# Foreword – Moving beyond Gypsylorism


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This Thematic Issue of *Critical Romani Studies* is one of the results of the International Conference "Racism and Romani Studies", organised 14–15 September 2023, by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), in cooperation with the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara and West University of Timișoara, and funded by Timișoara Municipality and the European Union. Meeting on the university campus, the conference allowed Romani and non-Romani scholars from across Europe to share and discuss research results and analyses on this topic from different disciplinary perspectives (ERIAC 2023).

The conference was part of a component of the program of Timișoara 2023 – European Capital of Culture, proposed and led by the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara, titled "Invisible/Visible – Deconstructing Stereotypes and Overcoming Marginalisation of Roma Communities in Timișoara and Europe". Both the inclusion of an academic dimension related to Roma in the program of Timișoara 2023 and the partnership with ERIAC were in themselves important symbolic messages aimed at challenging the stereotypical representations of Roma in public discourse, at both the local and European levels. The topic of the conference, chosen jointly by the two organisations, reflects a commitment that the Intercultural Institute has made since 1997–1998, when it published the first book and organised the first public events in Romania that denounced anti-Roma racism. It was affirmed then that the main barrier that Roma face is not poverty but a kind of racism, embedded in the functioning of society. It was during those years that similar claims were being made for the first time also across Europe. Tracy Smith (1997) was among the first to mention not just "racist attitudes" but also institutional racism, while references to anti-Roma racism were appearing in reports and publications of the European Roma Rights Centre. It was also during those years that a parallel was drawn between antisemitism and antigypsyism, not just in connection with the racist policies of the Nazis but also in their more recent manifestations in European societies. However, the context was different in different parts of the continent. In Western Europe, antisemitism was largely confronted, and antigypsyism was not. In Romania and across Eastern Europe, both remained strongly embedded in society and were amplified in the 1990s, while being strongly denied in public discourse. Thus, talking about a form of racism against Roma in 1990s Romania was strongly rebutted by authorities and considered as exaggerated in the media and even in academia.

Antigypsyism is a transhistorical, transnational, and transgenerational phenomenon that constitutes a special form of racism directly impacting Romani people. Antigypsyism has deprived and repressed Romani people's agency, including identity politics, practices, and self-articulation, self-representation, and emancipatory memories, which are based not only on everyday "otherings" and pejorative perceptions of those labelled as "Gypsy" in the public imagination but also rooted in social distancing, physical acts, and systemic oppression. Romani agency in the past centuries have had a troubling legacy in academia and artistic representations that resulted in academic antigypsyism. These social and historical notions structurally embedded forms of epistemic and structural biases and stereotypical representations that have shaped the ways in which Romani people have been researched, misrepresented, and excluded in academic and public discourses (Mate 2024). As a current critic, these academic thoughts from the early 1600s until the early school of Critical Romani Studies (2010s) often presented results from external standpoints and perceptions that instrumentalised and exploited Roma as research objects and, in countless cases, through a racist, classicist, and exoticised orientalist perspective (Bogdan et al. 2018). Therefore, Romani agency is excluded from public memories, which has resulted in limited access to

academic knowledge productions and ethical representations in arts and culture (End 2017; McGarry and Mirga-Kruszelnicka, forthcoming).

Romani cultural heritage has long shaped global artistic and cultural practices. Yet, the memories and narratives of Romani people remain insufficiently acknowledged within academic and cultural institutions. The processes of deconstructing and reconstructing Romani memories, emancipation, and self-representation cannot be meaningfully pursued without critically engaging with the structural racist ambivalences that are embedded in antigypsyism. To date, it remains largely unexamined how antigypsyism has impeded the recognition of Romani memories and narratives in the past. Furthermore, the question of how academic antigypsyism, as a form of structural racism that has historically excluded, delegitimized, and marginalised Romani scholarship, operates within academic discourse has yet to be fully addressed.

This Thematic Issue aims to contribute to opening a scholarly dialogue by interrogating the mechanisms through which antigypsyism has shaped knowledge production and the critique of how Romani people have been placed in the margins and remain so – until today. Deconstructing antigypsyism and affirming Romani past contributions to European cultural heritage and academic narratives are essential steps toward placing a dignified collective memory into European societies. Acknowledging Romani histories and intellectual contributions not only enriches our understanding of the past but also challenges prevailing, often biased constructions of the "Gypsy" that persist in the present.

## The Gypsy Lore Society and the Legacy of Early 'Gypsy' Studies

The founding of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) in 1888 effectively institutionalised what would become modern Romani Studies, though earlier publications about Roma existed (Mayall 2004). This institutionalisation coincided with broader European imperial projects focused on systematically cataloguing colonised populations. The GLS transformed Roma from subjects of occasional curiosity into objects of systematic academic investigation, embedding them within colonial epistemologies of race and ethnicity. Romani Studies thus became a subspecialty within ethnic and racial studies designed to catalogue, categorise, and manage populations deemed "Oriental" or "Indigenous", serving broader imperial agendas of controlling territories and peoples considered "uncivilised" (Selling, 2018). Ken Lee (2000) defines Gypsylorism as "a discursive formation that emerges from asymmetrical exchanges of power of different sorts (political, economic, cultural, intellectual and moral) that in turn help to re-constitute and perpetuate the unequal exchanges that underlay the initial discursive formation". Lee is effectively positioning Roma as Europe's internal Orientals, a framework that mirrors Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism but operates within European borders rather than across them.

Gypsylorist scholarship distinguished itself through elaborate mythological explanations of Romani origins. Hancock (2002) documents how popular narratives attributed Romani origins to Biblical myths, Caucasian legends, and even fantastical realms, framing them as mystical survivals of ancient "lost tribes".

These mythological frameworks served multiple purposes: they positioned Roma as fundamentally different from contemporary Europeans while simultaneously creating objects of romantic fascination removed from ordinary social and political realities. Magic and supernatural associations became integral components of Gypsylorist constructions, as Asprem (2024) demonstrates in his analysis of Charles Godfrey Leland's influential work on "Gypsy magic". These associations produced contradictory images of Roma as possessing genuine mystical powers yet simultaneously being fraudulent, which reinforced their status as Europe's internal Orientals. The emphasis on supernatural origins effectively excluded Roma from rational, scientific discourse while maintaining them as subjects worthy of scholarly attention.

The integration of Roma into colonial epistemologies produced consequences extending far beyond academic circles. Nazi racial scientists drew upon earlier romanticized and racialised portrayals of Roma and Sinti developed within Gypsylorist traditions. The Gypsylorists' romantic celebration of "Gypsy" life typically rested on distinctions between "pure-blooded" (authentic) Romanies and others, reflecting broader European anxieties about racial mixing and ethnic boundaries. Academic pursuits of "authentic" Roma thus became entangled with eugenic ideology and racial hierarchy. The Nazi distinction between Aryans and non-Aryans mirrored the Gypsylorists' distinction into blood purity. This continuity between romantic academic representation and genocidal racial policy demonstrates how apparently benign scholarly frameworks can provide intellectual foundations for systematic violence.

Early "Gypsy" studies established conceptual vocabularies and imagery emphasising polarities between white Europeans and Roma, creating frameworks of difference, inferiority, and subordination that could be mobilised for various political purposes (Matache 2016). The academic construction of Roma as essentially different and inferior provided conceptual tools later weaponised within fascist racial policies. The relationship between Gypsylorist scholarship and racial science reveals the political relations of supposedly neutral academic inquiry. When scholars constructed Roma as racial others, they participated actively in creating racial categories that could justify exclusion, persecution, and ultimately genocide. This historical connection underscores the responsibility researchers bear for the social implications of their work.

Romani Studies continued replicating foundational Gypsylorist biases long after the contexts that initially produced them had changed. Non-Romani inquiry continued its domination of Romani Studies even after the defeat of Nazi and fascist regimes and the rise of anticolonial movements following the Second World War. This persistence demonstrates solid Gypsylorist epistemological frameworks and their deep embedding within academic institutions. Contemporary research still reproduces Gypsylorist approaches, as Ryder (2015), and Selling (2018) document.

The legacy of early "Gypsy" studies has made it difficult for present-day scholarship to shift from problematising and othering Roma toward exploring Roma as "free subjects of thought or action" (Matache 2016). This challenge reflects more than methodological inertia; it reveals structural inequalities within academic institutions. Non-Romani scholars, media, and institutions maintain privileged positions within social hierarchies, investing them with power to validate or reject Romani scholarship as legitimate knowledge production (Matache 2016). Romani scholars often find their ethnic identity negatively impacting their academic standing within the field, creating barriers to participation in knowledge production about their own communities.

Contemporary manifestations of Gypsylorism often appear more subtly than historical predecessors but remain structurally significant. They emerge in funding priorities privileging certain research types, methodological approaches maintaining researcher-subject hierarchies, and institutional practices marginalising Romani scholars and community knowledge.

Within Romani Studies, this symbolic and epistemic violence (Gomez 2020) manifests through systematic exclusion of Romani perspectives from knowledge production, privileging external interpretations over Romani self-representation, and continued focus on deficit models that problematise Roma rather than examining structural inequalities. The marginalisation of Roma voices represents a fundamental violation of epistemic justice and the principle of "nothing about us without us" (Ryder et al. 2015).

Critical Romani Studies has emerged as a counter-paradigm explicitly challenging Gypsylorist assumptions. Brooks et al. (2021) describe how "a new critical paradigm in Romani studies has been emerging during the past couple of decades, addressing the persisting exclusion of Roma contributions from knowledge production and decision-making, arguing for more critically reflexive, collaborative, and Roma-led studies". Critical Romani Studies draws inspiration from decolonial and critical race theory traditions. The transition from nineteenth-century Gypsylorism to twenty-first-century Critical Romani Studies represents engagement with decolonisation and challenges to antigypsyism (Bogdan et al. 2018). This involves methodological changes and fundamental shifts in power relations within the field.

For decades, Romani activists, artists, and intellectuals dreamed of an international Roma-led platform that would counteract dominant cultural and academic (mis)representations and formulate reliable counter-narratives and imagery rooted in Romani subjective experiences. Indeed, the First World Romani Congress, held in 1971, marked a historical milestone and inaugurated a new era in the international Romani movement. This gradual political awakening was accompanied by a parallel development in the arts. One of the Congress's major achievements was the adoption of unifying symbols, a Roma flag and anthem, designed to affirm a political Romani identity shaped and articulated by Roma themselves. Cultural and artistic practices thus became crucial vehicles for advancing the broader agenda of Romani self-emancipation (Junghaus 2006; McGarry and Mirga-Kruszelnicka forthcoming; Mate forthcoming). Following the 1971 Congress, Romani visual artists began to assert collective recognition within the art world. This emerging consciousness across European Roma communities disrupted the exclusionary relations of the cultural sphere and challenged long-standing traditions in which Roma were portrayed exclusively through non-Romani perspectives. Such representations had historically confined Roma to the conceptual ghetto of the "Gypsy", reinforcing stereotypes and limiting agency (Junghaus 2007; Tremlett 2023).

## Moving towards Cultural and Academic Emancipation

The establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture represents both a historic milestone and the symbolic culmination of these efforts to create a Roma-led institution dedicated to cultural emancipation. The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture e.V. (ERIAC) is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Leaders' initiative, and

the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. ERIAC is an association registered under German law in April 2017, and launched in June 2017 in Berlin, Germany. It exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media.

ERIAC acts as an international creative hub to support the exchange of creative ideas across borders, cultural domains, and Romani identities. ERIAC also exists to be a communicator and public educator, to disseminate a positive image and knowledge about Romani people, for dialogue brings together Romani and non-Romani individuals and institutions, including numerous scholars, within five special sections, one of which focuses explicitly on knowledge production. It operates as a hub linking scholars, artists, activists, and community members whose work transforms the ways Romani knowledge is produced, disseminated, and accessed. ERIAC's commitment to knowledge generation is deeply embedded in its strategy and has, since its founding, emphasised impact in academic and educational domains. This dedication aims to strengthen Romani scholarship, particularly within Critical Romani Studies, and to enhance the visibility of Romani academic narratives and scholars.

Although ERIAC is not a university or research institute in the traditional sense, knowledge production constitutes one of its core pillars. ERIAC aspires to become a leading reference for knowledge about Romani culture, history, and identity for universities, governments, and Romani communities alike. One of its strategic objectives for 2021–2025 is to build upon the Council of Europe's Recommendation on the inclusion of Roma and Traveller histories in school curricula and teaching materials (Council of Europe 2020). To this end, ERIAC seeks to serve as a key institutional partner providing policy input to the Council of Europe and its member states while also fostering enduring collaborations with universities and other educational institutions across Europe.

It is, therefore, no surprise, that ERIAC is also a committed contributor and ally of the *Critical Romani Studies Journal*. In fact, ERIAC's executive director Tímea Junghaus is among the Journal's editors, while ERIAC itself is its proud founder. ERIAC has also facilitated access to the rich Romani contemporary art scene, regularly featured on the *Journal's* covers. This current issue is the first time, however, where ERIAC acts as a guest co-editor.

Through various academic initiatives and partnerships, ERIAC positions itself as both catalyst and connector, amplifying Romani voices, shaping research agendas, and creating spaces for dialogue and co-creation. Its approach reflects the belief that knowledge production extends beyond academia, thriving at the intersections of culture, activism, and education. Together with Critical Romani Studies, ERIAC forms part of a broader epistemological and political shift that redefines who produces knowledge and whose perspectives shape collective understanding. Grounded in Romani positionality, experience, and historical consciousness, this new framework not only reinterprets Romani histories but also contributes to more democratic, ethical, and inclusive modes of representation and scholarship (Costache 2018; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2023).

Recent contributions to Critical Romani Studies reflect a rapidly developing intellectual field that challenges epistemic hierarchies, reclaims Romani subjectivity, and redefines the politics of representation

within European academia and culture. Across these studies, Romani and allied scholars examine the entanglement of antigypsyism, colonial epistemologies, and institutional exclusion while advancing new frameworks of resistance, memory, and participatory knowledge production.

Rafael Buhigas Jiménez, in "'Antigypsyism Does Not Exist' and Other Assessments. Romani History by a Romani Historian Evaluated at the White Academy", examines the epistemological racism embedded in Spanish academia. Drawing from his personal experiences as a Romani historian, he critiques the scientific marginalisation of Romani voices and the colonial assumptions that have shaped the historiography of Roma in Spain. Buhigas Jiménez calls for the inclusion of Romani epistemologies as integral to the social and human sciences, arguing that reconstructing Romani history and memory is not only an academic task but a form of cultural and political reparation. Lesia Pahulich critically examines how the racialisation of Roma is intertwined with the development of European modernity and the legacies of imperial entanglements. The analysis reveals that constructions of Romani identity have been shaped by broader processes of power, knowledge, and colonial hierarchies within Europe. Gaëtan Cognard's "Darkland, Fairyland, Gypsyland" revisits literary and artistic myths of "Gypsy" heterotopias, tracing the dual "pink" and "black" legends that have framed Roma as either romantic outsiders or dangerous others. His analysis underscores how these symbolic constructions continue to inform cultural production and public imagination in Europe. Nora Tyeklar's study of the Hungarian term hazaáruló ("traitor") demonstrates how language becomes a site of political and moral exclusion, particularly regarding Romani migration and asylum. Ognyan Isaev and Martina Drobenova examine the structural barriers that hinder Romani students' participation and success in higher education beyond issues of tuition. The analysis highlights how systemic inequalities and institutional practices perpetuate educational exclusion and limit opportunities for Romani learners. Similarly attentive to the politics of erasure, Stefania Cotei's "Old Blouses, Old Houses: Hauntings of Romani Slavery in the Production of Romanian Nationalism" critiques how heritage discourses, such as UNESCO's recognition of Romanian folk blouses obscure Romani women's histories of enslavement and labour. By unpacking the nationalist and neoliberal ideologies underlying heritage preservation, Cotei reveals how multicultural rhetoric often perpetuates systemic oppression under the guise of cultural inclusion. Other contributions focus on reclaiming agency through cultural and linguistic self-definition. Camilla Salvatore's "Reclaiming Folk in Discourses about Music" explores how Roma in Kotel, Bulgaria, reappropriate terms like "authentic" and "pure" to assert cultural belonging and resist antigypsyist stereotypes.

Recent book reviews by Eddie Bruce-Jones, Dora Bogárdi, and Adrian-Nicolae Furtună extend these debates into comparative and historical terrains, connecting Roma rights to global civil rights movements, evaluating EU policy failures, and tracing the eugenic roots of racial science in Eastern Europe.

In the Arts and Culture sections several authors foreground institutional critique and epistemic transformation. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, together with Dezso Mate, expands the argument in "Producing Knowledge from Within", situating the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) as a key institution for epistemic justice and decolonial knowledge production. Other articles by Diana Aburas, Sanni Lindroos, and Rufat Demirov, trace the emergence of Critical Romani Studies as a field born from resistance to Gypsylorism and scholarly colonialism. They emphasise "epistemic sovereignty", decolonial refusal, participatory methodologies, and ethical-based research as foundations for a more

just and inclusive academic practice. Furthermore, André Raatzsch and Mate's "Reparative Memory and the Visibility of Roma Subjectivity in Otto Mueller's 'Gypsy' Depictions" offers a powerful reflection on art, affect, and visibility, arguing for participatory curatorial practices that centre Romani scholars. Complementary case studies, such as Calin Rus's analysis of Roma inclusion in European Capital of Culture programs, show how cultural policy can either reproduce or challenge stereotypes depending on implementation. Finally, Ismael Cortés Gómez and Carmen Cañete Quesada engage in a critical debate on "Charting New Frontiers in Democracy: A Roma Voice in Parliament". Their discussion examines the political participation of Romani representatives and the broader implications for democratic inclusion and equality. Together, these works articulate a coherent intellectual movement: the transformation of Romani Studies into a critical, decolonial, and self-reflexive discipline that reclaims Roma as knowledge producers and active agents in shaping European history, culture, and memory.

## Conclusions

Gypsylorism represents a foundational paradigm that has shaped Romani Studies since its inception, establishing frameworks of othering, exoticisation, and epistemological exclusion that continue to influence contemporary scholarship. Its characteristics like romantic primitivism, magical othering, and emphasis on authenticity and origins have created lasting constraints on academic inquiry, limiting both the questions researchers ask and their ability to recognise Romani agency and self-determination.

The emergence of Critical Romani Studies offers promising alternatives, emphasising Romani participation in knowledge production, structural analysis of antigypsyism, and decolonial approaches to research. However, the persistence of Gypsylorist influences in institutional structures and academic networks demonstrates that transformation requires sustained effort across multiple levels of academic and political engagement.

The scholarship demonstrates that Critical Romani Studies has developed into a field that interrogates entrenched epistemic hierarchies, systemic antigypsyism, and the colonial frameworks that have historically shaped knowledge about Romani communities. Across disciplines such as art, cultural policy, history, linguistics, and music, researchers reveal how traditional academic practices have marginalised Romani voices, essentialised identities, and reinforced stereotypes. Central concerns include visibility, subjectivity, and the reclamation of agency within both scholarly and cultural contexts. The field emphasises participatory and decolonial methodologies, highlighting the importance of epistemic sovereignty for Romani scholars and communities. Institutional initiatives still fail to provide spaces for Roma-led knowledge production that could foster cultural and intellectual agency while promoting reparative memory and historical justice. Research on cultural projects, linguistic exclusion, and policy failures illustrates the necessity of producing knowledge from within, grounded in lived experience and collective memory.

Overall, Critical Romani Studies advocates for a plural, inclusive, and reflexive approach to scholarship that positions Roma as co-creators of knowledge, challenges hegemonic narratives, and advances epistemic justice. This approach seeks to promote cultural recognition, social inclusion, and sustainable

transformation, demonstrating that scholarly practices can be both rigorous and socially responsible when informed by the perspectives of those most directly affected.

This thematic issue speaks for itself. It could have been further extended, but unfortunately, at some point we had to stop including articles that critically examine racism and Gypsylorism. This two-year intellectual journey around Racism and Romani Studies includes eighteen articles by twenty-one scholars and thirty-three academic reviews from across the globe. We extend our gratitude to the contributors and reviewers who made this special issue possible.

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