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Romaphobia among adolescents : the role of perceived threat, nationalism, and acculturation expectations

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3. Romaphobia among Serbian adolescents: The role of national in-group attitudes and perceived threat

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This study employed the integrated threat theory to examine Serbian adolescents' attitudes towards the Roma. The sample consisted of 687 secondary school students (mean age 17), of which 53% were females. In a survey-based study, we assessed adolescents' national in-group attitudes (i.e. nationalism), their feelings toward the Roma, and their perception of economic and symbolic threat. Findings suggest that perceived threat to either real resources or worldviews of the dominant group was related to more negative attitudes towards the Roma minority. Further, Romaphobia was positively related to adolescents' nationalism and this relationship was partially mediated by perceived economic and symbolic threat. The theoretical and educational implications are discussed.

Keywords

Romaphobia, perceived threat, nationalism, Serbian adolescents

Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by international and European efforts to improve the position of the Roma, widely considered one of the most disadvantaged groups in Europe (Barany, 2001; Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Guy, 2001; Hancock, 1987; Petrova, 2003; Sigona, 2005). The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) is an international political initiative involving twelve European countries dedicated to reducing discrimination, segregation and poverty among this minority. In June 2008, Serbia took the Decade Presidency and announced the National Action Plans for Roma inclusion, prioritizing legalization of Roma settlements and the prevention of discrimination in education. However, the Roma remained segregated from the mainstream population, facing high-unemployment and low-education rates, poor living conditions and limited access to healthcare (Miklos, Smederevac & Tovilovic, 2009; Milcher, 2009). Moreover, they were often subjected to forced evictions, as well as to sporadic incidents of racially motivated violence, committed mostly by ultra nationalist youth groups and skinheads (Ackovic, 2009; Crowe, 2008; Simeunovic, 2008).

The scientific insight into the factors preceding the anti-Roma attitudes may shed new light on the factors that are relevant for preventing discrimination against the Roma. In previous research, the word “anti-Gypsyism” has commonly been used as a generic term for a broad set of negative feelings, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices against the Roma (Hancock, 1987; Petrova, 2003). This term is controversial, however, because it also reflects a pejorative meaning of the word “Gypsy” (Liegeois, 1994). Yet, an alternative in the form of a concise definition of anti-Roma attitudes is lacking. In this study, we define anti-Roma attitudes as Romaphobia. Similar to terms such as Islamophobia or Homophobia, the word “Romaphobia” does not reflect excessive or pathological fear of a particular group; instead, it refers to negative emotions towards the group in settings in which group labels, such as ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, become a salient basis for categorization (Brondolo, Ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). The Roma group membership is strongly determined by common ancestry (Liegeois & Gheorghe, 1995). Nevertheless, the label “Roma” does not refer to a homogenous group, but to a highly diversified minority, which adheres to multiple cultural and religious traditions (Liegeois, 1994). Because of this reason some authors argue that the Roma identity is a subjective or ascribed

identification with a group that has historically been labeled “Roma” (Scepely & Simon, 2004). Cross-cultural research shows that the label “Roma” pertains to Roma ethnicity (i.e. heritage), but also reflects status differences from the mainstream population (Kligman, 2001; Prieto-Flores, 2006). Past research suggests that the stereotypical perception of Roma “otherness”, i.e. in terms of threat and mistrust, may be the key to anti Roma attitudes (Petrova, 2003). In addition, it was shown that nationalism and a desire for cultural homogenization among dominant group members may have contributed to the perceived threat from Roma (Brearley, 2001; Woodcock, 2007).

The idea that perceived threat constitutes a key for negative prejudice has extensively been discussed within the realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, 1966), and symbolic racism theory (Kinder & Sears, 1981). More recently, Stephan and Stephan (1996) unified these conceptually different notions into the integrated threat theory. The integrated threat theory suggests the social psychological mechanisms underlying outgroup prejudice involve perceived threat and its antecedents (e.g. ingroup identity) (Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006, for a meta analysis).

The notions of nationalism and perceived threat may certainly depict the intergroup relationships in Serbia over the last decades (Pesic, 1996). Past research suggests that the relationships between the Roma and Serbian majority were not conflictive, however they were influenced by regional and local conflicts (Brearley, 2001; Crowe, 1994). In former Yugoslavia (1943-1992), the integration of Roma into the mainstream society was actively promoted within the state-governed policy of multiculturalism (Frazer, 1992). This meant that there was room for the preservation of the language and culture of the Roma, but also that there were efforts toward equal access to education, housing, healthcare, and employment possibilities (Barany, 2001). Different from the situation in other communist countries, Yugoslav Roma had the right to set up their own social and cultural organizations, unsupervised by the state (Barany, 2001; Crowe, 1994). Nevertheless, the Roma integration was only partially successful; the socio-economic discrepancy between the Roma and non-Roma remained, particularly in the area of education levels and the standard of living (Crowe, 1994; Latham, 1999).

This trend and its consequences became more rigorous during the economic and political crises of the post-Communist era, when the living conditions of the Roma further deteriorated, while negative attitudes and discrimination against the minority

increased (Antic, 2005; Brearley, 2001). Hence, the salience of economic threat can be attributed to the factors which associate the Roma group with poverty and a distribution of social benefits. The salience of symbolic threat may be related to the socio-political changes in Serbia. The political transition (from a one-party system to political pluralism) induced nationalism as a device to preserve superior group status in the face of socio-political changes (Denitch, 1996; Pesic, 1996; Ramet, 2006; Todosijevic, 2008). On the one hand, symbolic threat may be a manifestation of general intolerance towards (ethnic, racial, and/or religious) diversity in the post-war society (Ivekovic, 2002; Sekulic, Massey & Hodson, 2006). On the other hand, it can be seen as a part of the newly emerging racism in Serbia (Byford, 2002), focusing on ‘cultural differences’ as legitimate grounds for negative feelings towards out-groups.

Drawing on past research, we expect that the relationships between nationalism and Romaphobia in Serbia may be explained by feelings of threat (cf. Brewer, 1999). More specifically, we expect that perceived threat mediates the relationship between nationalism and Romaphobia. Testing this assumption is the main goal of the present study.

Nationalism as antecedent of perceived threat and Romaphobia

Nationalism has been defined in two major ways, as the national in-group identity, or the ideology and socio-political movement for realization of political autonomy in the name of a nation (cf. Weiss, 2003). On the one hand, these definitions emphasize the importance of cultural-historical entities as the bases for political legitimacy. On the other, they assume a strong emotional component which determines the relationship with one’s own ethnic group, language, religion, as well as a specific sense of comradeship among the group members (Anderson, 1983). Nationalists typically want a nation state to “protect” or “maintain” national cultural values. As the research into the recent Serbian past clearly indicates, Serbian nationalism is based on an emotional identification with the ethnic in-group and a belief that a country must meet national, rather than individual interests (Pesic, 1996). Although the Serbian involvement in the Yugoslav war devastated the country both economically and symbolically, nationalism has remained the dominant factor of socio-political cohesion and political legitimacy in post-conflict Serbia (Byford, 2002; Todosijevic, 2008).

For the current purpose, we will define nationalism as a type of in-group identification that is primarily centered on affiliation with a nation, which depending

on the circumstances and ideological premises, may reflect strong attachment to or a desire for a nation state (Anderson, 1983). For people with strong nationalist feelings, the national group provides a familiar context in a broader social landscape. The feeling of belonging and attachment to a nation accommodates a desire for a positive social identity and aggregate security and harmony of interests (Weiss, 2003). However, this feeling may also reinforce a fear of outsiders jeopardizing desired ethnic homogeneity and a national monopoly over scarce resources (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966).

In previous studies, people with strong nationalistic feelings were found more prejudiced towards culturally distinct minorities and perceived more threat (Brearley, 2001; Helleiner, 1995; MacLaughlin, 1998; Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001; Salecl, 1993; Woodcock, 2007). From these findings it is not clear whether nationalism precedes threat or whether threat fuels nationalism (Li & Brewer, 2004; Staub & Levine, 1999). The integrated threat theory proposes that perceived threat mediates the relationships between in-group and out-group attitudes (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Hence, the notion of mediation implies that the relationships between nationalism and Romaphobia in Serbia may be explained by real or perceived conditions in which groups compete over scarce resources (cf. Brewer, 1999).

Romaphobia and perceived threat

Conceptually, this study builds upon the integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1996) which considers perceived threat (posed by the out-group or its members) as the main predictor to prejudice. The present study focuses on perceived or the apperception of personally experienced economic and symbolic threat. Perceived economic threat concerns intergroup competition for scarce resources such as jobs and housing (Sheriff, 1966). Symbolic threat is about the worldviews of a group, which is assumingly threatened by out-group members with distinct morals, norms, and values (Sears, 1988).

Past research has provided evidence that perceived threat depends of the socioeconomic context and the type of group that is dealt with (Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006, for a meta analysis). For example, symbolic but not economic threat was found to predict negative attitudes toward Ethiopian immigrants in Israel (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998) and adolescents' Islamophobia in the Netherlands (Gonzalez, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). Common for these

groups (Ethiopians in Israel, and Moroccans in the Netherlands) is that they are considered to belong to lower social strata in the host countries and therefore do not compete for scarce resources (e.g. jobs) with the mainstream population. In addition, economic circumstances in both countries are relatively favorable; hence there is no objective ground for the perception of economic threat. However, being culturally different from the dominant ethnic group, the nationals, these minorities are typically perceived as a threat to values cherished by the dominant group, including individualism, work ethic, gender equality, and democratic culture in general (Stephan, Boniecki, Ybarra, Bettencourt, Ervin, & Jackson, 2002; Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman, 1999).

In the Serbian context, one would expect that symbolic threat coincides with the desire for cultural homogenization and fear of out-groups (in this case the Roma) not accommodating this desire. Although ideological discussions surrounding intercultural differences played an important role in ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia and hence in Serbia (Pesic, 1996), the hardship of the economic reality in the post-conflict era has shifted the focus of public attention towards mundane matters, such as employment, sustainable development, and the quality of life (Todosijevic, 2008). For these reasons we expect Serbian adolescents' anti Roma attitudes to be linked to perceived threat to mainstream culture (symbolic threat), and material wellbeing (economic threat).

Moreover, the feelings of threat felt by the nationals are likely to be triggered by the 'visibility' of the Roma in general. The attention for the Decade of Roma Inclusion may increase the salience of the Roma and hence may increase Romaphobia. The role of institutional support in enhancing the salience of group memberships is well known from studies on anti-Black attitudes in the United States that show that people tend to perceive institutional support for out-groups as a type of unwelcome and unjustified positive discrimination, which raises the levels of perceived economic and symbolic threat (e.g. Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Renfro, Duran, Stephan, & Clason, 2006). Nationalists typically believe that the national material and immaterial resources belong to the dominant group; hence, they may perceive the affirmative actions in favor of a subordinate group as an unfavorable distribution of these resources (Li & Brewer, 2004; Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999).

Finally, demographic changes which occurred due to the massive arrival of Roma refugees from Kosovo in 1999 may have facilitated symbolic threat. Most of these new-comers were Muslims and were perceived to be culturally different from the

national population which is predominantly Christian (European Roma Rights Centre, 1999). Moreover, these newcomers had an unclear legal status. Many have been forced to live in temporary settlements and have been unable to obtain valid residence permits (Humanitarian Law Centre, 2003).

The role of gender and education

Earlier studies highlighted gender and educational differences regarding appreciation or animosity towards various out-groups (e.g. Arendt-Toth & Vijver, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Watts, 1996). Generally, being a female or highly educated coincide with lower levels of prejudice and less perception of intergroup threat than being male or less educated. Drawing from past research, the current study examines gender and education differences in regard to the adolescents' prejudice toward the Roma.

The present study

Current study focuses on perceived economic and symbolic threat from Roma. In addition, it analyzes the direct and indirect (via perceived threat) relationships between nationalism and prejudice. The study adds to past research by providing insights into the relative contribution of different types of threat to adolescents' Romaphobia, and by introducing nationalism as an antecedent of threat. Furthermore, earlier studies primarily focused on adults' attitudes (Dunbar & Simonova, 2003; Postma, 1996), whereas the current study uses a sample of adolescent secondary school students. An important reason to focus on young people as the research population is the empirical evidence that basic inter-ethnic attitudes are developed at an early age, and that these attitudes, once developed, tend to be long-lasting (Aboud, 2008; Barret & Oppenheimer, 2011; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009). A second reason is that this group is still at school. If desired or needed they can be relatively easy reached to correct one-sided perceptions and negative behavioral consequences (e.g., teasing, discrimination). If indeed threat plays an important mediating role between nationalism and Romaphobia, addressing threat may provide better opportunities for prevention and intervention than the focus nationalism. Attempts to reduce or avoid fear may even be the key to changing nationalist attitudes. Finally, the study allows for assessing the differences in anti Roma attitudes between different educational levels.

The hypotheses guiding the current study are formulated as follows:

- 1) *Romaphobia is positively related to both economic and symbolic threat.*
- 2) *Nationalistic in-group attitudes will be positively associated to anti Roma attitudes;*
- 3) *Both types of perceived threat will mediate the relationship between nationalism and Romaphobia.*
- 4) *The male and the vocational school students will feel more threatened and have stronger anti Roma attitudes than the female and grammar school students.*

Method

Participants

In May 2008, 747 adolescents (aged 16-18) participated in the survey-based study which took place in both grammar (53.4 percent) and vocational (46.3 percent) schools in Serbia. The sample consisted of second, third, and fourth grade students. Based on self-report, a great majority of students were ethnic Serbs ($N = 687$; 92.3%). Minority students, including two who declared themselves as ethnic Roma, were excluded from the data set. The sample consisted of 364 (53.3%) females, and 319 (46.7%) males. Four students did not report gender. Sixty-two percent of grammar students, and 42.3% of vocational students were females. The mean age of the whole sample was 16.96 ($SD = .69$), and was similar among the school types (grammar: $M = 17$; $SD = .66$; vocational: $M = 16.86$; $SD = .71$).

Procedure

Prior to the data collection, we contacted twenty, randomly chosen, grammar and vocational schools from four cities. Four schools, two grammar and two vocational schools, promptly showed interest in participating in the survey, and were surveyed first. Thereafter we assured access to six schools thanks to recommendations from the schools already participating in the study. The directors of the participating schools had the authority to act in *loco parentis* to give permission for the students to take part. Data were collected in the classrooms, during the regular school hours, and supervised by the researcher or the research assistant. The students were asked to participate in a study on “adolescents’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and the plural society.” All students participated voluntarily and gave their consent prior to their inclusion in the

study. Questionnaires were in Serbian and it took the students about 45 minutes to complete them.

Measures

The first part of the questionnaire contained *demographic questions* dealing with age, ethnicity, gender, and school type.

Romaphobia was measured with a six item scale, based on a scale developed by Stephan and colleagues (1999, 2000, 2002). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent the words, such as *approval, acceptance, admiration* (all reverse-scored), *antipathy, disdain, and disrespect* reflected their feelings towards the Roma. Responses ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). A principal component analysis with varimax rotation (henceforth PCA) revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 52% variance. Cronbach's alpha amounted to .80.

The two threat scales were based on instruments used in previous studies on perceived out-group threat (Stephan et al., 1999, 2000, 2002). *Economic Threat* was measured with a 11-item Scale (sample items: "*Too much money is spent on Roma educational programs*"; "*Many companies prefer less qualified Roma than more qualified non-Roma when hiring people*"). The five-point response scale ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 50% variance. Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Symbolic threat was measured with a 12-item scale (sample items: "*Roma and non-Roma have different family values*"; "*Roma have different work attitudes than non-Roma*"). The items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 37% variance. Cronbach's alpha was .83

Nationalism was measured with a 9-item scale extracted from Dekker et al.'s scale (2003). Sample items: "*In general, Serbs are better than people with other nationalities*"; "*The Serbs should not mix with people with other nationalities*"; etc. The five-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). A PCA revealed that all items loaded on one factor, explaining 56.7% variance. Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Statistical analyses

We first present descriptive data and measures of correlation and dependence between the variables. We next present hierarchical regression analyses conducted to assess the predictive power of the variables on Romaphobia. The objective of subsequent mediation analyses (Baron and Kenny, 1986) is to test direct and indirect (via perceived threat) relationships between national in-group attitudes and anti Roma attitudes.

Results

Descriptives and correlations of the main variables

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations of the main study variables. In general, adolescents did not express strong negative attitudes towards Roma ($M= 2.06$; $SD= .91$), or a high level of perceived threat ($M= 1.95$, $SD= .84$, for economic); and ($M= 2.95$; $SD= .85$, for symbolic threat). The mean score for nationalism was also relatively low ($M= 2.89$; $SD= 1.15$). This pattern of results followed previous (self-report) survey-based findings from social psychological research, which primarily reveal “neutral or low positive” out-group attitudes (cf. Gonzales, et al., 2008).

The correlations between the main study variables were significant. Consistent with our expectations, nationalism was significantly correlated to Romaphobia ($r=.25$, $p< .001$); but also to the threat variables (economic: $r= .37$, $p< .001$; and symbolic: $r=.26$, $p< .001$). The two threat variables were also significantly correlated with each other ($r=.54$, $p<.001$) and with Romaphobia (economic threat: $r=.45$, $p<.001$, and symbolic threat: $r=.39$, $p<.001$).

A one-way ANOVA procedure was used to test for gender and educational differences in Romaphobia. The analyses revealed a main effect of gender ($F(1.679)=30.960$, $p<.001$) and school type ($F(1.682)= 14.038$, $p<.001$). More specifically, it was found that being a female ($M = 1.89$; $SD = .86$) or a grammar student ($M = 1.94$; $SD = .89$) corresponded with a lower level of Romaphobia than being a male ($M=2.27$; $SD=.92$, *Cohen's d*= .42) or a vocational student ($M=2.20$; $SD=.91$, *Cohen's d*= .28).

Table 1

Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations between variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Romaphobia	Economic threat	Symbolic threat
Romaphobia	2.06	.91	-		
Economic threat	1.95	.84	.45**		
Symbolic threat	2.95	.85	.39**	.54**	
Nationalism	2.89	1.15	.25**	.37**	.26**

** $p < .001$ *Threat hypotheses*

To test our first and second hypotheses, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed between Romaphobia as the dependent variable and perceived threat (i.e. economic and symbolic) and nationalism as independent variables. Because of their well documented association to out-group negative attitudes, gender (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and adolescents' education (Tumin, Barton & Burrus, 1958, Stephan, 1999, Wagner & Zick, 2006) were added as control variables in hypotheses testing. These nominal variables (i.e. gender and school type) were dummy-coded before being entered into the regression model. In the step-wise procedure, demographic variables were entered first into the regression model (model 1). Thereafter, the threat variables were entered (model 2). Finally, national in-group preference was added (model 3). Results are presented in Table 2.

The first hypothesis was supported. Economic and symbolic threat accounted for eighteen percent of explained variance in Romaphobia. With respect to socio-demographic factors, gender remained a significant predictor for Romaphobia after all variables were entered into the model, whereas education was no longer a significant predictor after economic threat was entered into the regression model.

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses supported the second hypothesis that nationalist in-group attitudes ($\beta = .12$, $t(626) = 2.80$, $p < .01$) would be a significant, albeit weak predictor for Romaphobia ($R^2 = .01$). The whole model accounted for 25% of variance in adolescents' anti Roma attitudes.

Table 2

Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting Romaphobia ($N = 634$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Gender	-.33	.07	-.18**	-.26	.06	-.14**	-.23	.06	-.12**
School type	-.25	.07	-.14**	-.01	.06	-.01	.00	.06	.00
Economic threat				.32	.04	.30**	.29	.04	.27**
Symbolic threat				.23	.04	.22**	.22	.04	.21**
Nationalism							.09	.03	.12**
ΔR^2			.06**			.18**			.01*
<i>F</i> for change in R^2			14.778			79.116			4.440

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$

Mediation hypothesis

To test whether there was both a direct and indirect (via economic and symbolic threat) effect of national in-group attitudes on Romaphobia (the third hypothesis), mediation analyses were performed. Mediation analyses were performed in accordance with Kenny and Baron (1986), i.e. estimating a series of regression models (see Table 3). The first step tested the predictive power of nationalism, which accounted for six percent of explained variance in anti Roma attitudes ($\beta = .25$, $t(673) = 6.73$; $p < .001$). The second step was to test the separate relationships between nationalism, on the one hand, and the two types of threat, on the other. Nationalism was found a significant predictor for both economic ($\beta = .37$, $t(674) = 10.53$, $p < .001$) and symbolic ($\beta = .26$, $t(671) = 7.02$, $p < .001$) threat; explained variances were 14%, and 6%, respectively. The third and final step revealed support for the mediation hypothesis, albeit partially. Economic threat predicted Romaphobia, even when nationalism was statistically controlled, while the effect of nationalism on Romaphobia decreased when economic threat was statistically controlled ($\beta = .09$, $t(672) = 2.65$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the standardized regression coefficient between nationalism and anti-Roma attitudes partially decreased when controlling for symbolic threat ($\beta = .16$, $t(669) = 4.47$, $p < .001$).

Table 3

Mediating role of threats on relationship between nationalism and Romaphobia

	Dependent variable	Predictor	B	SEB	B	R ²
Step 1	Romaphobia	Nationalism	.19	.02	.25**	.06**
Step 2	Economic threat	Nationalism	.27	.02	.37**	.14**
Step 3	Romaphobia	Economic threat	.44	.04	.41**	.20**
		Nationalism	.07	.02	.09*	
Step 1	Romaphobia	Nationalism	.19	.02	.25**	.06**
Step 2	Symbolic threat	Nationalism	.19	.02	.26**	.06**
Step 3	Romaphobia	Symbolic threat	.37	.03	.35**	.17**
		Nationalism	.12	.02	.16**	

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$

Discussion

Nationalism as an antecedent of threat and Romaphobia

In the current study we measured adolescents' in-group identity as nationalism. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study analyzed the relationships between nationalism, perceived threat, and out-group attitudes (but see Morrison, Plaut & Ybarra, 2010). Empirical research points to nationalists' inclination for intolerance and negative attitudes towards others (Weiss, 2003). Nationalism generates concerns about resource allocations, i.e. economic threat, and cultural interests of the dominant group, i.e. symbolic threat (Li & Brewer, 2004; Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999). This threat, in turn, entices and supports the emergence of Romaphobia.

The most important contribution of the current study concerns the introduction of adolescents' nationalistic feeling as an antecedent of threat. The results revealed that both nationalism and perceived threat explain part of the variance in anti Roma attitudes. A nationalistic desire to preserve the dominant group status may be particularly salient within the context of complex transitional processes in contemporary Serbia, i.e. the emergence of a liberalized economic system and new market competition (Antic, 2005; Todosijevic, 2008). In this context it could be that nationalism induces ethno-cultural polarization or a climate in which ethnic (or cultural) diversity is typically seen as challenging the dominant culture. Hence, both

economic and symbolic threat may be seen as a manifestation of ethno-cultural polarization in post-conflict Serbia (Denitch, 1996; Pesic, 1996; Ramet, 2006). Furthermore, the results suggest that the relationship between nationalism and anti Roma attitudes cannot be completely explained by the link that both have with economic and symbolic threat. It may be that nationalism provides an ideological framework for intolerance and intergroup animosity, affecting most of the citizens, including adolescents (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001).

Alternatively, one may argue that the relationships between nationalism and threat may be intertwined and cyclic, i.e. reflecting (and depending on) intergroup dynamics in specific socio-political contexts. For example, out-group threat is typically salient in times of socio-political crises due to political elite's attempts to undergird the national ties using emotional mobilization (Stern, 1995). In recent Serbian history, such emotional mobilization had undoubtedly a notable role in providing mainstream support for the ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia. The most prominent Serbian national myths were related to a specific intergroup context (for example, the 1389 Kosovo battle as a symbol of "historical animosity" between Serbs and Muslims). Perhaps this threat-driven nationalist exclusionism resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy in intergroup relationships. Notwithstanding a relatively passive role of Roma people in the Yugoslav crisis, Romaphobia increased during the ethnic conflicts (Crowe, 2008).

Threat and Romaphobia

Results of this study demonstrated that both economic and symbolic threat accounted for a considerable percentage of the variance in Romaphobia among Serbian adolescents. This finding was in accordance with our expectations, and with the integrated threat theory that formed the basis for our hypotheses. The relative contribution of specific types of threat can be attributed to several contextual and intergroup factors, such as socio-economic circumstances in the country, history of intergroup relationships, subordinate group status, and cultural differences (See Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006, for a meta analysis).

The current findings can be elucidated by a short historical account of the relationship between the Roma and the Serbian majority. Historically this relationship has been peaceful, although influenced by social crises and regional conflicts (Brearley, 2001; Crowe, 1994). Serbian involvement in the brutal ethnic conflicts in

the 1990's led to the international isolation and the devastation of living conditions for most of the citizens (Jaksic, 2002), a situation that amplified intergroup competition for scarce national resources. In times of crisis, the Roma typically served as a scapegoat for disadvantageous economic circumstances (Liegeois, 1994; Liegeois & Gheorghe, 1995). Apparent economic vulnerability of the Roma and unwanted distribution of social benefits added to the salience of nationals' feelings of economic threat. The salience of symbolic threat may be a manifestation of general intolerance towards ethnic diversity in post-war Serbia (Ivekovic, 2002; Sekulic, Massey & Hodson, 2006), but may also be evidence of a newly emerging racism towards a visible minority with a distinct culture (Bobo, 1999).

Gender and school type

The relationship between gender and out-group prejudice concurs with previous research (cf. Ekehammar, Akrami, & Araya, 2003). On average, males scored higher on anti Roma attitudes, than females. This may be due to different appreciations of threat between man and women, but it may reflect differences in actual competitiveness when it comes to the real resources, or cultural values.

As predicted, vocational students were more Romaphobic than adolescents attending the grammar schools. In contrast to the grammar schools students that are encouraged to obtain higher education, associated to better jobs and higher social status, the vocational students are provided with sufficient skills and knowledge to enter the labor market soon after the completion of secondary education. The vocational students are therefore more likely to compete for jobs with the subordinate group members, which may lead to a higher level of perceived economic threat, and higher anti Roma attitudes among this educational group.

Implications

The results of the study suggest that prevention efforts for reduction of Romaphobia should focus on the feelings of threat and the nationalistic feelings. The feelings of economic threat may be reduced by working towards the creation of superordinate group identities that endorse perception of out-groups as valuable resources; not just as an extra group of competitors (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Symbolic threat may be reduced through intercultural training programs that may focus on enhancing alternative multidimensional classifications of 'others' (Bigler & Liben,

2002), and on reducing the salience of category distinctiveness (Brewer, 1999). The adolescents participating in the current study were all students in secondary schools.

Given the fact that the Roma youngsters are particularly a risk group to be exposed to all forms of violence from their peers (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008), these schools and possibly primary schools as well, are ideal places to implement strategies and programs aimed at achieving the aforementioned goals. And, last but not least, in terms of political participation in society adolescents are the newcomers. Their attitudes in the field of ethnic prejudice may provide important insight into personal value orientations that are crucial in a democratic society, such as tolerance and voting behavior (e.g. Miller & Sears, 1986).

Limitations and prospects

The study presented in this article has some limitations. It is a correlational study that cannot deal adequately with the uncertainty about causal relationships between the variables. Although proposed model was a directional model in which nationalism was suggested to precede Romaphobia and threat was positioned as the mechanism of influence, this study actually does present no evidence about the suggested causality. We would need a longitudinal or experimental design to find such evidence. Moreover, a longitudinal study would allow for a better analysis and interpretation of the mediation models tested in this study. An important shortcoming is also the use of self-reports, typically associated to motivational response concerns (Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le, & Schmitt, 2005). The use of implicit attitude measures (Fazio & Olson, 2003), instead of self-assessment (i.e. questionnaire), especially in research on socially sensitive matters, such as out-group attitudes may reduce social desirability bias. Furthermore, in order to get a better view on the national youths' perception of Roma and their position in Serbian society, future researchers would be well advised to investigate the symbolic position of Roma in comparison to the other culturally different out-groups, such as new Chinese migrants. In addition, future research may benefit from a more interactive approach, including also Roma's perspective, and some refinements with respect to the antecedent factors. For example, the notion of minority influence and the conflict elaboration (Perez & Mugny, 1996) may be used to explore how a low status minority like the Roma exercise social influence in a competitive intergroup context. Moreover, the effect of possible moderators, such as intergroup contact, acculturation expectations, and

knowledge (ignorance) about the Roma, pose challenges for future research on Romaphobia. Studying such moderators may more directly than the current study feed into future interventions that can be implemented in schools to combat anti Roma attitudes.

Conclusion

Our assumptions came from the integrated threat theory, which proposes in-group identity to be an antecedent of threat. The current study defined nationalism as a social identity. The results of the study indicate that the relationships between nationalistic preferences and Romaphobia are partially direct and partially due to perceived threat to economic wellbeing and cultural values. The present findings do not exclude the possibility that the relationship between nationalism and threat is cyclic or reciprocal, instead of simply linear.

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