

# Decolonizing the Arts: A Genealogy of Romani Stereotypes in the Louvre and Prado Collections

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## Abstract

Knowledge producers of Romani ethnicity, like the people to whom they belong, both inside and outside normative frameworks governing development modes and the transmission of knowledge, are hampered profoundly by three fundamental ethical credentials of being: the power to say, the power to act, and the power to collect their own lives into a comprehensible and acceptable story. Due to an historical process of epistemological alienation which appeared with the Enlightenment, it has been impossible for Romani subjects to have as their duty, their responsibility to the world, the power to act.

Through a “Foucauldian archaeology” on Romani iconography in the Louvre and Prado collections, and using as a methodological presupposition historical and epistemological decolonial thought, this paper will try to advance the understanding of the genealogy of abnormativity by referring to the study of the Romani motif in the arts.

The analysis of the pictographic treatment allows us to understand how those “topoi” responded to religious, ethical-moral, and geopolitical imperatives of majority society in a dialectic that oscillates between formal presence and ontological absence from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. The arrival of the Roma in fifteenth-century Europe, in full epistemological *caesura*, between a dying hermeneutic age and the age of the nascent *cogito*, conditions a radical change in the consideration of Romani alterity. Indeed, this alteration of the Romani alterity experience by mainstream societies constitutes a paradigmatic example of epistemicidiary structural dynamics and idiomicidiaries born of the slime of “historical modernity.”

## Keywords

- Epistemology of Art
- Romani iconography
- Romani history
- Decoloniality
- Alterity and exteriority
- Louvre museum
- Prado museum

## Introduction

Despite being absent from accounts of national histories in which they have played a part since the nineteenth century in Europe, various Romani groups were at the heart of geopolitical affairs during their centuries-long migration from the East to Western Europe. Historiography has treated them like free radicals, outside the world and outside history, despite their valuable contributions as disseminators of knowledge and reflectors of external points of view. Alleged specialists in Romani Studies and experts of all kinds have appropriated the “subject” in order to make them their “object,” a treatment that ranges from the entomological to the cultural via a dignified vision at the climax of colonialism in the nineteenth century. Roma, Bohemians, Gypsies, *Tsiganes*, and Travellers are also creations and motifs. An analysis of two of the most prestigious and political European art collections as a means of decrypting the connections that create the structure for today’s Romaphobia and antigypsyism serves as an enriching experience in historical epistemology.

Works have been produced using contradictory projections and artistic motifs *par excellence*. Since Roma began to live among mainstream societies, these depictions have not ceased projecting the mysteries, fantasies, and fears of the latter in the performing arts, literature, and the collective imagination. At the Louvre in Paris and the Prado in Madrid, they have been depicted by the greatest masters of European painting. Here, Roma are seen every day by thousands of people without even being noticed. Even if a visitor were to seek out and glimpse the realities of Romani people in these two collections, it would be impossible to experience either the power or the vulnerability of their Otherness.

Thirteen works are listed in this article, thus creating for the first time a complete catalogue of depictions of the people whom we now know as Roma, Manouches, and Kale, whether travelling or settled, in the two most important collections in France and Spain. The items show the way in which pictorial representations of Roma have evolved, each time in response to social, moral, ethical, and geopolitical necessity among majority societies and in a dialectic that oscillates between presence and absence. In fact, the works in both the Louvre and at the Prado collections shift from a religious and moral treatment in the fifteenth century to a political treatment in the nineteenth century that finishes by Orientalizing Roma. From Raphael to Goya, Bosch to Niccolò dell’Abate via Caravaggio, Bourdon, Brueghel, Jan van de Venne, Madrazo y Gareta, Navez, and Corot, disembodiment is a common leitmotif. There are only a few works that escape this logic, thus giving us a paradigm to decipher.

Depictions of the Romani body and of Romani attributes, whether real or imagined, serve majority societies. Their appearance in Western Europe in the fifteenth century, as a full epistemological *caesura* between the waning age of interpretation and the embryonic age of *cogito*, influences a certain relationship with Otherness. Whether hermeneutical or allegorical figures of vice, seduction, or even embryonic nation-states, it is the ontological absence of Roma that is highlighted by the Louvre’s and the Prado’s pictorial lists, and this clarifies the relationship that the European power apparatus maintains with this minority.

While until the sixteenth century Romani dress and regalia were used *inter alia* to portray biblical figures known for their hermeneutic and prophetic gifts, from the second half of the sixteenth century,

and especially with the repeated use of the fortuneteller by Caravaggio and his followers, the images of Bohemians, Gypsies, or *Tsigane* gradually turned into incarnations of vice, theft, and alienating exteriority. Later, when Romanticism and then Orientalism emerged as systems of thought and representation, revealing how the West perceived the Other, the Romani figure became sexualized and the female body objectified. What was previously fantasy or even the reviled norm became the reference through “de-ethnicization”. Cultural appropriation, which different Romani groups remain victims of today, was already in the making.

Epistemology and hermeneutics are words which, from the point of view of the philosophy of ideas, help us comprehend the involvement of Romani Otherness in the very construction of the alterity/exteriority dialectic in Europe, and one must refer to the philosophy of perception in order to appreciate the issues at play in this study. In the Prado, as in the Louvre, it is just a matter of perception.

Perception is how we form a sensitive representation of everything around us. It is neither sensation (a direct impression on the senses) nor imagination (through which we (re-)compose our sensations). In perception the reception of an external stimulus connects with our mental representation of it. Interpretation and language play a major role here: the subject perceives and interprets in a space defined by their history and culture. The artist perceives, as does the society in which they live, and the person contemplating the work is the receptacle of this paradigm. When the perceiving subject is the person looking at an image that purports to reflect who that person is, when in fact it may be nothing but a reflection in a deforming mirror, the dismay it causes is such that the subject concerned has little choice: to accept and assimilate the proposed figure or to deconstruct, from a genealogical perspective, the epistemic logics of the destruction of meaning and knowledge behind the formation of the image concerned (Didi-Huberman 1992).

Those who produce art have an ethical responsibility to Otherness. The history of the fabrication of radical exteriority by the arts is a paradigm for the relationship to the Otherness maintained by majority societies from the fifteenth century to the present. The plastic artist shapes the motif, the writer creates the *topos*, and the power structures transform them into *schemes* (imaginary representations). At the very end of this process history is responsible for crystallizing them into stereotypes (see, for example, Jacob Rogozinsky).

Romani people, in their intrinsic pluralism – yet hampered by the “three fundamental ethical powers of being,” namely the power of speech, the power of action, and the power of organizing one’s own life into an intelligible, acceptable narrative – are actually excluded from their “payment obligations,” from their responsibility to the world, and also to a great extent from their power to act (see, for example, Paul Ricœur 1950). For Roma Others who are regarded as radical exteriority and who are treated as the wretched of “the wretched of the Earth” (Fanon 1961), there is no choice but to accept that they will only be emancipated, whether socially or intellectually, if the philosophical injunctions of Paul Ricœur do not become a foregone conclusion (Ricœur 1950). Our analysis and decoding of the Prado’s and the Louvre’s collections show that, beyond perception, the subjects-objects represented today are capable of surmounting the representation that has been built up and proposed throughout history by using the fundamental powers of being: the power to say, to act, to tell, and to which we must add imputability and promise (*ibid.*).

Access to the Other ideally is ethical from the start. It is the radical alterity that is manifest in the face of the Other. Neither master nor slave, the Other is a blessing. For Levinas, the face of the Other is urgency, “immemoriality” and “unbearability” all at once.<sup>11</sup> The ethical signification of the face is founded in the sentimental immediacy of access to the Other, where it is urgent to listen to the Other. Defining and knowing the Other is left for later. The Other is also immemorial in its ethical intrigue. As Levinas (1972) remarks, “The Other, I have always met him.” The precarity and the power of the Other are an upheaval that has always marked the subjectivity of the individual. The Other is simply the most human subjectivity, that which contains the Other in me. “Unbearability,” another of Levinas’s neologisms, thus lies in the death of the Other. To look at the Other’s face is to look at him under threat of death. The Other is less than a phenomenon because it is disappearing. So the face is ethical. It is not to be examined through the prism of sensitivity but through that of sensitivity that has passed through the filter of sentiment, where Otherness takes on the dual meaning of distress and teaching.

## 1. Hermeneutic Figure of the Interpreter and the Annunciator

There is no denying the importance of sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings from the Flemish and Italian collections of the museums in this story. They include works by Northern and Italian Renaissance masters such as Hieronymus Bosch, Joachim Patinir, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Raphael and Giulio Romano. Beyond the artistic interest of the Roma theme in the paintings of these great masters, this predominance of sixteenth and seventeenth century works also raises the question of the use of this theme at a very precise moment in the history of European thought, a moment that would mark it up to this very day: the passage of time between mediaeval hermeneutics and the Age of Reason.

Before this internal otherness that comprises the Rom, Sinto and Kalo groups became fixed in the European imagination as a stereotype, culminating in their deterioration into Egyptians or Bohemians. These strangers from “little Egypt,” as they were called in the chronicles of the late Middle Ages and who are a recurring presence in Western Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, are first and foremost assimilated into three of the main archetypal figures of medieval Western culture:

- biblical Egypt and the figure of the exile (mobility), linked to the world of the Old Testament;
- the hermeneutist female figures of the New Testament;
- the nursing mother related to telluric forces.

The earliest representation of this *topos* appeared in the *Triptych of the Glorious Virgin*, an anonymous Flemish tapestry dating from the end of the fifteenth century and exhibited at the Louvre Museum. The central panel depicts the Glorious Virgin, crowned by two angels. The panel on the right shows Christ

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1 Author’s translation from “Imémoriabilité” et “insupportabilité” in *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, by Emmanuel Levinas, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.

healing a sick man, while the panel on the left, the one in which we are interested, shows a scene from the Old Testament, namely that of Moses making the water spring from the rock during the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt. A woman, who is accompanied by a child, is dressed and styled in the manner of Gypsies of the time and has a baby at her breast. Why has the artist incorporated a Hebrew woman dressed in the style of fifteenth-century Gypsies into this religious work?

By the end of the fourteenth century, Romani people had been in Europe for some decades, and even up to a century in some areas. At that time, like the Hebrews fleeing persecution, the Roma are also a people on the move. Historical sources from the period suggest that their roaming was atonement for having renounced their faith in Christ when under Turkish rule. Moreover, everything relating to Egypt was considered to be magical and mysterious but without any negative connotations at that time. If there had been any, the woman in the panel would not have appeared in this Biblical scene. Finally, the woman who is dressed in the style of a Roma woman is holding a baby in the crook of her left arm. She appears to be nursing. This figure of the ontologically loving mother is the only connotation-free common theme in the development of Roma femininity from the chronicles of the late Middle Ages through to the poetry of the nineteenth century.

Another example of an Old Testament's figure reinvestment is present in the preparatory drawing for *Moses Saved from the Water* by Niccolo dell'Abate (Louvre 1539). The subject of this drawing is an episode from the Old Testament, taken from the Book of Exodus. Several scenes are depicted. The Pharaoh's daughter can be seen in the foreground, pointing to Moses in his basket. She is accompanied by some other women. A woman can be seen picking up the same basket or entrusting it to the rough waters of the river in the background, and even farther away some people can be seen on the river bank, as well as a suggestion of drowning. The Pharaoh's daughter's hair is coiled in a voluminous, circular style and tied up with bands or "bern" in the Romani language, in a manner characteristic of Romani women in the late Middle Ages and early modern period (Vaux de Foletier 1966). This voluminous, coiled hairstyle is typical of Romani women of the period in which the painter produced the drawing that it becomes a feature of Egyptian women. Here, a Romani attribute indicates the Egyptian origin of the people depicted.

The second phase of a spiritual treatment of the Romani presence in art is used through the hermeneutic figure of the interpreter and the annunciator, proposed by Raphael in his *Great Holy Family* (Louvre) and its corollary by Giulio Romano, *Little Holy Family* (Louvre) in the person of Saint Elisabeth, mother of Saint John the Baptist and annunciator of the coming and the death of Jesus Christ, dressed in the manner of the Gypsies of that era. It is also present in *The Holy Family* aka *La Perla* by Raphael (Prado 1518) and in *The Visitation*, a joint work by Giulio Romano, Giovanni Penni, and Raphael (Prado 1517), both of which display a positively connoted, hermeneutic interpretation of the female Roma figure.

In *The Visitation* by Romano, Penni, and Raphael, in a pyramid composition, we see a pregnant Mary with her cousin, Saint Elisabeth, whose features are those of an old woman. Behind them a landscape, and some way off, as if announcing Jesus' sacrifice, the scene of Christ being baptized by Saint John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Saint Elisabeth's hair is bound up in a turban in the Romani fashion of the day. As the mother of Saint John the Baptist, she is enigmatic, an annunciator, a hermeneutic, and as such she is portrayed with the attributes of a Gypsy woman. It should be noted that St. Elisabeth has a serious

expression. She knows the sacrifices and suffering that her son and Jesus will endure for their faith. St. Elizabeth has the power to see into the future, just as Roma women of the time were thought to do, and she is depicted with a dull complexion and more angular features. In many other scenes from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we find female figures like Saint Anne as well as images of the Virgin and child dressed in a similar way or wearing a flat round hat also characteristic of Bohemian women. This is the case in some of the works of Boccaccio, Dell'Abate, Correggio, Ansaldo, Mantegna, or Titian.

Medieval society was undergoing a transformation at that time, preparing to go through what Michel Foucault (1966) has called an epistemological *caesura*: a fundamental, structuring transition between a human being in a world conceived of through the prism of hermeneutics and interpretation (in which the ontological Roma figure could be the paradigm) and a modern society modelled on reason and *cogito*. It is in this *caesura* that Roma appear and throw a spanner in the works. Between two worlds, Oriental and Occidental, between two historical milestones, the Middle Ages and the modern period, the figure of the Rom, known by the majority societies of the time with exonyms such as *Egyptian*, *Saracen*, *Bohemian*, or even *Tatar*, shifts over the course of a few generations from otherness (from a mirrored relationship with the Other) to exteriority, imposed by the advent of normativity.

Over a few decades, a radical shift occurred in the symbolic and artistic representation of Romani individuality. In fact, around 1500, the great Egyptian companies were chased out of the towns and cities, and derogatory clichés took deep root in the pictorial treatment of Roma populations. Those who quite rightly had been considered as hermeneutists, interpreters, and disseminators of knowledge were turned into necromancers, sorcerers, cowards, child eaters, poisoners, and thieves. Through these works, we can see how magic ceases to be prophetic and sibylline, and comes to embody dupery, ugliness, vice, and theft.

The advent of reason demands the domestication of the Other. When this domestication cannot be fully attained, the Other must be banished outside the boundaries of the self, the structuring norms. The Other must be made into an outsider, and sometimes one that is so distressing that it must be exposed in an instructing way in order to be controlled. The allegory of vice and deception, the embodiment of the deceived deceiver, these are the images projected onto Romani people, and especially Roma women. As if it were a receptacle for the fear and fascination of the majority, the manufactured idea of the Romani *topos* mutates repeatedly and forever.

## 2. The Epistemological Crossroads

Bosch's work perfectly illustrates a profound change in how both artists and their audiences consider the margins. Bosch lies at the epistemological crossroads (*ibid.*). He associates sin, madness, idiocy, and reprehensible behavior with a large group of people, those who live on the margins.

If reason and formalism characterize his pictorial synthesis of his era, on the border between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, one thing ties the artist to the Mediaeval era in spite of the vehemence he displays against the popular classes. His lack of regard for the lesser culture of his time notwithstanding, Hieronymus Bosch was influenced strongly by folklore: customs, rituals, and celebrations, symbolic

objects, popular proverbs, and metaphors. There lies Bosch's paradox, a constant tension between harsh criticism of popular culture and his almost systematic use of references emanating from the people.

The *Haywain Triptych* (Prado 1512–15) reflects the mental, ideological, and religious configuration of this pivotal period in the history of thought when the Romani figure first appeared in everyday European life (Vandenbroeck 2016). The *Haywain* is a moralistic allegory, a biblical metaphor for the fleeting, mortal nature of earthly things. Open, the triptych is about sin. The central panel, the main scene, is a mirror that features a hay wagon, the panel on the left shows paradise, while the one on the right depicts hell. When closed, these two panels represent *homo viator*, the wayfarer, the traveler, making his way through life.

Man, regardless of social class or place of origin, is full of desire to acquire and enjoy material possessions and is seduced and deceived by the Demon in doing so. The artist's message is meant to encourage us to forego earthly goods and pleasures in order to avoid eternal damnation, for humankind is corrupted by sin. The hay wagon, which symbolizes wealth, honors, and pleasures among others, trundles towards the granary, drawn by seven monsters symbolizing the seven deadly sins.

Underneath, in the foreground of the central panel and for the purposes of this analysis, we are particularly interested in a child who leads a blind man by the hand, a reference to the tradition of the picaresque Spanish novel, a clear sign of the circulation of ideas and themes towards the end of the Middle Ages. To their right, two Gypsy women, outsiders and mistrusted, recognizable by their dark complexions, their wide, round hats, and their shawls, are purposely placed in the center of the picture.<sup>[2]</sup> One is taking the hand of a young, pale-skinned lady whose fine clothes tell us she is of noble stock. So the Gypsy woman is a fortuneteller, an activity frowned on by the Church. She holds a baby against her breast, tucked inside the fold of her robe, while another, bare-legged child reaches out to touch the rich woman's dress. The other Gypsy woman sits on the ground, busy washing the bottom of a baby lying across her lap, using water from a bowl on the ground beside her. Behind her are a jug, a pig, something roasting on a spit, and a dog. In his portrayal of Roma abnormality through the two female figures, bearing in mind that witch-hunting was rife in sixteenth-century Flanders (Ginzburg 1992), Bosch was unable to resist an ancient and recurrent trait attributed to Roma women, that of the loving mother, in a rather wild but nevertheless non-threatening natural setting.

Another paradox further complicates our understanding of Bosch's universe through the prism of this epistemological *caesura*. He condemns marginality while formally paying tribute to it. The reverse side of the triptych depicts a wayfarer, the only lower-class vagabond considered with benevolence in the iconography of Hieronymus Bosch. An old traveler, bent under the weight of his load, fends off a growling dog with his cudgel. He is a good man, looking back over the years. But what he sees is robbery, violence, and the punishment that awaits the people of little faith portrayed inside the polyptych.

The codification of Bosch's art, however, is such that it can appear complex and hermetic to our eyes. But the moral system he illustrates is at once rationalistic and formalistic. Bosch's work is certainly one

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2 Turbans and flat round hats were typical Gypsy dress at the time, as was wearing a coarse shawl draped over the shoulder.



of the best vectors for appreciating the importance of contextualization and interdisciplinarity, the only methodological key to understanding the references and worldview of an era and its episteme.

### 3. The Shift from Alterity to Exteriority: From Hermeneutists to Fortunetellers

If Raphael's Saint Elizabeth, who is depicted as a Romni/Egyptian, is a sacred evocation of the proclamation of Christ's future sacrifice – a profane image – then it becomes a recurring theme for Caravaggio and European Caravaggesques. Fortunetellers, as negative allegories of vice and of moral marginality, crystallize the artistic and social representation of Roma women. Caravaggesque fortunetellers and others before them tell us about the ancient nature of depictions of Roma women as predictors of the future and mistresses of the “Black arts.”

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, the theme of the fortuneteller took center stage. The Gypsy and the naïve customer, accompanied in some cases by drinkers, musicians, and people of easy virtue, are recurring themes in all the studios of Europe (for example, *The Fortune Teller* by Le Valentin, 1628; *Meeting at a Cabaret*, 1625; *The Fortune Teller* by Nicolas Régnier, 1626). This iconographic archetype was not created by Caravaggio alone. It can already be found some decades earlier, for instance, in the *Haywain Triptych* by Jérôme Bosch mentioned above. However, as it became a school and spread internationally, the Caravaggesque motif removed the fortune teller from her complexity and the richness of her world, isolating her and turning her to an allegorical representation of immorality.

Caravaggio and the Caravaggesques crystallized and disseminated an artistic and moral motif on an international scale. Some of them projected the same moral vices, namely theft, dupery and lechery, with each of them incorporating particular features. In the case of *The Fortune Teller* by Nicolas Régnier, the motif is strongly eroticized (Lemoine 2007). It embodies the beginning of the Orientalist view of Gypsy women, forged by fascination, fear, and fantasy. Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* (Louvre 1595–98) portrays two young people with strangely similar faces: a young Romani woman on the left and a young aristocratic man on the right, who can be recognized as such by his clothes, hat, gloves, and épée. Caravaggio set the scene by only one plane in this picture. The framing is cropped. The figures are shown from the waist up. The framing and the background, with no ornamentation or detail, block the composition and bring the scene towards the viewer, who becomes the witness. The people are positioned face to face. The expression and smile on the young woman's face support those of the man and are intensified by their matching faces. The fortuneteller is taking the young man's hand in order to read it. The position of her fingers, with the index finger on the young man's ring finger, with his ring visible, suggests that she is going to steal his jewelry. Her hairstyle (long turban) and cape (piece of thick fabric attached to the shoulder) are typical of Romani dress of the period.

## 4. Nationalization, Marginal Nature, Military Presence, and Disembodiment

Together, historical modernity and the age of *cogito* push a key figure of hermeneutics to the side by means of the figure of the female Gypsy. It is this exteriority that will be developed using the motif of the fortuneteller. However, as a pictorial response to this epistemological *caesura*, about halfway through the seventeenth century, and in correspondence with the nation-state concept emerging from the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, the racialized figure of the Bohemian is eclipsed gradually.

As the concept of the nation-state is consolidated by the end of the eighteenth century, all European countries test an identical process for defining the nation, with some gaining self-belief and thus their colonial enterprises. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were no doubt among the most terrifying centuries for Romani peoples. The political animosity towards them reached a climax. A multitude of different anti-Gypsy laws all around Europe were a prelude to what would be the first genocidal episode in their history that culminated in the Black Wednesday of July 30, 1749: the Great Gypsy Round-up in Spain (Gomez Alfaro 1992).

The emergence of market capitalism, the invention of printing, and the birth of vernacular languages as instruments of administrative centralization are three key elements in the construction of majority national identities (Anderson 1983). An exhaustive study mirroring these three elements – completely contrary to the pre-modern and modern economic practices of Roma – linked to circulation, orality, and the multilingual nature of Roma – would be of decisive importance for understanding the construction of a Romani *abnormality* by majority societies.

Nevertheless, Romani reality has occupied an undeniable place in European nationalist constructs. The abnormality of the inside that they already embodied had a mirror effect on the normative frameworks on which such nationalism was structured. That is why there is unity in the use of Romani motifs for national iconography. European artists of the seventeenth century mainly used Romani *topoi* in their new fashion-style paintings, the genre painting. The formula proved to be a great success, and it was practiced by numerous European painters, including Frenchmen such as Sébastien Bourdon, whose works are particularly interesting: *Soldiers at Rest*, renamed *Gypsies at Rest* (Louvre 1640–43), and *Travellers Beneath the Ruins* (Louvre 1642–43). Another example is Dutchman Jan Miel and his *Military Resting with a Fortune Teller* (Louvre 1648–50).

The works by Bourdon can be interpreted, like those by Miel, from another angle than the genre painting. These three works show day-to-day Romani life from a military perspective. This is a fundamental point because the history of the Romani people has been linked to geopolitics and military conflicts in the East and in the West since their departure from India at the start of the first millennium. Military and mercenary activity is a constant in Romani proto-history and history (Carmona 2013). This anchoring of Romani identity in warmongering and European geopolitical history allows the Romani movement to be conditioned initially by seigniorial wars and subsequently by national wars (Carmona 2017).

In *Soldiers at Rest*, renamed *Gypsies at Rest*, seven people are portrayed in the picture. There are some women, one of whom is feeding a baby, as well as children and men resting under an improvised tent. Some of the men are armed, and there are some other weapons placed on the ground. There is an armed man on an exhausted horse, viewed from behind, who appears to be addressing them. The scene takes place outside. There are ruins visible that are evocative of Antiquity, a cave, and a distant landscape. Bourdon used a mineral, metallic palette, highlighted by the red of the cavalryman's cape and the blue of the skirt on the young girl who is feeding a child. In works of this kind and at this time, European painters created what art historians named a "Bohemian setting" (Thuillier 2000). Small groups of Gypsies, often armed, resting or marching, occupy typical places such as caves or forests. Makeshift camps and this marginal yet nurturing geography underline the free nature of Romani populations in the imagination of society and of the artist. During this era, the figure of the young Gypsy girl feeding a child comes to be established as an allegory of natural freedom, a freedom that forms part of an idealized natural setting, as opposed to a society bound by strict rules and social codes.

Since their arrival in Europe in the fourteenth century, the main activities engaged in by Romani groups, and probably also their movements, were motivated by the military conflicts of the time (the Alpujarras War in Spain, the War of Spanish Succession, the French Wars of Religion, and the Franco-Flemish wars). Great companies and then more fragmented groups went to serve in the armies, the men often as mercenaries, blacksmiths, horse traders, and musicians, and the women as washerwomen and cooks.

The seventeenth century was a turning point in the history of Romani people in Europe. Military activities were an important factor in the structure of Romani society at that time. For nearly two centuries, Romani people had moved around the territory of nation-states by founding "Bohemian companies" that offered their services to seigniorial troops. Despite the incessant wars taking place in Europe, the seventeenth century marked the end of these great companies owing to national centralization policies and the passing of declarations, edicts, and legal texts against Romani populations, resulting in their being condemned to the galleys or institutions for vagrancy for their refusal to abandon their dress, language, and traditions.

Progressively the Romani exteriority undergoes a different sort of treatment. The Romani motif is idealized and becomes an allegory, but this time embodying telluric power through a politicized representation of nature owing to the advent of nationalism. Henceforth, Romani exteriority will be depicted and expressed in marginal natural landscapes and used by artists as a symbolic way of furthering the advent of nation-states.

In this entirely disembodied iconographic creation, the Romani model typically is placed in a marginal geography. If the nature of the century of Enlightenment is part of the exteriority in which marginal groups are entrenched, then the abstract idea of nature is a critical tool as well as being the foundation of the new order that this exteriority seeks. It is an object of study, but it is also a nature that is subject to norms and categories, subdued, a nature that is tamable and tamed.

In *Gathering of Gypsies in the Wood* by Jan Brueghel the Elder (Prado 1612), the Flemish master's special treatment of landscape is apparent (Prosperetti 2008; Museo Nacional del Prado 2011). The views are panoramic and mountainous, the forests are dense, and the realism of the whole is the result of his

meticulous touch and of great technical quality. The diagonal line of the mountainside divides the picture in two parts. On the left a wide landscape bathed in misty light opens up in the distance, with tiny dwellings here and there. On the right, in darker hues, a path opens up in the middle of a forest. A group of Gypsies is driving a small caravan of horses and mules. A seated woman wearing a flat, round hat and draped in a Marian blue robe holds a baby in her arms and appears to be talking to an older woman. A third woman, in an ochre robe, is talking to the man leading the mules, who is wearing a sword or dagger on his left hip. The rest of the company follow with the horses and mules. If you look carefully, you will see that all the men are armed. This whole scene is at odds with the laws in force in Europe at the time, which barred Gypsies from carrying weapons, travelling, and trading in livestock.

Nature in the century of Enlightenment is a constituent element of the exteriority in which certain marginal groups are entrenched, the abstract idea of nature is a critical tool for establishing the new order that this exteriority is looking for. It is an object of study. However, it is a nature that is subject to norms, categories, topics, a nature that is tamable and tamed. Nevertheless, this highlighting of nature and of things like man gradually provides an idealized, normative representation. The Romani exteriority and its relationship to nature cannot be represented there without a filter. Their relationship is a disembodied one there too. It is within this very relationship that the anchoring of embryonic European nationalism, Romanticism and Orientalism are rooted.

If nature is presented in *Landscape with Gypsies* by David Teniers III (1641–45) as it is by Brueghel the Elder in *Gathering of Gypsies in the Wood*, if both contrast nature (on the left) and culture (on the right), the figure of the Gypsy portrayed there has lost its substance and its panache. The characters, whose ragged clothes are bathed in light, seem physically less ethnicized and are placed on the paths like figurines. At the foot of a rocky landscape bordering a road, three Gypsies and a child – boy or girl we do not know – wait as an old woman tells a peasant's fortune. At the entrance to the village, where the house facades seem to form an impenetrable barrier between two adjoining worlds, three other figures observe the scene.

A Dutch artist from this era, Jan van de Venne, also known as the “Master of the Gypsies,” must also be given due consideration. His pictographic treatment of the Romani figure stands out owing to a deep personal empathy with the status of his models yet showing a certain respect for the humble, noble characters. *The Gypsy Camp* (1631–1651) is a small picture, slightly larger than a tablet screen today. The painting captures a scene of everyday Romani life at the time: a younger woman delouses a child by a fire on which an old woman is preparing a meal, while a third woman watches. It takes place outside or possibly in a cave, as could be indicated by the rocky ground and the top-right corner of the picture. The artist has depicted the people in this scene in a very lively, quasi-realistic way, and the three women are representative of three stages of life. The light and the faded brown shades make the scene come alive and create movement.

Van de Venne gives us a very special view of Roma women for the time. Of course, they are depicted in a natural setting typical of the seventeenth century. However, it is a view that contains fewer stereotypes than those of other contemporary artists. Despite the poverty of these women they are depicted as dignified, loving, and attentive people.

## 5. Costumed Figures, Fusion, and Cultural Appropriation

From the eighteenth century onwards, the vast majority of Romani figures were costumed in a marginal and constructed geography. In the *Gypsy Wedding Feast* by Alessandro Magnasco (1730–35), a wedding feast has been arranged. This picture fully embraces the idea of the gallant Bohemian and the vacillation between projection and reality. The characters are in tents. The scene comes alive with three musicians. Just as Frans Hall's *Gypsy Girl* (Louvre 1528–1530), a strange Dutch Caravagesque painting from two centuries earlier, nothing else than the title allows us to identify the characters or even to confirm that they are actually Romani. They are all simply made up, in a formal negation of otherness.

By the end of the eighteenth century the last descendants of the Jews and Moors ceased to be perceptible in Spain, but nothing of the sort happened to Gypsies. The national cultural, literary, and musical imagination shaped a series of identifying archetypes that would determine the popular representation of Spanish society. These were mainly the *majo*, the Gypsy, the *torero*, and the *payo cateto*. A hybrid aesthetic motif was created by the interpenetration of Romani identities with the *majo* and the *bandolero* (bandit or highwayman: an outlaw living mainly by robbery and smuggling) (Ruiz Mas 2008).

*Majismo* is a social phenomenon that emerged around the mid-eighteenth century, in Madrid in particular. It was the man in the street's response to the hegemony of French fashion, the scope of which would bring about a veritable reversal of social mimicry, with the wealthier social classes also adopting the style. In their dress and in changing their manner of speech, young people showed their total rejection of the influence of international fashion and a renewed interest in things popular. The *majismo* of Castile was echoed by the *gitanismo* of Andalusia. For instance, theatrical works by Antonio Guerrero, Esteve, Laserna, and Ramón de la Cruz painted Gypsies in a favorable light, sometimes even displaying a certain admiration, highlighting their honesty, their loyalty in love and their artistic talents. The Gypsy thus became a familiar figure, on a par with the *majo*. Originally appearing under the reign of Carlos III, this trend later became a fully-fledged movement in the nineteenth century that would be labelled “*costumbrismo*.” Well-to-do young adopted the postures, clothes, speech, manners, and customs of the Gypsies. This fondness towards them was also the result of a romantic interest in things marginal or, more precisely, anything which noble or bourgeois young people considered to lie outside the accepted norms and standards. Literature, the arts, and music all took up the trend.

Basque historian and essayist Julio Caro Baroja suggests the appearance of the Gypsy figure in Spanish theatre coincides with the rise of the tourist industry that began to cater to foreigners expecting picaresque experiences in Spain (Caro Baroja 1990). A catalyst for cultural appropriation, at the origin of Romanticism and subsequently Orientalism, economic interests appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that did very little to benefit the communities concerned. This is the cultural panorama in which Francisco de Goya y Lucientes produced his works.

The Prado houses over five hundred works by the artist. Superimposing the Andalusian theme with the treatment of the figure of the Gypsy, *majo*, and/or *bandolero* requires in-depth research in order to identify

those works where the Romani reference is best embodied. *The Maja and the Cloaked Men* or *A Walk in Andalusia* (1777) depicts a young lady meeting with her suitor, described by Goya as a “Gypsy man and woman” (*un jitano y una gitana*) in a thick pine forest where the perspective is cut off by an adobe wall. Men with masked faces and a vaguely threatening air about them seem to be accompanying and watching the couple while, in the background, on the right, a woman wearing a white veil and holding a fan seems to be observing both the characters in the scene and the people looking at the painting.

There are two things to notice here in addition to the veracity of the ethnic origin of the subjects. One is the opulence with which the clothing of the protagonists is treated, a perfect illustration of the importance attached in those days to the *majismo/gitanismo* aesthetic. Their clothes were reminiscent of the descriptions of Gypsy clothes already mentioned in sixteenth century archives in Europe.

In the foreground of the picture the position of the couple and the other figures is a mystery. Their close proximity suggests that the masked men might be watching over the couple. While the well-lit features of the Gypsy woman’s face are perfectly visible, and her expression, backed up by the movement of her hand, seems to be inviting the man to take her somewhere away from prying eyes, the cloaked, masked men are depicted in less direct light, against a background evocative of places frequented by *bandoleros* (dry tree branch, mineral elements in the adobe wall, the rock on which one of the men sits). Whether *majo*, Gypsy, or *bandolero*, in this period, and especially in Goya’s work, the models and their identities are hard to tell apart, and only their gaze reveals their singularity.

The other thing to notice in *The Maja and the Cloaked Men* or *A Walk in Andalusia* is the special relationship the artist develops between his characters, but also with the spectator, through their gazes, what is revealed and what is concealed in order better to be seen. If something is to be *visible*, it must be placed in sight of the seer. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) explains, in the beginning every being is subjected to *seeing*. With Lacanian logic he affirms that where form is instituted, the scopic field is formed. Lacan (1963) asserts that “in the scopic field the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture.” Before seeing, we are given to be seen, everyone is observed in the spectacle of the world, by a gaze which is not shown to us. The conscience can only see if it sees itself being seen. Such is the fantasy of Platonic contemplation: that the quality of *omnividence* should be transferred to an absolute being. His gaze presents itself as a contingency: I am looked at, it is he who triggers my gaze. Which is where the feeling of strangeness begins.

In Goya’s painting the young Gypsy sees herself being observed by the gazes behind the masks or by us looking at the painting and observed by the figure wearing the white veil on the bottom right, who also appears to be external to the scene. It is this crossing of all the gazes that calls us and draws us into this picture, where the margins seem to come together as Gypsy, *majos*, or *bandoleros*, veiled woman, voyeur/onlooker, spectator. It is in the articulation of the abnormative relationship and aesthetic fascination that majority societies have with the margins that are sown the seeds of cultural appropriation, which is still at work today and perhaps more than ever before.

At the time, armed bands were in abundance in Italy as they were in Spain. They were often selected by painters because their Romantic spirit represented free men facing an immovable society. Repressive

measures against various Romani groups and their ways of life in Europe compelled them to leave the towns and cities and to embed themselves in the mountains and remote places where bandits and *bandoleros* developed and invested in an equally marginal nature. The subject is therefore treated by almost all of the young painters who went to Rome to complete their studies, but they are inspired by contemporary people.

François-Joseph Navez, whose *Scene of Bandits with a Fortune Teller* is on display at the Louvre, describes his picture in a letter addressed to his benefactor and friend on July 21, 1821: “I have finished a picture... It is a fortune teller with an extraordinary expression and tone.” The characters depicted in this work are models who were highly rated by artists of the time. The fortuneteller, “of venerable age, slightly tanned by the sun, with hard, rugged features,” is also represented in *The Old Italian Woman* by Géricault, *The Old Italian Woman* by Léon Cogniet, and in *The Childhood of Sixtus V* and *The Fortune Teller* by Victor.

## 6. Intra-European Orientalism. The Epistemicidal Power of Images and Words

It is difficult not to feel extremely sad when faced with *Zingara with a Basque Tambourine* by Camille Corot (Louvre 1865–70). An impenetrable melancholy overwhelms anyone who stops to look at this face. For some, it portrays the nostalgia of youth retranscribed by a painter whose death was near; the weight of seven centuries of epistemicide, in an absence, a total absence of being, which is nonetheless able to evoke something of the Romani people and of Romani women. This young model, who appears to be innocent and who is not really, this young girl whose tambourine is meant to ethnicize her, has the dignified eroticism of all the stereotypes of the French writer Prosper Mérimée relating to female Gypsies. There are no physical elements or clothing that allow us to do this. Only the title of the work and the tambourine that she is holding in her right hand allow us to come closer to this woman from the world of music, with which various Romani groups are often associated.

Within a Romantic setting, Orientalism is powerful for those who are willing to admit it. This young girl appears to be on the brink of whispering something, and it is in this silence charged with words to come that makes it possible to catch a glimpse of the Orientalizing relationship that the nineteenth century had with the Romani body, but also with Romani language and philology.

## Conclusion

Beyond a genealogical and historical approach to Romaphobia and antigypsyism, the purpose of this study is to redefine the relationship between singularity and universality, a filigree present at the core of any situated study. In light of a realignment of thinking with regard to Romani identity, the singular and the universal are revisited by the Romani episteme. Far from being a modality, these two concepts can be totally reconsidered through the prism of this plural otherness.

Romaniness can only blossom in *pluriversality* (Dussel 1993), that is, through an augmented form of alienating universalism, alone capable of enabling exteriorities – these fermentations of power – to

express themselves to the full. To quote Paul Ricœur (1950), referring to Spinoza's theorem, "it is when the being is at its most singular that it is able to meet God," which is like referring to the universal in the language of the philosopher from Amsterdam.

In the history of philosophy, at least since Kant, the relationship between the universal and the singular has always been defined as a perfectibility on the horizon of truth. In that perfectibility on the horizon of truth, epistemes that have been minoritized or relegated to the limbo of exteriority, like the Roma episteme, find themselves isolated in the idea of particularism. Approaching the universal and the particular from a Romani standpoint requires a change of paradigm.

So the Romani episteme must not be considered as something determinate, a category of a heteronomic, dogmatic, outside law that needs to be folklorized or converted to correspond to this perfectibility, the horizon of truth that underpins Western philosophy. We must imagine another relationship between singularity and universality in order to re-enter the scope of the possible and move from universality to pluriversality. Romani singularity is not "particularism." It is the means to another universal, a universal reached in a different way.

But Romaniness also means another relationship with truth. This is no minor consideration in times when men and women from different Romani groups are subjected to denials of justice. Like many marginal epistemes, the Romani episteme considers the universal in its relationship with justice. Justice permits us to move and pierce the concept of truth. The perfectible is a means of relating to the history of truth, understood as a coming together, a unification, an origin, and based on the dominant philosophical tradition. All these ways of thinking have reduced Romaniness to a particularism, a particular determination. The answer to that is not, like the Romani intellectual emancipation movements have done thus far, to clamor that Roma and their intellectuals are equally capable of thinking the universal. Instead Romani intellectuals should be thinking about reformulating the relationship between singular and universal in a very different way. This reassessment also needs to take another paradigm into account, that of the multiple forms of Romaniness. The Romani being challenges the notion of identity, taking position outside the essentialism versus universalism dialectic. If we think of justice as something dissociated from truth, that makes justice the modality whereby singulars become multiples. It means calling on a significance other than that circumscribed by truth, which marks a fixed, determined identity. It means, on the contrary, questioning the significance of multiplicities as we do that of singularities.

Throughout this analysis, therefore, we have been talking not about truth but about justice. By justice we mean returning to the three powers cited by Paul Ricœur which we mentioned in the introduction: the power to say, to act, and to tell. Far from wanting to draw an illustrated historical genealogy of the expiatory victim as embodied in the Gypsy, Manouche, Sinto, and the Rom, the exercise proposed here requires an effort to make a differentiation among the typologies of rejection. Indeed, if the theory of the scapegoat focuses our thinking about rejection of the most extreme forms of violence, also suffered on numerous occasions by the different Romani groups (for example, the Great Round-up and the *Porrajmos*, the genocide perpetrated against the Roma during the Second World War), this focalization ignores the insidious violence of exclusion, stigmatization, hygienism, and internment which make such massacres and persecutions possible and does not take into account the machinery of power or the



fear of the imperceptible other. The reality of Romani otherness lies in an oscillation, to the rhythm of history, between an imagined radical otherness and the idea of “another who is imperceptibly other,”<sup>[3]</sup> where the imperceptible stirs up all kinds of hate.

In times when it is impossible to re-examine discourse on identity with serenity, the “Roma question” and the use of that term no longer even surprise us, so normal is it for us to consider Romani otherness as *de facto* ab-normativity. The epistemological root, the cultural identity, and the ontological *koine* of different Romani groups in Europe are denied. However, challenging the notion of a “Roma question” does not mean ceasing to think about Romani essentialism. On the contrary, it means denouncing the identification of a Man as a Roma by an external being, be it a Romaphobe with his hatred or an institution with its normative approach. Beyond its posture, this way of looking at the paradox is actually philosophical. While objecting to someone or something external identifying a human being as Romani is legitimate, it does not mean we cannot talk about an ontological form of plural identity. It does not mean one cannot be Romani even though one cannot offer a definition of it. While the “Roma question” implies ontological reflexion, while “being” is the most natural thing there is, for different Romani groups that is not necessarily evident, as the paradigm is in the question. This ontological paradox is related to what Jankélévitch says in his work on “quoddity” and “quiddity.” *Romanipen*, the sense of belonging to the Romani people, can be viewed through this lens. Quoddity is the *fact* of being; quiddity is the *way* of being. *Romanipen* is therefore a “*je-ne-sais-quoi*,” the cornerstone of Jankélévitch’s philosophy, something that is but to which we cannot give a meaning. Such fun, rhetorically thumbing one’s nose at the experts and Romologists who cannot conceive of this “inexpressibility” in light of the thinking of one of the greatest contemporary philosophers.... Neither folklore nor common memory, or so little.... It is this “*je-ne-sais-quoi*,” this imperceptibility of being Other, that kindles hate, for what we cannot grasp is also daunting.

Today, as yesterday, Roma resemble and dissemble. The “hominity” of man is “to be similar and different” (Jankélévitch 2015). Throughout their history, Roma have been locked in a difference they carry in them but which is and remains denied as a living Otherness. To think of antigypsyism and Romaphobia as a species in a genre would be to show conceptual laziness. These forms cannot be a particular case of racism as nothing is a particular case of anything. Pseudo-rational systematization would consist in thinking there is a transcendental consciousness floating over history. The importance given to the distinction is not a concern for hierarchy but a condemnation of the pseudo-scientific use of the term racism. To conceptualize racism is to banalize its effects. To make antigypsyism and Romaphobia forms of racism out of concern for benevolent universalism is what comes of abandoning differential thinking, of intellectual laziness, of denying the all-important “almost nothing,” the similar which is not the same. Subsuming Roma within a broader category prevents us from understanding antigypsyism, negrophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and racism. However, modern-day Romaphobia and antigypsyism do have a racial foundation, which is what differentiates them from their historical forms. The genocidal episode of the Great Round-up of 1749 was where it started. To deny this racial characteristic would be to ignore what makes the *Porrajmos* unique. Yet that cannot serve as a pretext for what makes the singularity of

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3 Author’s translation from “l’Autre imperceptiblement autre” in *Quelque part dans l’inachevé*, by Vladimir Jankélévitch, Paris: Gallimard, 1978, p. 198.

antigypsyism, what distinguishes it from other forms of racism. It is the combination of imperceptibility and ab-normativity that makes the specificity of antigypsyism and Romaphobia. The majority societies have a moral responsibility towards history and the process of marginalization of minority epistemes. The desire for ontological autonomy is powerful for Romani generations. Unfortunately, other forms of alienation are now at work or soon will be. The quest for autonomy, in the sense of abiding by one's own law, comes up against a heteronomy (abiding by another's law), the aim of which is not so much to annoy or oppress as to nourish and satisfy, the better to subdue. Good sense and common sense are not enough: "only a truly critical and genealogical approach can address the complex combinations of activity and passivity, of command and obedience, of desire and capture of desire that attend the constitution of a subjectivity" (Astor 2016).

And to conclude on this subject, the last work in the Prado collection, *Dónde iremos? Bosnios* by Joaquín Araujo y Ruano, from 1884 is a picture of extreme weariness, exhaustion of body and soul, terrible in its resemblance to what we see every day on the streets of Europe's cities. This Gypsy family, the painter tells us, are Bosnians who sleep the sleep of the world-weary: the parents sitting, the little girl strapped to a mule, and the boy, his face flat against a tambourine, too far gone even to feel the agile fingers of the monkey searching his hair for lice. Seeing the sleep of the Other here is not just contemplation but also tension.

Yet faced with this image one can imagine that their dream, even if it is terrible, even if it is a flight, is also the potential substrate of a budding power to act. It is possible to imagine that the alienated being, if he is not completely broken, will wake up and realize the value of his culture, his "living" culture that was there before the Modern era, during the Modern era, and will outlive it, thereby reinterpreting Spinoza's concept of "*potentia*" (Spinoza 1849).

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## Appendix



Anonymous (Flanders)  
*Triptych of the Glorious Virgin*  
1485  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Jérôme Bosch  
*Haywain Triptic*  
1512–1515  
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Raphael, Giulio Romano, Giovanni Penni  
*The Visitation*  
1517  
Madrid, Museo del Prado



Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino known as Raphael,  
Giulio Romano  
*Little Holy Family*  
1519  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Frans Hals  
*Gypsy Girl*  
1528-1530  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio known as Le Caravage,  
*The Fortune Teller*  
1595-1598  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Niccolò dell'Abate  
*Moses Saved from the Water*  
1539  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Jan Brueghel the Elder  
*Gypsies Gathering in the Wood*  
1612  
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Sébastien Bourdon  
*Soldiers at Rest, renamed Gypsies at Rest*  
1640–1643  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



David Teniers III  
*Landscape with Gypsies*  
1641–1645  
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Jan Miel  
*Military Resting with a Fortune Teller*  
1648–1650  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Alessandro Magnasco  
*Gypsy Wedding Feast*  
1730–35  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Francisco de Goya y Lucientes  
*The Maja and the Cloaked Men or A Walk in Andalusia*  
1777  
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Camille Corot  
*Zingara with a Basque Tambourine*  
1865–1870  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Jean-François Navez  
*Scene of Bandits with a Fortune Teller*  
1821  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Joaquin Araujo y Ruano  
*Where Should We Go? Bosnians*  
1884  
Museo del Prado, Madrid