The Romani People: From Enslaved People to Citizens

Nicolae Gheorghe

Sociologist

Nicolae Gheorghe was a foundational figure of modern Romani activism and a leading intellectual in the field of Roma rights. A sociologist by training, he founded Romani CRISS and shaped key national and European Romani mobilisations and policies. He advanced critical frameworks on ethnicity, citizenship, and minority rights, and played a central role in building pan-European Romani networks and engaging institutions such as the United Nations, Council of Europe or Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – where he served as Senior Advisor.

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Abstract

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An essay on the beginnings of civic discourse regarding Romani people in Romanian Principalities and on the significance of abolishing Romani enslavement in the international context of the "European integration" of Romanian Principalities in the mid-nineteenth century.

Keywords

- Abolition
- Citizenship
- Reforms
- Revolution
- Slavery

1. The Institution of Slavery of Romani People

In December 1855 and February 1856, the administrative authorities of Moldavia and Wallachia, commonly called the Romanian Principalities, proclaimed the total abolition of Romani slavery in these countries. The historical significance of these events is not limited to Romani people living in Romania but also to Romani speakers of the so-called "Vlah" dialect of Romanian residing in Central and Western Europe, as well as in the Americas, whose ancestors emigrated from the territory of present-day Romania after the abolition of slavery. That is why, for example, in March 1982, the International Romani Centre in Paris, or now, in February 2006, the Romani associations of France have and will organise celebrations to mark the emancipation of Roma from enslavement.

The abolition of Romani enslavement was long and challenging. One of the first moments of this struggle was marked by the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia (*Ţara Românească*). Among the reforms initiated by the revolution was a proclamation on the liberation of Roma owned by private individuals, the boyars (*boier*): so-called "*ţigani boiereşti*" (boyar-owned Gypsies, boyar Gypsies). When the revolution in Wallachia failed, emancipated Roma returned to their former masters. Nonetheless, their courageous fight to defend their freedom from slavery influenced later political events: in the end, slavery was abolished, and Roma were given full rights as citizens. The massive participation of Roma in the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia was one of their most notable political manifestations in European countries. Any commemoration of the European revolutions of 1848 must also remember the mass uprising of Romani people against their subordinate status during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia.

All of these commemorations are a call for today's Roma to draw public attention to the events of Romani enslavement and their history in general. We must see this as part of our duty to "collect for ourselves" fragments of our history from all the larger and smaller communities of a Romani nation scattered around the world.

This essay is an attempt to address the controversial and still unexplored issue of the origins and causes of Romani enslavement in the Romanian Principalities.

I must begin by clarifying that in this text, the term "Romanian State" refers to a political entity formed by the union of historical and geographical provinces that, for a very long time, had been autonomous political entities, namely Wallachia (Ţara Românească), historical Moldavia, including Bessarabia and Bucovina, Transylvania, and Dobrogea.

The presence of Roma was registered early in all of these provinces: in 1385 in Wallachia, in 1402 in Moldavia, and in 1417 in Transylvania. However, Roma had different statuses and destinies as political and economic circumstances differed in these regions. In Transylvania, Roma were "free people" from a legal point of view. But Romani people who came to Wallachia and Moldavia fell into a form of economic and legal dependence that gradually hardened into a socio-legal institution of slavery that only ended in the mid-nineteenth century. What was the cause of slavery in these regions?

A Summary of the Migration of Roma Who Were Enslaved by the Romanian Principalities

The mere juxtaposition of the words "slavery" and "Roma" may seem paradoxical, if not impossible, given that slavery denotes the worst form of dependency between two people and the binding of someone to a given place. Romani people and their way of life are perceived as powerful symbols of nomadic life and freedom, and also as symbols of a people who are bound only by freely accepted rules and who follow the customs of their community. One peculiar historical characteristic of Romani communities settled within the borders of the Romanian Principalities is their experience of more than three hundred years of *slavery*, a legal and social condition equivalent to modern forms of *slavery* in other parts of the world.

The enslavement of Roma within the Romanian Principalities was a unique experience in the overall history of Romani people. Although Roma held low social positions in many other countries, only the Romanian Principalities assigned them collectively and hereditarily to a caste-like social category called slavery. Legally, this status was interpreted as a particular form of personal dependence on an owner who was formally vested with full rights (apart from the right to kill them without being punished) over the persons, families, and property of their Romani slaves or "*țigani*" (Gypsies).

If this type of slavery was unique to the history of Romani people, we need to explore the origins of this institution: why did the Romani people fall into slavery, and why did this happen only in the Romanian Principalities?

The answers can be found in the concrete historical circumstances of Romani migration to Romanian territories as well as in the cultural, economic, and political characteristics of these territories and their subsequent development. Nevertheless, different authors have approached these issues in many ways based on the information available on the history of Roma and according to their ideological attitudes and positions towards Romani people and their culture.

Some theories argue that the Romanian Principalities, especially Moldavia, were "gateways" for Roma to enter Europe, as Roma allegedly arrived on the heels of Tatar armies that invaded Eastern Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is believed that Tatars already had enslaved the ancestors of Roma. Once defeated, Tatar leaders may have left their slaves/bondmen on the battlefield, especially on Moldavian territory, which was closer to Tatar camps in the Crimea. Following this thread, it is assumed that enslaved Roma were transferred from their former masters to their new ones, landowners or *boyars*, who were therefore "authorised" to enslave Roma, as they were considered "spoils of war".

Various variants of this theory are common to Romanian historiography as an explanation of certain historical realities, such as:

- the early presence of Romani people on Romanian territory, which began at the end of the thirteenth century,

- their large number in these lands,
- their supposed slave/bondman status in the earliest recorded accounts about them, and
- the fact that in Moldavia, both Roma and "tătari" (Tatars) are mentioned as "bondmen" in some historical documents.

A few historians have added new arguments to the above theory, arguing that Roma always have been slaves. According to this theory, even in medieval Indian languages, Roma were referred to as members of lower castes and *pariahs* and, therefore, not respected by their contemporaries. Therefore, "Roma were born into slavery", and their status as bondmen/slaves in Romanian society was to their "benefit", as they were accepted as such by their masters and others and had a recognised economic and social value. Such an argument is not only historically incorrect but also racially and ethnically biased because it attempts to explain the practical institution of Romani enslavement in feudal Romanian society as the result of a timeless, ahistorical social inferiority. The explanation of a historical and cultural fact within particular circumstances is made through a presumed inability of Roma to be free, an "innate" and inherited inability of the Romani population.

Recent research on the origins of Roma and their migration from India helps us to critically evaluate and reject such arguments based on prejudice and preconceptions. There are strong arguments that identify Roma as descendants of *all* Indian castes and sub-castes from the time of their historical migration to Central Asia and then to Europe, including merchant and warrior caste populations of India in the ninth and tenth centuries. These facts also shed new light on the controversial issue of Romani servitude in the Romanian Principalities.

In my opinion, the ancestors of Roma were free people. They were part of a complex and socially sophisticated organisation and a culture whose legitimate presence lies in the richness and unity of Romani language and the diversity of their customs, combined with a strong sense of belonging to the same people, despite the time and space that now separate Romani communities scattered throughout the world. It also is consistently argued that the ancestors of Roma emigrated from their Indian homeland precisely to avoid their humiliating status as "prisoners of war and slaves" after Mahmud Ghaznavi's repeated invasions of northern India. It is now accepted that most Romani migration followed a route through Central Asia to Byzantium and then to the Balkan territories. From there, they fanned out in successive waves, starting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to eastern, central, and western Europe in search of economic opportunities and better administrative treatment.

The Romanian Principalities were among the first areas where groups of migrating Roma settled. Therefore, they have been present and recorded on Romanian territory since the twelfth century, as presumed. As the first wave of Roma crossing the Danube to the Romanian Principalities continued, their numbers in the region increased significantly. Another wave later followed this initial spontaneous migration: during numerous wars in territories south of the Danube, Romanian princes or *voivods* often captured large numbers of Roma from the Balkans and brought them to the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. According to one document, 11,000 to 12,000 people were taken forcibly from Bulgaria to Wallachia without baggage or animals, and they looked like "Egyptians": it is assumed that these people were Roma.

Another document records that Moldavian prince Stephen the Great, after emerging victorious from a war with his neighbours in Wallachia (1471), transported more than 17,000 Roma or "ţigani" (Gypsies) to Moldavia to use their labour. These figures may be exaggerated, but they show the high economic value associated with "Gypsies".

Thus, while it is possible that some Roma in Moldavia arrived as a result of a Crimean branch of Romani migration, possibly following trade routes opened up by Tatar armies, historical evidence suggests that the vast majority of Roma migrated to Romanian territories from regions south of the Danube, as did other groups of Roma who migrated to central and western Europe. Like their relatives who travelled to various European countries, Roma, who arrived in the Romanian Principalities in the second half of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, were free people and remained free for a long time before being enslaved. One piece of evidence supporting this claim is the fact that there was a small but constant number of free Roma throughout the medieval history of the Romanian Principalities, reminding both their enslaved counterparts and today's impartial experts of the original free status of Roma who became enslaved much later. Assuming that Roma came to Europe following the Tatars (whose slaves they already would have been), one wonders why they were not slaves/bondmen in the other Eastern and Central European countries, which were also invaded by Tatars and also had the habit of treating "prisoners of war" as slaves. However, if Roma came to the Romanian Principalities as free people, why did they become slaves? Why are "ţiganii" (Gypsies) recorded as slaves in the first documents mentioning their presence in the Romanian Principalities?

Romani Enslavement – Integral to the Romanian Principalities in the Medieval Period

In my opinion, the root cause of the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities neither lies in the dangers of their migration to Romanian territories nor lies in their "inferior" ethnic characteristics, as mentioned and argued in theories based on prejudice.

On the contrary, the dependent and later enslaved status of Roma in these lands is linked to the power structure and class formation processes in medieval Romanian society, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to present the whole process in its entirety. As a general theoretical framework, I can mention the theory of social historians (mainly Henri H. Stahl) who studied the controversies surrounding landless peasants and those "fallen" into serfdom at the beginning of modernity in the Romanian Principalities. According to this theory, "landed" peasants originally lived as free men with collective ownership (*devălmășie*) of the land of their villages. Growing fiscal exploitation by a group of *boyars*, collectively represented by a local prince, gradually led to them being "tied to the land" as serfs, being dispossessed of their land, and placed in an increasing economic and legal dependence on the owner, who thus became rich through abuse.

Over time, local voivodes, especially in Wallachia, gave particular landlords and monasteries the right to collect tax from villages. The boyars and the monasteries fought to gradually transform

this right into a right over land and, later, over people who were initially free. As a result, a class of landless and dependent peasants emerged in the Romanian Principalities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This local process was part of a wider movement throughout Eastern Europe where peasantry underwent what has been called a "second serfdom", culminating in the severe exploitation of peasant labour through a system of forced labour and later drudgery, both of which were a form of semi-slavery (economist and sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein called this type of exploitation "coerced cash-crop labour").

Land rights were not only the basic condition of social and legal freedom but also the basis of "citizenship" as the source and guarantee of rights in relation to the political entities that existed at the time. In the Romanian Principalities, being "*pământean*" (landed) or "native" meant owning a piece of land. The newcomers to Romanian territories, so-called "*venetici*" (foreigners or aliens), were denied access to the right to own land so that, like "aliens", they became legally dependent on a local prince, a relationship that materialised in the payment of special taxes to him. These taxes paid by aliens corresponded to the collective tribute paid by villages as an expression of their "landed" status. The voivode was considered the rightful owner of the entire territory of the Romanian Principalities. Similarly, the same prince was considered the nominal "owner" of the aliens settled in his country, who were then treated as part of the prince's "property".

Without diving into a complete social history of the Romanian Principalities, it must be added that the exploitation of the peasantry and the specific forms that the "second serfdom" took in these countries were much harsher than in other regions of Eastern Europe. These facts were related to the unique social organisation of the Romanian Principalities and their external dependence on the Ottoman Empire and, later (in the first half of the nineteenth century), on the "protector" Tsarist Empire.

All these general characteristics of the Romanian Principalities had specific consequences for the social circumstances and administrative treatment of Romani immigrants in Romanian territories. We can now see that Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities was part of the general class structure of Romanian feudal society. Their status as bondmen was added to that of Romanian serfs, and together they formed the lowest stratum of a feudal social hierarchy. There were differences between the serfdom of Romanian peasantry and the servitude or "țigania" (Gypsydom) of Roma. Still, essentially both social categories were part of the same system of a "second serfdom". The intensity of their exploitation and their administrative treatment were similar to the extent that certain Romani groups (who were formally, legally, and fiscally bondmen) had better working and living conditions than certain groups of Romanian serfs and were somewhat "freer" in terms of a possibility for residential mobility.

During the campaign for the abolition of Romani servitude in the mid-nineteenth century, a famous Romanian poet and publicist evoked "[...] the feeling of brotherhood that moved the descendants of the Indian Shudras and those of the Roman Emperor Trajan's colonists: they supported each other, and together they bore the hardships of this land, and together they carried on their shoulders the burden of boyar feudalism". But if Romani slavery was only a variant of the generalised servitude relations in the Romanian Principalities, why were *only* Roma in the position of bondmen, and why

was being a "Gypsy" equivalent to the legal status of a bondman? What role did their ethnicity play in their enslavement?

A 'Scenario' of the Fall of Roma into Slavery in the Romanian Principalities

The subjugation of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was not an isolated, formal event on record as a "historical document". Instead, it was a process that ran parallel to the transformation of Romanian peasants, the "landed" ones, from free men to serfs tied to the land. Considering the above details about Romani migration to Europe and the social structure in medieval Romania, we can now "reconstruct" the main directions of the process of Romani servitude in the Romanian Principalities.

Driven by westward migration from the Balkans to regions north of the Danube and Central Europe, groups of Romani migrants arrived in the territories of Wallachia and later Moldavia and Transylvania. They were attracted by flourishing thirteenth- to sixteenth-century economies of the political entities that were emerging in the territories of present-day Romania. During this period, strong trade linked these areas with the Mediterranean (to the west) and the Near and Far East. Nomadic Romani groups enjoyed good conditions for practicing crafts such as metalworking, woodworking, and so on, or for trading in livestock (as the first records about Roma in Moldavia show). These economic opportunities explain why many Roma preferred to limit their nomadism to Romanian territories and why other spontaneous migrations to these territories continued between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In addition to such good economic conditions, Romani migrants were treated well from an administrative point of view, as their skills were needed, and the laws were favourable during this early period of Romanian feudalism. Like all other aliens settling on Romanian soil, Romani migrants had to pay an annual tribute (taxes) to local princes and accept the protection offered by the princes and boyars, mainly a military class at that time. As a result, nomadic Romani groups became fiscally dependent on the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, who represented the public authority of the time. But this was a limited form of dependence in return for a clear set of taxes: money, gold, labour, and goods. Romani groups had a considerable degree of freedom per the customs and norms (customary law) of the time. They were free to keep their trades and to move around the country to practice them. They also maintained their customs and traditions, their community life, and their leaders. This worked as a loose "contract" between Romanian princes and Romani leaders, a mutually beneficial agreement. This situation is historically documented by the treatment of so-called "*țigani domnești*" (craftsmen and commercial dealers); Roma, who were the property of the prince and later (in the eighteenth century) of the state, were the most numerous and kept their rights and privileges until the mid-nineteenth century, when the legal institution of servitude was abolished. Roma belonging to these groups remained nomads until after the Second World War, when they settled under the pressure of administrative measures initiated by the postwar Romanian state. To this day, they preserve the customs and rules of social organisation that are very different from those of the majority, reminding us of the specific way of life of the Romani groups from past centuries that arrived on Romanian territory.

Their customs, and in particular the Romani language they speak, are similar to those of Romani groups settled in other countries where slavery did not exist as an extreme form of dependency.

The situation referred to as "slavery" in the case of groups of Roma belonging to a prince was, I repeat, represented only by an administrative and fiscal dependency; it involved little (if any) of the humiliating personal dependency evoked and documented as "slavery".

Moreover, the daily life of Roma was in some respects better than that of Romanian peasants living in the same area because the latter were tied to the land and heavily exploited. At the same time, nomadic Roma were free to move around the country and were well paid for their crafts. It was Roma who belonged to two other categories of landowners – boyars and monasteries – who really lived in "slavery".

As I have already mentioned, it was a rule and custom in these countries for the voivode to bequeath goods, land, and livestock, among others, to Orthodox monasteries and nobles and to exercise his right to collect taxes from villages of free peasants (who later also fell into "serfdom" and were tied to the land). As part of the prince's property (because they were aliens in the Romanian Principalities), Romani families and groups (referred to as "*șatre*" and "*sălașe*" in documents of the era) also were given to monasteries and nobility as slaves to provide labour and craftsmanship needed in the agricultural economy. Thus, the first records about Roma in the Romanian Principalities appear in such deeds, the legal content and purpose of which underlined the subordinate and dependent position of Romani groups. But in the case of Roma (as in the case of villages donated with all their peasants), what the princes gave to the monasteries and landlords was not the right to ownership (in the modern sense of the word) of the people but the right of monasteries or landlords to collect taxes (in labour, money, and produce), which Roma were obliged to pay to the voivodeship. What was transferred from the voivode to private owners was **the relationship of dependence**, which was limited and included elements of freedom as well as certain rights.

In my opinion, the earliest records about Roma in the Romanian Principalities tell us that in the fourteenth century Roma were in a position of dependence (seemingly "normal" in the social organisation of that period) but not necessarily in a position of "slavery" (in the sense of modern slavery), as some of the theories mentioned in the first chapter of this essay claim.

Things changed considerably in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when nobility (boyars) and monasteries attempted to convert their rights over donated goods and privileges into personal property rights. This process took place when the technological development of domestic agriculture was low, and the demand for labour constantly was threatened by demographic fluctuations due to numerous wars waged by the Romanian Principalities and the individual attempts of local peasants to escape from various landowners. In this context, Romani groups offered the emerging feudal landlords the prospect of a steady, cheap, and skilled labour force. Romani people were numerous, and they were among the few skilled in metalworking and woodworking in villages and feudal domains.

The monasteries and boyars obtained from the voivode the right to transform the right to collect taxes from Roma, which guaranteed their freedom, into the right to restrict their freedom through these

taxes. Monasteries and landlords paid the taxes for Roma who settled on their estates. In return, they demanded increasingly more work and services from them. Over time, an initially limited and contractual dependence on feudal landlords was transformed into an unlimited and hereditary dependence; they also managed to subordinate some of the initially free peasant "*devălmaş*" villages (with collective ownership) in a similar way. As Roma were given to these owners along with property, including land, animals, and so forth, Romani individuals began to be seen as economic assets and legally treated as "objects" rather than persons. Since Roma were considered the "personal property" of boyars, the latter felt entitled to use them to the point of abuse, to exercise almost total control over their persons and property, apart from a formal right to kill them with impunity (although such cases were recorded). Mostly treated as objects, Roma were bought, sold, and passed on as inheritance and dowry. In some cases, the owners exchanged Roma for other goods, such as horses and cattle, houses and gardens, household tools, and so on. As the power and rights of the owners over their Romani servants increased, their situation worsened, almost reaching the status and treatment of what we now call servitude, that is, slavery, as a legal concept and as a social institution.

The process of enslaving Roma began in the sixteenth century and reached its peak in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time, the terms "*rob*" (slave) and "*ţigan*" (Gypsy) became synonymous, and they were used to refer to Roma and their subordinate social status. This was the period when the Romanian Principalities entered the European capitalist grain and cattle markets, a period when large landowners were concerned with providing a large labour force necessary for an agricultural sector that was no longer geared to subsistence but to incipient forms of modern market economy. During this period, indigenous peasants who were in relationships of "*şerbie*" (serfdom) experienced a deterioration in their status, becoming increasingly dependent on the landowners, to the point of being treated as "slaves" in some cases. Villages of dependent Romanian peasants also were subject to exchange, purchase, and sale. Peasants were collectively or jointly bound to **the land of their "estate"** (that is, their inheritance, handed down genealogically), and it was therefore impossible for an owner to separate peasants and their families from the land they worked. In contrast, Romani groups (individuals and families) were tied to the **person** who owned the property. This is another fact that explains why the bondage that Romani groups were subjected to was much more severe and gradually came very close to slavery.

However, different categories or occupational groups of Roma were affected by this process of gradual enslavement to varying degrees. For example, "*ţigani domneşti*", that is, Roma listed in the tax register of princes, were much freer than the "*ţiganii mănăstireşti*" (monastery Gypsies) or the "*ţiganii boiereşti*" (boyar Gypsies). The "monastery Gypsies" were also treated worse and exploited more than the "*boyar Gypsies*" because the monasteries had fewer local peasants to work their fields. Among the "*boyar Gypsies*" who worked in agriculture, the so-called "*ţiganii de câmp*" (field Gypsies) had a more challenging life than the "*ţiganii de curte*" (court Gypsies or Gypsies of the ruler), those Roma who carried out various tasks related to the households and daily lives of landlords. The latter category included a large number of craftsmen, who generally were treated more favourably. Many Roma lived in urban areas and, therefore, had easier access to urban resources than those living in rural areas. Many Romani groups were forced to settle, although most of them retained their nomadic lifestyle, especially "*ţiganii domneşti*" (Gypsies of the prince). All these differences significantly impacted the

social and cultural dynamics of different Romani groups. What is unusual about the history of Roma in the Romanian Principalities is that, despite such harsh living conditions, they managed to preserve, reproduce, and enrich their cultural heritage and distinct identity. As a result, many Roma in Romania today, descendants of former bondmen, have distinct cultural customs, community lives, and a strong sense of Romani identity. Of course, there are differences between groups regarding distinct cultural practices and the degree to which they identify as Roma, and some differences may be attributed to their ancestors' experiences as Roma.

Let us pause to summarise some of the conclusions of the arguments presented so far. Contrary to particular theories about the origins of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities, I believe that Romani groups arrived early in the history of the Romanian Principalities through spontaneous migration as itinerant craftsmen and traders. When they arrived in these lands, they were free people, and they kept their status as free people, or a status of limited dependence, for almost two centuries. Their "fall into slavery" was a gradual process of slow transformation of an initially limited fiscal dependence of Roma on Romanian princes into unlimited personal dependence on large landowners, monasteries, and boyars. Formally speaking, the whole process of enslaving the Roma was **abuse** on the part of landowners, without any legal basis or authorisation; a repeated practice, a constantly reinforced abuse, which slowly became a "*de facto*" situation, a kind of "custom of the land". Much later, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, this custom was "written" and transcribed in the "*Codul Robiei*" (Code of Slavery), represented in legal codes issued by Phanariot rulers, in particular Mavrocordatos, Caradja, Callimachi, and partially reproduced in the Organic Regulations (*Regulamentele organice*), the interpretation of which depended on the owners' interests.

The causes of the enslavement of Roma lie in their position as an alien, "venetic" group entering an agrarian society based on the right of free ownership of land, exercised by the "*pământeni*" (landed or landowners), the economic basis of what later became "citizenship" in the modern Romanian state. Mediated access to land ownership through the (actual or fictitious) genealogical community of the collective village ("*satul devălmaş*") prevented Roma, like other aliens, from owning their own land, a condition for freedom and the right to full "citizenship" and civil rights in both incipient or mature forms of statehood of the Romanian Principalities.

These facts, specific to the social organisation of the Romanian territories, were combined with resources generated by the specific skills and occupations of Roma – metalworking, woodworking, gold panning, physical labour – resources that were highly valuable in a society with an underdeveloped agriculture sector. A solution to preserving Romani people's skills and labour, increasingly needed as Romania's agrarian economy moved towards a market economy, was to keep Roma in personal dependencies that gradually developed into servitude. In Romanian society of the Middle Ages, a social division of labour interfered with an ethnic division of labour, status, and privileges. In such a society, the cultural and ethnic characteristics of Roma became the sources of their economic role and, later, of their socio-legal status of subordination. Their derogatory ethnic name *ţigan* – borrowed from the areas south of the Danube in the form of "aţ*ngani" – acquired the social meaning of slave, a subordinate category lower in the social hierarchy. Something similar

was true of the local serfs, whose ethnic name "*rumân*" in Wallachia referred to dependent, landless peasants, while the landowning class, belonging to the same ethnic group, identified with a foreign political elite, Turks, or their cosmopolitan officials, Greeks. Later, "*rumân*" was transformed into the ethnic-national appellative "român" (Romanian), with its derivatives.

Following the flow of the above arguments, it is easier to understand that the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was a rather exceptional phenomenon, considering the history of Roma in other countries, but it was more or less "normal" given the cultural, economic, and political circumstances of the Romanian Principalities, where various forms of personal and social dependence based on existing social categories were the rule. Moreover, the political dependence of the Romanian Principalities on the Ottoman Empire, and later the Empire of Tsarist Russia, explains, among other things, the maintenance of feudal social structures in these countries – including the enslavement of Roma – until the mid-nineteenth century.

Apart from these particular and unique circumstances, the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities seems to be only one chapter in a long history of suffering and discrimination against Romani people throughout their history in modern Europe. Romani groups in other European countries were not bought and sold like their relatives in the Romanian Principalities but were subjected to ethnic prejudice and discrimination, harassment, expulsion, cruel punishment, and even collective extermination. The "pillars" of medieval Europe – the Catholic Church, guilds, and feudal aristocracy – feared and despised Roma and pursued a permanent policy of isolation and marginalisation in various countries. The "enlightenment" programs for the forced "civilisation" of Roma, conceived and implemented by the likes of Maria Theresa or Joseph II, by Charles V or Catherine the Great, had the same effects as forced sedentarisation with the enslavement of massive groups of Roma in the Romanian Principalities.

As we have pointed out, while Roma were enslaved because their skills and labour were needed in the economically and technologically underdeveloped Romanian Principalities, other Romani groups were marginalised and stigmatised as "vagabonds", "nomads", and "parasites" in Western European countries precisely because their skills and labour were not required in the more technologically advanced and already capitalist-oriented Western societies and economies.

In a broader comparative context, however, the institution of slavery was not unique to the Romanian Principalities. Slavery flourished in the late Byzantine Empire until the end of the thirteenth century. The Ottomans had a thriving slave trade until the end of the nineteenth century. A similar slave trade on the Black Sea and Mediterranean was carried out by Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish cities with slaves from Eastern Europe, preserving a living European "tradition" that later exploded in the form of the transoceanic trade of African slaves to the Americas. Moreover, Russia's peasantry faced a situation similar to slavery until about 1865.

Given all these facts, it is not surprising that Romani migrants became subordinates in the Romanian Principalities, which inherited many of the institutions of Byzantine and neighbouring countries. Far from "inheriting" the bondage of their past Indian history, Romani migrants in Eastern Europe,

between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, fell into a pattern of "pure" European extraction, of labour recruitment through forced enslavement (let us not forget that there were also forms of voluntary enslavement, by contract, as Adalbert Gebora shows in his work "Robia in Transilvania"), and through cultural discrimination, pre-existing institutions such as social practices and legal institutions, in relation to the economic migration of Roma.

The enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and their subordinate status in other Eastern European countries were only variants of a generalised system of "forced cash labour" and "second serfdom" specific to these and other regions of the world that were incorporated as "peripheral" economies and societies into the expanding "capitalist world system" (Immanuel Wallerstein).

Seen as such, Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities appears as another chapter in a lengthy history of oppression and enslavement, from a "classical" era to a "modern slavery" as practiced in the Americas and West Indies. The emancipation of Roma from slavery in the nineteenth century is also seen as part of a broader international movement for the abolition of slavery. This movement changed the lives and history of millions of people worldwide and paved the way for their future struggles for ethnic affirmation and civil rights.

Such comparative analyses are beneficial in order to discover and expose the similarities between the history of Roma and other peoples in a world that has also changed from various statuses of personal dependence embedded in hierarchies specific to a feudal world or to American capitalism – including different forms of servitude/slavery – to the status of citizenship and equal access to rights specific to the modern world, in particular to today's world (at least in the sphere of ideology).

Today's Romanian Roma have developed a particular kind of social mobility while retaining their distinctive cultural elements and ethnic consciousness. A lesson learned from their enslaved ancestors was one of constant resistance to any form of abuse, discrimination, or subordination. Descendants of former slaves have now joined the international Romani movement to affirm their own culture, Romani language, and equal access to civil rights in a world that continues to reproduce elements of social subordination and cultural discrimination inherited from multiple local social histories based on group dependencies and hierarchies.

2. 'Abolitionist' Ideas of the 1848 Generation

The enslavement of Roma, which lasted for almost five centuries as a legal and social relationship, deeply penetrated the feudal social order of the two principalities, their economic relations and their administrative and legal structures, daily life, and the mentality of slave owners, Roma themselves (as "ţigani"), and other social categories.

Closely linked to more general problems of feudal society and the privileges of the owners of land, serfs, and "ţigani" (Gypsies), the slavery of Roma was hard to eradicate all at once. For this reason, the abolition of servitude took on the character of an arduous political process consisting of a series of events and

actions directly or indirectly related to slavery. This process unfolded gradually, sinuously, over more than three decades, in line with the political turmoil, social contradictions, and general changes to Romanian society in the Romanian Principalities during this period.

In February 1856, General Divan of Wallachia passed a law declaring that "slavery is abolished" throughout the Principality, after a similar law in Moldavia in December 1855 proclaimed in its preamble that: "Slavery is abolished forever in the Principality of Moldavia, all who tread Moldavian soil are free men."

This sanctioned the legal conclusion of a lengthy process, the critical moments of which include:

- Legal regulation of slavery through late eighteenth-century legislation and the Caragea (1817) and Calimah (1818) Codes;
- Liberation of private bondmen by some liberal landlords: Costache Conachi in Moldavia in 1826[1]; Ion Câmpineanu in Wallachia in 1834; Emanoil Bălăceanu in Wallachia, within the framework of the "Scăieni Phalanstery", organised between 1835–1836 and inspired by Theodor Diamand;
- Measures taken in Wallachia between 1833 and 1840 by the sovereign and the state administration based on provisions of the Organic Ordinance for the "colonisation" of state slaves on boyar estates as agricultural labourers and their liberation in Wallachia in 1847;
- Creation of budgetary funds in both Principalities for "redemption" and released by the State of private slaves ("boyar's Gypsies") when they were sold;
- Abolition of the institution of boyar (private owner) slaves in Wallachia during the revolution of 1848, which was reintroduced after the removal of the provisional revolutionary government by the intervention of a foreign army;
- Liberation of privately owned slaves, with compensation to their owners, by the laws of 1855 and 1856 in Moldavia and Wallachia.

Every moment of this challenging process of emancipation made it easier to define the political program of the generation that carried out the revolution of 1848, the unification of the two principalities, and the achievement of Romanian independence in 1877/78. The abolition of Romani slavery thus became part of a vast program to transform society, democratise its institutions, and modernise the mentalities and public spirit of the two principalities.

The clash of interests and the public debates surrounding the abolition of slavery provided the "progressives" with a convenient opportunity, sometimes even a simple pretext, to address more complex contemporary problems of Romanian society and to promote ideas that could not otherwise pass the strict censorship of the press, which was then carefully monitored by the "sovereign" or "protector" powers of the principalities, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia. As one voice of the time said, the abolition of the institution of slavery "[...] means that another step is taken on the path of progress, which means that the step taken will be followed by a series of similar steps towards the improvement of the social condition of our country".

1 Costache Conachi, *Istoria României*, Bucharest, Vol II, p. 307.

The idea of Romani emancipation was both an outcome, a "beneficiary" of the broader social reform agenda, and a carrier of it, sometimes pre-empting deeper reforms because it more easily achieved the public consensus, otherwise so divided by group interests.

This is why the measures to abolish the institution of slavery, whether partial, as in 1844 and 1847, or complete, as in 1855–1856, were greeted with great enthusiasm by progressive members of the political class, "reformers", and protagonists of the "transition" of the political institutions of the time. For their part, rulers of the "regulatory period", unable to act to improve the situation of the peasants bound to the land, left to the discretion of landlords by the Organic Regulations, disputed the priority of initiating one or the other of these measures. The emancipation of slaves owned by clergy and state in 1844 was considered one of the most significant acts of the era. In 1847, the ruler Gheorghe Bibescu justified the vote for a similar measure as "the opportunity to acquire one of the greatest rights of humanity and the gratitude of posterity".

The day of 28 November 1855, when the ruler of Moldavia, Grigore Ghica initiated a draft law on the liberation of private slaves, was considered "[...] a day of celebration for the homeland [...] signifying the most beautiful page in the progress of the Romanian nation", and "a day of freedom springing from the beautiful sky of Moldavia". The abolition of slavery was "[...] a proud achievement of the contemporary history of the Romanian people, which can thus glimpse its great future because it is a proud and great step towards it", and "a triumph won by the weapons of civilisation over one of the enemies of society".

The law on the abolition of slavery in Wallachia stipulated that "[...] a day of public solemnity shall be determined, on which this act of the abolition of slavery in the Principality shall be celebrated forever".

Later, by a decision of the Administrative Council of Wallachia, this day was set to 20 February because on this day, in 1856, the ruler Barbu Știrbei had passed the law for the abolition of slavery, thus giving it a definitive form.

In 1855, Mihail Kogălniceanu described the act of abolishing slavery as "[...] conviction of the heart, of logic, the most vivid desire of my existence". Later, recalling the political achievements of his generation, Kogălniceanu considered the emancipation of the slaves as one of the "three great dates in the contemporary history of Romania", together with the emancipation of the peasants, the abolition of boyar privileges, and the proclamation of political and civil freedom for all children in Romania.

This complex significance of the emancipation of Romani slaves meant that every critical moment in the process was accompanied by a broad public discussion on more general measures to be taken to change attitudes towards emancipated Roma, for their civic integration, in their new condition as free people, as citizens with equal rights with other inhabitants, with "landed" people.

The public debate was more intense in Moldavia, where it took the form of a real "press campaign" in 1855, but it was also present in Wallachia and in some Transylvanian newspapers, such as *Telegraful* and *Gazeta de Transilvania*.

The public debate on the abolition of slavery led to an expression of attitudes and dissemination of historical and economic information that, when read today, reveal a coherent vision, a "*Romanian abolitionist thought*", as an integral part of Romanian social and political idea in the first half of the nineteenth century and an important but insufficiently analysed component of the ideology of the generation of 1848.

Without following any pre-established systematic plan – but benefiting from the cumulative effect of writings by influential personalities and systematic research by renowned historians such as Mihail Kogălniceanu or Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah – social and public thought, prompted by the abolition of slavery, examined a broad range of issues related to the historical origins of the legal institution of servitude, its place and relations with other social categories within the social division of labour, and the feudal system.

The analysis of this particular institution of Romanian social and political history was part of an overall political program generated by the engagement of progressive thinkers in debates about the reform of society in the Romanian Principalities, democratisation and modernisation of its institutions, and for the affirmation and acquisition of the political autonomy of the Romanian state.

In this text, we propose to identify and analyse some of the basic motifs (ideas) behind the "public discourse" on the abolition of Romani slavery, with the following aims:

a. to help complete the picture of how Romanian ideology evolved between 1840 and 1860;
b. to illustrate a way of thinking and a particular way of "talking" about Roma;
c. to place the "discourse" in a political context that was essential for the formation of the modern Romanian state: reform of social institutions and public affirmation of the liberation of the Romanian Principalities from the domination of two great political powers, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia, and by seeking the support of other great powers, like Western European states, the support of which was sought by the animators of a projected sovereign Romanian state.

3. Romania's Public Discourse on Abolition

The idea of abolishing slavery and freeing Gypsy slaves was affirmed, defended, and argued in a polemic against the mentality and opinions of the great slave owners (the ruler as representative of the state, the monasteries, the boyars), who tried to justify the maintenance of slavery or at least the postponement of its abolition.

In this polemic, which was part of the broader struggle to reform Romanian society, intellectuals and the progressive press of the mid-nineteenth century denounced the historical, temporary nature of the institution of slavery, which until then had been considered "natural" and ever-present, because it was believed that "Gypsies were born to be slaves".

In his 1837 work on Roma/Gypsies, Mihail Kogălniceanu was still concerned with exploring the history of Roma as a people to convince European public opinion of the need to abolish slavery. In the preface to his work, he mocks the Europeans who set up philanthropic societies to abolish slavery, forgetting that "[...] in the bosom of their own continent, in Europe, there are 400,000 Gypsies who are slaves", whose customs and social situation arouse a passing curiosity, without "anyone taking the trouble to civilise this people".

Although published abroad, Kogălniceanu's work did not go unnoticed by progressive scholars and politicians in the country. In his memoirs, Costache Negruzzi, then a deputy in the Moldavian General Assembly, notes the interest that reading Kogălniceanu's book arose in the situation of Gypsy slaves, to the point of writing a speech in favour of their liberation from slavery. Information on the history of Roma in the Principalities and the historical origin of their enslavement frequently appeared in the Moldavian press in the run-up to the vote on the law for the emancipation of the Gypsies; we will reproduce some of them in the following.

3.1 Views on the Origins of the Institution of Enslavement of Roma and their Construction as 'Țigani' (Gypsies) in the Social History of the Two Principalities

A commentary in the *Gazeta de Moldova* to the *Ofisul princiar* (prince's decree) of 28 November 1855, concerning the abolition of Gypsy slavery, mentions the Indian origin of Roma and their migration around the world.

Their social situation in Moldavia as slaves is compared to the legal serfdom of local peasants, and both legal institutions, servitude and serfdom, are denounced as abuses. In Moldavia, the Roma "[...] sought shelter, security, and hospitality [...] where for this benefit they gave [sacrificed] their serfdom", a custom that "[…] deviated from decency and the Gypsies, like the Helots of the Lacedaemonians, were treated here not as people but as things".

This social condition deprived them of "the right to individual liberty and deprived them of the benefits of the teachings of religion and morality, and diverted their natural talents and abilities to acts by which they became the scorn of humanity and a public burden, even to the detriment of the owners".

The Organic Regulations of the two Principalities – with their aristocratic outlook aimed at justifying the interests of landowning and slave-owning boyars – considered slaves to be "a burden and a curse for the other inhabitants of the land". According to the authors of the regulations, the cause of the "evils" committed by the enslaved Roma, the "*țigani*" (Gypsies), was to be found in the "way of life" of some of them, the nomads, in their "fickleness" and, above all, "[...] in the fact that the departure of the Gypsies from the dogmas of our holy religion is one of the causes of their savagery and godlessness". The property relations within which the bondage of the Gypsies was possible were unquestioned, and on the contrary, they were strengthened: the Regulations recorded the obligation of the "*țigani*" slaves to be "[...] at the service of their masters", the slaves being private property.

Contrary to paternalistic-conservative solutions advocated by the Organic Regulations for the "improvement" of the fate of the Gypsies enslaved by the state, the article (quoted above) in *Gazeta de Moldova*, a newspaper representing the views of the proponents of modernisation, sought the cause of the socially disordered behaviour of the bondmen in their legal status as people who were treated as "objects", as slaves, by abusive owners. The solutions of the Organic Regulations are criticised directly: "[...] The Organic Regulations governing the fate of the Gypsies and the emancipation of these from the state and the monasteries had introduced an anomaly in their rights so that the name 'ţigan' was still synonymous with 'slave'."

It argued for the need to abolish slavery and to free privately owned Romani slaves who were the most numerous and whose emancipation raised the general problem of feudal property relations and the privileges of the nobility.

Referring to the history of Roma and their enslavement in the Romanian Principalities, historian and publicist Theodor Codreanu, editor of the newspaper *Zimbrul*, notes in a published article on the "*oriental origin*" of Roma: "[...] a people who, on arriving in Europe, found nowhere a more hospitable asylum than in the Romanian countries", but who "suddenly found themselves under the yoke of slavery, under the yoke of boyar feudalism"; for this reason, they "suffered the most avaricious persecutions". Underlining the relationship between the enslavement of Roma as "*ţigani*" and feudal social organisation, Theodor Codreanu stated: "As long as the Gypsies were serfs [that is, slaves], so long did the Romanian feudalism last in the principalities." Similarly, other articles from the same period denounced the enslavement of Gypsies as an "abusive practice" and "a sign of centuries of violence and feudal tyranny".

3.2 The Value of the Work and Economic Contribution of Romani Slaves

Presentation of the historical origin of the enslavement of their Roma – as an "abuse" on the part of the boyars, as a "deviation" from the customs and "decency" of the Romanian people – was accompanied by an emphasis on the economic contribution of the work of Roma, of "ţigani" as slaves over time in the mid-nineteenth-century press.

Roma made a significant contribution to the social history and economy of the Romanian Principalities, with variations reflecting the overall profile and development of the Principalities' economies over time. Clarifying this economic contribution was the basic argument for demanding their emancipation by the actors of political modernisation. The right of Roma to be freed from slavery was justified by the tradition of their work, which had made them "related to the Moldo-Romanians". The argument over the disenfranchisement of the "*ţigani*" (Gypsies) was also valid for the abolition of Romania's dependent peasantry, a reform that *Gazeta oficială* could only allude to, criticising feudal property relations that made Romanian peasants bondmen just as slaves "[…] condemned to serfdom, which deprived them of the freedom to choose another master of their choice".

The economic value of Gypsy slaves as cheap labour began to decline as a result of changes in agricultural practice on boyar estates, intensive use of peasant-dependent labour, and the spread of industrial activity in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This new type of agricultural exploitation was more consolidated in Moldavia than in Wallachia, a situation that influenced, among other things, owners' attitudes towards the work of Gypsy slaves and the maintenance of slavery in general. In addition, Moldavian landowners were more receptive to the idea of the abolishment of private slavery and more generous when renouncing the compensation offered by the state in the law adopted on 10 December 1855.

In this overall economic and socio-cultural context, as the value of slave labour declined – also reflected in the decline in their price in those few slave transactions that still took place – it seemed to many, especially conservative landlords, that the economic usefulness of slave labour had always been diminishing, that Gypsy slaves were being "kept" with food and clothing at the expense of landlords, causing them more harm than good. Slavery was thus presented and defended as beneficial to the "*țigani*", and there was no shortage of opinions according to which slavery was preferable for Roma compared to the "freedom" of bondmen peasants.

Arguing with such views, proponents for economic and social modernisation of the Principalities emphasised the economic usefulness of the labour that slaves provided to their masters over the centuries; through their skills as craftsmen or agricultural labourers, Roma enslaved as "*țigani*" made a significant economic contribution alongside peasants made "*rumân*" or serfs, with variations reflecting the overall profile and development of the Principalities' economies over time.

Highlighting this economic contribution was the basic argument for demanding their emancipation by the political reformist class of the time.

A commentary in *Gazeta de Moldova* in 1855 stated that slaves had earned their right to liberation "[...] by carrying the yoke for four centuries", and George Sion, in his article "Cauza sclavilor" (The cause of the slaves), published in the same year i, urged owners to renounce the compensation offered by the state for the liberation of their slaves, because "[...] through a long slavery they have redeemed ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred times their price (if the soul of a human being can still be valued)!" Similarly, Nicolae Rucăreanu, who had been involved in the emancipation of slaves in Wallachia since 1844, asked somewhat rhetorically, on behalf of the owners, "[...] how will we ever be able to do without these significant benefits" brought by the work and taxes of the "*țigan*" slaves, and he proposed some economic measures to accompany the political act of emancipation, such as:

> [...] not only should the emancipated not abandon their crafts in iron, brass, bone, etc., but even more, the owner should urge his fellows to learn from them what they do not know, to increase and improve their tools, so that when we ourselves shall be freer, I mean when we shall have power, means and money enough (for what is our power? slavery; what is our powerlessness? submission), and shall bring industry into our country, these people will be better prepared and more ready to put their progress into practice.

Slave owners were fully aware of the economic value of Romani slaves. However, the contribution of their labour varied from one owner to another, depending not only on the number of slaves but also on the master's ability to exploit their labour. For many, especially for the great boyars, "*țigan*" slaves were part of their "label" (*etichetă*): their **number** was supposed to indicate their rank or, for example, the "dowry" they gave to their sons and daughters when they married. For other landowners, especially smaller ones, the cost of keeping slaves was more significant than the **benefit** of their cheap labour; when they gave up the compensation offered by the state, they gave up a small number of slaves but admitted, as one such small boyar said, that "all his wealth consists only of these slaves". Large landowners only agreed to "halve their wealth".

A certain Nicolae Băleanu from Dâmbovița County, however, managed to make better use of the labour of Romani slaves: in 1848, when the provisional revolutionary government of Wallachia had proclaimed the liberation of slaves, Băleanu resisted the departure of a considerable number of Roma whom he had employed to work in a cloth factory in this district. They had protested against the owner, who, according to the document, "[...] now demands them to work for a wage and in no way wants to receive compensation on the pretext that they are suffering from the mistreatment they suffered in bondage."

The liberation of Romani slaves by the Moldavian state in 1844 allowed Nicolae Istrati to write "Disertație în privința țiganilor" (A dissertation on the Gypsies), published in *Gazeta de Transilvania*. The author, who was well acquainted with relations between landowners and peasants, also proved to be an expert on the customs and occupations of various Romani peoples, arguing in favour of their qualities as agricultural workers or craftsmen. He criticised the opinion of those who "[..] think that, if they touched the establishment of Gypsies of the state, any attempt would be futile" because "Gypsies" are "unaccustomed to the work of the field, [...] fickle and without inclination to work. [...] But these opinions are very wrong." To support his argument, he analyses the specific situation of the two categories of "*țigani*" formerly owned by the State: spoon-makers (*lingurari*) and bear-trainers (*ursari*). In the case of the former (spoon-maker slaves, 2,925 families with 10,051 individuals), "[...] they have been domesticated [meaning sedentary] and settled in villages for ages, they are today no different from the serfs, and therefore the Commission [for the settlement of emancipated Gypsies] will have nothing to do for them; as for the monastery Gypsies, it will only have to give them places to grow food after they have settled down, as in the case of other inhabitants, and to abolish haggling with owners, which in some places is very burdensome and oppressive."

As for the bear-training (*ursar*) Roma, their nomadic way of life is not due to their stubbornness or their unwillingness to work in the fields, since according to Nicolae Istrati, they "[...] would have settled down more easily if the bitter state of the peasants today had not disgusted and frightened them; and on the other hand, if the representatives of the districts and other state officials, looking after their own interests [taxes paid by 'Gypsies of the state'] had not made them believe that the disenfranchisement was a mask and that they would remain the slaves of the private owners where they would settle." In the case of these Roma as well, Nicolae Istrati shows that "[...] there are some hard-working and industrious ones. Some have considerable wealth ('goods', 'possessions')". The author goes on to illustrate a specific case: besides working in the fields, "each of them has two or three other crafts, which is why they have been called craftsmen since the time when our Romanian ancestors had to deal

only with weapons in order to defend their dwellings against the invasion of the barbarian tribes and to preserve a homeland for their future descendants (as an inheritance)." In view of their qualities as agricultural workers and craftsmen, Nicolae Istrati suggests that the bear-leaders should be settled by "giving them, at a reasonable price, one of those many estates of the monasteries which are said to be consecrated, where they can all settle, paying in due time the amount of money that the estate will cost", since they are "able to pay such a sum of money". The author presents a detailed economic calculation of such an undertaking, left to the administration of the freed Gypsies, and shows how feasible it would be, were it not for "[...] the obstacle that some would pretend to encounter in the settlement of these Gypsies". Such obstacles were invented by "[...] those unsatisfied spirits discontented within themselves" who "were and are enemies of every reform and declared opponents of every step that is made in civilisation and culture because they were and are guided in all their movements by the system [by the new state, by the Organic Regulations that protect their interests] and not by principle." At this point in his dissertation, the author vehemently polemicised with those "rusty spirits" who had slandered the gesture of the young Moldavians who, led by Mihail Kogălniceanu, had praised the act of the ruler Mihail Sturdza and the General Assembly of Moldavia, which had adopted a law on the emancipation of monastery Gypsies and then of those of the state; those "*rusty spirits*" had accused the young modernisers of flattery and material interests. The article concludes with a clear delineation of group and class positions in the context of political struggles in which, as we have shown, the emancipation of Romani slaves was only one part of an extensive political program. To those who had criticised the young liberals, enthusiastic about the emancipation of monastery Gypsies, to the ones who, in the clear opinion of the article's author, belonged to "a privileged class who own land, animals, and people without any conditions", Nicolae Istrati addressed a blunt formulation of the divisions and conflicts that characterised the Romanian political class at that time: "[...] you are sons of another age, of another time, of another spirit as well as of another class".

Once again, the problem of emancipating and settling nomadic Roma was not seen by reformers as a problem of correcting the "way of life" of the "ţigani ", but as a problem of criticising and changing social relations, especially those of the large boyar estates.

I have presented and quoted Nicolae Istrati's "dissertation" at length because this text shows how a reforming public consciousness of the mid-nineteenth century was concerned with the problem of the emancipation of Roma from slavery, from "Gypsydom" and with what we would now call their "social integration", in accordance with general social relations specific to the period and based on a good knowledge of the customs and occupations of each group or "*neam*" (people) of Roma and the differences among them.

Moreover, the analysis of this text reveals the nature of the "public discourse" on the place of Roma in the economy and society of the period, and how various motifs and objectives, thoughts and actions of a political group that aimed to reform Romanian society according to a liberal program were interwoven. Nicolae Istrati's study deals directly with the specific issue of the emancipation of Roma ("*ţigani*") from slavery. Still, during its argumentation, the study raises several major social concerns and reveals the intellectual repertoire of advocates for the reform of economic and social institutions and, more generally, the public spirit. These concerns included:

- bonded peasants' difficult situation ("the poor state of the peasants");
- their burdensome labour debts to the state, the "dreadful *salahorie*" (day labour) of bonded peasantry (from which emancipated Roma were to be exempt in the first years of their settlement in the villages);
- status of monasteries "dedicated" to Mount Athos and the leasehold of their lands;
- abuse of state administration officials: district representatives, and state officials who advised nomadic Roma, recently released former "*țigani domnești*" (Gypsies belonging to the state), not to settle down (sedentarise) in order not to lose their income;
- conflict between youth and "*rusty souls*", the criticism of class privileges, and the militancy of the former for civilisation and culture;
- the glorification of the struggle of our forebears to defend the homeland, alongside the criticism of those contemporaries who not only failed to *"love their country as they should"* but also "endangered" and "sacrificed" it through their intrigues and servility toward dominant foreign powers – the "protectors" of the rights of great landowners and maintainers of the system of exploitation against dependent peasants and enslaved Roma.

Thus, the "*Disertația în privința țiganilor*" (Dissertation on the Gypsies) defined a whole political program, an attitude, a state of mind that gradually would change the existing feudal institutions and prepare for the birth of the modern Romanian state.

Nicolae Istrati's and his generation's discourse argued polemically and convincingly for a place that Roma emancipated from slavery were to have in a new society, free in their work and in their person, alongside serf peasants from whom, at least for some Roma, they no longer had any cultural differences. The integration of Romani slaves, "*țigani*" into Romania's economy and society, and their contribution to its development, was the basis for the acquisition of political freedom for their "landed" status (the term used at the time, "împământenire", denoted the status of "citizenship") and of "brotherhood" with the Romanian people, in whose name the provisional government of 1848 proclaimed: "The times of slavery are over and the *ypsies of today are our brothers."

3.3 Vectors of Social Reform: Ending Gypsy ('Tigan') Slavery and Abolition of Peasant Serfdom

The serfdom of Romanian peasants and the enslavement of Roma as "*țigani*" were components of economic, legal, and spiritual relations created by the great feudal property owners represented by rulers, nobility (boyars), and monasteries of the Orthodox Church. Each measure to reform one of these components of feudal property paved the way for the reform of the others within a general context of changes imposed by the emergence and consolidation of modern relations of production based on individual bourgeois property and the integration of the economy of the Principalities into a European capitalist market.

The abolition of "*rumânie*" and "*vecinie*" (serfdom) in the mid-eighteenth century also marked the beginning of the gradual abolition of slavery, an idea emphasised by Mihail Kogălniceanu, who sought

to situate the act of emancipating "*țigani*" slaves within the political struggle for social reform and modernisation of the Romanian state.

In January 1844, the newspaper *Propasirea*, edited by Mihail Kogălniceanu, paid homage to the act of liberating the slaves of the clergy and the state with a special issue printed on green paper, the colour of hope, proposing 6 April 1849 as the date marking the complete abolition of slavery, on the centenary of liberation from serfdom ("*abolirea robiei*", the abolition of slavery, in the author's words) of the peasants or "serfs" of Moldavia, in 1749.

The historian Theodor Codrescu described the same "historical series" as a moment of breaking the chains of "ugly slavery in the whole of Moldavia".
On the other hand, the emancipation of Gypsies in the mid-nineteenth century was described by Alecu Russo in an article published in *Steaua Dunării*, also led by Kogălniceanu, as "an emancipation that will lead us to emancipations from other bad habits of ours that have other names". These "other names" were bluntly defined in an editorial or *hronica*, published in *România Literară* a few days after Russo's article: "[...] today, [B]lack slavery falls and is abolished tomorrow, white slavery should fall and be abolished [...], for how else can we begin to be a society" founded on "principles of justice and humanity", as the paragraph immediately preceding the article states.

The challenge to the great boyar estates was so direct that this prophecy, skilfully inserted into an article praising a wise measure of the government of the time, did not escape the attention of censors, which led to suppression of the publication of Alecsandri's magazine,[2] *România Literară,* and proposal for a genuine political program for achieving national unity in a modern state.

3.4 Towards Full Social Citizenship: Equal Work Opportunities for Roma Freed from Slavery

The completion of the individual freedom of Roma, emancipated from slavery, with a radical reform of the property regime was part of the "Gordian knot" that had to be cut. In Kogălniceanu's words: feudal property did not make it possible "to establish free arms and free property in Romania",[3] the economic and political goal of the Romanian bourgeoisie – in full affirmation, an ideal from the perspective of which "[...] the interest of the owner and of a wise state economy is to increase the number of free workers, but not the number of beggars and slaves", as an article in *Zimbrul*, entitled "Chestia robilor" (The question of slaves), points out.[4] The article's author also was concerned with the adoption of public education measures to train the emancipated as disciplined workers, fit for a new type of capitalist economy, who would understand "[...] that through work their skill and material improvement will increase".

2 See: C. Zane: *Nicolae Bălcescu*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1979.

3 *Gazeta de Moldavia*, XXVII, 1855, p. 384.

4 Idem.

The abolition of slavery not only created the opportunity for the education of free and work-oriented workers but also for the education of a new bourgeois economic rationality or mentality in the former owners. Alecu Russo, in the article quoted above, tried to convince them that slaves, as an economic asset, represented a "capital that is difficult to convert", whereas "[...] converting slavery into money (through compensation to be paid by the State) is a more sensible use than slavery". The payment of compensation was to be made through a system of public credit, the beginning of a modern financial system that would thus prepare "[...] the means for all the great improvements that await us".[5]

4. The Abolition of Romani Slavery

4.1 Roma and the Collective Imaginary of Nineteenth-century Romania: Projects of Social Organisation in Light of Roma Emancipation

A concern to reform Romania's economy and society on a new basis is also present in the Memorandum (*Memoriu*) addressed by Theodor Diamand to the Moldavian government in 1841, which at that time was concerned with the implementation of the provisions of the Organic Regulations on the settlement of nomadic "ţigani", former slaves of the state. In this reform, which in Moldavia, unlike in Wallachia, began later and without many results, Theodor Diamand found the pretext to formulate one of his most consistent social utopias, inspired by the theories of Charles Fourier, regarding the organisation of Romanian society on a "societal" basis.

Diamand proposed organising Gypsies, along with "*many other poor families*", into *"agricultural-industrial colonies"* organised on principles similar to the "Scăieni Phalanstery" that had failed in Wallachia in the 1830s. The economic advantages and administrative details were now better argued and explained to convince the authorities and gain their cooperation in a project that had the stated aim of "improving the moral and material condition of the Gypsies" and the "morale of the lower classes" in general. These "colonies", which were to start modestly (in the form of what we would now call "social assistance" and "social integration of the marginalised"), were intended, in Diamand's words, to develop Romanian industry, "to save time, labour and fuel, to exploit domestic natural resources, to modernise agricultural techniques, to improve domestic and foreign trade and the balance of payments", in short, "to double the income from the property in less than five years".

These radical reforms were presented in the typical manner of utopian socialism, as a project to improve the way of life of nomadic Roma, a specific problem for the administration. We do not know the reaction of the Moldavian government to Diamand's memorandum, but we do know that, whether in connection with it or not, administrative efforts to settle nomads intensified from the following year, 1842.

5 Mihail Kogălniceanu, "Dezrobirea Ţiganilor," *Propasirea* I (1), 1844, supplement to No 5, pp. 1–2.

Writing from a socialist position but with a romantic nature and a more pronounced character of social criticism, Cezar Bolliac, in his political, journalistic, and literary activity, also showed a constant interest in the problems of liberating Romani slaves and improving their lives, as part of the process of overthrowing the feudal system of labour exploitation and replacing it with a modern economy and society. In his poem "*Țiganul și clăcașul / au fost gândirea mea*" (The Gypsy and the serf / were my thought), he formulated a poetic confession that summed up the social credo of an entire generation of fighters for the reform of feudal society.

Following this credo, in 1835 and 1836, Bolliac addressed *Memorii* (memoirs) to political personalities in Wallachia and Moldavia to abolish slavery; he protested the various miseries suffered by Gypsy slaves in poems such as "Fata de boier și fata de țigan" (The boyar's daughter and the Gypsy's daughter') or "Țiganul vândut" (The sold Gypsy) (1843). He was also a member of the Commission for the Liberation of the Slaves during the provisional revolutionary government in Wallachia in 1848. He sang of the joy of those freed from slavery in the poem "O Țigancă cu pruncul său la statuia libertății în București" (A Gypsy woman with her child at the Statue of Liberty in Bucharest), after encouraging political agitation among the slaves in the run-up to the revolution.

We can see that, from different political and ideological positions (general-liberal, socialist-utopian, socialist-romantic), the slavery of Roma, of "*țigani*", as well as the serfdom or forced labour of Romanian peasants, were criticised as defining elements of a feudal system of labour and social organisation which had to be replaced by a new, vaguely outlined bourgeois-capitalist or socialist economy and society.

4.2 Arguments for Legal and Constitutional Reform of the Romanian State

The criticism of the feudal economic and social system, through the criticism of "țigani" slavery and the demand for its abolition, was continued by a **criticism of the political and legal institutions** that reinforced and legitimised the system of inequalities and privileges of which slavery was a part. Emancipating the slaves became part of the liberal program, which sought to achieve political equality before the law for all the country's inhabitants. Slaves were also part of that "social mosaic" (Cezar Bolliac) represented by various social and fiscal categories established by the Organic Regulations, categories that signified the social, political, and legal inequalities characteristic of a feudal society in transition to a new institutional order.

Just as slave owners, mostly boyars, were "above" the general laws of the state as privileged people, and their slaves, "boyar's Gypsies", were "below" the same laws (for example, both social categories did not pay taxes to the state) as persons with incomplete legal capacity, having the status of "economic property" owned by someone else. The fight against slavery implicitly meant a fight against a whole system of feudal political inequalities: first of all, against the privileges of the boyars, whose significance and "*etichetă*" (label, etiquette) included a number of enslaved Roma. Let us remember that "here it is considered as a label that completes the dignity of a person to do his service through slavery [domestic work]."

From the perspective of the formation of a modern, democratic state, slavery appeared to the revolutionaries of 1848 and the authors of the political union of the Principalities as "a black stain on our social order", "a monstrous anomaly", "a degrading state of humanity which keeps this interesting race [the Gypsies] in subservience", and "the ultimate sign of barbarism".

The Proclamation of Islaz (*Proclamația de la Islaz*) of 1848 declared, among other things, that, "The Romanian people renounce the inhumanity and shame of keeping slaves and declare the freedom of private slaves," and Mihail Kogălniceanu, in *Dorințele partidei naționale în Moldova* (Desires of the National Party in Moldavia), declared that "a constitutional state with slaves would be a monstrosity".

The enslavement of Roma had, at a certain point, become a symbol of the untouched preservation of property of the nobility and a social order established by the Organic Regulations. We can understand why a decree by an occupying power (which had suppressed the revolution of 1848) and the Caimacam, which it set up, gave way to the interests of the landowners, who owned both land and slaves, and returned the "țigani" to slavery as "part of the property of private individuals", since their emancipation "necessarily affects the prosperity of the country".

In 1855, when he freed his family's slaves without compensation, thus anticipating by a few months the law abolishing private slavery, Vasile Alecsandri showed, in addition to his well-known poetic sensibility, a clear political intuition that defined his entire generation. Alecsandri accompanied his gesture with a public declaration that would resonate with the consciences of the most diverse political and ideological orientations: "In the face of the stable future of happiness and dignity that opens before us, [...] when the Romanian nation is called to take its place among the other nations that enjoy the joys of a wise freedom, [...] slavery is the ugliest stain that still dishonours our homeland in this age of prosperity."

The modernisers of the Principalities, who had reached maturity in their political program and were anxious to achieve state autonomy, no longer accepted any restrictions on civil rights, individual freedom, and equality before the law. Slavery was the final stage in denying these rights, "the negative conscience" of the principles on which they were based.

An essential part of the critique of the socio-political foundations of slavery was to question its **legitimacy** as a principle of law, a critique based on theoretical and legal arguments drawn from the arsenal of rationalism and the Enlightenment, from theories of natural law and the rights of peoples. The only legal basis for slavery was the legacy of the past, the "custom of the land", customary law, transcribed and enshrined in various laws and codes of law, which, in principle, represented the interests of the nobility. The "modern" codes of Caragea and Calimah preserved these "customs" relating to the enslavement of "țigani", attempting a vague correlation with rational legal principles. According to the Calimah Code, which was in force until the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was "against the natural rights of mankind", but it was accepted because of the customs of the land.

For a coherent modern mind, such as that of Eufrosin Poteca, educated in the school of French rationalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "[...] whoever understands the freedom of mankind can no

longer suffer to be a slave, nor hold others in bondage": not only on religious grounds "but also politically, because slavery is considered very harmful and barbaric". In the middle of the century, the legitimacy of the customary law of slavery was utterly and radically questioned as an "abusive practice", a law "so filthy and inhuman" (George Sion), "a custom of great damage to our souls, left by our ancestors as a curse on our heads" (Mihail Kogălniceanu).

The legal argument was also based on a more general concept of a human being and humanity as a whole. For Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah, freedom is part of the natural condition of human beings and of people, of their very definition. To be a slave, to subject someone to bondage is to deprive him of his essential nature, to treat him as an object, to make him not human. Slavery appeared as a "logical impossibility", and therefore, "[...] the words slave and right are totally contradictory, they cancel each other".

The right to own slaves was contested, as was the body of law in which it appeared. The principle of the relativity of the rules and the need to modify them when the public interest so requires was accepted (Papadopol-Calimah). More radically, Cezar Bolliac demanded that "the *Arhondologia* (Almanac of the nobility), the Organic Regulations, Caragea's *Pravila* (Caragea's Code), the Criminal Register of 1851", the main legal instruments of the feudal social order, be burned because, among other things, they stipulated the right to sell and buy people like cattle, to split families by sale and inheritance.

Abolition of the servitude of "boyar's Gypsies" and liberation of slaves owned by private individuals raised a difficult question concerning the relationship between public and private law since it was one of the first interventions by the state in the sphere of private property, the fundamental principle of the feudal order as well as the new bourgeois order. The compensation paid by the state was a way of preserving intact the principle of private property. But this right of the owners to compensation was also contested, both on moral grounds, because it was a "trading of human souls" and on historical-economic grounds: as we have seen, the owners were urged to be satisfied with the work done by the "țigan" slaves during four centuries of slavery.

The interest of these ideas, arguments, and attitudes in relation to the institution of Romani slavery and its abolition as a legal institution goes beyond its strict framework. It is relevant to the general political thinking of the time, particularly to a broader and more heated discussion on the abolition of serfdom and peasants' allotments.

In the case of the complicated "peasant question", the arguments followed a similar structure: researching the historical origins of land ownership among different categories of owners; denouncing boyar ownership as abuse and challenging its legal legitimacy; and asserting the peasants' right to the abolition of serfdom and allotment without compensation.

Once again, it seems that the issue of the abolition of Romani slavery was incorporated into a general strategy of action and way of thinking that corresponded to essential problems of the time. A discussion of specific issues related to the abolition of slavery contributed to clarification and better elaboration of some details and nuances of this general strategy of action and thought, helpful in approaching and solving fundamental political problems. An intense discussion of abolition thus became a civic exercise

that contributed to the articulation of political thought and development of a coherent program of action to reform Romanian society.

4.3 A Spiritual Revolution of Romanians in the Early Nineteenth Century and the 'Discovery of Roma': Roma – Part of a Political, Multicultural Nation of a Modern Romanian State

So far, we have attempted to trace the contours of "Romanian abolitionist thought" as articulated in the debate on the abolition of Romani slavery. The general direction of ideas, concepts, and consciences between the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth century also can be traced and "measured" through a sensitive "barometer" of attitudes towards "*țigani*" slaves.

As a form of absolute personal dependency, social and psychological relations involved in the slavery of Roma provoked consciences with a contradiction generated by the dual position and status of a slave:

a. an "economic asset" similar to other "things/objects" in someone else's possession;
b. a "human person" who is anthropologically and culturally similar to free human beings, including his or her owner.

The emphasis on one or the other of these aspects, a perception of a slave as an individual and as a member of a larger group, in the consciousness of others and one's own consciousness, reflected and was related to cultural institutions and motifs embedded in a social practice in which both slaves and slave owners and other social categories of people were a part, in varying degrees of freedom and dependence on each other. Without delving into such a study, we would like to mention here some lines of analysis relating to the changes and evolution of the public spirit of mentalities expressed by concepts such as "humanity", "human", "people", "homeland", and "nation".

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as throughout the feudal period, the existence and the contemplation of Romani slavery did not cause any "disturbances of conscience" (Dimitrie Bolintineanu) as it was considered natural and just. Romani slaves, as "*țigani*", were perceived more as things, as objects (although, through derision, their number and price were related to their "souls"), and the "*țigani*", as a social group with certain cultural and moral characteristics, were perceived more in their state of "*animality*" and "*savagery*".

Similarly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a result of the influence of the Enlightenment that had begun a century earlier, the concept of a "Christian brotherhood" between slaves and free men was established, which made the relationship of bondage between master and slave difficult but by no means impossible.

Christian religion has always had an ambivalent attitude towards slavery, tolerating and justifying it in the sense that we are all "servants of God" but also criticising it based on the equality of all human beings before the Creator.

The spread of rationalist and Enlightenment concepts, if a secular orientation, allowed a broadening of the perception of man and humanity up to the identification of the slave as a human being, fully entitled to and capable of freedom, granted based on the civil and political equality of all citizens of a state before its laws.

This moment of "mutation" in Romanian public mentality, which occurred towards the middle of the nineteenth century, made it legally possible to free Roma from slavery and led to the beginning of their perception as human persons and citizens in the Romanian state (a perception that is still being clarified today, at the start of the twenty-first century).

This new perception projected both on individuals, former slaves, and Roma as a specific historical and cultural group, made it possible to "discover" their qualities: their skills useful in economic production, their artistic sensitivity, and their very humanity.

The history of this group (see the writings of Kogălniceanu and Papadopol-Calimah), the characteristics and cultural differences of various Romani subgroups, which are rooted in their specific, differentiated history within the history of the social institutions and mores of Romanian society, were sought with interest.

There was an interest in knowing the ethnic characteristics of this people, as in Jean Alexandre Vaillant's and, to a lesser extent, Mihail Kogălniceanu's studies of the language, and in representing them through art, as in Gheorghe Asachi's *Idilul* or *Ţiganii*. Questions were raised about the political status of these people in the social structure of Romanian society, by Nicolae Rucăreanu, a contemporary poet, writer, and politician, and within the framework of the nascent Romanian nation, then conceived a political nation and not, as in the twentieth century, as an ethnic one; at that time nationality or "landed" status was interpreted as **citizenship** derived from the right to the land, *ius soli*, and not from some supposed right of blood – see the press during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia.

If in Mitiță Filipescu's movement of 1848, the boyars and their subjects were not included in the concept of "*popor*" because some were considered privileged and others unfit for political activity; subsequent "constitutions", which stipulated the liberation of "*țigani*" slaves, also granted them the status of citizens. Roma thus were considered to be part of the Romanian state, which was conceived politically as a modern state in which freedom and equal rights were guaranteed to individuals, who were thought of as individuals and not as members of "legal states" – see again Bolliac's description of a "social mosaic".

The integration of Roma into modern Romanian society, the acceptance of their humanity, was achieved through a renewal of the individual soul and through political notions that reflect how the public spirit sought clarification and connection with the modernising spirit of the time, that of the nineteenth century. There is now talk of a "brotherhood" and "union" of Romani slaves with the native inhabitants, with the "landed" who, less than a hundred years earlier, in the time of Mavrocordat, insisted that their "*rumânie*" or "*vecinie*" (serfdom) should not be confused with the "*țigănia*" of Romani slaves. The "brotherhood through work" of Romanian peasants and Romani slaves was invoked in support of the latter's emancipation. For example, a *hronică* (commentary) published in *România Literară*, a magazine

edited by Vasile Alecsandri, spoke of "that feeling of human brotherhood which animates the great-grandchildren of the Shudras of India, fellow citizens with the great-grandchildren of Trajan's colonists", who "embraced each other in a brotherly union, and together bore the hardships of their land, and together bore boyar feudalism on their shoulders, until today, when the dawn of the days of freedom and justice destined for the Romanian people is breaking."

The term *brotherhood* had complex social and political meanings in the mid-nineteenth century, representing one of the many influences received and assimilated by the ideology of the generation of 1848 from the ideas of the Revolution and French socialism and providing one of the arguments for the economic basis of social solidarity. At that time, "*ţigani*" (Gypsies) still constituted the lowest social status category, formally and legally separated from the rest of society by the legal settlements of the late eighteenth century and the codes of Caragea and Calimah, still in force in the 1850s.

The right of Roma to be considered an integral part of society as citizens was also argued by attempting to present the "positive" consequences of slavery. The official newspaper *Gazeta de Moldova* stated that:

> […] the emancipation of the Gypsies has become an important issue in our country because of their number and the relationship they have with the Moldo-Romanians. Elsewhere, these groups of people live in isolation from society and support themselves more by unpardoned trickery [illicit occupations – from French text] than through the work of the hand or toil. Here, however, most of the Gypsies, who were part of the domestic economy, satisfy their material interests by labour, for which their masters see to it that they are fed and clothed so that this expenditure is equivalent to, though it does not exceed, a regular wage.

From the perspective of this reform of the civic spirit (briefly outlined above), we can understand the almost universal enthusiasm of public opinion in the mid-nineteenth century, which saw in the abolition of slavery not only the direct benefit of approximately 200,000 Roma living in the Principality at the time but also the economic, political, and moral benefit of society as a whole. As Theodor Codrescu noted on the eve of the emancipation of Moldavian slaves, "the name ţigan had come to mean, in the Romanian language, *the person subjected to the degradation of serfdom*" (emphasis in original).

The liberation of Roma from the institution of Gypsy slavery meant not only the restoration of their dignity as human beings but also the restoration of the integrity of the concept of man and humanity in the Romanian political and moral consciousness. Public opinion, therefore, saw the abolition of slavery as an opportunity to "congratulate society on the moral reform it had achieved". "For if the Gypsies were thus saved from the yoke of slavery, society was no less saved from the yoke of immoral salvation" that slavery produced, through the behaviour of people who were not "*naturally evil*", but who, "without any kind of learning", despised and scorned by their owners, took revenge by "poisoning" their "domestic relations" with their owners and their sons, whose education was almost exclusively the responsibility of the slaves. The abolition of slavery was to be accompanied by wider measures to educate new free citizens, with the article urging the government to "endeavour to open the doors of educational institutions to the Gypsy youth of both sexes", so that "through the benevolent influence of both government and society, the Gypsies may emancipate themselves from their vices".

The abolition of slavery, by freeing the slaves from their "domestic relations" with their owners, also brought about *a reform of daily life*, of the habits of everyday life inherited from Turkish domination, especially during the reign of the Phanariotes. With sarcasm, George Sion describes the effect of the news of the emancipation of slaves, which "fell like a bomb on hundreds of houses", who "wondered how they were going to live without the Gypsies", because, as the article goes on to say, "how can one be a boyar without Gypsies, buffaloes, and a shingled house?" The former owners had to "give up the housework that was done by the Gypsies and do it themselves, by the sweat of their brow".

Slavery, with the benefits and social relations it generated, had penetrated deeply into the social order of the Principalities, into the habits of daily life, and into the character and tastes of the privileged class and its imitators. These habits and cultural tastes were even more resistant to the idea of manumission than the economic interests associated with property.

In campaigning for the abolition of slavery, the reformers and progressives of the period were engaged in a complex and comprehensive effort to change and modernise the repertoire of sentiments, ideological and cultural motifs in the public mind, moral consciousness, and inertia of everyday life. These efforts aimed to remove Romanian society from the circle of Oriental influences and to place it in the European political orbit.

Then, as now, Europe was less of a geographical reality "frozen" within contours drawn by artificial political borders. Political and spiritual frontiers were then, as now, relative and mobile, approaching the Carpathians and the Danube, offering hope and a chance that a new political order of a modern type, a bourgeois state, rule of law, with all the political freedoms that this entailed, a new conception of humankind and humanity, a new sensibility and culture of everyday life could be realised.

The maintenance of Romani slavery was a sign of distance from this Europe, a symbol of the subordination of the Principalities to foreign powers that defended the old social order, of which slavery was an integral part. "Would you rather be among the ennobled boors of Russia than join the *hora* [dance] of the civilised nations?" Sion asks the slave owners. The question annoyed and offended the slave owners, as the chronicler of the time, the newspaper editor in which Sion's article had appeared, noted: "The great boyars were alarmed and, through five landowners, showed their dissatisfaction with *Zimbru's* mocking remarks." Therefore, "to reassure the deputation of the boyars", the ruler Grigore Ghica instructed the secretary of state to protest against the newspaper's editorial board support for the article, which contained "such horrors as to provoke hatred against one of the classes of society".

Abolition of slavery was not achieved solely by the enthusiastic applause of public opinion influencers, the writers of newspaper articles at the time. Its slow, gradual unfolding reflects a fierce clash of interests, the opposition of slave owners and their external protectors, the resistance of some institutions, and the habits that the passage of time seemed to make irreplaceable. For this reason, a confrontation over the issue of Romani manumission has been an area for a general political conflict between "social classes", giving rise to affirmations and demarcations of positions, affinities of ideas and groups, and proof of the consistency of messages and political programs.

Let us recall the invective of Nicolae Istrati in his *Dissertation on the Gypsies* of 1848 (when the monastic and state slaves in Moldavia were liberated), those "rusty spirits", "unsatisfied spirits [...] and enemies of any reform [...] that is made in civilisation": "You are sons of another age, of another time, of another spirit as well as of another class."

5. Romani Manumission and 'European Integration'

Like other social reforms of the time, the abolitionist movement was part of efforts by the political elites of the Principalities to create a unified, autonomous state "emancipated from foreign domination and influence". The generation that brought about the political union of the Romanian Principalities believed in the unity of political freedoms, equality, and international political sovereignty.

In 1834, Ion Câmpineanu expropriated the peasants on his estate, freed the enslaved people, and renounced the privileges of his boyar rank as a sign of protest against the social order established by the Organic Regulations under the protectorate of Tsarist Russia. Furthermore, the vote on the law for the emancipation of enslaved Roma people of the "land" and "dedicated" monasteries in Moldavia in January 1844 was perceived in the public consciousness as a political challenge to the pro-Russian consul Dascof, who had come to Iaşi to influence the election of a pro-Russian metropolitan or bishop favourable to the idea of uniting the Moldavian Church with Moscow.

The enthusiasm of liberal youth of the time was also motivated by the political significance of the law adopted by the country's General Assembly. The occasion was used to urge a union of minds and a realisation of a common cause, "the liberation of an entire people", illustrated by the manumission of enslaved Romani people.

A few years later, in 1855–1856, the international context following the Crimean War was used by the political elite of the Principalities to put an end to the Russian protectorate and the regulatory period. Decisions to free privately owned slaves were linked explicitly to national political interests, clearly formulated by a political class interested in maintaining the sovereignty of the Romanian Principalities, through a clever use of the argument for the abolition of "Gypsy slavery" in the geopolitical context of the time.

By passing laws for a complete abolition of Romani slavery, the General Divans of the two Principalities asserted and exercised their right to legislate, previously forbidden by the humiliating Convention of Balta Liman, thus marking a *de facto* exit from under the Russian protectorate, before the subsequent international conferences enshrined this political reality.

Shortly after the vote on the Moldavian law, the priest Josafat Snagovineanul, a former member of the Commission for the Liberation of Slaves set up by the provisional government of the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia, delivered a moving speech in Paris to an audience gathered to celebrate the "double blessing": "the abolition of the Russian protectorate and the emancipation of our Gypsy slaves". The speaker stated: "I make no distinction between the idea of the liberation of the Gypsies

and that of our own liberation, for the same iron hand is pressing down on them as on us. [...] Slavery no longer has a protector."

The international public was thus informed of one of the causes of the long perpetuation of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities until the mid-nineteenth century: external political subordination did not allow for an internal implementation of an innovative and humanistic social reform. Slavery as a legal institution existed in various forms both in Tsarist Russia (where the serfdom of Russian peasants, considered a real form of slavery, was not abolished until 1865) and in the Ottoman Empire, where a public slave trade continued, legally or illegally, until the end of the nineteenth century.

For the political elite of the time, social freedom, including liberation of Romani slaves, could not be achieved without the political sovereignty of the Principalities.

Shortly after the liberation of private slaves, in January 1856, the Law on the Abolition of Censorship was also passed in Moldavia, marking a further step towards the affirmation of the legislative autonomy of the state.

By passing these laws amid debates between the great political and military powers of the time, which were concerned, among other things, with the political future of the Principalities, they demonstrated their political ability to use an international context to achieve modernising social reforms. By abolishing slavery and censorship, the Principalities wanted to show international public opinion their determination to use the instrument of the sovereign state to promote liberal social-political freedoms at home.

"A people that maintains slavery deserves to be placed among the damned peoples": the famous words of the French historian de Maistre, also taken up by Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah, also offered a solution for the opposite situation: a people that abolishes the institution of slavery from its internal legal order legitimises its right to be counted among free peoples. This idea was formulated by Mihail Kogălniceanu in his 1848 work "*Dorințele partidei naționale în Moldova*" (Desires of the National Party in Moldavia), in which he called for the abolition of slavery and asked: "Could we, who will be a free nation, still bear the stain of having slaves?" In 1855, it was Kogălniceau again who renewed the argument for the abolition of Romani slavery: "The best way to ascertain our right to autonomy before Europe is to use it to establish in the country a social and political state that will put us in the same league as the great families of the civilised world, that is to say, by introducing freedom, justice and equality in Europe."

For the Romanian citizen today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the abolition of Romani slavery may be perceived as a minor social reform, perhaps important at the time but not essential. However, in the geopolitical context of the mid-nineteenth century, the abolition of Romani slavery was of particular public importance, at least for intellectual and political elites involved in the formation of the modern and independent Romanian state. For the "people of progress" at the time, the achievement of this reform went beyond the scope of the social categories directly affected by it (slaves and their owners) and became a moment and a symbol of a will and a political ideal that aimed at the realisation of the

liberal program in its entirety: democratisation of political institutions and the achievement of unity and autonomy of the Romanian state. The political significance of abolishing Romani slavery is recorded in the documents of the state administration dating from this period.

In the *Ofisul domnesc* (decree) of the ruler Grigore Ghica of 28 November 1855, as in that of 5 December 1855, the maintenance of slavery in the Principalities was considered to be "in contradiction", not only with Christian dogmas and the principles of humanity but also with "the vital interest of the state". The abolition of slavery was therefore a "humanitarian question of the first order", the solution to which "in the present circumstances is dictated by the wisdom of the state", "and concerns above all the dignity of the country". Therefore, "among the reforms that have been initiated and those that the future demands, we consider that this matter is one of those that must come before any other".

The Administrative Council of Wallachia also recognised, in its Journal (*Jurnal*) of 1855, that the maintenance of slavery was a "social anomaly" that had to be eliminated. The "vital" importance of the abolition of slavery was reinforced in the international context and by the specific position of the Principalities in the "Eastern Question" being discussed at the time. "[…] when Europe is showing such a lively interest in the Principalities and meditates the regulation of their destiny, it is the duty of our motherland to take a step forward of its own accord."

The initiative of the Principalities in the act of emancipating slaves and the implementation of this democratic and humanitarian reform was part of a political calculation in pursuit of the national interest, as well as of the "lesson learned" by the political class in the previous decades: after the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, the two Romanian Principalities had to accept the interference of Tsarist Russia, which legitimised its "protection" through modernisations promoted by the Organic Regulations. "It is better to do something, even if it costs us such great sacrifices, which comes from our own good will, by which we will raise the opinion of foreigners of our political maturity, than to wait for the minute when a foreign interference will feel entitled to take over our internal organisation," read an article in *Zimbrul* newspaper.

The "sacrifice" invoked was primarily financial, represented by sums that the state paid slave owners in order not to violate their principle of private property. Although some owners, particularly those in Moldavia, waived their right to compensation, sums paid out by the state were high, justifying Cezar Bolliac's criticism that "the treasury will feel the pain of the wound" by paying the sums to those "entitled" to compensation.

The political gain from the decision to free Romani slaves far outweighed the financial losses. What was important was that: "Moldavia, which aspired to the honour of joining the circle of European families, to which its position and common interest entitled it, had shaken off the last traces of barbarism." Hence George Sion's call to slave owners: "Not the rulers, but all of us, boyars and owners of țigani, representatives of civilisation and of the rebirth of our homeland, are obliged to take this step to show the world that we deserve a national life, a political existence, a future of progress, respect among peoples." This political message was taken up by the international press and public opinion, which was favourable to the Principalities. The newspaper *La Presse d'Orient* praised

the measure taken to abolish slavery with the following words on 3 January 1856: "The important act of emancipating the slaves of Moldavia is likely to attract not only the eyes but also the sympathy of the whole of Europe to this Principality."

The Principalities' abolishment of slavery was later popularised in many works on the history of the Principalities or other general information, published abroad, especially in France, by steadfast friends of the political cause of the Romanians, many of whom were both direct participants in the political turmoil and revolutionary movements in the two Principalities and authors of works on the history, language, and customs of Roma, such as Jean Alexandre Vaillant, Félix Colson, Jean-Henri-Abdolonyme Ubicini, and Paul Battailard.

Informing international public opinion about the abolition of slavery in the Principalities, as part of the extensive propaganda in its favour, was also intended to fulfil an objective focused on "image", as we would say today, by making foreigners "stop at once and as soon as possible from confronting us and saying that we are not doing our best to join the great family of civilised nations of Europe". The aim was therefore both to obtain a "seal of approval" from the great powers of the time and to demonstrate the will and ability of the local political elite to modernise the socio-political institutions of the planned sovereign state by their own means, even at a financial cost. Among the administrative reforms to be carried out, the abolition of Romani slavery was "one of those that must come before any other".

Let us remember that, in the decades of the mid-nineteenth century, England, France, and later elites in the northern United States were deeply involved politically and diplomatically in restricting and banning the global slave trade; this was the main objective of a nascent human rights movement, pursued by means of state diplomacy.

The use of the term "slavery" in press articles and even in the text of the laws on the abolition of Romani servitude opened the way for the penetration of liberal European ideas and the criticism of all forms of personal dependency in the Principality, explicitly the slavery of "*țigani*" but also "peasant servitude". This also marked the Principalities' own contribution to an international human rights campaign dictated by the political interests of the time: in the short term, the withdrawal of the Principalities from the sphere of dominance and influence of Tsarist Russia, and in the medium term, the achievement of independence and international recognition of the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Romania. The abolition of the institution of Romani slavery was therefore a contribution that the two Romanian Principalities made on their own initiative, with some sacrifices, and which placed them together and on an equal footing with civilised countries of the era. This idea, which was part of the consciousness of the political class, was formulated clearly by Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah at the end of his historical and political article on the manumission of slaves: "Through manumission, the Romanian people will today stand proud and equal before Europe, and if equality does not consist only in material equality, how much more in equality of feelings!"

The idea of the political unification of the two Romanian Principalities and the abolition of Romani slavery, seemingly so far apart, were explicitly linked by those who were the "champions of progress"

for the modernisation of society and a nascent Romanian state. The newspaper *Steaua Dunării*, led by Mihail Kogălniceanu, which brought together the most active and radical forces in favour of the political unification of the two Principalities, had also included the cause of Romani emancipation in its program. When Kogălnicenu published in his newspaper *The Journal* (Jurnalul) the Decision of the Administrative Council of the Romanian Country on the abolition of slavery, he found the occasion for an extensive historical commentary on "this law imposed on the principalities since their foundation [...], the law of their common historical destiny, for better or for worse, the law of their union. How could slavery, which had been abolished in Moldavia, continue to be part of the social order in Wallachia, given the tendency to assimilate, to unite in everything, as partners for better or for worse?"

For Kogălniceanu, the succession of measures for gradual emancipation of slaves, in which each principality was either the initiator or the imitator of the other, was proof of an eternal emulation that had been established between the two countries throughout their history, a cultural and social emulation that was waiting to be completed by political union.

For a moment in history, at least for a few public figures, the right of Roma to individual freedom and the interest of the Romanians to form their own state by uniting fragments of their territory under different rulers and spheres of interest coincided and took the form of effective political action.

6. Enslaved Romani Participants

Roma were beneficiaries of civil reform and of political confrontations between different segments of a political class in the Romanian Principalities that led to the abolition of slavery. Still, they were also actors and active participants in contemporary political movements, including the events that led to the unification of the two Principalities. The emancipated former slaves, now free citizens, declared in the *Jurnal al Brezlei dezrobiților* (Journal of the body of the emancipated) from Iași, on 4 September 1857, that "[...] Together with our staroste [chief] we will participate in the town elections to be elected to the ad hoc Divan."

In the context of political and civil reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, various forms of protest and struggle of Roma throughout the historical period of their enslavement found fulfilment and historical significance. Romani slaves were not just an amorphous, inert commodity, resigned to a life of misery. Subjected to "cruel exploitation", "often treated like animals", the slaves' resistance, their escape from their owners, was the main form of limiting labour obligations imposed by feudal lords.

Flight was not the only form of protest. Despite the views of the time that "*țigan*" slaves were "born to be slaves", "unfit for freedom", or "content with their state of servitude", Roma did not cease to seek their freedom through escape, through association with free people, through individual efforts to "forgive bondage" through ransom, or through their participation as a group in political actions to abolish slavery as an institution.

In the mid-nineteenth century, this protest became more diversified and more widespread. The documents of the time speak of Roma "complaining" to officials about the abuses of landlords or landowners; joining outlaw bands; and supporting and deliberately participating in the revolutionary actions of 1848. In 1830, according to Vaillant, Romani slaves tried to persuade Kiseleff to restore their freedom in an original way, offering him "as much gold as a horse can carry". Only the opposition of the boyars, who had already lost the right to have squires, prevented the Russian general from freeing this "rank of men".

Their demand for a better life seems to have been echoed in the Organic Regulations by the inclusion of measures for the sedentarisation and colonisation of nomadic Gypsies belonging to villages on boyar estates, a measure probably influenced by Kiseleff's information on state policy towards Roma in the Habsburg Empire during the time of Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the eighteenth century.

However, all the boyars benefited from this measure, as French historian Félix Colsson, a participant and direct observer of political life in the Principalities, noted. Unwilling to serve the interests of the boyars, many nomadic Roma, especially those of the *lăieți*, also known as *netoti* (wandering Gypsies), resisted colonisation, preferring to join the powerful groups of "*clăcași*" peasants who had also fled boyar exploitation and who, especially in the Moldavian Carpathians, waged a veritable "guerrilla war" against the armed forces of the rulers. A literary echo of these historical realities can be found in the book *Prețul Libertății* (The price of freedom), written by Mateo Maximoff, an educated Kalderash Roma and member of a famous group of Roma who, after manumission, went to Bessarabia and then, fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, settled in a suburb of Paris, in Romainville, where they continued to speak a Romani language full of words from the Kalderash dialect.

Slaves settled on boyar estates in Wallachia soon felt the burden of the leaseholders' greed, and the complaints of many of these serfs to the *Vornicia temnițelor* (which administered the sedentarisation of the nomads until 1843) forced this state body to ask the owners of the estates to "curb the greed of the leaseholders".

On the eve of the liberation of monastic and state slaves, in 1844 and 1847, and encouraged by reform fighters, including Mihail Kogălniceanu and Cezar Boliac, the unrest of slaves against the oppression of boyars increased in the two Principalities. There were local rebellions and violent protests against landlords or tenants.

In the context of social and political unrest in Moldavia in 1846, a "radical" Constantin Negruzzi considered attacking the city of Iași with the help of "[...] young people and 400 armed Gypsies". Local rebellions of Romani slaves became a real "social movement" for liberation from slavery during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia. Documents from the 1848 Revolution tell of the enthusiasm with which thousands of Roma flocked to Bucharest to obtain their "certificates of liberation" from slavery, offered by the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

General Gheorghe Magheru, as is known, had gathered his own army and was waiting, on the outskirts of Craiova, for the decision of the Provisional Government of the Revolution on whether to resist the intervention of the Imperial troops, which, this time, were allied. In the ranks of this army were many

Roma emancipated from slavery. They were apparently under the command of an ad hoc leader who was impressive in his enormous stature. But General Magheru had to abandon his military plans, yielding to the pressure of the other leaders of the revolution, perhaps wiser, aware of the inequality of forces, or perhaps simply more willing to compromise, aware of the internal weaknesses of a fragile political class still tied to the status quo of the social order that guaranteed their property and their "label" (*etichetă*), which included a number of enslaved Roma.

The briefly liberated Roma returned to their former legal status and masters, many of whom paid dearly in beatings and other forms of oppression for the audacity to seek the freedom promised and granted to them by revolutionary youth of the time.

After a few years, however, in 1855 and 1856, the servitude of Roma, who were privately owned by the boyars, was to be abolished by decisions taken separately but successively by the legislative bodies and rulers of the two Principalities, on the dates now commemorated.

7. 150 Years after Emancipation

Since 1990, with the recognition of Roma as a national minority in post-communist Romania, Romani associations have initiated the celebration of the anniversary of Roma's "exit from slavery" in February each year.

The political act of abolishing slavery as a legal institution in the Romanian Principalities, promulgated between December 1855 and February 1856, is part of our collective memory, of the history of our people, Roma, in Romania, in Europe and all over the world – see, for example, Ian Hancock's book, *The Land of Pain.*

Many Roma freed from slavery migrated to Western Europe and then to the "New World", forming communities that still retain elements of "Vlah" language and culture, or even a complete dialect of the Romanian language – the case of the Boyash or "Rudari" who spread throughout the Balkans, Hungary, and United States.

The above text uses information mainly from newspapers that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century; the text, written in 1980, is *NOT* a work on the history of Romani manumission.

A systematic work by Viorel Achim is now available to Romanian readers: *Istoria ţiganilor din România* (History of the Gypsies in Romania), which includes a chapter on the abolition of Romani slavery. Achim's study also highlights the limits of the actions of the 1848 generation with regard to enslaved Roma: the abolition of slavery was not accompanied by measures to appropriate the enslaved, so that the "marginalisation" of Roma in Romanian society has been reproduced to this day.

We also have shown that a "language gap" exists among Romani activists in how they think and "talk" about Roma today. In this way, we can explore the "dark side" of Romania's public spirit today, an area of

individual and collective subconscious where prejudices, negative stereotypes, and intolerance towards cultural differences, often translated into xenophobia or even racism, take root.

Between the European revolutions of 1848 and the present-day, at the beginning of a new century and millennium, there have been nationalist ideologies, two world wars, the tragedy of the Holocaust, a division of the world during the Cold War, the suppression of individual freedoms in the name of a collective good promoted by totalitarian communism, and the costs of transition in Eastern Europe.

Roma in Romania and Roma around the world have also experienced these tragedies, together with others and separately, in their own way. Today's human rights movement is concerned with combating a resurgence of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, antisemitism, and aggressive nationalism. We believe that, in the context of a transition full of confusion, reading articles written from the mid-nineteenth century could contribute to re-establishing, in the public mentality, a link between the "Roma problem" and a political process of moral and civic reform of a Romania facing the hopes and failures of a new "integration into Europe".

Perhaps the prestige enjoyed by the generation of 1848 in the Romanian consciousness could inspire those of us who write (civic activists, journalists, politicians) to affirm now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ethnic identities of Romanians and Roma, in a civic political process of building a common public space that is democratic, non-discriminatory, tolerant, and open to cultural, religious, and political diversity. Reading the lines that we have reproduced in our text may also help us, descendants of Roma who were freed 150 years ago, to measure the impact of world events on our souls and on others around us.
The manumission of Romani slaves was part of a process of modernisation of Romania's society in the mid-nineteenth century and the establishment of an autonomous and later sovereign and independent Romanian state. The political class of the time explicitly presented the decision to abolish the slavery of Romani people in the Romanian Principalities as a contribution to an international movement against the slave trade and the institution of slavery, in the spirit of the ideals of European and American revolutions for the affirmation of human and civil rights.

The reconstruction of the "abolitionist discourse" for the abolition of the slavery of Romani people in the Romanian Principalities can now, in 2006, be a contribution to the European campaign against racism, intolerance, xenophobia, and antisemitism. Reading public discourse from the press of the mid-nineteenth century has given the author (and perhaps others as well) a feeling of *déjà vu*, *déjà connu.* It is as if, in these years, we, Roma and non-Roma alike, have again felt the need for a "coming out of slavery", a more confused slavery, not related to legal segregations explicitly formulated in legal codes. We seem to be living a "slavery" of the mind caused by *intolerance* towards the other, an intolerance deeply rooted in mentalities, in stereotypes of thought, speech, and feeling, an intolerance that is expressed, among other things, in the way we feel and talk about today's "Gypsies". Again, there seems to be a desire for a change in mentality, including a change in the way Roma are written and spoken about in contemporary Romanian society.

Such a renewed revolution of the soul would be part of a social and political reform of the "transition", which for today's Romania is once again "integration into Europe", an integration into a Europe that is also experiencing moments similar to those of the revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century.

At the beginning of this new millennium, we are all taking part in a new political revolution: that of building a *united* Europe through democratic values and institutions; a *complete* Europe, embracing all geopolitical entities, all peoples and cultures that have formed nation-states, but also national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities; a *non-racist* Europe. A Europe concerned with recovering multiculturalism and tolerance towards others, after having reacted with excessive violence to "foreigners" invented by aggressive nationalism, is now trying to give a chance to Roma, a people living in diasporas across the world, who are the epitome of multiculturalism, of the ability to adapt to different political and cultural environments.

Some of us, who are descendants of traders who came from the India of our ancestors, believe that Europe has become a second motherland for us. In such a Europe, as a political alternative to the "classical" national minorities, some Romani associations have proposed becoming *a European minority*. The Council of Europe and the European Parliament have received and recognised this message, with some documents referring to Roma as "a truly European people", a transnational minority.

After December 1990, the Romanian state faced the challenge of integrating into the structures of the European Union and strengthening its position in the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

In this political process of profound reform of the country's values, political institutions, and economy, the current situation of Roma in Romania is often perceived as an obstacle. Agenda 2000, the European Commission's document on the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, explicitly states in its chapter on the assessment of the political situation in these countries: the human rights of Roma are not respected equally before the laws of the country in the same way as those of other citizens, either belonging to the majority or to other national minorities in Romania. In the case of Roma, the circumstances created by economic transition have led to a deterioration in their daily living conditions, health, their children's education, their access to work, and social protection. Cases of violence against Roma find justifications in the discourse of local authorities and the press that, over time, recall the words used by the defenders of Romani slavery to justify the institution.

The Romanian government's initiatives on Roma-specific issues, including legislative proposals, are not as clear, firm, and effective as those of other neighbouring Central European countries. It is as if Roma, "Gypsies", are once again "a shameful stain", an obstacle, a "ballast" for a Romania that needs the "seal of approval" from the Europe from which it has been cut off, and that once again sees itself as a kind of "poor relative" of Europe, from which it expects recognition and solidarity. It is as if we are once again facing a political and moral challenge similar to that experienced by the intellectual and political elite 150 years ago.

I have transcribed some excerpts of this discourse, so as not to copy it simply, out of ignorance; perhaps we, Romanians and Roma, can succeed in renewing and advancing the reform of the soul that precedes and accompanies political events and legislative acts. The words spoken and written 150 years ago seem to urge today's Romanian political class to be as bold and innovative in their initiatives to reform the socio-

political situation of Roma as their predecessors were in the mid-nineteenth century. They, intellectuals and politicians of the time, were faced with the problem of creating and gaining international recognition for an independent Romanian state: the sympathy and political support of Europe at the time was won, among other reforms, by the abolition of Romani slavery and the granting of full citizenship to Roma of Wallachia and Moldavia.

The challenge to the political class in Romania today is to repeat such a courageous moral and political gesture. Do we now have the imagination and the courage to take up this challenge?

I believe that we could consider of the anniversary of the abolition of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities as the beginning of the campaign to combat current forms of racism, intolerance, discrimination, and social exclusion of Roma, as recommended by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its report and resolution on Romania's compliance with its political commitments to respect human rights. A campaign aimed at "escaping the bondage" in which we live, perhaps without being aware of it, due to racial prejudices, and at the common integration of Romania and Roma in Romania into a European political space.

But what if we had the same desire to be part of a "great story" as the hearts of the youth of 1848?
From slaves... to Romanian citizens and through Romania... to European citizenship.

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