

Knowledge Hegemony: Silencing Sexual Violence during Romani Slavery

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Critical
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Abstract

Romani women were primary targets of the institution of chattel slavery within the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (territories that are mostly part of present-day Romania). However, past and present research has ignored or distorted the distinct experiences of Romani women and the gendered harms they suffered. This article examines historical sources to document systematic forms of sexual violence that Romani women faced during enslavement. Additionally, it employs critical feminist and anti-racist frameworks to study four influential academic texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Kogălniceanu 1837; Sion 1915; Potra 1939; Achim 1998) that focused on the institution of slavery and how they approached this topic. Specifically, the article zooms in on how such texts have contributed to silencing and distorting the history of sexual violence and exploitation, while depicting enslaved women as hypersexual objects. The following article contains descriptions of sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and rape perpetrated against Romani women during slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia. These passages may be distressing. Reader discretion is strongly advised.

Keywords

- Moldavia
- Roma
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual violence
- Silence
- Slavery
- Wallachia
- Women

Introduction

On 20 February 2025, we marked 169 years since Romani people in Romania gained legal freedom from slavery. However, Romania still has not recognised the full scope of this history, including its profound violence, legacies, and continuities (Matache and Bhabha 2021; Matache 2025). Current national history textbooks still fail to accurately and adequately address the injustices faced over those 500 years (Costache 2016; Medeleanu forthcoming), along with the power imbalances and social and political inequities that persist to this day (Mandache 2018; Furtună 2019; Matache and Bhabha 2021, Matache 2025). Critically, research has yet to interrogate the traumatic sexual violence endured by enslaved women (Gheorghe 2010), particularly from critical feminist and anti-racist perspectives (Oprea 2004; 2012).

Despite activism and scholarly work done by Romani scholars to highlight the sexual exploitation of enslaved women (Oprea 2005; Gheorghe 2010; Sandu 2020; Medeleanu 2022; Matache 2025; Matache and Gardner forthcoming), the topic remains marginalised in academic studies. Partly, this is a result of the limited participation, resources, and access of Romani women in creating knowledge about slavery, especially on the gendered experiences of enslaved women. At the same time, this limitation stems from a lack of specific data and testimonies of enslaved women, similar to other contexts, particularly in the United States (Davis 2019). Yet, in the American context, despite such challenges and absences, the topic of sexual exploitation appears in almost every influential text written about the American system of slavery (Feinstein 2018; Davis 2019). In Romanian knowledge production on Romani slavery, however, sexual violence and exploitation are either hidden and minimised through euphemistic language that masks the reality of the sexual abuse (Lukács 2016), ignored (Kogălniceanu 1900; Achim 1998) or briefly referenced as the ordinary practices of ‘beautiful’ Romani enslaved women (Djuvara 1989; Oişteanu 2018; Sandu 2020; Negoî 2025, Dumitru forthcoming).

Hence, in this article, I examine historiographical sources to document the systematic sexual violence faced by enslaved Romani women. Additionally, I employ critical feminist and anti-racist frameworks to study four major and influential academic texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that focused on slavery and how they approached this topic: Kogălniceanu, *Schiță Despre Țigani* (Sketches about Gypsies), 1837; Sion, *Suvenire contimpurane* (Contemporary souvenirs), 1915; Potra, *Contributiiuni la istoricul Țigănilor din România* (Contributions to the history of Gypsies in Romania), 1939; Achim, *Țigăni în istoria României* (Gypsies in the history of Romania), 1998. I zoom in on how such texts have contributed to silencing and distorting the history of sexual violence and exploitation, while depicting enslaved women as hypersexual objects.

1. Intertwined Gendered Labour and Sexual Violence

Enslaved women, like their children and families, were legally and socially considered property as they were sold, gifted, or kept as heritage if the slave owners chose to (Petcuț 2015). Although women’s contributions were essential to increasing wealth (Potra 1939, 94; Petcuț 2015, 76), enslavers undervalued their labour and dismissed their humanity. They were sold for lower prices at public auctions,^[1] and

1 This fact was not always the same; Petcuț (2015) showed that the prices could change, and women could also value higher.

they were coerced into domestic and reproductive labour, as well as sexual violence. Here, I argue that gendered labour and sexual violence are most profoundly evident and interconnected in the experiences of “*jiitoare*”^[2] a distinct form of sexual violence which will be explained later.

Coerced domestic gendered labour included agriculture, cleaning, cooking, farming, laundry, providing care to female boyars, spinning linen, and tailoring among other duties (Sion 1915; Achim 2004, 32; Petcuț 2015, 61). A large number of Romani women were instructed to perform their primary duty as maids and serve the nobility. Women also had to take part in manual labour related to looms and weaving workshops, producing items such as embroidered bed sheets, carpets, and various textiles (Achim 1998; Petcuț 2015). Likewise, enslavers also coerced Romani women into gendered reproductive labour, often treating them as *breeders* (Grigore 2007; Dumitru forthcoming). They forced women to bear children to ensure the continuation of slavery by supplying and replenishing the number of enslaved people (Petcuț 2015; Matache 2025; Dumitru forthcoming).

Importantly, enslaved Romani females were also forced to provide reproductive labour in the families that they were forced to serve. They had to breastfeed and raise enslavers’ children and infants, in addition to their own children, from whom they were often separated (Mateescu 2014, 54-59; Matache and Gardner forthcoming). The performance of both domestic and reproductive labour of enslaved Romani women was pressured by fear, punishments, and strict supervision. If they did not meet the expectations of the female enslaver, they were frequently met with violence. Sion (1915) notes that when women did not accomplish something requested, besides the lash, one effective corrective tool was to whip them with violin strings over their bodies, causing severe pain and leaving bruises for over a month (Sion 1915, 16).

Critically, sexual abuse, and broadly sexual violence, was a common practice, often summarised and justified in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century academic texts as enslavers’ *mistakes*, *sins*, or *lapses*. At times, it was simply portrayed as legitimate actions taken by enslavers toward the so-called highly sexually and promiscuous “G*psy”^[3] female slaves.

In general, sexual abuse was sanctioned by law. However, the applicability was questionable. In the case of murders or rape, there are no available records that would prove that enslavers were held accountable (Petcuț 2015). Yet, the sexual abuse of Romani women would not have permeated the fabric of the Romanian Principalities if the legal, social, religious, and moral laws and beliefs had not supported that. For example, the Moldavian Legal Code of the 1800s stipulated that if an enslaver had raped an enslaved woman, he could not be held responsible (Hancock 1987; Petcuț 2015). In contrast, if an enslaved

2 This is a new data found within my research of PhD project, entitled provisionally “Romani Slavery and Gender”, and is further elaborated there.

3 In referring to Roma in my work I use Roma or Romani people. However, I have used the G* word here to make reference to G*psy female promiscuity, something that has dominated European literature, starting from Cervantes with *Gitanilla*, to Hugo with *Esmeralda*, but also to the Romanian oversexualised literature on women, such as Alecsandri in *Istoria unui galbân* or Rosetii in *Pacatul Sulgeriului*.

man abused a white woman, he would be sentenced to death, and in some cases, burned alive – a legal punishment inspired by biblical beliefs (Petcuț 2015, 71).

The sexual abuse of Romani women served not only for the enslavers' pleasure but also worked as a mechanism of domination and control over Romani people. It could begin at a very young age, as early as 10 years old, affecting both young girls and adult women, married or unmarried (Oișteanu 2018). Despite the false and sexist but common assumption that only Romani women who were virgins and "beautiful" were subjected to sexual abuse, enslavers had unlimited rights over their "properties", that is, "slaves", which included sexual abuse.

Absolutely disgusting was the way he (the master) used the girls and women of the people of those unfortunates. Starting from the principle that the enslaved person's body is the property of the master, G^{*}psies, grown girls and married women were regarded by the master's as true flesh of pleasure. They were used in this appropriation with the knowledge of their relatives and husbands (Djuvara 1989, 161).

The sexual violence included distinct forms of sexual abuse, and one of them, was the practice of rape as *Jus primae noctis*, referring to a feudal right of a lord to engage in sexual relations with a tenant's bride on the wedding night (Oișteanu 2018). When weddings took place between enslaved people – most of the time held at the enslaver's own decision – the enslaved Romani woman was obliged to be "bedded", thus raped, by the enslaver (Oișteanu 2018, 521). During slavery, the *Jus primae noctis* was so alarmingly widespread that for five centuries, this form of raping of Romani women evolved into a disturbingly normalised practice (Oișteanu 2018; Negoï 2025).

Jus primae noctis was only one aspect of the wider abusive system endured by enslaved Romani women. The practices of rape took other forms, including what Oișteanu labelled "sexual hospitality" (Oișteanu 2018, 535). *Sexual hospitality*, meant that Romani girls and women, especially virgins, were made available to be raped by guests – foreigners or Moldavian and Wallachian boyars returning from their travels abroad. Women were deliberately chosen and forced to serve as *sexual gifts* – a feature of the hospitality customs which extended beyond the mere provision of food and shelter to include the company of an enslaved girl (Oișteanu 2018, 534–535). Some boyars (enslavers) developed a preference for certain enslaved females. In *Writings: What I Have Heard from Others* (1923), Radu Rosetti tells the story of a nobleman, Alecu Crivea, who continually requested a slave named Dochîța, impregnating her. Rape resulted in the birth of a girl, Anica, who was also later sexually abused by another boyar called Sandu Hortopan (Pravilniceasca condică 1780, 146/6; Radu Rosetti 1923; Stith Thompson in Oișteanu 2018, 534–535).

Another form of rape was what Oișteanu calls the *sexual initiation* of noble young boys or men. Romani women and girls were forced into sexual acts with their masters' sons or other nobles. At times, women were trained and instructed for this role by older slave women (Oișteanu 2018).

Continually, another notable form of sexual abuse of enslaved women includes perhaps the most recognised, widespread, and common practice, that of *frecatul picioarelor* or foot rubbing. "*Foot rubbing*"

is a euphemistic term to name a master's requests for sexual services. Therefore, it does not literally refer specifically to the practice of foot massage but refers to rape. This practice was known in the context of Romanian slavery, and also in other regions, such as Russia, and was commonly understood as a euphemism for non-consensual sexual acts imposed by masters on enslaved Romani women (Sion 1915; Gheorghe 2010; Lukács 2016; Oişteanu 2018). Although the sexual abuse of Romani women is rarely addressed in terms of rape, the practice of *foot rubbing* is found in almost all texts that include knowledge of slavery (Lukács 2016). *Foot rubbing* targeted enslaved women of all kinds of ages and was a practice that generations of women were coerced into experiencing. In Radu Rosetti's novel *Păcatele Sulgeriului* (1912), the character Catinca, a married Romani slave, is asked to rub her master's feet for the first time (Rosetti 1912, 79). When Ion, her husband, learns of this request, a state of shock and despair grips him, revealing a deep sense of vulnerability and helplessness (*Ibid.*, 80). When Ion stirs from his daze, he recalls the experiences of the women in his life – his mother, aunts, and sisters – who similarly endured such experiences.

Sexual abuse through *frecatul picioarelor* could occur with or without consent. If the character Catinca in Rosetti's novel had expressed her decision not to enter the enslaver's chamber, she would still have ended up being sexually abused since she was property. In consequence, different forms of rape become normalised, and broadly, gendered labour and sexual exploitation became internalised across generations. Thus, forced domestic labour, sexual violence, particularly sexual abuse and the lack of bodily autonomy, continued throughout the long duration of slavery. They were widespread, as they are frequently mentioned in relation to various forms of knowledge production literature, and it was encountered in various forms, particularly in the experiences of *ţiiitoare*.

1.1 'Ţiiitoare' or Concubines

While every enslaved Romani woman was vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, as shown above, a particular group of female Romani slaves was created to perform sexual servitude, and it was known as "*ţiiitoare*". A contemporary Romanian dictionary of today explains that the meaning of a *ţiiitoare* is synonymous with that of a mistress, a *concubine*, and/or a *woman economically dependent on a man*. However, during enslavement, this term specifically referred to a category of enslaved women whose primary gendered function was to provide coerced sexual services and companionship to their slave owners, thus experiencing rape repeatedly.

The existence of *ţiiitoare* was not only socially accepted but also legislated, as it appears in the legal codes of the time. Specifically, the legislation of the nineteenth century (Calimach Code)^[4] indicated that enslaved Romani women could attain freedom from enslavement if they were held as *ţiiitoare* of their deceased slave owners (Calimach Code 1958; Petcuţ 2015). However, given the high value of the slaves, and due to the pervasive sexual exploitation of enslaved women, it is unlikely that such provisions were actually enforced.

4 See Calimach Code 1958, vol III, 176, page 123.

The term or name of *țitoare* was not necessarily uniquely associated with Romani female slaves subjected to sexual slavery, but it has biblical origins, and it meant “concubine”. Nonetheless, it became specifically used to identify enslaved Romani women who were coerced into sexual exploitation and companionship with enslavers. It is worth mentioning that the practice of *țitoare* was inherently ageist – enslaved females would not remain in this role indefinitely. Often, when a *țitoare* aged, she would revert to her previous status as a regular slave in the household, and any children born from this relationship were classified as slaves according to the laws of slavery (Petcuț 2015, 77). That is to say that their status as *țitoare* was something temporary, and once the enslavers lost interest, most probably other younger substitutes were forced to replace them.

In summary, the gendered exploitation and abuse of Romani women under slavery involved complex and interlinked forms of coerced sexual violence and domestic and reproductive labour. They were subjected to different forms of rape, euphemistically called *jus primae noctis*, *sexual hospitality*, *sexual initiators*, *foot rubbing*, and ultimately, they were forced into sexual slavery – *țitoare*.

For all of that, after exposing these practices and experiences of gendered violence, it is important to see how the narratives that knowledge producers constructed and framed something so obvious but so invisible. Accordingly, in the next part, the article examines how some of the most influential texts of the nineteenth and twentieth century have portrayed sexual violence against Romani women during slavery. This section explores the views of four works on sexual violence, analysing the words and expressions used to describe rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

2. Academic Writings – Sexual Abuse and Exploitation during Slavery

The typical portrayals of Romani people in writings from the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries were gendered. Romani men were primarily described as barbarians in need of “civilizing”, criminal by nature, degraded, heretics, cheating, stupid, and untrustworthy (Kogălniceanu 1837; Dan 1892; Potra 1939; Chelcea 1944). Romani women were described and attributed to a set of stereotypes which, in sum, characterise them as oversexualised and promiscuous (Woodcock 2004, 2015; Puskás-Bajkó 2016) – “*witches, flower girls, loud and bold figures, perfect creatures, beggar queens, flashy shooting stars, prostitutes, depraved, shameless beggars, worst characters*” were some of them (Gheorghe 2010, 23). Such labels are found in the works of many writers, but here I focus on four of the most influential pieces: Kogălniceanu, *Schiță Despre Ț*gani*, 1837; Sion, *Suvenire contimpurane*, 1915; Potra, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul Ț*ganilor din România*, 1939; Achim, *Ț*ganii în istoria României*, 1998.

All four texts were written in the context of serious events for the Romani community. Kogălniceanu wrote his piece in 1837 before slavery was abolished (1856); Sion wrote his text 1915 in the context of the development of the first Romani civil society movement in the interwar period; Potra wrote in a context just before the Roma Genocide and deportations to concentration camps in Transnistria, and finally, Achim wrote his piece while Roma were suffering from pogroms, riots, and displacements in the 1980s

and 1990s) (European Roma Rights Centre 2001; Turda and Furtună 2022). Yet, none of the authors addressed those issues and contextualised the problems that Romani communities were facing during those respective times, and none of them analysed the experiences of women in relation to those events.

Mihail Kogălniceanu, an enslaver, a politician, and an abolitionist,^[5] was not exempt from perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Romani women, characterising them as promiscuous. In his iconic piece, *SchiȚa despre Ț*gani* (Sketches about G*psies), which was initially written in 1837 in Berlin, and later translated into Romanian in 1900, he portrays women in the following way: “Women lack a sense of chastity and may offer themselves to individuals for financial gain, even if they are not prostituting” (Kogălniceanu 1900, 27).

In the same piece, besides characterising Romani women as promiscuous, the author also articulated an oversexualized image of Romani women: “[...] Their girls are beautiful; pitched, they unite the features of the Greeks and the fire of their ancestors; big black eyes, bushy eyebrows, they are so captivating” (*Ibid.*, 22–23).

Historian George Potra was another influential knowledge producer. In his influential text *Contribuțiuni la Istoricul Ț*ganilor din România* (1939), Potra further developed and perpetuated such gendered tropes, describing Romani women under the same attributions but in a more elaborated way:

Women have the most depraved character [...] G*psy^[6] women have no shame and are totally devoid of morals. Their debauchery reaches a maximum point and is not considered as something bad, extraordinary. The G*psy in the prime of her life driven by a perverse lust and like young girls trained and encouraged by their mothers indulge in the greatest shamelessness. They do not regularly practice the status of a public prostitute, but at the same time, they do not know what it means to refuse favours when the smallest monetary offering is made to them (Potra 1939, 99).

[...] Who did not stop at the sight of the smoked tents [...] and the beautiful G*psies with a flower between their teeth or in their ear. [...] The string of white pearls like milk foam in contrast with the bronze of the face and the wrists of the hands and feet ready to be broken at any fine movement that they were (*Ibid.*, 127).

Similar to Kogălniceanu, Potra oscillated between contempt and exotification when referring to Romani women. Yet, while the piece of Kogălniceanu was originally written in 1837, before all forms of enslavement were abolished (1856), the text of Potra was written almost a century later. This shows us that there was a continuation in the stereotypes and negative attributions towards Romani women that was further developed and perpetuated as a framework that survived long after enslavement was abolished.

5 Read more about Kogălniceanu in Chirac (2019).

6 Pejorative word for Romani people.

Not in chronological order, next is Gheorghe Sion, as an influential and frequently cited author. He wrote about slavery and explored the experiences of Romani women – particularly stories of romantic adventures and drama involving enslavers and slaves. His text, *Suvenire contimpurane* (1915), combines prose with historical facts, trying to humanise Romani women's suffering, but falls within the social narrative in drawing Romani slaves as hypersexual and of inferior condition. He also discusses practices of rape but fails to properly name the actions, and most importantly, the repercussions on enslaved bodies. The following excerpt tells the story of an enslaved Romani woman named Maria.

After learning about the miraculous massage offered by the enslaved person to his great wife, the Boyer Paşcanu also wanted to find out about Maria's talent. After a few sessions, he was convinced that the girl practised the massage with great skill: but with a difference: instead of falling asleep like his wife did, he lets himself into the most charming dreams; his eyes instead of closing, fixed on the breasts and the beautiful forms of the girl's body; his mouth, instead of looking to quench his thirst with a glass of water, sniffed at the peonies that shone on Maria's cheeks. This girl was a right and diabolical temptation; she was not a child anymore because four or five years had passed since she had become a courtesan,^[7] and she was beautiful as if she was broken from the sun (*Ibid.*, 20).

[...]

He also could not sit sensitively next to such a perfect creature, which according to the law was his property and which he had the right to enjoy in any way, anytime, and in any case. Poor Maria, in addition to the feeling of duty that she knew was imposed on her by her condition as an enslaved person, slowly felt another feeling emerging in her heart [...] because this was the first man who had approached her and told her that he loves her.^[8] [...] So the boyar in his hours of amusement drank from the cup of pleasure without any care or rage: and his slave in her juvenile exaltation only thought how to please him better (*Ibid.*, 20–21).^[9]

Most of the enslaved women were forced to lose their virginity through rapes by their enslavers. The second quote offered by Sion, “[...] because this was the first man who had approached her and told her that he loves her”, clearly refers to the fact that he was probably the first to abuse her. This reference shows us that the author not only had a very clear understanding and knowledge of the sexual abuse but also deliberately decided to minimise, relate, and write these experiences in a “romantic”, erotic, even innocent tone. Therefore, Sion, like other authors, hides the violence of rape under the veil of *foot rubbing*. Sion does mention in some other parts of his text that Romani women slaves were forced to marry without consent or that their forced and arranged unions as a common practice. Still, there is an avoidance of highlighting how sexual exploitation of Romani women was so common and how it was accepted socially, morally, religiously, and legally^[10] (Sion 1915).

7 The age of becoming courtesan was approximately 11 or 12 years old (Sion 1915, 20).

8 The authors make a clear reference to sexual intercourse.

9 Clerics as well as boyars sexually exploited Romani women. See Oişteanu (2018, 611–613) and Petcuţ (2015, 74).

10 Oişteanu (2018, 519) speaks that sexual abuse was not demanded by law, but the law did not prevent or punish the sexual abuse endured by enslaved Romani females.

The last text to be examined, is *Țigăanii în istoria României*, written by historian Viorel Achim, who highly marked the narrative of Romani slavery in the twenty-first century. Achim's book (1998) becomes a foundational text that has served as a source for many scholars in the field of Romani slavery. However, Achim's text neither considers the issue of sexual violence against Romani women slaves nor tackles their forced gendered labour. The author offers silence on the topic and continues in the same vein as the other authors to use the pejorative word *Țig*n* in his book title and text (*Țig*nii în istoria Romaniei*). Despite being one of the most cited texts on the topic, the book did not engage with the experiences of gendered issues within the institution of slavery. In turn, it continued the traditional way of referring to Romani women from a privileged *gadjikane*^[11] male position.

In summary, the four academic texts selected from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal relational and distinct representations of gendered labour and sexual violence affecting Romani women. However, these works were embedded in a patriarchal tradition dominated by privileged male *gadjikane* perspectives, which often perpetuate racist ideologies that sustain the ongoing subjugation of Romani women. A notable aspect of these narratives is the duality of social perceptions of Romani women as observed in the selected quotes. On the one hand, there is a clear intention to fetishise enslaved women, especially young women, portraying them as exotic figures, captivating *perfect creatures* – a representation that can be traced from literary work to scholarly studies (Gheorghe 2010; Woodcock 2015; Medeleanu 2023). On the other hand, this fascination is often juxtaposed with a strong repulsion and contempt, as demonstrated by the degrading depictions of their characters as *beggars, cheaters, liars, oversexualized, perverts, and prostitutes*, among others.

In conclusion, the influential texts of Kogălniceanu, Sion, Potra, and Achim fail to acknowledge enslaved Romani women experiences in relation to sexual violence during the institution of slavery. Furthermore, there is a complicit participation of the texts in the misrepresentation of sexual violence, as well as an absence of this critical knowledge.

Importantly, in contrast, Djuvara (1989), Lukács (2016), and Oișteanu (2018) name and explore the topic of sexual exploitation of Romani women, be it from a minimalistic and safe distance. Nonetheless, they do contribute to the revealing of the complex and traumatic experiences of Romani women during slavery. Still, the texts of these authors, as well as others, fail to provide a comprehensive examination of the practices of sexual violence, as well as to interrogate the significance and impact of the four texts consulted^[12] in the construction of women as sexual objects. Their texts (Djuvara, Lukács, and Oișteanu) do not challenge the authors' roles as academics in perpetuating and legitimising racist and sexist epistemologies, as well as the traditional way of producing knowledge about Romani women without understanding the intersection of gender and ethnic oppression. Hence, although the existing literature covering Romani enslavement in Romania can help us to understand the institution of slavery and its harms, there is extremely limited recognition of the sexual violence against Romani women during slavery and its implications in Romanian society post enslavement.

11 See Matache (2016, 2023, 2025).

12 Kogălniceanu, *Schiță Despre Țigani* 1837; Sion, *Suvenire Contimpurane* 1915; Potra, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul Țiganilor din Romania* 1939; Achim, *Țigăanii în istoria României*, 1998.

Overall, there is an academic silence regarding sexual exploitation, as in the four consulted texts, the words abuse and rape are not mentioned, and they only have come into use recently in Djuvara's work from 1989.^[13] Silence occurs around these words and topics, as well as a devaluation in general of the Romani women and their traumatic stories of sexual violence. In conclusion, academic silence has led to a lack of studies on this topic, as well as a detachment from the historical persecution of Roma in Romania and their current struggles for liberation.

Conclusions

Despite the brief references to the sexual abuse suffered, there is a significant gap in research regarding sexual violence against Romani women, particularly from an anti-racist and feminist perspective. Often reflecting the biased and *gadjikane*^[14] (non-Romani) positions, these portrayals navigate between sexualisation and feelings of repulsion, creating a complex antagonism. To respond to this gap, this article takes a critical feminist and anti-racist approach to analyse both exploitation and abuse against enslaved Romani women in the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in slavery and its historiographical framing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The article highlights the links between coerced domestic labour, reproductive labour, and sexual violence. Additionally, it explicitly mentions rape and sexual violence by their proper terms, while categorising and analysing different forms of “rape under another name” against enslaved Romani women: *jus primae noctis*, *sexual hospitality*, *sexual initiators*, *foot rubbing*, and ultimately, sexual slavery – *fiitoare*.

The article also examines how influential academic texts on Roma predominantly have been written from an outsider perspective, established on dynamics of power relations based on racism, sexism, and dehumanization, where: (a) enslaved Roma women were recognised as labour bodies to be exploited for free and (b) as bodies for control, sexual entertainment, and reproduction within the same system of oppression. In particular, the article explores four of the most influential historiographical texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – authored by Kogălniceanu, Sion, Potra, and Achim – which have marked the slavery narrative in the present Romanian context. It reveals that the forms of sexual violence and their harms on Roma women are far from being recognised, known, or even acknowledged.

The article highlights a pattern of academic silences and distortion. Kogălniceanu, Sion, Potra, and Achim have not written any words that would indicate that Romani women were subjected to sexual violence, nor that they were suffering a double oppression, as slaves and as women. In turn, the practice of sexual abuse is hidden or named as *affairs*, *pleasures*, *sins* of the boyars, *escapes*, or portrayed as small *mistakes* (Gheorghe 2010, 27). Moreover, there are extensive efforts to portray the enslavers as innocent, sensible in the face of Romani enslaved women, who were depicted as diabolical yet perfect creatures.

13 Neagu Djuvara was an important scholar in discussing sexual exploitation of Romani women, but his work also has tones of Orientalism and exoticism.

14 Read more in Matache (2023; 2025).

Additionally, the article points to elements of minimisation of the enslavers' control over female bodies in the four texts. A case in point is the description of *frecatul picioarelor* (foot rubbing) as being something desirable for slave women and their families, and not as something imposed or rape. However, such assumptions fall short given the fact that enslaved women were absolute property, without the power of consent or decision.

Finally, the article highlights an intentional portrayal of Romani enslaved women as promiscuous and degraded in historiographical works. This characterisation enabled their mistreatment and abuse within the slavery system – thus often legitimisation comes from the constructed image of Romani women as hypersexual objects. Hence, enslaved Romani women were subject to multiple oppressions, resulting in suffering what the Black scholar Davis (2019) called double exploitation.

Generally, history and other forms of knowledge production bury the subject of sexual violence endured by many nameless enslaved Romani women who experienced countless, varied, and systematic forms of abuse. I wonder what lies in the dusty archives of Romania today, how many stories of women who survived sexual abuse and the atrocity of being slaves still exist? How many Catincas, Maries, or Ancas we still do not know? And why?

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