

Romani Slavery in Romanian History Textbooks: Between Reparations and Coloniality of Knowledge

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Critical
Romani Studies

Abstract

This article investigates the depiction of Romani slavery in Romanian history textbooks for years 4, 8, and 12 that were approved by Romania's Ministry of National Education for the 2023–2024 school year. Using Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis framework, the study examines to what extent the Romanian curriculum has been decolonised in the discipline of history or, if on the contrary, it still preserves epistemic power structures as described in Aníbal Quijano's concept of the colonial matrix of power.

Keywords

- Critical discourse analysis
- Coloniality of knowledge
- Decolonisation
- History textbooks
- Power relations
- Romani Slavery
- Reparative justice

Introduction

The construction of mainstream identity usually designates an outsider – someone who does not belong – as a foil. A social space is constructed, and those deigned not to belong are positioned outside it, both physically and conceptually (McGarry 2017). In Europe, Roma are placed outside the space belonging to non-Roma, both physically and conceptually, and are construed as a threat to Europeans. The most egregious example of exclusion is the enslavement of the Roma, on the territory of present-day Romania, from at least 1385 until 1856. Not only did this place the Roma outside society; it excluded them from the category of human beings. Slaves were like things: they could be bought and sold, gifted, bequeathed, dowried, and given in lieu of debt.

Romani historian Petre Petcuț states that the abolition of slavery was the most important social event in the modern history of Romania. It triggered two long-lasting phenomena: State attempts to integrate/assimilate these new citizens – still ongoing – and dramatic inequality between the emancipated and the rest of the population. Superficial abolitionist policies, ostensibly aimed at integrating former slaves into society, led to their exclusion and marginalisation, creating a distinct citizen group. Many people were simply thrown onto the street and forced to become vagrants, populations were displaced, and whole groups became stateless (Petcuț 2015, 10).

The relationship of dependency through which Roma were subordinated and exploited has crystallised over the centuries into a set of collective stereotypes, much internalised, albeit in different ways, by both communities. On the one hand, attitudes of retreat and withdrawal are held on the part of the minority; on the other hand, the majority, due to superiority complexes and collective stigmatisation of the minority, tends to ignore power relations formed between Roma and non-Roma over time due to the period of slavery (Furtună 2022).

How does this history reflect on the relations between Roma and Romanians today? Do the legacies of slavery still shape relations between Roma and the majority population today? Is this traumatic legacy properly processed and integrated into the collective consciousness of Romanian society? Or, on the contrary, do power relations continue to be updated and normalised to the point of invisibility?

Romani researcher Magda Matache discusses several strategies to repair the harm of anti-Roma collective injustice, past and present, namely Truth Telling, Memorialising Resistance, Strengthening the Voices of the Victims, Offender Accountability, Restitution, Apology, Reparative Compensation, Legal Measures (Bhabha, Matache, and Elkins 2021). But how many of these strategies to repair the damage caused by past and present collective anti-Roma injustice have been put into practice through state policies and clear interventions that regulate this power imbalance created during slavery and that continued after its abolition, given superficial abolitionist policies?

After 1990, when Roma were recognised as a national minority, Romani students could choose to study Romani language and literature for three to four hours per week, respectively, as well as an hour a week of Romani History and Traditions in years six and seven. In addition, from the 2025–2026 school year,

“History, Slavery and Deportation of the Roma” will be introduced as an optional subject for secondary and high school education.^[1] Besides these subjects, which are mainly addressed to Romani students and are part of an additional curriculum available only at the request of parents, what place does Romani slavery have in mandatory history textbooks used by all students in Romanian schools? Is there room for the inclusion of this subject in the dominant narrative about the formation of the Romanian nation? How is the history of Romani slavery integrated into the national narrative?

To what extent is the Romanian educational space sufficiently inclusive and effective in helping Romani and non-Romani students to become aware of the historical and social mechanisms behind the interethnic relations in the society in which they live? By attending Romanian history classes, do Romani students manage to perceive themselves as part of the Romanian society?

In this article, I discuss the representation of Romani slavery in Romanian history textbooks in connection to the syllabi for the same discipline – two important components of the formal curriculum^[2] – considering that in the Romanian national system only the syllabi are mandatory. The textbooks must be approved each year by the Ministry of Education and follow already approved syllabi. Still, I chose to focus on textbooks as part of the curriculum, because even though they are not mandatory – teachers can use any educational materials as long as they comply with the contents and objectives of syllabi – the textbooks are embedded in schools and have authority in the educational system, establishing the national narrative and what is important to guide to future generations.

My analysis investigates the depiction of Romani Slavery in Romanian history textbooks for years 4, 8, and 12 that were approved by the Ministry of National Education for the 2023–2024 school year. I chose to examine history textbooks for these years because they are at the epicentre of where the history of Romania is taught and where the subject of slavery might be approached as an integral part of Romanian history, given that this topic belongs to the history of Romania as a whole. Moreover, as Mihai Rusu states, a national history textbook is a vector of memory that structures collective reporting on the past. By creating historical texts as school history textbooks, the nation’s textual community historicises its existence, elaborating a meta-narrative of its origin, destiny, and becoming (Rusu 2015, 57–59).

Taking as a case study the representation of Romani slavery in Romanian history textbooks, I will examine to what extent the Romanian curriculum has engaged with the repair strategies discussed by Magda Matache, or, if on the contrary, it still preserves the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2007). In his article “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”, the Peruvian sociologist

1 See the opinion of the Centre for Legal Resources: <https://www.crj.ro/en/educated-romania-puts-romani-history-on-the-sidelines>.

2 In *The International Encyclopedia of Education’s* 1994 edition, Husen T. Postlethwaite states that the basic structure of the curriculum contains the following components: system of theoretical considerations on persons subject to the education process and society; educational goals/finalities; contents or subjects of study selected and organised for didactic purposes; teaching-learning methodologies; methodologies for evaluating school performance. Curricular products at the level of the educational process include the education plan, syllabi, textbooks, auxiliary curriculum materials, and curriculum planning (Husen 1994, 1147).

Anibal Quijano describes the colonial matrix of power as having four interrelated domains of control that are used to maintain and reproduce coloniality: Economy – land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources; Authority – setting up army power and enforcing coloniser’s rules and law; Control of gender and sexuality – enforcing colonialist’s constructed societal norms and conventions; Knowledge – enforcing colonialists’ constructed epistemology and education norms (Quijano 2000). Regarding the coloniality of knowledge he states that Europeans generated a new perspective on history by rejecting the history and culture of colonised populations, which led to the repression of their ways of producing knowledge. They end up producing knowledge about themselves only based on the superiority/inferiority relationship imposed by a hierarchical structure (Quijano 2000, 540–41).

So, the decolonisation of the educational curriculum in Romanian history could be a first step towards the reparations discussed by Magda Matache, which implies both institutional engagement and public consciousness, understanding Romani slavery as a form of internal colonialism (Casanova 1965). Even if it does not contain a geographical dimension, it was a form of economic and cultural exploitation of Roma. I define decolonisation of the curriculum as Musharrat Ahmed-Landeryou describes it: a method of repairing the damage done for centuries to marginalised and discriminated populations. This repair begins by including their perspectives and their experiences in the curriculum by integrating those authors who belong to the oppressed populations, in order to help students who belong to these minorities feel represented in the curriculum. Reconstructing in the collective consciousness of the entire society a common assumed historical past (Ahmed-Landeryou 2023).

Methodology

In regard to the methodology used to analyse Romani slavery’s representation in Romanian history textbooks, at the first stage I analysed the content of textbooks for each level of study regarding the information about Roma and especially Romani slavery. So, I examined 19 Romanian history textbooks in total: 9 for year 4; 3 for year 8; and 7 for year 12. A result of this first stage of analysis was an identification of common elements in all textbooks by taking into account the degree of complexity of information from one level of study to another. In the end, I decided to analyse all the textbooks as a whole, not dividing them by year of study, considering it important to discuss the common thread of problematic and racist situations, regardless of the level of study.

To analyse these textbooks, I used the critical discourse analysis outlined by Teun A. van Dijk. As he contends, there is a strong link between discourse and the maintenance of inequity in a society, the role of discourse being essential in reproducing and legitimising already existing power relations. Van Dijk states that power and dominance are usually organised and institutionalised, ideologically sustained and reproduced by the media or textbooks, because “there is no comparable institution in which discourse is as massively inculcated as that of school” (Van Dijk 1993, 154).

Adapting van Dijk’s theory and tools to my analysis, I consider several narrative and linguistic tools such as the speech acts that dominate the text, the specificity and complexity of the content related to Romani slavery, the perspective from which the texts are written, the grammatical forms (use of pronouns,

verbs, adjectives, and active/passive voices); and the vocabulary and syntax that relate to Romani slavery narratives. As a result of this investigation, three categories of content emerged according to which I structured the article: (1) the omission of Romani slavery as a power tool; (2) (de)contextualising the topic of slavery in the structure of a textbook; (3) the perspective of the “master”.

1. The Omission of Romani Slavery as a Power Tool

In this section I will focus on the textbooks that contain broader or briefer information about Roma, but do not mention Romani slavery at all. I chose to discuss history textbooks that do not contain information about slavery but do information about Roma in general because, as van Dijk states, omitting information about a subject can become a strategy to maintain power relations through discourse (van Dijk 1993, 147).

Of the 19 textbooks that represent the entire educational offering in the discipline of history for years 4, 8, and 12, only 7 explicitly discuss Romani slavery. Of the remaining 12, 1 textbook does not mention Roma at all, while the other 11 only make a few broader or briefer references to Roma. In 7 of these 11, Roma only are mentioned in the lessons on the national minorities of Romania, with no additional information. Romani personalities are mentioned with no detailed context, unlike those of other origins, such as the Szekler nobleman Gheorghe Doja (György Dózsa), for example. As far as Romani personalities mentioned in the textbooks, the musician Ion Voicu predominates. In a single year-12 textbook, the Romani rights activist Lăzurică Lăzureanu is mentioned only in passing (Petre et al. 2007, 50 – year 12, Corint Publishing House).^[3] In the year-4 textbook by Litera Publishing House, the Romani ruler Stefan Răzvan appears as a Muslim ruler, which is incorrect. In the same textbook, by the lesson *Communities in Romania's territory today* (Comunități ale Minorităților pe teritoriu de azi al României), there appears a reference to the YouTube link for the cartoon documentary *Man's Long Slavery* (Lunga Robie a omului) made by the Roma association “Agentia Impreuna”. This reference can be found in the “I want to know more” (Vreau să știu mai mult) section without any other explanation of this topic (Gheorghe, Săvuță, and Soare 2021, 25 – year 4, Litera Publishing House).

Only 3 of these 11 textbooks contain cultural and social information regarding Roma (2 from year 4 and 1 from year 12). In the year-4 textbooks, information about Roma can be found in the lesson “Local Community” (Comunitatea locală), respectively in the lesson “Minority Communities in Romania's Territory Today” (Comunități ale minorităților pe teritoriu de azi al României), and in the year-12 textbook, information about Roma is presented in the lesson “Ethnic, Confessional Diversity and Political Solutions in Modern Romania. National Minorities in Romania in the 20th century” (Diversitate etnică, confesională și soluții politice în România modernă. Minorități naționale în România secolului XX), in the context of the Roma Holocaust.

None of the texts mention the first evidence of Roma in Romanian space nor do they state that Roma belong to society as a whole or use inclusive terms such as “part of”, “citizens of”, “national/international

3 When citing the textbooks, I mention the publisher because textbooks are identified primarily by publisher in Romania.

minority”, or any other terms which infer that Roma are part of Romanian society as a minority and have been present here for centuries. There is no information about the present life of Roma, no mention of the international Roma flag, or International Roma Day, or any other information that leads to the idea that the Roma are a people with all the requisite elements.

On the contrary, both year-4 textbooks use expressions such as: “being nomads (travellers without a fixed domicile), they spread throughout Europe”, or “Roma have spread over many centuries throughout the world, especially in Europe”, thus emphasising the nomadic character of the Roma and their instability. In both texts the verb tense, “have spread” (s-au răspândit) is used when referring to the presence of Roma in Europe, which conveys the idea that Roma are outsiders and are not part of either Romanian or European space. In addition, these expressions only reiterate a Romani image in the Romanian collective imaginary as not having a sense of identification or of belonging, and not subscribing to a “cult of territory”, being a people without history.

Textbooks continue to amplify the idea of Romani exclusion from Romanian society using phrases as: “many of the Roma settled on the territory of our country”. The possessive pronoun “our” shows the contrast and the distance between “us” and “them” and the fact that Roma do not belong to Romanian society.

In addition, these two textbooks associate Roma with the idea of primitivism, stating that traditional Romani crafts are still practiced today.^[4] “Many Roma who settled on the territory of our country still practice trades inherited from their ancestors.”^[5] This statement presents Roma as an inferior culture, reducing them to the status of a marginal group, with no modern culture.

Roma cultural inferiority is also presented in the next statement: “Nowadays, Roma have become sedentary, adopting the language and culture of the peoples where they have integrated” (Burtea and Perțea 2021, 46 – year 4, Aramis Publishing House).^[6] Here, cultural assimilation is portrayed as a positive practice, with non-Roma being presented as civilisers of Roma. Losing their cultural values and adopting the language and culture of the dominant society with which they live are signs of the civilisation of Roma, from the authors’ perspective.

The year-12 textbook also presents Roma as primitives and marginal. Intending to present information about the Roma Holocaust during the Second World War and about their forced cultural assimilation during the communist regime, this passage justifies racism, accuses the victims of their own persecution, and presents the perpetrators of the atrocities in a positive light, amplifying the power relations present in the Romanian society. In addition, the authors encourage the inferiorisation of Roma by using the pejorative term “G*psy” as a synonym for the “Roma minority”:

4 For instance, bear shows have not taken place since the interwar period, and the other skilled trades like coppersmiths or silversmiths have become crafts that are only practiced by a few families.

5 “Mulți dintre romii stabiliți pe teritoriul țării noastre practică și astăzi meserii moștenite de la strămoși” (Burtea and Perțea 2021, 46 – year 4, Aramis Publishing House)

6 In Romanian: “În zilele noastre, romii au devenit sedentari, adoptând limba și cultura popoarelor în care s-au integrat.”

The Roma minority (G*psies) were in a difficult situation. Because they had limited material means, lacked education and their way of life was often different from that of the rest of the population, they were subjected to several coercive measures by the Romanian government. During the Second World War, they were deported to Transnistria, where many Roma died in concentration camps. After the war, the communist regime imposed a settlement scheme on the Roma minority that was primarily designed to assimilate the G*psies. In some respects, it had positive consequences: Compulsory education and professional training (Băluțoiu and Grecu 2007, 97–98 – year 12, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House).^[7]

As regards the situation of Roma today, the text does not critically interrogate discrimination against Roma or the racism of Romanian society regarding Roma. On the contrary it perpetuates them, continuing to reinforce the guilt of Roma because “they fail to integrate into Romanian society which is considered the standard in relation to Roma who are considered deviant and inferior (Grigore et al. 2013, 7):

“Even after 1989, their situation has barely changed, although the Roma minority enjoys full rights, and attempts are made to integrate them into Romanian society” (Băluțoiu and Grecu 2007, 97–98 – year 12, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House).^[8]

To reinforce this guilt even more, the authors use the phrase “the Roma minority enjoys full rights” without developing what rights Roma enjoy today, and if these rights are applied in an appropriate way. In addition, this remark fits perfectly into what van Dijk calls discourse strategies intended to justify inequalities and reproduce dominance used by white people when talking about ethnic minorities. It is about positive representation of the in-group, and negative representation of Others, emphasising “positive discrimination”, “our” tolerance, help, or sympathy, by focusing on “negative social or deviance attributed to them” (van Dijk 1993, 263–64). In the same lesson, in the section entitled *Sources* (Izvoare), while personalities from other minorities who made notable contributions to Romanian society are mentioned, such as Tristan Tzara, Mihail Sebastian, Béla Bartok, the only information regarding the Roma minority is taken from an obscure Romanian magazine entitled *Young Christian* (Tânăra Creștin).^[9]

7 The English translation is not mine. It is taken from the article “Between Antigypsyism and Human Rights Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representations of the Roma Holocaust in European Textbooks”, by Marko Pecak et al. 2021, 111. Here is the original Romanian version from the textbook: “O situație dificilă a avut minoritatea rromă (țiganească), având posibilități materiale reduse, lipsită de educație, cu un stil de viață diferit, de cele mai multe ori, de cel al celorlalți locuitori, ei au fost supuși unor măsuri coercitive din partea statului român. În timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial au fost deportați în Transnistria 28, unde un mare număr de rromi au murit în lagărele de concentrare. După război, regimul comunist, a supus minoritatea rromă unui program de sedentarizare, care a urmărit în primul rând asimilarea țiganilor. În unele privințe, acesta a avut urmări pozitive: școlarizarea obligatorie, învățarea unor meserii.”

8 “Nici după 1989 situația lor nu s-a schimbat prea mult, deși minoritatea rromă se bucură de toate drepturile și se încearcă integrarea sa în societatea românească.”

9 Stau și mă gândesc chiar acum la câtă dragoste pentru oameni și cât sacrificiu este cerut pentru a lucra cu țiganii. Nu e nevoie decât să rostești cuvântul “țigan” pe stradă pentru a vedea fețe încruntate. Așa eram și eu! Până am ajuns la Dumbrava... Am văzut o lume nouă, o lume nevăzută. Pentru cei care încă nu au înțeles despre ce vorbesc, închipuiți-vă camera de 4 pe 4 metri în care trăiesc de

In this text, the word Roma is not used at all, but only the pejorative “G*psy” and the main subject of the text is the extreme poverty and marginality of Roma. The inferior status of Roma is automatically assumed without being questioned at all, and their ethnicity one of insurmountable isolation: “I sit and think right now about how much love for people and how much sacrifice is required to work with G*psies” (*Ibid.*, 95). The text emphasises the state of extreme poverty of Roma from Dumbrava village, in order to highlight the “goodwill” of the Romanians towards them and the *Christian mercy* that the Romanians show in their relationship with these primitives who are not even aware of their primitivism: “For those who still don’t understand what I’m talking about, imagine a 4-by-4-metre room where a couple, husband, and wife, most of them married at illegitimate ages, have lived for their entire lives. Their children, believe it or not, in most families, outnumber the members of your families, a small, small yard full of mud, dust and all half-dressed children playing happily in it” (*Ibid.*).

The racist idea of Roma’s social and cultural inferiority and the emphasis on Roma otherness are also suggested in the skills assessment section, where students are encouraged to reflect on the topics studied. Regarding the Roma minority, the students are asked, “what measures should be taken to increase the cultural, civilisational and material level of the Roma and their integration into the Romanian society” (*Ibid.*, 96). This reinforces the power relations between Roma and non-Roma, stressing the inferiority of Roma even today, and creating racist perspectives among students about Roma as uncivilised and not belonging to Romanian society. The only mention of Romani slavery that is found in this textbook is in the case study: *Institutions and Citizenship Rights* (Instituții și drepturi cetățenești), in the *Sources* (Izvoare) section. Here, among other quotes about rights and freedoms in the history of Romania, is a short paragraph that sets out some of the requests included in the *Islaz Proclamation* from 1848, one of which was “The emancipation of the G*psies without compensation” (*Ibid.*, 134). No further explanation is given following this paragraph.

None of the three textbooks interrogate stereotypes concerning Romani people. On the contrary, they encourage racist narratives, highlighting their otherness, marginality, and primitivism, and cultural assimilation is presented as a positive practice. Prejudice against Roma is addressed as a given, whilst the historical power relations between Roma and Romanians are ignored. None of the three textbooks address the historical relationship between the dominant population and the Roma minority, which is crucial to understanding the status of the Roma in Romania today. The absence of historical information about interactions between Roma and non-Roma over time validates the asymmetry of power.

Instead, in most textbooks, the term “slavery” is mentioned in regard to the state of dependence of Romanian peasants on the boyars. An example is the definition of the term “slave” provided by the year-4 textbook

o viață întreagă un cuplu, soț și soție, majoritatea casatoriți la vârste ilegiteime. Copiii lor, care credeți sau nu credeți, în majoritatea familiilor depășesc numărul membrilor familiilor voastre, o curte mică - mică plină de noroi, praf și toți copii îmbracați pe jumătate, jucându-se fericiți în ea. Pentru ei acolo e acasă”. Pentru noi uneori acasă” înseamnă un apartament de cel puțin 2 camere unde mami ne așteaptă cu mâncarea pregătită, televizorul nu lipsește și calculatorul trebuie să fie pe birou, hainele teancuri în dulapul din cameră și un așternut curat cu o pernă moale și frumos mirositoare sub cap. Sună a poveste... și pentru unii chiar poveste pare. De multe ori spunem “Vreau mai mult!”, “Doamne, scoate-mă de aici și dă-mi o viață mai bună.” și de multe ori nu ne dăm seama că avem o viață mai bună (Băluțoiu and Grecu 2007, 95 – year 12, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House).

from Corint: “slave = a man deprived of freedom, under the rule of a noble, who, however, did not have the right to kill him” (Teodorescu et al. 2021, 63 – year 4, Corint Publishing House).^[10] Another example is the telegram from Romanian peasants in Fălciu County, who had received land during the agrarian reform initiated by the ruler Alexandu I. Cuza: “The deed that Your Majesty has accomplished, freeing the Romanian nation from the manorial, forced labour, which was worse than slavery, is so great that nobody can write about it” (Băluțoiu and Grecu 2017, 110 – year 12, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House).^[11]

In order to provide a balanced overview of Roma enslavement, the authors of the history textbooks should clarify the status of Romani slaves, explaining that enslaved Roma were owned by boyars (landowners), Romanian orthodox church (monasteries), and the state. Their work was fundamental for both rural and urban economies. Their labour was highly diverse and reflected both their forced servitude and their specialised skills. While the enslaved Roma who settled close to estates of their masters provided free labour, so-called “nomadic” Roma were forced to pay large sums in cash to their masters. They were broadly categorised into different groups based on their work, with some engaged in agricultural labour, while others provided essential artisanal and service-based work. The legal framework of slavery ensured that Roma remained property, bought and sold like commodities. Families were often separated, and individuals were subjected to physical punishment, restrictions on movement, and inhumane living conditions.

Moreover, it would have been useful for both Romani and non-Romani students and teachers if the textbook had clarified the differences between these two social categories. The fundamental difference between the two servile conditions was the level of their relationship with the land. The peasants lived in their own villages. Therefore, they belonged to land that had been theirs. When the owner had several estates, Romanian peasants lived in their native villages. The dependence of the slaves on the owners of the estates had the character of personal belonging. Slaves could be moved from one estate to another according to the interests of their masters or even sold (Nastasă-Matei et al. 2016, 7). In the absence of prior knowledge or adequate teaching guidance, the omission of Romani slavery, and its association with the dependence of the Romanian peasants on the boyars, reduces the importance and complexity of Romani slavery and creates confusion in the minds of students regarding the two groups, amplifying the feeling of exclusion and marginalisation among Roma students.

2. (De)contextualisation of Slavery in Textbook Structures

Formulating the context plays a fundamental role in understanding a historical event. The key elements are the relevance of the social transformations it brings about, its framing in space and time, and its connection with other events. Do the textbooks provide an adequate framework for understanding

10 “rob = om lipsit de libertate, aflat sub stăpânirea unui nobil, care însă nu avea dreptul să îl omoare.”

11 “Fapta pe care Măria Voastră ați isprăvit, slobozind neamul românesc din boieresc, munca silită, ce era mai rea decât robia, este atât de mare cât nu o poate scrie nimenea.”

Romani slavery in relation to the narrative of Romania's history as a whole? Is slavery presented as an integral part of the entire historical narrative? In this chapter, to answer these questions, I looked at the structure and layout across all textbooks that mention Romani slavery. As I mentioned in the previous section, only 7 history textbooks discuss Romani slavery out of a total of 19 textbooks representing the entire educational provision for Romanian history, over three educational cycles analysed: 1 of 9 in year 4; 3 of 3 in the year 8; 3 of 7 textbooks in year 12.

The only textbook that clearly states that slavery was an injustice is the year-4 textbook produced by Didactical and Pedagogical Publishing. Here, Romani slavery is mentioned right from the first section of the book entitled "Past and present around us" (*Trecutul și prezentul din jurul nostru*) in the lesson about minority communities in today's Romania. Also, the year-4 textbook is one of the few that uses the term slave, instead of bondsman/serf (*rob*) and specifies that the term *G*psy* is pejorative. Unfortunately, the textbook does not fully integrate Romani slavery into the structure of Romanian society. No information about Romani slavery is mentioned in the second section, dedicated to the Middle Ages and the formation of Modern Romania. This section includes two lessons about diversity, minorities, and social hierarchies: "Transylvania – multiethnic space" (*Transilvania – spațiu multietnic*) and "Personalities of minorities" (*Personalități ale minorităților*), but the Romani minority is not mentioned at all, much less Romani slavery.

The year-8 textbooks, published and accredited in 2019–2020 in accordance with the 2017 syllabi, dedicate an entire case study entitled "Roma from Slavery to Emancipation" (*Rromii – de la Robie la Emancipare*) on Romani slavery in the lesson about the modernisation of Romania immediately after the Pasoptist Revolution. Although very well-sited in the structure of the textbook, right after the Pasoptist Revolution – which played an important role in the abolition of Romani slavery until this historical moment, slavery does not appear anywhere in two of the three year-8 textbooks. Even if, in the chapter on the Middle Ages, each textbook dedicates an entire lesson to the ethnic and confessional diversity in the Romanian space, Roma are only listed among other minorities, and nothing is mentioned about their condition as "slaves". Slavery is mentioned only in the last paragraph of the diversity lesson in the Litera Publishing textbook. This paragraph mentions the first evidence of Roma in the medieval Romanian states as slaves, the fact that Roma were craftsmen, especially blacksmiths, and that they contributed to the economic development of Romanian society. "Roma are indicated in the documents of the time, in Romania in 1385, in Transylvania in 1400, and in Moldova in 1428. From the first documentary evidence, Roma had the status of slaves. They were craftsmen, contributing greatly to the economic development of Romanian society. One of the favourite crafts was blacksmithing" (Gheorghe and Săvuță 2020, 56 – year 8, Litera publishing House^[12]). There are no additional details about the persecution of Roma during slavery, about the sale of enslaved Roma, or about who the slave owners were. Moreover, the information presented seems neutral, even positive, inferring that the status of a slave was not an inferior one but was synonymous with that of a craftsman.

12 "Rromii sunt atestați în documentele vremii, în țara Românească la 1385, în Transilvania la 1400, iar în Moldova la 1428. De la primele atestări documentare rromii aveau statutul de robi. Aceștia erau meșteșugari, contribuind în mare măsură la dezvoltarea economică a societății românești. Unul dintre meșteșugurile preferate era fierăria."

Regarding year-12 textbooks, the only references to Romani slavery can be found in the chapter “People, society and the world of ideas” (Oameni, societate și lumea ideilor), within the lesson “Ethnic, confessional diversity and political solutions in Modern Romania (1859–1918)” (Diversitate etnică și confesională. Soluții politice în România modernă (1859–1918)). Here the situation of the Roma is presented briefly alongside that of Jews, Armenians, or Bulgarians.

The only textbook that cites Romani slavery in a different context than that of ethnic and confessional diversity is by the Corint Publishing House and coordinated by Zoe Petre. Here, in the lesson about the Romanian and European village, in the sub-chapter *Social structures* (Structuri Sociale), a last line is dedicated to Romani slavery: “Also, until the 19th century, the Romanian space, especially the extra Carpathian one, would be characterised by the existence of G*psy slaves (in Moldova, and Tatars, coming from prisoners of war)” (Petre et al. 2007, 38 – year 12, Corint Publishing House).^[13] The positioning of the discussion about Romani slavery within the lesson on social structures in the Romanian medieval countryside is appropriate, but this sentence does not explain the status of Romani and Tatar slaves in Romanian society. The text neither shows who their masters were nor describes their living conditions in relation to other social groups in that period. The experiences of Roma are only listed, without being contextualised and connected to the national narrative. With the exception of these two lessons, Romani slavery is not mentioned anywhere in year-12 history textbooks, not even in the chapter “State and Politics” (Statul și Politica), in the lesson “The Modern State: from the political project to the realisation of Greater Romania” (Statul Modern: De la proiect politic la realizarea României Mari) where the 1848 Revolution and the Union of the Principalities are discussed. I believe that a consideration of Romani slavery in this lesson would have been appropriate, the abolition of slavery being one of the most important policies of the 1848 Revolution, as well as one of the most important conditions for the modernisation of Romania. Summing up, the topic of Romani slavery is addressed in a limited and decontextualised manner in Romanian history textbooks. Even if a wider space is allocated to it in year-8 textbooks, it is a separate area that leaves slavery out of the national historical narrative, without making clear its place in the hierarchy of medieval Romanian society, or the role of the abolition of slavery in the modernisation of the Romanian state.

3. The Perspective of the ‘Master’

In this section I will argue that the experiences suffered by Roma during the period of slavery are presented in Romanian history textbooks from a dominant perspective, without questioning the “ideology of the master”, thus making the history book an oppressive tool for both Romani and Romanian students, reproducing cultural and behavioural racism.

13 “De asemenea, tot până în secolul al XIX-lea, spațiul românesc, în special cel extracarpatic, avea să fie caracterizat de existența robilor țigani (în Moldova, tătari, proveniți din prizonierii de război).”

Using the pejorative term *G*psy* as an oppressive tool

This domination is proven, first of all, by the choice of the pejorative *G*psy* to designate Roma, without its use being justified or explained. Although, ever since the Ibasfalau Assemblies in 1919,^[14] Roma sued for the elimination of the term *G*psy* from official documents, and, at the initiative of several Romani nongovernmental organisations in 2011, the definition of the term *G*psy* acquired a clear offensive meaning in the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, this term still appears in official history textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. It appears inside the lessons as a synonym for the term Roma (both terms being used alternatively), in quotes from historical sources, or in additional texts. With the exception of the year-4 textbook from the Didactical and Pedagogical Publishing House, which clearly mentions that the term *G*psy* is offensive, the rest of the history books do not manage, and probably do not even aim, to clarify the deeply oppressive burden of this word. Even if the origin of the terms Roma and *G*psy* is presented in two of the year-8 textbooks, these descriptions are neutral and do not make any reference to the stigma that the word *G*psy* acquired during the period of slavery (the term *G*psy* being also synonymous with slave) or to its offensive implications for Roma of today.^[15]

Here they apparently received the name ‘*G*psies*’ from a Greek word meaning ‘untouchable’ (*athinganoi*). The word rrom or rom comes from the Sanskrit language and means human or man (Stoica et al. 2020, 84 – year-8, CD Press Publishing House).^[16]

Some historians assume that Roma – called in the old documents ‘*G*psies*’, from the Greek-Byzantine term *atthiganinen* (not to touch) – arrived in Romanian space together with the Tatars (Soare et al. 2021, 72 – year 8, Art Klett publishing house).^[17]

Blaming the victim and justification of racism

Another proof of the dominant perspective is the lack of grammatical structures or contents that directly and explicitly condemn slavery. According to many expressions in the textbooks, “Roma became slaves”, “they became slaves”, “their status was one of slaves”, or “they were mentioned as slaves”. The passive voice is preferred because it allows the avoidance of responsibility, to the detriment of expressions like “Roma were enslaved,” which assume that a person was forced into slavery and automatically imply a recognition that someone else enslaved that person. In fact, some textbooks legitimise slavery and justify the racism of the Romanian people, as is the case with the year-12 textbook from the “Gimnasium” Publishing House: “Ever since they settled here, Roma have been considered, due to their backward standard of living and physical appearance, a lower category population. That is

14 For further details, see Petre Matei, “The Gypsy Assemblies of 1919 in Transylvania”.

15 For further details, see Grigore et al. 2013, 23.

16 “Aici au primit, se pare, numele de ‘țigani’, dintr-un cuvânt grecesc care înseamnă ‘de neatins’ (*athinganoi*).”

17 “Unii istorici presupun că rromii – denumiți în documentele vechi ‘țigani’, de la termenul grecesc-bizantin *atthigainein* (‘a nu atinge’).”

why, right from the beginning, they were marginalised and isolated” (Scurtu et al. 2007, 49 – year-12, Gimnasium Publishing House).^[18]

This passage reinforces the existing prejudices and discrimination in Romanian society against Roma and deepens the social distance between Roma and Romanians, maintaining historical trauma and power relations. Moreover, such an approach constitutes epistemic violence against Romani students, reiterating violent and racist ideologies that emphasise the inferiority of Roma.

Minimisation and denial

In other textbooks, slavery is addressed in terms of minimisation or denial, as is the case with the year-8 textbook from CD Press Publishing House. Here, the authors explain slave status as a legal protection that estate owners offered to Roma in exchange for the payment of certain taxes or the performance of certain jobs, transforming the image of the slave master into that of a “protector who keeps other souls by his side who could hardly find work elsewhere” (Furtună 2019, 15–16). In addition, the authors justify the “dependence of Roma on the estate owners” by their lack of land: “Since, like many Romanian peasants, they did not own land, Roma became dependent on the estate owners”, reducing the complexity of slavery and presenting it as a form of economic exploitation and social dependence similar to Romanian peasants, a fact that is not supported historically, considering sales transactions of Romani slaves between boyars, nobles of the country, or monasteries, that are found in the national archives.

Slavery versus bondage (robie)

No textbook uses the term “slavery”. The authors prefer the term bondage (robie) which, in the Romanian language, refers rather to a form of servitude. The term bondage is preferred both in order to convey the idea that slavery in Romanian countries was different from that of African-Americans and in order to transform the image of a Romani slave into that of a servant near the boyar’s court (Furtună 2019, 15). This type of discourse reflects the dominant historiographical tendencies that try to mitigate the brutality of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities^[19] by giving it a gentler, more human touch. But, as the historian Viorel Achim states, quoted by Petcuț, “Rob in the old Romanian language meant slave and, when in the first half of the 19th century the Romanian language was modernised, the Romanians called these people “slaves”, and Robie in the Romanian countries even meant slavery, of course, as in other parts, with great variations from master to master, from one group of slaves to another, and with variations according to the era” (Achim, quoted by Petcuț 2015, 9). Moreover, adds Petre Petcuț, “the liberation of the Roma in Moldova (1855) was done by abolishing slavery, a word that puts Roma from

18 “Încă de la așezarea lor aici, romii au fost considerați, datorită nivelului înapoiat de viață și al aspectului fizic, o populație de categorie inferioară. De aceea, încă de la început a fost marginalizată și izolată.”

19 The phrase Romanian Principalities describes, in the academic and university definition: the states of Moldova and Wallachia ruled by the Romanian boyars or assimilated, in the historical period in which they bore the title of “Principalities”, namely the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

the Romanian area on the same legal level as Black slaves from the English and French colonies or the African-Americans from the United States of America” (*Ibid.*).

Slavery in images

Regarding images that illustrate the living conditions of Roma during the period of slavery, those that portray Roma in a neutral way as craftsmen or violinists predominate. Only the year-8 textbook by ArtKlett Publishing House presents two images that convey the idea that slavery was a form of human exploitation. One is a poster showing a Romani slave in chains and another showing an auction of Romani slaves. The images are accompanied by descriptions such as: “G*psy slave, vintage drawing” and “Ad for the sale of some Gypsy slaves”.

Failure to forge empathetic connections and awareness concerning the complexity of Romani enslavement

The complex history of slavery is greatly simplified, being presented as an impersonal, abstract experience, and Roma are treated as a collective, homogeneous group.

Overall, the textbooks fail to present any life experiences of Roma during the period of slavery that would offer students the opportunity to connect emotionally and personally with the persecution of Roma in the past, in order to forge a sense of collective moral and social responsibility and solidarity with the Romani community. Characters from Romani slavery, such as Dincă from *The Emancipation of the Gypsies* by Gheorghe Sion, who chose to commit suicide for freedom, archival documents with testaments from the boyars in which the slaves were left as inheritance, or dowry sheets in which Romani slaves appeared, along with lands, animals, or properties are nowhere to be found. The only textbook in which a fragment of an abolitionist text is found is the year-4 textbook from the Didactical and Pedagogical Publishing House. Here, the authors reproduce a passage from the story “Vasile Porojan” by the Romanian writer Vasile Alecsandri, a former slave owner. However, the leading questions in the text do not explore the racial dimension in depth, failing to encourage students to engage critically with the topic.

Lack of narrative about Romani women during slavery

No attention is paid to the experiences of enslaved Romani women, and no mention is made of the sexual exploitation they faced during slavery.^[20] Although these kinds of stories can constitute an essential aspect to give abstract information a human dimension to facilitate the students’ empathic connection with the presented subject, the sole image in which Romani women are represented is that of a “Roma dwelling in

20 As Pârvulescu and Boatcă show in their work *Creolisation of Modern*: “The Calimach Code recognises the frequency of sexual relations between masters and slaves, by including an article that states: “If someone, having a slave girl until the end of his life, has not freed her from slavery, then she shall be freed and, if they have had children with her, they shall also be freed.” Historians of slavery have emphasised the circularity of the argument: because a slave girl “owes” to a master, she cannot make sexual decisions, which leads to a situation of sexual exploitation” (Pârvulescu and Boatcă 2024, 10).

the Siret valley” from 1916, in which several poorly dressed Romani women holding their children in their arms appear in front of a small and dilapidated house. This image, which, paradoxically, is included in the lesson “Roma – From Slavery to Emancipation” in the year-8 textbook from CD Press Publishing house, reinforces the prototype of a marginal and primitive Romani woman who lives in poverty, emphasising more powerfully the essentialised representation of Romani women in the Romanian collective mind.

Lack of Romani perspective and agency

There is no language representing Roma as an integral part of Romanian society. A Romani perspective is not represented anywhere in the textbooks. Stories about Roma’s struggle for freedom, didactic materials, or support texts belonging to Romani authors that empower and lend agency to Romani slaves are not integrated. Instead, a large space is dedicated, both within the lessons and within the additional texts, to the strivings of Romanian rulers and intellectuals from that time for the abolition of Romani slavery. This theme is presented in detail, building triumphant narratives of how Romanian politicians and rulers such as Mihail Kogălniceanu, Grigore Alexandru Ghica, or Gheorghe Bibescu fought for the eradication of slavery and the “emancipation of Roma”.

After abolition and the situation of Roma today

As for the situation of Roma after the abolition of slavery and their status today, the textbooks emphasise the idea that “they were left in a precarious material condition”, “they continued to live in poverty, practicing their jobs and the nomadic way of life”, or “their lives not changing significantly, continuing to work the land of the former masters”. The year-12 textbook from Gimnasium Publishing House describes Roma today as follows: “they still practice a series of traditional occupations, such as those of coppersmiths, goldsmiths, bricklayers (*caldarari*, *aurari*, *rudari*, *caramidari*) but also new ones: the trade in old clothes or bird feathers (*fulgari*), and some of G*psies continue to lead a nomadic life, moving with their carts from one place to another, others gradually become sedentary, settling in marginal areas of rural and urban localities with a Romanian majority population” (Scurtu 2007, 49 – year 12, Gimnasium Publishing House).^[21] To support this narrative, the authors present an image of a poor and improvised settlement accompanied by the following description, “Rromi – they kept the traditional way of life, similar to that of the 19th century”.

Neither the tasks nor questions from the knowledge assessment section develop students’ critical and reflective thinking regarding the legacies of power relations in today’s society due to Romani slavery, nor do they create an empathetic connection with the experiences of Roma during slavery, the debates being proposed on themes such as: “Is social integration or marginalisation of the Roma necessary?” (*Ibid.*, 52).^[22]

21 Ei practică în continuare o serie de ocupații tradiționale, cum sunt cele de căldărari, aurari, zidari, aurari, rudari, cărămidari, dar și altele noi: comerțul cu haine vechi sau fulgi de păsări (fulgari). O parte din dintre țigani continuă să ducă o viață nomadă, deplasându-se cu carele dintr-un loc în altul, alții se sedentarizează treptat, așezându-se în zonele marginase ale localităților rurale și urbane cu populație majoritară românească.

22 Este necesară integrarea socială sau marginalizarea rromilor?

Concluding Remarks

While the history syllabi for all three analysed educational cycles (primary, middle school, and secondary school) advocate for the formation of intellectual mechanisms to prevent nationalistic or xenophobic attitudes among students – an assumption of multiculturalism and multiperspectives, together with a valorisation of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the development of emotional intelligence when analysing the impact of the past in everyday life – the current textbook representations of slavery reinforce Roma's inferior status; they portray them as a “primitive other”, completely ignoring the presence of Romani students in the educational space and legitimising the marginalisation, stigmatisation, and exclusion that Roma currently face. The impact of slavery on the contemporary oppression of Roma is not discussed in any of the textbooks, and the discrimination and racism that Roma still experience in Romanian society are not questioned. Moreover, the status of Roma as a national minority in Romania today is not specified, Romani personalities are not mentioned, nor is there any information about the Romani civic movement, Roma's cultural richness, their contribution to the formation of the Romanian state, which in turn emphasises the idea that Roma have not evolved from a cultural, social or economic point of view since the abolition of slavery until the present day. The date of the abolition of Romani slavery in the Romanian Countries is not even specified, thus missing an opportunity to generate a sense of collective responsibility among students and educate them so that the traumas of the past can be reconciled.

Coming back to the main question that leads this article: to what extent does the national history textbook, as part of the formal curriculum, maintain and consolidate the epistemology constructed by the “masters”? Or, on the contrary, has it been decolonised by integrating reparative strategies as discussed by Magda Matache? Disappointingly, following this analysis, I can affirm that Romanian history textbooks still preserve the coloniality of knowledge discussed by Quijano.

The textbooks neither advance ideas to replace the rationality of the dominant culture as the only framework for existence, analysis, and thinking, nor do they offer students the critical tools necessary to make them aware of the legacy of slavery in Romanian society. On the contrary, they deepen the gap between Roma and non-Roma and emphasise the superiority of Romanians, failing to build a sense of belonging for Romani students or to create an inclusive space in which they feel part, making them feel complete outsiders and stigmatised in the school space.

In order to discuss a proper decolonisation of the curriculum in the subject of Romanian history in relation to Romani slavery, I emphasise, once again, the explicit and specific condemnation of the atrocities of Romani slavery, the avoidance of linguistic structures that reflect the dominant perspective (for instance, usage of passive verbs, an unreflective reproduction of the terminology of “master”, lack of Romani agency or stories about their struggle for freedom).

Another important step towards decolonising history textbooks and transforming them into inclusive spaces where all students can equally find themselves is to include more Romani perspectives and voices

in the narrative of slavery and introduce Romani heroes and heroines. An example in this regard is the case of Ioana Rudăreasa,^[23] who fought nine years for her own and her children's freedom.

Textbooks must enable history students and teachers to form emotional connections about the persecution of Roma and promote values of justice and equity. As Mihai Rusu stated, national history textbooks can be considered essential elements in the formation and reformation of collective memory, serving as the basis for the national identity promoted by the state. Beyond their educational role of transmitting historical information, these textbooks also fulfil an important social function, contributing to the integration of young people into the values and principles supported by state authorities (Rusu 2015, 45). In other words, textbooks form a discursive crucible for the daily reproduction of biased ethnic beliefs and discriminatory practices based on them. As long as they are not decolonised and inclusive, they will continue to produce and reproduce racism and prejudice against Roma living in Romanian society and will contribute to the legitimisation of power relations formulated over centuries between Roma and Romanians.

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23 The case of Ioana Rudăreasa was documented by the Roma sociologist Adrian-Nicolae Furtună and published in the volume *Rethinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*, coordinated by Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva within the European Rome Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) in 2020.

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