Critical Romani Studies

Exploring Romani Literature

from Theory to Practice

VOLUME 3 • NUMBER 2 • 2020

Critical Romani Studies

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Aims and Scope

Critical Romani Studies is an international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal providing a forum for activist-scholars to critically examine racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and human rights abuses of Roma. Without compromising academic standards of evidence collection and analysis, the Journal seeks to create a platform to critically engage with academic knowledge production, and generate critical academic and policy knowledge targeting – amongst others – scholars, activists, and policymakers.

Scholarly expertise is a tool, rather than the end, for critical analysis of social phenomena affecting Roma, contributing to the fight for social justice. The Journal especially welcomes the cross-fertilization of Romani studies with the fields of critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical policy studies, diaspora studies, colonial studies, postcolonial studies, and studies of decolonization.

The Journal actively solicits papers from critically-minded young Romani scholars who have historically experienced significant barriers in engaging with academic knowledge production. The Journal considers only previously unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research. The Journal is committed to the principle of open access, so articles are available free of charge. All published articles undergo rigorous peer review, based on initial editorial screening and refereeing by at least two anonymous scholars. The Journal provides a modest but fair remuneration for authors, editors, and reviewers.

The Journal has grown out of the informal Roma Research and Empowerment Network, and it is founded by the Romani Studies Program of Central European University and the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. The Romani Studies Program at CEU organizes conferences annually where draft papers are presented and discussed before selecting them for peer review.

Critical Romani Studies is published by the Romani Studies Program at Central European University. Angéla Kóczé, Chair of Romani Studies. Address: Nádor utca 9, 1051 Budapest, Hungary. Homepage: https://romanistudies.ceu.edu

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ISSN 2560-3019

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Foreword

Ana Belén Martín Sevillano

ab.martin.sevillano@umontreal.ca

Tenured Associate Professor, Université de Montréal

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7829-3067

Ana Belén Martín Sevillano received her BA and PhD in Hispanic Philology from Universidad Complutense de Madrid, specializing in Latin American Literature and Culture. Her research focuses on issues related to *diaspora*, "race"/ethnicity, and gender in Spain and Latin America. In 2014 she received an endowment from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to work on her project The Emergence of the Hispano-Romani Literature: The Writing of Ethnicity, Diaspora and Citizenship.

Oksana Marafioti

oksanamarafioti@gmail.com

Author and Instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Oksana Marafioti is the author of *American Gypsy: A Memoir (2012)* and *Donatti's Lunatics* (2018). Her writings have appeared in *Rumpus*, *Slate*, and *Time* magazines, and in a number of literary journals and anthologies. She has presented lectures at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and CSPAN's Book TV. Oksana was the 2013 Library of Congress Literary Award Recipient and was the 2020 recipient of the Picador Excellence in Literature Award from the University of Leipzig, Germany. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and teaches at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Exploring Romani Literature: From Theory to Practice

The 2019 Critical Approaches to Romani Studies Conference – held at the Central European University – included a panel on Romani literature that was the kernel of this issue. The regular presence of literary scholars in Romani studies forums and conferences suggests that literature, whether oral or written, is indeed a very important dimension of past and present Romani culture. What was unusual in the abovementioned panel was the presence of an author, Oksana Marafioti, whose presentation reflected on the very act of writing. Occasionally, writers are invited to read their work during academic conferences, either as keynote speakers or during special sessions, but in this case we had the unique opportunity to seamlessly discuss how literature is a spheric production in which the processes of writing, editing/publishing, and reception – both by general or critical readership – are intertwined and feed each other in complex ways.

When Oksana Marafioti and I were invited to put together this special issue on Romani literature, we soon agreed that it would offer a more compelling critical view if it were to include creative writing, which is rarely published in academic journals. The *Critical Romani Studies* editorial committee gracefully approved our plan, and for the last year we have been working with the authors and anonymous reviewers in putting together this collection of stories and critical articles that offer a glimpse of what Romani literature might be. Oksana and I are very grateful for the hard work and effort the contributors to this issue have made. The anonymous reviewers involved in the double-blind review process that the academic articles followed should be explicitly praised; their comments and input greatly helped authors to improve their initial work.

This *Critical Romani Studies* special issue explores the notion and practice of Romani literature through scholarly papers and creative writing. As any other cultural product, literature is shaped by social and historical circumstances; literary practice and theory change over time, adjusting to new ideological and aesthetical contexts. In the case of Romani literature, the ethnic dimension that it entails poses an additional layer of complexity, not only because the Romani peoples are diverse and scattered, but also because ethnicity as an identity marker can be experienced in different, often contradictory, ways. At the same time, not all Romani writers explicitly reflect on their ethnicity in their writing; certainly, considering all the works authored by Roma as ethnic literature can play down their depth and artistic value. Still, and as the pieces in this issue convey, identity is a critical question in texts authored by Roma. If for any minority the challenge of preserving its cultural identity is of great consequence, for Roma, a historically oppressed group, it is vital. Yet, what is Romani identity (or any other national or ethnic identity for that matter)? This is a question with no straight answer. Each one of the individuals who self-identify as Rom might have a different understanding and experience of what it means to be Rom. Hence, this special issue explores how authors are addressing from their positioned experiences the dimensions of ethnic identity through creative writing and literary analysis.

The astounding development of Romani writing in the last few decades is undoubtedly linked to the development of a Romani ethnopolitical movement through a network of civil organizations. At this time in history, we can trace a transnational Romani literary activity in which individual, group, and

national values or experiences are pieced together with those of the broader diasporic group. The ideo-aesthetic commonalities that exist among a diverse array of written texts reveal the building of a diasporic consciousness that emerges from the credo of the International Romani Union and other ethnopolitical instances of representation.

In the last decades, and in parallel to the emergence of the Romani literature, studies on Romani literature have considered its diasporic, hybrid, and multilingual character (Toninato 2014; Blandfort 2015; Zahova 2016). Three of the critical articles in this issue build on those seminal studies, explicitly addressing the benefits and the pitfalls that the tag of "Romani literature" might entail. More importantly, they offer theoretical tools in order to effectively sort, categorize, and analyze Romani literary production. In particular, Ileana Chirila builds on studies on Jewish literature, equally diasporic, extensive and geographically spread as the Romani one, borrowing the concept of "literary complex" (Miron 2010), and applying it to the analysis of *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* by Anina Ciuciu and *Rien ne rèsiste à Romica* by Valérie Rodrigue. Similarly, Martín Sevillano´s article departs from the notion of "ethos" (Reynolds 1993; Baumlin and Meyer 2018) in order to establish the existing ideo-esthetic cohesion among literary narratives written in different languages and national settings: *Camelamos Naquerar* by José Heredia Maya, *Goddamn Gypsy* by Ronald Lee, *Dites-le avec des pleurs* by Mateo Maximoff, and *Fires in the Dark* by Louise Doughty. This series of critical papers on the notion of Romani literature closes with Marina Hertrampf´s work, which weighs the extent and traits of Romani literature assisted by Deleuze and Guattari´s concept of "minor literature," offering as an example a descriptive overview of French and Spanish authors and texts.

The fourth critical article in this issue, "Tackling Negative Representation: The Use of Storytelling as a Critical Pedagogical Tool for Positive Representation of Roma" by Georgia Kalpazidou, Dimitris Ladopoulos, and Theofano Papakonstantinou, serves as a bridge between literary theory and literary practice by focusing on the pedagogical dimension of storytelling. The authors consider how this literary practice can be used as a teaching/learning tool to counteract the negative social representation that affects Roma and has a profound impact on children and young adults.

Finally, the critical section closes with an article that focuses on visual culture, connecting in meaningful ways with some of the topics addressed in the pieces devoted to literature. Éva Kovács's "Black Bodies, White Bodies – 'Gypsy' Images in Central Europe at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1880–1920)" offers a sophisticated analysis of the subtle ways in which oppression, perception, and representation intertwine.

The three reviews that follow are pertinent to this special issue in that they reveal the actual development of Romani literature and Romani studies. Laura Tittel's piece critically describes the participation of Romani literature as a distinct entity in the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair, which reveals the current momentum of Romani arts and cultures in the international scene. Mariana Sabino Salazar offers an organized account of the history, content, and current state of the Romani Archives and Documentation Centre (RADOC), one of the most salient elements of Dr. Ian Hancock´s academic legacy. Finally, Deniz Selmani offers a descriptive account of a significant recent addition to the field of Romani studies: *The Roma and their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé.

The Arts and Culture section of this issue is devoted to creative writing and reflections on the reoccurring themes of family and memories and the roles both play in the construction of a literary Romani identity. The collection is a peek into the depths of the Romani literary production, and it proffers a generous start point for scholars and writers interested in exploring the multidimensionality of Romani narratives.

Oksana Marafioti's foreword examines the damaging effects of the practice of Romani identity as a caricature embedded in non-Romani literary and scholarly discourses, before establishing the vital role classical and contemporary Romani authors play in Romani literary activism movements that seek to re-establish Romani characters in fiction and non-fiction.

In Jorge Emilio Nedich's "Gypsy Identity" a young boy learns the rules of survival from Romani parents caught between the yearning to build a good life and the hard realities of wandering outcasts. During the process of writing essays and memoirs, authors often become the keepers of vital and, in equal parts, personal and cultural histories, as can be seen in the three creative non-fiction pieces by Jessica Reidy, Frances Roberts–Reilly, and Katelan Foisy. Reidy's "What We Will Not Burn" brims with attention as a grandmother passes to her granddaughter not only precious family heirlooms but also life-tested advice about grit. In Roberts–Reilly's "Who Was John Sampson Really Protecting?" the author's birthday road trip through Wales runs parallel to intrigue and a historical mix-up about the life of a well-known Romani ancestor. Foisy's "Roots" considers the idea of rootedness as transgenerational history of Herbalism. A case of cultural appropriation takes centerstage in Galina Trefil's "Gypsabee Dilemma." In the final two poems, Diana Norma Szokolyai evokes a world spun from the familial imagery and generational connection to culture so integral to our understanding of Romani identity.

As editors, we are aware that the articles and stories here can only offer a partial open-ended account of what Romani literature, in theory and in practice, is or can be. It is precisely this fluid and flexible texture that we would like to underscore as a distinctive trait of Romani literary activity.

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Unity or Contiguity: Expanding the Field of Romani Literature

Ileana D. Chirila

ileana.chirila@unh.edu

Assistant Professor, University of New Hampshire

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2811-7596

Ileana D. Chirila is an Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of New Hampshire. She specializes in transcultural literatures in French, with a special focus on Sino-French literature and Romani literature in French. Her research extends to disciplines such as extreme contemporary literature, cultural studies, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, cultural theory, and migrant studies. She has published and has forthcoming volume chapters and articles in journals such as *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, Critical Romani Studies, La Francophonie en Asie-Pacifique*.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 10–23 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.87

Abstract

Romani literature has an important role in challenging the predominant negative views about Roma, but its influence is lessened by the minimization of Romani cultural expressions, literature being one of them. In this paper, after a theoretical positioning of Romani literature, I show how contemporary Romani literature could expand its position of influence through a re-evaluation of what constitutes the literary canon, and by the promotion, by scholars and specialists, of a "Romani literary complex." As a case study, I discuss here two Francophone texts, by a Roma (Anina Ciuciu) and by a non-Roma (Valérie Rodrigue), positing that, although not "literary" in the traditional sense, both of them could be considered part of an emerging Romani literary complex that , in turn, might accelerate the institutionalization of this literature.

Keywords

- Anina Ciuciu
- Contiguity
- French literature
- Romani literary complex
- Romani literature
- Valérie Rodrigue

Introduction

Western literature has played an important role in the othering of Roma, as for centuries "Gypsy"[1] characters have been depicted as outsiders in letters and historical documents produced about, rather than by, Roma. In the absence of texts written by Romani authors, the relentless portrayal of Roma as foreigners, thieves, abductors, or outcasts, from Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Hugo, to modern films and TV adaptations, has produced a body of imagery that, as Glajar and Radulescu underline in *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*, has "shaped the individual and collective perceptions of people across Europe for centuries" (2008, 33). As a literary device, this type of exotic imagery about marginal communities or people may have been conceived as a narrative strategy for capturing readers' attention, but exoticism was also the product of a specific philosophical and historical context, one concerned with the perception and description of difference, or "otherness," mainly for colonial or imperialistic purposes, and always with a racist subtext. Functioning in the same parameters as tropes about other "exotic" subjects (such as "the African," "the Arab," "the Chinese," or "the Indian"), literary exoticism about Roma rarely gave a truthful or realistic picture of Romani culture, or of Roma as fully dimensional human beings. Instead, it reduced "the Gypsy" to a stock character, constantly symbolizing geographical meandering, cultural remoteness, or/and human inadequacy. As a result, employed *ad nauseam*, these negative and stereotypical tropes permeated social discourse and informed public attitudes, surfacing in political discourses, media representations, and ordinary conversations, especially alongside biased opinions about real people and communities.

To counteract these prevailing clichés, the popularization and dissemination of Romani literature should offer an effective means of recalibrating the general view or understanding about Roma. A growing body of literary narratives by Roma (and, although scarcer, by non-Roma) is contributing to the dispelling of these long-standing stereotypes, through a different, more nuanced, and more realistic representation of the personal experiences and values of Romani characters. Concurrently, the academic scholarship dedicated to Romani literature has grown exponentially in the last decade, rapidly evolving from sparse articles in specialized journals to doctoral dissertations and monographs. Nevertheless, despite the growth of this literary production and of the readership that accompanies it, Romani literature still suffers from lack of institutionalization (it is less taught in school), lack of dissemination (it is less published), lack of recognition (it has fewer literary prizes), and sometimes even lack of definition ("What is Romani literature?"). In this study I claim that, to help Romani literature emerge into the light, we should take into consideration theoretical interpretations that can increase our understanding of the complexities of Romani literature today, and can lead to an expansion of the field of Romani literature through the incorporation of non-canonical texts. One such theory is contained within Dan Miron's ideas of the "modern literary complex" and "contiguity," which I discuss in this paper in relation to two texts published in French: *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste*, a piece of collaborative writing between a Romani author, Anina

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1 There is no single term embracing all people of Romani or related ethnic affiliation. In this article I use the term *Roma* as an ethnonym, and the terms *Manouche* and *Tzigane* in keeping with the choices of the authors represented here who used these exonyms. The use of the quotation marks ("Gypsy") is meant to underscore that non-Roma often attach derogatory connotations to these exonyms.

Ciuciu, and a French journalist; and *Rien ne résiste à Romica*, written by a French journalist, Valérie Rodrigue, and thus with, ostensibly, no Romani authorship. Although Miron's authoritative literary theory was developed in regard to Jewish writings, common features between the situations of the two literatures could make it applicable to Romani literature.

1. What Is Romani Literature?

Romani literature as a category is not easy to define, or even identify, and the general public might not even be aware that it exists. Compared to the discipline of literature in general, the field of Romani literature is very young. For reference, the discipline of literature, or literary studies, is considered by many to have started in the fourth century BCE, with the first major study of literature: Aristotle's *Poetics*. By contrast, although oral folk stories and storytelling traditions existed within Romani communities for centuries,[2] it is believed that the first written iterations of Romani literature date back to the first decades of the twentieth century, while the public's acquaintance with Romani literature as a distinct field might date from 2019, when the International Roma Writers Association (IRWA) debuted a "Gypsy Pavilion" at the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany, the largest book fair in the world. The inaugural appearance as an organized presence was an attempt to represent what was described as "Europe's largest minority group" and who amount up to 25 million people worldwide. According to Veijo Baltzar, a Romani-Finnish author and the president of the IRWA, organizing this pavilion was not without its challenges, given the fact that Romani authors seldom belong to national writer unions, and the marginalization of Romani writers is a serious issue (they rarely succeed in publishing with the significant professional publishers in various markets). The unprecedented and most relevant aspect of this new pavilion was its transnational composition: the Romani writers featured in the pavilion hailed from many diverse countries and wrote in different national languages and Romani dialects – ethnic affiliation being the only element they had in common. Some of the authors represented in Frankfurt were Semso Avdic (Bosnia and Herzegovina/ Sweden), Luminiţa Cioabă (Romania), Louise Doughty (Great Britain), Ibraim Dzemail (Macedonia/ Germany), Irena Eliásová (Slovakia), Jasna Kosanovic (Germany), Félix Monget (France), Jud Nirenberg (United States), Ruzdija Russo Sejdovic (Montenegro/Germany), Santino Spinelli (Italy), and Georgi Tsvetkoff (Russia/Bulgaria).

In the face of this indisputable transnationality of Romani texts, it becomes easier to understand why the public at large is less familiar with Romani literature – not only because of its relative novelty, but also because it is, perhaps, the most overlooked representation of what Deleuze and Guattari call "minor literature": not the literature of a minor language, but the literature that a minority writes in a major language. What we could call Romani literature is produced not only in Romani but also, especially, in English, German, French, Spanish, and Russian, among other languages. An even more complicated image emerges after a more in-depth examination of the language issue: while in Eastern Europe there are strong communities of Roma who have preserved their language, and there is a demand for texts in Romani, in Western Europe some communities do not have a written language, such as the Manouche in

2 These oral storytelling traditions include such forms as songs, legends, and fairy tales.

France, who use a specific dialect of Romani for oral communication among themselves, and French for everything else. Therefore, questions related to identifying and defining Romani literature have formed the basis of most studies dedicated to Romani literature, and continue to be hotly debated by both writers and field specialists.[3]

In the last decade, as these interrogations have increasingly made their way into discussion forums, literary conferences, and scholarly publications, what we might call Romani literature has become a progressively more complex and complicated field – one that is still emerging, on the verge of making the transition from anthropology to literature, from testimony to creation, and from oral culture to printed culture. Since Romani culture has essentially been orally based for centuries, researchers have differed in their opinions about the modern Romani literary canon, and whether it should include transcriptions of the traditional oral literature, including legends, songs, and fairy tales, and transcriptions of testimonies and oral autobiographies, or whether it should be limited to literary productions as conceived by the Western tradition, such as biographies, essays, memoirs, novels, plays, poetry, and stories.

For Milena Hübschmannová (see Eder-Jordan) and Marie-Dominique Wicker Romani literature affirms the centuries-old oral tradition within Romani communities, and the ways in which this tradition translates into the subtleties and nuances of new literary forms. They argue that written Romani literature should always maintain a special connection with this oral tradition, while also striving to be a link between dispersed Romani communities. What is important here is the idea of unity and continuity within diversity, a concept that informs most scholarship about Romani literature. Others, like Alain Reyniers, hold more traditional views, undoubtedly drawn to compare new and emergent literatures to the older Western canon. For Reyniers there is an oral Romani tradition, and written texts produced by Romani writers, but no Romani literature, or at least not yet. According to him, for such an emergent literature to mature a new stature or importance must be given, collectively, to written expression. In other words, for Romani literature to exist, a collective revolution must happen, which "would undoubtedly imply collective conscience beyond the community, and a relativization of group expressions" (Reyniers 2009, 115). This position can be controversial for its caducity: while the category of "world literature" has made a powerful return in the twenty-first century, Reyniers' theory pleads for a national consciousness, capable to command and produce a "national" type of literature. In a strict opposition to the upholders of "world literature" theories,[4] Reyniers does not situate local subjectivities and histories within the larger framework of global modernity, but instead conceives literature merely as a reflection of the fight for national sovereignty. Like Reyniers, Jean-Luc Poueyto considers that Romani literature is the literature produced by Roma only, regardless of the fact that this strict delimitation raises many other questions related to the ethnic composition of the population called "Roma."[5] The complications of such a strictly ethnical definition are infinite, and they go beyond literature.

3 Such questions include: How can we identify and define Romani literature? Should this literature be written in Romani only? By whom is it written, and for what public?

4 Like Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and Christopher Prendergast.

5 When does one stop being Roma? Is a person whose Romani heritage goes back to only one great-grandparent still Roma? Is it open for interpretation?

Cécile Kovacshazy rejects this narrow taxonomy by highlighting the dire consequences of such a restriction, and by pointing to the contemporary literary field, with its plurality of places, languages, and cultures – the obstacles of which some are attempting to overcome through concepts like "Weltliteratur," "world literature," and "littérature-monde," as mentioned above. Kovacshazy considers that, in the case of Romani literature, these impediments can be alleviated by taking into account one specific element of its status as an emergent literature: intentionality. In her opinion, Romani literature consists of any text that claims itself as such, and this aspect sets it apart from other category, such as Francophone or postcolonial literature – although in many ways it recycles the same questions as Creole, postcolonial, or Francophone literature. Kovacshazy's take on the present state of Romani literature, as a fragmented conglomerate of Romani literary expressions, is much more empirical than theoretical, and suggests some basic differences between this corpus of work and what are more commonly regarded as national literatures: there is not "one" Romani literature, and being part of it implies an *a priori* ideological commitment from the writer, beyond a commitment to literature itself.

Paola Toninato, in her *Romani Writing: Literacy, Literature and Identity Politics*, also emphasizes the idea that many Romani writers work within the framework of more than one Romani literature, and that bilingualism (and sometimes even trilingualism) is not only common but also natural. According to Toninato, the deterritorialized nature of Romani communities has led to a hybridity of Romani literatures. She addresses this hybridity by classifying them according to the main language of writing or publication: Romani literature in English, French, Polish, Romanian, Russian, and so forth. She pays special attention to different categorizations of Romani literature, rejecting some ("ethnic literature," "migrant literature"), embracing others as possible alternatives ("literature with no fixed abode," "decentralized writing," "world literature"), and receiving one with mixed criticism ("minor literature"). Although Toninato is thorough in explaining the implications of literature and literacy for Roma, she misses the opportunity to consider the very fruitful concept of diaspora, which she sees as problematic when talking about Romani communities. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides a broad definition of diasporas as "members of ethnic and national communities, who have left, but maintain links with, their homelands. The term 'diasporas' conveys the idea of transnational populations, living in one place, while still maintaining relations with their homelands, being both 'here' and 'there'" (IOM 2019, 49). In light of this definition, Toninato rightfully considers the case of Roma to be quite exceptional, as they share some defining features of a diasporic population – for example, Roma share a sense of collective memory and a strong group consciousness as an ethnic community, one that is sustained over a long period of time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, and perhaps more significantly, they are a widely dispersed and internally varied group. However, Roma completely lack other crucial diasporic features, such as that which lies at the core of the classical notion of diaspora, as conceived for the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside ancient Palestine after the Babylonian exile: namely, a strong link with a homeland – the original homeland.

And yet, regardless of the myriad details that complicate the way in which the diasporic status of Roma is interpreted, the concept is at the heart of many productive theories and perspectives on Romani literature. Julia Blandfort, for example, contends that, as a socio-cultural category, the notion of a "diaspora" allows us to better account for some specific structures and ideas expressed in Romani literature, like dispersion, exclusion and inclusion, and references to a territory of origin. She argues that the concepts of "minor" and "migrant" literature are inadequate when accounting for the literature of the Romani communities that

together make up a "diasporic people." Blandfort's originality rests in her contention that, although the diasporic experience is deeply linked to memory transmission, in the case of Romani writers this cultural memory is fictional: there is no national reconstruction project, simply because this cultural memory is established without the consensus of the Romani people, which makes it fragile and transitional.

One glaring absence from the scholarship dedicated to Romani writings is discussions about the similarities connecting these writings to the original diasporic literature: Jewish literature. The concept of Jewish literature has equally demanded definition, as Jewish authors have lived in many countries, and have written in many different languages and in diverse genres. Critics are even today pondering the boundaries and stylistic features of Jewish literature, to such an extent that although Jewish texts have been written continuously for the past 3,000 years, one of the most cited volumes in the field has the edifying title, *What Is Jewish Literature?* The book explores the same questions that pertain to Romani literature such as: What are the criteria for identifying Jewish literature? Are they language, the religious affiliation of the author, a distinctive Jewish imagination, or literary tradition? These are long-standing questions that demonstrate, according to the author, Hana Wirth-Nesher, the ultimate indefinability of the subject. The most obvious similarity between Romani and Jewish literatures is the fact that both lack the basic markers of what is commonly understood to be a "national literature": a shared geography and a common language. Moreover, Romani literature also shares some features with Israeli literature, the existence of which also complicates the concept of "national" literature, having been produced in several languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, Yiddish, among others), by both Jews and non-Jews.

Aligning himself with critics of the concept of "national literature," in 2010 literary critic and scholar Dan Miron put forward a new theory about the way we think about literature by asserting in his book *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* that the concept of "Jewish literature" is no longer viable. In an attempt to put an end to the question "what is Jewish literature," he reproached previous theorists for their view of Jewish literature as a continuous, unified field, and for their failure to accept its overwhelming diversity, and especially the "abnormal" centrifugal forces of modern Jewish literature. In his book, Miron drew attention to American and European Jewish writers who did not necessarily write for a Jewish audience, and who had been left out by previous theories about Jewish literature, like Marcel Proust or Heinrich Heine. Miron went against the grain in not looking for unity, tradition, or continuity in his definition of Jewish literature, in what he saw as the obvious multiplicity and broader scope of Jewish writing. Instead of "unity" and "continuity," Miron proposed "contiguity" as the principle that must inform a new Jewish literary theory. He recommended abandoning the idea of a single "Jewish literature" or a "modern Jewish canon" in favour of a "modern Jewish literary complex." According to Miron, this Jewish literary complex would be almost impossible to define, because it is too vast and disorderly, and somewhat diffuse.

Miron's new theory, based on contiguity, focuses on proximities, contacts, textual influence, dualities, mobilities, parallelisms, and other ambivalent and hard-to-define relations between the text, the author, and what he calls "Judesein" – a reference to the German term *Dasein*.[6] For an example of contiguity

6 "Dasein" refers to an awareness of (human) existence. Similarly, Miron has declared "Jewish" any text that "evinces an interest in or is in whatever way and to whatever extent conditioned by a sense of Judesein, being Jewish."

in the Jewish literary complex, Miron looks to Franz Kafka and Sholem Aleichem, not to imply that there are intertextual links between their works but to demonstrate that both were reacting in their writings to a similar Jewish context of persecution and weakness. In Miron's interpretation, the two writers are contiguous not because they were influenced by each other (they were not: they wrote in different languages, and within radically different literary milieus), but because they both embraced inaction, weakness, inertia, and a marginal existence, and they both reflected a suspicion of rules, laws, and ideology in their writings.

By focusing on texts that were relational through links that are more ambivalent and less tangible, or predictable, than those that we tend to refer to when discussing intertextuality, influence, inspiration, or a national context, Miron's "Jewish literary complex" has gone further than all previous literary theories used to define a literary corpus. In the case of Romani literature, Miron's theory opens up the possibility of moving from various ontological definitions (such as those based on language, location, ethnicity of the author, specific "Romani" content, or form) to an empirical definition, captured by the term *Romasein* – the sense of "being Roma in the world." This fundamental concept implies a new way of thinking about literature as a construct: it suggests that there is no previous Western canon to which Romani literature should conform, and there should be no specific Romani canon by which writers must abide.

By applying Miron's revolutionary concept of contiguity, we could define a new Romani literary complex based on proximities, unregulated contacts, and moments of adjacency. The new Romani literary complex would go beyond the traditional concept of literature as corpus of texts connected by a distinguishable formal property called "literariness" (as defined by Russian Formalists), and would align more with Terry Eagleton's assertion that literature is made of any text that a particular group relates to and values. A Romani literary complex would not necessarily "replace" the field of Romani literature, but would transform it into a multifaceted entity consisting of different connected, semi-connected, and unconnected particles, to paraphrase Miron, and would make room for writers who are Romani-literate without necessarily being Roma. This new way of decontextualizing and recontextualizing literariness, and literature in general, could have major consequences for the inclusion of literary Romaniness ("Gitanidad," "Gypsyness") in fields that tend to be very structured and less flexible, like academia, and therefore could lead to a faster institutionalization of Romani literature. Miron's crucial contribution was to assert that Hebrew and Yiddish literatures can claim no monopoly on literary Jewishness, thus endorsing the latest trends in American universities, namely the inclusion of professors in French, German, or Russian literature on the list of affiliated faculty for Jewish studies programs. Similarly, Romani literature would increase its reach by becoming increasingly featured in academic programs of world literatures (or French or Portuguese literatures, and so on), through the presence of authors belonging to the Romani literary complex.

2. Case Study: Romani Literature of French Expression

As a case study, let us consider the Romani writers of French expression. For a long time, these writers were either absent from French and Francophone literary anthologies and critical works, or classified as exceptions, in the margins of the French canon. Matéo Maximoff, who has established himself as one of the great figures of literature in Europe, and whose books have been translated into multiple languages, is one such writer. Despite having written all his works, apart from a few unpublished stories, in French, and despite having been decorated as a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres of the French Republic in 1986, Maximoff has been consistently presented to the public as an "écrivain tsigane" or "écrivain manouche" ("Gypsy writer"). The same designation ("écrivain tsigane" or "artiste tsigane") is used for Alexandre Romanès, a Romani-French contemporary writer and artist, even though he is one of the very few artist recipients of the French Legion of Honour,[7] and despite the fact that at the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, his troupe[8] represented France, and not Romanestan, Ionel Rotaru's imagined country for all Roma.[9]

The literary works of many other contemporary Romani writers of French expression are often rejected by editors, either because the writer is not an established "name" in literature, or because their writings are unclassifiable and difficult to market, being uncharacteristic for the French canon. When talking about Luis Ruiz's 2008 novel *La guerre noble*, for example, Hélène Ramdani, the founder of Le Navire en pleine ville, the very young publishing house that printed the book, qualified it as "a kind of philosophical tale written by a young Gypsy." The publishing of the novel was advertised to the larger public as being "an event," because of the misperception that the rest of Romani literature is exclusively oral. The marketing package accompanying *La guerre noble* informs the reader:

> This book is an event. Its author, Luis Ruiz is Gypsy, and *his culture is all oral*. However, whether through his photographs that he exhibits regularly, or through his texts which are all odes to the richness of the world from which he came, Luis Ruiz has chosen to create bridges between the Gypsy universe and that of the Gadjos. And *for the first time, a text written by a member of the Gypsy community* receives the support of his peers, and *its publication is encouraged* (author's translation and italics).

Quotes like this make it obvious that for the French publishing industry, either the concept of Romani literature in French does not exist or the inclusion of its members in the French canon is implausible.

With the exception of Maximoff and Romanès, all the other Romani writers of French expression are hosted by small, specialized publishing houses, even Sandra Jayat, whose first, autobiographically inspired novel, *La longue route d'une zingarina*, became required reading for elementary school French literature classes in the 1980s. Like Jayat, Romani writers Françoise Gaspard, Miguel Haler, Louise

7 Romanès received the Legion of Honour in 2016.

8 Romanès' troupe was called Cirque Tzigane Romanès.

9 See Maria Sierra, "Creating *Romanestan*."

Pisla Helmstetter, Jean-Marie Kerwich, and Sterna Weltz-Zigler are taking their chances with less famous presses that publish work that is perceived as risky, challenging, and pushing boundaries, and therefore unlikely to find any commercial success. While often rejected by editors at big houses, who have aggressive sales goals, Romani writers of French expression are embraced by smaller presses like Wallâda, which Françoise Mingot-Tauran created in 1982 with the encouragement and financial support of Father Fleury, the great resistance fighter and "national chaplain of the Gypsies." Wallâda is the only French/Francophone publishing house that has an entire collection dedicated to Romani literary creation (Waroutcho). Other than Maximoff, other Romani writers published by Wallâda are Joseph Doërr, Lick Dubois, Miguel Dufour, Jan Vania de Gila-Kochanowski, Roberto Lorier, Esmeralda Romanez, Joseph Stimbach, Georgina Valin, and Ricardo Viscardi.

Even a superficial analysis of the marketing and publishing situation of Romani writers of French expression shows that Romani Francophone literature is emergent, multifaceted, marginalized, and in dire need of dissemination. Considering all this, Miron's concepts of a "literary complex" and "contiguity" could prove very helpful in promulgating texts and perspectives that may not be either traditional (as conceived within Western literature) or widely accepted by the community (both the Romani community and the larger literary community), but that can shed a light on the complexity of Romani culture and literary performance.

I am suggesting here two particular texts, *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* (in a very liberal translation: I am Gypsy, now and forever) by Anina Ciuciu, and *Rien ne résiste à Romica* (Nothing can stop Romica), by Valérie Rodrigue, which, without the consideration of Miron's two concepts, would not necessarily fit the traditional notion of literature for at least two reasons: they would not be perceived as literary works, as intended by their authors, and they would not be perceived as literary in aesthetic terms.

In *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste*, Ciuciu tells the story of a young Romani woman, Ciuciu herself, whose journey leads from refugee camps to the Sorbonne, from a precarious life to the status of lawyer and French-language author. It is the story of a difficult life, but just as much a testimony to a humanism that crosses borders of nationality, race, gender, and language. The idea of writing an autobiographical testimony seems completely inconceivable, even to the 22-year-old Romani author herself: she admits several times that unveiling her intimate self to the public eye was a difficult ordeal. The anxiety she felt by being exposed to public humiliation comes up several times in the book, including on the back cover: "My name is Anina, I am 22 years old and I am Roma. I have known misery, insults, sordid camps. In France, I did not always have enough to eat, and I had to beg in the street to survive. I will be forever humiliated by it" (author's translation).

Also inconceivable is the invisibility of human misery, against which Rodrigue leads the charge in *Rien ne résiste à Romica*, a text painting the story of an improbable friendship between a Parisian bourgeois (the author) and a woman belonging to the Romani community, Romica, a pregnant mother who begs in front of the post office. Like Anina, the young protagonist of *Rien ne résiste à Romica* succeeds in moving from living in a slum to acquiring diplomas, a profession, and ultimately a country: France. Rodrigue presents to us Romica's story, even with the risk of self-accusation and society shaming: "Romica had been begging in front of the main post office for four years and I had just noticed her presence" (Rodrigue 2016, 12; author's translation). Further on, she asks rhetorical questions that dishonour not only her

readers but humanity as a whole, which she considers plagued by widespread blindness: "If people build shelters under our motorways, is it in the name of a nomadic lifestyle or extreme poverty? Who leaves their country? Who sleeps outside for pleasure?" (Rodrigue 2016, 15; author's translation).

What is striking in both these testimonies is their call to examine one's conscience, the humanist search they undertake, and their demands for justice. Very quickly the reader comes to understand the reality for these young women: Anina's quest for a hospitable country, her tribulations during the long journey from Romania to her host country, and her humiliating experiences in the streets of Italy and France, as well as Romica's very early marriage, her illusions regarding having children and the poverty that presided over her exile, and the makeshift villages where she lives. We are presented with a world that most people only see on television, or on the outskirts of French cities, when these areas are evacuated by the CRS.[10] Rodrigue's and Ciuciu's stories reveal all the imaginable pitfalls, and all the appalling administrative obstacles that Romica and Anina must overcome to come out of their "nonexistence" and their hiding – to claim a normal life, work, earn a living, study, find their place in society, and break through the invisibility that surrounds them.

However, when it comes to categorizing these two stories in terms of traditional literary genres, opinions could differ: they seem to meet the criteria equally for popular literature, literary journalism, and paraliterature in the form of autobiographical discourse. Representative especially of the type of emerging literature that is Romani literature in French, the stories of Anina and Romica remain very close to the narrative universe of the folk tale, from which they both borrow the dominant perspective of the subject-hero who embodies a group's social values. Just as the folk tale hero, the two women go through the most difficult trials (illnesses, accidents, extreme precarity and mendicity), without losing the sense of morality and values passed on by their family and community, or their hopes for surpassing the difficulties that lay before them and their hopes to succeed in life. As shown in the beginning of this article, there are very few positive fictional representations of Roma in literature; most representations are portraits of destitute vagrants who spread contagious diseases, kidnap children, or kill honourable citizens. In contrast to these stereotypes, but still far from the (Western) canonical model of the hero, the portraits of Anina and Romica take shape in an otherwise familiar way: they each have a family who loves them and are part of a community whose members help each other, and, despite the difficulties, the end of each tale presents the heroine as an accomplished young woman – one will be a lawyer, the other a nursing assistant. They become, thus, carriers of the group's desires and fears, embodying the group's common social values. These elements anchor the two texts in the axiological universe of ethno-literature: the folk tale, through the trajectory of its hero, submits the collective values to the test for the sole purpose of finding them validated at the end of the story. But *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* and *Rien ne résiste à Romica* are not mere folk tales. Unlike folk literature, the two texts exist in a transboundary area, between ethno-literature, literature, and journalism, thanks to the act of writing. Although the story belongs exclusively to the two Romani women, Anina and Romica, the pen, which performs an intricate dance between activism, clinical descriptions, lucid observation, and poignant, heartbreaking calls, more likely belongs to Frédéric

10 CRS (*Compagnies républicaines de sécurité*, or Republican Security Companies) is the general reserve of the French National Police. They are primarily involved in general security but the task for which they are best known is crowd and riot control.

Veille, a journalist, and Valérie Rodrigue. All of this complicates both the authorial pact and the creative features necessary for the classification of "literature" as defined by Western tradition.

The two texts subscribe therefore to an atypical literary category. They are not folk tales, but neither are they traditional literary testimonies. *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste*, which was announced with fanfare by the publisher as "the first testimony of a young Roma, without concessions, moving, and beyond prejudice," has a narrative that does not necessarily respect the rules of a literary testimony, such as those by Primo Levi. Although the writing of the book was motivated, just like with Levi's story *If This Is a Man*, by a need to proclaim a hidden truth, to give expression to memories, to share a traumatic experience so that it does not happen again, Ciuciu's narrative, unlike that of Levi's, is not self-referential writing. The text was written, we learn on the second title page, by Frédéric Veille, based on Anina's words, as collected by the journalist. In the same way, *Rien ne résiste à Romica*, although inspired by real events, and although "transcribing" real dialogue, is not really the testimony of the heroine, Romica. The real writer is Rodrigue, even if the story belongs to the young Romani woman. We are therefore dealing with two texts that bear the signs of self-narration without being written by the actors in the events described by them. According to the criteria of the Western canon, they would not necessarily be classified as literature, given that both "scripters" (Veille and Rodrigue) are journalists, and the particular type of prose used in these pieces closely resembles journalistic writing.

In order to contextualize these two remarkable works, we need to take a closer look at a relatively recent phenomenon in the literary episteme, which we could call the democratization of literature, and which coincides with the advent of globalization, after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, in 1989. This democratization made possible new literary forms, such as those that Mary Louise Pratt calls "auto-ethnographic," and describes as being visible especially in the "contact zones," "these social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt 1991, 35). In the Latin American world, the best known of these texts, called "testimonio" by John Beverley, is *Yo, Rigoberta Menchú*, by the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú, who went on to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. In France, these kinds of testimonies increasingly have been disseminated since the start of the twenty-first century, and cover a huge range of subjects and contexts, from the situation of the homeless and refugees; to prostitution; physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse; autism and others neuroatypical conditions; harassment at school; and even cyber-addiction. Most of these texts, due to their co-authorship with a journalist, border on what is called "truth-writing," or "reality-writing."

The two narratives described here closely align with these types of "reality-writings" that have flooded the French publishing market in the last decades. Considered less important than works institutionalized by their inclusion in school curricula, anthologies, or literary histories, and therefore avoided by literary critics and academics for their low relevance to the French literary field, they have, however, benefited from a relatively high media attention, compared to other similar testimonies. Ciuciu has been featured in several cultural TV shows and invited to talk about the book and about herself, as the first woman of Romani origin to study at the Sorbonne, while Rodrigue has promoted her book through interviews, always in Romica's company, whom she has introduced as co-author, and with whom she has shared the proceedings. Despite these parallels, if we were to judge these two texts by the ethnic affiliation of their

writers, only one would be considered part of Romani literature, Ciuciu's narrative, for having been told by a Roma (even if with the assistance of a non-Roma). *Rien ne résiste à Romica*, although sharing distinctive ideological assumptions, formal commonalities, overlapping themes, and thematic similarities with *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste*, would be rejected from the Romani literary canon because it was written by a non-Roma (even if with the assistance of a Roma). Equally significant, the latter would likely be rejected by Romani scholars (and many Romani writers themselves), whose approach to constructing a Romani literature corpus heavily implies an ideological commitment to a "national" project. However, the book would be an excellent candidate for a modern Romani literary complex, because this complex is less a set canon of texts than a mode of reading, emphasizing post-nationality and transculturality.

I believe, in this context, that by applying the concept of a "literary complex," we could move beyond a strict taxonomy of texts belonging to the literary canon, and include texts like the ones described here, characterized by "dualities, parallelisms, occasional intersections, marginal overlapping, hybrids, similarities within dissimilarities, mobility, changeability, occasional emergence of patterns and their eventual disappearance, randomness, and, when approximating a semblance of significant order, contiguities" (Miron 2010, 276), and even texts that are not produced by Romani authors, but that were written in reaction to Romani persecution.[11] The adoption of these new concepts would not only lead to a great expansion of the Romani literary complex; it would also create the basis for an institutionalized cultural capital (in Bourdieusian terms) that would, in return, certify the status and the importance of Romani literature as an autonomous field.

11 Other examples could be *N'entre pas dans mon âme avec tes chaussures* (Don't step on my soul with your shoes) by Paola Pigani, or *Amadora: Une enfance tzigane* by Dominique Simonnot.

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The Romani Ethos: A Transnational Approach to Romani Literature

Ana Belén Martín Sevillano

ab.martin.sevillano@umontreal.ca

Tenured Associate Professor
Université de Montréal

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7829-3067

Ana Belén Martín Sevillano received her BA and PhD in Hispanic Philology from Universidad Complutense de Madrid, specializing in Latin American Literature and Culture. Her research focuses on issues related to *diaspora*, "race"/ethnicity, and gender in Spain and Latin America. In 2014 she received an endowment from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to work on her project The Emergence of the Hispano-Romani Literature: The Writing of Ethnicity, Diaspora and Citizenship.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 24–40 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.84

Abstract

In the context of the sociopolitical articulation of the Romani diaspora, this paper explores how its narrative is supported in four literary works written in different languages and national settings – *Fires in the Dark* by Louise Doughty, *Camelamos Naquerar* (We want to speak) by José Heredia Maya, *Goddamn Gypsy* by Ronald Lee, and *Dites-le avec des pleurs* (Say it with tears) by Mateo Maximoff – shaping a transnational/diasporic literary production. Departing from the existence of a common Romani ethos, the analysis focuses on how these literary works shape a transnational/diasporic literature by representing the specificities of the Romani history – in particular the recollection of traumatic collective experiences – through a number of narrative strategies, such as self-representation or the depiction of cultural memory.

Keywords

- Culture
- Ethos
- History
- Romani literature
- Self-representation
- Transnational
- Trauma

Introduction

The idea of the existence of a transnational/diasporic Romani community has been central to establishing the ethnopolitical credo of the Romani movement (Vermeersch 2006), which demands rights for all Roma. The legal claims of all the instances and associations comprised under such a denomination emerge from the notion that dispersed Romani groups are linked not only by a common origin but also by a shared experience of discrimination and persecution. At the same time, the ethnopolitical discourse of the Romani movement nurtures the idea of the distinct cultural specificity of all Roma, regardless of their national ascription, specific history, or mother tongue. Still, disparities among the numerous Romani communities are undeniable, and so is their internal heterogeneity. The narrative(s) of the Romani diaspora, and of its pitfalls, is articulated in political, legal, historical, and cultural/literary texts that, whether oral or written, depart from the need to configure new and diverse representations of what it means to be Roma. These new representations convey Roma's diversity and heterogeneity by considering individual experiences, transcending the essentialism that ethnic identities might entail. Depicting Roma as a plural array of groups whose members are distinct individuals, with a particular experience and understanding of the world, has an impact both on how Roma are socially perceived and on how they might perceive themselves. In this context, this article initially elaborates the notion of a transnational Romani Literature. In order to support the existing connection among the range of literary works that would comprise a transnational Romani literature, the analysis of the texts builds on the notion of ethnic ethos, which is deployed through a number of thematic and representational strategies.

1. On Romani Literature and Ethos

As a cultural entity, Romani literature is still in the making. Critical studies on this subject usually build on methodological nationalism. This would be the case of the foundational work of Rajko Djuric (2002), who mapped the literary activity of Romani authors in Europe, sorting them out by nationalities. More recently, other scholars (Toninato 2014; Blandfort 2015; French 2015; Zahova 2016, 2020) equally have resorted to linguistic or national frames to describe or analyse Romani literary practices. These scholars draw attention to the plural and hybrid character of Romani writing, pointing out a number of common conceptual and thematic threads that transcend location and language. These commonalities often are linked to the ethnopolitical character of the texts that delve into issues related to identity politics and cultural memory. In particular, Toninato's study departs from and implements a transnational perspective in the analysis and then resorts to the national or regional frame to map literary production (2014, 74–89). One of its chapters is fully consecrated to consider the complexity and difficulty of critically framing Romani literature, pondering the pertinence of applying categories such as *ethnic*, *migrant,* or *minor* (*Ibid.*, 115–126). I agree with Toninato that, while critical branding might be methodologically effective, it might essentialize and fail to value the complexity of Romani writing practices.

Certainly, the notion of literature, closely linked to that of language, has been traditionally ascribed to national territories. The nation remains today the primary taxonomic criterium when sorting, whether for commercial or analytical purposes, literary practices. Specialized studies, such as those abovementioned, usually accord a double attribution to the work authored by Roma: it belongs at once to Romani

literature, regardless of the language in which it is written, and to that of the country of origin of the author. However, Romani authors have received little recognition in national literary accounts, and they remain largely unknown, which suggests that locating and framing their works in the context of national literatures reduces their reach and impact. Louise Doughty (b. 1963), a well-published English author of Romani descent, pointed out in an interview that, regrettably, the two literary pieces in which she explored Romani history, both in Central Europe and in England, were not as well received, particularly in terms of sales, as the rest of her novels (Smith 2018).

It is the premise of this article that constructing the notion of the Romani literature in parallel to that of the Romani diaspora helps to articulate a more compelling approach to Romani literary practices. A transnational and multilingual frame would not just reveal the complex nature of these works but also highlight how they emerge from related positions and viewpoints, and how they represent analogous experiences. This approach is by no means new; in 1998, the publication of *The Roads of the Roma, A PEN Anthology of Gypsy Writers* suggested the existence of a transnational Romani literature. As explicitly indicated in the title, the main selection criterium was the ethnic ascription of the international cast of authors, whose texts had been originally written in an array of languages. Two of the editors of this anthology, Ian Hancock and Rajko Djuric, are renowned Romani scholars and activists, notorious for their sociocultural and political engagement; the third, Siobhan Dowd, the editor for PEN International, was a conscientious supporter of minority literatures and a writer herself. At the same time, it is undeniable that the very idea of a transnational literature, as appealing as it might be, poses challenges due to a number of important factors, such as the scarcity of available translations, which has an enormous impact on readership or commercial production and distribution. I am also quite aware of the many glitches and limitations of considering a transnational perspective that is limited by the few languages that I can read. Still, I expect this analysis to be a single piece in a larger puzzle of academic works that, as a whole, will reveal a coherent total picture of what makes up transnational Romani literature. Thus, my approach to the idea of a Romani literature goes beyond the limits imposed by territoriality, language, or the author's ethnic ascription as it focuses on the nature of the text, and how it discusses issues related to the embodied experience of being Roma. The analysis in this article implements a methodological frame that escapes the nation, or the language for that matter, as an analytical unit, proposing a new drawing of what Romani literature is today: a transnational multilingual body of works that register the Romani experience of the world through the very lens of that experience. For that purpose, the analysis will consider literary works, written in different languages and countries, that develop an aesthetic and a viewpoint that belong to the particular Romani ethos: *Camelamos Naquerar* (1976) by José Heredia Maya, *Goddamn Gypsy* (1971) by Ronald Lee, *Dites-le avec des pleurs* (1990) by Mateo Maximoff, and *Fires in the Dark* (2003) by Louise Doughty.

As defined by Baumlin and Meyer, the idea of ethos entails an idiosyncratic "cultural and embodied" narrative that comprises the subject's position in society (2018, 1). It is our thesis that many of the diverse and disperse literary practices authored by Roma reveal a common ethos, which in turn would be shared – at least to some extent – by the various groups comprised under the denomination of Roma. This ethos emerges from a set of values instilled by the practice of the *Romaniya,*[1] from the preservation of

1 The *Romaniya* is a body of norms, rules, and laws that regulate the domestic and social life of the Roma. *Cf.* Weyrauch 2001.

their own oral and material culture (preserved by collective and domestic rites), from the distinct ethnic consciousness that Roma possess, and from the continuous and common experience of marginalization and persecution. After Reynolds, we consider ethos "as a social act and as a product of a community's character" (1993, 327). As other oppressed social groups, Roma are claiming their own voice by validating their marginal position in society, and by asserting in their discourse the rhetorical authority that emerges from that very social *locus* (*Ibid.*, 330). Specifically, in literary practices, the Romani ethos is established by a number of elements, such as:

1. the recovery and assertion of Romani history;
2. the renewal of Roma's social representations through self-representation, legitimizing from within previously misconstrued behaviours or practices;
3. the vindication of a culture that has been misunderstood and despised;
4. the reconstruction of a language that has been considered a fabricated devious tool.

These elements often are intertwined and appear embedded in the texts written by Roma, which offer an embodied insider's account of historical episodes and social experiences while simultaneously reformulating social representations. Departing from the notion of the common ethos, this analysis is articulated in three sections that examine some of the key notions that shape this very ethos: history – in particular, the recollection of traumatic experiences – self-representation, and culture and language.

2. Romani History, Memory, and the Narrative of Trauma

Reconstructing Romani history is a challenging endeavor that is still in the making through interdisciplinary methodologies that involve historiographic, linguistic, or genetic research, among others. As an institutional discipline, historiography traditionally has ignored minority groups, and when it has recognized them, their representation in the historical discourse has not always been positive and certainly has never been informed by the views and voices of the members of those minority groups. Reconstructing Romani history from official documents that belong to the very systems that have oppressed Roma is also problematic. In the last few decades, the literary text has been an alternative site in which Roma are registering experiences that the historiographic discourse has obliterated or, worse, misconstrued. Additionally, fictional writing makes use of the results provided by the ongoing historical reconstruction in order to question or discuss them, as well as to embody experiences that the historical discourse can otherwise reduce to data and facts. Through the fictionalization of historical events, literary writing has the ability to fully depict the suffering of those that were despised for centuries. In this sense, literary studies have identified the prominence that the narrative of trauma has attained in the last few decades in texts authored by Roma. *The Roads of the Roma* anthology is certainly a revealing testimony to how the experience of trauma is a pivotal theme in Romani literature. In particular, and in parallel with political and legal discourses, literary discourse is paying attention to *o baro porrajmos*, the Roma Holocaust, which is still a controversial and understudied subject (Hancock 2002). The lack of political clout of the Roma and the scarcity of documentation, among other reasons, make this subject complex. The literary texts have become irreplaceable documents that represent the experience of Roma during the Nazi regime of terror and its expansion in Europe. For instance, Toninato dedicates a few pages to analyze

the complexity behind the written representation of the Romani Holocaust (2004, 101–106). Likewise, in her study of Romani literature in German-speaking countries, French (2015) examines survivors' autobiographical accounts, pondering the impact that gender has in the process of reconstruction and representation. Blandfort (2013) points out that the Romani Holocaust has in fact become a cultural *topos* in French and German Romani literature. Thus, it could be argued that the Holocaust has become a founding trauma (LaCapra 2014, xii) for Romani communities, in the sense that the horrific experiences endured by Roma during the Nazi regime are at the source of the ethnopolitical Romani movement and its legal claims for rights and recognition.

In this context, Louise Doughty's *Fires in the Dark* offers a compelling fictional account of the Romani Holocaust by building on precise historical facts. The novel relies on a robust documentation to plausibly recreate the life of Roma who travelled the roads of Moravia and Bohemia during the first half of the twentieth century. This documentation not only informs the main plot but also is framed within it. Thus, the reader has an opportunity to verify within the actual limits of the literary text the transcript of those legal documents or managerial reports that had a shattering impact on the lives of many Roma, symbolically embodied by the novel's main characters. Doughty has declared that *Fires in the Dark* explored what could have been the story of her family had they not emigrated to England (Smith 2018). The space of fiction, together with historical documentation, allows the author to celebrate her origins by denouncing the cruel fate of those who, unlike her family, remained in the lands that they had travelled for centuries.

The plot of this historical fiction runs from 1927 to 1945, focusing on three generations of a Kalderash family that followed a seminomadic life in the Czech lands. Most of the narrative adopts the viewpoint of Anna, whose first childbirth opens the story. Indeed, motherhood serves as a rich allegory in the novel; on the one hand, it denotes the critical meaning that family bonds have in Romani culture and, on the other hand, it conveys that the fictional process of reconstructing Romani history is as strenuous and gratifying as giving birth to a human being. Anna's family initially endures the control that the authorities exerted on Roma shortly after the region declared its independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and became Czechoslovakia. Law No. 117 of 1927 ordained all Roma to be fingerprinted, registered, and forced to inform the authorities of their movements. It also prevented Roma from accessing certain areas and pushed them to live on the margins of a hostile society. After Nazi occupation of the country in 1938, the existing official records facilitated the genocide of Roma, who were confined in the Lety and Hodonín concentration camps, from where many were transported to Auschwitz. Kenrick reports that, out of a population of at least 40,000 Roma in the Czech lands, only 600 survived the Holocaust (2007, 60–61). The radically disturbing events that Roma endured in those camps are depicted in the novel through the fate of Anna and her family members.

The significance of this novel lies in how the horrific events that shaped Central European societies in the first half of the twentieth century are embodied by unusual fictional characters. The social destitution of Roma traditionally has excluded them from any non-discriminatory or complex social representation. Within the Western novelistic tradition, Roma were not only stereotyped but often animalized or reduced to immoral beings. In *Fires in the Dark* – as well as in *Stone Cradle* (2006) – Doughty depicts psychologically complex Romani characters, offering an extraordinary account of their experiences and providing access

to a subjectivity that transcends ethnic or racial parameters. At the same time, the narrative in *Fires in the Dark* seamlessly flows between the characters' experiences and the insertion of the historical context in which those experiences take place.

In the first chapter, Josef, Anna's husband, a noble and caring man, witnesses the public announcement of the just enacted Law No. 117.

> The Officer had paused to gain everybody's attention. He glanced at Josef. […] The Officer continued amiably. 'All persons who have no fixed abode or who are of a nomadic inclination must present themselves immediately to the nearest authority of the state for the issuing of detailed identification. Each member of the family over the age of fifteen must attend, although all family members may be registered upon the identification papers of the head of the family. Prints of all five fingers on each hand will be required along with a physical description of each individual' (20).

Josef silently stares at the officer in charge of the announcement in front of a delighted crowd who welcomes the repressive practices that will eventually enable the massacre of thousands of human beings. Doughty conscientiously inserts a transcription/translation of the law within the narrative, conveying the historical, social, political, and legal frame that will allow the Holocaust to take place in Central Europe. At the same time, by focusing on the history of Anna and her family, Doughty places Roma at the center of one of the most traumatic episodes in Western history, revealing them as actual subjects, and agents, depicting a subjectivity that Roma had not owned until recently in literary texts.

The insertion of historical and legal text is a strategy that José Heredia Maya (1947– 2010) also implemented in *Camelamos naquerar* (*We want to speak*)[2] (1976), which addresses the mistreatment that Spanish *Gitanos* have endured. This hybrid piece was conceived as a flamenco musical to be recorded, at the same time, as a documentary.[3] It comprises poetry (sung as flamenco), music, and dance, together with historical legal texts. The poems are fully articulated around the embodied experience of persecution and marginalization, which is unequivocally conveyed by the flamenco singing and dancing. From beginning to end the dominant tone is one of denouncement.

> *CAMELAMOS NAQUERAR es un espectáculo flamenco que tiene como objetivo exponer una situación de injusticia determinada. Hemos querido ceñirnos a la peculiar forma de racismo que con nosotros se sigue practicando desde que finalizado el siglo XV, los Reyes Católicos firmaron (…) una pragmática cruel e inhumana, tendente al exterminio de un grupo: el gitano* (9).[4]

2 *Camelamos naquerar* is written in Spanish, with the occasional use of terms or expressions in *Caló*, such as the title itsef. *Caló* is the mixed language of the Spanish *Gitanos*, generally consisting of Romani vocabulary over a Spanish grammatical base.

3 A documentary version is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOzi04RhC9k

4 *Camelamos naquerar* is a flamenco show that aims at presenting a specific situation of injustice. We chose to follow the very distinct form of racism that we have been enduring ever since, at the end of the fifteenth century, the Catholic monarchs signed (…) a cruel and inhuman law with the objective of exterminating a group: the Gypsies (author's translation).

In parallel to what Doughty does in her novel, Heredia Maya opposes the emotional denouncing voice of the *Gitanos*, which dominates the poems, to the historical legal texts, that are quoted word for word. The legal documents range from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, giving evidence of the institutional persecution that Roma have suffered in Spain over the centuries.

However, historical artifacts are not the only source of information for writers, who also delve into the collective memory of the group in order to reconstruct their past. In the last few decades, recalling and representing traumatic memories has been crucial in shaping Romani legal discourse, hence the recent memory activism within the ethnopolitical Romani movement. The practice of creative writing by some of those who lived or witnessed distressing events has not only been a valuable therapeutic exercise but has also provided an archive of testimonials that offer an embodied account of the historical episodes. It is not surprising that these texts usually present a hybrid composition as they display a number of elements that belong to different discourses such as legal, anthropological, psychological, historical, or political. The recollection, organization, and representation of trauma allows survivors to make sense of a rather incomprehensible experience. Narrating a traumatic event offers a possible account of the psychological and social effects it had on those individuals and groups who endured it (Caruth 1995, 153). Shaping a cultural narrative of the mass trauma suffered by Romani peoples allows for its integration into collective memory, compensating for the silences of mainstream historiography. As Paul Ricœur pointed out, any exercise of memory that lack the imperative of justice would be futile (2004, 86–89); and in this sense the texts about the Holocaust are implicitly political and justice-seeking. In parallel, prominent historian Dominik LaCapra argues that recovering and representing trauma goes well beyond the individual psychological sphere, reaching the social and political ones, and dialoguing with historical accounts (2014, xii–xiii). Implicitly, all cultural artifacts in which trauma is represented denounce the violence that simmers in the societies in which minority ethnic groups are abused. In this sense, the representation of trauma gives the literary text a denouncing tone that intensifies its political quality.

During his later years, Mateo Maximoff (1917–1999) worked on two narrative pieces whose central point is the persecution and genocide that the Roma suffered under the Nazi regime: the novel *Dites-le avec des pleurs* (Tell it with tears) and the memoir *Routes sans roulottes* (Roads without caravans). Born in Barcelona to a Kalderash father and a Manouche mother, Maximoff is today considered one of the founders of Romani literature. He lived most of his life in France, where he became an activist and writer, choosing French as his literary language despite speaking Romanes. His legacy is made of a homogeneous collection of novels that delve into the culture, history, and experiences of Roma. Most of these were edited and published by the author himself, and some of them still are distributed today thanks to the determination of his family.

In *Dites-le avec des pleurs*, a novel with autobiographical elements, the narrative follows a somewhat time-based logic that begins with the origins and birth of Mateï – an *alter-ego* of the author – moving gradually to his experiences during the Second World War. Maximoff does not want to leave any room for ambiguity and the novel begins in a German concentration camp in which Mateï is imprisoned at the age of 26.[5] As a whole, the novel intends to counteract institutional silence about the Roma genocide, while

5 As far as we know, Maximoff was interned intermittently in a number of concentration camps in southern France, but never in Germany, so this particular experienced is not autobiographical.

finding genuine ways to represent the horror of war. The textual space allows the writer to sort out the extent of what can be transferred with words; the exercise of memory and the representation of distress and suffering has a clear political tone that is conferred by the very events that are recollected and by the nature of their textual representation.

> *Maintenant que les Allemands n'étaient plus là, les journaux commencaient à parler du massacre des Juifs dans les camps de concentration, les camps d'extermination et leurs sinistres fours crematories. Mais aucun journal ne faisait la moindre mention du massacre des plus de cinq cent mille Tziganes* (184).[6]

More than 40 years after the end of the Second World War, memory assisted the author in tracing his life between 1917 and 1944 in occupied France. Still, the scope of the novel represents the life and fate of European Roma under the Nazi regime. Aware of the perils of restricting the narrative to his own recollection of events, Maximoff inserts oral accounts that friends and family members disclosed to him in the past. Following the Romani oral tradition, these stories are part of the collective memory of the group, and they are revered for the valuable knowledge they carry. Memory is an essential skill in traditional Romani oral culture, and Maximoff uses it here to represent the history of the Roma as a plural but distinct ethnic group. In order to enhance this, the second part of the novel finishes with the inclusion of a transcribed speech by Bogomila Michalewicz in which she gives account of the brutal fate suffered by Roma in Poland. Michalewicz, as a Romani woman, sociologist, and activist, inserts testimonies of other Roma that witnessed the genocide in her own speech. Furthermore, in the third part of the novel, Maximoff transcribes and translates three interviews in Romani that he recorded with Roma who suffered during the war. At the end, Maximoff declares:

> *Deux ou trois témoignages ne suffiraient pas à éclairer d'une sinister lumiére la misère des camps Nazis. Pendant leur internement, pas ou peu de Roms savaient lire et écrire. Que de témoignages n'auraient-ils pas pu raconter, ceux qui ont eu le bonheur de sortir vivants de cet enfer humain* (236).[7]

The plurality of memories and accounts create a spiral structure within the novel that reveals the importance of oral tradition and of factual experiences for the production of a Romani memory archive. At the same time, Maximoff implements this strategy for the sake of inclusivity and legitimacy; by inserting other voices in his novel, he is sorting out the danger that implies to speak for others in justice-seeking narratives (Dawes 2009, 401–2).

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6 Now that the Germans were gone, the newspapers started to talk about the execution of Jews in the concentration camps and in the sinister crematorium ovens in the extermination camps, but no journal made any mention of the execution of more than 500,000 Roma (author's translation).

7 Two or three testimonial stories would not be enough to shed light – a sinister one – on the misery of the Nazi camps. During their imprisonment, none or few Roma could read or write, otherwise those who were lucky enough to survive that living hell could have offered many testimonies (author's translation).

The influence of Romani oral tradition is not only present in the structure and narrative of the novel; Maximoff's compositional style is also highly influenced by oral textuality (Junáková 2006, 22–23). In this sense, the reader is surprised at how some storylines are interrupted or forgotten, or how a number of characters are introduced and never mentioned again. There are representational strategies that are connected to the ways in which oral cultures comprehend and express their experiences of the world: for instance, time references are often vague and they mostly allude to seasonal changes; the description of the characters focuses on their origin and on the specific Romani group to which they belong; and, most significantly, the novel never considers any fact or event that is not related to the author/main character's experiences or to the experiences of his kin, which, as we have mentioned above, have been communicated to him through oral accounts. Maximoff's writing is always set within the Romani horizon and culture, which supports the views and behaviours of the characters, contesting previous exogenous representations of Roma.

3. Self-representation: Redrawing Roma's Social Representation

Self-representation in works authored by Roma implicitly discusses the image of this ethnic group in the public sphere, intrinsically asserting their right to have control over it. Still, Romani authors confront a difficult literary challenge, that of building well-rounded and complex characters that can successfully convey the psychological consequences of economic and social discrimination which trap individuals in damaging behaviours that, in turn, feed social prejudices. Like other instances of cultural production, literature provides a social space in which Romani authors can examine their subjectivity and identity, assessing the dimensions, often paradoxical, of their own ethnicity. Romani literary texts operate as multifaceted documents that challenge the silences and misrepresentations that have affected Roma in hegemonic and institutional discourses.

As previously discussed, the narrative in *Dites-le avec des pleurs* is presented in third person, including occasional references to the author himself. However, the main character, Mateï, is an unambiguous *alter-ego* of the author, a surrogacy that allows Maximoff to distance himself from the disturbing experience of remembering the traumatic events of his youth. At the same time, this literary strategy permits the integration in Mateï's biography of experiences that belonged to other members of Maximoff's family or to his Romani friends. Significantly, the fourth chapter of the book opens with the following sentence: "*C'est volontairement que l'auteur a choisi de presenter la vie de trois Tziganes parmi des milliers d'autres. Essayons de comprendre pourquoi*" (38).[8] Here, narrative voice projects the author as a third person, precisely to highlight with its authority and presumed impartiality that the author has carefully crafted the design of the novel within the limits of kinship. Despite Maximoff not following through with his initial plan, the selection of these three characters is based on their representative quality, since they belong to different

8 The author has willingly chosen to present the life of three Gypsies among thousands of others. Let's try to understand why (author's translation).

Romani groups. The characters' diverse origins and traditions convey the heterogeneous condition of Roma. At the same time, the novel focuses on how these characters were victims of Nazi genocide for the simple reason of being Roma (39–44).

Similarly, in *Goddamn Gypsy*, Ronald Lee (1934–2020) presents his own autobiography as a Canadian Kalderash through the character of Yanko, who is conceived as a literary proxy that allows the author to freely recreate his own past.[9] The narrative follows a chronological line that begins in the early 1960s, when Yanko is a young adult, and progresses to the end of the decade. The plot is set in the geopolitical context of eastern Canada, featuring historical events, such as the Quiet Revolution in Quebec or the organization of the 1967 World Expo in Montreal. Early on in the novel, Yanko recounts how he grew up with *gadje* and received formal education, a process that detached himself from a culture –Romani– that was rightfully his by birth, placing him in a liminal space (27) and conferring a hybrid identity that he seems to regret but cannot escape. Aidan McGarry echoed this point when he pointed out that usually Roma display a hybrid identity as they inhabit more than one culture at the same time (770).

Inspired by Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Lee depicts Yanko's journey as one of recovery. Determined to regain his native *romité,*[10] he undergoes a symbolic christening, becoming a newborn Rom (31). After this, the narrative follows the process of repossession of those traits that Yanko considers would make of him a true Rom, such as command and preservation of the Romani language (30), and the knowledge of the history of his people, which emphasizes the events that took place during the Holocaust. As in the case of Maximoff's work, the main character of Lee's novel builds on the author's experiences while reflecting on how to live within Romani culture, from the use and appreciation of Roma's specific language, to the preservation and recognition of their ancestral beliefs and practices.

The literary text opens up a space of reflection in which Roma can rethink the relational nature of representations and produce new alternatives, having an impact on both Romani and non-Romani readers as they reframe Romani public identity (McGarry 769). Still, self-representation is not free of contradictions, as it might be conditioned from existing internalized social prejudices. Nicolae Gheorghe rightly pointed out that self-representation might in fact fulfill some of the general expectations of what Roma are supposed to be and do (2013, 50). In this sense, the depiction of cultural practices gives depth to the novel's characters, whose viewpoint and behaviour reflect the complexity of their beliefs and values, establishing therefore a clear ethnic ethos.

9 In 2009, Magoria Books reedited the novel under a new bilingual title *E Zhivindi Yag/The Living Fire*. In the preface that accompanies this edition, Lee claims that his original proposed title was indeed *The Living Fire*, but it was rejected (viii), presumably by the editors.

10 This concept, used by Courtiade (1990, xv), conveys the idea of the Romani ethos that we are implementing in this article. Other critics have adapted this term to their own context and languages, such as the notion of "*gitanidad*" used by Sergio Rodríguez in his study of Spanish *Gitanos*.

4. Romani Culture and Language

Romani authors are paying extensive attention in their work to particular ways of living in their communities, conveying the depth of their cultural identity and simultaneously contesting previous misconceptions that have long affected Roma's social representation. The four literary works that we discuss in this article offer information about the norms, beliefs, and values that shape Roma's behavior, both in private and social spaces. This material becomes instrumental in establishing a Romani ethos, as it examines the particular viewpoints and features that are characteristic of, and often exclusive to, Romani culture. The references to these aspects are often illustrated with details about their particular material culture, and they disclose exceptional information about the lives of Roma, such as the spaces they inhabit or the tools they use for domestic or professional purposes.

As discussed earlier, the interest of Maximoff in *Dites-le avec des pleurs* is to denounce the Holocaust and its dreadful consequences for European Romani communities. The storyline, diversions included, focuses on depicting characters that endured, directly or indirectly, the Holocaust and the waves of repression that preceded and followed it. These characters usually are outlined in terms of their ethnic identity, and in this sense the author offers detailed information about their ways of life. Since the characters belong to different Romani groups, Maximoff points out the existing disparity in terms of practices, conveying the heterogeneity that the general ethnic label might otherwise hide. This information often is inserted within the plot of the novel, following the life of Mateï. For example, one of the most characteristic *topos* of Romani folklore, that of the *mula* – dead people or spirits – and the afterlife, is presented within the storyline that retrieves the most significant episodes of Mateï's early years.

> […] *Lutka s'adressa à quelqu'un que Mateï ne voyait pas:*
> *– Va-t-en, Poleskina!*
> *En entendant le nom de sa mère, Mateï leva la tete. Sa mère n'était-elle donc pas morte? Puis la grand-mére parla de nouveau:*
> *– Laisse ton petit tranquille!* (49).[11]

Cleverly, the narrator does not address directly a topic that would certainly shake the logic of many of his readers; he presents it through the direct experience of Mateï, who witnessed a conversation between his grandmother and his deceased mother, initially problematizing it but later accepting this without further questions. This narrative strategy is also implemented in the works of Doughty and Lee, which are both particularly rich in terms of the anthropological information they insert within their plots. In particular, *Fires in the Dark* is an extraordinary catalogue of the rituals and beliefs of Central Europe's Romani community. The ethnological information is skillfully embedded in the storyline, conveying how cultural practices are not only internalized and embodied but also intrinsically connected to the survival of the individual and the group. Thus, the adherence to the rules of the *Marimé* code, which might be

11 Lutka talked to somebody that Matei could not see. – Go away, Poleskina! When he heard his mother's name, Matei rose his head. Wasn't she dead? Then, the grandmother spoke again: – Leave your little one alone (author's translation).

considered odd for outsiders, is self-explained in the narrative by the circumstances of deprivation and neediness that plague the characters' lives.[12] In this sense, in becomes clear that the defiled – *marimé* – condition of Anna after childbirth and the mandatory two-weeks post-partum isolation allow her to bond with her newborn, giving her time to rest and heal. In the context of Anna and her group's life, which is characterized by daily exertion through physical work, this seclusion improves the chances of survival for both mother and newborn.

The narratives of these novels also offer key information about the objects used by Roma in their daily lives. In *Goddamn Gypsy*, Ronald Lee inserted a number of Tarot cards that enlighten *avant la lettre* the storyline of Yanko's journey. These cards, expressly drawn for the novel by one of Lee's relatives (Mudure 2009, 308), deliver a Romani version of the Tarot since the figures either are embodied by Roma or they refer to their folklore. They are also accompanied by an explanation that elucidates its meaning within Romani culture and within the novel's narrative.

E De Devleski, or Earth-Mother card. This is primarily the card of the dreamer, the seeker after illusions and the youth searching for the answer to the riddle of life. It also carries a warning for man not to meddle with the secret mysteries of nature which can bring either good or evil results. It is the card of the romantic, the artist, the thinker and the student, but not of the realist. (…)
This is Yanko as he sets out on his journey (xii–xiii).

Divination cards are surely an important element in Romani material culture, since they have been used for generations as a professional tool. In this regard, the novel refers in several instances to characters, usually women, whose main activity is fortune-telling (81), a customary economic activity in most Romani groups.

As it follows Yanko's journey of learning Romani ways, *Goddamn Gypsy* recurrently gives details of rituals associated with transitional experiences, such a birth or marriage, or it describes ceremonial rites, such as the *kris* (Romani court) or the celebration of a *pakiv* (welcoming party for special guests). In particular, Lee's novel emphasizes the importance of music in Romani culture, as it serves many purposes, from

12 As defined by Ronald Lee himself "The *marimé* code (*Romaniya*) is a complicated system of taboos concerning areas of pollution and defilement. It also embraces a Gypsy's personal behavior towards his fellows (…)" (2001, 203).

economic to spiritual. On several occasions, the text integrates songs as part of the oral culture that keeps alive the memory of critical historical experiences, such as that of the Holocaust (62).

Likewise, *Camelamos naquerar* considers music a wholly embodied element of *Gitano* culture. All the characters in this piece express themselves through flamenco singing and dancing, embodied practices that reveal their history and social experiences. Heredia Maya explicitly indicates how the experience of oppression and marginalization are at the heart of flamenco (9).

Finally, the use of Romanes becomes a quintessential element in these literary works as it reinforces their *romité* even when they are written in another language. During the last decades, Romani has become a notorious mark of authenticity, regardless of the fact that there is a significant degree of disparity among different dialects and that some communities have long lost the ability to speak it. Djuric states that "*la langue romani est la patrie rom la plus vraie, la plus exacte*"[13] (1990, vii); and, in the same note, Ian Hancock refers to a Romani saying: *Amari čhib s'amari zor* "our language is our strength" (2002, 139), as he points out that the use of Romani is a critical mark of identity. Indeed, the works we are discussing here make use of this language in different ways, further increasing their hybrid and heterogeneous character. Maximoff and Doughty periodically employ Romani terms when these bear a particular meaning or do not have a direct translation into the language of the text. Maximoff usually prefers to translate these terms directly into the text: "*Les roulottes (les* vourdona*) étaient stationnées entre deux villages, au bord d'un ruisseau*" (22), or "*Les jeunes, les* ternear *(jeunes à marier) emmenaient les chevaux dans les près* [sic]" (60). [14] Doughty usually leaves in the text the original term, inviting the reader to deduct its meaning with the information provided:

> No other farmer in the whole of Bohemia employed as many Roma as Ctibor Michálek. His harvests had become famous as a place for the *vitsas* to meet and exchange news, for marriage agreements and the settling of debts. A series of *divanos* would be held throughout the harvest to settle disputes, lasting all the long, long evenings… (44).

Likewise, Heredia Maya occasionally inserts in his text *Caló* terms or sentences that he translates in footnotes:

> *Mira que flamenco, prima,*
> *mira que gitano soy,*
> *pena el crayí que me naje*
> *yo con mi gente me estoy* (25).[15]

13 "The Romani language has become the real Romani fatherland, the right one" (author's translation).

14 "The wagons (the *vardos*) were parked between two villages, near a creek"; "The young girls, the *ternear* (young girls to be married) took the horses to the moor".

15 "Look, girl, how flamenco I am/look, how *Gitano* I am,/the king says I should leave/but I'm staying with my people". The first, second, and last verses of this poem are written in Spanish, and the third one is in Caló, which Heredia Maya translates with the help of a footnote. This third verse is incomprehensible to the average Spaniard reader. The Spanish term *primo-a* means "cousin", but *Gitanos* use it to address and to refer to other members of their ethnic community who are not older than themselves; otherwise, they would use the term *tío-a* (uncle or aunt). The poetic voice identifies himself as *Gitano* and *flamenco*, addressing the girl in order to impress her with these features.

In the case of Ronald Lee, his life-long dedication to the Romani language seeps constantly throughout the pages of *Goddamn Gypsy*, both at the textual level and in the storyline. Within the actual English text, Lee makes abundant use of Romani sayings, sentences, or words that he subsequently translates. At the same time, very early on in the novel Yanko displays a keen interest in his people's language, as he observes and takes notes when other characters speak it in front of him. In fact, one of Yanko's main cultural projects is to create a Romani dictionary, a topic that is discussed in several chapters of the novel.

Conclusion

Given the wide adoption of the narrative of the Romani diaspora by civil and political organizations, the study of literary texts within a transnational scope offers a compelling view of how this narrative is being developed in cultural texts that emerge in different communities and national settings. This transnational scale might indeed entail some methodological challenges, since there is a limited amount of translated works, a problem that affects not only creative writing but also academic and critical analyses.

The concept of ethos implemented in this article supports the delimitation and analysis of some of the common traits that works authored by Roma exhibit. Within the restricted scope of a research article, I have examined how literary texts depart from and recreate a specific Romani ethos through the recovery of an untold history, self-representation, and the reaffirmation of a misconstrued culture. The analysis of this ethos could expand to other features of Romani culture that enter creative writing and shape distinctive traits. Since ethos, as defined by Reynolds, is an ongoing social product (327), the literary texts reveal the values and discourses that characterize a community in a given space and time. In this sense, certain cultural and social *topoi*, such as nomadism, the notion of India as a mystic original place, or that of a Romani nation, among others, should be considered, as well as questioned, as part of the Romani ethos.

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Romani Literature(s) As Minor Literature(s) in the Context of World Literature: A Survey of Romani Literatures in French and Spanish

Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf

marina.hertrampf@uni-passau.de

Professor of Romance Literature and Culture with a focus on France, University of Passau, Germany

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8932-2193

Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf is Professor of Romance Literature and Culture with a focus on France at the University of Passau, Germany. She is the author of a monograph on the interrelations of photography and the novel in French Postmodernism (2011), a study on the spatial dimensions in Spanish Corpus Christi plays (2018), and a small book on French graphic novels on the Arab Spring (2016). She runs the book series Aesthetics of Roma: Self and External Representations (AVM Munich).

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 42–57 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.88

Abstract

The article discusses the comparatively young form of written Romani literary self-expression as an example of "minor literature" in Deleuze and Guattari's sense.[1] The focus here is on producing a classifying survey of the literary production of Romani writers in France and Spain, with the article outlining the different aesthetic fields and literary forms evident in French and Spanish Romani literature. The comparative approach reveals that despite regional and national differences, these minor literatures demonstrate several aesthetic similarities typical of Romani literature that could ultimately come to define the transnational, cross-border characteristics of Romani literature. Furthermore, I show that there are literary tendencies in contemporary Romani literatures that go beyond the usual forms of establishing literary self-expression in diasporic cultural productions or aesthetic appropriation of major society's literary traditions, so that Romani literatures in French and Spanish should, I argue, also be seen as part of world literature.

Keywords

- France
- Minor literature
- Romani literature
- Spain
- Transnational diaspora
- World literature

1 It is important to emphasize that the potentially offending implications of the evaluative use of the term "minor" is by no means hinted at in Deleuze and Guattari: The French "literature mineure" does not indicate lower aesthetic qualities or literary inferiority to majority literature but rather describes a literature produced by writers not (exclusively) belonging to the nation-state in which they live. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the term "small literature," in contrast to minor literatures, means literary expressions from small nations or/and in small languages like, for example, in Bulgarian, Estonian, or Luxembourgish (cf., Glesener 2012).

Introduction: What Is Romani Literature?

What is Romani literature? The question seems quite simple but, in fact, is not.[2] When talking about Romani literature, the first question to be asked is what is meant by "Romani" at all. Does the adjective refer to literary texts written in Romani, or is it an ethnic attribution concerning the authors of the texts in question? Strictly speaking, both, but let us start with the basics.

Every classification designation is a construct and is subject to ideological and literary-critical tendencies and trends. Just what one understands by the term "literature" changes over time, revealing, as the British literary scholar Terry Eagleton (1983) emphasized, close connections to the ideologies of societies. If ideologies determine what is to be regarded as literature, this applies increasingly to literary texts that, according to majority societal designations, show difference and divergence from majority literature, for example in the case of migrant and exile literature or, precisely, Romani literature(s), which also raises the highly complex question of ethnic identity. By the same token, however, the choice of the language could be used as a criterion: Romani literature would then be literature written in *romani chib* (Romani language).

Thus, the term "Romani literature" ultimately eludes a clear definition. Aware of this problem, I will apply the following pragmatic rule here: on the basis of an inter- and transmedial understanding of literature, the term "Romani literature" will include literary texts that were created by Romani authors, regardless of the language they were written in. Furthermore, anyone who explicitly presents themselves as Roma in paratexts, public forums (on the internet, in interviews, and so forth), or (socio-)political initiatives will be considered an author of Romani literature.

This form of ethnic labelling, of course, has a strong hegemonic and ethnocentric flavour and, moreover, carries with it the fundamental risk of overlooking the aesthetic quality of a literary work and instead foregrounding the fact that a representative of an ethnic minority has expressed themselves literarily in the majority language at all. This is probably one of the main reasons why José Heredia Maya (1947–2010), one of the best-known Spanish Romani poets, was opposed to this "ethnic exclusion" and stressed that there is no Spanish-language Romani literature: "*Si escribimos en español hay una literatura española, con modulaciones personales, de estilo, de cultura … pero no se puede hablar en sentido estricto de una literatura gitana si no hay una lengua que la soporte*"[3] (Heredia Maya, in Rodríguez Mata 2000, 16). Although Heredia Maya's reasoning is understandable, it still seems legitimate to differentiate Romani literature within Spanish and other national literatures as a special form of literary expression. This article aims to outline further reasons for this beyond the criterion of the author's ethnic origin.[4]

2 For further discussions on what Romani literature does mean, see, for example, Djurić 2002, Eder-Jordan 1993, and Zahova 2014 and 2016.

3 "If we write in Spanish there is a Spanish literature, with personal modulations in style, in culture … but you cannot strictly speak of a Romani literature if there is no language that supports it" (author's translation).

4 See also Hertrampf and Blandfort 2011.

Romani cultures are traditionally oral cultures. Until the middle of the twentieth century, writing – especially in the majority languages – was regarded as an unacceptable cultural approach to the "majority society." In particular, writing about Romani society was perceived as taboo and led to exclusion from the society. The most striking example of this is the case of the Polish Romani author Bronisława Wajs, better known as Papusza, who was disregarded by Romani society due to the publication of her literary texts (Fonseca 2003).

Even if literary writing is still not accepted by all groups (and their members), there is increasing tolerance towards written literature from and about Roma within Romani society. This development is undoubtedly due to the acceptance of social change and the rapidly changing lives of Roma: if, today, the preservation of traditions is largely part of inner family life, and traditional life can only be conveyed through the stories of a passed generation of family members, the phenomenon of *oraliture* (Blandfort 2015, 76–100) becomes essential in order to preserve the collective memory.

Roma who write in the language of the majority culture are often not only linguistically and culturally assimilated but also socially integrated to some degree. It is noteworthy that in some of the works by these Romani authors there is a clear tendency towards the literary reconstruction of a rather old-fashioned, traditional Romani identity. In fact, there is a deliberate delimitation – or self-distancing, or othering – from the culture in which they live in order to emphasize their ethnic and cultural alterity and thus to preserve their cultural independence as a diasporic community. In this respect, the emergence of written Romani literature is crucial to the creation of a diasporic consciousness. Thus, written Romani literature is an expression of self-confidence and empowerment and could to some degree be understood as a political act. In this respect the emergence of Romani literature plays an important role in the Romani self-perception as a transnational diaspora.[5]

If we assume that Romani literature is the cultural expression of a transnational diaspora, then it also becomes clear that it is a form of literature that has a strong cross-border character and is not only part of one specific national language majority literature. In order to adequately describe these two central characteristics of Romani literature as an aesthetic self-expression of a transnational diaspora, the concepts of minor literature and world literature seem particularly applicable.

5 The concept of (transnational) diaspora is understood in the sense of Vertovec 1997, 278, and Brubaker 2005, 12. For the understanding of Roma as a transnational diaspora, see Blandfort 2015, 37–61, and Hertrampf 2021.

1. On Minor Literature and World Literature: Some Remarks on Two Literary Concepts

The notion of "minor literature" developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their seminal 1975 book on Franz Kafka is perfectly suited to Romani literature that is not written in *romani chib* (Romani) but in the language of the majority. In fact, all three characteristics of minor literatures apply to Romani literature. First, a "minor literature," Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 16) claim, "is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language." French or Spanish Romani literatures, for instance, use the language of the majority without being completely identical to national literatures. In this respect, such literature addresses that they are both in between participation, integration, and assimilation on the one hand and issues of difference, othering, and delimitation on the other; therefore, Romani literary expression is always characterized by a certain degree of cultural and linguistic deterritorialization. Second, the idea that "everything in them [works of literature] is political" (*Ibid.*) also applies to Romani literature, which, in fact, can almost always be understood as non-violent resistance and sometimes – like in the case of Helios Gómez – even as subversive rebellion against the hegemonic and discriminatory behaviour of the majority. Romani literature thus becomes the "weapon" of the subaltern (Spivak 1995) in the struggle for recognition. Consciously or not, every Romani writer thus acts necessarily as a spokesperson for the minority.

At the same time, Romani literary production creates and reinforces diasporic consciousness and therefore illustrates "that everything has a collective value" (*Ibid.*, 17). Indeed, the arguments of the third characteristic of minor literatures apply perfectly to many Romani authors:

> In effect, precisely because talents do not abound in a minor literature, the conditions are not given for an individuated utterance which would be that of some "master" and could be separated from collective utterance. As a result the rarity of talents is, in fact, beneficial, and makes possible a conception of something other than a literature of masters: what the solitary writer says or does is necessarily political – even if others do not agree with him (*Ibid.*, 17).

Literary expressions of the deterritorialized, transnational diaspora community in the language of the dominant majority thus always differ from national literatures and their aesthetic standards and literary canons. Following Kovacshazy (2009, 137), we must therefore understand Romani literature not only as a minor literature but also as an exemplary case of de- or polycentred notions of world literature.[6]

6 In order to describe the emergence of transnational and transregional forms of cross-border literatures, some critics prefer the term "global literature" (cf., e.g., Cooppan 2001). They argue that "globalization and world literature go hand in hand: they are both part of a larger cultural awareness of the processes of transculturation, inspiration, exchange, and engagement that govern our cultural, political, and economic lives. The attention they draw to these forms of circulation and exchange allows us to break out of our national, monolingual, or even purely inter-national models for the study of everyday life and of the history of literature – producing a new emphasis on local-global interactions, contact zones, regional formations, and multilingual literatures, among other things" (Hayot 2012, 224).

Postcolonial as well as diasporic perspectives call into question the nation-based, proleptic emphasis of world literature, and the modernity of the world economic system that underpins it. Rather than a literary history comprised of national masterpieces that will be surpassed by transnational expressions, disaporic writers conjure a literary past marked precisely by the circulation, translation, and revision that Goethe identifies as the hallmark of the contemporary era of world literature (Frydman 2012, 233).

In his *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity* (1996, 66), Glissant describes Roma as the quintessential people of diversity characterized by cultural *métissage*, world openness, and transgressive dynamism. Consequently, the literary self-expression of Roma is "without fixed abode" (Ette 2003) and is characterized by its aesthetic diversity; Romani literature is therefore paradigmatic of multiple cross-border "literatures on the move" (*Ibid.*). This follows Damrosch's concept of world literature as a mode of reading rather than a selection of canonical works:

> World literature is … always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone (2003, 283).

Thus, Romani minor literature can be understood as world literature insofar as it configures a vision of the world, not only through diverse literary influences, transcultural hybridity, and cultural recycling, but also through revealing parallel developments across spatio-temporal, ethnic, and political spaces. Not least, Romani minor literature partakes of world literature through its ideological and political stance – that is, its individual reinterpretation of normative facts and national standards.

2. In-between Locality and Transnationality: Romani Minor Literatures

To a much greater extent than other diasporic groups, Roma do not exist as one homogeneous ethnic group in the sense of a uniformly defined cultural community, but rather as a geographically disperse, inherently multicultural minority with more or less pronounced amalgam or hybrid identities (cf., Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995, 29). Transnational associations and interest groups such as the International Romani Union (IRU), existing from 1978 until 2018, the International Romani Writers' Association (IRWA), founded in 2002, or the Romani writers PEN Center show that the transnationality is also seen from the inside as an essential characteristic of a Romani diasporic nation. In literary texts, the concept of transnational belonging can often be found in the image of the world as home, combined with an existential connection to nature. This is the case in the poem "*Por nacer gitano*" (For having been born Gypsy) by the Spanish Romani poet Pedro Amaya (1993, 9), in which Amaya states:

Por nacer gitano
y de cuerpo entero,
el mundo es mi casa,
el cielo es mi techo,
la tierra es mi suelo.[7]

However, participation in the global network at respective nodes, which creates a sense of identity, is always in conflict with local integration into the majority society. In the everyday life of the different Romani groups, diaspora is more often felt as a part of everyday experience, rather than as a recognized concept. What is much more relevelant is the specific national and regional location, as well as linguistic and cultural integration. And yet Romani identities must be understood as a contradictory amalgam of integration and delimitation: locality and transnationality seem to merge into a diasporic "dual homeness" (Ben-Rafael 2013). This is explicitly articulated, for example, by Louise Helmstetter, a French Romani author who has been living in Alsace for generations. In an interview in which she was asked what her home country was, she replied: "*L'Alsace… toute [sic] le monde!*"[8] (Helmstetter 2012, 4:46–4:47).

In addition to regional localization, however, tendencies towards distinction and separation emphasizing the alterity of Romani culture can be observed as well: "*Que se den cuenta de que somos hombres. Y gitanos, pero gitanos de verdad*"[9] (Giménez Mendoza 1969, 114). Because of this hybrid identity between transnationality and locality, between participation in the culture and language of the surrounding majority society and self-confident othering, there is neither one single Romani culture nor one single Romani literature.[10] Rather, a large number of minor (Romani) literatures can be assumed, which can be thought of as a rhizome, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term (1980, 36–37), that is, as a network that has diverse nodes at which connections, links, and exchanges can take place between the transnationally dispersed communities.

Despite the peculiarities of the different minor (Romani) literatures, they all possess common characteristics, through which they form a cross-border network within world literature. Accordingly, the connecting characteristics of the minor (Romani) literatures can be understood in Wittgenstein's sense (1953, sections 66–71) as "family resemblances," that is, as tendencies and characteristics on an aesthetic level that can be regarded as a similar "handwriting" connecting all works by Romani authors.

7 For having been born Gypsy / and with a whole body, / the world is my home, / Heaven is my roof, / the earth is my soil (author's translation).

8 "Alsace… everywhere in the world!" (author's translation).

9 "Let them realize that we are men. And Gypsies, but real Gypsies" (author's translation).

10 The idea of literary plurality has been strengthened by Cécile Kovacshazy 2009, 136.

3. Aesthetic Fields and Literary Forms of Romani Minor Literatures

A comparison of the works of contemporary Romani authors who are writing in romance languages reveals certain stylistic and aesthetic similarities.[11] These include the tendency to employ vernacular language, a comparatively high level of dialogue, and the integration of Romani words. Many works by Roma are performative and/or hybrid in character. The preference for performative narrative forms can be traced back to long-standing traditions of oral literature (magic legends, myths, fairy tales) as well as oral history building, that is, the oral transmission of collective memory, founding origin myths, and life experiences to maintain and strengthen group identity. Music and dance, elements of Romani cultures that constitute identity, and whose performative character is reflected in various forms of intermediality and combining media, play an important role in almost all literary texts by Romani authors. The presence of music and dance also reflects the creative urge to (re)create written literature in order to merge artistic-aesthetic traditions of oral Romani literature with elements of the majority written literature.

As with all emerging, comparatively new minor literatures, different phases of literary self-expression can be found in terms of aesthetics, often leading from initial attempts at writing through literary appropriation to literary emancipation. Of course, as with all such classifications, these are purely constructed ideal types. The aesthetic fields and literary forms presented below can thus be regarded as interwoven and even dynamic categories: there are parallels and overlaps between the phases, and individual authors go through different phases simultaneously or successively, often entailing several literary fields, forms, and models. Generally speaking, the following four major literary fields, forms, and models can be traced.

In the first category are works whose creators are literary autodidacts, who consciously raise their voice in the written majority language and want to be perceived explicitly as "authors." In a way, this form of literary expression resembles popular folkloric art forms, which is by no means to be understood as a judgement on quality, but rather as a widely used form of aesthetic expression by emerging art forms. With these works, the writing process originates from the desire to transfer a sense of creative surplus into the documentation of group-specific collective knowledge. In many cases, these are forms of *oraliture*, that is, texts that are strongly linguistically based on the oral language and thus have a function in documenting the Romani oral literary tradition and forming a sense of identity. Even if such literary production can in some cases lead to the exclusion of authors from the community, they generally become cultural productions that serve to strengthen diasporic group cohesion.

A large number of Romani authors have clear literary and aesthetic ideas, which they give expression to in narratives in the tradition of the realistic novel of the nineteenth century, which often follows a popular aesthetic narrative pattern. As a rule, these are narrative texts with a more or less pronounced

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11 To work out transnational stylistic and aesthetic similarities of all Romani literatures was the aim of the Scientific Network's project "Aesthetics of the Roma: Literature, Comic and Film of Roma" (2017–2020), founded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/359840883). The results are published in Hertrampf and von Hagen 2020b.

(auto-)biographical or docufictional character. Looking back at the past is a dominant theme, with narratives often focused on family histories or the author's own childhood and youth in the times of Nazi persecution. In many cases, these are also intergenerational stories of suffering and social advancement in the tradition of sentimental narratives, combined with folklore and regional elements that clearly engage the reader's sympathy for Romani protagonists. These works can at times also take on features of *littérature engagée* (committed literature).[12] The texts in this category are mostly aimed at readers of the majority society, which can be seen, for example, in the explanations of customs and traditions, values, and taboos.

Some writers of Romani descent do not only see themselves as literary mouthpieces of the minority but as emancipated writers within the surrounding majority societies. Thus, their works break free from thematic self-references and represent instead a form of modern aesthetics of minor literatures, as their authors not only have a clear aesthetic awareness of what constitutes literature and its poetic surplus but also an extensive knowledge of literary patterns and aesthetic processes from that majority literature's modernity.

The fourth category can be described as an aesthetics of emancipation and demarcation. Works from this phase are inscribed in the contemporary literary field of majority societies. The authors are part of the literary field and can take a position accordingly with their works, co-write or continue to write according to trends (postmodern aesthetics, gender aspects and diversity, bio-documentation, and so on), or deliberately differentiate themselves from these trends. Authors of these works seek success not only aesthetically but also commercially. Even if these literary productions have no explicit thematic reference to the minority group and go unmarked (at least aesthetically) as part of the literary production of the majority societies, they often display subtle subversions of existing literary forms or develop new types by blending elements of different literary conventions and traditions.

The following two sections illustrate how these four major categories of developing Romani literature are reflected in French and Spanish literary productions of Romani authors.

4. French Romani Literature

The phenomenon of French Romani literature is relatively new, emerging just after the Second World War when Matéo Maximoff (1917–1999) published his first novel, *Les Ursitory* (The Ursitory), in 1946. Since the 1990s in particular, more and more publications by Romani authors have appeared in France, though with only a very small number of works being published in nationally recognized publishing houses that provide access to a larger market. French Romani literature therefore remains – mostly for economic and structural reasons, concerning publication and distribution – just as "invisible" as many members of the minority themselves.

12 For the political elements of Romani writing, see Toninato 2014.

Until now, around 20 writers who identify as Roma have published literary texts in France (Blandfort 2019). It should also be noted that even if lyrical works significantly outnumber narrative texts, it is nevertheless narrative texts that have appeared in print with major national publishing houses – with a few notable exceptions, such as Alexandre Romanès' poetry book *Paroles perdues* (Lost words, 2004).

An overview of the overall production of narrative texts by French Romani authors shows a clear dominance of autobiographical and semi-fictional texts with strong ethnic self-reference, in which the view of the past is predominant and the everyday life of nomadic Roma is depicted.[13] It also shows that the vast majority of the authors are literary autodidacts and that many narrative texts were created in co-authorship with members of the majority society, quite often in the form of *oraliture*. With the (quite political) goal of drawing attention to the painful past and making Roma visible as a transnational diaspora culture, these texts are very often addressed to majority society, which can be seen, for example, in the tendency to provide explanations of Romani words and customs.

Examples of these are the fragmentary family biographies *Où vas-tu, manouche? Vie et mœurs d'un peuple libre* (Where are you going, Gypsy? Life and customs of a free people) (1982) by Joseph Doerr (1902–1986) and *Sur ces chemins où nos pas se sont effacés* (On these paths where our steps have faded) (2012) by Louise "Pisla" Helmstetter (1926–2013), Lick Dubois' trilogy *Scènes de la vie manouche* (Gypsy life scenes) (1998, 2003, and 2007), and Miguel Haler's autobiography *Le guitariste nomade* (The nomad guitarist) (2005). The case of *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* (I'm a Gypsy, now and forever) (2013) by Anina Ciuciu and co-authored with the non-Romani journalist Frédéric Veille is a little different: Ciuciu's report on her family's migration from ex-communist Romania to France and her final success in studying law at France's renowned Sorbonne University in Paris has a double purpose. On the one hand, it draws the attention of non-Romani readers to the particular difficulties of integration faced by young Romani women. On the other hand, *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* has a strong appellative function and is aimed at young Romani women who are in the same situation, encouraging them to take a new, self-confident path towards achieving similar success.

There are also many more or less fictional stories about Romani protagonists, the majority of which are aimed at a majority society readership. Often, stories such as Sandra Jayat's *La longue route d'une Zingarina* and *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* (The long road of a Zingarina, *and* Zingarina or wild grass) (2010) or Miguel Haler's *La Route des gitans* (The Gypsy route) (2008) display features of auto- and docufiction. While reference to the past dominates the vast majority of narrative texts, an exception is Lick Dubois' *Romanestan: L'île du peuple rom* (Romanestan: The island of Romani people) (2010). The novel has a utopian character, as is evident in its stance towards efforts to build a Romani state.

The increasing acceptance of written Romani literature goes hand in hand with the recognition of literature as a legitimate form of media for preserving and passing on collective memory. Some Romani authors, therefore, deliberately write for a younger generation who no longer know the traditional ways of life and who have little or no command of Romani language. This applies to authors who, like Roberto Lorier in

13 For more detailed surveys and case studies, see Blandfort 2015 and Hertrampf 2017, 151–60.

his *Saga tsigane: Pâni et le peuple sans frontières* (Gypsy saga: Pâni and the people without borders) (2010), present the origin myths of Roma and their emigration from India in literary narratives, or those like the linguist Vania de Gila-Kochanowski (1920–2007), who write down traditional oral myths, legends, and fairy tales, like in *Le roi des serpents et autres contes tsiganes balto slaves* (King of snakes and other Balto-Slavic Gypsy tales) (1996) or *La prière des loups: Récits tsiganes* (The prayer of the wolves: Gypsy stories) (2005). Gila-Kochanowski's mostly bilingual works always have a strong linguistic, didactic impetus and also serve, among other things, to present Romani to young Roma as well as to non-Roma.

The first movements towards aesthetic emancipation, including thematic self-reference and a clear enrolment in French majority literature, are particularly pronounced with Miguel Haler. His more recent works such as the children's book *Le grand voyage de Loa* (Loa's great journey) (2010), the animal history *Les mémoires d'un chat de gouttière* (The memories of a gutter cat) (2011), or *Moi, Joseph l'Alsacien: Soldat français de la Grande Guerre* (Me, Joseph the Alsatian: French soldier of the Great War) (2014) have no thematic relation to the minority group and constitute an unmarked part of literary production in France.

5. Spanish Romani Literature

Cultural practices of Roma in Spain have become part of the majority culture much more than in other countries. This influence has played a major role in the construction of Spanish identity in general, and the proportion of Spanish Roma who are completely assimilated into majority society in terms of language, and at least selectively and partially assimilated in terms of language and culture (Bernecker 2007, 295), is very large in comparison with other European countries. Nevertheless, Spanish Roma are still perceived as "other within" or "domestic/internal other" (Boyarin 1994; Nord 2006).

As in other European countries, written Romani literature in Spain is a fairly recent development, emerging only at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hackl 1987; Hertrampf 2011; Hertrampf and Blandfort, 2011). The Sevillian poet, artist, and revolutionary Helios Gómez (1905–1956) is generally considered the first Romani author to write in Spanish (Tjaden 1998). Not least because of Franco's reprisals against all Spanish minorities, any literature penned by Roma was rendered virtually non-existent. A certain exception, however, was flamenco poetry, although it should also be noted that, apart from José Heredia Maya, only a few Romani flamenco poets have achieved national recognition.[14] But even after the *transición* (that is, the period of transition to democracy after the death of Franco in 1975), literary productions by Roma remained virtually invisible. A turning point can only be seen from the 1990s onwards. Still, Spanish-writing Roma who, as mediators, deliberately cross cultural-ethnic boundaries between the surrounding society and their own group, continue to be the exception.[15]

In contrast to French Romani literature, contemporary Spanish Romani literary production is almost exclusively concentrated on narrative texts, although it, too, had its origins in lyrical works. Furthermore, literary work

14 On Heredia Maya, see Hancock, et al., 1998, 37–39.

15 For more detailed surveys, see Hertrampf 2011, 2019; and Hertrampf and Blandfort, 2011.

and political engagement are much more closely linked. Joaquín Albaicín (born 1965) is undoubtedly the best-known and most productive Spanish Romani author of the present-day. He is a founding member of the IRWA and, in addition to his literary activity, works as a socially and politically active journalist. Spanish Romani authors of younger generations like Sally Cortés Santiago, Marcos Santiago Cortés, and Núria León de Santiago appear confidently in public and on social networks as *Gitan@s*, and are involved in various nongovernmental organizations and Romani associations for the empowerment of Roma in general and Romani women in particular. With their commitment to being seen as Spaniards as well as Roma, the road seems paved for a greater visibility of literary works by Spanish authors with Romani backgrounds in the future.

Albaicín comes from a well-known Spanish Romani artist family: his mother and great aunt were celebrated flamenco dancers and his grandfather the successful torero Rafael Albaicín. In his esoteric narrative works, Albaicín deals with Romani mythology and traditional Romani culture. In *Gitanos en el ruedo: El Indostán en el toreo* (Gypsies in the ring: Hindustan in bullfighting) (1993), *La serpiente terrenal* (The earthly serpent) (1993), *En pos del sol: Los gitanos en la historia, el mito a la leyenda* (In pursuit of the sun: Gypsies in history, myth to legend) (1997), and the storybook *La estrella de plata* (The silver star) (2000), Albaicín presents the Romani origin story in fiction by incorporating different founding myths. In general, his prose texts are characterized by the oscillation between non-fiction and narrative storytelling, reality and fiction. This is particularly evident in his *Diario de un paulista* (Diary of a São Paulo resident) (1995), which is a form of diary that traces the life story of his grandfather in a semi-documentary way.

Much like Albaicín, Sally Cortés Santiago, in her debut novel *Cuando callan las estrellas* (When the stars are silent) (2018), works with one of the founding legends of the Roma, whom she calls "Gypsios," then combining this with a dystopian vision of a Third World War. Ultimately, at the centre of the novel is the forming of the identity of the 21-year-old protagonist, Serena, who has to assert herself in a disrupted world that exists between tradition and progress, right and wrong, hate and love.

The lawyer Marcos Santiago Cortés (born in 1972), who works in Córdoba, is also the author of four novels, although he only explicitly deals with Romani culture in *Gitanófilo* (Gypsiphil) (2018), a kind of homage to his Romani roots. His other novels follow common literary patterns of contemporary (Spanish) fiction. On the one hand, he works in a semi-documentary style, dealing with Spain's recent history. His *Amor de Olivo* (Olive love) (2013) throws a critical light on the exploitation and discrimination of women in rural Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is also the setting of his novel *Rivera de Primo* (2015). Santiago Cortés has also published a novel called *La nueva Jerusalén* (The new Jerusalem) (2019), which is somewhere between a social novel and a crime novel, and deals with drug trafficking and procurement crime in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Cordoba.

Finally, Núria León de Santiago should be mentioned: not only is she the first female Spanish Romani author to represent her Spanish Romani authorship in an unusually confident manner, but her debut novel – *El ángel de Mahler* (Mahler's angel) (2014) – can be described as an outstanding example of an aesthetics of emancipation.[16] *El ángel de Mahler* uses aesthetic patterns of majority literary writing and

16 For a more detailed analysis of the novel, see Hertrampf 2020.

thus inscribes itself in the field of contemporary Spanish literature, in which biofictions and docufictions belong to the fictional mainstream. By placing Gustav Mahler, that is, a historical, non-*Gitano* personality, at the centre of her biofiction and only presenting marginal thematic references to the minority group, León de Santiago emancipates herself from self-referential forms of aesthetic expression commonly used by Romani authors and thus distances herself from the category of minority or "Gitano" literature. At the same time, the novel is a plea for tolerance and acceptance of individual and collective diversity, as well as for a return to the greatest of human values, which is an unconditional love that overcomes all differences. In this way, *El ángel de Mahler* can be read as an attempt to develop a transcultural as well as trans-ethnic (Romani) aesthetic.

Conclusion: Romani Minor Literatures on their Way to World Literature

This article began by asking a very general question: What is Romani literature? I have argued that the ambiguous term describes literary texts written in Romani or any other national language by authors of Romani descent or who consider themselves as Roma. Furthermore, it could be shown that there is not one Romani literature, but that the differences within the numerous groups of the minority, as well as the multiple linguistic, literary, and cultural affiliations with or orientations towards established literatures of majority societies, have lead to the emergence of various minor literatures, and that these minor literature show common peculiarities in form and content that can be regarded as characteristic of Romani literature. Thus, in fact, there is a wide range of Romani minor literatures all over the globe that nevertheless remain rather invisible. The invisibility of Romani minor literatures is the result of several factors: a limited number of works of Romani literature, a certain lack of confidence of some Romani authors and their Romani reading public, and structural problems concerning the recognition of Romani literature by the authorities and institutions that dominate literary fields and book markets within majority societies.

The overview of the literary production of French and Spanish Romani authors presented here has shown, however, that there is a growng tendency towards self-confident writing and performance among these Romani authors. Therefore, it can be said that today's Romani minor literatures have taken the first step towards taking their place in the expanding global scope of world literature.

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Tackling Negative Representation: The Use of Storytelling As a Critical Pedagogical Tool for Positive Representation of Roma

Georgia Kalpazidou

gkalpazi@gmail.com

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3671-1018

Georgia Kalpazidou is a Greek philologist and a postgraduate student of Historical and Balkan Linguistics at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki. Her Romani origins prompted her to specialize in Romani Linguistics. She has worked as an educator and cultural mediator. Since 2019 she is assistant researcher in the project Areal Typology with Emphasis on Balkan Data of the Institute of Modern Greek Studies. She is a member of Alternative Innovative Development (AID).

Dimitris Alexandros Ladopoulos

dimlado@hotmail.com

Alternative Innovative Development, Larisa, Greece

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5301-3767

Dimitrios Alexandros Ladopoulos, co-founder and member of Alternative Innovative Development, studied Rural and Survey Engineering. He has supervised several projects in multiple management and administrative roles. His main topics of interest are new technologies, adult education through non-formal learning methods, environment, and youth entrepreneurship, with a special focus on vulnerable groups.

Theofano Papakonstantinou

feniapapakonstantinou@gmail.com

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Alternative Innovative Development, Thessaloniki, Greece

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8190-2142

Theofano Papakonstantinou, co-founder of Alternative Innovative Development, is a PhD candidate at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in the School of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education. She was a member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe from 2017 to 2019. Among her multiple interests are adult education, non-formal learning methods, entrepreneurship, and the implementation of innovative action plans with an emphasis on supporting Roma and other vulnerable social groups.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 58–70 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.79

Abstract

This article focuses on the negative representation of Roma in Greece in the early twenty-first century. It investigates how negative feedback takes the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy that suppresses the self-esteem of young Roma and maintains a distance between Romani identity and education despite several positive yet little known examples of Romani scientists and scholars. The article questions how negative Romani images can be reversed in order to enhance Roma's educational success. The importance of innovative educational activities based on Romani literature, critical multiculturalism, and the parameter of Romani bilingualism is highlighted. Particularly, the article focuses on the power and the echo that stories can have (storytelling), where protagonists have a Romani connection or identity and are portrayed as positive models, both within classrooms with Romani students and within a society where the idea of Romani literature is a fantasy.

Keywords

- Critical pedagogy
- Multiculturalism
- Romani representation
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Storytelling

Introduction: In the Spectrum of Negative Representation

It is estimated that Roma and Travellers, with a population of more than 10 million, constitute the largest minority group in Europe and face day-to-day discrimination and marginalization. The vast majority of European citizens hold established views about the contemporary social representation of Roma, even if these views are not based on personal experience (Matras 2013). As Matras mentions, "No tabula rasa is available when it comes to briefing politicians, media, or the wider public about Roma/Gypsies and their needs or aspirations" (2013, 2). This viewpoint is most likely to be negative, as depicted in Google's imagery for searches of the word "Roma."

Negative beliefs easily lead to harmful outcomes, both for individuals who directly are affected by stereotypes and for society at large (Maučec 2013), especially when popular media representation of misunderstood groups in the digital era can feed fear and paranoia and exacerbate community conflict (Richardson 2014). As Richardson mentions, "anti-Gypsy discourse is hegemonic and can constrain groups' freedom to practice individual cultures through heightening their 'otherness' and therefore subjecting them to increased social surveillance and control" (2014, 51).

Focusing on the depiction of Roma in Greece, the above portrait persists. Riga and Demonakou observe that "[t]he issue of the meeting of the cultural identities of the Greeks and Roma in Greece, seen through the prism of their conflicting relationship in daily practice, is 'burdened' by the hue of cultural diversity that the identity of the latter carries within it" (Riga and Demonakou 2002, 280).

Biased representations towards Roma are unfortunately common phenomena within and outside the borders of Greece. Roma are considered to be parasitical elements in a territory where they have been present for centuries. Undoubtedly, one-sided social coverage of Roma perpetuates inequalities and builds higher walls among Greek Roma and Greek non-Roma in a relatively small country, defying the fact that these two groups often share a common reality with common problems, which usually stems from the state's inability to take care of vulnerable groups. In the end, as Maučec describes, "Despite some positive stereotypes (e.g. Roma have a natural talent for music), the stereotypes about Roma are overwhelmingly negative" (2013, 184).

Negative viewpoints link to negative expectations. Interpersonal expectations are powerful (Madon, Jussim, and Eccles 1997) and date back to Merton's (1948) coining of the term *self-fulfilling prophecy*, which is defined as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true" (1948, 195). According to Merton (1948), the common pattern of the self-fulfilling prophecy explains a host of social problems such as discrimination against stigmatized groups. By way of explanation, the term refers to initially false beliefs that lead the "victim" to act similarly and to correspond to negative expectations which are especially powerful among certain targets (Madon, Jussim, and Eccles 1997).

A false belief that persists in the early twenty-first century is that Roma are unable to learn and that their culture is incompatible with education. Poor school attendance by Romani students usually is connected to Romani identity by non-Romani people (Moucheli 1996; Komis 1998; Gotovos 2004b in Nikolaou 2009) who ignore a number of serious socio-economic causes. The academic success of Romani students comes as a shock to many, and this attitude can be confirmed by the author's personal experience: when she entered university in 2007, a newspaper article was published with the headline "A 19-year-old Gypsy Girl Breaks the Stereotypes" (Macedonia 2008).

Social beliefs are so ingrained that even young children are surprised that a Romani man or woman has attended university, underlining the pervasiveness and strength of this self-fulfilling prophecy that suppresses the self-esteem of young Roma. This is especially poignant when Romani students learn from a Romani teacher in the classroom. From the author's personal and professional observations, elementary school students persistently were unable to understand how Romani women study in university, since "Romani women do not study." Even if a growing number of Romani scientists are noted contributors to their respective fields around the world, they usually are invisible among Romani societies.[1]

Moreover, educational systems and educators are affected deeply by the stereotype of "natural" Romani disaffection (Flecha and Soler 2013), and this situation is reflected in the curriculum and way of teaching (Kokkoni 2017). Teachers aim to bring students into conformity with the dominant culture and the values and behaviors of the majority (Kokkoni 2017), thus rejecting the identity of students from minority groups, such as Roma, who come from different socio-linguistic backgrounds. Kyuchukov writes, "Teachers expect Roma children to know how to cope with the school rules" (2000, 274). But whenever this expectation is not met, the student-teacher relationship is impacted, often negatively.

Schools as institutions represent a particular and dominant system of values and a particular language that together may operate to marginalize those students who deviate from them. In other words, a monolingual and monocultural orientation causes a fear of noncompliance and exclusion, which piles pressure on children, followed by feelings of inferiority (Kokkoni 2017). Thus, a combination of negative experiences, an unfamiliar school environment, and the influence of teachers' negative attitudes often leads students to leave school early (Kokkoni 2017).

How can Roma and especially Romani students escape this vicious cycle of reproduction of a negative representation of Romani identity and culture in schools and society at large? First, this article aims to highlight the importance of designing, organizing, and implementing multicultural educational activities for elementary and high school pupils, using the methodological approach of oral storytelling as a critical and multicultural pedagogical tool and learning method. It also sheds light on the need to enhance the depth of pupils' cultural experiences and identity by exposing them to the idea of Romani literature and by developing their critical abilities as strategies to navigate the trap of Romani self-fulfilling prophecies in education.

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1 For example, Ian Hancock, Hristo Kyuchukov, and Magda Matache in the Humanities. In Greece, Γιάννης Γεωργίου (John Georgiou) and Μαρία Δημητρίου (Maria Dimitriou).

1. Multiple Reforms of Education Now

In today's Greek school environment, students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may not have sufficient stimuli to help them to adapt to the reality of school. Due to a lack of appropriate teaching methods to help them cope, they underperform in school, have negative perceptions about school, or even experience outright rejection. The low rate of attendance of Romani students in Greece is confirmed in research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) in which 43 percent of Romani children of compulsory school-age are reported to be not attending school. This percentage is one of the two highest rates in Europe of Romani children not attending compulsory education.

In particular, regarding the education of Romani children, Liegeois (1999) states that schools have paid little attention to the way Roma educate their children within the family, while pedagogical school practices seem contradictory, resulting in divisive positions. Vasileiadou and Pavli-Korre (2011) emphasize that today's schools reject Romani children, their skills, culture, and language, with the result that Romani children experience the conflict of two different value systems, that of the school and that of the community. In fact, Vasileiadou and Pavli-Korre (2011) underline that the introduction of intercultural thematic units is insufficient, and a modernization of teaching methods is required.

Although progress has been made in recent years in reducing the school dropout rate of Romani children, the rates of Romani children's nonattendance of school in relation to the general population continue to be high, which is in line with an outstanding need to revise both educational protocols and thematic methods and teaching methods of the schools.

An educational system is like a vivid organism; it must be able to change, evolve, and adapt according to historical and social contexts (Chartier 1991). In a multicultural society, education has to be multicultural, too, in order to be sustainable and efficient.

Banks and Banks (2010) highlight the tripartite composition of multiculturalism which consists of the concept, the educational reform movement, and the process. In a multicultural frame, where differences are equalized, social asymmetries and variables are perceived not as difficulties but as positive contributions (Kellner 2003, 96).

In conjunction, multicultural education is a broad concept with several different and important dimensions and should be viewed as an ongoing process (Banks 2004). Practicing educators can use the dimensions as a guide to school reform when trying to implement multicultural disciplines in the way of teaching. The dimensions include content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks and Banks 2010).

In fact, critical pedagogy and multicultural education complement each other; when merged, they become an attitude or ideology that helps teachers "to confront and engage the world critically and challenge power relations" (Sleeter and McLaren 1995, 7). Chan (2011) highlights that critical pedagogy

is grounded in social justice and equality. Banks and Wink also support the idea that critical teachers need to realize that education is a political site for power struggles and that the educational curriculum is a political document (Banks 2004; Wink 2005).

Multicultural education should focus on the development of healthy identities and of intergroup awareness, through teaching about cultural practices without stereotyping or misinterpreting (Banks and Banks 2010). A way that could lead students to experience multiculturalism is storytelling (Chartier 1991), which is aligned closely with non-formal education.

Non-formal education may be aimed at people who do not have access to formal education or cannot complete the full cycle of basic education (Yasunaga 2014). Non-formal education has significant advantages as it can be adapted to the specific learning needs of individuals and populations in different conditions. The resilience of non-formal education and environmentally friendly approaches are appropriate and useful for fulfilling the right to education of marginalized groups and populations with special learning needs.

Additionally, multiculturalism is linked to multilingualism. Despite multilingualism surrounding us, monolingualism still prevails. In previous decades the bilingualism of minorities was perceived as a deficiency and was correlated to low scores and school failure (Oller and Eilers 2002). However, planning actions within the framework of intercultural education principles and encouraging the use of minority languages can lead to enhancing positive language attitudes as well as allowing students to redefine their identities and to strengthen their self-esteem. As Kokkoni mentions "bilingualism should not be degraded nor its speakers" (2017, 99).

Concerning Romani bilingualism, this parameter usually is ignored. Nonetheless, "When the majority (finally) starts to appreciate the Romani language and Romani bilingualism in all its richness then a transformation of society will take place" (Kyuchukov 2000, 278). This article supports the view that the use of narratives which include elements of Romani life and give the chance to students to express themselves in Romani could work in the above-mentioned direction.

2. The Dendropotamos Case Study

Since 2013, the author has participated in interventions in local schools in Dendropotamos, a Romani district close to Thessaloniki's city center, as a teacher and cultural mediator under the Education of Roma Children Program of the Pedagogy Faculty of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. During her interactions with Romani high school students, the author noticed that many Romani students expressed a passive and unmotivated attitude towards school, which is unsurprising as school represents a foreign and distant place where negative representations of Roma persist.

Disappointingly, even if a Romani student expresses a willingness for more active engagement and learning, the school often is unable to play a more supportive role. Romani adolescents, and especially teenage girls, have to face not only discrimination from mainstream society but also the frequently negative reactions of

their family members if they show a preference to study and follow an academic/professional career rather than marrying, which is the first choice expected of a Rom/Romni in their community. Exactly here at this life juncture does the self-fulfilling prophecy begin to come true. To overcome such personal barriers, young Roma have to summon the courage to make decisions against the norm, particularly when their choices are treated with irony and contemptuous attitudes within close-knit family environments. As a result, it is reasonable for students who have no "ally" to give up far too soon.

Given the fact that schools usually do not stray from their typical teaching program and tend to ignore the individual needs of students, it is easy to understand why school seems unattractive to those students with particular cultural characteristics.

The purpose of the researcher's interventions was to interact with Romani students and to devise a way that regular school attendance might be integrated into Romani culture. Materials for the interventions were to be based on Romani students' living conditions in order to connect two seemingly incompatible concepts: school and Romani culture.

The Dendropotamos case study aimed to examine whether and to what extent the method of storytelling – both as a critical pedagogical tool and as a made-up story where the protagonist was a positive Romani character – could contribute to tackling the negative representation of Roma. It also aimed to measure how storytelling could promote the active participation of students in the classroom and enhance their cultural background and identity by recognizing and utilizing elements of their culture in an unfamiliar school context.

Storytelling workshops took place at Dendropotamos high school in 2018 over four teaching hours and were held for approximately 20 bilingual Arli Romani freshman with low educational levels and low socio-economic backgrounds. The students were separated into two groups of ten. Participatory observation formed the core of the methodology and extensive notes were taken before and after the workshops in order to observe the reactions, attitudes, and comments of participating students.

Mixing storytelling and non-formal education has been gaining acceptance globally as an important empowerment tool. Narrative is a widely used educational strategy and common in Greece, especially fairy tales that create a pleasant and creative learning environment. It should be noted that oral narration is highly regarded in Romani culture. Consequently, this study also aimed to outline the use of storytelling and the art of narration for the purpose of a positive representation of Roma.

Numerous scholars support the pedagogical value of storytelling. For instance, Burk (2000) proposes the use of storytelling for at-risk students. In her paper, it is suggested that implementing storytelling as a pedagogical tool helps to cultivate an empowering learning environment and to demonstrate cultural pride and confidence (Burk 2000, 7). Furthermore, Akbar mentions that "storytelling is one of the learning methods to practice critical thinking" (Dewey 1910 cited in Akbar 2018, 2), also referring to investigations and analyses about the use of the storytelling process in enhancing critical thinking skills. Conjointly, fairy tales are tools "by which we close the gap between the sensorial input and the abstract concept" (Hohr 2000, 96).

In the context of intercultural intervention, the researcher authored a story entitled "Butterfly Irene and the Magic Recipe" in which the protagonist has Romani origins, and her magic recipe – asking for and gathering knowledge – helps her to develop herself and to travel around the world. The story represents Roma positively, an uncommon feature of most Romani characters in literature, and it was the researcher's main tool to assess the issue of representation of Roma and their relationship to education.

The researcher read the story aloud and then asked students to express their opinion about the story and Irene's recipe, which lead to lifelong learning. The issue of education in relation to Romani daily life was the central topic. The researcher asked students questions such as what Irene's goal was, how did she achieve it, and if it was truly a "problem" that she had Romani origins, with the goal to provoke critical thinking.

Additionally, in order to be given the impetus for a critical look of the world beyond the borders of their neighborhood, students were asked to think and write their questions about the world, as Butterfly Irene had, provoking an interesting discussion among the students.

The basic purpose of the story was to deliver a symbolic message that education is perhaps the only way to achieve a better life, that education allows us to grow wings, no matter if we are from Romani or non-Romani origins. Knowledge and education are considered the recipe for transforming our view about ourselves and others' views about us, keeping in mind that education is not a privilege but a human right.

An underlying purpose of this intervention was to draw students' attention to the fact that Romani origins do not automatically block us from education and from any kind of literacy. Tellingly, Romani literature is completely absent from school and educational horizons in Greece. Roma appear in literature only as ethnographic characters imbued with mostly negative stereotypical features. So far, there is no interest in Romani writers and their literature production. As a result, Romani students are not looking for Romani literature as they are unaware of its existence and consider themselves excluded from this area of arts and culture.

3. Results

Before the intervention, the researcher and students held a discussion. Some students mentioned that they attend school because they have nowhere else to go when their parents are working or only because they have fun with their friends at school. The researcher observed that there was a feeling of distance among students from the goals represented by the institution of their school. In other words, youngsters assumed that they would get married in a few years, so attending school was not that important.

After the narration of the story, students were pleasantly surprised; they were not used to a positive representation of Roma, especially in literary contexts. Thereafter, an interactive conversation started about the benefits of education and about students' problems and difficulties with school attendance as well as their future dreams. After some encouragement, children expressed themselves verbally in Greek

and in Romani, their mother tongue, and they were happy that they could use their language at school. More students were more actively engaged to participate in the discussion when allowed to speak their mother tongue.

The researcher and pupils shared their common worries, and the researcher, in an attempt to inspire them, shared with them her personal story about how she managed to overcome the obstacles that arise due to Romani culture such as early marriages in addition to the underestimated socio-linguistic status of Roma. Students then began to talk about various professions in which they were interested. Some girls said that they wanted to become like Butterfly Irene or like the Romani teacher with them in the classroom.

The children, in cooperation with an art teacher, illustrated the story within a month, and they presented their work to the school. During the presentation, teachers positively observed that the children were excited. Moreover, students added their own questions such as where Zulus live, who built Thessaloniki's White Tower, or when Christopher Columbus was born, which were answered by teachers; they also referred to their dreams and future professional plans.

Moreover, the fact that they saw a member of their community in the role of a teacher – in a role that so far was "opposite" of the image of Roma and mostly was connected to *gadje* – created the impression that Romani origins are not an obstacle to achieving personal goals and improving one's life. Moreover, many Romani students opined that if someone, and especially a woman, from their community has managed to go to university and become a teacher, then they could do the same.

A combination of storytelling and interactive dialogue proved to be an excellent student learning tool for the adoption of values and creating opinions. By fostering student engagement, the researcher and students shared their cultural knowledge and offered different and alternative perspectives not widely disseminated in society. By sharing the storytelling processes and taking turns, the researcher offered the "floor" to pupils and structured a classroom talk that allowed and facilitated discussion. By linking themes and scaffolding learning, students engaged in an interactive environment that related theoretical constructs with practical experience and problem-solving skills.

It is worth mentioning that the above action resounded beyond the context of the school environment. Its echo reached the wider social environment of the children as they excitedly conveyed this unexpected school experience. Students' parents reacted positively in their comments to the researcher.

Positive school experiences that allow for the dismantling of students' stigmatized identities have a wider positive impact on students' families and contribute to a different, critical way of thinking based on a multicultural view. When parents feel that their children are not pushed to the sidelines and that their culture receives respect in an unfamiliar environment like school, it becomes easier for parents to support their children's education. Thus, *their* school, the school of *gadje*, became *our* school, too.

In sum, these activities cultivated free expression, communication, imagination, and inspiration, leading to a positive and effective enhancement of Romani students' cultural identity, along with the culture of different social groups. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the Romani community

of Dendropotamos, like many others, is unfamiliar with Romani literature and the idea of literature production by Roma. Contact with modern literary texts written by and for Roma can serve as a starting point for familiarizing students with contemporary Romani writing. Such contact may serve as a fertile ground for developing a different approach towards the representation of Romani identity, by both Romani and non-Romani individuals.

Conclusion

The negative social representation of Roma is a phenomenon with deep roots that date back centuries. Yet the need to tackle anti-Romani attitudes is absolutely necessary in order to maintain if not increase social cohesion. School has a significant role in mitigating the negative representation of Roma within Romani communities as well as wider society by transforming difficulties into possibilities.

Furthermore, values and self-perception are inextricably linked to frames of references (Mezirow 1997). Therefore, if members of stigmatized groups, subconsciously or not, believe that their personal development is bounded by their racial identity and not by their personal goals, it is necessary to revise their views, in order to take firm control of their lives and to make decisions that will be based on their own personal needs and not on stereotypes.

The development of critical thinking assumes the formation of individual identity, which is one of the targets of transformative learning, and critical thinking also strengthens an individual's emancipation from foreign but taken-for-granted assumptions (Cranton 2000). Here, teachers have a duty to contribute to this development process. As this articles suggests, oral storytelling can be used as a tool to work with Romani children; storytelling and including positive Romani life stories can play an important role for alternative interpretations of reality, especially during childhood so as to empower Romani students to fight against the trap of a self-fulfilling prophecy of school failure. Storytelling and subsequent teacher-student interactions provide meaning within the learning process, ranging from practical experiences to theoretical constructs.

Non-formal activities that are unpopular in the traditional teaching methods of many schools appear to be a valuable tool for Romani students. Establishing learning environments that allow students to express themselves in their mother tongue gives a positive impulse to students, respecting them for their culture and language, and integrating them into the wider social context. Ultimately, this article confirmed that narration was an important learning tool, where students, through tales and stories, were engaged in how to be inquisitive about the knowledge being disseminated.

A school that uses teaching methods designed to inspire Romani students and that embraces the life experiences and stories of Roma is a positive example that should be explored further. Collecting a larger, more representative sample (different areas, different ages) over a longer observation period may lead to a deeper understanding applicable to the wider school system in Greece.

The limitations of this study need to be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the researcher's own sensitivity and integrity were the primary instruments of data collection and analysis.

However, neither is training readily available to aspiring case study researchers nor are there guidelines in constructing the final report.

Second, time limitations hampered the effort to examine the phenomena in depth. Further limitations involve issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability (Hamel 1993), or as Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer, the "unusual problems of ethics" since an unethical researcher and author could select specific data to lead to concrete results that they wish to be illustrated. A lack of representativeness and rigor in collection, construction, and analysis need to be mentioned. Future research requires the collection of more variables in a more representative sample (different areas, different ages) over a longer observation period that can lead to better understanding and conclusions.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the two co-authors of this article, Dimitris Alexandros Ladopoulos and Theofano Papakonstantinou, from the nongovernmental organization Alternative Innovative Development (AID) for their help, support, and encouragement. They were great colleagues in my first academic steps. I also would like to thank professor Hristo Kyuchukov for his constructive comments.

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Black Bodies, White Bodies – 'Gypsy' Images in Central Europe at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1880–1920)

Éva Kovács

kovacs.eva@tk.hu

Institute of Sociology, Center for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary
Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Vienna, Austria

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4280-9794

Éva Kovács, PhD, studied sociology and economics at the universities of economics in Pécs and Budapest, PhD 1994, Habilitation 2009. She is Deputy Director at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) and is Research Professor at the Institute of Sociology at the Center for Social Sciences in Budapest. Her research fields include visual studies, community studies, research on memory and remembrance, as well as ethnic identities in East Central Europe. She has authored five monographs, edited nine volumes, and published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals. She founded the digital audiovisual archive 'Voices of the Twentieth Century' in Budapest and was co-curator of the exhibitions on 'Myths of the Nations' at the German Historical Museum in Berlin, the 'Representation of Roma and Sinti' in Kunsthalle Krems, 'Contemporary Roma Art' in Collegium Hungaricum, and on cultural opposition under state socialism in Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, Vienna, and Warsaw. She is a member of the Curatorial Board of the European Roma Cultural Foundation and a member of the Editorial Board of *Critical Romani Studies*.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 72–94 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.75

Abstract

The problem of the observer has long been a key concern of social theories. However, in mainstream sociology, it was not until three decades ago that the relationship between image and text, seeing and gaze, appeared on the horizon of the discipline. Studying the visual representation of Roma in Modernity, one sees how Central European societies create their own sexualised and feminised Blackness through 'savage' groups and individuals. The central thesis of the article is that, across Europe, the panoptic regime of Modernity operates with the optical unconscious in two ways. On the one hand, by re-visualising social differences that became invisible after the collapse of feudal society; on the other, by bringing the oppressed into sight and rendering the oppressors invisible. However, there is a significant difference between the Western and Eastern European representations of 'savages': in the process of nation-building, the 'Gypsy' became an ambiguous part of the national imaginary in Eastern European countries. The paper argues that ideas and visual representations of Roma commuted between Central and Western Europe resulted in tensions between the colonial and emancipatory gazes.

Keywords

- Central Europe
- Colonial gaze
- Emancipatory gaze
- Modernity
- Painting at the turn of the nineteenth century
- Visual representation of Roma

Introduction

The following thought experiment was occasioned by an invitation to curate an exhibition titled 'Representation of "Gypsies" in Modern Painting' in the Kunsthalle of Krems (Austria) more than ten years ago (Baumgartner and Kovács 2007, 2008; Kovács 2009). I discovered certain connections of interest to those concerned with the archaeology of images during a course of intensive preparatory research.[1] This article revolves around two key categories: the *optical unconscious* (Benjamin 1980) and the *panoptic regime* of Modernity (Foucault 1995), by no means excluding the possibility that the representation of Roma ('Gypsies')[2] in nineteenth- and early-twentieth century painting can be approached in radically different ways.

This essay reflects the position of a sociologist interested in visual studies. My knowledge lies in the representation of Otherness from studies of Central European Jewry from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. It was in the early 1990s that I read *The Jew's Body* (Gilman 1991). In this book, Sander L. Gilman analysed anti-Semitic rhetoric with the help of case studies on Jewish body and mind, creatively combining medical and historical approaches. I was impressed deeply by this book, so I read Gilman's other writings, including *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-century Art, Medicine, and Literature* (1985), the line of argument of which I attempt to follow in this essay. I also became familiar with two important books by Georges-Didi Huberman: *Invention of Hysteria* (2004) and *Opening up Venus* (1999). As far as I know, these two favourite authors of mine never referred to each other's works; nevertheless, I connected

Figure 1.
János Göröncsér Gundel, *Gypsy Girl and Nude Model*, c. 1907, oil on canvas, 69 x 59 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

1 The whole corpus of paintings I studied – approximately 500 pieces – contained pictures from the Renaissance to the twentieth century from Portugal to Romania and from Great Britain to Italy. In this paper, I will only discuss a collection of approximately 100 paintings made by Central European artists in the four to five decades around 1900. Although all of my hypotheses were tested on many works of Austrian, Czech, German, or Romanian painters, I will use Austrian and Hungarian examples, not just because I know this corpus better but also because of practical copyright issues. The reader can check my hypotheses with the help of the catalogue from our exhibition (Belgin and Baumgartner 2007).

2 In this paper, I use the word ´Gypsy´, that was a pejorative term in the era under scrutiny, between single quotes, while the term of Roma (and Sinti) refers to the current self-definition of this people.

them in order to interpret both the images and texts that crossed my path during preparations for the exhibition. Still, had I not encountered János Göröncsér Gundel's painting, *Gypsy Girl and Nude Model*, my ponderings might never taken shape (Figure 1). Looking at the picture by this artist who died at the age of 27 in 1908, I felt a picture emerging in my mind, too. I will analyse this painting in detail later.

Visual conventions take a wide range of forms, styles, and icons in Western aesthetic cultures. All these manifestations define the locations (statuses) and qualities taken by the individuum in society. Hence, visual conventions can be grasped in representations. For the social scientist, representations of science, the arts, or everyday life share the same status, inasmuch as they are all based on experienced or observed reality. However, the history of vision is not merely the history of representations; it also encompasses the history of the status of the observer at the intersection of relations between the body and forms of institutionalised discursive power (Crary 1990).

This is not to contradict the notion that *gaze* is a primary process of perception and interpretation. The knowledge and understanding of practices that were used to transform things into images belongs to suppressed knowledge one wants to re-establish. The perception of images takes place via an 'act of metamorphosis', in which the images seen are transformed into remembered images and find a new place in our image memory (Belting 2001). Belting writes, 'We are used to thinking of gaze and image as separate, and therefore we speak of looking at an image. (…) however, images form in adapting the gaze. The complicity between body and gaze leads to the image' (2012, 187).

It is an experience that one is not necessarily aware of; instead, it often remains in the optical unconscious, in a visual dimension of the material world filtered out and rendered invisible by social consciousness. As Walter Benjamin wrote about the gaze of the camera, it 'introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. The camera reveals aspects of reality that register in our senses but never quite get processed consciously' (Benjamin 1980, 500; Hárs 2006). My central thesis is that the panoptic regime of Modernity operates with the optical unconscious in two ways across Europe: on the one hand, by *re-visualising social differences* that became invisible after the collapse of feudal society in the nineteenth century; on the other, by *bringing the oppressed into sight and rendering the oppressors invisible* (Foucault 1995).[3]

I will support my central thesis with the following arguments: (1) in European Modernity the Black body becomes *sexualised* and *feminised*, while also masculinised inasmuch as the white society projects its desire and discontent onto the Black feminine or masculine body; (2) adopting Western patterns in the visualisation of social and ethnic differences, Central European societies create their own Blackness

3 Here, for reasons of space, I cannot delve into the recent literature on the subject. I would only like to stress the interconnection between gaze and optical unconsciousness in experiencing social segregation in a broader sense: 'The idea of a gaze that belongs to the other, a component of Benjamin's understanding of the optical unconscious, was also central to Du Bois's experience of double consciousness. For Du Bois, racial consciousness was a visual dynamic, an effect of an exterior gaze, and his concept names the psychic strain that African Americans experienced living in a segregated world: 'It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Smith and Sliwinski 2017, 14).

through 'savages' and their faraway and nearby colonies (Piotrowski 2009; Buck-Morss 2011). In the Panopticon of Central European Modernity, 'Gypsies' become *pendants* of the African and Asian 'primitives' of Western Europe.

1. 'Blacks' along the Banks of the Seine

Gilman's enigmatic illustration of his thesis takes us back to nineteenth-century Paris, directly in front of Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (Gilman 1985). The history of this painting is well known: following Tizian and Giorgone, Manet 'only' meant to paint a beautiful Venus. The main figure of Olympia, rather bare than naked, with her provocative glance at the viewers, stirring them from their comfort, caused such outrage that the painting finally was removed from the *Paris Salon*. Visitors regarded it as an apology of prostitution, mocking Olympia as a yellow-bellied Odalisque, a Venus with a cat, a sort of female gorilla. Gilman draws attention to the fact that – besides other iconographic elements in the picture – Olympia's figure is sexualised primarily through the Black maid. Gilman considers Olympia to be an empty object that acquires its meaning from the Black body that imparts promiscuity on the white body.

The prostitute represents the essence of female sexuality, in particular, a passionate and sick sexuality whose psychology and physiognomy was studied thoroughly in this period (Parent-Duchâtelet 1837).[4] It was in the nineteenth century that the perception of the prostitute mingled with that of Blackness: the pathology of the female body was seen as the representation of primitive social life, regression, and thus insanity or unrestrained and uncontrollable sexuality. For this to happen, both prostitution and Blackness had to be displaced from their previous social positions and set out in new directions of popularisation and reflexivity (Bernheimer 1997; Lestringant 1997).

Owing to modern medicine and biology, the *sexus* of the Black woman and man became iconic for deviant sexuality. A formative experience of colonial cultural history has been researched meticulously since the exhibition of the *Hottentot Venus*, i.e. Saat-Jee Baartman, a slave San woman from South Africa (Bitterli 1976; Schultz 1999).[5] The event, by the way, barely stood out in a world of habitual *Völkerschaus*,[6] culminating in the *vogue nègre* that turned into negrophilia by the early twentieth century (Gombrich 1999). Saat-Jee's European short story differs from the conventional *Völkerschau*s of her time, mainly in that she was not exhibited as an example of 'savage tribes' among her kin members in the context of a 'tribal world' – to be sure, she appeared at the ball of the French government – but as a Black woman with 'abnormal' proportions. This allowed for her involvement with or, rather, incorporation into white society as a visible physical being. It also meant that her presentation

4 Besides Germany, the idea became pervasive in Hungary as well (Cséri 1893). See also Schlor (1991).

5 The story has been thoroughly discussed in feminist and postcolonial literature (Bloom 1999; Sharpley-Whiting 1999).

6 Exhibitions of extra-European people in zoos were common civic attractions up until the 1930s. For instance, 250 members of Sudanese and Congolese tribes were exhibited in the Budapest Zoo for Hungarian millennium celebrations (Mathez, Froidevaux, Földessy, and Szántó 2008; N. Kovács 2008).

– as opposed to exhibitions of the Congolese, Inuit, and Senegalese – was limited explicitly to the aggrandisement of her sexual organs. As Gilman puts it, the public was watching her breasts and buttocks, while fantasising about her vagina (1985, 235–237). The fact that this did not happen to an Inuit corresponded to the European tradition of sideshows spanning several centuries. That tradition may be seen as a kind of self-disciplining practice in a society exhibiting its own ill people, dwarfs and 'lunatics' looking 'extraordinary' or 'abnormal'. Using Saat-Jee Baartman as a spectacular object reveals that, paradoxically, white society perceived Blacks to be actually very close to themselves. The bare reality of the derogatory treatment of Saat-Jee was a way of recognising and attempting to eliminate this proximity. It was transparent in contemporary culture as well as in the incipient discipline of anthropology at the time.[7] Negrophilia went hand in hand with negrophobia.[8]

By the nineteenth century, the images of prostitutes were projected onto Black people: important thinkers of the time such as Hegel or Schopenhauer attributed uncontrollable sexuality, primitive social life, and, consequently, a greater inclination to regression to Black people. The next generation of theorists only had to push this a little further to associate insanity or unrestrained sexuality with Blackness and femininity. Hence, Blackness was introduced in medical discourse as a pathological symptom.

First Detour: The Aesthetics of Hysteria

Prejudices concerning female sexuality in the nineteenth century were not so different from those ingrained in previous centuries (i.e. in comparison to men, women's *sexus* is inferior, female genitalia are more primitive, and female sexuality is predominantly anal); however, these prejudices became invested with radically new meanings owing to the expansion of representations as well as the revolutionary changes in medicine and natural sciences during this period.

The visualisation of mentally ill women reached a peak in the last third of the nineteenth century with the help of photographs made in the hospital of Salpêtrière.[9] In the 1870s, more than 4,000 women diagnosed with incurable diseases or mental illnesses received treatment there. The ward of hysterical patients, directed by the imminently famous Jean-Martin Charcot, was considered especially spectacular. Regular examinations, theatrical Tuesday shows where chronic cases were

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7 The history of the 'Hottentot Venus' has a huge literature. See e.g. Willis 2010. For a critical analysis of the place of black female body within American culture, see Wallace-Sanders 2002.

8 Negrophilia (from French *negrophilie*) is the term of adapting and popularising 'Black' culture into the 'white' society of Paris in the early 1900s. See Archer-Straw 2000. Frantz Fanon's classical auto-theoretical work *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Black skin, white masks) was published in 1952. In this book, Fanon analysed the colonised psychic constructions of Blackness. For negrophobia, see Thomas 2007.

9 Didi-Huberman writes: The Salpêtrière was the Mecca of the great confinement, known locally as the 'little Arsenal', and was the largest hospital in France. It was another Bastille, with its 'courtyard of massacres', 'debauched women', convulsionaries of Saint-Médard, and 'women of abnormal constitution' confined all together. It was the general hospital for women, or rather for the feminine dregs of society; 'physicians of the Hôtel-Dieu were even forbidden to receive and treat them', for women with venereal diseases, among others, were 'gathered up' only at the Salpêtrière. They were whipped on arrival, the 'punishment certificate' was completed, and they were interned. The largest hospital in France was the hospice for women. One must imagine, or try to imagine the Salpêtrière, in Paris itself, as such an improbable place of femininity – I mean it was a city of women, the city of incurable women (2003, 13).

presented to the public, including some of the most distinguished medical doctors, scholars, politicians, and artists of the age, in a so-called amphitheatre – just like the recording of these events in the photographic series – reflected a kind of *mediatised image of sick female sexuality*, calling for the disciplinary and controlling power of the men's world. 'If everything seems to be in these images, it is because photography was in the ideal position to crystallize the link between the fantasy of hysteria and the fantasy of knowledge' (Didi-Huberman 2003, xi).[10] Such positioning of the female body, detached from space and time and deprived of identity was perfectly apt to condense the various images of women, the 'other', and those with unstable moral identities (prostitute or criminal) in a single image, in which the nude does not look back anymore but deflects herself from her own body.[11]

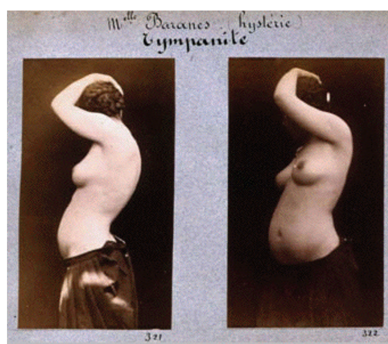

Figure 2.
Albert Londe, Mlle Banares (hystérie);
Tympanite, c. 1883, toned gelatine silver,
35.5 x 47 cm, collection Texbraun.

Figure 3.
André Kertész, *Untitled*, Abony, 1921, glass plate, 4.5 x 6 cm,
Ministére de la Culture (AFDPP), France.

After cross-reading Gilman's and Didi-Huberman's texts and studying Central European Romani representations at the turn of the nineteenth century, let me raise this question: considering the iconography of the image of the hysterical female body, i.e. viewing it not in terms of Roland Barthes's (1981) *studium* but rather in those of *punctum*, is there a significant difference between two particular photographs:

10 Attempts were made in Hungary to explore this phenomenon, too, although not following Didi-Huberman but providing in Foucault's vein, some significant analogies between the French and the Hungarian cases (Lafferton 2003; Kövér 2005).

11 For the debate on hysteria in art and photography, see Steer 2017; Timpano 2017.

Tympanite by Charcot's clinical photographer Albert Londe (Figure 2) and an early untitled work by André Kertész probably showing a Gypsy girl from the Hungarian village of Abony (Figure 3). In spite of remarkable differences between them regarding the backgrounds (blank studio versus sunlit lilac bushes), the poses of the women (side versus frontal), the visibility of their faces (totally obscured versus a visible lower half), and their physical gestures (covering their face with one hand while they hold onto their clothes with the other), they show significant similarities because both condense the image of shame and the 'hysterical' female body.

Second Detour: Criminalisation of 'Black' and 'Gypsy'

Criminal anthropology was born as a discipline by the mid-eighteenth century, and it swiftly arrived at the Austro-Hungarian monarchy – and also contributed to the precepts of Nazi racism (which, thanks to feminist and postcolonial criticism, does not need to be presented here in detail) that summarised the 'phantasy of knowledge' described above. Particularly horrific examples in which distinct types of social otherness could be encapsulated in a single image are provided in the work of Guglielmo Ferrero and Cesare Lombroso (2004; see also Mátay 2005). In the portrait gallery of born criminals – i.e. groups of perpetrators to be prosecuted – *the* 'Black' and *the* 'Gypsy' appear next to *the* prostitute and *the* hysterical. Paradoxical as it may seem, images of body, gender, sin, deviance, and ethnicity were so confluent that – when sufficiently justified by nascent racial theory – they had the power to transform the essentially feminine nature of hysteria, as it had been considered since antiquity, *to become a male attribute.* A man could just as well be hysterical as long as he happened to be, for instance, a Jew (Gilman 1991, 61–103) or (as will be explored in the following section) a member of another marginalised or stigmatised community like Roma in Central Europe.[12] An interesting example of both the transformation of an ethnicised, criminalised, and gendered imaginary into the representation of Roma and Jews and the mediatising of that transformation between East and West is a book written by Austro-Hungarian composer Franz/ Ferenc Liszt, *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*, which was published in Paris in 1859 and republished in 1881. As a counterpoint to freedom-loving Roma, he devoted one seventh of the book to another 'nationless' people, Jews,[13] in a way that was completely unrelated to the subject of music (see also Hamburger 2011; Gelbart 2019).

These examples come from the mainstream of the era: they do not refer to sensational events of the time, even though their sensational aspects *travelled* all over Europe through the contemporary press; these

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12 The representation of Otherness has an enormous sociological literature from Georg Simmel to current postcolonial or feminist authors that would stretch the theoretical framework of the study. However, I would like to express my special thanks to one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to contemporary art theory debates on Otherness in Modernity. As e.g. Piotr Piotrowski argues for a 'horizontal history' of European art: The non-European 'Other' is a real 'Other', while the Central or Eastern European Other is a 'not-quite-Other' or a 'close Other'. (…) In modern culture, however, the place of the 'close Other' is on the margins of European culture, outside the center but still within the same cultural frame of reference, while the place of the 'real Other' is determined not by the strategy of marginalization, but by that of colonization (2009, 52–53; see also Pejić 1999).

13 Another example from *Illustrated London*: 'The Gipsies – who of us has not at one time or other, paused to watch and wonder at these picturesque and mysterious wanderers – the most widely-diffused race, not excepting even the Jews, on the face of the earth?' ('The Roumany-Char or Gipsies', 28 September 1856, a correspondent, p. 304, quoted by Gilman 2001, 61).

are practices and ingrained images, embodiments of ideals, which remained pervasive as part of the institutional world of Modernity for two centuries.

3. 'Savage' People on Hungarian Riverbanks

What do events by the Seine or the Thames have to do with those taking place by the rivers of the Carpathian Basin? As a matter of fact, there were *Völkerschau*s, or side shows, in Budapest which, like their counterparts in the West, shared ideas on the social stigmatisation of prostitution and hysteria, the social theory of criminology, or the incessant attraction to, incorporation of, and violent severance from the 'Other'. The salons of Austrian, Bohemian, Czech, and Hungarian middle- and upper-class homes also were decorated with works portraying 'our savages'. For example, a 'Gypsy' painting by Hungarian artist István Csók used to hang on the wall of the Gellért Bath Hotel, one of Budapest's most elegant establishments. Since the end of the eighteenth century, Romaphobia and Romaphilia – as negrophobia and negrophilia in Paris – have marched hand in hand in the Carpathian Basin.

Third Detour: Illustratio Hungariae

There is, however, a remarkable difference between the representation of 'savages' imported from colonies and domestic ones; let me call it *Illustratio Hungariae* (Miskolczi 2008). This is not simply about diverse pro-Gypsy sentiments and a romantic Gypsy cult opposed to essentialist antigypsyism – because such a contrast can just as well be found in representations of Blackness. Rather, *Illustratio Hungariae* means that 'Gypsy' became an ambiguous part of Hungarian national imaginary in poetry, music, and the arts – including popular genres (Hegedűs 2002; Szuhay 2002; Oros-Kelementisz 2008).

A notorious example is the 'musician Gypsy' whose figure entails a kind of *carnivalesque* transformation of Romani people (Altorjai 1978 [1736]). Obviously, this move could not result in the *transgression* of social boundaries but only in their momentary suspension. Its most typical instances include 'Gypsy clowns' in sixteenth century iconography and their modern counterpart, the 'Gypsy musician', entertaining gentlemen, sitting next to the king, taking princesses for mistresses and being a master of pain and sorrow. We know of prominent musician-singers who were assimilated beyond recognition into 'noblemen' in some of the paintings of the time, their excellence being thus predicated upon their non-Gypsy look. It should be noted that the European perception of Hungarians contributed to this ambiguity: viewed from Vienna, Berlin, or Paris, 'Gypsy music' was identified as Hungarian music. As Franz Liszt defined himself in a letter: '*On me définirait assez bien en allemand Zu einer Hälfte Zigeuner, zur andern Franziskaner*' [In German, I probably would be defined as half-Gypsy and half-Franciscan] (La Mara 1899, 316; see Hamburger 2011).

The historicising approach presents the image of Gypsy troops participating in the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence as naturalised Hungarians. These Gypsy figures serve to preserve the memory of lost battles and dissipating national dreams in poetry. For example, in *Vén cigány* (The old Gypsy), a famous poem by Mihály Vörösmarty, the figure of the historicised and naturalised 'Gypsy' is a projection of the poet's own national identity as the patriotic nobleman masked himself as an old

Gypsy musician.[14] These romantic representations show 'the Gypsy' in accordance with Rousseau's enlightened ideal of society. The ubiquitous compositions of 'three Gypsies', so popular in the period's painting, are allegories of an idyllic primordial condition that, although much desired, is unattainable for the 'civilised man' – a world where bourgeois society cannot return anymore. In sum, the triads are allegories emancipating or glorifying not Romani people, as it were, but a natural condition that is only conveyed by the 'Gypsy'.

> To our eyes these people seems to lead what is practically an animal existence (...) A race having neither any religion nor any law, any definite belief or any rule of conduct; holding together only by gross superstition, vague custom, constant misery and profound abasement; yet obstinately persisting, in spite of all degradations and deprivations, in keeping its tents and rags, its hunger and its liberty. It is a people who exercises on civilised nations a fascination that is as hard to describe as to destroy; passing, as it does, like some mysterious legacy, from age to age; and one which, though of ill-repute, appeals to our greatest poets by the energy and charm of its types (Liszt 1859, quoted by Kligman 2001, 61).

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, 'Gypsy' becomes a demonstration of patriotic joy and sorrow in Central Europe. Besides the erratic ways of fashion, a wide range of facts from social history explain this phenomenon. Miskolczy stresses that mandatory military service introduced by Emperor Joseph II (1780–1790) contributed to a greater visibility of 'Gypsies' in the monarchy and made them appear in larger groups and from new perspectives. Other authors associate the iconographic turn with the 'civilisatory' measures issued by Maria Theresa (1740–1780). It is more likely that even larger social powers were at work during the merging of the images of the 'Gypsy' and the nation. As revealed by Miskolczy's study, the development of Hungarian national identity paused (i.e. after defeat in the 1848 War of Independence) exactly when the image of the 'Gypsy' started to convey a sense of patriotic joy and sorrow in the language of empire. To a certain extent, the diversity of the Habsburg Empire was due to the many languages and cultures of its peoples; but this diversity was also produced by the empire itself in order to expand its control over various ethnic groups (Feichtinger, Prutsch, and Csáky 2003; Klement, Miskolczy, and Vári 2006). This artistic, cultural, and political production of diversity allowed the designation of 'Gypsy' to stand for and visualise, *pars pro toto,* a kind of people, while at the same time relegating Gypsies to the physical and mental periphery of society and, *vice versa*, interpreting peripheral situations as typically 'Gypsy' phenomena.

Bodies Driven out, 'Denigrated' and Eliminated: 'Gypsies' by the Seine, Foreign Artists on the Banks of the Tisza

August von Pettenkofen and Johann Gaulbert Raffalt were renowned Austrian landscape and genre painters in the nineteenth century. As a war correspondent, Pettenkofen was present at the final defeat

14 Mihály Vörösmarty. 1854. 'The Old Gypsy'. Translated by Peter Zollman. https://www.visegradliterature.net/works/hu/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6smarty_Mih%C3%A1ly-1800/A_v%C3%A9n_cig%C3%A1ny/en/2120-The_ancient_gypsy
See also the poem of Nikolaus Lenau, 'Die drei Zigeuner' (1838), among others. See more about the German context of the topic in Solms 2008.

of the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence. In 1852–53, he lived in Paris and subsequently visited Szolnok, a Hungarian provincial town, where he spent summers for the next 30 years. With Lajos Deák-Ébner, he was a precursor of the Szolnok Artists' Colony that flourished at the turn of the century. His later admirer Dezső Rózsaffy wrote in 1905:

> It was their *definite racial character*, picturesque attire, flamboyantly original habits and lifestyle that attracted Pettenkofen to the Gypsies. *The Gypsy is the Bedouin of the Great Plain*. While dispossessed and *poor as a dervish in the desert*, having but a leaky tent, a hovel looking like a ground squirrel's hole, one or two nags and lots of children, they nevertheless rejoice and enjoy life. (…) His other favourite motif was a group of bathing Gypsy women and children. (…) A painting with an *amicable* subject is the *Pig-thief*. A Gypsy boy runs across the meadow carrying his loot, while dogs are chasing him. (…) There are also a couple of head studies. One example is a beautiful male head in red and brown with characteristic Gypsy features in the Modern Art Gallery of Vienna (Rózsaffy 1905 – translated by Róza Vajda, author's italics).

Moral disdain is only one step further from the stigmatisation of poverty. What Rózsaffy sees as a 'painting with an amicable subject' is based on the fundamental *topos* of theft, a core element of popular anti-Gypsy anecdotes. There is no need to analyse the above quotation line by line to identify suggestive parallels between 'Gypsy' and 'Black'.

I would like to dwell for a moment on Pettenkofen's study of a 'beautiful male head' (Figure 4) which brings to mind another artist, Pettenkofen's friend, Johann Gualbert Raffalt. Raffalt also appeared in Szolnok and became an acclaimed artist of the so-called 'Gypsy town', the fair, and the *puszta* – no wonder he often was referred to as *Pußtamaler* by his critics. 'It was a piece of East, an immediate Marrakesh, or Egypt, it carried in itself the nomad life and the chaos of the Puszta for those Viennese artists who got tired of pursuing the genre' (Rózsaffy 1905 – translated by Anna Lujza Szász). Quite possibly, the same 'Gypsy' families inspired him and his elder master. There is, nevertheless, something disturbing in both Pettenkofen and Raffalt's paintings (Figure 5), and what we do not see in the works of Hungarian artists at the time: aestheticised and staged representations of hysteria.

The two Austrian artists – 'strangers' themselves, though distinguished strangers in the empire – mingled the image of social exclusion in the Hungarian countryside which habitually was expressed by Hungarian artists: a portrayal of ragged clothes, dark skin, a man's bearded face, a woman's unkempt hair caught in the wind, the averted gaze of both, and the outward signs of living outside society with images of the savage, the agitated, and the hysteric. The stigmatising gaze cast by the 'strangers of the empire' shows an affinity not so much with contemporary art but with gross, indifferent, or even arrogant ideas of public poetry (Hegedűs 2004).

The bourgeois gaze of the turn of the century treats the 'Gypsies' as some strange and exotic tribe from the colonies (Dearing 2010). This has consequences for the representation of both male and female figures. On the one hand, the 'Gypsy man' *per se* is constructed, his otherness clearly manifest in his savage look, so that he does not need to wear the characteristic marks of his crafts as in earlier paintings. This savagery,

Figure 4.
August von Pettenkofen, *Brustbild eines Zigeuners*, c.1860, oil on wood, 23 x 19 cm, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Wien.

Figure 5.
Johann Gualbert Raffalt, *Zigeunerin*, c. 1855–60, oil on wood, 27 x 18 cm, Neue Galerie am LM Joanneum, Graz.

so dangerous to the 'civilised' world, becomes interesting and beautiful when it appears in the arts. On the other hand, the 'Gypsy girl' or 'Gypsy woman' *per se* may serve as a target of paedophilia, sexual humiliation, and essentialism. The reminiscences of Lajos Kunffy, an artist working in the village of Somogytúr, provide an apt illustration of the artist's essentialising gaze as well as the synergies dominating contemporary European art:

> In 1905, I started painting Gypsy pictures, mainly dark-complexioned, so-called trough-maker Gypsies with long hair tied at the front. I found these people particularly picturesque, sitting by their tents in summer time, preparing troughs and cooking, while the children were running around naked; together giving the impression of a primitive, ancient people. No doubt, they come from India. When Albert Besnard returned to France from his voyage in India and I saw his work, I told him *there was no need to travel great distances as you can paint figures like that in Hungary, too.* (…) Most of my Gypsy paintings have been sold since; I hardly have any left in my ownership. In a collective exhibition in Paris in 1913, where I still had many works with Gypsy themes on show, the daily *Paris-Midi* that reproduced some of these paintings called me *'le peintre des zigán'*. But what had befallen these Gypsies? They were no longer wearing long hair. As a matter of fact, those drafted into the army in 1914 had their hair cut short.

> (…) They would come to me after the war, too, asking if I still wanted to paint them, without their long hair, as they liked the easy money. Lately, realising it was more comfortable this way, even children have ceased to wear long hair. *Therefore, I stopped being that interested in men*; I painted, instead, a couple of beautiful girls and the so-called Kolompár Gypsies whose outfit is a lot more colourful (Kunffy 2006, 108–109 – translated by Róza Vajda, author's italics).

UN MAITRE HONGROIS

Lajos de Kunffy, peintre des Tziganes

Le peintre hongrois Lajos de Kunffy est un habitué de nos Salons. Chaque année, à la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, il expose quelque grave paysage, quelque type saisissant de son pays. C'est un probe et sion d'aujourd'hui. C'est, à coup sûr, une remarquable manifestation d'art.

L'observation de la vie tzigane a toujours prévalu, en M. Lajos de Kunffy, et l'on ne saurait trop l'en féliciter. Que de peintres

Tziganes

(Cliché Henri Garnier.)

Figure 6.
Tabarant, 'Un maître Hongrois. Lajos de Kunffy, peintre des Tziganes'. *Paris Midi*, 29 January 1913.

Although the First World War prevented prevented Albert Besnard from making a trip to Hungary, Somogytúr turned into a small colony of Hungarian artists. Béla Iványi Grünwald, Lajos Szilányi, Aladár Edvi-Illés, and József Rippl-Rónai all visited Kunffy and portrayed Kunffy's 'Gypsies' (Horváth 2006; Kunffy 2006). Apparently, creating 'Gypsy' images proved to be a lucrative business for Kunffy himself, whose reproduced works became accessible to a broader Parisian public (Figure 6). Nevertheless, although many of his models were living around his estate for many years, Kunffy fails to mention them or their families by name, both in his paintings with 'Gypsy' subjects and in his memoirs. Instead, his works carry titles in the fashion of *Gypsy Girl, Gypsy Chief,* and the like.

Meanwhile, life continued along the banks of Tisza, too. Leaving Wrocław and his professorship behind, Otto Mueller, a distinguished member of the *Brücke* group, whose *Zigeunermappe* – the title was not given by the author – became available only recently, used to spend some of his holidays in the 'Gypsy town' of Szolnok

(Pirsig-Marschall 2004; Dearing 2010). He made photos and sketches on the spot, elaborating his topics in colourful lithographs upon his return home. According to some biographical sources, while on holiday, Otto Mueller lived among Roma and Sinti people. He entertained the idea that his ancestors may have been 'Gypsies' (Junghaus and Székely 2006) – which, however, was not confirmed by Tanja Pirsig-Marschall, a scholar who studied his oeuvre. Probably Otto Mueller was no more of a 'Gypsy artist' than Kunffy was *le peintre des zigán*. (What is known, however, is that Mueller prepared *Negro and the Show Girl,* a painting from 1903.) His famous works with 'Gypsy' subjects – evoking ancient Egyptian forms and colours that are much more delicate than those of his contemporaries – mainly consist of 'Gypsy' nudes painted in nature.

Bodies Resuscitated and Appropriated: The Paedophile, the Sexist, and the Essentialising Gaze

The passionate painting of nudes – often based on preliminary sketches and photographs like in the case of Otto Mueller – was a more precarious business than conventional *plein air* art because of the need for models (Reuter 2014). 'Expeditions' to the world of distant art colonies provided a viable solution; a case in point is the Nagybánya (Baia Mare, Romania) art school. Béni Ferenczy remembers:

> Basically, only Gypsies were willing to show their naked bodies; miners' daughters and village girls would pose for nudes only in a state of debauchery, and even that did not last long as their brief career as models got bogged down in the local brothel or the one in Szatmár. The majority of Gypsy girls usually would be partially naked, undressed to the waist, or not even that. The most beautiful one, Eszter Krajcár, the card reader in my father's triad of Gypsies, would pose for anyone but only in clothes (Murádin and Szűcs 1996, 201 – translated by Róza Vajda).

A half-grown girl looks at us with timid, inquisitive eyes from István Réti's nudes of 1912/13; she is probably younger than any model of her kind in the history of modern art (Figure 7). These paintings by a renowned master of the famous Nagybánya art colony and a significant artist of twentieth century Hungarian painting are considered masterpieces by Hungarian art historians. However, almost a century later, it is the plight of the vulnerable child, rather than the artistic performance, that strikes the eye. Thus, it is incomprehensible why one should discover the 'joy and beauty of youth' in them (Szöllőssy 2002, 78). Indeed, the longer we linger on this girl's figure the more we see Nabokov's *Lolita*

Figure 7.
István Réti, *Gypsy Girl*, 1912, oil on canvas, 80.5 x 91 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

rather than a young woman. The title of the painting suggests so, too. The eyes of the adolescent girl reflect the dominant – so to speak, paedophile – male gaze: instead of eroticism, they suggest embarrassment, fear, and sexual vulnerability. Such an explicit infringement of social norms was possible only when oppressed ethnic or social groups were concerned – hard as I tried, I have not found a single similar composition by any contemporary Hungarian artist of a 'white' adolescent girl. Why this body is not white is another question. We might ask here how did meaning get shifted from 'peasant' to 'Gypsy'?

This question brings us back to the painting by Gölöncsér Gundel, a trigger of the present study (Figure 1). Art historian László Beke wrote about this piece:

> Gundel Göröncsér's artwork may be considered a *plein air* work in typical Nagybánya style; however, its composition is more courageous and canny than Károly Ferency's paintings. Moreover, one feels like it conveys a strange, symbolic, or even allegorical sense. The dark silhouette figure in the shadowed foreground, contrasted with the female nude on the sunny waterfront – as if a snapshot taken from a film – thematise the Gypsy characters as a dualism of «heavenly and earthly love» or «intellectualism and sensualism» (Beke 2007, 74 – translated by Róza Vajda).

Beke mentions 'Gypsy characters', and he is right: based on the iconography of the image and confirmed by the memoirs of Ferenczy, *both women* were 'Gypsy models'. Instructed by the title, however, we are required to see them as a 'Gypsy girl' and a 'nude model'. The title refers to one of the bodies (the one in clothes) as a 'Gypsy', designating the other one (only) as a nude model. What does this title – that is perhaps erratic and expedient (hence, driven by the *optical unconscious*), or may be sophisticated just like the composition itself – add to the meanings of the painting?[15]

The similarities in clothes, hair colour, and style also suggest a kind of dialogue between the two bodies, a dynamic unity formed by the two women. The arch formed by the 'Gypsy girl's' forehead, nose, mouth, and chin is interlocked with the line created by the breasts, belly, and mons of the nude model. Viewed from this perspective, the painting looks like a first frame in a fictional *motion picture* on shame where the next frame will show the 'Gypsy girl' completely covering the nude model who, throwing her blouse onto the grass and raising her eyes that so far have been fixed modestly to the ground, will directly face us right at the moment when the 'Gypsy girl' casts an admonishing glance in our direction, while we, just like the nude, will be completely hidden at this point. In this fictional film, the 'Gypsy girl' and the nude model do not look at each other – they are ashamed of even being seen by one another.

There is another way of reading the painting, namely, as condensing the passing of time in a single image in which the *moral integrity* of the 'Gypsy' is at stake. This interpretation shows the immature and innocent Gypsy girl stepping from the shade into the light of the male gazes of the adult world, now with a mature

15 Only a very few of Göröncsér Gundel's paintings have survived. These allow for both interpretations.

and naked body. Thus, the nude model points back to the 'Gypsy girl', casting a shadow over her: 'You shall become like this!' This is how the body of the 'Gypsy' is exposed on the altar of a radical yearning for freedom in *plein air* art. Like other art historians Beke refrains from going beyond a thorough analysis of the conventional composition and the iconographic and decorative elements reflecting the period and the school in question and directly suggests that the dual figure should be read as the dualism of the World of Arts versus Earthly Life.

My interpretation differs but not because I inadequately move *beyond* art history. In fact, my question should be raised by art historians: What do 'Gypsy' and 'nude' refer to here? Saying that the naked 'Gypsy' body merely serves as a decorative element would be highly inappropriate. What kind of social relations allow beauty and shame to be incarnated by a 'Gypsy girl'? A response to this question leads to my second argument: Central European societies create their own Blackness through savage groups and individuals, distant and nearby colonies. In the Central European panoptic regime of Modernity 'Gypsies' become the *pendants* of the African and Asian 'primitives' of Western Europe.

4. Transgressions and Exceptions

This is how the optical unconscious of society is reflected in typical 'Gypsy' representations of Modernity. Yet, there are certain (and as far as I know unique) cases when multifaceted pro-Gypsy sensibilities and essentialist anti-Gypsy feelings – Romaphilia and Romaphobia – transgress the limits of 'Gypsy' as a cultural code and paradoxically come close to *self-representation* or even create a position to be taken by Roma artists later – even if no 'Gypsy' or Roma artists were known to be practicing fine art production at the time these paintings were created. An example of this is *Gypsy with a Pipe* by József Rippl-Rónai (Figure 8). Rippl-Rónai is said to have depicted one of Kunffy's models (Figure 9) when visiting in Somogytúr; in his painting Kunffy's beautiful beast is turned into a jovial gentleman.

My second example concerns a classical composition of Madonna with child by Lajos Tihanyi, where a white child is put into the dark hands of a 'Gypsy' woman (Figure 10). The third example could be Pál Jávor's *Gypsy Girl* showing an elegant woman waking up (Figure 11). This composition draws attention to other motifs related to the embourgeoisement of the 'Gypsy': through the fine Japonism of the contours of the female body, hair style, and covered breasts, the figure of the *Gypsy Girl* is incorporated into the bourgeois world, while, at the same time, the image becomes Magyarised (nationalised) owing to the folkloristic context created by Hungarian motifs of a dinner plate, an embroidered damask tablecloth, and the painting on the wall.

The emancipating gaze described above is only one way of challenging the 'Gypsy' as a cultural code by resuscitating the 'Gypsy' body and involving it in a world of folklore or of the bourgeoisie, while still adhering to the conventions of the era, that is, applying the 'Gypsy' body simply as a decorative element in the picture. There was another, though extremely narrow, range within Romaphilia. This had nothing to do with the ethnographical or anthropological representations. A rare example of the turn produced by situational proximity or biographical dependency is János Valentiny, an

artist who worked on Lipót Nádasdy's estate for almost a quarter of a century, starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, and created several paintings of Romani families from the village of Nádasd-Ladány. In Valentiny's paintings, the 'Gypsy' was neither displaced to become a

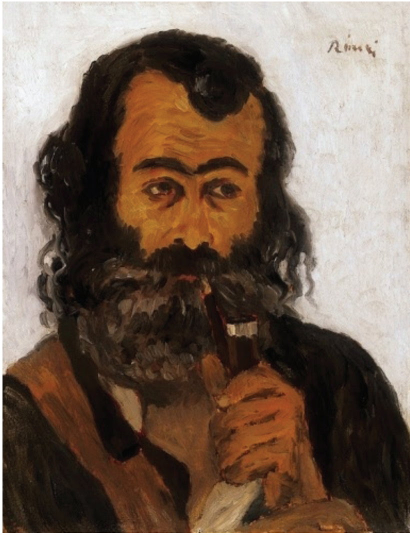

Figure 8.
József Rippl-Rónai, *Gypsy with a Pipe*, 1905, oil on wood, 41 x 32 cm, private collection. http://www.kieselbach.hu/alkotas/pipazo-cigany_-1905_4899

Figure 9.
Lajos Kunffy, *Two Gypsies*, 1910, oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm, Kunffy Museum, Somogytúr.

Figure 10.
Lajos Tihanyi, *Gypsy Woman with Child*, 1908, oil on canvas, 84 × 75 cm, Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.

Figure 11.
Pál Jávor, *Gypsy Girl*, c. 1915, oil on canvas, 80 × 71 cm, Damjanich János Museum, Szolnok.

Figure 12.
János Valentiny, *Gypsy School*, 1896, oil on canvas, 129 x 197 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

trope for the noble, the bourgeois, or the folkloric, nor were ‘Gypsy’ figures conferred a ‘savage’ look so as to confer an exotic appearance. Instead, Valentiny made loveable genre paintings, and in many of which he situated himself as an observer among Romani neighbours. Though an ahistorical exaggeration, I venture to say he drew the non-Gypsy world into that of Romani people as part of a proactive mission (Figure 12).

Conclusion

This article discussed the visual representation of Roma in Central European societies by citing examples of Austro-Hungarian painters. According to the central thesis of my essay, the panoptic regime of Modernity operated in a similar way in the two halves of the continent. On the one hand, this regime revisualised social differences; on the other, it brought the oppressed social and ethnic groups into sight and rendered the oppressors invisible. In the contextualisation of these developments, it also became apparent that, in the emerging Romani imaginary, the ‘Gypsy’ functioned as an ambiguous part of the patriotic self-image during nation-building in Central Europe. Recent studies on the social and cultural history of the Habsburg Empire in the nineteenth century stress not only the cultural diversity of its peoples but also the diversity produced by the empire itself in order to expand its control over them. The ‘Gypsy’ relegated to the physical and mental peripheries of society became, *pars pro toto*, a kind of people, and, *vice versa*, peripheral situations were recognised as ‘Gypsy’ spaces.

I also identified the main channels and agents of entanglement between the ideas of ‘savages’ in Western and Central Europe, specifically the sexualisation and feminisation of groups and individuals through their ethnic origin. It was argued that the images of body, gender, sin, deviance, and ethnicity were so confluent that they transformed the essentially feminine nature of hysteria to become a male attribute in the case of Roma (and Jews). Besides entanglements and similarities, certain differences are also remarkable, which resulted in a permanent tension between the colonial and emancipatory gazes in Romani representation. Yet, there are certain cases in which multifaceted pro-Gypsy sensibilities and essentialist anti-Gypsy feelings transgressed the limits of the ‘Gypsy’ as a cultural code and, paradoxically, came close to self-representation, or at least created a position to be taken by Roma artists later.

While ideas, imaginations, and artists commuted between the Western and Eastern parts of Europe, their objects – stigmatised as 'nationless' travellers – were already settled and integrated in society. (In 1893, Hungarian authorities reported 3.2 per cent of 'Gypsies' as travellers; while 82 per cent of Romani working-age men were already part of the labour market.) Thus, it is quite likely that settled Romani families inspired all the non-Romani painters at the Szolnok and Nagybánya artists' colonies or on the estate of Kunffy in Somogytúr, respectively. However, it is almost impossible to reconstruct the names of these Romani models and present them as agents of my story. Apart from Eszter Krajcár from Nagybánya, artists' memoirs and correspondence hardly ever mentioned Romani models by their names. Two years ago, a colleague conducted a pilot project to trace the Romani families in the 'Gypsy-town' of Szolnok (Szász 2019). Her main task was 'to find out who the models were: to unfold their life stories and to offer them a place in history not only as empirical "objects" of art but also as "subjects" who are placed in power relations and are unique as well as embody agency, historical awareness, and autonomy' (Szász 2019). She could identify just some of names of possible models of the *fin de siècle* painters. For instance, in the middle of the 1950s, a local monthly published a short essay about the Szolnok art colony, in which the authors reported the death of György Nana – a model for Pettenkofen, János Bihari, and many other painters from the Szolnok art colony (Keszegh and Krámer 1955). In the archival files, many other names appeared.[16] Further micro-historical research could provide ample opportunity to complement or rewrite my thought experiment by exceeding the limits of art history.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Gerhard Baumgartner, László Beke, Tayfun Belgin, Éva Forgács, Anna Lujza Szász, Péter Szuhay, and Róza Vajda for their encouragement and criticism. I owe also special thanks to the anonymous reviewers whose comments have improved the manuscript greatly.

16 Here, I would also like to mention: János Nagyhajú, Lajosné Nagyhajú, Lászlóné Fazekas, Samu Rostás, Mária Pege, János Rozsár, Gábor Frigor, Pálné Rozsár, Józsefné Kadet, Róza Rozsár, Zsigmondné Rozsár, Lajos Horváth, István Nagyhajú, Béla Varga, Gáborné Horváth, Istvánné Nagyhajú, Sándorné Sántha, Lajos Frigul, Sándor Spiru, Mihályné Horváth, Piros Bagi, Lajos Szabó, Gusztáv Kóré, Rózsi G. Nagy, János Raffael, Menyhért Kállai, Sándor Horváth, Miklós Raffael, László Kiss, Péter Barna, Sándor Farkas, Lajosné Károlyi, István Kovács, Györgyné Balog, László Mondok, Sándor Kökény and Ferenc Göncző (Szász 2019).

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Contesting Stereotypes through Self-Representation? A Review of the Romani Exhibition Stands at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair

Laura Soréna Tittel

laura.tittel@sowi.uni-giessen.de

Research Associate, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5946-2504

Laura Soréna Tittel is a research associate for the project Between Minority Protection and Securitization: Roma Minority Formation in Modern European History at the Collaborative Research Center/Transregio 138 Dynamics of Security, funded by the German Research Foundation. She is a PhD candidate at the chair of Political Theory and History of Ideas at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. Her PhD project examines the relationship between securitization, "racial" conceptualizations, and imagination to develop a political theory of antigypsyism.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 96–103 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.94

Abstract

Romani literature was exhibited at the Frankfurt Book Fair at specific stands and events for the first time in 2019. This article reviews the presented literature and authors and discusses advantages and disadvantages of establishing the category "Romani literature" within the context of the Frankfurt Book Fair. It argues that the category provides a new platform for Romani authors as well as for Romani identity politics and was set up with the aim to fight existing racism against Roma. Making oneself visible as a diverse minority at such an event can help to break up stereotypes and constitutes a success after centuries of underrepresentation. At the same time, the article uncovers the danger of feeding into essentialism through the label "Romani literature" and reflects on the limitations of emancipatory politics when participating in a predominantly commercial event.

Keywords

- Diversity
- Essentialism
- Frankfurt Book Fair
- Identity politics
- Romani literature
- Visibility

Introduction

The Frankfurt Book Fair takes place once a year in October and is the largest book fair in the world, with more than 7,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries. In the 2019 edition, Romani literature was featured by itself for the first time, holding two exhibition stands and a number of events, such as book presentations and discussion panels, which I will comment on in this review. The first stand was organized together by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Central Council) and the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma (Documentation Center), while the Finland-based International Roma Writers' Association (IRWA) was in charge of the second stand. Both stands displayed carefully selected contemporary Romani literature – mostly from Germany and other European countries. The fruitful discussion panel "Sinti and Roma Literature in Germany and the World," which brought together authors and scholars invited by the three abovementioned organizations, took place at the Weltempfang Center – a venue for discussing politics, culture, and literature funded and managed by the Frankfurt Book Fair in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office.

1. Book Presentations

At their stand, the Central Council and the Documentation Center aimed to provide a stage for literature authored *by* Sinti and Roma instead of literature *about* Sinti and Roma – showing a wide array of self-representation practices. They invited a variety of authors to present their works, which belong to literary genres like autobiography, prose, and poetry, as well as academic publishing. These were written either in Romani or in the national languages of the authors' countries of residence.

The books presented during the fair addressed crucial historical issues, such as the suffering that Sinti and Roma experienced under National Socialism, a taboo subject in post-war Germany. A number of literary works had delved on these issues since the 1980s, compensating for the lack of official recognition that victims experienced and, at the same time, supporting the growing civil rights movement (Zwicker 2010). The Holocaust survivor and civil rights activist **Zoni Weisz** – from Dutch Sinti descent – presented his worthwhile autobiography *Der vergessene Holocaust. Mein Leben als Sinto, Unternehmer und Überlebender* (The forgotten Holocaust. My life as a Sinto, entrepreneur, and survivor).[1] During his presentation he recalled his childhood and talked about the strategies he resorted to in order to survive Nazi occupation.

Likewise, the book *Ede und Unku – die wahre Geschichte* (Ede and Unku – The real story), by **Janko Lauenberger** and **Juliane Weidemeyer**, was presented at the fair stand. This book evokes the children´s novel *Ede und Unku* (Ede and Unku), written by the communist writer Grete Weißkopf under the male pseudonym Alex Wedding. Published in 1931, the original novel explored the friendship between a working-class boy with a Sinta girl during the early twentieth century, and it was widely read at schools in postwar East Germany. Lauenberger and Weidemeyer examine the real historical events that Unku's family experienced. Labeling them as "Gypsies," the Nazis deported Erna Lauenburger – Unku – and

1 This is the German translation from the original in Dutch, which was published in 2018 by the publishing house dtv.

her relatives to concentration camps. Along with many other Sinti and Roma, she was examined by the "racial scientists" Robert Ritter and Eva Justin before being killed in Auschwitz in 1944, at the age of 24. Janko Lauenberger, a German Sinto, is one of her few descendants, and together with his co-author, the journalist Juliane Weidemeyer, they discussed their book in a lively, open panel.

The authors **Nizaqete Bislimi** and **Jovan Nikolić** addressed another important subject for Romani communities, that of escaping oppression and migration. They both had to flee their countries – Bislimi migrated at the age of 14 from Kosovo to Germany in 1993; and Nikolić escaped from Serbia during the Kosovo War in 1999, settling in Germany. In her autobiography – *Durch die Wand – von der Asylbewerberin zur Rechtsanwältin* (Through the wall – From asylum seeker to lawyer) – the sympathetic author Bislimi reflected on her experiences as an asylum seeker, who succeeded in becoming a lawyer and who now helps other refugees to claim their asylum rights. Nikolić processed his experiences in several literary works, both in poetry and prose, such as *Zimmer mit Rad* (The room with a wheel), *Weißer Rabe, schwarzes Lamm* (White crow, black sheep) and *Käfig* (Cage). At the fair stand, he presented his debut novel *Seelenfänger, lautlos lärmend* (Soul catcher, silently noisy) from 2011.

Issues with language and translation were also a concern discussed in some of the fair events. The civil rights activist **Ilona Lagrene** presented a poetry anthology that her recently deceased husband, Reinhold Lagrene, had produced. With the title of *Djiparmissa – Klassische deutsche Gedichte auf Romanes* (Djiparmissa – Classical German poems in Romani), this book is a bilingual (German and Romani) edition of poems authored by major German poets, such as Goethe, Schiller, Mörike, Hölderlin, and Fontane.

The young Austrian author **Samuel Mago** presented another bilingual book, which he wrote together with his brother Károly Mágó: *Glücksmacher – e baxt romani* (Happiness-maker – e baxt romani). It contains 13 "short stories from the world of the Roma" as the subtitle specifies. Samuel Mago has won several literature prizes in recent years – among them the Roma Literature Prize of the Austrian PEN club.

In contrast to these personal experiences, **Radmila Mladenova** offered a scientific perspective to the program with her recently published study *Patterns of Symbolic Violence. The Motif of ´Gypsy‘ Child-theft across Visual Media*, the first volume of a new series by the Heidelberg Research Centre on Antigypsyism. In her study, she focuses on the color-coding of bodies and the racialized representation of Romani characters in film, usually marked as black or dark. She points to the existing parallels between the forms of racism that the Black population experiences in the United States with those that affect Sinti and Roma in Europe. Her presentation stood out from the program as it focused on the image of the "Gypsy" rather than on actual experiences of Sinti and Roma.

2. Panel Discussion about Romani Literature

The panel "Sinti and Roma Literature – In Germany and the World" offered a compelling overview on the problems faced by Romani authors. The literary scholar Beate Eder-Jordan stated that the number of Romani publications has increased in Europe the last 35 years. She pointed out that, while during the 1920s and 1930s, flourishing Romani literary scenes existed in Romania and the Soviet Union, these

scenes were erased during the Second World War through a systematic destruction of cultural life and through the persecution of Sinti and Roma. Thus, it has not been easy to re-establish them, as Sinti and Roma continuously have had to fight the spread of discrimination.

Romani writers Ruždija Sejdović and Veijo Baltzar, head of the IRWA, considered the many challenges that Romani authors face when they try to publish their literary work. Both talked about their first-hand experiences in finding a suitable publisher willing to publish Romani literature. They pointed out that Romani writers encounter difficulties to publish in their corresponding national languages due to the lack of a specific Romani literary tradition, which would involve established networks. This difficulty increases when authors try to publish in Romani, a language without a standardized spelling and that consists of many different dialects. In the last decades, different groups have put forward proposals for standardizing Romani languages, some aiming for regional codification, others for a universal standardization.[2]

Finally, Erika Hornbogner the fourth participant in the panel, discussed her experience as head of the Austrian publishing house Drava, one of a handful that works with bilingual or multilingual literary works. While translation is an expensive undertaking, especially for literary niche products, Drava is a positive and meaningful example of the complex situation that multilingual authors face when wishing to write either in Romani, a language with a small market, or in more than one language due to migrant experiences. Drava has so far published Romani-German poetry collections from the Serbian-Austrian-Romani author Ilija Jovanović and the Swiss-Yenish author Mariella Mehr and several Romani-German editions of Romani fairy tales. Mišo Nikolić has translated Mehr's German poems into Romani and has published his own autobiographical texts in German with Drava. Jovan Nikolić's work was published in the original Serbo-Croatian versions as well as translated into German. The authors have benefitted from individual solutions and bilingual editions.

3. Towards Social Recognition as a Minority

In order to discuss the social and political meaning of the event, it is important to consider the specific context of the Frankfurt Book Fair. The fair has a long history and, related to the rise of the modern printing press in Europe, took place for the first time in 1454. Nearly five centuries later, after 1948, it was established in its current form as a place for public book marketing, trading, and discussing publishing rights and licenses (see Niemeier 2001). As a public fair, it connects the sphere of cultural production with the economic sphere, addressing the different financial stages that affect authors, publishers, and consumers. For small and alternative publishing houses, the opportunity to exhibit their products at the fair may have important repercussions, as it can provide access to a wider market. However, to rent a stand at the book fair is an expensive enterprise, which is a significant obstacle for the participation of small publishers and non-profit organizations. In 2019, the Central Council and the Documentation Center received funding from the Freudenberg Foundation, a private organization. Therefore, the presence of the Romani exhibition stands depended on the financial support and willingness of foundations sponsoring

2 Among these groups was IRWA, and projects like "Translation Romani."

anti-racism and pro-democracy causes. The funding largely has been beyond the control of the Romani organizations that participated in the 2019 fair. Attendees also find economic barriers: the first three days of the event are reserved for trade visitors, who pay high prices for their tickets; the weekend is open for the general public for a fee.[3] Hence, the book fair, in general, is part of a global economy that reproduces exclusion and social inequality.

Nonetheless, as we have already seen, the Frankfurt Book Fair provides many opportunities for exhibiting and discussing social topics. The Central Council, a prominent active social agent in Germany, chose the Frankfurt Book Fair as an opportunity to increase the visibility of a new wave of Romani literature and the many ways of contemporary Romani life. One of the goals is to address politics with this concern, and this was achieved partially when the German Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office, Michael Roth, visited the exhibition stand.

Romani literature had not been completely absent from the book fair in previous editions, since some Romani authors have been publishing participating firms. What is new, though, is the exhibition of Romani literature under the very label of "Romani literature." This provides a different kind of platform, with new opportunities, but also with certain risks, both for authors and for the development of Romani identity politics. Authors publishing without ethnic adscription have the opportunity to be considered as individuals rather than as representatives of a community. However, this might neglect the specific social experiences shared by many Sinti and Roma today. Across Europe, Sinti and Roma are disproportionally disadvantaged when it comes to social equality and political representation. Therefore, Romani literature might benefit from being understood as the production of a sparsely visible and underrepresented minority. In this context, representation at the book fair can be an important step towards social recognition, both for an ethnic group and for its individual members.

The Romani presence at the Frankfurt Book Fair might very well be the effect of the growing visibility that Romani literature has achieved in literary and cultural studies over the last decade. Initially, progressive literary studies focused on the representation and stereotypes of "Gypsies" in mainstream works (Solms and Strauß 1995; Hölz 2002; Saul 2007; Solms 2008; Hagen 2009; Bogdal 2011; Brittnacher 2012; Patrut 2014). More recently, Romani literature (and Romani art more generally) has become an independent category that is in the process of being shaped (Djurić 2002; Blandfort 2011; Toninato 2014; Blandfort 2015; French 2015). These two approaches are concerned with different issues. While the former deals with mainstream literature and the representation of Sinti and Roma and others perceived as "Gypsies," such as homeless people or vagabonds, the latter considers literature written by Sinti and Roma and their self-representation, as well as their contribution to challenging mainstream, often stereotypical representations of Sinti and Roma in literary and cultural production, thereby actively creating new representational spaces in the domain of culture. Nonetheless, both categories of literature as well as the scientific approaches have emerged from social practices and resort to the same mechanisms of knowledge production. Thus, stereotypes and prejudices that are analyzed within the domain of the first

3 The trade visitor ticket for one day costs EUR 69–75. A regular one-day ticket for members of the public during the weekend costs EUR 22 (concessions EUR 15).

set of studies can certainly be found in those works that the category of Romani literature comprises.[4] Therefore, Romani literary studies have to deal with issues that pertain to the internalization of practices and standards that feed into social discrimination. A critical social theory might help to identify the reproduction of social mechanisms of exclusion.

For Romani authors, the framework of "Romani literature" can open up different possibilities of (self-) representation. However, the label might convey a false idea of homogeneity, enabling stereotypes that have supported social discriminatory structures for centuries. In this sense, the Central Council and the Documentation Center took certain precautions, as many of the invited authors are civil rights advocates, either in cultural or educational domains. The various book presentations shed light on different and sometimes still common experiences, such as the persecution of Sinti and Roma under National Socialism, migration stories, bilingualism, and discrimination. From an emancipatory perspective, this depiction of common experiences through individual voices is one possibility to provide a necessary balance in order to contest stereotypes and achieve social awareness.

Another problem of representation of "Romani literature" at the Frankfurt Book Fair are the boundaries given within the sphere of cultural production and thus the sphere of economy. From an economic perspective, literary pieces that offer stereotypical representations might sell better than those presenting more alternative and distinct drawings of Romani identities. Thus, even raising awareness of stereotypical thinking largely depends on the intentions of both authors and publishers – they have to be explicitly critical of the mainstream discourse and withstand market mechanisms in order to challenge underlying tendencies of exclusion. Moreover, many of the mechanism of exclusion are structural phenomena of our societies and do not only appear in depictions, but in socio-economic practices. They cannot be solved within the context of the book fair and social awareness alone will not change the underlying socio-economic and racial structures that produce and reproduce exclusion. Still, it is commendable that the Central Council and the Documentation Center invited many politically active authors who also engage in other societal contexts. The study of Romani literature can neither be oblivious to market mechanisms nor to economic constraints nor the fertile ground for racialized and stereotypical thinking that authors and works face within society. Thus, aiming at establishing a certain niche in the book market and in the field of literature has drawbacks and consequences.

The presence of the Romani exhibition stands at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair is the result of the political activism that many Sinti and Roma have undertaken in the last decades. This achievement provides a space for self-identification and for building community awareness, and can (but may not necessarily) draw a counter-image to traditional, stereotype-based representations. Offering singular, distinct experiences by individuals that identify as members of a marginalized ethnic minority can contest stereotypes and encourage reflective thinking about societies that are built on Manichean world views. Still, the perils of essentialism have to be considered both by authors and literary critics. The Romani literature presented can be seen together as a cultural expression of specific experiences and as a practice of socio-political activism.

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4 For a broader discussion on the interaction of both strands, see Saul and Tebbutt 2004.

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The Romani Archives and Documentation Center: A Migratory Archive?

Mariana Sabino Salazar

soymariana@gmail.com

PhD candidate and Instructor of Record at the University of Texas at Austin

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4580-2341

Mariana Sabino Salazar is a PhD candidate in Iberian and Latin American Literatures and Cultures. Her dissertation is about the perpetuation of the Iberian "Gypsy" femme fatale literary archetype in Brazilian and Mexican cinema between 1950 and 1980. Her research interests include counter-archives, subaltern history, stereotypes and prejudice, and gender and nationalism. She volunteered at the Romani Archives and Documentation Center from 2013 to 2019 and has published two book chapters related to Romani history in Latin America.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 104–111 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.81

Abstract

The purpose of this review is to outline the history of the Romani Archives and Documentation Center (RADOC), its origin, mission, function, and what sets it apart from other archives in the world. Ian Hancock, emeritus professor at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and author of *The Pariah Syndrome* (1987) and *We Are the Romani People* (2002), initiated the collection and was responsible for its organization and preservation for the last 50 years. Due to Hancock's recent retirement, RADOC will soon move from Texas to Turkey. It seems appropriate to reflect on this unique collection through Rodrigo Lazo's concept of the migratory archive. RADOC differs from hegemonic national archives because it represents a heterogeneous group of people dispersed throughout the world who speak different languages. Romani history has been largely written by outsiders, but the experience of Roma has also been recorded through other means, including literature and music. Regardless of the format, RADOC is committed to preserving the diversity of Romani voices. It is crucial that new generations of Romani and non-Romani scholars fight for the conservation of this archive and the preservation of Romani history.

Keywords

- Ian Hancock
- History
- Literature
- Migratory archives
- National archives

What is RADOC?

The Romani Archives and Documentation Center (RADOC) is a collection initiated by Ian Hancock more than 50 years ago. RADOC became one of the most important Romani archives in the world and is now in a process of reconfiguration. It is made up of over 10,000 pieces of printed materials, including books, monographs, articles, periodicals, and dissertations. The collection also contains audio and visual recordings in different formats (DVDs, tapes, compact discs, photographs, and transparencies), as well as maps, posters, prints, and artifacts. The documentation relates to Romani organizations and educational project reports in the United States and Europe. It has been housed in Calhoun Hall at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) for the last 45 years. At Calhoun Hall, RADOC was open by appointment for academic research and served patrons from around the world.

RADOC was a counterpart of the Croft-Cooke Collection hosted by the Harry Ransom Center, which is located only a few steps away from Calhoun Hall. The Croft-Cooke Collection is focused on European Roma and contains the correspondence and collection of Rupert Croft-Cooke, a prominent member of the Gypsy Lore Society.[1] RADOC, on the other hand, was established by Hancock, a Romani intellectual, to reflect on the diversity of the Romani experience throughout the world. One of RADOC's main objectives is to contest the stereotype of the "Gypsy" by preserving the cultural products that have facilitated the circulation of this image. Over the years, RADOC's volunteers have been responsible for documenting racist media portrayals and legislation, and monitoring publishers, advertisers, and television producers. For the last five years, RADOC has also served as a meeting point and research space for Romani students and scholars in the field of Romani Studies at UT. It currently functions as a small cultural center that organizes the "Barvale Sam (We Are Rich!)": The Wealth of Romani Lifeworlds film series and promotes other cultural activities.[2]

RADOC was housed in a two-room office. In the first room was Prof. Hancock's office, the video, image, and newspaper collection, and the reference section that included country by country modules. In the second room, there was a meeting room, the music and linguistic collections, and other thematic sections such as law, women, performing arts, education, and so on. The picture was taken from the second room. On the right side, there is the marionette collection.

1 Rupert Croft-Cooke was the author of *The Moon in My Pocket: Life with the Romanies* (1948) and *A Few Gypsies* (1955). He was very prolific and wrote books in multiple genres, among them 31 detective novels under the pseudonym Leo Bruce. Other books he published related to "Gypsies" and the circus were *Pharaoh with His Wagons* (1937), *Case with Four Clowns* (1939), and *The Circus Has No Home* (1941). See Evans 2010.

2 Among those cultural activities RADOC promotes, there have been two exhibits. *Romanies in Texas* was held in the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, from June 2017 to June 2018, and *The Myth of the Gypsy Femme Fatale* was exhibited at the Perry–Castañeda Library at UT from February 2020 to August 2020.

1. Ian Hancock and RADOC

Hancock first took an interest in researching the history of Romani people when he was a student at the University of London. He started collecting materials during the 1960s, a decade when many important counterculture movements originated. His desire to learn and become part of a group that shared his views led him to meet Thomas Acton, Donald Kenrick, and Grattan Puxton, all of whom were part of the National Gypsy Education Council in East London.

Hancock's interest in establishing a collection of materials portraying Romani/Gypsies intensified at the 1971 World Romani Congress. The emergence of Romani national consciousness movements led to a proliferation of Romani scholars and political leaders interested in combating xenophobia. Among them were Ronald Lee, Rajko Đurić, Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, and Hancock. During this congress, the Romani flag and anthem were adopted. These symbols proclaimed a set of ideas collectively known as Romani nationalism (Gelbart, n.d.). While there were a few renowned European Romani writers, Romani history had yet to be written by Roma themselves. Hancock's objective was to collect historic evidence of the Romani people that contrasted with the romantic stereotype of the wandering Gypsy. Unknowingly, he was establishing a kind of national archive that gave legitimacy and credibility to the Romani nationalist project. Hancock realized that archives constitute the memory of nations and societies, and that it was important to examine who produced and controlled the information related to "Gypsies" and Roma.

Hancock's life became intertwined with that of RADOC; he spent his life as its curator and head archivist. When Hancock was appointed assistant professor at UT in 1972, he began to slowly ship the collection from London and Canada to Austin. At this point, the collection was a growing archive of the books acquired and collected throughout Hancock's life. Hancock would often make xeroxed copies of books that were not for sale in a printed edition and add these to the archive. He would also carefully bind those materials using paperboard and tape, sometimes even hand-stitching the pages together. Some friends and scholars donated part of their collections, as was the case with the activist Donald Kenrick, writer Diane Tong, and anthropologist William G. Lockwood.[3] Other organizations, publishers, and individuals contributed throughout the years with other materials – mostly books and journals.

In many ways, the archive's early history ran parallel with Hancock's career as an academic and activist. He was promoted to professor in 1984 and used the bonus he was granted to buy materials for RADOC. Hancock's collection reflects the topics in which he was particularly interested, encompassing linguistics, the Romani victims of the Holocaust, and the history of Roma enslavement in Wallachia and Moldavia. The collection also includes a number of Hancock's own writings and teaching materials, along with different versions and manuscripts, which provide insights into his thinking at the time.

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3 Lockwood was a professor at the University of Michigan from 1969 to 1997. He contributed to RADOC before his death in 2017. In 2016, the William G. Lockwood Collection of Romani Ethnology and Gypsy Stereotypes at Michigan State University was established. The collection, donated by Lockwood and curated by his wife, Yvonne, contains several thousand items focused on the Balkans, Romani/Gypsy culture, ethnicity, and the anthropology of food and foodways.

Hancock's appointment to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council promised to transform RADOC into an educational project. The Council drafted a proposal that led to the establishment of the United Romani Educational Foundation in 2001.[4] The Foundation was intended to be funded from the compensation for looted Swiss assets seized from Sinti, Manouche, and Roma Holocaust victims after their arrest. The plan was to develop a network of cultural centers equipped with libraries and Internet access for promoting Romani scholarship and academic activities. Although the funds never became available, RADOC still aimed to function as an educational entity serving Romani people. In 2018, Hancock retired as a professor in the departments of Linguistics and English at UT. He was able to negotiate with UT for the archive to be held in its original premises for one year after his retirement, but in 2019, RADOC closed its doors. Years before, Hancock had approached and been approached by European and American institutions interested in acquiring RADOC. Hancock's most important condition was that the institution that purchased the collection needed to launch a Romani research center in parallel so that the materials in the collection would serve the purpose of expanding Romani research in different fields.

2. RADOC's Future

In 2018, Hancock decided to allow a group of Romani intellectuals and activists to take over the operation of RADOC's educational project. Initially, Orhan Galhus and Hristo Kyuchukov offered to provide a new home for the collection in Turkey, possibly in the national archives in Istanbul.[5] Turkey's geographic location as a transcontinental state between Europe and Asia made it more accessible to the largest Romani communities. It is also an important space for understanding Romani history, given that Anatolia might be the place where Romani identity once formed.[6] In the last year, Hancock has considered offers from the Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (MuCEM) and a Canadian university. As for now, RADOC has not been relocated and Hancock is still looking for an institution to host the collection in an attempt to renew its legacy as an archive that preserves Romani history for future generations of Roma and non-Roma.

3. RADOC as a Migratory Archive

For Rodrigo Lazo, a migrant archive "reside[s] in obscurity and is always at the edge of annihilation" (Lazo 2010, 37). "Migratory archives are not widely available, nor is their existence known by a large number of people" (*Ibid.*, 50). Lazo's notion of a migratory archive is oxymoronic: while the purpose of any archive is to safeguard historic knowledge, the texts in a migratory archive cross borders, jeopardizing their integrity and putting the archive at risk (*Ibid.*, 38). Although Lazo used the concept of a "migrant archive"

4 This proposal was drafted by the Council, headed by U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and Michael Rubenstein, and consisting of seventeen members, Hancock being the chairman.

5 The Ottoman Archives at the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (the Prime Minister's Ottoman Archives) in the Kâğıthane district, Istanbul.

6 According to Adrian Marsh, the first reference to Roma people – who were difficult to distinguish from Lom or the Atsinganoi – dates back to the eleventh century (Marsh 2010, 27). Their presence was well-documented from the twelfth century on. They were an important part of Ottoman society and joined the forces who took Constantinople in 1453 (Ibid., 28).

Prof. Ian Hancock in RADOC prior to its closure.

Some of the boxes that include the collection in a storage facility awaiting their next location.

to understand the place of (Hispanic) subaltern voices within the Anglo-American nation, his ideas are relevant to the study of RADOC. Like the migrant archives Lazo describes, RADOC is a transcultural project that represents a heterogeneous and multilingual group of people. It contains texts that challenge official narratives and deviate from those typically found in official narratives and standardized languages.

RADOC has no official language and includes materials in more than 40 different ones. Although RADOC was initially comprised of texts in hegemonic languages like English, French, Italian, and German, it now features texts in Romani and other less prominent languages such as Albanian, Japanese, Finnish, and Slovak. The archive documents different Romani dialects through dictionaries and samples, directly impacting the conservation of Romani voices. For Lazo, writing in another language "can lead scholars to alternative ways of remembering the past, new ways of naming multiple nations and communities, and even the invention of new ontologies" (*Ibid.*, 38). One of RADOC's core missions is to show the difference between the myth of the Gypsy and the reality of Roma, and the adequacy of using endonyms and exonyms. This mission has contributed to the formation of a pan-Romani political identity. RADOC is a collection that speaks to a common legacy, even if that legacy is a history of persecution and trauma. The collection gives physical credibility to the Romani national project, as it implies continuity and tradition.

4. Cataloguing Criteria

RADOC grew more diverse over the years, challenging the limits of cataloging systems. One of RADOC's largest sub-collections is devoted to the preservation of Romani literature, and it contains a wide array of works by Romani authors, including different editions, translations, and even autographed copies. While traditional archives would host published materials edited by "reputable" sources, RADOC accommodates texts that otherwise would be destroyed. The inclusion of materials that represent Romani polyvocality also affects cataloging criteria. For example, most established archives contain defined history and literature categories, but in the Romani archives these two intersect. In this sense, RADOC supports the legitimization of other forms of history, such as stories, poems, and songs.

Although literature does not follow positivistic historical methods, it is a device to preserve and communicate history itself.[7] For Roma, literature is valuable as a testimonial tool for recording memories and lived experiences that recount trauma and resistance. It also represents a receptacle of diverse Romani cultural backgrounds, customs, and traditions. Bronisława Wajs' poems and Matéo Maximoff's novels, for example, document their perspective and position in the matrix of power. Literary practices (from poetry and theater to the performing and visual arts) have delineated Romani cultural and political identities and have been instrumental in the creation of a historical narrative.

Conclusion

Romani history has been overwhelmingly written by outsiders because it is a challenging and expensive task that few can undertake. Even the most important archives and libraries have small collections of materials related to the history of Roma or the Gypsy stereotype. In order to contrast the information found in a few books, a rigorous social scientist would have to travel to other locations and latitudes to research in other small collections. RADOC democratizes this effort by making available various documents scattered throughout hundreds of libraries and archives around the world. There has been a tendency to digitize the most important repositories of archival materials in the world, but that should not replace the actual physical collection. Digital archives move beyond a fixed location, but they are fragile and prone to disappear. Even if RADOC is eventually digitized, Romani organizations should be held responsible for the preservation of the physical archive.

RADOC's history allows us to reflect on who has access to Romani archives, what their cultural and national identity is, and who controls this information. RADOC was the first Romani archive in which the leadership roles were occupied by Roma, a model that other successful digital collections like RomArchive and the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture have imitated. RADOC also distances itself from the notion of a single-language archive by showcasing the multilingual and heterogenous past of Romani. The preservation of this collection is fundamental to safeguarding the history and legacy of Roma. It is important that the new generation of Roma activists and academics understand the responsibility they are inheriting and are equipped to make decisions regarding the future of the collection.

7 The relationship between literature and history has been studied by numerous scholars, from Aristotle in his *Poetics* to Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*.

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Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé, eds. 2020. *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, Berghan Books.

Book review by

Deniz Selmani

selmanideniz@gmail.com

Program Manager, Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7095-215X

Deniz Selmani is a co-founder of the Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico and the civic movement AVAJA. His professional experience includes work for civil society organizations and think tanks. He was selected to participate in the Obama Foundation's Europe Leaders program, which identifies emerging leaders working in government, civil society, and the private sector who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing the common good. His main interests are political parties, electoral systems, human rights, and strategic communication.

The book *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé, consists of five major parts. The first part introduces the reader to the struggle for Romani identity in contemporary Europe. The second part covers the topics of society, history, and citizenship. The third part discusses the challenge of "ethnic minority governance" in Europe. The fourth part is dedicated to the topics of gender and social movements. The final part of the book explores the topics of art and culture.

Van Baar begins by examining the epistemology of art, as a significant element in the formation of Romani identity. In chapter 2, Julia Szalai discusses segregation as a form of oppression and demonstrates the reasons behind such practices by many state apparatuses. In chapter 3, Nidhi Trehan analyzes how different stakeholders during the socialist and post-socialist era in Hungary were approaching the so-called "Gypsy question" by looking into various ethnographic materials. In chapter 4, Angéla Kóczé discusses how a restructured welfare system in the post-1989 era, together with the intersection of race, gender, and class in Central and Eastern Europe, largely contributed to long-term poverty among Romani communities, especially among Romani women. In chapter 5, Huub van Baar argues that, to a large degree, the Europeanization of the representation of Roma cannot be seen as Europeanization of the Roma issue, identity, or policy, and explains how the European citizenship of Roma has deteriorated. In chapter 6, Iulius Rostas looks closely at the EU's adoption and implementation of policies and programs designed to improve the lives of Roma but inadvertently have worsened them, mainly because many stakeholders were approaching and defining "the Roma" differently and problematizing the situation of Roma. In chapter 7, Debra Schultz provides evidence of activism by Romani women to influence the agenda of various actors and shows how the personal and collective activities of these women affects Romani identity formation. In chapter 8, Violetta Zentai studies movements by Romani movements in Central and Eastern Europe, describing how Romani women, in particular, swapped intersectional reasoning with what she calls "transformative anti-essentialism." In chapter 9, Carol Silverman discusses the relationship between culture and ethnicity, arguing that culture and tradition, as concepts, are not fixed but rather are instruments used to portray a particular identity. In chapter 10, Tina Magazzini explores how Romani art and culture influence identity formation, through an interview with the two co-directors of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), Tímea Junghaus and Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka. In chapter 11, Annabel Tremlett and Delaine Le Bas discuss the challenges and possibilities that contemporary Romani art movements offer in identity formation, through interviews with the artists Damian Le Bas and Delaine Le Bas.

The book is a bold new look at the forming of Romani identity in contemporary Europe, based on wide-ranging, insightful analyses of societal events that shaped the process of performing Romani identity. The authors make a fresh and relevant contribution to Romani studies, in which they clearly challenge the knowledge production of Roma identity in the twenty-first century. The topics covered by the authors range from postcolonial theory to critical race theory, to feminism, political theory, and anthropology, in which hegemony seems to play a crucial role. The authors challenge the European perception of the construction of Romani identity, critically analyzing and deconstructing this perception, while offering readers a means to better understand the complexity, essentialism, and hybridity of the formation of Roma identity. The book digs deep to understand and to explain to readers the struggle of Roma in the process of forming their identity in contemporary Europe.

The authors demonstrate that Romani identities are formed through attempts to control. Szalai writes, "segregation not only implies direct control over minority, but also helps the practicing of power over large segments of society." However, Romani movements around Europe are still struggling to take control of the formation of Romani identity, mainly because of "state propaganda," as Trehan demonstrates. One method of state propaganda is to create false narratives to exclude Roma from society. Many populist leaders are using such narratives, such as Viktor Orbán, who imposes the label "Gypsy crime" on Romani communities in Hungary and attaches it to Romani identity. The other method, as Rostas discusses, is the exclusion of Roma from policy design, which contributes to the paradox of bringing in many policies while the situation of Roma worsens. Having said this, the dominant narrative created by the majority is that Roma do not want to integrate into society, despite all the efforts of the EU and national governments, which is a very dangerous narrative attached to Roma identity.

In my view, the volume has only one limitation, which is to not look critically at religion as a cultural system that contributes to the formation of Romani identity, especially after the fall of communism and regarding post-communist policies on practicing religion. This would give readers deeper insight into the strong influence of religious authorities over the construction of Roma identity. However, the authors raise a lot of important questions that should be studied. One particular area for further review should be community mobilization in the Romani movement, as populism and far-right movements are growing in Europe.

I would strongly recommend this book to academics, activists, and students of political science, social philosophy, and sociology, and anyone who would like to have a critical perspective on the struggle of Roma for identity. The book presents a wide array of social issues related to Roma across Europe. In conclusion, this book is a major contribution to Romani studies because of the insightful perceptions it provides as the authors discuss various ideas and phenomena related to the struggle of identity formation.

Romani Identity in Literary Practices

Oksana Marafioti

oksanamarafioti@gmail.com

Author and Instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Oksana Marafioti is the author of *American Gypsy: A Memoir* (2012) and *Donatti's Lunatics* (2018). Her writings have appeared in *Rumpus*, *Slate*, and *Time* magazines, and in a number of literary journals and anthologies. She has presented lectures at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and CSPAN's Book TV. Oksana was the 2013 Library of Congress Literary Award Recipient and was the 2020 recipient of the Picador Excellence in Literature Award from the University of Leipzig, Germany. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and teaches at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 116–121 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.128

Long before the development of the alphabet, storytellers have carried the tradition of preserving stories. Written language allowed scribes and educators to interpret those narratives. Passed between the wordsmith and the teacher, storytelling gave birth to cultural memories. It is not a coincidence that in hierarchical civilizations elites have acted as the gatekeepers of this knowledge. After all, these dominant narratives have been responsible for shaping our cultural identities across centuries of strife and progress, evolutions and languages, political upheavals, and great renaissances.

However, if most societies' knowledge is forged from the philosophies of the powerful, how does that particular dynamic affect marginalized groups like Roma, and how is our identity as a people shaped by it?

In stories, Roma have played a role unchanged for millennia – that of a conflicted character: impetuously dissident and admirably protective of their freedom. Romani characters are resistant to any attempts at becoming civilized, remaining an animal as wild as its most recognized literary companion – the undomesticated horse. Even when placed within the boundaries of a refined society, between the pages of literary works a Gypsy never truly abandons what is perceived to be their fundamental nature, their identity. Yet, as remarkable as that image may appear, it does not describe a human being. Not one fully realized. Or as writers like to say, it is not a fleshed-out character.

Real people are different from story people, yet, in narratives which have been written primarily by a non-Romani contingent, Roma lack the luxury of such distinction. In stories, we have remained unreal, our identity artificial and static. This skewed representation has, in turn, contributed not only to how Romani culture is perceived by others but also to how we perceive ourselves.

Every writer knows that humanity is far too complex to be frozen on the page. Not one of us is entirely good or bad, our lives steered continuously by the reins of fate and free will. We are unpredictable; universes spun of contradictions, equally capable of tyranny and love.

What is a writer to do? How do we make our protagonists more palatable? Typically, we prescribe to them a manageable list of traits. We settle on a general idea of what the character is made of at their very core, and then we make our readers believe us. In short, the power to create a character's identity is immeasurable. Life molded out of nothing – a true Pygmalion experience. The writer carves out a personality until it begins to evolve into a living soul full of angst and dreams.

Can the final product be considered a real person?

No.

Is it enough?

Generally, yes. Readers are quite good at acknowledging the boundary between life and fiction.

Except for when the character is a Gypsy – nearly always presumed to be a figment of the writer's imagination. Without context, the reader is led blindly into thinking a Gypsy shares the field with dragons and leprechauns in that they do not exist or evolve.

This raises an important question, addressed repeatedly in the papers and stories in this issue. How do Romani writers gain agency in establishing identity long misused and manipulated in Western literature?

Before we explore this question further, we must remember, a character's hypercentricity on the page – that easily manageable cluster of attributes picked by the writer and isolated from the bigger context – seldom appears in living beings.

In actuality, everyone shares some essential qualities. We are in a constant flux of progression and regression, life and death, and in that very process, we are as one. We relate to one another through our collective experiences, and what unites us as real-life people is our diverse ordinariness.

In other words, a pen is no match for the abundance of human experiences, and yet Roma are described in literature more like cardboard cutouts than human beings. In fiction as in reality, we are rarely allowed to be ordinary, nor are we given permission to learn from our experiences – a self-discovery that readers would expect from fleshed-out characters. A Romani protagonist often lacks self-awareness and instead acts upon impulse alone. Heathcliff comes to mind. Driven by his emotional tempest, this tortured anti-hero damns himself and those he loves.

It follows that in written depictions and across most art mediums, Roma have remained a caricature, robbed of the opportunity to be ordinary. Ordinary is good, however counterintuitive this may sound. It is a more accurate representation of humanness than labels such as "bohemian" and "mystical." Ordinary comes with a multitude of human capabilities, presenting a rich spectrum of feelings and temperaments, and most importantly allowing room for the sense of identity to change as is its natural inclination.

Everyone evolves.

We lose and gain convictions. Life keeps us peculiarly unstable however steadfast in our individual quests. Story people share this with their real-life counterparts. Yet Roma have been typecast in literature and reality without remorse, never permitted to deviate from the obsolete narrative of long-dead scribes.

For centuries Romani misrepresentation has been deeply ingrained in the Western storytelling modes to such a degree that – short on role models – many young Roma grow up believing some of the traits assigned to them in historical and literary descriptions. They subconsciously absorb the identity prescribed to them.

We could go so far as to say that in some cases these clichés have had a detrimental influence on legislators who create social policies that further underserve and ostracize Romani communities around the world. In Canada, Romani asylum-seekers are often unlikely to be accepted. They are often criminalized and linked to gangs, human trafficking, forced childhood marriage, and so on. In the U.S., student truancy policies target Romani families. Better examples are in Europe where Romani neighborhoods are segregated by physical barriers, in classrooms, in schools, and where Romani workers are excluded from the labor market. Their homes are bulldozed, they are put into permanent exile, and then their homelessness is attributed to allegedly natural Gypsy identity.

The connotations of the derogatory label, Gypsy, are usually escorted by stereotypically insidious reactions. What is troubling is that a number of highly regarded writers are oblivious of their part in reinforcing these marginalizing typecasts. They do not see the crippling effects of rendering an entire ethnic group as a stylized archetype, nor do they attempt to reform the unbalanced representation of Romani identity in literature. Prosper Mérimée's Carmen corrupts a good man into becoming a murderer, Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester disguises himself as a Gypsy clairvoyant. The list is long.

Using materials found in Western literary traditions, writers and educators continue to contribute to the skewed perception of Romani culture. Over time, this practice has led them to become conduits of this harmfully stagnant view of our diversity, fueling a fixed idea of the "Gypsy Other" who is far removed from and resistant to "cultured" society at large.

Unruly Gypsy
Stupid Gypsy
Impulsive Gypsy
Seductive Gypsy
Lawless Gypsy
No roots
No cares
Dangerous
Aggressive
Uneducated
Unwashed
Free-spirited
Unhuman

The above images are links in the chain of the fixed "Romani Identity" shackled to our ankles for centuries.

It has been said we fear what we do not know. The other side of fear is fascination. In a formulaic Romani character, we find both, someone to fear and someone to desire; a notion taught to us by countless examples: Caliban, Esmeralda, Heathcliff, Paprika. None are ordinary. Removed from society by way of their idiosyncrasies and attitudes, such characters are doomed by their refusal to conform, and in doing so they mesmerize the reader because they act in ways most of us are too afraid to act. They are the ultimate nonconformists.

Upon closer examination, one thing becomes clear. Romani characters of the Western literary discourse are not human at all, but ideas and metaphors – lenses that help readers glimpse their own uncivilized and savage natures. It is a convenient literary device for storytellers, one used for centuries and across cultures and languages. However, it fails to advocate for a deeper understanding of an ostracized culture – the case with Romani people – when there is no contrast, nothing to offset a damaging or romanticized depiction.

One could argue that readers need characters who are driven by their ungovernable urges. While the contrast between hero and anti-hero has always captivated this world, is it ethical to cast Roma as the latter, time and time again? What happens when an entire group's identity is entrenched in the belief that Romani people lack multidimensionality of experience, that every individual in their midst is a thief, a witch, a brawler, or a free-spirited nomad?

Moreover, when an overwhelming majority of Roma depicted in books are insubordinate and untrustworthy, can the reader who meets a Romani person for the first time judge them to be otherwise? Considering the severe deficit of positive or even realistic Romani protagonists, unlikely. The tropes have been set in place since antiquity, and the motives behind this misdirection are numerous. From ignorance to political choreography. Against common sense, these narratives endure.

Some might assume today's intellectual community is better informed, resistant to the dated models of cultural misperception. No matter how tempting this idea may sound in theory, it fails in practice, as is evident in the perpetuation of the Gypsy stereotypes in creative and scholarly forms.

Bearing in mind that even the most intellectually progressive individuals fall victim to latent racism and xenophobia, how do we find a way to leave behind the archaic depiction of the Romani character in creative and, by extension, social discourses? Can we teach the reader to understand and respect the people behind the stereotype, and if so, where do we begin?

The most effective solution might lie in the very place where the static Romani image was first established – creative arts. To reverse the chronic biases embedded so deeply in the psyches of our readers, the aim of any writer and educator considering this subject matter is not only to engage readers and students in a critical examination of cultural stereotypes within the established canon but also to actively replace the archaic image of the "Gypsy Other" with more sophisticated and informed models. A Romani literary canon is the most vital player in this endeavor, specifically in its role as the tool to convey a Romani identity as complex as its diverse culture.

We cannot ignore the fact that Romani-made narratives have been absent from the Western literary canon, our greatest intellectuals seldom read or studied. We are absent from libraries, classrooms, conferences, and traditional publishing mediums. Our voices, though never silent, have not been heard. In literary, pedagogical, and cultural discourses, we have remained powerless observers as others continue to shape assumptions of our motivations and histories, as others shape our identity and take credit for its questionable truth. Even as the underrepresented voices of many are finally being heard today, we are often excluded from those conversations, barely acknowledged.

Often but not always.

A change is coming.

Romani writers, artists, and scholars are speaking up, louder than ever, and that is exactly what we need to reclaim full ownership of our identity. Tradition rich in storytelling, poetry, music, and folk art awaits to greet the world, ushered in by established and emerging artists. Papusza (Bronisława Wajs), Katarina Taikon, Matéo Maximoff – all created meaningful works during the times of greatest persecutions and strife because they believed a word could change the world. Along with more contemporary writers such as Cecilia Woloch, Ronald Lee, Hedina Sijerčić, Jo Clement, and Damian Le Bas, to name a few, they constitute the foundation of Romani literary tradition. Our narratives are emerging, giving way to opportunities for dynamic discussion of issues that impact Romani societies today. In the process, our identities are emerging, too, stronger and more diverse than anyone could ever imagine.

To better understand what defines Romani identity within the context of literary tradition, let us take a closer look at the creative materials in this issue. What is unique about the writers here in these pages is that, together and from a distinct creative artists' perspective, they address a scholastic audience. The two worlds, creative and academic, rarely find themselves in direct conversation.

Creative writers, regularly examined through the lens of literary criticism and theory, are seldom given the opportunity to enter into a dialogue. Here, we have the opportunity to experience, side by side, these two counterparts of the literary domain communicate and express their perspectives.

The question posed to each contributor in this issue was simple and yet one that still evades a definitive answer: What does Romani identity mean to you?

The necessity for such inquiry is an obvious one.

The clichéd identity designated to us by non-Romani academics and writers, no longer stands. It never did. Fundamentally, what this question asks of our writers is to reach beyond those clichés, beyond generic identity markers we all share in the forms of careers, gender labels, class associations, and such. Rather, the writers are invited to contemplate how an evolving Romani cultural history effects a sense of familial kinship, and since the tool utilized to form the answers is writing, it would be remiss of us to ignore that the stories in this issue are also a study of how a written language, in its own right, shapes identity.

The responses are fascinating in that they are vastly different and yet maintain several unifying truths:

Contemporary Romani particularities are difficult to pin down, made so by the fact that identity is fluid by nature.

Romani identity is often found in memories.

Romani identity is often contained in its language.

Romani identity is often observed in the traditions passed on from the elderly to the young.

More often than not, Romani identity seems to reside in the writer's attempt to either preserve it against all odds or find a way home, to stay on some barely defined path that promises agency of Romani experience. The latter marks a return to either a culture one left behind as a child or discovered as an adult.

Romani identity is often unearthed in reclaiming oneself and one's place of home. Or rather, it brings shape to that path home, and through that process, shape to the writer's sense of self that for various reasons hasn't been given permission to thrive. This is often true for writers, regardless of whether or not they come from a traditional Romani household. The Romani writer seeks to either preserve, reclaim, or uncover.

Most of all, the Romani writer seeks kinship, to feel a part of a community that reaches across the entire globe like a net cast far and wide. The breadth of our narratives is fascinating in that even when fragmented, the roots we share seem to hold stronger than geographical or cultural boundaries.

Our stories are vastly unique, and yet the ideas explored point to two common themes: belonging and acceptance.

Ironic, since nomadic proclivities have been written into our stories generously by interloper literary figureheads. Ironic but also expected, since for centuries, systematic and systemic erasure of our identities has rendered Romani populations less likely to verbalize who we ourselves believe we are and what we desire.

The reclaiming of self and the search for belonging to that self and its origins is a necessary step for Romani writers in resurrecting our public cultural individualities.

The writers who contributed stories and poems to this issue had a difficult task ahead of them, but the work has resulted in a generous sharing of intimate journeys: tales of children who know they are losing parts of their culture with the passing of their elders. Accounts of descendants salvaging family histories, reminding the rest where those stories belong – with family. Poems of vivid beauty and enduring generational trauma.

While reading the collection of voices in this issue, one can easily grasp the immense latitudes of Romani experiences and narratives. Yet again, at the beating heart of these tales is a recuring cohesion, perhaps one that holds the response to the inquiry this issue had originally posed.

What is a Romani identity?

It is undeniable that Romani people are pulled to a Romani ethos. We carry with us, across millennia, across borders and continents, across generations, across tragedy and hope, an innate sense of belonging to our culture. Without land, without physical boundaries, our origin stories and the heritage spun from them are faithful companions, even to those of us who have been robbed of the opportunity to grow up with an insight more practiced traditions generally provide.

This fascination seems to transcend our upbringing, whether we're orphans, slaves, full-blooded, or mixed, whether we grew up in a rural Romani village or met our distant Romani cousins for the first time as aging adults.

The Romani characteristic we seek to define might just be in the very act of our search for it – of the collective desire to know our identity intimately, to redefine it if needed, to understand the past in order to find ourselves in our present and our future.

Gypsy Identity

Jorge Emilio Nedich

jen050259@gmail.com

Born in 1959 in Argentina in a nomad Ludar family, Nedich did not receive any formal education until 1999, when he was granted the right to be admitted to the B.A. program at the Universidad Nacional de las Lomas de Zamora. A writer, editor, and teacher, he has published fourteen books, being twice a finalist for the prestigious Planeta Prize. In 2014 he published his last novel, *El alma de los parias*, which was well received both by critics and readership. His work has been translated into several languages. "Gypsy Identity" is the first chapter from an unpublished novel, *La transformación interminable* (The neverending transformation).

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 122–127 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.89

My father and I walked hand in hand, dilly-dally, as two who dearly love each other. From time to time we let go, laughing as we ran and kicked the dirt clumps under our feet, but only those that rose, sassy and filled with air, bursting as soon as we hit them. We also looked for four-leaf clovers, plucking them and placing them behind our ears; not too many, just enough to get lucky and avoid misfortune. We were still laughing when a storm suddenly broke, as if a river flooded from the sky. My father turned around and looked at my mother, who followed behind. He shrugged helplessly, raised his head and looked up. He must've seen something up there, in the sky, or maybe God said something bad about premature babies, because he was upset as he looked down.

He placed his hands on his waist, looked up to the sky again, spit and exclaimed, "Goddamn it!"

My mother stared at him and replied, "Your damn mouth."

Then, my father made a promise to himself, "I will go to Mr. Patarino's house, knock on the door, and request to borrow one, just one mule to attach to the wagon so we can continue our journey. If I look decent, he will lend it to me, otherwise, God have mercy on us."

"What do you think you are doing?" my mother asked him defiantly. "You are going to ruin your suit in this rain."

"Yes, what am I doing?" he said as he gave me his hat. He removed his jacket and trousers, folded them carefully, piled one on top of the other, like husband and wife, and placed them under his arm so the rain would not damage them. With his clothing safeguarded, he walked towards the house, which was not far but could not be seen in the heavy rain.

As he passed by naked, my mother asked, "Don't you have any underwear?"

"I don't have a mule," he replied, putting on the hat that I had just handed him.

My father came back sad.

"We'll get one somehow," my mother told him.

And that is all that I remember. I mean from the last day when my dad was still alive. From my father's death I got the sadness of being in the rain, which grew deeper inside me when my mother, during his wake, led on a loser that was good for nothing.

That night I cried for a long time after my mother said, "Petre, we are on our own now, and I have to think about you and me. That guy promised to bring us a mule."

I did not like the mule he brought, even though it did pull the wagon. It made me sad to look at it because its stride was not gypsy, not like a stride my dad's mule would have. Not even close.

And then my mother said to me, "Wipe that look off your face and be grateful because, even if your father had managed to get a mule, he might still have died. He was sick, don't you forget that."

"That's right," said the wino, and sat me by his side.

I did not want to, but I stayed put because my mom smiled at me.

Next day, in the carriage, he handed me the reins, and I liked that. But after a while I stopped looking ahead and watched the mule's tail instead, following the flies, swiping at them now and again. The wino got mad because the wagon went off the road, and he scolded me.

"Give me those reins, you premature boy."

I looked at my mother just to check if she had heard, just for that, but she seemed not to pay attention. She just hit me in a way that did not hurt because I understood what she meant.

I moved to the back, slurped my snot, and watched how the road slipped away from the wagon.

Later on, and for whatever reason, my mom also got hit and came back with a hand on her nose, wiggling it and sniffling. She sat by my side and watched the road moving away. I did not want to join her, so I started to think about my father. I could see him drenched under the rain, with his T-shirt down, covering his bum. But his thing was hanging down, like a dog's. I saw my mother thinking as well. I was not quite sure, but it seemed to me that she was often lost in her thoughts.

The wino noticed as well because he shouted, "Don't waste your time, you already did it when you gave birth to that thing." And he pointed at me. He talked about me all the time, but he hardly knew me.

I asked my mother once, "Take me to grandpa."

She shook me and screamed, "Shut up, you premature boy."

One morning my mother went to the neighbours to help some kids get rid of the evil eye. She would ask for something to eat and, why not, for a nice drink as well. By then she had taught me how to treat stomach ache with a ribbon, a healing skill which helped me earn something to put in the pot and buy books with drawings, but that day she did not allow me to join her.

The evening came cold, and mother was not back. The sluggard called out to me. He took a swig from the wine pitcher, grabbed a belt, and, as he wrapped it around his hand, said, "Don't cry, filthy boy; your mother got drunk or maybe she left with another man. If I'm right, she will never be back, and I don't want any nuisances in my way."

I turned my back as soon as I heard his words, held the wagon's wheel and waited for the whipping. He threw the whip to the ground.

"Remove your clothes," he said.

When he saw me naked, he came closer and touched me. He threw me to the floor and tied my hands to the wheel. I could feel him at my back, then he opened my legs and touched me again. He groped me and got mad, the same way some winos who fondled my mother by the fire pit once did. He put his hand in his fly, breathed on me, and made me bleed. Afterwards he untied me, climbed into the carriage and left. I wanted to run after him so he would admit that he lied about my mother, but my hips and legs were numbed, and I fell.

When I woke up, I had been blessed: my mother was hugging me.

"Don't worry, Petre, we are leaving." Once in the station, she said, "This train is going to change our luck; we will look for my father and we will be the happiest Gypsies on earth."

Indeed, the journey made us happy and, hand in hand, my mother and I laughed when the train roared in the tunnels. My mother did not hug me often, but when she did, all sorrows left.

When we arrived in Roque Pérez, we started to look for you, grandpa.

"Hey," my mom would ask in the station, "don't you know an old Gypsy man who drives a red wagon? I am his daughter, and this is his grandson. We are looking for him."

For a long time, we walked from one village to another, just for the sake of walking.

Then, when I turned eleven, my mother wanted to give me away. She was going to get married again. I got angry, took her shoes, and threw them away. Then, I got the wedding dress she had made for herself and threw it to the floor. My mother picked it up and ordered me to leave. She told me to look for you on my own and grabbed a stick to hit me on my legs so I would run. "Lame, you will be lame. I will eat your legs away." Still, the whipping did not hurt until she said, "You already scared one away. You, premature boy."

And it was then that I stabbed her with a knife.

* * *

Grandpa, I realize now that my mother drank only to forget. At times she would look at me between one drink and the next, shaking her head in disbelief, horrified by our misfortune.

As long as I can remember, the booze never let her grasp ideas clearly, so she would try to spank me or, just the opposite, she would treat me to a cigarette, and we'd drink and smoke together. During one of those early days when she let me drink with her, when my father was still alive, I saw her belly growing out of her skinny body. But she would look sadly at it, so I was not hopeful. That evening, in a rage, I told my father that the baby would be premature.

"Right," he said. "Now we have another fortune teller in the family."

That night I tossed around in bed, unable to sleep. My dad slid the blanket away, gently grabbed my hand and took me outside the wagon. We sat cross-legged on the grass. He calmly rolled a cigarette, lit it, and handed me the tobacco bag and a rolling paper.

He instructed as he used to. "Enjoy your cigarette, take your time, and even out the leaves as if they were words in a poem." Then he lay down with the cigarette in his mouth.

"What do you know about poems? You cannot read."

"I know what a poem is."

"And what is it?" I dared him.

He smiled and said, "A boy like you under the sky."

"Bah!" And I hugged him so I could feel his smell.

* * *

And what is it to be a Gypsy, grandpa?

Another poem, usually sad, occasionally happy. To be a Gypsy is to know our own ways and laws, which drive the life of the group. All Gypsies are alike, we can recognize each other by looking into the eyes. We are a fraternity, bonded by the same mandate: to be happy inside the hole and unhappy outside it. Maybe we should have been happy also outside. We stayed inside the hole for too long, and we were left outside the times. People hate us because we ruin their landscape, they avoid us, they don't want us in the schools or at the workplace; they lose their smile when they see us.

We are very good at surviving, but we don't give our children the opportunity to study. To despise the wisdom and knowledge in the books is to despise the world. We don't know what our rights are, and we don't know what the others' rights are either. All that is taught in school, but we don't want to go and they don't want us there anyway. But the price for not knowing our own rights is on us.

And why are we more sad than happy?

The old wise men, a bunch of elitists, classists, and racists, say that to be true Gypsies we must be free. We should not go to school, nor live, work, or think as the *gadye* do; that's why we have our traditions. Maybe in the future, Gypsies might get together somewhere and find an anthem and a flag. Gypsies need symbols that dignify our culture. Had I gone to school I would have done that. I would understand the world better, I think.

What if I could understand, grandpa? I could help you out and we would be better Gypsies, and people wouldn't curse us when they see us, nor lose their smile when we look at them.

I don't think things would be much different, but with time life would be better for you, and for Tomás, Damián and Yuri, for Veruska, for Natasha, for Voria, for Voria Rosa, and for the eight, ten, or twelve million Gypsies who I carry every day in my wagon.

* * *

My father used to smoke under the stars. He used to say that we should never lose connection with whatever is up there. The earth gets what it needs from there, and it is there where men find the answers they are looking for.

I did not quite understand dad when he said those things, but his face was confident and hopeful. So I asked him, "Does it say up there what would be of my little brother if he is born premature?"

"What a tongue you have, worse than your mother!" he said.

"Maybe, but you did not answer my question."

"How do you want me to answer you if I cannot read?"

"Dad," I asked him, "Do we take care of poems?"

"Of course, no doubt about it."

"Well," I warned him, "Don't you doubt it either when my brother is born."

* * *

Fifteen days after she gave birth, my mother's breasts went dry. She cried in despair for the little girl who, like me, was born premature. My father asked my mother to offer her the breast, but she wouldn't. The day she was born my dad and I cried; we had prayed for a full-term boy who would eventually take care of things when my father, in his rushed old-age, could not.

But God wouldn't help us, and my mother did not take long in leaving the little girl aside to return to the booze. Between one drink and the next she would look up to the sky, then to the girl, and, finally, to me, shaking her head slowly. I knew that we had done something terrible for God to punish us a second time.

One evening, my mother prepared a bottle, placed it in the baby's mouth, and fixed it with a cloth wrapped around her neck. Instead of holding it, the cloth pushed the bottle in. It went so deep that the baby could not even cry. When we found her, she was still, face up, the color of a sugar beet. It took me some time to untie the knot. While my dad filled a water bowl, I undressed her. Little angels must be clean when they arrive in heaven. My hands were trembling in sorrow.

When we finished bathing her, we dried her and wrapped her with a blanket, then we put her in a basket. Carefully, I placed it under a tree, away from the ants and sun. Later, we went to where my mother was lying. She had so much alcohol in her body that the sun might have lit her had a tree not covered her with its shadow. It took effort to place her leaning back on the tree. She was unconscious and her body slid away like an eel. I thought that it would have been easy to place a bottle in her boozer's open mouth, tie it up with a cloth, and wait for time to work it out, but my father's voice sounded right there as a warning.

"Don't you think about it now, we have to bury your sister."

He said nothing else. We left my mother and walked towards the tree where we had left the basket protecting the baby from the ants. But it was nowhere to be seen. Not far, Mr. Patarino's wild pigs were

fighting, the baby's body flying around between them. We ran and yelled, and some pigs rushed away, but not the biggest three. They stood their ground, waiting for a fight. When they realized what we wanted they charged, and we fought them back with sticks. One of the pigs went back, got the remains of the little girl, and joined the rest of the herd. Dad and I could not retrieve a single piece.

This new misfortune took away all my strength and the desire to take revenge on my mother. When she woke up from her stupor, she refused to believe the story of the bottle. She found the trace of blood and the rags that the pigs left behind, and she took out her rage on us. First, she screamed, then she took a thumb-thick wire and hit us as much as she could. Days later, she would still be seized by random madness and we got the worst of her anger if we were asleep or distracted.

We did all the chores in the wagon so she would tolerate our presence. We cooked when we had something, we cleaned the wagon, and my dad groomed and fed the mule. Oddly enough, my dad would be happy only around the animal; he loved me, true enough, but he also worried about me. Sometimes, when I wasn't looking at him, he would set his eyes on me, and I could feel his soul in his gaze. He saw no future for me.

My father harnessed the mule to the wagon and headed to Mr. Patarino's house.

My mother carelessly said, "Nature is wise. With this miserable life we have, what were we supposed to do with two premature children?"

Dad thought about it, and found wisdom, or maybe relief, in what my mother had said. He hit the whip on the animal's hindquarters and turned around violently. The mule, taken by surprise, was forced to exit the road in order to turn. She stepped in a burrow and broke her leg. My dad would remember the wood-like cracking sound of the bone as it broke. It was difficult for him to load the shotgun and look into the mule's eyes. He said that the shot was like thunder on the heart of his soul. From then on, my dad let himself die.

My father loved trucks and he wanted to drive one the way the rich Gypsies did, but he could not afford it, not even an old one. He was on his own with the wagon, but he still loved his dead mule. Without her and with all the sorrow we carried, our life became very hard. We would be without work for long periods, with no chance of getting another mule. My mother was wasted, my father was sick, especially after she hit him with the wire.

* * *

It makes no sense, grandpa, to keep going on remembering. My dad was slowly dying with every passing evening, and one day he died all together. After that, the wino came with all his filth. Sometimes I got confused and drank, not much, just a little, so I would imagine you standing on your wagon, looking for me among the people, and the hope of seeing you again would grow in me. And life would be filled with laughter.

Grandpa, I can promise you that when I have children they will go to school, and they will see the Gypsy flag waving, and they will sing our anthem. Our wisdom does not need the knowledge in the books to embrace us all, making us equal in the world, being better Gypsies every day that goes by.

Translation by Ana Belén Martín Sevillano

What We Will Not Burn

Jessica Reidy

jessica.s.reidy@gmail.com

Jessica Reidy is a writer of mixed-Sinti heritage. Her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in *Narrative Magazine* as Short Story of the Week, *Prairie Schooner*, *Kenyon Review Online*, and other publications. She is the winner of the Penelope Nivens Award for Creative Nonfiction and the Glenna Luschei Prize. She is the co-host of Romanistan alongside Paulina Verminski, a podcast celebrating Roma, roots, and rebels. She is an educator, activist, artist, trauma-informed yoga teacher, and fine arts model. She also works her family trades, dancing, and healing, including herbalism, bodywork, and card, palm, and tea leaf reading.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 128–131 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.93

I never really know if I'm behaving myself.

I sit amidst the long ruffles of tissue paper that litter my grandmother's trailer as she unwraps another thing and offers it to me. I pretend she does this just because I'm moving to take that job I'm not sure I want. It's not because she's old and making sure I get what I want before she dies, before the rest of the family swoops in, because I'm her favorite, and I'm leaving Arizona.

"Great Uncle Raphael's knife?" she asks, and tilts her head. "Bone handle, silver blade. Very sharp."

"Absolutely."

She weighs it in her palm before wrapping it up again and placing it in my box.

"It's good to keep the history," she says.

"I thought Sinti and Roma are supposed to burn a dead person's possessions," I say before really thinking about how it sounds, like I'm teaching her. I cringe hearing myself but she doesn't take it that way.

"Everything changed for our family after the war."

After the war means after the Nazis, after our river Gypsies stopped going up and down the Danube and went into camps instead, after she ran away with an American soldier when she didn't speak a word of English so she didn't notice he was schizophrenic. That man tortured the family at gunpoint like some fathers play catch with their sons, and it'd be a lie to say we didn't sigh, relieved when he slipped his favorite rifle in his mouth. When we cremated him, no one wanted those ashes, the boys still bruised, the girls still shaking from everything he slipped to us in the dark. We were all still burning from the bomb in his chest, and my grandmother from those charred memories before: playmates, cousins, neighbors all gone up in Germany's smokestack, devoured by a demon no one wanted to name. After all those burning bodies, she means, how could you set one more thing alight?

Everything changed after the war, she says to me, and I know what she means. Everything changes after violence.

"Is it because I have dirty blood?" I had asked her after school one blazing day in first grade. I was covered in little congealed cuts, and red dust from the long walk home masked my face. Some kids had invited me to play with them behind the cafeteria. "Come over here, Coco. Want to see something?" and then pelted my face with rocks

"This isn't your fault," my grandmother told me when I got home from school, not smoothing my hair, not hugging my shoulder, but looking at me solemnly with strong, sweet tea between us, piping hot.

I knew the kids threw rocks because they knew we were Gypsies, and the fact that we didn't go to church didn't help, but I was afraid they threw them because they could scent that I was dirty. My blood was mixed so I could not even be pure Sinti, and I thought of that when my mother mentioned her own mixed blood with shame. The worst of all my fears was that they could smell my dead grandfather's fingers on me. He was the demon that none of us knew how to fight, and though he died the season before I started school, I still dreamed of him every night. His ghost lingered in the mourning-white halls at school, the halls that shimmered and whispered, *bad girl, bad girl* as I walked to my classroom where my teacher waited, sure to accuse me of giving the evil eye.

I whispered to my grandmother, "I just can't follow all the rules. Not even if I tried. I'm too dirty."

"Girl, if we followed all the rules we'd be dead," she said. "My blood isn't dirty and neither is yours. We wash in running water. We eat bitter bread and cleanse our souls. We do the important things. Something bad happened to you just because bad things happen to people. *The wind doesn't recognize whose wagon it blows over.* And those kids don't know shit."

And, full-grown and planning my life elsewhere, I want to ask her if I'm bad again, even though the war was years ago, and she's been a lucky widow living on her own. Even though she thinks that some rules are just stupid. Who can argue with an elder? Especially her, with her clear spooky eyes that know death is the beautiful woman who comes for us all, and could probably point her out in a crowd, sure and calm as a pot of tea. *You have to scald the pot first*, I remember her telling me when I was young and learning the family trades, everything from sewing to fortune-telling. *It sterilizes the pot and makes a better-tasting tea and blesses the vessel for reading the leaves.* I can't scald my vessel—I can't wash-out that feeling of knowing what I'm supposed to do and being afraid to do it. Take the job and learn to market a line, maybe my own line, of clothes? Stay here and sew up this town's drooping seams? I wonder if I wear my hair in braids and sew coins into my skirts that suddenly the world will make sense. But my grandmother's dresser has pictures of our ancestors like this, and if anything, it cut their world short. I look at my palms and trace the little rivers running over the sides.

"Don't read your own palm. No good comes of it," she says, slapping my hand to my side. The slap is surprisingly hard coming from an old woman.

"I don't know if I want this job," I say to her. "I don't know if I'll be happy in L.A."

"Let me give you some advice. There's nothing for you here. What are you going to do in the desert? Go, take the job, and be happy."

I don't want to leave, but I can't tell that to a woman who left her family 50 years ago for an uncertain chance at something on the arm of a loose-cannon stranger. Gypsies are supposed to move together, I want to tell her. We run from violence or for opportunity, but in a band, like some rambling half-myth. Here my family stays, and I'm supposed to go.

"You're supposed to go places," she says, like she's listening to my thoughts. But when I think about it, that's just something she's always said. She may as well have said, "You're supposed to pick hyssop when the moon is fat." Which, of course, I do. I pick it out of the terracotta pots in my parents' house. It promises safe travel.

"Do you want this teapot?" she asks me now. "Don't you have anything to make tea in?"

I want to tell her I do, which is a lie, so she will think I make tea every week in my apartment, and read all my friends' tea leaves for practice, and for closeness, as she says. She can't know that I microwave water in a mug for three minutes, but it's a sin to lie to your Sinti grandmother, and she says it's a sin to lie to another Gypsy at all. Though that might just be something she jokes, because Devel knows all people everywhere lie to ourselves and the world at large just to make it through one more day.

And anyway, I know for a fact she doesn't believe in sin.

"Can I have it?" I ask. "I like this teapot better than the one I have now."

She hands it to me and is quiet for a moment. I think she knows I lied. My chest balloons with explanations but nothing comes out. I can't even exhale. She twists her loose hair back into a knot, all grizzled like steel wool, and asks me, "Do you still have Great-Grandmother Mathilde's thimble?"

"Of course," I say, reaching over to my purse and digging out the tiny, slightly warped thing. It sits flat on my palm, and I push it under her face, and wait for her approval.

"You'll be fine," she says, flaring her nostrils as she exhales, certain and forceful like a horse. I think of the wild white horses she told me about as a child. *They live in the South of* France, she said. *Marvelous creatures. Some stories I heard said they were women in mourning. I think they were women broken loose.*

"When you get there," she said, "I want you to keep going. Don't linger for nostalgia's sake. Nostalgia is just for drugging women dumb."

My grandmother never got to see those horses—it wasn't safe for her to travel during the war, lest she and her family be caught by the Nazis like so many other Roma and Sinti, and the boat she took to America with her crazy soldier did not skirt horse territory in the South of France. *I saw plenty of a wide, sick ocean though*, she assured me, but that wasn't quite enough for her. That day I came home as a child, bloody from rocks, we drank our tea and I told her she might go on a trip someday, a big trip like she always wanted, though I was unsure whether I saw or wished this from the leaves. She flared her nostrils then too, revealing I'd hit a mark, and confessed: *I always wished to see those horses, moon-colored, pale and strong, with the salt marshes sucking at their hooves as they gallop through and keep going.*

Who Was John Sampson Really Protecting?

Frances Roberts Reilly

franceswrites@me.com

Frances Roberts Reilly was born on the Welsh border and grew up in England. She's of mixed-heritage Welsh Gypsy-English, a descendant of Abram Wood, the notable family of musicians and storytellers. Frances has an international profile as a Romani writer. She has published *Parramisha: A Romani Poetry Collection* (Cinnamon Press). Her poems have been published internationally in well-regarded anthologies in Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Wales. She began writing while working at BBC television in London, England. After making award-winning documentaries on human rights, she earned an Honours degree in English Literature at the University of Toronto.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 132–141 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.90

Abstract

Begun in 1888, the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) set out to describe and preserve Welsh Kale Romani customs, culture and language. Leaders in this effort were John Sampson, Francis Hindes Groome and Dora Yates, among others who took on the role of ethnographers, anthropologists and linguists. This paper raises the question, "Who Was John Sampson Really Protecting?" It is answered through an extensive examination of documented sources: birth records, census records, newspaper articles, Gypsy Lore Society Journals, academics on racism, and modern-day ethnography and anthropological practices. As well as family history; the archived memory of a Wood family member. It is premised on these facts – that John Sampson's ethics, methods and emotional investment ignores the context and inhumane impact of his study, namely the everyday lives and voices of his subject matter. His goal was heavily influenced by the works of Charles Darwin and intellectual baggage of the history of the world seen through British eyes; simply as a straight line from cultures to possess the deep roots of civilization itself. The purer and more hidden the better. The method used by John Sampson was to capture as much of the Welsh Kale culture and language by embedding himself in one family – the Wood family who he proclaimed spoke the "pure" Romanus language of the Abram Wood tribe of North Wales. His published work on this is *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales: Being the Older Form of British Romani Preserved in the Speech of the Clan of Abram Wood"* (1926). Against this intellectual stronghold fortressed inside a racially superior monolith, the story of Edward Wood, John Roberts and their extended family is told. Ethically however, his project also raises serious questions about the dichotomy of singling out the Wood family from others who also spoke Welsh Kale Romanus but were excluded from John Sampson's studies. He and the GLS recast the Wood family in romantic Victorian terms to use as props with which to stage their inventions in widely published articles to a gullible audience. In this paper, the moral position taken is one of non-compliance with the Romanized recasting and politicizing of the "Pure" Gypsy that local authorities used as policy to rationalize the separation of families and force them into housing right up to the 1970s. What is called today, "Scientific Racism". Concluding with the ways we are dealing with the intergenerational trauma and the collateral damage done to these Welsh Kale families. Asserting, our own voices and legacy have earned us a rightful place in the wider collective as we commit to standing together in our ethnicity, diversity, and authenticity with all Roma.

"I want to go home to Wales." My husband had asked me where in the world I wanted to go to celebrate my seventieth birthday. Our itinerary? To drive from north to south Wales, visiting cousins. The route followed my direct blood line back to Abram Wood, buried near Aberystwyth through to John Roberts who lived in Newtown and onto South Wales to visit a cousin. We'd be on the *drom*, just like them. It is through music I know my Welsh Kale family which is apart from extended family.

Our drive also followed the well-documented path the Victorian Ryes and ethnographers had travelled through Wales two hundred years prior. But from my reading of the books and journals written by the Gypsy Lore Society's (GLS) Ryes – Charles Leland, Francis Hindes Groome, John Sampson, and Dora Yates among others – I had a completely different perspective. Mine is very much at odds with what they wrote about my great-great grandfather, Edward Wood, his wife Mary Ann, their daughter Winnie Wood, and my great-great-great-grandfather, John Roberts. The GLS account has become widely acknowledged as the authority on our Romanus language and Welsh Gypsy customs and culture, not only in Wales but with cyber-culture, worldwide.

As I've said, it is through music I know my Welsh Kale family. Like my ancestors, I learned to tune and play the harp. From an early age, I would read a music score and hear the music play in my head; still do to this day. To my musical ear there is a dissonance and disconnect between what I know and what the Ryes wrote about us. These Ryes invented a lost rural England by using my family and taking many liberties with the facts as they successfully marketed the fantasy of a romantic rural pastoral. A convenient antidote to the rapid industrialization that transformed the country, sold to a suggestable audience of readers, researchers, and academics.[1]

Edward Wood (1838–1908), Harpist.
Photograph is property of the author.

On our *drom* we arrive in Corwen, driving past the house that Edward Wood, Mary Ann Roberts, and their child Winnie Wood, my great grandmother once lived in. Having been on the *drom*, they'd left the travelers life behind, eventually settling into houses. They made their living as musicians, playing their harp and fiddle music. Abram Wood brought the fiddle music with him, it was transposed for the harp using the Gypsy ornamentations and motifs – a repertoire of Gypsy hornpipes, jigs, and reels.

They played their harps and fiddles at paid gigs – weddings, dances, concerts, and as buskers at the popular seaside resorts on the North Wales coast. Their repertoire was not their Gypsy hornpipes, jigs, and reels, but of Welsh traditional airs, such as "The Bells of Aberdovey", "The Ash Grove", and "Daffyd y Careg Wen" – "David of the White Rock". A program designed for the punters who strolled the promenades, the gentry who danced Quadrille's (a courtly version of a country dance) at their military balls, and for the skaters who spun around the frozen River Severn in Newtown. They even busked outside the Bear Inn in Newtown and the Red Lion Inn (Plas Goch) in Bala for tips.

As reviewed in numerous newspaper reports of the day, the entire Roberts family had earned a solid reputation as The Cambrian Minstrels.

1 Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination (1807–1930)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

The popular musical group they formed consisted of John Roberts and his seven sons, as well as his son-in-law, Edward Wood with his daughter, Winnie Wood. They performed the traditional repertoire of Welsh Airs on triple harp and fiddle, while Winnie sang the popular Victorian patriotic and parlour songs of the day, accompanied by her father, Edward Wood on harp. They received favourable reviews: "The whole audience lustily cheered" chimed the *North Wales Express* in one review in 1881.

We next stop in Dolgello. Here the buildings are constructed of sturdy Welsh granite with grey slate roofs. It was here in Dolgello, according to Francis Hindes Groome[2] that he met up with John Roberts who was on his way to play his harp at a local wedding. As the account goes, after much joshing in Romanus with John Roberts, with John correcting Groome, they retired to an inn for refreshments.

Playing the triple harp is a feat of dexterity while possessing an ear trained to music's harmonics, a sound that is impossible to produce on any other instrument. It has to be learned. The first time I sat down to play, I took a deep breath, placed my hands on each side of the triple strings and my fingers a third apart. Then at intervals of another third, played a descending chord. My heart leapt as the harp offered up her unmistakable and unique sound of bells.

When I read Goome's reputed story that was ascribed to John Roberts, a couple of references gave me pause. One is the description of John carrying the harp on his back like a "wing". This is an image taken directly from a photograph taken in 1875,[3] widely available at the time, depicting him as a Gypsy bard walking the Welsh mountains. In reality, he preferred to load the harp on a cart or use the train. The tunes played that Groome listed were also widely available in newspaper reviews of the day.[4] Yet neither of these primary sources are cited in *Gipsy Tales*. Did Groome plagiarize or invent this conversation? Family have weighed in that Groome helped by his wife, Esmeralda Locke, took other liberties with the truth, changing family names to suit their recasting of our story.[5]

Now Corwen is a town dwarfed by Snowdon's mountains and in shadow most of the year. The shadow cast by the Welsh mountains had a protagonist in John Sampson: linguist, literary scholar and librarian, and the author of "The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales: Being the Older Form of British Romani Preserved in the Speech of the Clan of Abram Wood."

Having had a miserable childhood in Ireland and sent to Liverpool as a printer's apprentice, unable to pursue an education at age 14, Sampson had tracked down and embedded himself in the life of Edward Wood[6] in what we call these days, a family romance. A psychological compensation for denying his

2 Francis Hindes Groome, *In Gipsy Tents* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo & Co, 1880).

3 Photograph (circa 1875) by John Thomas Photographer (1838–1905) in John Thomas Collection, National Library of Wale.

4 Welsh Newspaper Archive, National Library of Wales.

5 On Groome – "In 1999, my father was ill and I would take turns with my sisters to help our mother nurse Dadus. I took Groome's book *In Gypsy tents* and read to him as he really did not read well enough to take in a book. As I started reading from Groome's book – as soon as I read Lovell first names like Plato, Loverin, etc., my father shouted, 'That's not right they aren't Lovell's, they are Locks and Boswells.' He became agitated to know there were books that told *hoknos* – lies. He refused to hear anymore. As for the bits of *chib* in the books he said it didn't sound right when I tried to pronounce the words as written." Bob Lovell, personal communication with author.

6 Anthony Sampson, "John Sampson and Romani Studies in Liverpool", in *Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter Images of 'Gypsies'/Romanies in European Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt, 15–20 (Liverpool University Press, 2004). https://doi.org/ 10.5949/UPO9781846313950

own dysfunctional and deprived early life by supplanting it with a romance of belonging to another family ideal. He was emotionally invested in proving one family had a "deep" and "pure" language. It became his work that "was largely concerned with a search for 'real Romanies' who spoke Romanus, and with identifying the 'mixed breed', or 'didicoi' as they were contemptuously known in English. The more isolated the Gypsy population the more 'pure' they were imagined to be."[7] Hence, we Woods and Roberts were to become his shadow family. Meanwhile for the sake of Victorian morality Sampson maintained a respectable career at Liverpool University and a traditional marriage.

In its psychological meaning, Sampson was split and lived a double life with many faces. His grandson, the author and journalist Anthony Sampson"[8] revealed the existence of his grandfather's illegitimate daughter, fathered with one of our own[9] and kept as a family secret from his wife. Searching his probate,[10] I discovered no mention of this child among his beneficiaries. Allowing for inflation, he had left over £300,000 ($510,000 CAD) to close family along with a cache of letters from John Roberts to Dora Yates[11] for publishing and selling in the thriving Gypsy business, a publishing model he was to successfully set up.

Still in the Welsh mountains, leaving behind Corwen and Dolgello, our *drom* takes us to Bala. We step inside the Plas Goch Inn to check out the lounge and bar. The Plas Goch has an imposing presence with its mock Tudor façade, standing taller than the stone storefronts on Bala High Street. It's here that my other Wood cousins, Howell and Manfri, Matthew Wood's sons, were for hire as "Gypsy fisherman" taking the Gentry for a day's fishing, using their "special powers" for catching the plentiful trout found in Lake Bala.

In 1894, the year John Roberts passed way, John Sampson while on a camping vacation in North Wales discovered Edward Wood in Bala in that same lounge in the Plas Goch Inn. A momentous event as Anthony Sampson recorded triumphantly because, "The Wood family transformed John Sampson's career."[12] Sampson arrived with more than just camping gear, he came with cultural baggage too; the history of the world seen through British eyes. It was a simple one – a straight line from cultures. Know this history and you begin to see his work as the struggle for domination, to possess the deep roots of civilization itself.[13] [14] The Ryes project of capturing my family's Welsh Kale dialect was how they envisioned their position in Romani scholarship and their place in history. The only literate amongst us was John Roberts, the rest could neither read nor write. The point was having all of it. The Ryes told our story for us. They were culture thieves.

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7 Michael Stewart, "Roma and Gypsy 'Ethnicity' As a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry", Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 42 (2013), 415–432. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092010-153348

8 Hermione Lee, "The Scholar Gypsy: The Quest for a Family Secret", in *The Independent,* 21 June 1997.

9 Though the official account is with one of his researchers, Gladys Imlach.

10 British Newspaper Archive – John Sampson's Probate and Will.

11 *Ibid.*

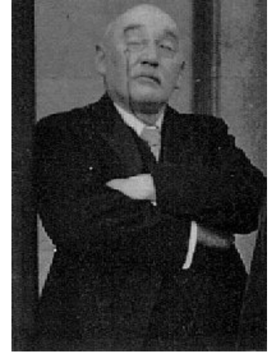
12 Anthony Sampson, "John Sampson and Romani Studies in Liverpool", 2004. According to Anthony Sampson's essay written in 2004, family remain supportive. Recently, I have been fact checking with these family members without success, due to Matthew Wood's granddaughters, having passed away in 1999 and 2000. Therefore, at the time of writing I cannot confirm this meeting nor their testimonial.

13 Angela Superior Saini, *The Return of Race Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

14 *Ibid.*

The Ryes, also called Lorists, used a racist classification to position Welsh Kale as a "pure" race. Descriptors they used such as "dark skinned", "black hair and eyes", and "black blood" point to the use of racist nomenclature. The power hierarchy had white people of European descent sitting at the top. They believed themselves to be "the natural winners, the inevitable heirs of great ancient civilizations".[15]

John Sampson considered himself a new scientist and true inheritor of Darwinism.[16] "The subtext of their narrative is that history is over." In Darwinist fashion, "the fittest have survived, and the victors have been decided."[17] The primary function of GLS and JGLS was to trap our story, draining it of our everyday authentic voices as if pinned like a "specimen inside a museum's glass cabinet". These ethnographers were entitled to recast us,[18] "giving themselves the right to document history their way, to define "scientific" facts about humankind"[19] – about Welsh Kale, about my family.



John Sampson (1862–1931), Liverpool University Librarian and President of the Gypsy Lore Society, Wikimedia Commons.

Against this intellectual stronghold fortressed inside a racially superior monolith, I tell my story.

In 1870 Edward Wood had lost his beloved wife, Mary Ann Roberts to a fluid disease that flooded her heart and liver. On her death certificate, it's noted that he was at her bedside when she passed away at the age of 30. Mary Ann had left Edward with a young child Winnie, age six. Mary Ann had been a brilliant harpist and singer, winning awards at the age of 12 at the Welsh National Eisteddfod. As husband and wife, they gave concerts in North Wales. With a young child, Mary Ann as a working mother was ahead of her time in Victorian Wales.

By the age of 15, Winnie and her father, Edward, performed together, he on the harp accompanying Winnie as she sang patriotic and Victorian parlour songs. A newspaper review of 1879 finds Edward Wood (41) and Winnie Wood (15) performing together at the Corwen Dramatic Society. "Edward played a Choice Selection of very masterful Welsh Melodies on his triple harp, Winnie Wood sang her most successful performance with the popular ballad, "Excelsior" a sentimental Victoria ballad of enduring marital love, which earned her "three encores and a standing ovation".[20]

By 1882, Edward had married Mary Ann's sister, Sarah after she turned 18 years of age. It was not as Sampson smuttily insinuated a "co-marriage" of Edward with two sisters.[21] The concerts had continued with the close

15 *Ibid.*

16 Anthony Sampson, "John Sampson and Romani Studies in Liverpool", 2004.

17 Angela Superior Saini, *The Return of Race Science*, 2019.

18 Arturo Escobar, "Limits of Reflexivity: Politics in Anthropology's Post-'Writing Culture' Era", *Journal of Anthropological Research* 49, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), 377–391.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Welsh Newspaper Archive, National Library of Wales.

21 John Sampson, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Vol. xii, 205.

family of musicians.[22] Edward's crowning achievement came in 1889 as harpist for a Royal performance at Palé Hall with Queen Victoria in attendance on her Royal Tour of North Wales. He was aged 51.

Reading of Edward's brilliant career as a Welsh triple harpist, in comparison, Sampson merely footnotes this concert along with one other that Edward gave to the H.R.H. Prince of Wales in 1899 in Ruthin at the home of Lady Cornwallis[23] with whom it was rumoured HRH was having an affair. This royal performance earned Edward the title of Telynor Meirion and John Roberts the title of Telynor Cymru – Royal Harpist of Wales. Sampson used the harp as a prop to leverage whatever influence and favours he could get to assuage his ambitions. A useful expedience. "Gypsy-lore was a 'discipline' that had never got beyond the use of peoples of the modern world as props with which to stage the nation's past."[24]

By 1886, Winnie had married David Charles Davies, her policeman (not a Welsh Draper as noted in JGLS).[25] She continued singing and performing and was like her mother Mary Ann, a working mother. Clearly, ours is a supportive family that nurtures gifts and talents. We respect Edward as a loving, good father and grandfather. Though happy in Wales, Winnie had married out. However, her first son, Edward, my great uncle, married a first cousin, Lucy, daughter of Madoc Roberts, brother of Mary Ann.

But what of Sampson's opus? By 1890, census records note that Oliver Lee, the first collaborator of Sampson's had by now left Wales for more lucrative work available in Liverpool.[26] He would have to find another collaborator. Meanwhile the Gypsy Lore Society was formed in 1888 with Charles Leland as president. The stage was set for the fulfillment of Sampson's ambitions.

What the JGLS fails to mention is the dramatic change in Edward's circumstances. By this time, Edward was down on his luck and had taken to alcohol as the family story goes.[27] Recalled in 1933 by J. Glynn Davies their meeting in 1892 at the Red Lion Inn.[28] In what makes painful reading, Davies describes Edward as having "a large jug of ale … which he emptied on his forehead." He falls asleep "half snoozing, with his head on the sounding board", nevertheless "his fingers very much awake." In his state, did Davies even bother to get Edward's consent before publishing?

On the 1891 and 1901 Census records Edward's occupation is listed as "Tinsmith". Edward worked like many Romani, mending pots and pans for Gadji (non-Rom) folk. Edward would likely have been seen in local villages with a grinding barrow. More often than not, villagers welcomed the Romani tinsmith.

22 There's the 1881 concert at the Assembly Rooms in Ruthin by the Cambrian Minstrels consisting of Wood/Roberts family members. In 1885, the Roberts' Family Concert was reported as "Mr. John Roberts and his celebrated family of Welsh harpists, assisted by Miss Winnie Wood, of Llangollen."

23 Gd Glynn Davies, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, n.d.

24 Michael Herzfeld. *Ours Once More; Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), cited in Michael Stewart, "Roma and Gypsy 'Ethnicity' As a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry", 2013.

25 *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* Series 3, Vols. 13 and 14 (1934–35).

26 The birth of Lily Lee, daughter of Oliver Lee and Julie Lee (Boswell) in Liverpool.

27 Martin Thomas (Lord Gresford) Speech "Teulu Abram Wood" at the International Harp Festival, Caernarfon, Wales 2015. Archive, National Library of Wales.

28 G. Glynn Davies, "Edward Wood", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* Series 3, Vols. 13 and 14 (1934–35) .

It was during Edward's most depressed life phase in 1894 that at age 56 he met John Sampson in Bala. That depression gene has been passed down the family. My grandmother, Gwen, Edward's granddaughter suffered from depression her entire life. On meeting a first cousin in 2015, I experienced the same familiar depression. Aware of this inherited mental illness, he confided in me that he has passed the depression onto his son. Other Wood family members, including my father, report mental health issues with borderline personality disorder. Some say it's due to endogamy – the intermarriage of cousins. Indeed, Edward Wood married his cousin Mary Ann Wood.

"One of the old saws of the folklorists had been to stress the superstitious beliefs of the 'pure' Romanus speakers in notions of pollution and ritual cleanliness," writes Michael Steward. Yet a glaring contradiction is the omission by Sampson of the cultural context of the cleanliness code and taboo. Searching the dictionary, I can only locate the word, *mokadi,* defined as "stained, unclean" referencing utensils and women's menses. However, the word *marimee* (pronounced marry-me) – the entire cultural context for *mokadi* in the practice of *marimee* is missing. Bob Dawson, the Romani author and educator has identified the word as very old and only spoken by a few.[29] Which leads me to believe that both Edward and Matthew chose carefully what information they conveyed to Sampson, the outsider, the Gadji. At times, his dictionary reads like a tourist phrase book. Other words appear to be inventions, such as the word for the harp as *Baro Basimengro*, which translates as "big stringed instrument". John Roberts in adapting to Wales, preferred the Welsh words, *Telyn* for harp *Telynor* for harpist. It is clear that Edward and Matthew knew that certain things were to be kept secret and never shared. Judith Okely, an anthropologist, is correct in identifying our secrets as our "personal and political autonomy".[30]

Therefore, claims by Sampson as the gatekeeper and guardian of the "pure" Romanus of Abram Wood and his descendants are exaggerated and founded on stereotypes.[31] And we didn't remain a "pure" tribe. There are at least 20 marriages recorded to Gadji in the family tree.

How do I know this when so few Welsh Romani words were handed down? My grandmother, Gwen, sprinkled Romanus and Welsh into her everyday speech. No doubt learned from her mother Winnie Wood. As a documentary filmmaker, I am interested in finding hidden stories to tell. I had discovered a speaker of Welsh Romanus in New Zealand on social media. Bob Lovell Kamulo's father, Adolphus, was born on an *atchitan* – stopping place called the Upper Race near Pontypool, Wales in 1924. He was raised in the traditional Welsh Gypsy culture, living in and travelling by *vardo* between Wales, south to the West country, east to the Midlands, and north to Lancashire and Cumbria. His father had taught him our *chib* – our language in New Zealand where it has survived.

Noticing that the Lovells are a mere footnote in Sampson writings, I asked Bob what his family thought of John Sampson. Why were the Lovell's excluded? Not one to hold back in his email his says, "Sampson's

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29 "Marimee is not found amongst English Romanichal," according to Bob Dawson. "The first time he heard or read me using Marimee he said that word is very Old Romanus, he had only ever heard it a long-time ago being spoken by few Rom." Bob Lovell, personal communication with author.

30 Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), cited in cited in Michael Stewart, "Roma and Gypsy 'Ethnicity' As a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry", 2013.

31 Colin Colin, "'Severity Has Often Enraged but Never Subdued a Gypsy': The History and Making of European Romani Stereotypes", in *Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter Images of 'Gypsies'/Romanies in European Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt, 226–46 (Liverpool University Press, 2004).

writings say things like, the Lovell's are the 'blackest and the most cunning', using the common garden variety of racism and not in its "pure" Gypsy differentiating meaning. Bob goes on, "Then in another bit I saw that he was complaining that he couldn't find speakers of the Welsh *chib* language, commenting that he'd have to talk to a Lovell woman he knew on the English boarder who had some *chib*. But in the end, it was a disappointment as it wasn't full on." Meaning that the Lovell *chib* wasn't "pure" enough.

Another good reason for avoiding the Lovells is that Sampson, was "seen off", Bob writes. "He also was extremely afraid of my great great Aunt Marjory Lovell. It was said she could give a person the 'eye' and they would sicken and die. She did not like any of the Ryes [so] they kept clear of her. My great granddad Surrenda Lovell also disliked the Ryes."

Arriving in Swansea, we end our *drom*. I meet my cousin Allison through Bob Lovell. He and I are third cousins, she is his second cousin and so Allison and I are cousins, too. Bob had been asked by his father, Adolphus, to find his eldest lost sister, Aunt Rhoda Lovell/Lee. They were taken from their bender tent in Brookers Field by "the social". In the 1990s Bob had travelled from New Zealand to Wales and tracked Allison down. When he told Allison about what had happened to her grandmother, it was the first time she'd heard the story.

We'd enjoyed a meal of marshland lamb. When the men retired Allison and I told our stories about our Romani *puri dye* – our grandmothers. Allison, a lawyer and social worker went first. "She was taken, snatched," said Allison. "Right out of the atchitan where they were stopping." "What year was this?" I asked. "1940," replied Allison. "She was a baby and she never saw her parents again." I looked over the table directly into her eyes and saw the grief behind them. "Not only that," she added. "My two languages – Welsh and Romani are persecuted. If Bob hadn't found me and told me the story, I would never have known. What about your grandmother?"

"Mine," I tell Allison. "Gwen had a #Metoo experience, targeted by a bigamist." I have no doubt it was due to the orientalism and exotic image of the seductive Roma promoted by GLS associates like the poet Arthur Symons who possibly emboldened the man when he wrote:

> *You dance, and I know the desire of all flesh, and the pain*
> *Of all longing of body for body; you beckon, repel,*
> *Entreat, and entice, and bewilder, and build up the spell.*[32]

Why did Edward collaborate with John Sampson? We'll never know. However, in my role as an elder of our Wood/Roberts family – Teulu Abram Wood – my position is clear. I do not condone nor am I complicit in preserving the GLS legacy, or as Bob says, the *baro hokni* – big lie of a "Pure" Romani. It has harmed our relationships and left a legacy of division and hostility among our extended families – Welsh Kale and Romanichal – the Lovells, Boswells, Stanleys, Lees and others with whom we intermarried. They too spoke Welsh Kale *chib* language, and all spoke three languages: Welsh, Romanus, and English. But were ignored by the Ryes. To add insult to injury, those "elderly [JGLS] editors gave up the ghost without having found a younger generation to replace them."[33]

Furthermore, the politicizing of the "didicoi" as "bastards" or "hybrids", categorizing them as distinct from the "Pure" Gypsy was used by local authorities as policy to rationalize the separation of

32 Arthur Symons (1865–1945), "To a Gitana Dancing".

33 Michael Stewart, "Roma and Gypsy 'Ethnicity' As a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry", 2013.

families and force them into housing right up to the 1970s.[34] This injustice or scientific racism has been well articulated by Dr Thomas Acton, to whom I am truly grateful. Allison has a personal story of this injustice. She now works in Wales with the Welsh government to mitigate these injustices and is seeking financial reparation for her family's pain and suffering. While, as a film maker and writer I am the heir to my grandmother's feisty strengths in my writing and creating documentaries on human and women's rights. Together we are dealing with intergenerational trauma and the collateral damage the GLS has done to our families.

What of the future? How do we preserve what's left of our Welsh Gypsy heritage, its culture and language? In 2019, I established a heritage fund in the name of my fourth father, John Roberts – The John Roberts Heritage Fund to keep alive what is left of our language and music. Bob Lovell and I formed a partnership to record him speaking our *chib*, offering it via website to those interested in learning everyday Romanus as it is spoken, not written. We have 22 episodes – a living legacy of what was once proclaimed a "dead" language by the Ryes.[35] It is offered free of charge to this and future generations.

As for the legacy of the triple harp. Schools in Wales are now teaching children how to play the Gypsy harp music of my family. Robin Huw Bowen is our advocate, having learned our music as it was handed down seven generations to Eldra Jarman, another cousin. Robin performs worldwide, telling the story of the Wood/Roberts family of Gypsy harpists. Plans are set for an annual scholarship awarded to a young triple harp player through the heritage fund.

If the existence of "Pure" Gypsy, speaking "Deep" Romanus is in dispute, one question remains: who is John Sampson really protecting? While we have never leveraged any of his Gypsy business models for profit, gain, or fame, we know who did. The answer is clear, John Sampson was protecting himself, his legacy and his self-serving narcissism. Surely, our own voices and legacy have earned us a rightful place in the wider collective as we commit to standing together in our ethnicity, diversity, and authenticity with all Roma.

At this time when prejudice against young Roma/Gypsies is on the rise, new voices in art, music, dance, activism, and literature are rising. Fortunately, in this twenty-first century the way forward lies in keeping alive the story of lost heritage and what is left of our ancient Romani/Gypsy ethnicity, identity, belonging, safety, language, and culture. It's where contemporary cultural movements take us if we successfully rewrite the outmoded and inaccurate narratives which have done us little justice. Although there are many questions that require thinking about on the intersection between disciplines, languages, and marginalizing, to name a few, I do think it possible to work together, avoiding silos or the politics of organized vocal divisiveness. Over time, that Romani literature canon will expand and deepen the general publics' outmoded perception of we Romani people.

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34 Thomas Acton, "Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, No. 7 (2016), 1187–1204.

35 Manfri Wood has recorded Romanus on *Harps & Hornpipes: Traditions of The Welsh Romany Gipsy* in 1975. Folktracks label. British Library collection. See also: E. Ernest Roberts, *Harp Fiddle and Folktale* (Aberystwyth: The Welsh Book Centre, 1981); Jarman and Jarman, *Welsh Gypsies: Children of Abram Wood*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991).

Roots

Katelan V. Foisy

katelanfoisy@gmail.com

Katelan Foisy is a multidisciplinary artist. She has created backdrops for The Smashing Pumpkins as well as William Patrick Corgan's *Ogilala* tour, and most recently interior design for Madame Zuzu's Teahouse. She is the illustrator for both *The Hoodoo Tarot* and *Sibyls Oraculum* with Tayannah Lee McQuillar. Her writing can be found on *Motherboard/VICE*, *Fenris Wolf*, and *Electric Literature* among others. She was called a "Female Jack Kerouac" by Taylor Mead.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 142–144 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.112

I trace the lines on maps, remembering the movements of my fingers down the stems of lemon balm in my grandmother's garden as a child. The scent fills my memory. I had accidentally uprooted them thinking they were weeds. Her hand passed over mine quickly placing them back into the dirt. Lemon balm will grow in almost any soil. It will thrive in both full sun and partial shade. It is resilient and strong. Her mother used it for medicine in Austria, her grandmother as well and so on. In the United States she planted herbs and flowers from her motherland to feel less lonely and here I was, one of the middle grandchildren, born on American soil digging them up.

Sometimes family histories are hidden, like the roots of lemon balm, chamomile, and other herbs we cherish for medicinal qualities. Sometimes they can be found within those medicines and recipes. I watched my grandmother go about day-to-day life. I'd pick up on certain little rituals like lighting a candle and going through each room of the house with a small prayer in a language I didn't understand, or how she separated the laundry or washed the dishes. There were folk remedies like red string and a key thrown over your left shoulder, a surefire way to rid yourself of menacing hiccups. A knife placed downward in a glass of water and drunk fast would do the same. I would later find the meaning of the herbal medicines she made. As an immigrant in a small New England town after the Second World War she was quick to hide anything that made us outsiders. She stopped speaking anything but English. My mother asked her to keep our language in the household as a child. Later I would beg her to teach me and she'd reply, "You live in America. We speak English here." Generations of the same reply made me wither like a flower dying of thirst. I would be angry at the United States for this, although I didn't quite understand the reasoning behind it. Our small town was not well versed in knowledge of Sinti or Roma or even Austrian heritage for that matter. Despite being a town of immigrants, the newest to arrive were always shunned, this was the way it was. No one ever tried to change it and it seems this was and is an ongoing story no matter where one may live.

As children we look to our parents and grandparents for guidance. We look to our families for a sense of belonging and ways to connect with our cultures. But what happens when we are removed from them? We didn't find out we were Sinti until my grandmother was passing away. She spoke it in a poetic manner, tiny things I picked up on were small parts of a culture hidden away. I was glad to know, but understanding this gave me an overwhelming sense of imposter syndrome, one I gather many children and grandchildren of immigrants trying to acclimate to life in a foreign country also feel. And so I turned to plants and food. In plant medicine I found connections to family. Brewing tea, with a tiny bit of jam, sliced oranges, and a drop of honey became a ritual on its own. Remembering my grandmother harvesting lemon balm for tea, making sure our bellies were digesting or to sprinkle on chicken for health. Fresh and dried chamomile soothed us when we were sick, along with small spoonfuls of honey. I took comfort in the bits of culture found in the home; edelweiss, a flower famed for being hard to reach as it grew on the sides of mountains, framed both on the wall and in pendants around our necks. It was said when someone gave you edelweiss it was a token of great love, as those who set out to pick it would risk their lives to do so. "Edel" means noble and "weiss" means white. The flower was also a symbol of purity and courage. The petals of edelweiss and leaves carved into the Black Forest cuckoo clock that chimed each hour alerting us with its mechanical sounds. Sometimes she would sing songs in German faintly while rocking my baby sister. I would try and listen closely to see if I could decipher the code that was another

dialect. By the clock where she sat in her rocking chair sat a "weather house." I was enamored with the "weather houses" with men and women dressed in traditional clothing telling us the temperature by the way one would emerge and the other would hide. The decorations contained cornflower and edelweiss paintings on the sides of the wooden cabin. Stencils of luludzje (flowers) trimmed the walls in the dining area and softened the goat horns on display. Sometimes snippets of languages would sneak through a bit of German and a bit of Chib. I always enjoyed those moments most.

Many of the family meals took place in the dining room. It was attached to the kitchen and when gatherings occurred you'd often find strudel, Linzer tarts, lemon breads, stollen, or spiced cookies. The memories I have of foods were often desserts and medicinal herbs. My grandmother was a nurse but she also knew the land. Elderflowers and peppermint could cure any stomach ailment; thyme not only helped with acne but also breathing issues caused by allergies or asthma. Dandelion and tomatoes helped with blood. Primrose, alder, and comfrey could be boiled up, cooled and pressed against swelling limbs and burns. Blackcurrant and lemon made into tea with a small spoonful of honey could cure a cold in a matter of a day or two. Folk belief that apples and lemons are good luck find their way into our apple strudels and lemon breads. Strong coffee (along with a little willow bark and water or rosemary) not only clears away a headache but also clears the mind. She kept these remedies and grew many of these herbs in her garden to keep her connected to the family she moved away from. She grew them for comfort and to ease the loneliness that comes from immigrating to a new land with its own set of wounds and culture.

In my youth I had no way of connecting with the language, only words and phrases I jotted down in small notebooks. As I grow older I look to the languages my family was not allowed to speak and recreate the recipes from not only my childhood memories but the lands that we traveled through and where we eventually settled. Spiced cookies with nutmeg for health but also to banish the evil eye, cinnamon for sweetness and luck, and perhaps a little acorn meal for love and family peace. Within our bloodlines are stories. They come in movements, how we prepare food, wash our clothes, or adorn ourselves. Regardless of whether we know our ancestors or not, our roots are strong like those of the lemon balm with the ruggedness of edelweiss. Our stories spread like chamomile, abundant and ever growing as we connect with others in both our bloodlines and outside of them. We connect through herbal recipes, food of our lands, and the deep connection to our art and stories. Our bodies are maps of those who came before us, their medicine is our medicine running deep within our veins. No matter where we are uprooted, no matter how much we are picked we will continue to grow, to resist, to be resilient and strong in the face of all that tries to oppress us. We are strong, rooted and grounded. Our networks are many and we will continue to claim each other. Some of us hang our *patrin* (leaves) and sweetgrass symbolically, continuing to notify the others that we have been here, to offer advice, heed warnings, and forever move through crossroads.

The Gypsabee Dilemma

Galina Trefil

maria.trefil@gmail.com

Galina Trefil's short stories and articles have appeared in *Neurology Now, Unbound Emagazine, The Guardian, Tikkun, Romea.CZ, Jewcy, Jewrotica, Telegram Magazine, Ink Drift Magazine, The Dissident Voice, and Open Road Review*. Her fiction has been accepted in over sixty anthologies. She plans to release a new edition of her novel, *The Incomplete Ones*, regarding Romani slavery soon.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 146–151 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.114

Martina scowled, crumbled the note in one of her fists, and then folded her defiant arms across her chest. All that she wanted was to come to work, to do her job, and to collect her much-needed paycheck. She didn't need this aggravation right now. She really didn't. Unfortunately, it didn't seem like there was any alternative. She was going to have to call Michael out – either that or just suck up this latest dose of nastiness and stupidity.

Michael had a friendly, boisterous way about him that nearly everyone else here at the restaurant liked. He always had a joke to tell; always a performance to enact. In fact, even without these notes of his, it was the way that he never seemed to stop performing that had initially made Martina dislike him. What was he really, underneath that funny guy veneer? Maybe just a harmless buffoon, like everyone else seemed to think. Martina couldn't be sure. And, put to it, she didn't really care either. She just wanted the notes to stop. So she stormed up to him during the employee lunch break behind the seaside restaurant and, in front of a few of their co-workers, cut him off in the middle of one of his attention-grabbing diatribes.

"Michael." The way that she said his name came out not as an inquiry or a greeting, but more as an unsuccessful attempt to appear civil. "We need to talk."

He blinked, as though surprised that she was speaking to him at all. For some time now, she'd made clear that she wasn't a fan of his. Finally, he smirked, looked back at their co-workers, raised his eyebrows a few times, and then departed from the picnic table where they were eating. "Yes?" He purred when they were distanced enough for the others not to hear them.

"You've got to knock this crap off," she declared flatly, shoving the piece of paper into his hand.

"I don't get it," he replied, looking it over. "You're pissed off about this?"

"Oh, yes."

"Geesh, it was just a joke."

"A joke? Michael, you stole something and – "

"And what? I didn't steal anything from you. Look, the owner here knows me. We're friends. I borrowed a little from the cash register, sure, but I paid it back too. Either way, Martina, how's that any of your business?"

"You messing with the cash register is one thing and, if you've got something worked out with the boss, yeah, that's between the two of you. But what you wrote here isn't that *you* stole money. It's written that money was stolen period. And you signed it 'the Gypsies.'" Her eyes narrowed bitterly. "The Gypsies, Michael? Really?"

He scratched his head. "I still don't get why you're upset."

"You don't get it?" She snapped. "Are you kidding me? I'm the only Romani employee here. Hell, I'm probably the only Romani person that a lot of the people that work here have ever knowingly met. Do you think that I need people giving me dirty looks, Michael? Do you think that, when I come to work, I want to have to deal with aspersions like this?"

"Oh, come on," he scoffed. "Everybody knows that I'm the one who wrote that note. I wouldn't frame you for stealing."

"No, but you're making a joke out of a stereotype that I have to live with every single day. I'm not a thief, Michael."

"I didn't say that you are."

"No, not me personally. No, you'd never call *me* that – just my people as a general whole."

"I can't believe you're so worked up about this."

"And I can't believe that I have to actually dumb this down for you. If it were any other minority group and you were putting this kind of racism about at work, you'd be fired. Friendship with the boss or no friendship with the boss, you'd lose your job because this is discrimination. And don't think that I don't know that you've been doing this for a long time just because I haven't said anything before now. It's not okay to leave little racially-charged messages lying on tables or on the bathroom walls, Michael. Hell, what's your thing about Romani people anyway? Why are you so fixated on us? What gives you the right to call yourself one of us?"

"Look, you say you're Roma, but how do I really know that?"

"What?"

"Well…." His eyes ran over her in an invasive, almost appraising fashion. "How would I really know? I mean, there's nothing about you that really indicates you're a Gypsy."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she flared, her fists clenching, "did I forget my crystal ball, bandana, and gold hoops at home today? How very thoughtless of me. I can see how that would cause you to become confused. Just taking me at my word that this *is* my ethnic background, which I would incidentally appreciate to not be demeaned for in my work place, that's clearly too much to ask."

"What I mean is, my girlfriend is a Gypsy. And you can tell she's a Gypsy. I mean, it's really obvious."

"Huh?" Well, that was certainly an unforeseen twist. What self-respecting Romani girl would date this bozo, Martina questioned? Either a masochist or one seeking to inflict some serious misery on her parents, no doubt.

"Yeah, my girlfriend's a Gypsy and she thinks my notes are funny. She doesn't think there's anything wrong with them. She also doesn't have any problem with me calling myself a Gypsy. Maybe you just need to lighten up."

Martina took a moment to force her stunned, gaping jaw to close. "Michael McKay. You're Irish, yeah?"

He shrugged. "Sure, my family's got some Irish, if coming over here from Ireland a hundred years ago counts anyway."

"Well, Mr. McKay, how would you feel if I came to work and started tossing raw potatoes in with your lunch and calling you a 'Paddy?'" He burst out laughing. "Oh, sure. You think it's funny now, but if you deal with it long enough, you'd start to sing a different tune. That's how it is for me. I have to deal with constant bullcrap about my background. Constant jokes and pranks and…." He only laughed harder. "Man, you're an empathy-lacking jackass!" She spat. "Just try to have some consideration for other people's feelings, will you? Try to treat people with the same respect that you're given."

Michael only continued his loud guffawing. He strolled away, leaving her near-shaking with rage and a feeling that she had accomplished absolutely nothing.

The next day, there was another note left out, roughly to the tune of the last one. From across the room, Martina and Michael's eyes met. His gaze was mirthful as he baited her. In turn, she envisioned yanking his tonsils out through his nose.

All too aware that not one of them had deigned to call Michael out, Martina didn't feel right about joining her co-workers during the lunch break. Instead, she sat in the restaurant parking lot in her car, munching on a sandwich while she thumbed through a book on gems and minerals. Doing so reminded her that she wasn't going to be a waitress forever. No, she had her intentions set on a gemology school. Just a few more months of saving up for her tuition and she was out of here. She'd get her degree and then be working in the diamond trade, far away from Michael's repugnant sense of humor….

"Hi!" Martina looked up from her book, startled by the sudden knock on the hood of the car. *Wow.* That was her first thought. Just… *wow.* Even before the girl introduced herself, Martina knew, just knew, that this had to be Michael's girlfriend. She wore a low-cut peasant blouse, multiple clunky necklaces, large golden bangles, and a bright, flowing skirt. "I'm Flower," she announced, putting her hand forward through the open driver's window as a gesture of friendliness. Flower, eh? Why, yes, Martina couldn't help but nod. Of course, she had a name like that. "Michael told me that you and he had a little spat yesterday."

"That's one way to put it."

"I thought that maybe we could have a talk about it."

Martina stiffened, reluctantly closing her book and setting her sandwich aside. "Why?"

"Well, you know that he's just having some harmless fun, don't you? He wouldn't ever do or say something offensive."

"Actually, no, I don't know that. I'd say I was pretty clear with him that what he's doing is blatantly racist. And he's made it clear that he has no intention to stop, which only makes it more obvious that, that's exactly what he is."

"Oh, no," Flower protested. "You've got him all wrong."

"Do I?"

"Michael has total respect for Gypsies."

"Sure," Martina snorted. "Sure, he does. That's why he calls us 'Gypsies,' and not 'Roma.' That's why he calls us thieves, because he respects us so much."

"He doesn't mean 'thief' the way you're taking it. He means it in a…more…carefree way."

"A carefree way?"

"You know, how we Gypsies just don't believe in possessiveness, the same way that other people do. Objects come and go and, ultimately, belong to a lot of different people. They're nothing to get your panties in a twist over."

"Uh huh…." Martina glowered. "And exactly what is your background then, Flower? Because, I've got to tell you, by that Halloween-type get-up you're wearing, I'm going to go out on a limb and say that you're not actually Romani at all."

"My soul is Romani," Flower remarked, a degree of defensiveness kicking at her zen.

"Your soul?"

"I have been a Gypsy for many lifetimes."

"I see."

"During my last life, I was even sent to Auschwitz," Flower sighed woefully. "I was a Gypsy King's daughter…. So, believe me, I wouldn't be dating a guy who doesn't respect the Gypsy people."

"So, I'm in the presence of reincarnated royalty," Martina fumed, cocking her head to one side. "Hip hip hurray."

"I'm not lying."

"Not to me, perhaps," shrugged Martina. "To yourself though? Oh, yes. Very much indeed. Look, Flower, my great-grandparents died in Auschwitz and I feel pretty damn certain that you weren't being gassed alongside them. I get that you probably think that Roma are free-spirited and magical or whatever, but you can kindly take your romantic notions and shove them. All girls like to play dress up when they're little. When you become a grown up, you should know when to put the costume back in the closet though."

"Oh my gosh, you are so rude!" Flower gasped.

"No, you're the one that's being rude by treating my heritage like it's some whimsical get-up that you can take on and off! You want to stand here, in front of someone whose family has been killed for being Roma, and spout out some twaddle that implies you'd have a damn thing to do with any of us if we were truly in the hotseat again? Give me a break!"

"I would!"

"Oh, really? Then if you're so dedicated to Romani culture and community, tell me about the school segregation our kids are facing in Eastern Europe. Tell me about the forced sterilizations Romani women have endured without compensation. Tell me about all of the other hate crimes and pogroms. No? You don't know about any of that stuff? Didn't think so.

"It's easy to say you're a reborn 'Gypsy' when you're surrounded by a bunch of dumbass hippies. It's a different thing entirely when that means belonging to a persecuted minority that's subjected to legitimate and intense violence. Go pull this crap in Eastern Europe. See what happens. Until then, get lost and take your sorry Esmeralda routine with you."

"Michael said you were a nasty person," Flower snapped. "I came here to try to show you that you were wrong about him. I was hoping that we might even all get to be friends."

Martina glared. "So, you'd have a real Romani girl as an accessary for this persona that you've created? Well, I guess that would've been novel, but I'm afraid that I'll leave you disappointed. Roma are people. We aren't props. We aren't caricatures."

"I didn't say that you were."

"You didn't have to," Martina scoffed. "Gypsabees never actually say what they're really thinking."

"Gypsabees?"

"Wannabe Gypsies. People like you," Martina clarified. "You all think that you have the right to define what we are with this… this... so-called 'Bohemian' crap. The real Romani experience is nothing like what any of you posers think it is and you damn sure couldn't handle what we actually have to live with, day in and day out. You'll never know how hard it is to deal with this kind of New Age stupidity and insensitivity."

Flower's eyes flicked downward to her costume, perhaps questioning its authenticity for the very first time, before she ultimately stormed away without another word.

Later that evening, as Martina lay studying in her bedroom, she was still scowling from the day's events. Gradually, she noticed that Michelle, her twelve-year-old sister, was poking her head through the nearby doorway. "Whatcha doing?" She purred.

"Homework."

"You aren't in school anymore."

"No, but I'm making sure that, when I am, I'll be one step ahead of everybody else. There's no point of getting a higher education if I'm not going to give it 100 percent. Either I do my best or I'll just stay waiting tables all my life, surrounded by jerks. No thank you!"

"Bad day?"

Martina raised a single eyebrow, then filled her in. Afterwards, Michelle frowned, plopping herself down on the bed beside her. "Why don't you just complain to your boss?"

"Honestly, I think I'm more likely to get punished than Michael if I make more of a to-do about this."

"Isn't that illegal or something? I mean, couldn't you sue? Claim it's a hostile work environment?"

Martina looked over at the middle-schooler, grinning for the first time in hours. "Where'd you hear a phrase like that?"

"Grandma likes me to watch daytime court shows with her." Michelle shrugged.

"Yeah, well, lawsuits happen a lot easier on TV than they do in real life. In real life, sadly, sometimes you just have to put up with this kind of crap."

"But… you can't just let them get away with this. It's racist and horrible."

"And, the older you get, the more racist, horrible people you'll meet. That's just how life works, kid. The one comfort that I have about the whole thing is that, I have zero doubt that, in ten years, I'm going to be sent around the world on gem-buying deals and those morons are still going to be washing dishes for minimum wage. Education, Michelle… more than anything else, it's the great equalizer. Those idiots want to demean us, make fun of us? Fine." Martina flipped the page of her book and returned to her reading. "They can choke on our dust when we reap the benefits of our labor."

"But it's not fair!"

Martina's gaze flicked up to her younger sibling's disappointed, bleak expression. She wanted to be a superhero for her. She wanted to wave a wand and make Michael and Flower and all the many like them reform their mean and thoughtless ways, so Michelle wouldn't find herself in similar circumstances when she entered the workforce. But that wasn't possible. And, really, there wasn't any use in sugarcoating reality. "If you don't like it," Martina finally told her, "then go do your own homework."

"What?"

"If you want to change the way things are, go be a lawyer. Go be a teacher. Go be a writer. All that starts with your homework."

Michelle lowered her eyes. "Work twice as hard as everybody else to get half the credit. That's what you mean, isn't it? Work harder… so that people have to pretend that they respect you?"

Martina was quiet for a moment. "What did great-grandpa and great-grandma do for a living?"

"They were photographers."

"Do you ever think of how hard that must have been? Just one generation back, our family were dirt-poor day-laborers in Czech Republic. The neighbors would as soon have spit on our family as tell them good day. But they worked hard and put together the only photography studio in the whole area. Imagine how much better their lives must have been. Maybe some people still couldn't get past the fact that they were Roma, but others… I bet that they just wanted to have their picture taken, by the only people who could take it. Great-grandpa and great-grandma fought to pull themselves up out of the muck, to put themselves in a position of power where they couldn't be stomped on anymore. We will too."

Michelle frowned. "But… our great-grandparents *were* still stomped on. Their studio was burned to the ground and they got killed in the Death Camp! In the end, all of their efforts didn't mean squat. What's the point of working so hard if, no matter what you do or where in the world you go, at the end of the day, you're going to be nothing but a worthless Gypsy?"

"You don't know what you're going to be. No one does."

"Tell that to the creeps at work."

"Hey!" Martina snapped. "People like that think that they get to define what Roma are. But they're wrong!" Martina held her book up in the air; then patted its cover. "This is who I am; what I am training myself to be. You hear? That's my choice and they can't take it from me.

"Every time that Roma get higher education, people like Michael and Flower fade more and more into the background. Give our people long enough and we'll make them go extinct."

"You really think so?"

"Yes," Martina nodded. "When you get down to it, what choice do we really have?"

Flamenco Lesson in Sacromonte
Affirmations of a Romani Woman

Diana Norma Szokolyai

DianaNorma@post.harvard.edu

Executive Artistic Director, Cambridge Writers' Workshop

Diana Norma Szokolyai is a first-generation American writer of Hungarian Romani heritage. Her books include two collections of poetry, *Parallel Sparrows* and *Roses in the Snow*, as well as an edited volume, *CREDO: An Anthology of Manifestos & Sourcebook for Creative Writing*. Her poetry has been anthologized in *Other Countries: Contemporary Poets Rewiring History*. An earlier version of the following poem was originally published in German as "Flamenco-Stunde in Sacromonte" in a critically-acclaimed anthology *Die Morgendämmerung der Worte Moderner Poesie- Atlas der Roma und Sinti*. She is co-founder of Chagall Performance Art Collaborative and the Cambridge Writers' Workshop.

Vol. 3. No. 2. 2020, 152–155 • DOI: 10.29098/crs.v3i2.111

Flamenco Lesson in Sacromonte

I arrive, a half-blood Gypsy
at the singing hills of Granada,
the white caves of Sacromonte.

I've come to this famed flamenco school
with my body feeling for its Romani roots,
my arms reaching for the heavens of my ancestors.

Just beginning to understand,
I am not entirely graceful.
I want each strike of my feet

to dance on the oppressors of my people.
My teacher says, "Hold in your stomach,
pull, like a needle and thread

from your navel to the ground
from your navel to the stars.
You have to stand tall,

Elbows out,
chin out, proud,
like a photo."

"Claro," I say, seeking clarity still,
"Are you a Gitana?"
Her eyes brighten at the question about Romani roots.

"No se, but I think so."
She shows me a picture of her grandfather
"¡Mira!" she exclaims,

Side by side, we look at the photograph.
"Es un Gitano, although my abuela says 'no.'
¡¿Es un Gitano, no?!"

She smiles and points,
standing tall
Proud.

I smile back and nod. Affirming her,
I too am affirmed –
this Spaniard, who seeks *duende*,

who lifts her eyes up,
gaze sparking with everything
that makes flamenco whirl.

The Romani spirit flies in front of me
like a swarm of honeybees.
Their honey is what my arms gather from the air

my lesson in Sacromonte,
a gift that will stay with me
for years.

Affirmations of a Romani Woman

I am the seventh sister. In Sanskrit, there are at least seven names for the sun. There are one hundred eight actually, but the seventh is most magical. My people come from India, and my tongue is woven of Sanskrit sounds, ornamented by the languages of those many lands my ancestors crossed. Being the seventh born, I possess the magic that number thundered into me. If you hurt one of my loved ones, beware, for I have put protections on all of them.

Mashkar le gadjende leski shib si le Romeski zor.	*Surrounded by the Gadje, the Rom's only defense is his tongue.*

I am the Moon, and the only Gypsy in this solar system. I've called my earthly children to sing to me. Their voices trill with the vibrations of stardust. Their melodies carry with them my tears, which Mother Earth has collected into chalices called oceans. Though I can be full of wonder, many nights I am slivered with melancholy, and for a time each month, I must disappear.

O ushalin zhala sar o kam mangela.	*The shadow moves as the sun commands.*

I am violet-blooded. I remember my late aunt's voice clearly, repeating again and again while laughing with a celebratory glass of wine in her hand: "Yes, your blood *is* purple!" A strange and beautiful phrase to loop. Her words were gifts and flowed through me like Bull's Blood, *Egri Bikavér*. In Hungary, it is said that Gypsies are dark-skinned because their blood is purple. My aunt made this into an affirmation, proudly crying: "Cigány vagy!" *You are a Gypsy*. "Azért vagy olyan szép és okos!" *That's why you're so beautiful and smart!*

"Shhh!" my Romani grandmother hushed her. "Quiet down, or the neighbors will hear."

Te avel angla tute, kodo khabe tai kado pimo tai menge pe sastimaste.	*May this food be before you, and in your memory, and may it profit us in good health and in good spirit.*

I am collage and mosaic, not a fashion campaign. *Bohemian, Gypsy-chic, Boho-Chic*. White models posing "wild" and "free-spirited," as if you could bottle the Romani soul. Gadjé designers attempt to distill Romani mojo into perfume, sew it into threads, and infuse it into beverages (*yes*, there is a "Gypsy" brand tea!). *Romanipen* cannot be stolen! You cannot take a horse's hair and glue it to your head and say that you have a mane.

Te khalion tai te shingerdjon che gada, hai tu te trais sastimasa tai voyasa.	*May your clothes rip and wear out, but may you live on in good health and in fulfillment.*

I am not to be pitied. In my early twenties, as an international student, I came back to Paris after spending Easter in Budapest with my Romani grandmother and aunt. I approached my Hungarian friend in the hallway of the American student house at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. She was studying international law and spoke several languages. And yet, when I told her "I am of Romani heritage," her response was to put a hand on my shoulder and say, "That's okay, my dear." "*That's okay,*" she said. Such deeply rooted bias echoed in my ears for a long time. It's more than *okay*, I thought, it's *wonderful.*

Te aves yertime mander tai te yertil tut o Del. *I forgive you and may God forgive you as I do.*

I am strong, like my grandmother, whom we called iron-boned. I am, like all Roma, resourceful. My great-grandmother holds a cure made from the blood of a hedgehog. My brother collects dandelion roots that commune with the roots of a thousand other weeds. Mother Earth gives us the keys to open her doors to nourishment and healing.

Nashti zhas vorta po drom o bango. *You cannot walk straight when the road is bent.*

I am the Black Train. *Fekete Vonat.* These trains transported migrant and seasonal workers hundreds of miles through Hungary, away from their families, to the only work they could find each week. Since the faces on the train were mainly of Romani people, faces darker in hue than the dominant population, the trains were nicknamed "The Black Trains." There is a popular song called "Fekete Vonat" I once saw people dancing to, in a conga line at an outdoor concert one summer evening in a Hungarian town square. "Fekete Vonat" is also the name of a harrowing 1970 documentary by Pál Schiffer about the lifestyle of these Romani families in a society offering few opportunities to them. How strange it is to think of the melancholy faces of those migrant workers crouched in the trains juxtaposed with the gleeful faces of those dancing in that conga line, likely unaware, in their merriment, of the reference.

Prohasar man opre pirende – sa muro djiben semas opre chengende. *Bury me standing – I've been on my knees all my life.*

I am not anything you want to categorize me as when you hear the word "Gypsy." I am not your fortune teller, but I feel fortunate to tell you this:

I am a Romani woman.
I am a woman.
I am a person.
I am as I am.

Kai zhal o vurdon vurma mekela. *Where the wagon goes a trail is left.*

Critical Romani Studies

Volume 3 ▪ Number 2 ▪ 2020

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