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Exploring misery discourses: problematized Roma in labour market projects

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse learning practices in labour market projects co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) targeting unemployed Roma in Sweden. The empirical material consists of 18 project descriptions from ESF projects, as well as national and European policy documents concerned with the inclusion of the Roma in contemporary Europe. The contemporary empirical material is analysed in relation to a government report from 1956 concerning the ‘Roma issue’ in Sweden. The analytical perspective of the study is governmentality, and the analysis focuses on different kinds of problematisations and the discursive positioning of the Roma subjects. One of the main findings is that unemployed Roma are situated in various discourses of misery and constructed as in need of reshaping their subjectivities in order to become educable as well as employable.

Keywords: Roma; learning; adult education; European Social Fund (ESF)

Introduction

In today’s Europe the situation for Roma is problematized, not least in terms of lacking education (Miskovic, 2013). In what has been called ‘the learning society’ (Masschelein, Simons, Bröckling & Pongratz, 2007), lack of education becomes particularly problematic. The aim of this article is to analyse learning practices in labour market projects targeting unemployed Roma in Sweden. The focus of the analysis is on the discursive construction and governing of Roma in relation to contemporary norms of the employable citizen. Further, the analysis is historicised through a government report from 1956 concerning the ‘Roma issue’ in Sweden (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956). Questions guiding the analysis are: How are the Roma constructed, positioned and problematized in relation to un/employability and learning? How are the Roma to become employable and included in society?

In EU politics, there seems to be an agreement that ‘Roma integration requires an enhanced political commitment to Roma inclusion’ (European Commission, 2011, p. 11). This political commitment is to be brought into action in many different practices,

whereas the empirical focus for this article is one illustrative example: labour market projects, as co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). These projects can be seen as sites for adult learning, not least in terms of learning to become employable (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004).

The main reason for choosing Roma as a group to analyse stems from previous research on ESF projects targeting unemployed ‘people with a foreign background’ (Vesterberg, 2013). This research shows that, in spite of a political ambition in Sweden to maintain general welfare and integration politics, two target groups are pinpointed on ethnic or national grounds –Somalis and the Roma¹.

Analytical perspective

The analytical perspective of this study is inspired by Michel Foucault (2007, 2008) and other scholars who have elaborated on the concept of governmentality (cf. Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999; Walters, 2012). A governmentality analysis focuses on different kinds of problematizations, as ‘problems do not exist in themselves’ (Dean & Hindess, 1998, p. 9), but rather, are produced in specific times, places and institutional and professional milieus. Power is, from this perspective, understood not only as prohibiting and repressing, but also as productive (Foucault, 1980, p. 59). Thus, power relationships constructs subjects, directing the will and aspirations of people, and conducting the conduct of the targeted subjects. These processes are facilitated by claims to truth and knowledge. Hence, power and knowledge are intertwined and closely related to problematizations. From a governmentality perspective, learning becomes a way of governing people through power and knowledge in attempts to conduct the conduct of the targeted learner (Masschelein et al., 2007).

As governmentality has a discursive character, it is crucial to ‘analyse the conceptualizations, explanations and calculations that inhabit the governmental field’ (Miller & Rose 2008, p. 29f) one is analysing. Following Foucault (1991, p. 58), the focus of the analysis is on the discursive positioning of subjects, in other words, how these subjects are constructed, positioned and problematized through particular ways of reasoning about the unemployed Roma in relation to un/employability and learning. In this way, the targeted subjects are made governable through problematizations.

There is a long tradition of problematizing the Roma. Historically, the Roma population in Europe has been understood as ‘representative of an underdeveloped, uncivilized, non-European pariah culture’ in need of radical assimilation (van Baar, 2011, p. 78). In such ways of reasoning about the Roma concepts of race, nation, ethnicity and culture have been mobilized in constructing ‘the Roma problem’. It has also been argued that much research on and with the Roma is primarily concerned with who the Roma are what they are doing, and that theoretically informed research concerned with broader questions of discourses on the Roma are scarce (Tremlett, McGarry & Agarin, 2014). In line with a governmentality perspective the Roma is, in this article, understood as an ‘invented’ category, as well as any other ethnicity or nationality (Isin, 2012, p. 161). The Roma are understood and analysed as an ethnicized discursive construction. From this perspective, any ‘people’ is the effect of relationships of power and knowledge, producing subjectivities and making subjects governable in various ways. Regarding the construction of the Roma people, a range of ‘Gypsy scholars’ from the late eighteenth and early seventeenth centuries have been crucial in producing ‘truths’ about the ‘nature’ and ‘origins’ of the Roma as a European minority (van Baar, 2011). Such ‘truths’ have had a persistent impact on popular understandings

of the Roma in Europe, illustrating the close connection of power and knowledge in constructing ‘a people’.

Methodological considerations and empirical material

ESF in Sweden has so far co-financed more than 90,000 projects with more than one million participants. ESF is financing projects with up to 40 per cent of the total costs. The remaining costs are covered by public co-financing, for instance via the Employment Service, the Social Insurance Agency, local authorities, or county boards. The main empirical material analysed in this article consists of 18 project descriptions from projects found with the search word ‘Roma’ in the ESF project database.² The analysed projects existed during the ESF program period of 2007 – 2013, and the timespan of the projects range from six months up to three years. The total budget for the ESF (for the whole of the EU) during this programme period was SEK 750 billion. Out of these, the ESF in Sweden got SEK 6.2 billion.³ The analysed ESF projects have as their overarching goal to increase the supply of labour and to create social inclusion. The projects targeting the Roma are driven by a range of organizations, from civil society organizations such as adult education providers (eight projects), to universities (two projects), county administrative boards and municipalities (seven projects), and the public employment office (one project).

The size of the project descriptions range from approximately two to ten pages, and their content is, to a certain degree determined in advance, as there are several mandatory headings imposed by the ESF.⁴ From a governmentality perspective, the project descriptions are analysed as discursive texts constituting the learning practices which constructs and position the Roma subjects within the discourse (cf. Fejes, 2014, p. 6). The projectification of welfare (Brunila, 2011) produces a specific discursive language genre guiding the vocabulary of the analysed project descriptions to be aligned with policy from the area where projects are applying for funds. In the analysis, the project descriptions are related to national (Ministry of Employment, 2011; Ministry of Culture, 2010) as well as European policy documents (ESF, 2007, European Commission, 2011) dealing with the inclusion of the Roma people in contemporary Europe.

Walters (2012, p. 110ff) argues that many studies of governmentality have lost their relationship to genealogy. Historicising governmental rationalities may destabilize and problematize contemporary problematizations and ‘truths’. In order to deepen the analysis of the contemporary problematizations of the Roma, I historicize the problematizations of the Roma through a parallel analysis of a government report from the 1950s concerning the situation of the Roma, *The Gypsy issue*⁵ (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956). This analytical strategy aims to create a contrast to the contemporary project descriptions, and renders visible the ways in which being Roma has been problematized in two distinct time periods.

Situating the Roma in Sweden and the European Union

With 10 – 12 million people, the Roma constitute the largest minority population in Europe, and every European state has Roma inhabitants (Isin, 2012, p. 161). The EU has allocated substantial amounts of resources to tackling the problem of socially excluded Roma:

For the European Social Fund, € 9.6 billion have been allocated in the period 2007-2013 for measures targeting socio-economic inclusion of disadvantaged people – among them marginalized Roma – and € 172 million have been explicitly allocated for actions aiming at integrating the Roma. (European Commission, 2011: 173: 9)

While the main part of European Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe (Miskovic, 2009), they have also lived in Sweden since at least the sixteenth century (Selling, 2013). They constitute one of five national minorities in Sweden⁶, granting them certain rights regarding the use of Romani as a minority language. The status of national minority also includes being officially recognized as a ‘part of the Swedish cultural heritage’ (Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality, 2007). In spite of this minority status, the Roma have been depicted as incompatible with Swedish welfare society, and Roma culture has been constructed as a synonym for social problems (Selling, 2013, p. 41).

The problematizing of the Roma is a persistent practice which, for instance, can be noticed in contemporary debates on Roma begging in the streets of cities throughout Europe (Mäkinen, 2013), or on Bulgarian Roma migrants picking berries under precarious conditions in the North of Sweden (Mesic & Woolfson, 2015). In post-communist Europe, the Roma have been constructed as the ‘ultimate scapegoat’ for every hardship that came with the transition to market economy (Miskovic, 2009). Further, studies have shown how their presence can destabilize the ideals of European citizenship and free mobility within the EU (Aradau, Huysmans, Macioti, & Squire, 2013). The Roma occupy an ambiguous position in relation to the EU, as they reveal the borders of inclusion and exclusion of EU citizenship (Caglar & Mehling, 2013).

This academic interest in the Roma situation is accompanied with a political concern for the ‘Roma issue’. Political responses to this issue have differed among European countries in different times, from once having the goal of exterminating the Roma in Nazi Germany, to the ‘Gypsy consultants’ in the heydays of Swedish welfarism, to the demolishing of Roma camps and subsequent expulsion in France in the early 2000s (Fekete, 2014).

The European Commission released an overarching agenda for the treatment of ‘Roma issues’ in the European Union, the *EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020* (European Commission, 2011: 173), in which the ‘Roma issue’ is understood as not compatible with the *Europe 2020* strategy for a new growth path. The ‘prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion’ facing the Roma in Europe is described as at odds with the ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ that are the maxims for the 2020 growth strategy. Hence, all member states shall ensure that Roma are ‘treated like any other EU citizen with equal access to all fundamental rights’ (European Commission, 2011).

Further, the commission encourages member states to ‘ensure that national, regional and local integration policies focus on the Roma in a clear and specific way, and address the needs of the Roma with explicit measures’ (European Commission, 2011: 173). The main argument put forward for this approach is that ‘classical social

inclusion measures were not sufficient to meet the Roma's specific needs' (European Commission, 2011, p. 4).

The guidelines from the commission's Roma strategy are conducting the conduct of various member states, encouraging them to formulate their own strategy to meet the economic and social problems among the Roma. This has resulted in the Swedish government report *A coordinated and long-term strategy for Roma inclusion 2012 – 2032*⁷ (Ministry of Employment, 2011), highlighting the need for adult education particularly targeting them⁸, with encouragement from the EU. One identified problem is that many Roma in Sweden drop out from elementary school. Hence, adult education targeting the Roma is seen as a prioritized remedy for this problem. With the ongoing projectification of welfare (Brunila. 2011), this kind of education is increasingly taking place in discourses of lifelong learning, provided by projects co-funded by the ESF.

What's the problem? Exploring Misery discourse

In the *EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020* (European Commission, 2011), the European Commission expresses a serious concern about the living conditions for the Roma throughout Europe. The commission states that Roma are 'marginalized and live in very poor socio-economic conditions' and that 'action is needed to break the vicious cycle of poverty moving from one generation to the next' (European Commission, 2011). One arena where this 'vicious cycle' is dealt with is the ESF projects analysed in this article.

Several projects are inspired by empowerment, and hence involve the Roma in planning and implementing them; other projects focus on spreading information about discrimination against the Roma to public officials, while others are more top-down oriented learning practices for the Roma. The kinds of projects that either are, or are not successful, and what consequences these different strategies might have, are important topics for the inclusion of the Roma. However, from the vantage point of governmentality, the analytical searchlight is directed to discourses problematizing, positioning and producing Roma subjectivities. In the projects analysed, there is a predominant rationality of problematizing and constructing the situation for the Roma in terms of miseries of various kinds. In the following, four such discourses of misery are analysed: *socioeconomic miseries*; *educational miseries*; *embodied and medicalized miseries* and *gendered miseries*, all of which shape and construct the subject position of unemployed Roma. Each one of these analysed miseries are contrasted with a government report (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956) where the discursive miseries are related to the ways of constructing Roma miseries in the 1950s, highlighting similarities and differences in historicizing the problematizations of the Roma in two distinct time periods.

Socioeconomic miseries

The project *Roma inclusion in the Stockholm region*⁹ formulates the discourse of social and economic miseries in a condensed way, as it is proclaimed that 'the Roma people's history of 500 years in Sweden is a story of social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination that persists even today'. The Roma are further positioned as being in a 'long-term isolation from the majority of society', leading to poor opportunities of finding employment.

The description from the project *New training program with and for Roma*¹⁰ states that ‘there is a need for specific training courses for the Romanis’, and that the goal of the project is to utilize and meet this forgotten group and to create models for helping Roma individuals. In this way, the Roma are constructed as a non-traditional group on the labour market as well as in adult education. The Roma are constructed as a targeted population in need of special interventions, making them governable towards learning to learn, since it is crucial for the lifelong learner to be *educable* (Tuschling & Engemann, 2007); afterwards in the next phase, they will be learning to become employable (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004).

The project *Romano zor! – Roma force!*¹¹ constructs the target group as having no prior working life experience and a high degree of marginalization and social exclusion. In addition, they have for ‘several generations, had poor anchorage in society’ as well as insecure childhoods with traumatic events within families and clans’. Thus, these economic and social positionings of the Roma are ethnicized when constructed as deeply rooted in Roma culture, and even formulated in hereditary terms as they are passed on through generations.

One of the main remedies for the socioeconomic miseries is vocational training, seeking to tackle the pressing issue of *unemployability*. This rationality is clearly illustrated in the project *Newo drom*, providing education in entrepreneurship, which seeks to motivate and change the attitudes of the participants, making them able to break their social exclusion. This governing rationale is typical for contemporary labour market measures, as they both responsibilize the target group, encouraging them to break their own exclusion, and individualize the problematizations focusing on motivation and attitudes (Rose, 1999).

In contrast to the contemporary problematizations of the Roma, the government report from the 1950s (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956) puts more emphasis on structural problems such as a changing labour market, which renders traditional occupations for the Roma obsolete. The report states that divination has lost its market due to the majority population’s more enlightened view of life; amusements parks are no longer a temptation due to ‘the modern entertainment industry’, and the ‘rhythms of Gypsy-music’ have lost their enchantment to the tunes of jazz. Hence, the Gypsies life-rhythm is described as not in sync with the rhythm of normal society (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956). In the 1950s, the social democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990) was well established, and this problematization of a changing labour market rather than individual attitudes and motivations, indicates a tendency where government was able to understand Roma problems in terms of structural issues, in contrast to contemporary problematizations’ emphasis on the individual.

The political ambition in the 1950s was to normalize the Roma through assimilation, and the tone was positive when speaking about the ‘settled Gypsies’:

Sweden’s approximately 230 settled Gypsies have adapted remarkably well to society. In general, they seem to have been accepted by their environment, in work places as well as among neighbours. Many of them speak with great enthusiasm about their new positions as settled citizens¹². (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 140)

The discussion of the ‘Gypsy issue’ was divided between ‘settled Gypsies’, who were constructed as assimilated and normal, and ‘vagrant Gypsies’, those who clung on to the ‘nomadic culture’. The latter category posed the most urgent problem. In fact, the actual roving way of life was understood as the major deviance from majority society:

[The Gypsies] have come to take special status in relation to the rest of the population. First and foremost this special status is the Gypsies' roving way of life, and their deviant lifestyles in general. (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 11)

This divide was further stressed, and the authorities showed serious concern for those not willing to adapt to 'normal society'. The vagrant Gypsy was positioned as left behind or missing out on the great opportunities for social welfare offered by society:

Only the Gypsies, who left the typical Gypsy way of life and switched to settled life and settled conditions in general [have reached] improved economic conditions [...]. For the Gypsies who still live the itinerant traditional way, deprivation is still the essentially distinctive feature [...]. Unfortunately, the situation of the itinerant Gypsies is becoming increasingly worse with each year that passes. While development for other people has ensured rising cultural and economic standards, and increased social security, for the itinerant Gypsies, it has meant the opposite. (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 12f)

Hence, the key issue where the socioeconomic problematizations of the Roma differ between contemporary ESF projects and the government report from 1956, is this issue of vagrant lifestyles, which is not problematized in contemporary constructions of the Roma. Nevertheless, the remedy for the Roma problem partly remains the same, as we shall see in the following, when educational miseries are analysed.

Educational miseries

In order to make the Roma employable, they first need to become *educable*. The problematization of unemployability is hence related to education and learning; for instance, this can be seen in the project *Roma in Norrköping*¹³, which seeks to 'develop methods for motivation and personal responsibility in the Roma group focusing on education, work and self-sufficiency'. Once again, the emphasis is on individual problematizations and responsibilization (Rose, 1999) in contemporary constructions of the problematic Roma learner (cf. Brine, 2006).

In the project *Romane buca*, the Roma are constructed as not enhancing the accumulation of human capital by education and working life experience deemed necessary to reach a position in the labour market. The educational situation of the Roma is constructed as a catch-22 situation: 'Due to the high unemployment, Roma people lack incentives to seek education that could lead to future employment'. In order to break this vicious cycle, the Roma are encouraged to acknowledge the value of education in order to become employable; in other words, they need to become *educable*.

The project *New training program with and for Roma* places the responsibility for this lacking education with the Roma parents, as we can see in the following quote discussing their school situations:

Elementary school competence is a necessary precondition for further studies and for entrance to the labour market. A reoccurring problem for many Roma is that they have quit elementary school without complete grades. Many Roma children quit school early; many of the Roma families do not link school with the future prospects and the connection between level of education and material wealth. (*New training program with and for Roma*)

In addition to the Roma children's lacking education, their parents are represented as being unable to connect education with a good life and material wealth. The project description further problematizes the school situation of the Roma by concluding that:

Schools that receive Roma pupils must be prepared to give them extra time and resources [...] the [Roma pupils] often have very poor knowledge of society in general – a result of the isolated lives they have been living. (New training program with and for Roma)

This rationality problematizes the Roma family; the Roma children are lacking education, and Roma adults are irresponsible parents since they have raised them in isolation from the majority society, and kept them ignorant of the value of education. Once more the problematic situation of the Roma is portrayed in hereditary terms, as Roma parents pass on their lack of interest in education to their descendants. In the 'learning society' (Masschelein et al., 2007), a first step towards becoming educable is given as learning to recognize the value of education.

The main solution offered to this miserable educational situation is adult education, which targets the Roma. Echoing the current discourse of lifelong learning, there is a predominant rationality that it is never too late to learn, and the ESF projects provide an opportunity for the participants to educate themselves, steering them towards becoming learning subjects.

One project focusing on the learning of Roma adults is *Empowerment and participation among Roma in western Sweden*. Although the project description places much of the cause for Roma exclusion on discriminating structures and racism, the remedies are individualized. The focus of the project is on combatting low self-esteem and low education level by strengthening the individual with empowerment. The processes of empowerment offered by the project seeks to strengthen the individual Roma, as it will 'give them the power to break their powerlessness' as well as to gain more influence over their own lives and strengthen their self-control. This will for empowerment (Cruikshank, 1999) is constructed as a way to increase confidence and promote a better self-image in the project description by encouraging the targeted learners to work with themselves. These are individual qualities constructed as necessary to be able to take the first step towards 'greater knowledge and skills'. The courses given in the project include basic societal orientation, health planning and communication, focusing on individual, rather than societal structures, thus governing the subject towards education for employability.

The will to educate the Roma participants is formulated in a condensed way in the project *Pre-study on Roma education*¹⁴, where they propose creating tailored educations for Roma and mixing formal and informal learning in different milieus, typical for the learning society (Masschelein et al., 2007). The project concludes that 'raising the educational level of the Roma is the method we believe is most successful to get the Roma into working life'. This quote clearly shows the primary motive for educating the Roma: increasing the supply of labour by making them employable and productive, and hence included in societal normality.

The deficit in Roma education was a problem just as crucial in the 1950s as it is today. How the vagrant Roma children should get access to public schooling is formulated as the most urgent issue (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 51). In line with this, the report problematizes the widespread illiteracy among 'the Gypsies':

It is obvious that illiteracy is a grave handicap for people in our modern and complex society. Except for the personal barrier it means for the person, with forced isolation, the inability to read and write also means a severely limited freedom of choice regarding occupation and livelihood. (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 51)

Since Roma children at the time had been included in compulsory school attendance, the problem of illiteracy was seen as solved by itself, when the children grew up. In this way the Roma adults were positioned as the main problem, since ‘it will always be the older, ignorant Gypsies who leave their mark on the Gypsies existence’ (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 61). The solution to this problem was adult education, as it was seen as enabling the adult Roma ‘to transform to another way of living’ if they were given the opportunity to attend education (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 61).

In the contemporary project descriptions, the ability to read and write among the Roma is not a prominent problem. In this respect, education appears to be successful; illiteracy is no longer constructed as a major problem for the Roma in Sweden. Yet, the ability to read and write does not seem to have been enough for improving their situation in any significant way, since the position of Roma in contemporary Sweden is still problematized in a number of ways. However, in other EU countries, the issue of illiteracy is still posing a problem (Miskovic, 2009), as the commission encourages the importance of combating illiteracy among Roma children and adults (European Commission, 2011).

Embodied and medicalized miseries

Another reoccurring problematization concerns the physical and psychological wellbeing of the Roma; in other words, embodied and medicalized discourses of misery are put forth. The project *Romano zor! – Roma force!* targets Roma adults that are ‘dependent on welfare’. The following quote from the project description illustratively positions the targeted subjects in a discourse of medicalized misery:

The conditions of life are the foundation for high psychological and physical illness. Stress-related diseases with psychological uneasiness, headache, depressions and panic anxiety are relatively common with pill and alcohol abuse as a result. Poor general condition due to arthritic diseases, back pain and over-weight is common. Also asthma, heart trouble, rheumatism and kidney problems are common, as well as different kinds of women’s health issues. (*Romano zor! – Roma force!*)

Here, the social and economic marginalization, in terms of welfare dependency, is constructed through medicalized discourses with a focus on the psychological as well as the physical status of the Roma. The economically poor Roma are constructed as pathological subjects in need of medical interventions.

This medicalization of unemployed Roma is also evident in the project description of the project *Roma in the north*¹⁵ claiming that ‘many Roma suffer from psychological and physical illnesses’. The suffering from these illnesses is described as taking place in silence as the unemployed Roma are, once again, positioned as ‘completely isolated from possibilities concerning working life’.

In the project description of *Empowerment and participation among Roma in western Sweden*¹⁶ the goal of the project is described as follows:

The goal is to increase possibilities for the Roma people to take control over their life situations, their own health, and issues that influence their health and social inclusion.
(Empowerment and participation among Roma in western Sweden)

In the quote, the starting point for thinking about the problems of the targeted Roma is constructed as their lack of control over life in general and their health problems in particular. These health problems are constructed as solvable by making the participants learn about dieting and wellness, with the goal of changing their unhealthy life-styles and risky behaviour. Responsibility for overcoming the excluded and isolated position is placed on the targeted subjects themselves, as they are encouraged to take control over their life situations. This individualized responsibilization (Rose 1999) is to be facilitated by the project through increased opportunities for the Roma to take charge over their life situations, spanning from health issues to social inclusion. The remedies proposed in order to deal with these medicalized problems are once more individualized; the individual must be made willing and able not only to educate herself, but also to work with herself, to learn how to improve one's body and soul, so that one might eventually become ready to learn how to become employable.

Medicalized problematizations of the Roma are nothing new or specific for contemporary ESF projects. On the contrary, it is an important aspect of the way 'the Gypsy issue' was thought of in the 1950s. The life expectancy of the Roma was a matter of grave concern in the report of 1956, since it was considerably lower than for the population in general. As today, the authorities then were worried that there was not adequate knowledge about the situation of the Roma:

Details of the roving Gypsies' health condition are admittedly not available, but that bronchitis and respiratory tract infections are particularly rampant among the Gypsies, especially the children, has been observed [...] (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 13)

The authorities were highly concerned with the 'severe deterioration of this population material', causing difficulties in 'conducting a normal social life' (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 13).

In the 1956 report, the issue of health and sickness was strongly connected to 'the Gypsies' ambulating way of living. Their inadequate, cold and draughty homes were seen as the source of much of the sickness flourishing among the 'itinerate Gypsy'. In relation to contemporary problematizations of the Roma, this is an interesting result. The homes of the Roma are no longer considered cold and draughty, or in any other way particularly problematic, but still the contemporary problematizations of the Roma's health is a pressing issue. Once again, we see the problematizations in the 1950s focused more on structural problems such as housing and changes in the labour market, in contrast to the more prominent individualized psychological reasoning in contemporary projects positioning the Roma as unemployable and excluded in discourses of medicalized, as well as embodied miseries. Learning about oneself and how to live one's life in a particular way becomes in this situation a learning activity where power and knowledge operate as a way of conducting the conduct of the targeted learner in a specific direction (Masschelein et al., 2007).

Gendered miseries

In the project descriptions, there is a particular interest in the situation of the Roma women. The problem of gender inequality is explicitly stressed by the ESF, as ‘gender mainstreaming’ is a mandatory heading imposed in the project descriptions, where each project is to formulate their ways of working with gender equality, creating a gendered dimension in discourses of Roma miseries.

The position of Roma women tends to be constructed as extraordinarily miserable. The project *Roma in the north* places a specific focus on Roma women, and positions them in discourses built on the rationale of deficits. The Roma women are constructed as lacking a number of valuable qualities in contemporary societies. They are problematized as having none or lacking role models, lacking insights into society, lacking education, lacking participation and having low self-esteem. In addition, they are described as suffering from substance abuse in the form of sedative medicine and ‘hidden alcoholism’. This substance abuse is constructed as a way for Roma women to escape the pressure that they experience since they are forced to live ‘in isolated relation to society and the majority population, without the possibility to change their situations’. Once again, the isolation from majority society is fronted as a major concern. Further the Roma women are constructed as dependent on welfare, causing a ‘depreciated human dignity, social exclusion and a damaged self-confidence’. In focusing on problems of self-confidence and lacking personal attributes, the contemporary gendered problematizations are individualizing the social exclusion. The project description also pays a great deal of attention to the great burdens of Roma women, as being solely responsible for the economy of their families and for raising their children, implicitly constructing the Roma male as irresponsible.

Another illustrative example of gendered miseries is the project *Romano zor! – Roma force!*, which problematizes gender relationships within the targeted Roma community, constructing the Roma family structures as hierarchical and patriarchal. Here, as well as in other projects, gendered miseries are explicitly linked to femininity, focusing on the problem of Roma women, while Roma masculinity is not explicitly constructed as a problem, but rather implicitly understood as patriarchal and traditional.

In the project description of *Roma dilemma, from internal to external integration*¹⁷, the problematized gender relations are explicitly ethnicized as ‘Roma culture’, and are constructed as traditional with traditional roles and duties. This problematization gender relationships positions Roma as deviant in relation to the dominant discourse in Sweden, which is in the frontline regarding gender equality (de los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari, 2006). The Roma woman is constructed as belonging in the home, with the primary responsibility of taking care of relatives. This situation is constructed as being casually related to a range of miseries: low self-esteem, guilt and anxiety, deteriorated health and chronic problems, and dependency on sleeping pills and anti-depressant medication. The remedies to these problems are individualized, as they seek to support the Roma women in feeling better and developing a healthy self-image as well as developing their own potential. Discourses individualizing the miseries among Roma women also make responsible (Rose 1999) the targeted subjects, as they are governed to work on themselves through raising self-confidence and becoming empowered. Once self-confident and empowered, the Roma woman can be made able and motivated to ‘learn to learn’ (Tuschling & Engemann, 2007) in order to become employable.

The project *Roma dilemma, from internal to external integration*, specifically targets young Roma women. In the project there is a need for knowledge, both *about* and *for* the Roma women; on the one hand, there is a ‘need to study the younger

generation's desires and dreams', while on the other hand, there is a need to 'support young women to develop a more coherent self-awareness and consciousness of their needs'. This will to learn about young Roma women and the will to make them learn about themselves is governing the targeted subjects towards becoming educable and employable, since power and knowledge operate as productive forces, producing subjectivities and directing the will and aspirations of the targeted subjects (Foucault 1980).

What about gendered problematizations in the 1950s? Due to political struggles, issues of gender equality have gained a more prominent position in public debates in recent decades. In the 1950s, the discourse of Roma women in relation to gender equality was not problematized, as it is in contemporary projects targeting the Roma people. Back then, the Roma woman was described as marrying young, and made faithful to her husband through the 'tribal morale'. These practices were ethnicized and constructed as part of normal Roma life, but were not explicitly problematized. There are also similarities between the contemporary and the 1950s gendered problematizations of the Roma. The Roma women of today as well as the 1950s, are constructed as having a heavy workload including responsibility for raising children, sewing, cooking and bringing in money to the family. Additionally in the past, she was portrayed as having too many children and living very isolated (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p.43). This isolated position of the Roma women is, as we have seen, also prominent in contemporary gendered Roma miseries.

Discussion

This article has analysed learning practices in labour market projects targeting unemployed Roma in Sweden focusing on discursive positioning and governing. Further, the analysis has been historicised with a government report from 1956 concerning the 'Roma issue' in Sweden (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956). The constructions of the Roma are not always explicitly ethnicized, but when the Roma are singled out as a targeted population, it enables government of this specific 'group' through various problematizations (Dean, 2010). In order to include the Roma in the labour market through employability, they first must be problematized as excluded and unemployable. The same rationality operates in terms of learning; in order to make the Roma a group in need of learning, they first must be constructed as problematic learners (cf. Brine, 2006). Hence the Roma are constructed as subjects that first need to recognize the value of education – to learn to learn, and thus become educable (Tuschling & n, 2007) and then go on to learn to become employable (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Next I will recapitulate and elaborate on the main findings of the analysis, following the analytical questions posed in the article.

How are the Roma constructed, positioned and problematized in relation to the labour market and learning? In analysing the discursive construction and governing of the Roma in labour market projects, we have seen their reoccurring positioning and problematization in four distinct discourses of misery: *socioeconomic miseries*, *educational miseries*, *embodied and medicalized miseries* and *gendered miseries*. All these discursive miseries construct the targeted Roma subjects as a group that is socially excluded, not the least being through the omnipresent discourse of isolation, which has been highlighted throughout the analysis. The analysis has shown that there is a wide concern about the welfare of the Roma, both today and in the 1950s.

During the 1950s, the ‘social democratic welfare regime’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990) was well established in Sweden and the decade to come has been called ‘the heyday of Swedish social democracy’ (Arter, 2003, p. 75). In the welfare policies of the 1950s, the formulas of government were exercised in the name of collective welfare (Rose, 1996, p. 48). In this period, the Swedish model had a reputation of successful economic growth, industrial development and full employment (Schierup, Hansen & Castles, 2006, p. 200). In the socioeconomic situation of the 1950s, the ‘vagrant Gypsy’ posed a political problem for Swedish authorities, as much of the miseries of the Roma were understood as being caused by an itinerate lifestyle. Today, itinerate lifestyles of the Roma are not explicitly problematized, but the Roma are still constructed as problematic in relation to education and employability. As the analysis of the 1956 government report shows, a serious concern was that the Roma were missing out on the ‘rising cultural and economic standards, and increased social security’ (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1956, p. 12f) that benefitted the majority of the population.

The 1950s was also a period when Swedish policies targeting the Roma were changing (Selling, 2013). The previously explicit racist discourse gradually shifted to policies of including the Roma through assimilation. The Roma were to be included in the Swedish welfare society through political efforts concerning education, proper housing and participation on the regular labour market (Selling, 2013, p. 129ff).

The main discrepancies between contemporary problems and remedies and those from the 1950s are that the Roma miseries of the 1950s were constructed with a more explicit focus on societal structures, such as housing and changes in the labour market. Today there is a greater emphasis on individualizing problematizations in terms of low self-esteem and psychological illnesses where the remedies predominantly found are in the will to strengthen the individual through techniques of empowerment (Cruikshank, 1999). The more explicit focus on structural problems in the 1950s may be understood in relation to the wider political focus on collective welfare, in contrast to the contemporary focus on individual freedom of choice (Rose, 1996).

Gendered problematizations are constructed in somewhat different ways in the two time periods. The contemporary gendered problematizations have a focus on gender equality, something which was absent in the debate of the 1950s. Common for the two time periods is a will to learn how the Roma women feel and what they want and desire, which indicates an intimate relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980) in gendered constructions of the Roma. The rationality is that knowledge problematizing Roma gender relationships is needed in order to govern Roma women towards societal normality (cf. Dean, 2010) through the learning of gender equality.

How are the Roma to become employable and included in society? The rationality of the learning practices engaged in making the Roma employable first need to problematize them as *unemployable*. The same rationality is at play in the ambition of creating social inclusion. To make someone includable, (s)he first needs to be positioned as excluded. Positioning the Roma in socioeconomic, educational, embodied/medicalized and gendered miseries puts them in a position very far from what is understood as an ‘employable individual’ that is included in society.

The remedy as well as the cause for much of the Roma problems in both time periods is learning and education. Education is a problem for the Roma since many quit school either too early or with low grades. Adult education and lifelong learning provided to them have sometimes been criticized for being narrowly focused on vocational training and mainly concerned with increasing the employability of the learners (cf. Brine, 2006). The analysis of educational miseries shows that the scope of the learning practices are not narrow at all, since it targets the participant as a whole person,

including both their physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as their family life, gender identity, and especially their socioeconomic situation. The overarching goal of the learning practices is to transform socially excluded unemployed Roma to included employable citizens, and the means for doing so is embracing more or less the whole life of the targeted learner. In this sense, the learning practices of the ESF projects not only become a basis for lifelong learning, but also life-wide learning. More or less, the whole social life as well as the life-span of the learning subject is problematized as being in need of improvement through education and learning.

It has been argued that studies of the Roma need a more critical understanding and theoretical elaboration of concepts such as ethnicity and diversity, in order to move beyond the will to find out who the Roma really are (Tremlett et al., 2014). This can be achieved with a governmentality perspective focusing on discursive constructions and ethnicized problematizations seeking to make the Roma governable, employable and educable. From a governmentality perspective, learning is understood as governing the conduct of the targeted learner (Masschelein et al., 2007). In order to properly govern the conduct and aspirations of the project participants, they first need to *be known*. Governing requires knowing *who* is to be governed. This governing further encourages the Roma to work with themselves. To become educable, they need to verbalize their problems and formulate their dreams, goals and ambitions: they need to know what they want and how to achieve their goals in order to educate themselves properly. In this way, the educable subject has to adapt to the norms of the value of education in the greater society and then act accordingly.

To summarize the analysis, we have seen how Roma subjects are discursively constructed through productive power which positions them in discourses of isolation, deprivation, substance abuse, gender inequalities and poor education. Such positioning of the targeted subjects within discursive miseries are simultaneously producing knowledge about the Roma, constructing them as problematic, unemployable and in need of learning, and thus making them governable and educable in various ways.

In relation to a contemporary European project of building a ‘learning society’ inhabited by ‘lifelong learners’ (Masschelein et al., 2007), the Roma is problematized, not least in terms of lacking education (Miskovic, 2013).

The European commission (European Commission, 2011) as well as the Swedish government (Ministry of Employment, 2011) encourages adult education particularly targeting Roma as a remedy for social and economic problems and as a way to strengthen Roma civic rights as well as employability. Such practices of lifelong learning are also, as we have seen, taking place in projects co-funded by the ESF. On the one hand, Roma can be seen as non-traditional lifelong learners, as adult education tend to attract middle-class populations with a solid education background. On the other hand, the analysis have shown that Roma, as a particularly problematized group, have a history of being targeted by governmental interventions, not least in terms of learning and education.

Inviting Roma, as a marginalised and non-traditional group, to participate in adult education is important for many reasons. But, as the results of this study show, it is equally important to reflect upon if, how and why Roma are positioned in discourses of misery when engaged in facilitating learning for Roma or other marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

Notes

- ¹ I have analysed labour market measures specifically targeting the Somali in a previous study: Vesterberg (2013)
- ² <http://www.esf.se/en/Projektbank/Search-project/> Retrieved April 23, 2014
- ³ <http://www.esf.se/sv/vara-program/Socialfonden/Om-Socialfonden/> Retrieved June 8, 2015
- ⁴ The mandatory headings are as follows: summary, background, purpose, objective, accessibility for people with disabilities, gender mainstreaming, co-financiers, partners, and municipality.
- ⁵ Author's translation. Swedish title: *Zigenarfrågan*
- ⁶ The other national minorities are the Jews, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers (Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality, 2007).
- ⁷ Author's translation. Swedish title: *En samordnad och långsiktig strategi för romsk inkludering 2012 – 2032.*
- ⁸ Who these projects actually target is a complex and somewhat fuzzy issue. Roma in Sweden are commonly categorized in a number of subgroups such as Swedish Roma, Finnish Roma, non-Nordic Roma or newly arrived Roma (Sametinget, 2015). What subgroup of Roma the projects are targeting is, in most of the projects, not specified.
- ⁹ Author's translation. Swedish name: Romsk inkludering i stockholmsregionen
- ¹⁰ Author's translation. Swedish name: *Nya utbildningsinsatser med och för Romer*
- ¹¹ Author's translation. Swedish name: *Romano zor! Romsk kraft!*
- ¹² All translations of empirical quotes are made by the author
- ¹³ Author's translation. Swedish title: *Romer i Norrköping*.
- ¹⁴ Author's translation. Swedish title: *Förstudie kring romska utbildningar*.
- ¹⁵ Author's translation. Swedish name: *Romer i norr*
- ¹⁶ Author's translation. Swedish Name: *Empowerment och delaktighet hos Romer i Västsverige*
- ¹⁷ Author's translation. Swedish name: *Romskt dilemma, från inre till yttre Integration*

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