



## **Integrating a Traditional Minority into a Nordic Society: Elite Discourse on the Finnish Roma**

*Camilla Nordberg, Åbo Academi University, Department of Social Policy*

Exclusion is partly about poverty but importantly it also goes beyond an economic predicament. Inclusion to 'normal' society is predominantly cultural: it is inclusion to the 'culture of the nation', that is, the values, aspirations and ways of living of the rest of us. (Haylett 2001, 49)

### **1 Introduction**

Citizenship has been used as an analytic as well as a political concept in order to elucidate the relationship between larger 'communities', primarily nation-states, and their members. The last decades have seen a revitalisation of the notion of citizenship in scholarly literature. Reflecting a more cosmopolitan and cultural interpretation of citizenship, previous struggles for equality and redistribution have increasingly been accompanied by demands for recognition of a plurality of identities based on ethnicity, gender, language, etc (Benhabib 2002; Delanty 2000; Fraser 1997; Isin and Wood 1999; Kymlicka 1995; Lister 2003; Siim 2000; Taylor 1994; Young 1998). In this contribution I want to scrutinise political elite claims-making related to a traditional minority ethnic group - the Finnish Roma. Thus, the general aim is to explore claims-making strategies in relation to a (multi)cultural dimension of citizenship in a Finnish welfare state setting. While the theoretical contribution to citizenship studies has been considerable, the amount of empirical work is less extensive (see e.g. Lister et al. 2003; Jones and Gaventa 2002).

I want to address the position of Finnish Roma in relation to emerging notions of cultural rights discourse. Scholarly work on multiculturalism and integration has predominantly been concerned with the integration of immigrants, while traditional minorities have been overlooked. The Roma do however share the marginalised socioeconomic position with that of many refugee and immigrant groups in spite of a history of 400 years on Finnish soil. Borchorst and Siim (2002: 95) note that 'The Nordic countries currently face problems with the integration of minorities, because, historically, they have all been based upon religious, cultural and ethnic homogeneity.' The authors further stress the discursive difference between the 'integration of women and the inclusion of ethnic minority groups... because women have been defined to be 'one of us' and ethnic minorities as 'the other' (Borchorst and Siim 2002: 93).' Although this is a fundamental and valid distinction, the boundaries between 'us' and 'the other' are more clear when it comes to immigrant groups than in the case of national minorities, simultaneously being part of 'our' nation and its history as well as forming a distinct cultural group. In this respect the analysis of right claims for a traditional minority ethnic group, may shed a different and more multifaceted light on the national model of incorporation than when looking at claims of or on behalf of immigrants alone.

The study draws on a top-down perspective by analysing political parliamentary claims-making between 1989 and 2003. Claims for citizenship rights are argued to primarily be 'made by important actor-claimants and these claims are then negotiated and re-negotiated by

elites and through public fora' (Pakulski 1997: 73). Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that citizenship is constructed both from above and from below (Hobsbawm 1990). Parliamentary work is arguably influenced by Romani initiatives, particularly through the work of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs.<sup>1</sup> Yet, while the initial claims-maker is not always evident; initiatives ultimately leading to a change in legislation or to increased governmental budget resources are eventually brought to the parliament for debate and decision-making<sup>2</sup>.

Through the exploration of political claims-making I want to shed light on the citizenship identity attached to the Roma as a traditional minority. Although notions of citizenship status and identity are constantly re-defined as a result of struggle and debate, national citizenship cultures change slowly and do embody certain structures, which have to be accounted for in claims-making practices. Consequently, through looking at different claims-making strategies, we potentially learn about the citizenship cultures of different national models and about the criteria for full and legitimate membership in a particular society.

## **2 Towards cultural justice in a welfare state context**

During the era of the welfare state, which still -more or less- prevails, the social dimension of citizenship evolved as a 'set of provisions to counter-act the negative consequences of class inequality in a capitalist system' (Turner 1993: 468). It is increasingly argued that the egalitarian objectives of the welfare state have failed to recognise and respond to the different needs of a population becoming more heterogeneous. In spite of increasing recognition of cultural and linguistic rights, the welfare states struggle with the substantial integration of its people within the framework of an equal and non-discriminatory citizenship.

The two concepts, 'a politics of recognition' or 'identity politics' have, in the language of ethnicity and culture, been largely connected to the writings of scholars advocating a multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995; Taylor 1994). While these writers have been criticised for their essentialist stance on collective identities as a prerequisite for a politics of recognition (e.g. Benhabib 2002), recent contributions have increasingly hyphenated the notion of 'cultural citizenship' (Pakulski 1997; Stevenson 2001; Turner 2001). Drawing on a broader and perhaps more dynamic understanding of cultural rights, conceptualised by Pakulski (1997: 74) as 'unhindered and legitimate representation, and propagation of identities and lifestyles through information systems', it opens up for a more fluid and transformative understanding of culture. Benhabib (2002) further points to the important distinction between a 'politics of recognition' and 'identity politics'. A politics of recognition should not lead to cultural separatism but rather to a critical dialogue and reflexive reconstruction of collective identities. Fraser (1997), 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' (1997: 185). These latter perspectives emphasise the negotiated nature of rights provision- agency and discourse- instead of seeing certain collective identities as rightfully entitled to protection on some historical or other ground.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> It is a consultative body where Romani representatives and the state meet in a permanent institution (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000). Half of the members are representatives of Romani organizations and half of the members are representatives of different ministries.

<sup>2</sup> Elite groups on the state-level, both the political and the administrative, have had a significant role in expanding the citizenship status of the Roma who do not have a political representation in the parliament.

<sup>3</sup> The debate on recognition and identity as politics is arguably more multifaceted than what can be outlined here (see also Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

According to Pakulski (1997: 79), an important push factor for the extension of citizenship in the direction of cultural rights is the critical re-valuation of welfare states. This may not necessarily be the case in Finland, where the legitimacy of the welfare state has been quite strong in spite of the early 1990s recession (Blomberg and Kroll 1999; Nygård 2003; Svallfors 1999). While the position of cultural rights and recognition within different welfare regimes is constitutive of the claims-making by political agents as well as broader global influences of migration and trans-national institutions, the national setting is still the primary locus of citizenship and, consequently, important to conceptualise (Siim 2000; Soysal 1994; Turner 1993). Different countries have different historical legacies concerning the language of citizenship, as well as political and welfare orientations (Bussemaker and Voet 1998). Despite Finland's linguistic and partly cultural heterogeneity, the strong nationalist dimension of the state-building project has created an atmosphere of homogeneous values (Lepola 2000, Pylkkänen 2004).<sup>4</sup> Next to the legacy of political and economic liberalism, Finland's agrarian history has contributed to a strong influence from communitarian political and theoretical thinking (Anttonen 1998: 357). In the case of Finland, previously dominated by emigration rather than immigration, and with no experience of labour immigration, the increasing movement of people and the new Euro-political order have conveyed a re-valuation of legislation and institutional practices. During the 1990s, the Finnish constitution was amended, now emphasising cultural and linguistic rights also for the Roma as a traditional minority. Finland adapted its first government action plan on immigration and refugee policy in 1997. Within the framework of the EU, it has become increasingly important to define the parameters of a multicultural society.

### **3 The case of the Roma and the Finnish nation-state**

The Roma have been conceived as both threatening and as having lower moral standards than the rest of the population (Viljanen 1999). The 16th and 17th century Swedish-Finnish policies served to exterminate the male Roma and to drive children and women out of the country (Grönfors 1977; Vehmas 1961). These harsh times were followed by centuries of attempts at forced assimilation. During the early 20th century, heavy nationalist values underpinned the goals of exterminating the Romani language (Suonoja and Lindberg 2000: 2). The prohibition of minority languages has been used as a strategy of assimilation by various governments (see further Carens 2000; Kymlicka 2001).<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s the 'Gypsy issue' was reintroduced on the political agenda after a long period of silence. The main target of the 'Gypsy committee' was also this time 'developable' Roma, i.e. children (Pulma 1999: 184). The key actor behind the assimilation policies of the last century was the Christian organisation *mustalaislähetys*, founded in 1906 by Oskari Jalkio. Jalkio concluded that the Roma do not have traditions, a history, homeland, literature, religion or mother tongue, that they do not have any patriotic feelings and want to be broken up as a people (Grönfors 1977).

---

<sup>4</sup> As a relic from the Swedish governance, approximately 6 % or 300,000 Swedish-speaking Finns live in Finland, which officially is a bilingual country. Traditional minorities are the indigenous Sámi (7,000), the Romani (10,000), the Jewish (less than 2,000) and the Tatar (less than 1,000) minorities. In 2002 there were just over 100,000 foreign citizens living in Finland. (Statistics Finland 2003). The comparatively modest number is partly due to the fact that Finland has not attracted as large numbers of immigrants as many other countries, but the immigration policies have also been fairly restrictive (Similä 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Carens (2000: 77) refers to the placements of aboriginal children in residential schools in Canada, prohibiting them from speaking their own languages and also to the Turkish suppression of Kurdish in public broadcasts and educational and political communication. Kymlicka (2001: 129) refers to 'Franco's attempt to eliminate all traces of the Catalan language in Spain; or France's attempt to eliminate all traces of the Basque and Breton languages'.

Radical movements in the late 1960s drew attention to the position of different excluded groups in society, among these the Roma. For the first time in Finnish history the rights of the Roma to participate in discussions regarding their own matters were stressed. This was a public recognition of competing interests between the Roma and the state. The Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs was reformed in 1968 and at this point the Roma had their own representation at the board (Suonoja and Lindberg 2000; see also Vehmas 1961). During the 1970s and 80s, targeted measures for preventing the Roma from social exclusion were attached to the housing issue, to employment and education. Most of these efforts were short-term and did not always prove successful (Grönfors 1977; Ollikainen 1995).

#### **4 Aim, method and data**

The aim of the study is to explore the contemporary political elite construction of Finnish Romani citizenship. Through looking at claims-making strategies in the parliament during a period of 15 years, the following question has governed the analysis: Which are the dimensions of citizenship identified in text and speech produced by the parliament on Roma, and how are these addressed? What can the construction of Romani citizenship mediate about the national citizenship culture? Different notions of citizenship are traced in the empirical data using an inductive approach, yet are influenced by my research questions and theoretical contributions to the citizenship debate.

The time-span for the study is between 1989 and 2003, largely coinciding with the dynamic period of immigration and increasingly multiculturalist political discourse (Lepola 2000). Also, 1989 was the year in which the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs obtained a permanent status at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The data constituted 135 documents: transcriptions from the plenary debate, oral and written questions including answers, parliamentary bills and documents related to government proposals, commission statements and different initiatives. Since most of the data is electronically available, it is supposedly an exhaustive database on the subject. Though parliamentary work constitutes the main focus of analysis, I have to a more limited extent explored relevant legislation, different policy-documents and action plans; these secondary texts support the interpretations of the political texts.

All documents containing the word Roma or Gypsy, including derivatives, were collected from the electronically available database or, regarding the early years, manually. I initially traced the content of claims and the legitimisation of claims made. Due to the argumentative nature of parliamentary work, most texts could be approached according to a claims-making perspective. Claims-making has been understood as 'collective action which mobilises political demands into the public domain' (Statham 2002: 6). The second stage of the analysis aimed at identifying different notions of Finnish Romani citizenship, evolving from the claims-making activities.

While the study is influenced by discourse analytic approaches (see e.g. Börjesson 2003; Winter Jørgensen and Phillips 2000), the analytic approach does not stem from a particular tradition. It is rather based on a close reading governed by citizenship theory and the research questions. The construction of Romani citizenship is constitutive of surrounding and previous discourses as well as of the political institutional reality, all of which are determining the possible ways of talking about citizenship.

In the wake of a systematic reading of different claims and their justifications, I found it useful and valid to structure the subsequent empirical analysis around three blocks, which roughly reflect three different time periods: 1989-1992, 1993-1996 and 1997-2003. The cut-off points refer to changes in the emphasis of argumentation, which may shed light on the link between parliamentary discourse and surrounding, societal events, further discussed in the

next sections. The division in time periods appeared as the analysis proceeded and was not the result of an initial objective to trace transformations. While the cut-off points do highlight a change in the emphasis of argumentation, it is not the case that the argumentation or the content of arguments change in a strictly path-dependent chronological order or that the same claims can be traced only during a specific point of time.

## 5 Top-down concern

The language of the 'welfare state', or claimed government responsibilities for objectives of equality and justice, are used throughout the debate. Specific for the early years of the study, from 1989 to around 1992, was a particularly top-down and occasionally also paternalistic understanding of the role of the state to support the Roma, including Romani culture.

"The Advisory Board for Romani Affairs works on several broad projects, i.e. concerning the improvement of education for the Gypsy population as well as the improvement of the possibilities for social authorities to help the Roma" (Government response to the Parliament on a written question, Minister for Nordic co-operation and gender equality, Tarja Halonen, Social Democratic Party, KK127/1989).<sup>6</sup>

Minister Halonen points to the need to strengthen public institutions in order to help the Roma. In the early 1990s parliamentary debate on Romani issues, cultural right claims are not articulated independently, within a general citizenship framework, as being beyond social rights (cf. Pakulski 1997). Rather, the cultural right claims are located within the communicative repertoires of general welfare rights. Culture is recognised as part of or intertwined with welfare policies.

"In order to reduce the educational and cultural problems among the Gypsies, the working group has raised a proposal to establish an independent educational and cultural centre for the Gypsies" (Budgetary Initiative, MP Tina Mäkelä, The Finnish Rural Party, government party, 2268/1989).<sup>7</sup>

"The Roma have a great interest in improving both their civil and their educational conditions, while simultaneously rightfully presupposing that their own culture is valued. Also among the majority population there is a genuine interest to preserve the Romani cultural heritage as well as to develop the social and educational conditions" (Written question, MP Paakkinen et al., Social Democratic Party, government party, KK 137/1989).

Furthermore, a 'problem' discourse is used, also 'cultural problems' are to be 'solved'. While the emphasis on problems arguably stems from the nature of the claims-making process, the situated nature and the consequences of categorising conditions as 'social problems' must be

---

<sup>6</sup> Written questions are 'a ... way for a Member to obtain information on matters being prepared by the Government or to draw attention to some other issue which the Member regards as important. Written questions are generally a page or so in length and include two parts: arguments and the question itself. A written question is sent to the appropriate minister, who must reply within 21 days of receiving it. ... Over a thousand written questions are submitted each year.' A written question may be supported by MPs from different political parties (The Finnish Parliament, homepages, [www.eduskunta.fi](http://www.eduskunta.fi)).

<sup>7</sup> In a budgetary initiative a Member can propose that an appropriation in the Government's budget proposal be increased or reduced or that a new appropriation be added for a specific purpose. Budgetary initiatives are handled in connection with the annual budget debate. Several hundred budgetary initiatives are submitted each year (The Finnish Parliament, homepages, [www.eduskunta.fi](http://www.eduskunta.fi))

recognised. As Bacchi (1999: 199) concludes: ‘‘problems’ do not exist out there, in the social world, waiting to be addressed and ‘solved’, but ... ‘problems’ are created by the political community’. When the written question refers to the interest of the majority in ‘preserving’ the Romani cultural heritage, the Roma are denoted to a fixed, static social category rather than to a group with a dynamic and constructed collective identity.

Claimed ‘solutions’ embrace the support and education of contact persons who would serve as links, e.g. between schools and Romani families. The establishing of a network of contact persons is legitimatised by referring to Romani children as insecure because of their distinctiveness from the wider society and because of the difficulty of being of a different ‘race’.

“Because of their racial belonging, Roma still have difficulties, for instance regarding children’s and young people’s schooling” (Budgetary initiative, MP Mäkelä et al., The Finnish Rural Party, opposition party, RA 842/1991).

“In a school environment the Romani child, deviant from the rest of society, is confronted with several offensive and frightening features. Consequently, special persons that are familiar with the special characteristics of the Romani people and know how to relate to these children are needed” (Budgetary initiative, MP Jääskeläinen et al., The Finnish Rural Party, opposition party, RA 584/1991).

Thus, the ‘problem’ is not the incapability of the larger society to relate to these children; it is rather understood as the children’s incapability of handling difference.

While civic participation is emphasised throughout the debate, participation is not primarily related to political participation. During these early years participation is about encouraging the Roma to take an active position as links or negotiators between the Romani and the majority society, constructed as binary oppositions. Claims are made for increased resources to the Advisory Board for Romani Affairs and for establishing a centre for Romani education and culture. As was shown earlier, this form of cultural right claims are intertwined with notes on the poor social situation of the Roma. Through the initiated expert bodies solutions to Romani ‘problems’ can be discussed within institutions with Romani representation. The official task of the Advisory Board for Romani Affairs is to monitor the living conditions of the Roma, to present initiatives and make requests of different kinds, as well as to take part in Nordic and other international co-operation,<sup>8</sup> all of which may preclude marginalisation. However, parliamentarians preferably stress the importance of obtaining expert knowledge in order to facilitate the work among the Roma. How the role of the Advisory Board is framed becomes an interesting symbol.

“Bureaucrats, the Government and the Parliament shall hear the ... board at all times when matters concerning them [the Roma] are handled in the respective body. This would guarantee the most accurate knowledge available also in cases that the majority bureaucrats or ‘elected people’ are not familiar with. By this arrangement also those problems still affecting the living conditions among the Roma, can be appropriately eliminated” (Petitionary initiative, MP Lahtinen et al., Democratic League for the Finnish People, opposition party, TA1/1990).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> The Government decision on the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs No 1058/1989.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Petitionary initiatives may contain proposals concerning legislation or other measures. The Speaker’s Council decides whether an initiative should be referred to a committee and announces its decision in plenary session. The Speaker’s Council can also ask the plenary session to make the decision after a preliminary debate (The Finnish Parliament, homepages, [www.eduskunta.fi](http://www.eduskunta.fi))’.

Thus, the statement highlights the need to obtain some form of ‘information’ about the Roma next to increasing the influence of the Roma on decision-making. The normative notion of ‘correct knowledge’ is detectable also in talk about a schooling project:

“Within the framework of the project, the midway termination of Romani education ... has been successfully prevented. At the same time useful information has been provided to majority pupils about the difference of the minority. It has been obvious that a lot of problems can be solved when the majority young people obtain the correct information about Gypsy culture” (Budgetary initiative, MP Kärhä et al., National Coalition Party, government party, RAA 2057/1990).

Weak educational participation is consequently constructed as a problem of interaction, or of the special Romani character, both of which can be handled through increased knowledge about Romani culture.

The recognition of cultural rights can be understood as an instrumentalist nation-state survival strategy of including people into a ‘common sense of belonging’ (Anderson 1991; Calhoun 1997) – although a sense of belonging grounded in historical sentiment rather than cultural and linguistic homogeneity (see also Smith 1986). Within the Nordic welfare paradigm there has been a tendency to incorporate deviant voices rather than to construct them as an issue drawing on a moral panic. This is discussed, for example, by Bredström and Dahlstedt (2002) in relation to hip-hop culture.

While the debate, during these early years of the study, does accentuate notions of difference, it is predominantly focused on how to deal with difference and deviance. Cultural rights are raised as an issue within the public sphere, albeit through instrumentalist language. The main focus is the social dimension of citizenship rather than the cultural. In these claims, notions of Romani agency are hardly visible.

## **6 The ‘new era’– minority status and culture as citizenship rights**

Pakulski (1997) concludes that ‘The claims for cultural citizenship involve not only tolerance and diverse ideas but also – and increasingly – claims to dignifying representation, normative accommodation, and active cultivation of these identities and their symbolic correlates.’ A trend towards a more active support for cultural rights becomes visible around 1993. This cut-off point does not imply that more top-down justifications for minority rights came to an end. Rather, new perspectives were added to the debate. A significant external event was the proposed amendment of the Finnish constitution, through which the Roma, the Sámi and other groups were granted the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. One of the parliamentarians concludes that:

“I am ... very happy ... that minority status has been recognised in the amendment of the constitution. I regard this as a very important issue of human dignity and it is also an important feat from the perspective of national morals and ethics. The amendment of the constitution ... aims to promote the equality of citizens and fair treatment in our society” (Plenary debate, MP Alho, Social Democratic Party, opposition party, Government bill on changing the Constitution Act, HE309/1993).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> The Finnish constitution was amended in 1995, bringing the national civil rights decree closer to international human rights. Of specific importance to the Roma was the right to use and develop the Romani language and culture (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000).

Cultural right claims are no longer rhetorically intertwined with a language of social conditions and problems. Minority status and attached rights become important per se, and are articulated, to all intents and purposes, as citizenship rights (Pakulski 1997; Stevenson 2001; Turner 2001). Drawing on a language of morals, ethics, fairness and dignity – related to the nation- appeals to a renewed national identity embedded in an open and tolerant society.

The main attention is given to language. Initiatives to support Romani include language training within the general education scheme for children and young people as well as the training of Romani teachers. During the 1990s, Romani was recognised as a minority language within the mother tongue educational programme for general education (Gynther 2001; Suonoja and Lindberg 2000). Other essential legal measures include the Children's Day Care Provision Decree (1336/1995), which requires the language and culture of children from all groups to be considered and supported in day care programmes (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000). The Minister of Education declares:

“... The aim is to clearly give the Roma a unique position as an old minority. The Board of education is currently organizing the training of mother tongue teachers for children and young people with a foreign language as their mother tongue. Also Romani teachers are participating. According to the opinion of the Ministry of Education, children belonging to a minority have the right to grow up to become active members of both their own cultural and linguistic community as well as of the Finnish society...” (Government response to the Parliament on a written question, Minister of Education, Riitta Uosukainen, National Coalition Party, KK 629/1993).

According to Carens (2000), a more extensive government support of linguistic rights for national minorities than for immigrant groups, can be justified on historical grounds and according to the numbers and concentration of the minority (p. 83). In the case of the Roma, the out-rooting of the Romani language and culture has partly contributed to the loss of language skills among the young generation. The political construction of Romani nation-state membership, where the Roma are ‘given a unique position as an old minority’, is drawing on the historical roots of the nation-state. The number of Roma is, however, smaller than that of Russians and Estonians, for example. The Roma are not concentrated to a particular part of Finland. From the point of view of the government, the support of language mediates generosity and goodwill without the risk of threatening the Finnish language and nation. Through the Finnish language, the Roma participate in the dominant, common culture and its institutional practices. Most young people do not speak Romani and the everyday language among Finnish Roma is Finnish, or in a few occasions Swedish (see also Huttunen 1997). Nevertheless, through the provision of Romani language rights, the government recognised Romani cultural identity as being important, although in a largely symbolic way (see also Carens 2000).

Kymlicka (1995) approaches national minorities through the lens of territory and autonomy. Consequently, his clear differentiation of language rights for national minorities and immigrants is not applicable to the Roma who are not occupying a territory or striving for national autonomy or encompassing their own institutional practices, but they do indeed share the historical narratives and the national belonging with the majority population.<sup>11</sup> Kymlicka argues that immigrant groups will eventually integrate into majority society while they do not

---

<sup>11</sup> In his more recent work Kymlicka (2001: 32) mentions the Roma as a group which ‘does not fit into the category of national minorities or immigrants’.

accommodate their own social institutions. History shows that the Roma have maintained their cultural identity despite not being in possession of their own institutions (see Kymlicka 1995: 77).

In her analysis of the parliamentary debate on immigration during the 1990s, Lepola (2000) concludes that the notion of multiculturalism was primarily attached to the politics of how to respond to a culturally diverse society rather than the state of this society. Lepola further notes that multiculturalism was predominantly used in relation to newcomers and not to national minorities. Talk about multiculturalism in relation to the Roma is not only attached to the various politics of how to respond to cultural diversity, but increasingly refers to the state of the society embodying national minorities as part of the nation-state.

“Finland’s own multiculturalism is also a much more multi-faceted issue than what could be established by the official bilingualism of the country. The oldest inhabitants in Finland are the Sámi. The Swedish settlement is of old age as well. The Roma have also been living here for hundreds of years and a new minority, among others, is the Russian” (Plenary debate, MP Halonen, Social Democratic Party, opposition party, Government bill on Sámi cultural autonomy, HE 248/1994).

While early 1990s discourse more clearly drew upon a paternalist perspective of how to handle or respond to the Romani minority, these following years see an increasing emphasis on a presumed new era of the multicultural nation-state. This becomes salient, not only when traditional minorities are constructed as part of the multicultural society, but also in rhetoric about recognition of difference as something new.

“I hope that this Parliament, when later looking back at its work, may state that it, for its own part, contributed to helping Finland understand difference, whilst still honouring equality, and by doing this takes more and more strongly towards a new era and a new Europe” (Plenary debate, MP Halonen, Social Democratic Party, opposition party, Government bill on changing the Constitution Act, HE309/1993).

A closer reading of the parliamentary debate draws attention to the fact that, in spite of the recognition of cultural rights as citizenship rights, the new ‘era of multiculturalism’ is primarily constructed as an essential feature of Finland’s new international or European image.

However, promoting Romani culture as a citizenship right and as an issue of equality is essentially embedded in a national rather than a post-national context. While the notion of cultural citizenship rights does have the potential of opening up for a more inclusive citizenship accessible to a broader group of people, notions of cultural rights constructed as general citizenship rights are here still primarily ascribed to nation-state citizenship, the Roma being given a unique status as an ‘old’ minority. There is a rationale drawing on the Finnish nation state and its moral and ethical foundations rather than on human rights in a broad sense, although human rights language is used rhetorically. The distancing from a more outspoken paternalist position to the Romani minority becomes salient in talk drawing on Romani agency as well as the right to identity. In a government statement (*selonteko*) to the parliament this declaration is being made:

“Society... also has to promote the cultural identity of those belonging to minority languages and cultures, such as the Sámi, the Roma and immigrants. This could in practice be carried out by creating conditions for these groups’ own active agency” (Government statement to the

Parliament, Lastensuojelusta kohti lapsipolitiikkaa, From child protection towards child politics, VNS 2/1995).

Identity talk is now occurring in the debate, opening up for a possibly more dynamic understanding of culture and ethnicity. While early discourse denoted participation to the objective of cultural policies with the government as the agent, a stronger emphasis on strengthening the conditions for agency can be traced during the mid 1990s.

## **7 Activation and re-evaluation**

Dividing the empirical part of this study into three different periods is, as stated earlier, not necessarily referring to very strict cut-off points, rather to a slowly evolving pattern of changing rhetoric emphasis. Around 1996 and 1997, after the years of identification with a cosmopolitan community, salient both in talk about a European belonging as well as in the notion of a 'culture-as-right' discourse, a new change of emphasis towards participatory and joint action rhetoric occurs. In a study of welfare-ideological change in Finnish parties during the 1990s, Nygård (2003: 225) concludes that a form of moralising attitude to the welfare state and its activities occurred during the latter part of the 1990s, when some form of counter-performance was being required in order to receive state benefits.

The notion of active citizenship has been used from a bottom-up perspective, referring to citizens' political participation and agency in a democratising sense (see further Lister 2003) as well as from a more negative, top-down perspective related to citizenship obligations or activation (Hvinden, Heikkilä and Kankare 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2002). The empirical data points to a double-edged change of argumentation in which notions of participation and activation are intertwined. Participation is increasingly stressed as a goal of minority policies. Whilst Romani agency is talked about in a language of citizenship obligations, this is also the case regarding cultural rights.

“In Finland, lots of resources are spent on maintaining the living standard and promoting the cultural attributes of foreign minorities. This money is partly used in vain, since the majority of the minorities do not engage in any activities in order to advance their situation and promote their culture. During the last few years, the Finnish original minority (perusvähemmistö), the Gypsies, have adjusted better and better to the rhythms of Finnish society and have increasingly started to care about preserving their own racial culture and language” (Budgetary initiative, MP Aittoniemi, Centre Party, opposition party, TAA 25/1996).

An implicit understanding of citizenship obligations as including also the preservation of culture and language is accompanied by the obligation to adjust to the 'rhythms of Finnish society'. Arguably, contemporary participatory dimensions of Romani nation state membership embody a wide range of forms of obligations. A group of parliamentarians claiming resources to the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs attach the weak social participation and influence in society to socio-economic status:

“The lower level of education and the higher unemployment that prevails among the Roma are still concrete problems in our country. Their social participation and influence in society is the weakest of all groups” (Budgetary initiative, MP Pykäläinen et al., Green Party, government party, TAA 660/1998 and TAA 811/1998).

There is also an interesting referral to these social problems as still existing in our country, constructing a national problem rather than a Romani problem. Social problems are again increasingly occurring on the parliamentary agenda, but they are discursively constructed in a different way. Rather than framing the Roma as objects, they are now increasingly seen as subjects (see also Brubaker 2001). Parliamentarian Räsänen concludes that Romani parents are reluctant to bring their children to school:

“Although we have free ‘pre-school tuition’, including free transport ... it is still not assured that all parents will bring their children to pre-school. Still some children might be closed out from this benefit. Here, I refer to the Romani Board’s statements, announced just a few days ago and in which the Roma expressed concern that Romani parents, without blaming them, do not have enough interest in pre-school, something that would give these children better prerequisites for later schooling and for getting on in this society, that would prevent them especially from exclusion” (Plenary debate, MP Räsänen, Christian Union, opposition party, Government bill on pre-schooling, HE309/1993).

The notion of co-operation may also be used to soften claims related to the elimination of social problems. Rather than taking on an outspoken top-down position of authority agency, joint action is now emphasised:

“Behind the implementation of the government’s compulsory-school education project ... is a common concern of Romani parents and authorities for the schooling situation... The committee emphasises that support measures must start off in co-operation with Romani parents” (The committee of Education and Culture, Statement about the budget proposals, SiVL 8/2002 vp, HE 132/2002).

“The work of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, as a co-operative board within central government administration, can be concluded to be a positive example of long-term co-operation between the government and the Roma. Indeed, this model can be offered, and has been offered as well, and great interest has been shown in several countries, for this kind of a joint action model” (Plenary debate, MP Ojala, Left Wing Alliance, government party, K 1/1999).

Through the ratification of international agreements, the Finnish nation-state obtained a possibility to mirror its own minority policy<sup>12</sup> and to evaluate its success. This success is usually assessed in comparison to the situation in other countries and by referring precisely to the Finnish Romani politics.

“I will conclude with something that most likely has been stated here before - Finland has been a model country. Actually, we, the Finnish parliamentarians in the European Council, have, I could almost say, been shaken to follow how different minorities in some European Council member states have been treated and are still treated today” (Plenary debate, MP Elo, Social Democratic Party, government party, K 1/1999).

Talk about Romani citizenship in the late 20th century draws on the strong and mature welfare-state, which has reached its policy goals of an egalitarian society where everyone can develop their own culture alongside with being part of the Finnish nation and its larger

---

<sup>12</sup> Issues related to cultural groups, regarded as different from the majority, are usually framed within a ‘minority framework’.

culture. Rhetoric consensus is constructed about an ideal situation where legislation and more overarching frameworks are as good as they can get. Although it is too early to draw any larger conclusions, there seems to be a shift towards a more critical stance during the very last years of the study. A survey conducted by the National Board of Education brings about a new intense debate on Romani schooling:

“The National Board of Education currently collects reports on the Roma and the Finnish education system. Available preliminary results are alarming. Around 15 per cent of the children terminate their schooling midway. 15 per cent of the children in the first six years of compulsory school and 30 per cent of the children in the last three years of compulsory school receive part time special education. 30 per cent have been transferred completely to special education ... What has then gone wrong? Why does the school not manage to better look after Romani children?” (Plenary debate, MP Pietikäinen, The Swedish People’s Party, government party, 113/2002).

The schooling issue is discussed in a language of surprise and frustration, stressing the general failure of the welfare state to concern for marginalized groups of people. The emphasis is now put on structural factors, entangled with a class dimension.

“What is meant by good education, when we are aware of the size of classes, the growth of different sorts of problems, the extent of special education and surveys about the education of Romani children, about them dropping out of school, not only after ninth grade, but from the very first grade. There are indeed alarming symptoms and issues pointing to a lack of resources. The teachers surely do everything they can and the education has developed, but now we must acknowledge these sore points, yet enough efforts have not been made, because (the speaker knocks) it is rather about a competition between the better off” (Plenary debate, MP Rauhala, Christian Union, opposition party, 113/2002).

The debate about education in the early years of the new millennium seems to be something of a wake-up-call for the members of parliament. Figures are used to stress the severity of the message. The rhetoric has changed. After almost a decade of success stories about the recognition of culture and identity, the report on Romani schooling again revealed the inequalities and injustices embedded in the welfare system, inequalities which had not been eliminated in spite of tolerant and seemingly progressive politics.

## **8 Conclusion**

The empirical study draws on a qualitative analysis of the Finnish parliamentary debate on Romani issues from 1989-2003. Certain breaking points were found in the debate concerning rhetoric emphasis as well as the content of claims-making in relation to different dimensions of citizenship. This was slightly surprising, since such transformation was not found in research on the parliamentary debate on immigrants during the same period (Lepola 2000). The social dimension was dominating until 1992 and after 1997, while the cultural dimension was frequently occurring on the agenda during 1993-1997.

Throughout the time period in focus, cultural rights for the Roma have been framed as a public matter within state responsibility. In spite of a shift from a more embedded to a more autonomous justification of cultural rights, the legitimatisation strategies have always drawn upon the language of social citizenship. While the early as well as the later years of the study emphasised objectives of integration, the mid 1990s discourse was, to a larger extent, concerned with cultural rights as a general dimension of equal citizenship and fair treatment.

This shift is strongly reflecting the political agenda of internationalisation and modernisation in the wake of post-communism and EU-membership and it follows the development in other settings. While a language of equality and fairness governed the claims-making strategies, this differentialist turn temporarily redirected the agenda from social to cultural rights. Not before the late 1990s is the social dimension returning to the political debate. The move from a top-down, occasionally also paternalistic and moralising perspective of social problems to a more empowering bottom-up perspective, one in which solutions to social problems are traced in a language of participation and co-operation, opens up for a broader interpretation of social citizenship, incorporating the Roma increasingly as social subjects rather than objects of state policies.

The three discursive shifts mirror the findings of Rogers Brubaker (2001) in a study of changing rhetoric on assimilation in France, Germany and the U.S. He concludes that the massive differentialist turn may have reached its peak, developing into a return of assimilation, although in a new and more normatively defensible understanding. One of the ways in which Brubaker argues that assimilation has been transformed is from seeing immigrant populations as malleable objects to active subjects. Assimilation is then not something 'done to persons, but rather something accomplished by them, not intentionally, but as an unlimited consequence of myriad individual actions and choices in particular social, cultural, economic and political contexts' (Brubaker 2001, 543; referring to Alba 1995). The co-operation between the Roma and Finnish authorities has arguably been advantageous for the Roma, at least for the elites, as well as for the Finnish government.

Pakulski (1997) concludes that 'the claims for cultural citizenship involve not only tolerance of diverse identities but also – and increasingly – claims to dignifying representation, normative accommodation, and active cultivation of these identities and their symbolic correlates.' While the autonomous celebration of cultural rights and recognition, introduced in the mid 1990s, is a prerequisite for symbolic and communicative inclusion, the linkage between the logic of recognition and the logic of redistribution needs further exploration (cf Benhabib 2002; Fraser 1997; Lister 2003). If cultural citizenship is about re-valuing stigmatised identities and marginalised lifestyles (Pakulski 1997), we need new openings for recognising the relation between misrecognition and low education, for example – what is active cultivation of identities? While the Finnish parliamentary debate has accentuated tolerance and the acceptance of difference as strengthening factors for Finnish social citizenship, it was not before the new millennium that the political discourse changed to increasingly stress notions of discrimination and inequalities in relation to the structural incapability to provide for the general education of the Roma.

Another feature of the parliamentary debate on Romani issues is that conscious-raising conflict and political negotiation does not really come out in the empirical analysis. I agree with Chris Haylett as he concludes that struggle for equality must recognise necessary conflict between different groups and individuals regarding 'the nature of that inclusive space, its dominant values and its systems of material distribution' (Haylett 2001: 53). The rhetorical change seems to occur as a reactive response to external events, as a consequence of social change, as maintaining rather than challenging the social order. Followed by this consensus policy, discussions about the foundations of a (multi)cultural citizenship are not very salient in the debate.

## References

Alba, R. 1995: 'Assimilation's quiet tide', in: *Public Interest* 119, pp. 3-18.

- Anderson, B.** 1991: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2nd revised edition. London: Verso.
- Anttonen, A.** 1998: 'Vocabularities of citizenship and gender: Finland', in: *Critical Social Policy*, 18,3, pp. 355-373.
- Bacchi, C.L.** 1999: *Women, Policy and Politics. The construction of policy problems*. London: Sage.
- Benhabib, S.** 2002: *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Blomberg, H. and Kroll, C.** 1999: 'Who wants to preserve the Scandinavian Service State? Attitudes to Welfare Services among Citizens and Local Government Elites in Finland, 1992-96', in: S. Svallfors and P. Taylor-Gooby (eds.): *The End of the Welfare State? Responses to State Retrenchment*. London: Routledge, pp. 52-86
- Börjesson, M.** 2003: *Diskurser och konstruktioner: En sorts metodbok*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Borchorst, A. and Siim B.** 2002: 'The women-friendly welfare states revisited', in: *NORA*, 2,10, pp. 90-98.
- Bredström, A. and Dahlstedt, M** 2002: 'Folkhemsrap?'- Motstånd och 'anständighet' i svensk hip hop. ThemES - Occasional Papers and Reprints on Ethnic Studies. Norrköping: Center for Ethnic and Urban Studies.
- Brubaker, R.** 2001: 'The Return of Assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany and the United States', in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24,4, pp. 531-548.
- Brubaker, R. and Cooper, F.** 2000: 'Beyond "identity"', in: *Theory and Society*, 29,1, pp. 1-47.
- Bussemaker, J. and Voet, R.** 1998: 'Citizenship and gender: theoretical approaches and historical legacies', in: *Critical Social Policy*, 18, 3, pp. 277-308
- Calhoun, C.** 1997: *Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Carens, J.** 2000: *Culture, Citizenship and Community. A contextual Exploration of Evenhandedness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delanty, G.** 2000: *Citizenship in a Global Age*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Fraser, N.** 1997: *Justice Interruptus*. London: Routledge.
- Grönfors, M.** 1977: *Blood Feuding among Finnish Gypsies*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston sosiologian laitoksen tutkimuksia no 213.
- Gynther, P.** 2001: 'Vocational and adult education of the Roma: The Finnish experience', in: *The Right to Education of Vulnerable Groups whilst Respecting their Cultural Identity*. Co-publication by UNESCO and Intercenter. Giappichelli Editore, Torino.
- Haylett, C.** 2001: 'Modernization, welfare and 'third way' politics: limits to theorizing in 'thirds''? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26,1, pp. 43-56.
- Hernesniemi, P. and Hannikainen, L** 2000: *Roma Minorities in the Nordic and Baltic Countries – are their rights realised? The Northern Institute for Environmental and Minority Law*. Rovaniemi: Lapland's University Press.
- Hobsbawn, E** 1990: *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huttunen, L.** 1997: 'Romanit suomalaisina ja vähemmistöidentiteettinsä rakentajina', in: *Nuorisotutkimus*, 15,4, pp. 4-14.
- Hvinden, B., Heikkilä, M. and Kankare, I.** 2001 'Towards activation? The changing relationship between social protection and employment in Western Europe', in: M Kautto, J Fritzell, B Hvinden, J Kvist and H Uusitalo (eds.): *Nordic Welfare States in the European Context*. London: Routledge, pp. 168-197.

- Isin, E.F. and Turner, B.S.** 2002: 'Citizenship studies: an introduction', in: E.F Isin and B.S Turner (eds.): *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. London: Sage, pp. 1-10.
- Isin, E.F. and Wood, P.K.** 1999: *Citizenship and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Jones, E. and Gaventa, J.** 2002: *Concepts of Citizenship: A Review*. University of Sussex: Institute for Developmental Studies.
- Kymlicka, W.** 1995: *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W.** 2001: *Politics in the Vernacular*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lepola, O.** 2000: *Ulkomaalaisesta suomenmaalaiseksi*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura.
- Lister, R.** 2003: *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. 2nd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Lister, R. et al.** 2003: 'Young People talk about Citizenship: Empirical Perspectives on Theoretical Debates', in: *Citizenship Studies*, 7,2, pp. 235-253.
- Nygård, M.** 2003: *Välfärdsstaten, partierna och marknaden. Den välfärdsideologiska förändringen inom fyra finländska partier under 1990-talet*. Åbo: Åbo Akademis förlag.
- Ollikainen, M.** 1995: *Vankkurikansan perilliset: romanit, Euroopan unohdettu vähemmistö*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Pakulski, J.** 1997: 'Cultural citizenship', in: *Citizenship Studies*, 1,1, pp. 73-86.
- Pulma, P.** 1999: 'Kun mustalaisleiri muutti kaupunkiin. Romanikysymys Helsingissä ja Tukholmassa 1950-luvulla', in: J Niemelä (ed.): *Ihmiset ovat kaupunki*. Turku: Thark, 53.
- Pykkänen, A.** 2004: 'Constructions of Legal Persons in a 'Communitarian' Context: The Modernisation of Law in Finland', in: V Puuronen et al. (eds.): *New Challenges for the Welfare Society*. Joensuu: University of Joensuu, pp. 63-89.
- Siim, B.** 2000: *Gender and Citizenship: Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Similä, M.** 2000: *Migrants and Ethnic Minorities on the Margins: report for Finland. MEMM-report to CEMES. Swedish School of Social Science/CEREN*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Smith, A.** 1986: *The Ethnic Origins of Nation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Soysal, Y.N.** 1994: *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Statham, P.** 2002: *The Contentious Politics of Asylum in Britain and Europe: A Research Outline*. Centre for European Political Communications. Working Paper Series 1/02.
- Statistics Finland** 2003: [http://tilastokeskus.fi/index\\_en.html](http://tilastokeskus.fi/index_en.html) [23.4.2003].
- Stevenson, N.** 2001: 'Culture and citizenship: an introduction', in: Stevenson, N. (ed.): *Culture & Citizenship*. London: Sage, pp. 1-10.
- Suonoja, K. and Lindberg, V.** 2000: *Strategies of the Policy on Roma*. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.
- Svallfors, S.** 1999: 'The middle class and welfare state retrenchment: attitudes to Swedish welfare policies', in: S Svallfors and P Taylor-Gooby (eds.): *The End of the Welfare State? Responses to state retrenchment*. London: Routledge, pp. 34-51.

**Taylor, C.** 1994: 'The politics of recognition', in A Gutmann (ed) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**Taylor-Gooby, P.** 2002: 'The silver age of the welfare state: perspectives on resilience', in: *Journal of Social Policy* 31,4, pp. 597-621.

**Turner, B.** 2001: 'Outline of a general theory of cultural citizenship', in Stevenson, N. (ed.): *Culture and Citizenship*. London: Sage, pp. 11-31.

**Turner, B.** 1993: *Citizenship and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

**Vehmas, R.** 1961: *Suomen Romaniväestön ryhmäluonne ja akkulturoituminen*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto.

**Viljanen, A-M.** 1999: 'A culture of psychiatry and culture in psychiatry', in: *Suomen Antropologi*, 4, pp. 114-130.

**Winther Jørgensen, M. and Phillips, L.** 2000: *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

**Young, I.M.** 1998: 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship', in G. Shafir (ed.): *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 263-290.

**Author's Address:**

PM Camilla Nordberg  
Åbo Academi University  
Department of Social Policy  
PO Box 311  
65101 VAASA  
Finland  
Tel. +358 6324 7494  
Email: [camilla.nordberg@abo.fi](mailto:camilla.nordberg@abo.fi)

**Social Work  
& Society**