Call for Papers

International Early Career Researchers Conference
Interdependencies between Memory Culture and Human Rights in the Context of Romani Communities

Scope

The justification and implementation of human rights often reverts to past atrocities and crimes against humanity. Particularly in the context of marginalized groups, such as Romani communities all over Europe, human rights in the present and past are often intertwined in a complex relationship. Thus, it is often emphasized that *"a sense of history is necessary in order to restore dignity and to empower the victims of massive human rights violations into actors for the struggle of securing human rights and dignity for everyone."*[1]

The conference "Interdependencies between Memory Culture and Human Rights in the Context of Romani Communities" is designed to gather expertise on the multifold connections between human rights and memory culture in relation to Romani communities. Taking place at the University of Graz (Austria), the event is aimed at international early career researchers. A thorough investigation of the conference topic demands a multidisciplinary approach to cover the plethora of contexts in which the marginalization of Romani communities throughout Europe can be related to the relevance (or lack thereof) of historical narratives of Romani suffering. Therefore, the conference's goal is to discuss how memory culture regarding the persecution of Romani people under National Socialism presently connects to human rights awareness and implementation. The underlying research project located at the University of Graz (see "Background and Further Information" below) combines the explanatory power of history and human rights law to examine the immense shift in experience of Central European Romani communities vis á vis their history and social positions. Changing circumstances for marginalized groups in public life and education systems and the implementation of the corresponding human rights are of specific interest for the legal analysis. The increasing awareness about human rights violations towards contemporary Romani communities has a direct relation to the mainstreaming of Romani suffering as a core element of European history, according to the project's preliminary findings. As argued in the project, these processes result in an increasingly abstract and less-specific culture of memory that remains outspoken about historical perpetration but non-committal towards present social injustice. In these contexts, Romani victims of the past are remembered, but contemporary Romani communities are more often excluded than given a voice. Whilst the above-mentioned research project has a cultural studies and legal focus, it also includes elements of historical and social studies, critical racism and gender/queer studies and is open for inputs from other disciplines as well. The conference therefore aims to create an environment for wide-ranged, yet topic-focused discussions able to enrich all participants' research by exploring new angles on the issues at hand.

[1] Ellie Keen, Rui Gomes: Right to Remember - A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide, Strasbourg, 2014.

If your research touches upon the topic of Romani communities, we are glad to accept papers on the following issues:

- The influence of public discourses about Romani suffering during Fascism, National Socialism and WW2 on contemporary issues of human rights implementation for Romani communities
- The effect(s) of a changed public perception of Romani communities on the public negotiation of historical narratives (and vice versa)
- The ways in which Romani empowerment projects make use of historical narratives to counter silencing and create effective speaker positions for Romani subjects
- The multi-folded contexts and effects of memory projects regarding Romani history
- Interdependencies between memory initiatives and other Romani-related projects
- The significance of agents of memory, their position and function in contemporary cultural, societal and legislative processes
- The relevance of human rights (specifically education and engagement in public life) in advisory statements to national legislators or the European Union on how to deal with present challenges regarding the inclusion of Romani communities
- The rhetoric of history and/or human rights in the (implementation) reports on national strategies following the EU framework for the integration of Romani communities
- Strategic litigation of (pending) cases concerning Romani rights (especially to education) before national or international courts or other tribunals
- National and international networking in institutions of the Romani movement on issues connecting history and human rights

Call Deadline and Contact Details

Proposals of early Post-Docs and PhD-candidates are welcome up to August 19th 2017 (no longer than 1500 characters incl. spaces), submitted to Stefan Benedik

E-Mail: Stefan Benedik, Gregor Fischer, Ursula Mindler-Steiner
Project Homepage

Date, Venue and Details

November 10th/11th , University of Graz, Austria

Due to the conference's restricted budget the number of travel or accommodation grants is highly limited. Applicants are asked to specify their current affiliation at research institutions and income situation if they seek to be granted a bursary for part of the travel and accommodation costs.

Background and Further Information

The international conference "Interdependencies between Memory Culture and Human Rights in the Context of Romani Communities" will be held in the framework of a joint research project of the University of Graz' Institute of History, the European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy of the University of Graz (UNI-ETC), the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) and the Andrássy University Budapest (AUB). The project seeks to shed light on the relations between contemporary memory culture and human rights practices regarding local Romani communities. As Austria has an "autochthonous" Romani population, it has recognized those communities and granted them special rights via the Austrian Ethnic Groups Act in 1993. *Inter alia*, those rights include special budgets for community projects, minority language education, and

consultation rights. Still, inequalities in the educational system and regarding participation in public life persist albeit national commitment, ongoing political engagement and memory activism, as preliminary findings of the project show. Notwithstanding universal and regional human rights instruments accepted by all states of the European Union and the increasing visibility of Romani people as a central victim group of National Socialism, phenomena of discrimination can be observed all across Europe.

Romani associations in Austria make continuous efforts to communicate their agendas publicly, both regarding history and the present, an undertaking in which they are partially successful. Also, the "Austrian National Contact Point for the Integration of Roma" and the "Roma Dialogue Platform" bring together community representatives and administrative staff to discuss pressing issues. However, the visibility and concrete output of these consultation processes does not stringently correspond with social and cultural representation. Memory culture serves as an example here: While in some Austrian municipalities memorials for Romani victims of National Socialism have been installed without any difficulty, in others, their setup was not permitted by the respective local authorities.

Such instances suggest a reading of hegemonic forms of memory relating to Romani experiences in Central Europe as "non-committal". The project therefore seeks to understand the paradox between an increased acceptance of stories of victimhood and persecution of Romani communities and the simultaneous continuation or even radicalization of racist rhetoric against Romani people as excluded from society and/or criminals. In Austria, this has often been explained as a consequence of divergent treatment of "native" vs. "foreign" communities, but a closer look reveals a more complex picture. While Romani suffering has over time and due to considerable efforts been accepted as a significant part of Austrian "national" cultural memory, that conveys an understanding as a reservoir for abstract "moral lessons", not as commitment towards the survivors and descendants of actual victims. Therefore, the present discourse seems to separate past and contemporary violence/injustice towards Romani people rather than migrant from non-migrant Romani communities. This tendency is clearly visible in the increasing numbers of memory projects in Austria dedicated explicitly to Romani victims of National Socialism at those places where Romani communities are (and have always been) mostly invisible. On the contrary, there are present cases in which authorities continuously deny Romani representatives the right to construct small gravestone-like memorials at places where Romani people continue to make up a visible part of the population. Often, initiatives with the aim to increase awareness about the suffering of Romani communities in the past have left no space for Romani voices, thus once again fostering an abstract understanding of National Socialist persecution as a means of contributing to an abstract "coming to terms with the past" rather than using that memory as a concrete subject for addressing ongoing marginalisation.