identity called upon and important? What is the political geography of Romani citizenship, e.g. which sites are enacted in claims-making? Finally - what are the exclusions and inclusions of citizenship regarding Finland's Roma? Departing from these questions, the overarching narratives, which evolve from the material, are discussed in relation to theoretical debates on citizenship, identity and belonging.

Silverman (2001) notes that in qualitative research, 'the aim is to understand the participants' categories and to see how these are used in concrete activities (p. 12). The interviews are a discursive field; the function of language is not merely to reflect some form of objective reality, rather, reality is simultaneously being produced through language (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). I am not interested in tracing a "true" representation of meaning, i.e. "Finnishness" through the participants; I am interested in how the category is used. None of our identities is constantly present; they are activated in particular circumstances. The stories and claims, which are triggered in the interview setting, may be different from those which are triggered at a meeting or in a TV debate, but they all jointly contribute to the public construction of Romani citizenship and to shedding light on the exclusions and inclusions by the national culture. Although discourses, or how we speak about different identities, may be instrumental, manipulative and sometimes unconsidered, they are never random. We must resign ourselves to the linguistic categories, which are available. They govern our way of talking, what can be said and how. Consequently, the possible ways of articulating notions of citizenship are restricted in different ways. Arguably, this poses a limit on the participants as well as on me as the interviewer and as the person conducting the analysis.

To be a nation-state member

How notions of identity are raised is significant for the broader understanding of the enactment of minority ethnic citizenship. The primary collective identities that can be traced on a nation-state level are those of being a national and a citizen. In 1990, Brubaker (1990: 311) asserted that 'debates about citizenship, in the age of the nation-state, are debates about nationhood – about what it means, and what it ought to mean, to belong to a nation-state'. In general, the participants were enthusiastic about their attachments to the Finnish nation-state.

National attachments

Firstly, membership in the national community is related to a common descent and history with the rest of the Finnish population, as well as to a common language and a common religion.

Well, now immigrants arrive and we who have been here for over 500 years /.../ we are Finnish, we speak Finnish, the Finnish culture and all the rest is ours, we're a part of this. We've got the same religion, which is very important.

This essentialist dimension of national identity was important particularly when relating the situation of Finnish Roma to that of immigrants, groups without the historical legacy. A traditional minority ethnic group must draw on its own argumentative logics when claiming recognition as full and valued citizens. Later in the text, it is shown how the same national culture is constructed as a barrier for inclusion and equality. Essentialist attributes become the entry-point for making legitimate claims qua citizens and not only through particularist narratives (c.f. Pakulski, 1997). Next to the historical legacy or cultural traits, a *sense* of belonging depicts the Romani attachment to the national community. This is articulated through instances of patriotism attached to sporting events and narratives of travelling. For one of the interviewees, the idea of the Roma as a 'nation', has provided a sense of community and uniqueness.

When I was a child, and I was teased at school for being a Gypsy, and I went home, I was six and /.../ my father saw my sadness /.../ he created this image of how the Roma travelled from India, and since this time I have had this feeling, when looking at the map of the world, that the Roma are all over, or that such a Roma nation is there behind it all /.../.

The participant asserts that this perspective is rare among Finnish Roma, an understanding reflected throughout the interviews.

I am completely against it. It confuses the whole agenda of minority politics, because it is a completely different thing to talk about a Romani minority than a Roma nation. /.../ when I consider that the Finnish Roma identify with the Finnish society and /.../ if we start to push through such an idea, that we are a nation, then we will soon be building our own territory.

On a European level, there have been strong attempts to promote such a cross-border conceptualisation, emphasising the common culture and the Indian descent. The 'nation' frame has been promoted by the Roma National Congress and the International Romani Union and was adopted as a declaration by the World National Congress in Prague in 2000 (Vermeersch, 2003). Experiences of a trans-national sense of ethnicity vary, but the

solidarity towards a Roma 'nation' is of a second order. It is important, however, to recognise the context of the interviews. A more multifaceted understanding of a Roma nation or brotherhood might occur in a different setting; here it is implicitly political and consequently instrumental even though ethnic rhetoric is used as well:

I guess when you see a person in need [Romani asylum-seekers], you don't just pass her like that; it works on the individual level. But then, when it comes to, say, within brackets, state politics. Look, as we don't know these people better than the Finns, it's not obvious that some people belong to the Romani community. Because in the end, we might not have anything else in common than the awareness of the ethnic identity, but it might be that we don't have much in common at all.³

Thus, claims for inclusion into the national collective are, firstly, legitimised through expressing an essential national identity (Smith, 1986). The Romani activists justify their position, not only as a particular group next to the Finnish people, but as being part of the Finnish identity. In spite of the essentialist or primordial connotations of discourse on the nation, diversity is not reduced to one 'ethnicity'. The emphasis is on the national culture rather than on the people residing within the community. On the level of personal encounters, cultural sameness can be related to immigrants: 'But then again, speaking of culture /.../ surely we have more in common with those who come from some other place than Finland; from just one catch of the eye, it is easy to know what is going on'.

Civic attachments

While the imagined community is characterized by a rhetoric of common decent and culture, people are also bound together by mutual obligation (Calhoun, 1997). History becomes important also for constructing a legitimate citizenship position through participatory activities, such as being at war. In a Finnish context, narratives attached to defending the nation against a powerful enemy during the Second World War have been important for creating a sense of community within the young nation-state (Anttonen, 1998; Lepola, 2000; Pylkkänen, 2004). This understanding is mirrored in claims-making strategies used by Romani participants.

You know, our men also fought in the war and made their sacrifice just like any other Finn. You know that a while ago, a monument for Romani war veterans was unveiled at *Hietaniemi* cemetery. This is unique for the whole world. So, we have no doubt always identified very strongly with this Finnishness and Finland and with this nationality.

The participants emphasise participation in nation-state *building* next to being part of the national culture. The highlighting of the uniqueness of the monument indicates an assumed mutuality between the Roma and the state – not only did they participate, they are also recognised. When this participant asserts that ‘we have *no doubt* always...’ it can be interpreted as a counter-argumentative strategy against an assumption of Roma as not identifying strongly with Finnish identity. Contemporary citizenship identity is constructed through countering a hegemonic discourse on the Roma as non-working and non-participatory. Consequently, citizenship is articulated through various forms of obligations, seemingly prior to rights.

When I have done my duty and worked for this Finnish society and paid my taxes, I feel that I have met the requirements set by society, I have done my military service and served this state in accordance with public law and so on, so I should be given the right to be a good Finnish citizen regardless of the fact that I am a Roma, who has a different ethnic background. Or what is the criterion - are you a good Finn?

Consequently, citizenship turns into a position that must be ‘earned’ (c.f. Börjesson, 2003), reflecting a general trend of increasing ‘duties discourse’ related to a communitarianist understanding of citizenship as an obligation to contribute to the ‘common good’ (Lister, 2003). The Finnish citizenship tradition has arguably put a strong emphasis on the meaning of work as a foundation for being a ‘good citizen’ (Anttonen, 1998). The participants do, however, make an attempt to broaden the understanding of participation in society.

The Roma /.../ take a very active part in NGOs and in the parishes, and just think about the care work they do for their old people and their children. It is the kind of work that is not noticed or valued by the rest of the society, and is at least not measured in any way.

The devaluation of care-work has been stressed in feminist critique of the public-private divide in traditional conceptualisations of citizenship. This debate points to questions about the political meaning of motherhood, arguing that the education and caring of the young is part of political life (Lister, 2003; Pateman, 1989; Siim, 2000). According to the traditional role differentiation within Romani culture, women are responsible for creating a home and raising children. Nonetheless, Finnish Romani women have had a comparatively active role in civil society and state politics (Markkanen, 2003). Siim (2000: 34) concludes that the inclusion of Scandinavian women in the political elite is not primarily determined by socio-economic factors but to a larger extent by political factors such as state feminism and the new women’s movement.

While a national culture and nation-building are strongly articulated, the Roma generally refer to a community of 'interest' rather than to a community of 'blood'. The emphasis on the state is not surprising, considering that many participants attach their Finnish citizenship identity to statements about the welfare state and the rule of law, about the equal position of individual citizens.

To be on the outside

Distributive inequality

The participants see the Roma as an underclass in Finnish society. This is particularly the case regarding schooling, but also regarding employment.

We are not really inside this society, /.../ of course, basically we are, but looking at any field of life and comparing for instance Finns and Roma, then no doubt we are much lower than others. I talk about education, work and all different kinds of problems that emerge in life...

A rhetoric of equal treatment is used as a response to such injustice, seen as a consequence of predominantly structural change. The participants assert that the welfare state has prevented the Finnish Roma from deeper poverty.

But in my opinion there is a clear justness and the Roma can certainly not complain about that, but in a way we are in a sort of social trap; these differences between the rich and poor have grown, and since we live in this kind of consumer society, in a way we can no longer cope with as little as earlier. So in one sense the lives of the young ones, those who don't have a job or an education, for example, their lives are limited to a minimal, narrow area/.../ So mentally it can sometimes be quite hard/.../but I think/.../from time to time we can also be content with how things are here in Finland; here people at least have roofs over their heads and bread on the table and so on as long as they have done the right thing.

There seems to be a consensus regarding the need to widen the scope from previous critique against public authorities to encouraging the empowerment of the Roma themselves.⁴ On the one hand, empowerment is claimed to be necessary for increasing the available resources. On the other hand, empowerment is related to the breaking of symbolic boundaries. The myth of an imagined community is maintained by a system of symbolic 'border guards', which are linked to various cultural codes (Armstrong, 1982). While feeling connected to the societal culture through language, religion and history, it is the same societal culture that closes the Roma out from full participation. Karl Deutsch (1966) talked about 'communicative communities',

a notion of citizenship salient also in recent conceptualisations of cultural citizenship (Stevenson, 2003).

When I began my studies, I was far in my twenties, I already had children and everything, and it was extremely difficult for me, I thought, oh my God, what is this, when I speak Finnish and these people speak Finnish, but I don't, like, get a thing, I somehow don't understand, that everything, like the literature and all this, it was extremely difficult, because I had to do a duplication of work, because I translated it to my own language, not exactly to Romani, but to this my own Finnish language, because the Finnish that we speak, it is different from the language used by the majority, and it is of big importance.

The emphasis on self-esteem is an important foundation for economic and social equality. Parekh (2004: 2006) asserts that redistribution is not solely economic and political, but has to be striven for and also sustained, which 'requires deep psychological, moral and cultural changes among the oppressed'. For this to occur, Parekh calls for a politics of recognition as an integral part of cultural change, to support the politics of redistribution. Thus, although the Roma see themselves as being part of the 'imagined community', they experience a lack of access to the 'communicative community'. While liberal theory has seen citizen training as essential for securing a job, virtue ethics understand the role of education as a requirement for a person who is to become an individual and to achieve personal autonomy (Isin and Turner 2002). While recognising the national cultural structures as governing the access to full citizenship, some participants further point to the importance of changing the particularist cultural structure of the Romani community and giving way for a more emancipated, individualist understanding of being a Rom.

I think that the starting point should be, and for me it is that the Roma would find their own new way of life. I don't mean that the old ways should be discarded but it's time for a change, and perhaps the biggest issue is this about the children, about supporting their going to school, big changes are needed there and those changes are on their way, but it takes time and through those changes different models for life will be found./.../ this is the issue which depends on the Roma themselves.

Discrimination as misrecognition

The counter-balancing of the discourse on Roma as non-participants may be interpreted as a claim for respect, an important thread running through the discussion. A claim for respect can also be traced in statements about discriminatory practices. While the 'state' is conceptualised as good and benevolent, participants have frequently experienced a discriminated

citizenship identity in everyday life situations, turning discrimination into the 'black hole' of citizenship.

...if we compare to other countries, of course the conditions in Finland are really very good and we have the right – well how do you say it – that it has been good to live in Finland. But /.../ considering that Finland is a welfare state and it's being talked so much about that and it is being held up as a model, so despite that, no doubt, in practice /.../, often you can notice that it comes even from the authority level. I have for example experience from such situations when I have made a complaint to the police about this kind of discrimination, so even the police have thought, well certainly we can proceed like this.

The participants initially indicate that discrimination and prejudice are such common elements of the daily lives of the Roma, and also so widely known, that the topic is not very inspiring to address. Nonetheless, when asked about full citizenship, instances of discrimination and humiliation were passionate examples of why the Romani participants do not consider themselves as full citizens. The point is also raised that most Roma are so accustomed to being discriminated against that they cannot seriously challenge it.

But, to us it is somehow built-in, that perhaps we too often accept that, that we don't really /.../ although we might say that 'this is wrong', that you can't act like that and that this violates my rights, but then we don't really, so strongly, believe that this actually is the case.

Attachment to the Romani community or other forms of support are essential for counteracting the negative experience of discriminatory and exclusionary practices in everyday encounters. One of the interviewees stresses the importance of good role models.

To already as a child be aware of the fact that in a certain way you are wrong/.../, so if you haven't got a solid home, background support, it doesn't have to be only parents, it can also be a teacher, someone that is, an adult or so who infuses a strong and sound self-esteem into the child, a person easily gets stuck in the mould that is cast for him or her. You start to put into practice these people's – what should I say – these people have decided that you are a certain kind of person, then a great deal of strength and courage is required in order to show them that 'hey, I'm not like that, what you assume me to be'.

Nonetheless, there are also examples of situations in which the Roma have been seen as individuals with rights and obligations as an individual. The main arena for undressing a particularistic identity is the workplace.

Somehow, at my first job, I had really good fellow-workers and the whole group there, including the boss, it was a big working community and I somehow got a very good start, a good professional identity. Somehow it has been, I always think, that it was really the basis for everything, that people trusted me and that I was treated just like Saga [assumed name] and as a human being.

Recognition in the meaning of a sphere free from disrespectful treatment is subsequently found where the Romani label is undressed and when treated as an individual. Instances of claims-making drawing on the celebration of Romani identity do not really occur, except in the context of claimed recognition in school books.

To be a Rom – the private sphere?

While Romani identity is articulated as a communitarian narrative with a strong emphasis on belonging and solidarity, and on the homogeneity as a group, it is not necessarily in conflict with the national identity, a position sometimes understood as a 'hyphenated identity' (Yuval-Davis, 2004: 217). As was concluded earlier, the public identity is a citizenship identity based on historical sentiment and affiliations with the welfare state; a societal culture which does not require cultural homogenisation.

Communitarian identity

The identification with 'Romani culture' is first and foremost expressed on a personal level: '...it is somehow in people's blood, in the soul, something inside a person, which cannot perhaps be described in words'. Yet these intra-cultural notions are simultaneously connecting individuals to the community.

You know that in your own culture among those people, there you know all the norms and ways to act and be, so then after all it is quite hard then when you are in a completely different cultural environment and that when you're not familiar with the norms and those things, then it is exhausting in another way. When you are among people of your own kind you feel comfortable.

Thus, cultural identity is, in this sense, a structuring category for individual action and, importantly, providing a sense of security. Identity has been understood as 'a moral, anchor, a sense of direction, and a body of ideals and values'. As the world becomes globalised and rootless, group identities are claimed to become a source of stability, which provides confidence to adjust with the times (Parekh, 2004: 207, see also Castells, 1996-1998). A rather dominant topic in the interviews was precisely the adaptation to

change and the demands of majority society. Some participants expressed concern for the effects of a disintegrated community.

....that families now live their own lives, one family here and one family there, and that children no longer have this close connection, for instance to other Romani children /.../ There is a risk that if this strong support and security provided at home no longer exists, /.../ we fall through the safety net and end up in no-man's-land, if these our own roots are not there.

Rather than expressing a clearly fragmented identity (Hall, 1996), the interviewees point to the different spaces or sites that the Roma need to manage. Some participants conclude that they live in two cultures, the Romani and the Finnish, but no one suggested their Romani identity being insignificant or fading.

Like an old Romani man once noted, a genuine Rom must be able to live his/her life in three different ways, the Finnish way, the Romani way and the gentleman's way. According to the circumstance, you must be able to handle every situation /.../ Decades ago, when the Roma were part of the agrarian society /.../ social skills were needed as well as the ability to go into different situations /.../ While they'd be uneducated, they'd beat professors and other intelligent people with their conventional wisdom and intelligence, or let's say wisdom.

Next to the importance of social ties - religion, and to a lesser extent the Romani language were the most important markers of Romani identity. Particular traditions were not frequently mentioned and they primarily marked the sense of belonging, not only to the Romani minority, but particularly to the Finnish Romani minority.

Minority status

When the participants relate to Romani identity, it is a predominantly private realm, albeit not exclusively so. Within a minority status frame it is also attached to the public. The identification with a minority group is, firstly, important for the recognition of the status as a 'national' or 'traditional' minority, compared to newcomers. The position as a traditional minority is strongly related to emotions and symbols – part of being a national. Secondly, the notion of a minority is attached to particular needs and rights on a group level. The dominant assertion is that particular rights ultimately lead to inequality. Some of the participants totally object to the idea of particular rights for Roma: '... I don't accept the idea that some group is strongly supported just because it represents /.../ a particular ethnic group, regardless of its history...' Thus, in terms of legal rights, the participants principally join a liberal tradition of individual and equal rights. However, three

different arguments for legitimising specific rights can be traced in the discussions. Firstly, during a time of transition particular support is needed in order to render future equality possible.

And now, there was this new directive from the Ministry of Labour concerning the improvement of employment for only Romani people, whatever that will bring about. But I think this is quite bad somehow, that if everything must be regulated by law, it will also take people to an unequal position, wouldn't it? Thus, when my rights are granted through special regulations, although both of us are Finnish /.../ It is good that there is a period of transition /.../ but in principle I don't necessarily find it that good...

Secondly, various support systems may be necessary in order to strengthen the self-esteem of children and young people in particular, something which is related to the previous discussion on a communicative larger community. One of the participants notes that vocational training for Roma, exclusively, is a double edged sword:

....like those sewing courses, certainly, someone might even get a profession because those costume makers are needed /.../ but considering this development, well, it is perhaps not the best way to promote change, which inevitably is coming and happening, yet I still see those courses directed to Roma as good, since the threshold is so huge for many, even if they want to study, they don't really dare to go to those majority... because they feel this inferiority.

When Young (1998: 286) asserts that group rights should not be about giving special compensation to the disadvantaged until they attain normality, but 'rather to denormalize the way institutions formulate their rules by revealing the plural circumstances and needs that exist, or ought to exist, within them', the Roma clearly stick to this understanding, problematising the affirmative policies hitherto adapted to promote integration, particularly in the labour market.

Thirdly, the political level is raised as an arena where special boards are needed for including the Roma in decision-making on matters of particular interest to them, such as schooling and language training. Also housing is an arena where special attention is claimed. The constitutional right to maintaining and developing Romani culture and language and the new Non-Discrimination Act are conceived as sufficient juridical instruments in terms of legal rights. The main concern is the lack of resources. One of the participants also points to the rights of the majority to learn about minority culture.

Also majority children have the right to learn about the minorities. I don't understand why information about Finnish minorities is not yet

included in teaching materials /.../ It is very tough to circulate in every single Finnish school and talk about basic things.

Sites - the political geography of claims-making

Recent debates on trans-national or post-national citizenship suggest that the contemporary practice of citizenship is increasingly decoupled from belonging in the national collective. Citizens are claimed to 'increasingly appeal to supra-national entities (the European Court or the European Parliament for example) to satisfy or achieve their (national) citizenship rights' (Turner, 1993: 469). Although several participants express a sense of pride in the initiative made by Finnish President, Tarja Halonen, to establish a European Romani and Travellers Forum at the Council of Europe, the Forum is primarily seen as a site for claims-making on behalf of Central and Eastern European Roma: 'If it can be seen as ... something positive and as getting a /.../ channel of influence, which would help these people, then it could be quite good'.

The previous discussion implies that the nation-state is conceptualised as the major setting for deciding on Finnish Romani matters. Not only has the state been celebrated for promoting the rights of the Roma in a general sense, but the activists stress the significance of state involvement also on a concrete level. When relating to the major official site of Romani claims-making, the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, one of the participants concludes that: 'There are different Ministry representatives from the Government, who give, who raise the profile immediately /.../ then we sort of jointly discuss with a mandate, which can also take things forward /.../' Thus, the co-operation with government officials is claimed to be significant in term of access to power and influence, but also as a form of training for citizenship agency: '...the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs /.../ has importantly raised many Romani leaders /.../ I regard its work as being very influential'. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992: 23) conclude that 'Different states differ in /.../ how sections and groupings from the civil society gain access to the state's coercive and controlling powers. It is within this context that the relationship between nations and states and other forms of ethnic groupings and the state has to be analysed'. Classical liberalism attempts to divide the state and civil society in order to minimize state interference. Pylkkänen (2004) argues that the Finnish history of law, in spite of its predominantly liberal notions, has embodied strong communitarian understandings of the needs of a whole.

The importance of the Advisory Board is undisputed. Criticism is raised, however, against the lack of democracy when electing the Romani representatives and against the consequent imbalance of power, not the least regionally: "This is surely a big challenge for the future, how to prevent such a concentration to the capital city, that Roma from the capital area decide about issues which affect all the Roma of Finland...'

Party politics have attracted a few Roma on the local level where they have joined predominantly leftist parties or the Christian democrats. When participants are asked about their role in this sphere, most of them see themselves as individuals and persons, rather than as Romani activists. The emphasis on group representation follows the ideals expressed by Young (1998: 277). She does, however, stress the importance, not only for groups to express their particular needs and interests, but also to maximise practical wisdom and understanding through differentiated knowledge about social facts and policies, about all aspects of the society. Thus, political agency is needed, not only within special boards, but in the political institutions of the larger society.

Discussion

I like to think of my analysis as a reconstruction of Romani activists' talk about citizenship in general and Finnish citizenship in particular. Such a reconstruction of the social reality has been governed not solely by the transcribed interviews, but also by theoretical and philosophical citizenship debates. In this last section of the article, I will make an attempt to more explicitly discuss the empirical data in relation to this conceptual and categorical content of citizenship as well as to the cultural content of citizenship, rooted in the particularity of the national model.

While the logic of citizenship necessarily implies an exclusionary potential, the articulation of citizenship identities tells us something about the boundaries of citizenship and how they are drawn. A sense of belonging to the citizenry of the nation-state is produced through historical narratives, predominantly of participation in war, through religion and language. Nonetheless, the marginal position of the Roma becomes salient when the narrative is another than that of patriotism and national belonging. The sense of exclusion from full citizenship derives from the same national culture and it is essentially articulated in a three-dimensional way, entailing a material, symbolic and emotional dimension. Structural change and an increasingly consumer oriented society are seen as the major components contributing to the relative material exclusion, but the focus here is predominantly on empowerment. Symbolic boundary drawings follow from the cultural border guards or the nature of a 'communicative' community (e.g. Stevenson, 2003), one in which the Roma find it hard to navigate. Emotional exclusion is the result of experiences of discriminatory practices and disrespect, particularly in everyday life encounters but also as a result of redistributive and symbolic inequality.

Romani activists allude to a sense of faith in the redistributive structures of the Nordic welfare state to be efficient enough to prevent economic injustice. The universalist ideals include the Roma in the citizenry, as full and equal members with the same rights, obligations and needs as the rest of the population. Arguably, the strong narrative of the 'good egalitarian state' reflects the fear of affirmative action to potentially increase exclusion

and stigmatisation at the margins. While the Roma see themselves as an underclass in society, claims for economic justice are articulated through the cultural lens as a consequence of a poor integration in or access to the larger culture. Claims for recognition are predominantly raised within a language of cultural democratisation or full inclusion into the communicative community, rather than within a language of redistributive particular rights. Nonetheless, recognition is largely claimed as a response to economic and social injustice and therefore notions of redistribution and recognition cannot be separated. As a response to various debates about a politics of recognition vs. a politics of redistribution, Isin and Wood (1999: 2) rightly assert that perhaps the distinction between culture and economy, cultural and social, and hence, between redistribution and recognition is an analytic distinction that, in their everyday struggles, the new social movements do not make.

As a result of the sense of symbolic and emotional misrecognition at a nation-state level, experiences of belonging are found within another layer of citizenship, within the minority ethnic community. Belonging has been depicted as a thicker concept than that of citizenship. Yuval-Davis points to the emotions memberships evoke, concluding that: 'we cannot leave the emotional outside our considerations and our theorizations of social justice and equality' (2002: 2; see also Lister, 2003) According to Brubaker, the nation-state should be understood as an 'institutional and *social-psychological* reality' (1990: 311, my own emphasis). The tension of the debate on cultural citizenship rests in the understanding of citizenship as the universal and public, and identity as the particular and private. If recognising that human beings are culturally embedded and that culture is an essential source of our 'system of meaning, values and ideals', culture cannot be abstracted to the private sphere (Parekh, 2004: 201).

While the welfare state functions as an important glue to hold the citizenry together, including the Roma, the participants call for a virtue ethics with emphasis on the breaking of cultural and communicative boundaries through education and integration, something which would also promote self-esteem and confidence. While a community of interest constitutes the essential bond to the larger society, in order to be fully included, a cultural democratisation is necessary. Nonetheless, the Roma do not explicitly call for a transformation of the societal institutions in order to reflect the differentiated experiences of the population, but rather for means of empowering the Roma themselves and for transforming social and ethnic relations between the people as individuals.

Notes

¹ A more thorough account of the grounds on which participants were selected is not possible due to the small number of Roma in Finland.

² The main themes of the interviews were: identity, rights and obligations and agency. While the same research guide was used for all the interviews, the

main focus varied depending on how the conversation developed, usually due to the particular fields of interest and competence.

³ Groups of Romani asylum-seekers have also arrived in Finland during the last couple of years, causing a lively public debate (Nordberg, 2004).

⁴ The political history of the Roma in Finland is not flattering. This could serve as a rationale for a totally marginalised national identity. Yet, one can ponder whether it now is a time for reconciliation, to at least temporarily 'go with the positive flow' in a time when the position of the Finnish Roma, at least regarding legislation, is better than ever.

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