



# Critical Romani Studies



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VOLUME 1 • NUMBER 1 • 2018

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*Critical Romani Studies* is an international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal, providing a forum for activist-scholars to critically examine racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and human rights abuses of Roma. Without compromising academic standards of evidence collection and analysis, the Journal seeks to create a platform to critically engage with academic knowledge production, and generate critical academic and policy knowledge targeting – amongst others – scholars, activists, and policy-makers.

Scholarly expertise is a tool, rather than the end, for critical analysis of social phenomena affecting Roma, contributing to the fight for social justice. The Journal especially welcomes the cross-fertilization of Romani studies with the fields of critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical policy studies, diaspora studies, colonial studies, postcolonial studies, and studies of decolonization.

The Journal actively solicits papers from critically-minded young Romani scholars who have historically experienced significant barriers in engaging with academic knowledge production. The Journal considers only previously unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research. The Journal is committed to the principle of open access, so articles are available free of charge. All published articles undergo rigorous peer review, based on initial editorial screening and refereeing by at least two anonymous scholars. The Journal provides a modest but fair remuneration for authors, editors, and reviewers.

The Journal has grown out of the informal Roma Research and Empowerment Network, and it is founded by the Romani Studies Program of Central European University and the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. CEU organizes conferences regularly where draft papers are presented and discussed before selecting them for peer review.

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ISSN 2560-3019

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by the Hungarian Social Research Fund. Her research focuses on the intersections between gender, ethnicity and class as well as the social and legal inequalities faced by the Roma in various European countries. She has published several peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters with various international presses including Palgrave Macmillan, Ashgate, and Central European University Press, as well as several thematic policy papers related to social inclusion, gender equality, social justice, and civil society. She currently is preparing a monograph on the political activism and social struggles of Romani women in post-socialist Europe, as well as an edited volume that takes stock of the contemporary situation and identity struggle of Europe's Romani minority. In 2013, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. honored Kóczé with the Ion Ratiu Democracy Award for her interdisciplinary research approach, which combines community engagement and policymaking with in-depth participatory research on the situation of the Roma.

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# The Origins of the Journal

*Critical Romani Studies* is the brainchild of a group of young activist-scholars from Budapest who saw a need to center Romani voices in the production of scholarship about Roma. The founding editors of the Journal have diverse personal and academic backgrounds. Each of us conducted our doctoral studies on topics related to the oppression and emancipation of Roma in diverse disciplines such as art history, media studies, political anthropology, political science, and sociology. We have all been involved in civic activism and the advocacy activities of various NGOs such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, the European Roma Cultural Foundation, the European Roma Rights Centre, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Education Fund. We believe that these organizations play an important role in the struggle for Romani emancipation; however, we wanted to go beyond advocacy and to create venues in which scholars and activists could reflect critically on key questions of this struggle.

Beginning in 2011, a group of us started to organize discussions in various cafés and pubs in the eighth district of Budapest. We created the informal Roma and Research Empowerment Network to bring together Roma and non-Roma researchers, activists, and concerned citizens who are committed to the social justice and equality of Roma. With invited speakers, we discussed diverse topics such as the expulsion of Roma from France, Roma school segregation, a local empowerment project in a Hungarian village, the situation of Roma in the Baltic states, the place of Beash identity in the Romani movement, early marriages, the anti-Roma marches in Czech cities, and post-colonial approaches to Romani Studies.

In addition to the informal discussions, we organized three conferences at Corvinus University Budapest: “Working Together for Roma Inclusion in the School and Community” (2012); “Roma Participation, Empowerment, and Emancipation” (2013); and “Roma Participation in Knowledge Production and Policy Making” (2014).<sup>[1]</sup> We held a number of workshops in conjunction with these conferences in a community center in the so-called “Roma ghetto” of Budapest, highlighting the importance of knowledge production outside academia.

The workshops held in 2014 focused on transforming the Romani movement, building coalitions with the feminist and LGBTQ rights movements as well as with trade unions; knowledge production and Roma representation; and the plan of setting up a pan-European Romani cultural institute. The organizers invited the participants to publish their ideas in a special issue of *Roma Rights, the Journal of the European Roma Rights Centre*, titled “Nothing About Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production”.<sup>[2]</sup>

1. The “core members” of the network have changed throughout the years. The following persons organized the conferences: in 2012, Iulius Rostas and Andrew Ryder; in 2013, Crina Marina Morteanu, Iulius Rostas, Márton Rövid, Andrew Ryder, Marius Taba, Timofey Agarin; in 2014, Maria Bogdan, Jekatyerina Dunajeva, Tímea Junghaus, Iulius Rostas, Márton Rövid, Andrew Ryder, Marek Szilvási, Marius Taba. Angéla Kóczé contributed to the journal issue published after the 2014 conference. You can find more information on the Roma Research and Empowerment Network at: <https://romaempowerment.wordpress.com>

2. <http://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us-roma-participation-in-policy-making-and-knowledge-production/4433>

Several papers in this publication challenge the hegemonic academic narratives on Roma. In their respective essays, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Angéla Kóczé interrogate the legacies of knowledge production in the field of Romani Studies. Although a handful of established scholars felt compelled to react to these articles – the authors were called “NGO scientists” and the publication “a campaigning magazine” – this special issue has become an important reference for subsequent critical studies on knowledge production on Roma. Romani activist-scholars who serve as teachers, researchers, or scholars under the purview of academic governance, share the plight of other racialized scholars who are unconsciously perceived as “incompetent”<sup>[3]</sup> and who are accused of “dilut[ing] academic rigorously”. These are unmeasurable “standards” created by mainly white upper-middle-class scholars (Gutiérrez et al., 2012). The position of any colored, racialized person is repeatedly undermined as a result of persistent structural inequality and the myths of meritocracy.

It thus became clear to us that a new academic journal was needed, specifically in order to create a platform for scholars seeking to embrace standpoint epistemologies and critical social theories in their research and writing about issues faced by Romani people. With its strong history of dedication to socially and morally responsible intellectual inquiry, Central European University (CEU) agreed to host and publish this new journal. CEU has been offering Roma-related courses and has supported Roma-related research since the 1990s. In 2004, the University launched the Roma Graduate Preparation Program, which sought to prepare Romani BA graduates for MA studies in English. In 2015, Ethel Brooks organized the summer school “Performing Romani Identities: Strategy and Critique” that represented a critical shift from earlier similar summer courses held at CEU. In 2016, Iulius Rostas was appointed Chair of Romani Studies and Angéla Kóczé was recruited as an assistant professor of Romani Studies. The new journal is being published by the Romani Studies Program at Central European University within the framework of CEU’s Roma in European Society initiative.

## Why a New Journal?

We are launching this journal to provide a forum for activist-scholars to critically examine racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and the human rights abuses of Roma. Without compromising academic standards of evidence collection and analysis, the Journal seeks to create a platform to critically engage with academic knowledge production, and generate critical academic and policy knowledge targeting – amongst others – scholars, activists, and policymakers. We see scholarly expertise as a tool, rather than an end, for critical analysis of social phenomena affecting Roma, and the fight for social justice writ large.

We acknowledge the importance of including the voice of Roma in knowledge production, and we aim to promote “talking back” (hooks, 1989).<sup>[4]</sup> Considering the history of oppression, structural inequalities,

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3. See in: Muhs, G. G., Niemann, Y. F., González, C. G., and Harris, A. P. (eds.) (2012). *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

4. hooks, b. (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press.

and persistent exclusion of Roma from various social realms, including scholarly endeavors, the language of academic knowledge concerning Roma is that of the dominant, non-Roma group. Therefore, it is imperative to include “liberatory voices” that will “take us away from the boundaries of domination”, as these very voices constitute a site of resistance to the exclusionary practices that still exist in academia (hooks, 1989: 28-29).

We consider scholarship on Romani and other populations that fails to incorporate the voice of the “target population” to be unethical, abusive, offensive, and methodologically flawed. The Journal aims to expose the different gendered, racialized positions and lived experiences of Roma as a basis for theorizing various forms of structural exclusion. We believe that this field of research should not be appropriated by a benevolent self-referencing group of white scholars; rather we promote an open, inter- and transdisciplinary movement that integrates diverse and heterogeneous voices.

The Journal aims to promote researchers who reflect critically on their own position and responsibility, but who at the same time remain committed to undertaking research of high academic standards. We are particularly interested in publishing results of participatory action research in which Romani “local informants” have been involved in all phases of the research and who are concerned not only with producing pure academic knowledge but also transforming local power relations.

We believe that the separation between the advancement of science and the advancement of practice is not only illusory, but also detrimental to “target populations”. Even if the research does not focus on local phenomena and therefore does not engage directly with local Romani inhabitants (for instance, studying so-called Roma inclusion policies), the researcher may still support and empower Romani voices that challenge (in this example) the hegemonic policy mechanisms being studied. The strict separation between activism and science is often promoted by well-established white, male “Western” scholars who are reluctant to reflect on their own privilege and are interested in maintaining the exclusion of oppressed voices from academia. We believe that scientific knowledge can be produced by respecting academic rigor, using multiple research methods while also supporting the struggles of oppressed communities. The research design and the product reflect the position of the scientist and are informed by the researcher’s values. The Journal seeks to promote research on various forms of social oppression openly standing up against injustice while promoting diversity, equality, defense of human rights, respect for Roma communities, open dialogue, and respect for dissent.

The Journal seeks to transform not only Romani Studies but also account for past injustices that have suppressed the voices of racialized minorities. Borrowing hooks’ terminology, the Journal strives to contribute to an “education of critical consciousness”, which in turn may transform the culture of domination in academia and beyond. Academia and knowledge production thus become prime sites for acknowledging and challenging exclusionary practices and marginalization, including racism and sexism; and for transforming those discourses by including the voices of the oppressed.

Such a critical scholarly attitude creates not only new discourses, but also provides new ways for the academic world to reflect on and bring about changes in our societies. In other words, critical approaches in Roma-related research not only challenge the concepts and perspectives of the Humanities and Social Sciences, but

they also transform the means and language of social activism. In particular, the Journal aims to contribute to the diverse movement for Romani self-determination and emancipation. This emerging movement comprises activists, artists, experts, politicians, scholars, and students, as well as non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, and various national and local bodies. The Journal seeks to provide a forum for in-depth discussion of the key questions, challenges, and dilemmas of the Romani movement.

The proliferation of equality and social inclusion policies indicate an increasing recognition of discrimination and violence against Roma. Various (local, national, international) organizations, however, fail to tackle the enduring injustices Roma face even as they claim their commitment to “Roma inclusion”, “anti-discrimination”, “the rights of minorities”, “protecting fundamental rights”, and so forth. These so-called Roma integration strategies have offered nothing more than short-term depoliticized solutions for a long history of psychological and material subjugation, structural oppression, and racial violence. Despite twenty years of European Roma inclusion policymaking, in some areas such as health and housing policy, Roma throughout Europe continue to experience the same level of exclusion and discrimination as in the past decades. We aim to create a platform to critically engage with projects, programs, and policies targeting Roma. We wish to develop a public sphere where the desirability, efficiency, and legitimacy of pro-Roma initiatives and institutions can be debated.

We believe that engagement with racism and racialization cannot be detached from the economic-political transformation of the last three to four decades, which is often described as the expansion of “neoliberalism”. In response, the Journal seeks to dismantle the walls of the Romani Studies “ghetto”. The narrow focus on “Roma inclusion” has diverted attention from questions of social justice, welfare, democracy, and diversity. To this end, the Journal actively solicits contributions from anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQ, and leftist scholars.

## About the New Journal

The Journal we are introducing here – Critical Romani Studies – is an international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed Journal that provides a forum for scholars and activists to critically examine racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and human rights abuses of Roma, as well as issues of identity, mobilization, and resistance. The Journal especially welcomes the cross-fertilization of Romani studies with the fields of critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical policy studies, diaspora studies, colonial studies, postcolonial studies, and studies of decolonization.

Published by the Romani Studies Program at CEU, the Journal meets the strict academic standards of mainstream academic publishers that dominate the industry while avoiding their exploitative practices. The Journal considers only previously unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research. Editorial screening and double-blind peer review ensure the high academic standards of every article published by the Journal. The Editorial Board consists of prominent critical scholars who inspired the founding of the Journal. In contrast to many academic journals, the editorial board of Critical Romani Studies does more than play a symbolic role. Board members advise on the direction and policy of the Journal, give feedback on articles and issues, and recommend topics, potential authors, and reviewers.

We believe that academic publishing has become a commodified and exploitative industry wherein only a limited number of privileged scholars and activists have access to international academic journals of high caliber. Fighting against and in an effort to transform these practices, we are joining the open access movement; all articles of *Critical Romani Studies* are available free of charge. Furthermore, the Journal remunerates authors, editors, and reviewers for their intellectual work and contributions.

Historically, Romani scholars have encountered significant barriers in engaging with academic knowledge production. The Journal actively solicits the emergence of critical Romani scholars through conference invitations, personal mentoring, organizing writing retreats, and commissioning shorter pieces such as blog posts or book reviews. We strive to provide all necessary assistance for such scholars to successfully participate in knowledge production.

We call for unpublished papers annually. The Romani Studies Program at Central European University organizes annual conferences for scholars embracing critical approaches and methods. Selected participants present their draft papers at these conferences and receive thorough feedback from a discussant and the other invited scholars. We recommend that authors present their draft papers at our conferences; and we also accept submissions from scholars who cannot attend the conferences.

This first issue of the Journal contains articles that were presented at the conference “Critical Approaches to Romani Studies” held in May 2017 at CEU, and consists of three sections: articles, book reviews, arts and culture. The first three articles deal with knowledge production on Roma. *Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka* discusses the role of Romani Scholars; *Ioanida Costache* writes on Identity Politics, Universality, Otherness, and (New) Romani Subjectivity; *Jan Selling* assesses the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society. *Felix B. Chang* discusses the lessons of federalism and civil rights in the United States for “Roma integration”. *Verena Meier* studies the role of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century German Protestant missions in the Othering of Roma and Sinti.

In the book review section, Andzrej Mirga reviews Mihai Surdu’s recent publication *Those Who Count*, and Jekatyerina Dunajeva reviews bell hooks’ classic *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. In addition to publishing reviews of recent Roma-focused texts, the Journal actively solicits reviews of pioneering works from critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical policy studies, diaspora studies, colonial studies, postcolonial studies, and studies of decolonization. Furthermore, the Journal welcomes critical reviews of documents that inform Roma inclusion policies.

Finally, the Journal includes a section on Arts and Culture which is edited in close cooperation with the recently founded European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC). This section comprises articles on Roma representation, self-representation, and cultural appropriation. The journal solicits reviews of both Romani cultural products and artistic works on Roma. The first issue includes an essay on Romani Design by Ágota Szilágyi-Kispista, along with Sunnie Rucker-Chang’s study of African-American and Romani cinematic representations.



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# Challenging Anti-gypsyism in Academia: The Role of Romani Scholars

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**Critical  
Romani Studies**

## Abstract

As a social phenomenon and an ideology, anti-gypsyism is sustained on essentialized narratives, which reify ethnic borders (between those considered as Roma and non-Roma) and assumes internal homogeneity of all members of the Romani group based on vaguely-defined and generalized notions of “culture” or “ethnicity”. These narratives tend to exclude plural and diverse representation of social realities and intersecting Romani identities, which can challenge the dominant and stigmatizing discourse. In this paper, I analyse how academic discourse contributes to sustaining essentialist representations of Roma and assess how more nuanced, plural, and context-sensitive interpretations of ethnic identity can contribute to challenging anti-gypsyism. By reviewing the scholarship of Brubaker (2002, 2004), Hall (1996) and Vertovec (2007), I discuss the potential of definitions in deconstructing homogenized and essentialized discourses on Roma in knowledge production and beyond. Furthermore, I discuss how the emergence and dynamic development of Romani scholarship has been gradually challenging the legacy of Romani Studies and providing an entry into new avenues of research, conducted primarily from the standpoint of Romani scholars. I argue that their engagement in knowledge-production is essential for promoting diversified, balanced and context-sensitive discourses. In this article, rather than prescribing a specific, normative framework for Romani Studies and elaborating a fixed research agenda, I point to possible directions and promising theoretical avenues which may provide a refreshing counter-balance to an otherwise homogenizing scholarship. In doing so, I assess possible implications for adapting diverse notions of ethnicity as a tool for de-essentializing academic discourses on Roma – including advantages and existing risks. Such an approach enables the mapping out of issues and challenges relevant for the process of elaborating a Critical Romani Studies research agenda.

## Keywords

- Anti-gypsyism
- Roma
- Essentialism
- Romani scholars
- Ethnic identity

## Introduction

In September 2016, the Board of Directors of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS), arguably the most important institution of Romani Studies founded in 1888, passed a motion regretting some of its past misdeeds. The 2016 motion came after the adoption of a similar apology was rejected in 2012 by the GLS, despite the recurrent claims, even from among its own members, of a legacy of scientific racism propagated by GLS in the past (Acton, 2015). The language of the 2016 GLS apology was “soft” and defensive; and although the word “racism” did not appear, the Board of Directors of the GLS did acknowledge “Statements and attitudes that may be interpreted as overtly patronising, disenfranchising, or otherwise biased...”<sup>[1]</sup> The adoption of the motion came at the time when evidence of scientific racism in Romani Studies as well as a dynamic development of critical perspectives on this legacy had begun to emerge in spaces of academic discussion.

This is not the first time that the GLS has attempted to deal with its somewhat troublesome past. In 1999, its flagship publication was renamed from *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* to *Romani Studies* in an attempt “to signal that our interest was in populations that had agency and their own image of themselves” (Matras 2017: 115); this decision was approved with only a very narrow majority of votes among the GLS Board (*ibid.*). The move to replace the term “Gypsy” with “Roma” with regards to the Journal has not led to a similar change within this institution itself. According to information posted on the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS), the motion to replace the name “Gypsy Lore Society” with “Society for Romani Studies” was rejected in 2017 “after vigorous opposition from some board members”<sup>[2]</sup>.

What is the significance of these changes (or lack thereof) within the Gypsy Lore Society and in Romani Studies as an academic discipline? And more broadly: what is the role of scholarship in sustaining and/or disrupting biased narratives on Roma? In this article, I will explore the relationship between notions of anti-gypsyism and scholarly practice. More specifically, I will discuss the extent to which the conceptualizations – or definitions – of identities, especially ethnic identities, contribute to sustaining essentialized discourses on Roma. I will briefly review the scholarly practice with regards to Roma and discuss alternative definitions of ethnicity which may provide tools for establishing more plural academic narratives on Roma. I will then turn towards the emergence of Romani scholarship, pointing to the importance of academic knowledge produced from within the Romani subjectivity.

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1. Interestingly, the text of the motion is nowhere to be found on the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) website. The quotes originate from personal correspondence with one of the members of the Board of the GLS. Available upon request.

2. E-mail sent by Yaron Matras on November 28th, 2017 through the EANRS mailing list.

# 1. Anti-gypsyism and the Notion of Ethnicity

Anti-gypsyism is a deeply-rooted, historically stable and multi-dimensional specific type of racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and those who are labelled as “Gypsies” (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 3). Although scholars, civil society and public institutions are yet to reach a consensus on the explicit definition of anti-gypsyism, it is generally agreed that it is a form of “racism and an ideology based on hatred and fear, originating in stereotypes or prejudices towards Roma” (Carrera, Rostas, and Vosyliūtė, 2017: 71). Importantly, anti-gypsyism does not only incorporate elements of biological racism but it is also considered a type of so-called “differentialist” racism, which centres around “cultural” differences between “us” and “them” (Nicolae, 2006).

One of its key attributes, typical of any ideology grounded in stereotypes, is the “homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups” (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 5). Anti-gypsyism assumes sameness of all members of the group, to whom a number of deviant, benevolent or malevolent stereotypical characteristics are attributed. On the one hand, the attributes associated with “Gypsy-ness” tend to frame this group as a threat to public order. In political, public, media and in some cases even scholarly discourse, Roma are treated as “abnormal citizens”, unable to fit into mainstream society, prone to crime and misconduct and with a tendency to disobey social and legal norms. This is often illustrated by problematizing and racializing such social phenomenon as migration, begging, vagrancy or unemployment, which are commonly treated as traditional and inherent to “a Romani culture”.<sup>[3]</sup> Such framing of the Roma leads to the emergence of what Huub van Baar (2014) calls “reasonable anti-Gypsyism”: “The argument goes that you are rightfully entitled to act against them and treat them differently, because they cause inconvenience, indulge in criminal activity and can generally be expected to cause trouble” (29). As a consequence, anti-gypsyism becomes a legitimized, justifiable and socially accepted attitude, instead of recognizing that anti-gypsyism is, in fact, a form of racism. It is for this reason that Aidan McGarry calls anti-gypsym “the last acceptable form of racism” (McGarry, 2017).

On the other hand, anti-gypsym can also be manifested through attributing cultural traits and behaviours which can be regarded as “positive”: romantic, exotified clichés of free-spirited, mysterious people and eternal nomads. Such “positive” framing can be equally detrimental as it relies on the conviction that the Roma are essentially and irreconcilably different from the non-Roma.

As the ‘positive’ cliché can have equally harmful outcomes, awareness-raising about anti-gypsyist stereotypes should not only target negative perceptions of Roma and other groups, but should address the pernicious effects of considering groups and individuals (and their needs, preferences and potential) through the lens of preconceived group characteristics, including the exoticizing and romanticizing ones (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 11).

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3. Background report “The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising racism and xenophobia,” Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe (2016), available at: <https://wcd.coe.int/com.intranet.IntraServlet?command=com.intranet.CmdBlobGet&IntranetImage=2947279&SecMode=1&DocId=2385346&Usage=2>. Accessed 1-02-2018.

As a social phenomenon and an ideology anti-gypsym is, thus, sustained on powerful essentialized narratives, which, on the one hand, reify ethnic borders (between those considered as Roma and non-Roma) and, on the other, assume internal homogeneity of all members of the Romani group based on vaguely-defined and generalized notions of “culture” or “ethnicity”. Indeed, “anti-Gypsym has a collective, not individual, character, targeting all those perceived by society as ‘Gypsies’ or portrayed as such by the majority” (Carrera, Rostas, and Vosyliūtė, 2017: 10). Such dominant, generalizing and superficial narratives of Roma are produced, maintained and replicated by media, political and public discourses, policies and institutions, among others. Part of the efforts aiming at dismantling notions of anti-gypsym must therefore focus on disrupting and challenging essentialized discourses by providing plural narratives of diverse and intersecting identities, which more accurately reflect the social reality of Romani lives.

## 2. The Role of Academia in Sustaining Essentialized Discourses on Roma

The world of the Academia has its role in maintaining and stabilizing the dominant essentialized representations of Roma.

Firstly, the very foundation of Romani Studies has inherited an anti-gypsyist worldviews in its scholarly canon. Some scholars argue that scientific racism is at the root of contemporary Romani Studies scholarship (Fraser, 1995; Acton, 2015; Acton, 1998; Acton, 1974; Hancock, 2010; Kóczé, 2015; Matache, 2016b; Lee, 2000). For example, Thomas Acton convincingly demonstrates that, “although scientific racism lost legitimacy in academia after 1951, it continued to influence both popular culture, and academic discourse about Roma/ Gypsy/ Travellers” (Acton, 2016: 1). Acton argues that the Gypsy Lore Society, the oldest scholarly association of Romani Studies, was profoundly racist since its creation in 1888 until after WWII and although it slowly attempted to move the scholarly discourse away from notions of scientific racism after 1945, the legacy of past decades of scholarship continues to shape knowledge-production on Roma even today.<sup>[4]</sup> Indeed, even a separate term “Gypsylorism” was coined to refer to knowledge-production which is most clearly influenced by the early Romani Studies scholarship and where traces of racism can easily be identified.<sup>[5]</sup> Elsewhere Acton argues that an “earlier discourse of European states and scholars about the ‘true Gypsy’ which formed a variant of European ‘scientific racism’ [...] has been called ‘Gypsylorism’ after its flagship publication, the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society” (Acton, 1998: 7). To Ken Lee, writing at the turn of the century, “Gypsylorism” is a form of Orientalism, wherein “the hegemony of Gypsylorism, that extended period of discursive domination and subject-constitution of ‘The Gypsies’ that began with establishment of the GLS and

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4. It is worth mentioning that Acton’s paper was written as a response to the rejection of the motion to issue an apology for historic and scientific racism by the Board of the Gypsy Lore Society in 2012.

5. Nonetheless, not everyone would agree. Yaron Matras, for example, argues that, “it is not quite clear what this term means (it is not a technical designation for ‘members of the Gypsy Lore Society’). It is, however, noticeable that the term is used with considerable emotional zeal by writers whose primary concern is to ‘de-construct’ the works of other scholars studying Roma/ Gypsies and to expose their allegedly misguided thoughts and conclusions” (Matras, 2005).

JGLS in 1888, has not been subjected to the same level of critical scrutiny and deconstructive exposure as Orientalism” (Lee, 2000: 147).

Secondly, it is important to recognize that the world of academia is inherently hierarchical and imposes scientific knowledge as authoritative and superior to other ways and spaces of knowledge-production. In this sense, as argued by Ken Lee for example, “the members of the GLS and JGLS claimed a privileged epistemological position, asserting that they were the only internationally recognised source of scholarly information about ‘The Gypsies’” (Lee, 2000: 133); arguably this trend is evident at the present time too. In the context of Romani Studies, knowledge produced outside of academic circles has often been depreciated or de-legitimized as “biased”, not evidence-based or labelled as “NGO science” (Marushiaikova and Popov, 2011; Matache, 2016a). The deep fissure between notions of scientism, that is, of “objective” and “neutral” scholarship, and critical research is evident (Ryder, 2015; Bogdán et al., 2015; Ryder, 2017). Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of Romani voices in the academia and limited practices of meaningful involvement of Roma in knowledge-production (Tremlett and Mcgarry, 2013; Acton and Ryder, 2013). In recent years, the increasing number of scholars of Romani background have challenged the scholarship produced on Roma which has previously excluded voices of those who are the subject of scientific inquiry. These debates between Roma and non-Roma scholars have, however, become deeply polarized and politicized (Matache, 2016a; Vajda, 2015; Kóczé, 2015; Ryder, 2017). The marginality of Romani voices in scholarship on Roma can be considered among the biggest weaknesses of Romani studies as a scientific discipline (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015); and consequently, this results in upholding potentially generalizing and simplified academic narratives by leaving them detached and un-contrasted with points of view from the Roma themselves. This trend of idealized status of scientific knowledge as “objective” and “neutral” and its assumed superiority over other fora of knowledge-production has important implications which go beyond the world of academia and not uncommonly, work to maintain Romani self-narratives in a marginalized position. For example, recently in Spain, Romani federations and activists have made public complaints in reaction to the announced creation of the Chair of Romani Studies (*Catedra de Estudios Gitanos*) at the University of Alicante.<sup>[6]</sup> local Roma organizations claimed that while the idea was welcome and reflected years of their own advocacy efforts, the Romani stakeholders were completely excluded from participating in the process of establishing this department and from negotiations between the academic institutions and public bodies financing its creation. In a powerful statement, the Federation of Roma Associations in Valencia (FAGA) stated that: “we would like to communicate to the whole society that the times of this despotism of ‘everything for Roma without Roma’ needs to end, and that for many years, we the Roma have wanted to be protagonists of our present and our future”.<sup>[7]</sup> In policy-processes, too, some scholars have argued that Romani expertise continues to be secondary to the influence of non-Roma academic experts (Acton and Ryder, 2013; Ryder, 2015).

Thirdly, Romani Studies scholarship tends to operate with generalized and, not uncommonly, essentialized concepts of “Roma”, even when its declared objective is quite the opposite. Indeed, there are instances when scholarship works towards supporting rather essentializing and homogenizing views of Romani

6. <http://www.unionromani.org/notis/2017/noti2017-09-20.htm>; <http://www.fagic.org/2017/09/25/una-catedra-de-estudios-gitanos-sin-gitanos>. Accessed 1-02-2018.

7. <http://www.unionromani.org/notis/2017/noti2017-09-20.htm>. Accessed 1-02-2018.

ethnicity. Some of these represent romanticized and exotified narratives which construct the notion of a “true Gypsy” which is perceived as inherently different from the non-Roma population. As early as 1974, Acton denounced this scholarly practice; in his 1998 Inaugural lecture at the University of Greenwich he argued that:

The Gypsylorists who sat at their campfires, and bribed them with tobacco and sixpences to tell them Romani words, were immensely flattered that they had met with the ‘true Gypsies’, or even, if they were very lucky, the king of the Gypsies, and wrote books, dressed up in the anthropological jargon of scientific racism, explaining how only a few of their personal friends were ‘true Gypsies’ - and all the rest were disreputable half-breeds or imitations. This then constituted the academic literature on Gypsies down to the 1960s; there was a twenty-year lag between the discrediting of scientific racism in mainstream academia and its being abandoned in Romani Studies (Acton, 1998: 10).

Ken Lee also denounced this approach by arguing that “The ‘true Romany’ is essentially a discourse that privileges a particular constellation of attributes as constituting an ‘authentic’ Romani identity (...). These exonymic classificatory schemes used to categorise Romanies are both implicitly racialised and racist” (Lee, 2000: 138). He further argues that the more the reality of Romani lives distances itself from this imagined and mythical notion of “Gypsiness”, “the more they are shifted from ahistorical Romanticised exotics to real, dangerously inauthentic, social problems” (*ibid.*).

It should be underlined, however, that such scholarly practice, which Acton and Lee regard as manifestations of scientific racism, is often, and ironically, guided by the will to de-construct negative and stereotypical imagery associated with Romani people. Thus, as scholars attempt to challenge popular and/or scientific racists notions, they may find it difficult to avoid making generalizations about “a people”. Annabel Tremlett (2009, 2014) quite skilfully demonstrates this paradox. She writes that while “Romani Studies (...) sees itself as a space for anti-racist type intervention – a means of revealing a realistic picture of a heterogeneous minority” (Tremlett, 2009: 148), scholars often tend to fall into the trap of homogenisation. By analysing the discussion between Michael Stewart and sociologists Janos Ladanyi and Ivan Szelenyi who emphasize the importance of heterogeneity, Tremlett convincingly argues that both parties “can still slip into talk about “the Gypsies” or “the Roma” as “a” different group of people” (Tremlett, 2009: 147). Indeed, the above-mentioned scholars, although representing drastically different views with regards to the nature of “Gypsy-hood”, make references to vaguely-defined notions of “traditional Gypsy culture”, “the Gypsy work” or “the Gypsy way”, inevitably contributing to sustaining essentialized and homogenizing perspective on Romani identity.

### 3. Challenging Essentialized Discourses Through Definitions

Ultimately, in the vast majority of cases, essentialized representations of Romani people in scholarship are not a result of ill-willed academics but rather have to do with how identities, especially ethnic identities, are perceived and described, and what definitions and theoretical paradigms we employ.

In 1996, Stuart Hall argued that there is a lack of consistency and clarity in the conceptual delineation and application of the concept of “identity” (Hall, 1996). In 2000, Brubaker and Cooper proposed an inventory of theoretical approaches to the concept of “identity” and concluded that it bears a

multivalent, even contradictory theoretical burden. (...) Critical discussions of ‘identity’ has thus sought not to jettison but to save the term by reformulating it so as to make it immune from certain objections, especially from the dreaded charge of ‘essentialism’ (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:8).

Likewise, modern scholarship on ethnicity has begun to move away from seeing ethnic identity as something given, fixed and static (Jenkins, 2000; Brubaker, 2009; Wimmer, 2008). Rather, ethnic identities, as all identities, are understood as dynamic, multi-faceted, ever-changing and complex constructs which cannot be described through tangible and stable properties but which have to be defined in a relational and processual manner. The seminal work of Frederik Barth’s “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” (1969) was fundamental in shaping the contemporary theoretical approaches to ethnicity, challenging the notion of static objectivism by famously rejecting the focus on “the cultural stuff”, that is, on shared, observable and tangible culture. Instead, Barth argued that it is the ethnic boundary that defines the group, shifting towards a more dynamic and processual understanding of ethnicity.

Barth’s notion of “ethnic boundaries” continues to shape contemporary scholarship and is especially popular in Romani Studies. In the case of Roma, it is extremely difficult to draw a convincing categorisation based on objective, commonly shared and tangible cultural traits. It is for this reason that the notion of the “ethnic boundary” is one of the main conceptual tools employed by scholars to define Romani ethnic identity. Indeed, the Romani world-view is shaped by an ontological dichotomy between the Roma and the *Gadjo* (non-Roma) (Mirga and Mróz, 1994; Mirga, 1987). However, Brubaker rightfully notes that,

Barth equates the drawing of ascriptive distinctions, and the channelling of certain actions in line with such distinctions, with the existence of bounded ethnic groups and thereby contributes, against his own intentions, to the reifications of groups (Brubaker, 2009: 29).

Scholarship on Roma, significantly developed by non-Roma scholars, tends to reify these ethnic boundaries between “us” and “them”, inevitably slipping into essentializing interpretations, without acknowledging the more complex and intersecting realities of the Roma. While such a tendency can be considered relatively benign, at times it can take quite outrageous forms and be largely harmful,

conveying openly biased opinions through the very research questions posed by scholars. For example, in 2016 a pair of Turkish scholars published a paper in the peer-reviewed journal *Border Crossing* on “Crime and socialisation dynamics in sub-cultures: Case of Gypsies in Karaman”. According to the abstract, the researchers conclude that, “It can be said that during the unique socialization process of Gypsy subculture, Gypsy individuals’ attitudes to crime is shaped in the context of its unique dynamics through their families, relatives and friends. Unlike other social groups, the Gypsy subculture allows forming a habitus conducive to be involved in crime.”<sup>[8]</sup> Needless to say, the article not only conveys openly racist assumptions on the inherent relationship between Roma culture and crime but also claims to support this thesis scientifically.

It should be noted, however, that the vast body of literature on ethnicity, developed by social scientists and anthropologists, provides conceptual tools which enable a more nuanced, plural, complex and context-sensitive interpretations of ethnic identity. Some of these alternative conceptualizations may pave the way to more heterogeneous understandings of Romani ethnic identity, and thus work towards deconstructing existing homogenizing academic narratives. Their use, nonetheless, still remains largely marginal to the contemporary scholarship on Romani Studies although increasing use of critical approaches, including theories of intersectionality, postcolonialism, critical feminist thought, critical race theory, among others, especially by scholars of Roma background, can be noted (Bogdán et al., 2015; Kóczé, 2009; Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh, 2015; Junghaus, 2014).<sup>[9]</sup>

In the subsequent section, I will discuss the major currents of scholarship on ethnicity which have been influential in conceptually shaping this field of research but which have only been applied to the field of Romani Studies to a limited extent. In order to challenge the essentialist notions in Romani Studies, the increasing application of such theoretical approaches may contribute to a more critical understanding of Romani ethnic identity and result in production of more plural and accurate academic narratives. Drawing on more recent scholarship I also help to place Romani Studies as a scientific discipline closer to contemporary and mainstream academic debates thereby diminishing the “splendid isolation” (Willems, 1997) of the field of Romani Studies.

Rather than analytically applying specific theoretical frameworks to concrete examples, I will succinctly describe the contributions of Brubaker, Hall and Vertovec, while briefly pointing out those elements which I believe have the potential of conceptually opening-up of the notion of Romani ethnicity towards a more nuanced and context-sensitive perspective.

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8. From the original abstract in English. The paper, in Turkish, is available here: <http://www.tplondon.com/journal/index.php/bc/article/viewFile/623/469>. Accessed 1-02-2018.

9. Increasing use of critical approaches in Romani Studies can also be witnessed by academic events organized over the past few years, especially “Nothing about us without us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production” (October 11-13, 2014, Budapest): <https://romaempowerment.wordpress.com/> and “Critical Approaches to Romani Studies” Conference (May 25-26, 2017, Budapest): <https://rap.ceu.edu/article/2017-03-17/conference-critical-approaches-romani-studies-call-papers>. Accessed 1-02-2018.

### 3.1 Brubaker and the Notion of “Groupness”

Contributions made by sociologist Rogers Brubaker have shaped the contemporary understanding of ethnic identities and provide a well-grounded apparatus to better understand the complexity of Romani identity(s). Brubaker reminds us that “ethnicity, race and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals—as the imagery of discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded and enduring ‘groups’ encourages us to do—but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms” (Brubaker, 2002: 167). He proposes that we critically “rethink ethnicity” beyond the reification of boundaries or essentializing and inevitably homogenizing perspectives on ethnicity. Brubaker challenges the concept of ethnicity altogether, which he refers to as “groupism” and leads to the perception of ethnic groups as internally homogeneous and externally bounded entities. He rather shifts the perspective towards “groupness”, paying attention to identifications (rather than identities), categorisations (rather than “shared culture”) and the process of making and re-making groups. He concludes that ethnicity (like race and nations) are not “things in the world” but ways of seeing, interpreting and representing the social world (Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker, 2004; Brubaker, 2009). Brubaker refers to this as “The Cognitive Turn” (2009) in which systems of classification, categorization and identification, formal and informal, play a significant role. Such an approach allows us to take into account the political, social, cultural and psychological contexts as well as various types of agencies which affect this process – especially, the agency of members of the group as well as the role (and impact) of institutions in the processes of categorization and classification.

The popularity of Brubaker’s approach has also made its way into the field of Romani studies (for example: Marsh and Strand, 2006; Vermeersch, 2006; McGarry, 2017). Brubaker’s writing is relevant for his emphasis on how groups and labels of groups are made, and also for taking into account political factors, the role of institutions and the groups’ own agency. However, what has been common in Romani Studies is that Brubaker’s contributions are employed to over-emphasize the role of institutions as well as experts in shaping public discourses on Roma, oftentimes concluding that Romani ethnicity is not a concept which refers to objectively existing people but an artificial institutional construction (Surdu, 2016). Despite the importance of identifications and the agency of groups themselves, which dominate Brubaker’s writing, in the case of Roma, the criticism is oftentimes directed most gravely towards Romani activists and organizations. This is especially the case with regards to the self-narratives of a trans-national Romani identity which has been variously framed as “the most amazing nonsense” and “a project of the elites” (Kovats, 2003), as an “expert-political construct” (Surdu and Kovats, 2015) and opposed to a supposed identity-framing of the Romani grassroots (Trehan and Sigona, 2010; Trehan 2001). Such understandings of Romani ethnicity fail to consider an evident reflection – that Romani identities which are performed and articulated differently do not necessarily prove the *existence of irreconcilably different groups* but rather show dynamism and contextuality of Romani identity-formations.

### 3.2 Stuart Hall and “New Ethnicities”

Stuart Hall’s writings have also been essential in reconceptualising ethnic identities under an anti-essentialist theoretical approach. Hall, one of the founders of British Cultural Studies, was influential in

promoting a new understanding of ethnicity and race, and shaping ideas now associated with postcolonial scholarship and theories of intersectionality. Writing about the status of “blacks” in “New Ethnicities” (1989), Hall proposes an anti-essentialist perspective on ethnicity, understood not as a fixed category rooted in Nature but as a politically and cultural constructed category. He argued that, “the term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual” (in Morley and Chen, 1996: 447); he further stated that all individuals are “ethnically located”. In the early 1990s, Hall announced the erosion and decline of what he regards as “old ethnicities”:

I mean here the great collective social identities which we thought of as large-scale, all-encompassing, homogenous, as unified collective identities, which could be spoken about almost as if they were singular actors in their own right but which, indeed, placed, positioned, stabilized, and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self: the great collective social identities of class, of race, of nation, of gender, and of the West (Hall, 1997: 44).

Instead, “new ethnicities” arise. These “new identities”, individual and collective, are never finished; they are in a process of constant formation. They are also deeply subjective, hybrid and made up of multiple elements or, in fact, multiple identities.<sup>[10]</sup> Such understanding of ethnicity opens up multiple possibilities of self-identification and/or representation, both collective and individual. Ethnicity is thus not constrained by and aligned with fixed biological or cultural categories but is constructed and transformed continuously, and is made up of multi-faceted and inter-changing, and even contradictory, elements. For Hall, identity is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (Hall, 1990: 225).

Research on Roma would benefit from engaging critically with the ideas of “new identities”: this approach gives way to understanding ethnic identities at the intersection with other variables, which transform and hybridize constantly under a number of factors. Such a perspective challenges the notion of “authenticity” – or the existence of a “true Gypsy” – and allows us instead to open up our conceptual understanding of ethnicity and to become inclusive of other elements and dimensions. Hall’s writing contributed to shaping ideas of intersectionality, which are increasingly being introduced into scholarship on Roma, especially by emerging Romani scholars (Kóczé, 2009; Bogdán et al., 2015; Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh, 2015).

Beyond Hall’s notion of “new ethnicities”, which provides a powerful conceptual apparatus for understanding fluid and dynamic Romani identities, Hall’s writing also grants compelling insights into the concept of representation through his model of the “circuit of culture” and the connections between representation, identity, regulation, production and consumption, and the politics of representation (Hall, 1997b).

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10. Hall writes: “We have the notion of identity as contradictory, as composed of more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other, as written in and through ambivalence and desire. These are extremely important ways of trying to think an identity which is not a sealed or closed totality” (Hall, 1997:49).

### 3.3 Vertovec and “Super-Diversity”

Drawing on the research of Hall and his colleagues, such as Paul Gilroy, the concept of “new ethnicities” as well as the development of theories of intersectionality gave way to the ideas of so-called “super-diversity”. “Super-diversity” is a term coined by Steven Vertovec (2007) which meant to respond to the increasing diversity of the British society related to the great inflow of migrants and the consequences this has had on individual and collective identity formation within the country. Vertovec argues that, “In the last decade the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables shows that it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere” (Vertovec, 2007:1025). The “super-diverse lens” aims to respond to the increasing hybridization and existing human diversity which goes beyond binary oppositions such as ‘native vs. migrant’, ‘national vs. minority cultures’, ‘local vs. global’ (Arnaut and Spotti, 2014). Annabel Tremlett (2014) was the first one to introduce the potential of “super-diversity” discourse as a new avenue of research in Romani Studies. Nonetheless, the use of this approach to ethnicity has not yet gained traction in scholarship on Roma despite its increasing popularity in the social sciences (Vertovec, 2014).

“Super-diversity”, like the influential concepts of “hybridity” and “in-betweenness”, popularized by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), can be useful for understanding the increasingly plural and complex reality of Romani lives. Currently, we can observe such increasing hybridization of the Romani collective and individual identities in which ethnic identity status intersects with citizenship status (immigrant, refugee, asylum-seeker), as well as other factors. Some Western European countries in particular can be considered sites of such hybridization. In Germany (Matras, 2013; Margalit and Matras, 2007), for example, there are diverse Romani groups present (“national” Sinto communities, as well as various Romani sub-groups coming from different countries); their formal status as migrants (for example, European citizens from Romania vs. asylum-seekers from Kosovo) topped with other variables (religion, sexual identity, class, etc.) produces increasingly more complex social realities. Furthermore, Romani individuals from diverse backgrounds and sub-groups are increasingly forming families together, resulting in complex personal identity formations and collective identity alignments.

### 3.4 Possibilities and Limits of De-essentializing Romani Studies

What are the possibilities for proposing a new normative framework for researching Romani ethnicity in Romani Studies? What are the risks and limits of conceptualizing the Roma through anti-essentialist ideas of “new ethnicities”, “hybrid identities” or “super-diversity”?

Arguably this discussion is not new as there is a long tradition of approaching the *problematique* of Romani ethnicity from a constructivist and structuralist perspectives. However, oftentimes scholars, as demonstrated by Tremlett (2009, 2014) fall into a trap of contradiction – while speaking of “the Gypsy way”, they emphasize internal heterogeneity, cultural and social distance across diverse Romani sub-groups and distinctiveness. In conceptualizing the viability of ethnic groups and the Roma especially, there is an obsession with sameness and a parallel stigmatization of in-group heterogeneity, as if it were

the proofs of the impossibility of existence of the Roma as a people, across linguistic, geographic, social and cultural borders. Likewise, as scholars aim to denounce exoticism and orientalism with regards to Roma (not only in scholarship but also in public discourses and policies), the very existence of “the Roma” as a single and viable ethnic group is called into question (Marushikova and Popov, 2016).

I argue, in contrast, that the denomination of internally-diverse groups with a single term does not necessarily and unequivocally mean sameness or represent a violent attempt at overriding diversity – after all, classifications such as “Indigenous peoples”, “Aboriginal people” or even national identities (especially in the context of multicultural and multilingual nation-states) also assumes and embraces diversity. In the context of Roma, heterogeneity is an assumed, acknowledged and lived reality and the tendency to increasingly refer to Romani cultures and identities in the plural, is yet another evidence of “multiculturality [as] (...) the basic reality of the Roma people” (Gheorghe and Acton, 2001: 55).

Furthermore, and taking these considerations as a point of departure, I argue that the alternative conceptualizations of ethnicity discussed above present a significant potential for the development of Romani Studies as an academic discipline; they may also contribute to the process of deconstructing homogenized and essentialized discourses on Roma in knowledge-production. Going beyond reified and fixed delineations of ethnic groups forces scholars to investigate multiple, plural and increasingly hybrid components which interplay within the contained concept of “Romani identity”, whether individual or collective. This allows us to study not only “traditional Romani communities” but also “halfies” (Brooks, 2015) or assimilated Romani individuals, families and communities, embracing multiple and constantly changing identity mutations or novel collective and individual identity framings. Inevitably, acknowledging the dynamism and complexity of Romani ethnicity will result in more plural narratives on Roma. And this, in turn, may contribute to disrupting essentialized and homogenizing notions of Roma in academic discourse, and beyond, and potentially help to dismantle fundamental notions of anti-gypsyism.

There are, however, potential risks which need to be acknowledged. On the one hand, the focus on individualistic and temporary aspects of identity formation (limited to the specific moment and context in which identity is being described) may result in excessive relativism, in which all potential collective boundaries and categories of distinction (both in terms of self-identification as well as categorization/labelling) are blurred. This is especially problematic in the context of public policies which target Roma as a group – under such diffuse understanding of ethnicity, establishing a functional and adequate policy categorization is a serious challenge. On the other hand, as Tremlett rightfully suggests, “if we think ‘beyond’ ethnicity (as Vertovec suggests), we may lose sight of ethnicity” (Tremlett, 2014: 15), leading to a dissolution of ethnicity altogether. Indeed, in the era of transracialism and trans-ethnicity (Brubaker, 2016a; Brubaker, 2016b; Tuvel, 2017), and post-ethnicity (Hollinger, 2006), it is increasingly important to adopt approaches which allow for nuanced representations of complex social realities while being able to delineate *de facto* existing distinct social/ ethnic groups.

This tendency also has an impact in the field of Romani Studies. The focus on the internal heterogeneity of Roma as a group may call into question the very existence of a collectively-shared ethnicity of Romani people. Indeed, some scholars, albeit for different reasons, have called into question the very existence of

“Roma” altogether. Among others, Okely (1983), Willems (1998) and Lucassen (1998) have long argued that the term Roma was developed historically by authorities and scholars to refer to marginalized and itinerant groups, and does not, therefore, refer to a viable ethnic group.

Such academic narratives can be sustained because there is a certain conceptual void with regards to defining Roma as a group. The tendency to further focus on Romani heterogeneity and plurality often provides evidence of internal atomization and fragmentation, not uncommonly leading to the conclusion that there is no “Romani ethnicity” (Jakoubek, 2004). At the same time, however, these conceptual and not uncommonly abstract academic discussions fail to provide a convincing description of an ethnic group which remains very much real and which undoubtedly exists. The salience of Romani voices in Romani Studies and the appearance of scholarship developed from a Romani standpoint may help to overcome this conceptual impasse, the topic of my final section.

## 4. The Role of Romani Scholars and the Importance of Self-identification

The emergence and dynamic development of Romani scholars, and their increasing use of critical approaches and theories, such as Postcolonial Studies or Critical Race Theory, gradually challenges the legacy of Romani Studies and provides an entryway into new avenues of research, in particular as conducted by Romani scholars themselves.

The added value of Romani scholars resides in their status as “outsiders within” (Collins, 1986; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015). The combination of lived experience, academic training and commitment to scientific rigour and quality that many Romani scholars possess offers the much-needed plurality of perspectives and voices otherwise currently missing from Romani Studies. The ascendance of authoritative Romani voices in scientific debates will help to unravel internal tensions, gaps and incongruences within Romani Studies by contrasting the body of knowledge on Roma with the lived experiences of community-members. In this sense, Romani scholars can approximate first-hand knowledge which can otherwise be inaccessible or difficult to attain by non-Romani scholars. How would it otherwise be possible to provide insight into the “authenticity tests” which a Romani scholar goes through when entering the field of research among a Roma group different than their own? How can a non-Roma researcher explain the intricate and complex relationship of belonging and distinctiveness when building relationships with Roma from another country or sub-group? Or, in what way can a non-Roma scholar describe why and how Romani identity is performed, described and felt differently, depending on the context; how might they understand the processes of “passing” and “invisibility”, as something that is contextual, temporary and fluid? These questions can best be answered from within Romani subjectivity, bearing in mind internal codes of conduct and performances of daily rituals, which require a level of intimacy, proximity and insiders’ knowledge.

The ethnicity of a scholar bears relevance but should not signify superiority or exclusivity. A heterogeneity of voices in scholarship should instead result in a dialogue based on equality and complementarity of knowledge, approaches and methodologies. In this sense, Romani scholars cannot claim greater

legitimacy over the knowledge they produce research on Roma, but neither can their non-Romani colleagues make these claims. It is also significant that despite its added value, the emergence of Romani scholarship does not automatically mean that researchers of Romani background are inherently immune to methodological shortcomings, theoretical pitfalls and indeed, even internalized racism. Neither does it mean that Romani scholars will by default produce plural narratives or challenge homogenizing and essentializing scholarship. Nonetheless, over the last few years an increasing number of Romani scholars have relied on critical scholarship; it becomes clear that their engagement in knowledge-production is essential for promoting diversified, balanced and context-sensitive discourse.

However, as heterogeneity and plurality become an indispensable element of such narratives, there is a risk of diluting Romani group identities and a sense of collective belonging. For this reason it becomes increasingly clear that Romani intellectuals and scholars need to produce convincing, empirically-grounded and authoritative definitions of “Roma-hood”, in order to respond to the ever-present question of “Who is Roma?”.

Indeed, scholars have long struggled to convincingly answer the question of “Who are the Roma?” and to provide a concrete but also comprehensive definition of this population. An example of these intense debates is the discussion on the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS) entitled: “Roma: A Misnomer?” which sparked fierce exchanges among scholars of Romani Studies (Friedman and Friedman, 2015). Today, these debates are yet to reach a consensus and they have fuelled a polarization between Roma and non-Roma scholars. These contentious discussions have also provided an overview of the diverse approaches, understandings and conceptualizations of the Romani people, and reflect not only the very complexity of defining the Roma, but also reveal the tensions surrounding who can legitimately shape these definitions. Discussions regarding ownership – “who is in charge of definitions?” – and the role of Roma and non-Roma scholars are important themes which commonly reappear in such academic exchanges.

Much of these discussions tend to focus on stable and tangible properties associated with ethnicity, which allow the researcher to determine whether the person is a Roma or not (for example, see: Ivanov, Kling, and Kagin, 2012); at the same time much criticism has centred on the Romani identity as a political project (Kovats, 2003; Rövid, 2011; McGarry, 2010; Vermeersch, 2006; Trehan and Sigona, 2010). Surprisingly, the question of self-definition and self-identification, as well as contributions to the academic discourse developed by Romani scholars and their power to produce definitions rooted not only in self-ascription but which also employ scientifically-sound methods, remain marginal at best. Some non-Roma scholars even claim that Roma are unable to provide significant contributions to the definition of “Romani ethnicity”. For example, non-Roma scholars Marushikova and Popov argue that,

Roma cannot comprehend how it is possible at all to define a real community which exists for centuries as a social construction. They know that their ancestors centuries ago were Roma and their children and grandchildren will be Roma too and there is no need to have somebody to construct their identity. That is why it should not surprise us that the ethnic essence of Roma is taken as unconditionally granted by authors who are from Roma origin (Gheorghe 1991; 1997; Mirga and Gheorghe 1997; Hancock 2002 and others.) (Marushikova and Popov, 2016: 16).

Appearing are a growing number of Romani voices denouncing the epistemic authority resting with the non-Roma scholars. For example, Angela Kóczé (2015) writes that, “Concerning the validation of Roma-related studies, there is a tacit consensus that non-Roma are in a better position to provide a more reliable and objective account of the situation of Roma. This assumption is based on the premise of ‘objectivity’ (... )” (Kóczé, 2015: 84). She further explains “how epistemic authority has been claimed and manifested as an exclusive power of non-Roma scholars, to maintain hegemony over Roma-related knowledge production” (*ibid.*).

Indeed, the field of Romani Studies, and most powerfully with regards to the questions of defining Roma, remains the main stage of power struggles between Roma and non-Roma scholars. It is in this field that Roma scholars need to produce assertive and authoritative contributions in response to the hegemonically charged notion of “scientific truth”. In describing “the essence” of being a Roma, the principles of self-definition and self-identification need to be at the heart of academic discussions. Ethel Brooks provides insight into the epistemic privilege (as understood by Angela Kóczé, 2015) of a scholarship produced from a Romani standpoint. In a response to the above-mentioned discussion on EANRS, she wrote that,

(...) It is really a question of self-ascription, but this is combined with the ascription that others give; hence the confusion, often, as to who is Roma. In many ways, the outside ascription has won here, where Roma becomes a stand-in for Gypsies in the older (dare I say gypsylorist?) sense. (...) It is important for us to engage these questions, but in the end, it is the complexity that I, as a Romani and as an academic, will hold onto. Growing up, I ‘knew’ what our relationship was to Roma and what our relationship was to Irish or Scottish Travellers. It was very clear and did not need debate. Again, the question is one of self-ascription. (...) In the eyes of outsiders, of course, we were (are) all Gypsies. Personally, I would rather not lose the complexity of self-ascription in the name of neatness. (Cited in Friedman and Friedman, 2015: 214-215).

In the face of the evident struggle over definitions and especially taking into consideration the polarization of these debates between Roma and non-Roma scholars, it is clear that, as a scientific field of inquiry, Romani Studies is at a crossroads. Overcoming this critical juncture will depend on the capacity of accommodating Romani voices rooted in a Romani subjectivity which, quite justifiably, assertively claim their authority as legitimate. A Romani standpoint or the “outsiders within” status of Romani scholars (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015) is thus necessary to navigate the contradictions and paradoxes of the heterogeneous, multi-faceted and eclectic range of Romani identity(s). As anti-essentialist approaches towards ethnicity are increasingly used and become increasingly rooted in Romani scholarship, relativism and the assumption of irreconcilable in-group heterogeneity might lead to diffusion of the concept of ethnicity altogether. Defending the existence of a Romani ethnicity as plural, hybrid, complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional will remain at the top of the academic and indeed, political agendas of Romani intellectuals. Thus, the answer may not lie in defining *the Romani ethnicity* but rather, in unravelling existing multiple Romani identities, that is, exploring the ways in which they are performed, lived, articulated and represented, and how these identities are linked and interact with each other.

Finally, academic knowledge produced by Romani scholars from within a Romani subjectivity and rooted in diverse Romani experiences, may help to forcefully challenge the notion of ethnic “authenticity” – of “the true Gypsy” – that is based on a concrete and “objective” set of fixed criteria. For

example, with regards to Indigenous communities, some scholars argue that “indigenous authenticity has deep roots within colonial racism (...) [and] regimes of biological and cultural authenticity continue to shape state policies and practices that regulate the everyday lives of Indigenous people around the world” (Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith, 2013: 1). Likewise, Jackson Jr., the African-American scholar, writing about the contemporary Black experience, denounces “authenticity’s hegemony” (Jackson, 2005: 175). Similarly, the struggle to define “the authentic Roma” can be seen as a form of tyranny over the individual, in which exogenous and imposed “objective” criteria rule over the complexities of dynamic and subjective Romani experiences. The discourse of “authenticity”, as Jackson Jr. suggests, can be opposed by the notion of “sincerity” (2005), and provides insight into a genuine experience of being and belonging. Potentially, the concept of “sincerity” opens up academic narratives on Romani identity to more plural, nuanced and contextual interpretations, which are more in-tune with the complex social realities of being a Roma in the contemporary world. The increasing salience of academic Romani voices might enable such shift from generalizing academic narratives on Roma towards ones rooted in subjectivity.

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# Reclaiming Romani-ness: Identity Politics, Universality and Otherness Or, Towards a (New) Romani Subjectivity

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## Abstract

Drawing on theories of identity postulated by cultural theorists, scholars of gender identity, and critical race theorists, I explore issues of identity politics and “Otherness” as they pertain to Romani identity, history and activism. By critiquing the latent bifurcation of identity and subjectivity in Judith Butler’s theory of performativity as well as her explicit adherence to universalism, I begin to outline a (post-Hegelian) hermeneutic in which narratives of self enable political processes of self-determination against symbolic and epistemic systems of racialization and minoritization.<sup>[1]</sup> Roma identity both serves as an oppressive social category while at the same time empowering people for whom a shared ethnic group provides a sense of solidarity and community. In re-conceptualizing, reimagining and re-claiming Romani-ness, we can make movements towards outlining a new *Romani* subjectivity – a subjectivity that is firmly rooted in *counterhistories* of Roma, with porous boundaries that both celebrate our diversity and foster solidarity. I come to the subject of Romani identity from an understanding that our racialized and gendered identities are both performed and embodied – forming part of the horizon from which we make meaning of the world. I wish to recast the discourse surrounding Romani identity as hybridized and multicultural, as well as, following Glissant, embedded into a pluritopic notion of history.

## Keywords

- Identity
- Post-positivist realism
- Romani subjectivity
- Counterhistories
- Universalism

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1. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for the eloquent wording of this phrase (February 2018).

# 1. The Bifurcation of Identity and Subjectivity

One of the major problems underpinning the field of Romani Studies to date is one that, in my opinion, has also plagued discourses and knowledge production across manifold academic disciplines. Namely, the problem lies in the lack of recognition that the category of the “subject” has been cast from a wholly hegemonic, Eurocentric and universalizing perspective. This has led, inevitably, to the relegation of discourses of minoritized, subaltern subjects to the realm of “identity” or “identity politics”, which has in turn fueled an interminable debate on the validity of identity to inform our understanding of political or social life, and ontology, more broadly.

In what follows I argue that “identity” plays a critical role in the ongoing struggle for Romani rights. I will also highlight the importance of Romani knowledge and cultural production as a means of increasing recognition of and respect for Romani peoples across the world. More specifically, I demonstrate in this paper one way in which Roma can work towards decolonizing Romani studies – a discipline which has almost exclusively consisted of non-Roma writing about Roma from the dominant perspective, but is on the precipice of important change. I also seek to reclaim the cultural, musical, and artistic spaces which, in some instances, have been co-opted as realms in which majority society promulgates stereotypes of Roma. In re-claiming identity as a salient category and also the creative spaces in which identity is forged, I hope to generate a discourse on how Roma are interpellated as subjects, and in doing so, forge a markedly *Romani* subjectivity.

Alexander Weheliye traces the aforementioned problem – that of the inception of the “subject” as a white being – back to what he calls the bifurcation of identity and subjectivity (Weheliye, 2005: 65). Weheliye’s work presents many rich avenues of exploration regarding identity and subject formation. Crucial for my purposes here is Weheliye’s critique of Stuart Hall for rending asunder the categories of identification and subjectivization in his seminal essay “Who Needs Identity?” In that text, Hall contends that:

‘identity’ ...refer[s] to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us... Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them (Hall, 1996: 5-6).

Weheliye argues that Hall’s conceptualization of these terms – identity and subject – as necessarily separate, actually calls into question the entire academic discourse on “identity”. Identity – which Weheliye labels “I be” – corresponds to the empirical man, that is, “the real human agent” who is shaped within a particular spatio-temporal horizon, whereas the subject, “I am” is an unmarked, abstract

concept. Weheliye's critique of this bifurcation stems from the problematic nature of the subject as a universal category.

Sylvia Wynter's notion of the Figure of Man conceives of the Western subject precisely along the same lines as Weheliye (Wynter, 1987). In *On Disenchanting Discourse: "Minority" Literary Criticism and Beyond*, she calls for a radical epistemological shift in our understanding of the systemic structures within which we act out our minority/majority identities. In her schema, the Figure of Man (read: white man) is foiled by the Ontological Other (non-white). Herein lies, most precisely, the crux of both her and Weheliye's arguments: the "subject" or Figure of Man as it has been thought of throughout centuries of philosophical musings on subject interpellation, have invariably taken white, Western man as its default subject. According to Wynter, The Figure of Man, a concept constituted by the discourse of biological idealism, is embodied in the "Indo-European [and] incarnated [as] the ideal prototype of the secular human" (Wynter, 1987: 236). The figure of "the Negro", or more generally the Ontological Other, is the latter's "imperative antithesis". Wynter argues that "our present organization of knowledge... was put in place to replicate", encode, and maintain the systemic existence of the Figure of Man (234). For this reason, Wynter impels Minority Discourse to "bring closure to our present order of discourse", which will necessarily bring about the erasure of the Figure of Man (209). The problem that Wynter and Weheliye describe is two-fold. Together their work poignantly demonstrates, first, how the Figure of Man – or, the Eurocentric white man – has persisted as the central (exclusive) focus of philosophical and political imaginaries through to the present day. This installation of the subject as a heterosexual, white male has led to a second problem: the development of "identity" as a catch-all for subjects who lie outside the boundaries of The Figure of Man, which has in turn forced minority discourses to the margins of academia.

Weheliye's academic agenda is emphatically de-colonial, as made evident in his rallying call to "wield... the category of the subject from the position of black studies" (Weheliye, 2005: 68). To enact this kind of decolonization would begin to undo the epistemological frameworks which shape scholarly discourses in many fields, Romani Studies included. What would it mean to wield the category of the subject from the position of Romani Studies? How might we, as scholars, begin to do scholarship that consistently challenges systems of thought that are both eminently oppressive, and, simultaneously, deeply embedded in the fabric of the spaces in which we operate? One answer, perhaps, lies in the conclusion to Weheliye's book in which he compels us to challenge the presumptions we've inherited regarding the bifurcation of identity and subjectivity, which serve to further minoritize marginalized voices. He melds identity and subjectivity in a single phrase "I am I be" (the title of a song by the hip hop group De La Soul) to demonstrate that "being" – both in terms of identification and in terms of subject interpellation – is one and the same thing, and that rending them asunder only serves to promulgate the false notion that blackness and brownness act as predicates to the noun "Man" by which we mean White man. Conceiving of the category of subject not as a blank (read: white) canvas upon which identities are composed would thus serve as an important corrective to the discipline of Romani Studies. We, Roma, are not (unmarked, universal) human first and Roma second; rather, we are both at once. Undoing this deleterious universalism is the first step towards intermeshing identity and subjectivity, which in turn will force us to take seriously the power of identity.

## 2. Critiques of Identity

The driving question of this essay is: *how* are Roma interpellated as subjects and what meaningful conclusions can we derive from asking this question as it pertains to the ongoing Romani struggle for political and social representation? In order to re-claim Romani identity as a powerful category of social organization, we must first understand and dismantle critiques of identity. Below, I summarize the political and philosophical critiques of identity, followed by a reconceptualization and re-claiming of (Romani) identity, while proposing a way to alter the present discourse of Romani studies.

The most salient critique of identity is perhaps best summarized by Paula Moya when she states that: “the postmodernist critique of identity... should be understood in part as a corrective to a prior social and intellectual tendency toward ‘essentialism’, in which essentialism refers to the “notion that individuals or groups have an immutable and discoverable ‘essence’ – a basic unvariable [sic], and presocial nature” (Moya, 2003: 7). Postmodernists, then, in an effort to rescue racially-marked bodies from bio-essentialist arguments and scientific racism (Acton, 2011), reject identity outright. As it pertains to Romani identity, the impetus to eschew the biological determinism inherent in early nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of race is particularly pertinent given the rampant essentialization<sup>[2]</sup> and commodification of Roma culture.

Yet, with the complete rejection of identity, postmodernists et al. have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, wholly eliminating the power identity can yield as an important analytic category that structures sociality and subjectification. In the effort to avoid essentialization, they have, ironically, effectively attempted to eliminate “difference” in broad, universalizing brushstrokes of homogenization.

Beyond simply this post-modernist critique of identity, Identity or “identity politics” continue to be contentious topic of debate. There exist two main strains of anti-identitarian rhetoric – the political and the philosophical critiques of identity, which Linda Alcoff neatly summarizes as follows:

The political critics worry that differences will be emphasized at the expense of commonalities, divisiveness will increase, and an irrational tribalism will grow. The philosophical critics worry that movements ‘in the name of’ social identities reinscribe their importance and reinforce the harmful illusion of their substantial reality (Alcoff, 2006: 80).

In line with both the philosophical and political critiques outlined by Alcoff, Judith Butler has consistently argued against the reliance on categories of identity as a way of organizing ourselves as a society. Butler conceives of identity categories as “inaccurate and oppressive” (Alcoff, 2006: 71) or put differently, that they serve as imprecise caricatures. I will here argue that at the root of Butler’s critique of identity is precisely the same bifurcation of identity and subjectivity that Weheliye brings to the fore.

2. Spivak coined the term strategic essentialism to describe the forging of a unified identity by the subaltern to aid in the struggle for equality (Spivak, 1988). Though related to my argumentation, what I offer here is quite different to Spivak’s concept. The shared identity built from *counterhistories* of Roma, as I propose, eschews the need for any essentialism whatsoever, even on the part of the subaltern.

Expanding upon Derrida's conception of the citational or (re)-iterable, Butler has argued that identity is performatively constituted (Butler, 1990).<sup>[3]</sup> I couldn't agree more. However, where Butler goes astray is when the word "performative", as she uses it, transforms the meaning to denote something almost derogatory. Identity, for Butler, amounts to a performative constellation of "*fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler, 1990: 185, emphasis added). She contends that this outward facing performance *does not* coincide in a one-to-one relationship with one's interior understanding of self, that is, to one's subjectivity. This disintegration of identity and subjectivity leads Butler to argue that identity, therefore, "has no ontological status" apart from the performance (*Ibid.*). Yet, the performative nature of identity she describes does not necessarily deny its ontological significance. As Linda Alcoff has argued, "[r]acial and gendered identities are socially produced, and yet they are fundamental to our selves as knowing, feeling, and acting subjects. Raced and gendered identities operate as epistemological perspectives or horizons from which certain aspects or layers are made visible" (Alcoff, 2006: 126).

The flaw in Butler's position is not her theory of performativity per se, but, rather, the normative conclusions Butler draws from the fact that our raced, sexed, etc. identities are performatively constituted. Dismissal of identity categories as performances with no ontological status not only undermines the manner in which they contribute to subjectivization, but more importantly, this slippage between identity as performatively constituted versus identity as fictitious fabrications buttresses Butler's adherence to universalism. It allows her to bypass identity as a hurdle to overcome toward universal humanism. Yet, as we learned from Weheliye and Wynter, the universal, unmarked subject is the true fiction.

Butler's seeming understanding of this epistemological fallacy, which is evident in her reading of Simone de Beauvoir, makes this adherence to universality all the more perplexing. Summarizing de Beauvoir, Butler underlines that, "the 'subject' within the existential analytic of misogyny is always already masculine, conflated with the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine 'Other' outside the universalizing norms of personhood..." (Butler, 1990/1997: 16). Rather than initiating a movement towards particularizing and thereby dissolving the universal (hegemonic) category of the Subject, Butler seeks to bring marginal, marked subjects into the fold of the universal, and essentially subsume them. She makes this quite explicit: "[T]he rights for which we struggle are plural rights, and that plurality is not circumscribed in advance by identity, that is, it is not a struggle to which only some identities can belong, and it is surely a struggle that seeks to *expand what we mean when we say 'we'*" (Butler, 2015: 66, emphasis added). Butler's political project – of expanding the hegemonic "we" to include the Other – is nothing short of Sisyphean, given that "the Other *as other* is radically inaccessible; the outside is a radical outside – precisely because it is constitutive for the inside" (Critchley and Marchart, 2004: 62).

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3. Other scholars have taken issue with Butler's theory of performativity of gender (for example, Schep, 2012), arguing that it is applied hegemonically and fails to account for an individual, lived experience of gender identity. Ironically, Boucher has critiqued Butler's argument for what he sees as "methodological individualism", as she fails to expand her theory of performativity beyond the limits of the individual to structural and systemic facets of subjectivization, conflating self-formation with Althusserian interpellation (Boucher, 2006: 112). I agree with Boucher, with the added caveat that Butler at times over-emphasizes the role of institutions and power in the subjectivization of the individual and this over-emphasis allows her to argue for the inaccuracy of these identity conferrals (Butler, 1990/1997: 28).

As a “constitutive outside” the margins remain ever-alienated from the hegemonic center, as the latter’s existence is contingent upon the former’s existence *as outside*.<sup>[4]</sup>

Butler further claims that identity politics “fails to furnish a broader conception of what it means, politically, to live together, across differences, sometimes in modes of unchosen proximity, especially when living together, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative” (Butler, 2015: 27). Following a post-modernist view of identity, she appeals to a human universality that erases difference. As George Ciccariello-Maher explains Butler is not alone in this reactionary recourse to universality. Maher explains how, in arguing against “poststructuralist and postcolonial critiques of the universal”, Alain Badiou, like Butler, “has assailed an ‘ethics of difference’ [...] opting instead for] the unalloyed universalism of a ‘generic humanity’ that is fundamentally ‘indifferent to differences’” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2017: 3). In a recent interview, Butler reinforces the same argument. When asked about the capacity for empathy for the suffering of others at a distance, Butler responds by critiquing identity as an impediment to some larger, nobler notion of humanity:

What worries me is that many of us form our sense of obligation toward another on the basis of feelings of identification. If someone else is like us, and that likeness is readily recognizable, then we are more inclined to respond in the way that we would have others respond to us. *The harder task is to maintain an obligation to those by whom we feel ourselves to have been injured, to those we fear, or to those whose difference from us seems to be quite severe.* This is why I do not think that global obligations can rest on identification, even expanded or expanding identifications; they have to claim us quite regardless of whether or not we feel love or sympathy, for the simple reason that the world is given to us in common and that without each other the world is not given. If the self is the basis of sympathy, our sympathy will be restricted to those who are like us. *The real challenge occurs when that extrapolation of the self is thwarted by alterity* (Butler and Berbec, 2017, emphasis added).

Butler ignores power, positionality and social location in making a grandiose and prescriptive claim such as this one – imploring mankind to transcend identity in order to overcome difference and live peacefully with one another. She argues for a transcendence of the intense individuality that has, unfortunately, dominated post-Enlightenment ontology. As philosophically sound and altruistic that such a position claims to be, it recklessly bypasses the importance of history and the ways in which a history of marginalization and subjugation affect the subaltern’s ability to engage in such an “extrapolation of the self”, given the exclusion and erasure minorities have already been forced to endure from time immemorial.

Here, Butler contradicts herself, as she has elsewhere written quite succinctly, on why universalization is an act of violence in the name of hegemony:

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4. Butler implies that a politics based on identitarianism fails to recognize the nature of rights as “plural rights”, by which I understand her to mean universal human rights. Outside the scope of this article, yet important to note nonetheless, is that Butler fails to address the role of imperialism, neoliberalism and capitalism in maintaining a system whose very existence is contingent upon exploitation and oppression (see Kóczé, 2017).

The point would not be to extend a violent regime to include the subaltern as one of its members: she is, indeed, already included there, and it is precisely the means of her inclusion that effects the violence of her effacement. *There is no one ‘other’ there, at the site of the subaltern, but an array of peoples who cannot be homogenized, or whose homogenization is the effect of the epistemic violence itself* (Butler, 2000: 36).

In spite of Butler's awareness of the problems involved in any discourse surrounding the universal, she still clings to the term, while failing to offer any viable solution to remedy – or at the very least, palliate – the normative, hegemonic understanding of “the universal”. Instead of enacting a different understanding of the term as is promised by the title of her essay “Restaging the Universal”, Butler ends, simply, by asking: “What ought universality to be? How do we understand what it means to be a ‘human?’” ((Butler et al., 2000: 41). In asking this question, Butler inadvertently demonstrates Weheliye's point: The adherence to universality – and thereby the insistence on a default category of the “human” – bifurcates subjectivity and identity, which demonstrates, as Weheliye has shown, an epistemological shortcoming in our ability to conceive of the Subject as an intersectional being. As Laclau poignantly states, “there is no universality which is not a hegemonic universality” (Butler et al., 2000: 193).

The self-effacing language – of “maintain[ing] an obligation to those by whom we feel ourselves to have been injured” – amounts to a dangerously submissive rhetoric that calls the subaltern to simply “turn the other cheek”. Butler seems to imply that both the oppressed and the oppressors are on a level playing field, and should therefore be able to see beyond identification and towards a more inclusive *human* identity. But how can we expect racially-marked individuals to shed their histories in the name of humanism, especially when the ripples of those histories are still being felt today? How can we expect brown and black people around the world to give up one of the only things that has given them pride, social location, a feeling of belonging in a world that has otherwise been, at best, unmoved by their existence, and at worst, deeply cruel to them? Liberation remains in the realm of dreams, and until it has been realized, we cannot impose post-liberatory agendas such as this on the marginalized and the subjected.

In the *Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler makes a different critique of identity, when she posits that subjects are both oppressed by their subjugation, but also constituted by such oppression. Drawing on Althusserian interpellation and Foucault's notion of discursive productivity, she concludes that, “subjection signifies [both] the process of becoming *subordinated* by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (Butler, 1997b: 2). Butler wants to argue that identities are unilaterally imposed upon individuals. She goes on to critique the manner in which subjectivization is conferred in many cases through violence, exclusion and injury:

If...we understand certain kinds of interpellations to confer identity, those *injurious* interpellations will constitute identity through injury. This is not the same as saying that such an identity will remain always and forever rooted in its injury as long as it remains an identity, but it does imply that the possibilities of signification will rework and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection without which subject formation – and re-formation – cannot succeed (104-105).

However, to cast away identity solely due to the injurious nature of interpellations is to effectively interdict those who have no say in *how* they are interpellated as subjects – as these processes are dictated by dominant forces in society – from the opportunity to move beyond the shame incurred upon injury. I turn to the example of hate speech to demonstrate the fallacious logic inherent in such a dismissal of identity. So long as we cannot end hate speech or stop all forms of bigotry – structural and individual – we also cannot bar its victims from exercising control over these discursive formations. Identity – the comfort and solidarity it provides – is one of the most important arenas in which subjects can reclaim stereotypes and harmful exonyms, and castrate them of their injurious power through communal subversion. Even Butler, in her piece “On Linguistic Vulnerability” describes the potential for “counter-appropriation” or the “restaging of offensive” speech to serve as correctives to injurious speech acts (Butler, 1997a: 14-15). Even more importantly, identity plays an imperative role in the project of cultural healing, serving as a tool for dealing with historical trauma. As Himani Bannerji states, for some, it “affirm[s] them... through the creative strength that comes from finding missing parts of one’s self in experiences and histories similar to others” (cited in Alcoff, 2006: 115). Thus, identity can legitimize and validate the social, political and philosophical survival of marginalized peoples.

I have shown above that the Butlerian critique of identity falls short, in many ways, of corresponding to a realist account of identity. Moreover, it suffers from precisely the unsound logic for which Weheliye critiques Hall. Namely, Butler sets the terms of her critique of identity within the false framework that subjecthood and identity can be bifurcated, instead of understanding that to even discuss these processes as separate is in and of itself hegemonic in its denigration of identity as an obstacle necessary to overcome on the path towards transcendent humanism.

It is easy to critique this kind of rhetoric, yet, the difficulty lies in the task of responding to Wynter and Weheliye’s call to truly decolonize hundreds of years of discourse that relegates minorities to the ancillary space that is “identity”. It requires a complete undoing of our post-Enlightenment epistemological framework. I turn now to a hermeneutic and methodological way forward – put simply, it is a call to do the kind of scholarship that constantly challenges hegemonic narratives. The defense of identity that I have thus far laid out in this essay serves to demonstrate that the term identity should be retained in the vocabulary of our emerging discourse of Critical Romani Studies.

### 3. The Postpositivist Turn in Identity Discourse

The thrust of the argument made by recent scholars who defend identity as a powerful and ineluctable social construction and means of self-definition, lies in the re-understanding and reconceptualizing of identity. In post-Hegelian thought, the Other begins to be understood (by Ricoeur, Code, Merleau-Ponty and Brison, among others) as a necessary player on the stage of social interactions, spaces in which the self can self-narrativize and therefore constitute a notion of selfhood (Alcoff, 2006: 60-64, 112). This important shift persists today as scholars tend to accept, along with Butler, that identity categories are constituted performatively (Butler, 1990/1997; Markus and Moya, 2010), which means that race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc., are things we *do* rather than things we inherently *are*, thereby eschewing bio-essentialist conceptions of identity. This distinction is important as it underlines the agency and

self-determination involved in identity conferral, refuting the critique of identity as oppressive labels that others impose upon us.

As mentioned above, the solution to the problems of identity raised by its critics – that is, essentialization and the potential constricting nature of identification and subjectivization – is not to deny identity its validity altogether. The claim that identity has on contemporary society is an influence too profound to ignore. It is undeniable that we are hailed as subjects in ways that can sometimes feel oppressive, but identity, in many cases, has the potential to act as a means of liberation. In either case, it is not something that individuals necessarily have the power to reject or accept. To argue that identity ceases to exist if we simply ignore it is to fall victim to the false-consciousness of “colorblind” or “post-race” rhetoric. As Moya states: “the solution to essentialism is not the rejection of identity but a more robust formulation of identity such as that offered by a postpositivist realist theory” (Moya, 2003: 22). Identity indisputably exists in our present order of reality; Racial and gendered identities manifest themselves in our lived experiences. Social identities form part of the horizon from which we construct meaning in the world and are thus so embedded in our conceptions of self that they are rendered embodied. Thus, we mustn’t shy away from contending with the implications of their existence. Instead, what is required is to reconceive of identity. Moya explains that,

A postpositivist realist theory of identity, in contrast to a postmodernist one [...] insists that we acknowledge and interrogate the consequences – social, political, economic, and epistemic – of social location. To do this, we must first acknowledge the reality of those social categories (race, class, gender, and sexuality) that together make up an individual’s social location. We do not need to see these categories as uncontested or absolutely fixed to acknowledge their ontological status. We do, however, need to recognize that they have real material effects and that their effects are systematic rather than accidental. A realist theory of identity understands that while identities are not fixed, neither are they random (Moya, 2003: 87).

A postpositivist realist theory of Romani identity, then, should correspond to the multi-valenced, intersectional lived experiences of Romani subjects. If we agree with Weheliye that there is no productive difference between identity and subjectivity, meaning identity and subjectivity are one and the same, then the Romani subjectivity conferred on Roma subjects must be one that corresponds to the reality of the plethora of Romani social locations. The Romani subjectivity that will prove the most valuable in altering the heretofore colonial discourse on Romani should be recast as hybridized and multicultural, as well as, following Glissant, embedded into a pluritopic notion of history. A founder of post-colonial theory, Glissant points to the importance of conceiving of histories (in the plural) instead of a false-diachronic, single History: “One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History... The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing... a true sense of one’s time and identity” (cited in Alcoff, 2006: 124).

The Romani identity that we must repossess or reclaim should be, following Glissant, porous – it should be as multifarious diverse, and inclusive of an identity as possible in order to take into account the multifarious, plural and diverse *histories* of the subjects it represents. This looser notion of Romani

identity takes stock of the plurality of ways Roma have been interpellated/hailed as subjects and as Romani subjects. As Stuart Hall states: “identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1990: 225). Therefore, rather than pointing towards a monolithic history of the Roma, we should work to promote a historical canon as diverse as the constituents of that history.

Foucault wanted to interrogate the epistemological underpinnings of our conceptions of how history is written. In so doing, he ostensibly upends the illusion that our history has been a product of a just system of representation. He calls for a different kind of historical analysis, presumably of a plethora of historical material, including that which has heretofore not been taken into consideration in the composing of History, and therefore in the allocation of power (Foucault, 1976).

We can lay a framework for overcoming epistemic injustice through a radical restructuring of the social imagination. Key to attaining a polyphonic and kaleidoscopic society is the process of *generating histories* of marginalized peoples, like the Roma, which counteract the epistemological shortcomings of our hegemonic historical narrative. José Medina calls for a “radical transformation of the social imagination by opening it up to multiple forms of contestation and making it answerable to oppressed and previously excluded perspectives” (Medina, 2012: 279). Following Foucault, he offers “genealogical investigations and insurrectionary practice of counter-memory [as a means to] produce [the] epistemic friction”, that is central to his epistemological project.

In his 1970s lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault develops the concept of *countermemory* and *counterhistory*:

[T]he history or counterhistory that is born of the story of the race struggle will of course speak from the side that is in darkness, from within the shadows. It will be the discourse of those who have no glory, or of those who have lost it and who now find themselves, perhaps for a time – but probably for a long time – in darkness and silence. Which means that this discourse – unlike the uninterrupted ode in which power perpetuated itself, and grew stronger by displaying its antiquity and its genealogy – will be a disruptive speech, an appeal: “We do not have any continuity behind us; we do not have behind us the great and glorious genealogy in which the law and power flaunt themselves in their power and their glory. We came out of the shadows, we had no glory and we had no rights, and that is why we are beginning to speak and to tell of our history” (Foucault, 1997: 70).

*Countermemories* and *counterhistories* generate epistemic friction, contest “normatively structured knowledges... [by] interrogating epistemic exclusions, disqualification, and hegemonies” (Medina, 2012: 281). In so doing, *counterhistories* produce an insurrection of subjugated knowledges, thus giving voice to a heretofore silenced people, like the Roma, and to their suffering, struggles, and exclusion. Foucauldian genealogies not only recover lost histories but bring them to the fore. Thus, for Foucault, like for Gramsci, *countermemories* exist “for the sake of reactivating struggles and energizing forms of resistance” (*Ibid.*). There exists a lack of presence of Roma histories in *the* (singular) diachronic historical narrative. Composing *counterhistories* works in tandem with the forging of a new Romani subjectivity

– one that doesn't fall prey to minoritization and marginalization by current hegemonic powers, which structure dominant narratives. As Geoff Boucher states:

Alternatives to power are constituted... in marginal practices and identities that exploit the paradoxical ‘constitutive outside’ of the hegemonic norm. These excluded practical identities permanently threaten the hegemonic norm; permanently, because they assist in its constitution and are therefore everywhere implied as an *absence* supporting its presence; threaten, because they expose the arbitrariness as a diacritical *construction* (Boucher, 2006: 117).

The “constitutive outside” of European whiteness is Romani identity. Following Said, Roma are the internal “Other” against which European identity crystallized. Boucher argues that “subversive repetition of gender norms in unprecedented contexts [...] displaces and denaturalizes the hegemonic universality of heterosexuality, constituting a practical deconstruction of the politics of gender normalization” (*Ibid.*). By the same logic, the subversion of normativity outlines how a re-claiming of Romani-ness can challenge the hegemonic universality of whiteness, effecting an undoing of the Figure of Man (Wynter, 1987). This process of “resignification” of citational/performative utterances of identity reveal the fictitious nature of dominant norms, in demonstrating their constructed ontology. This claim should not be misunderstood to mean that identity has, as Butler has claimed, “no ontological status” (Butler, 1990/1997: 173). It is, rather, exactly the opposite. What becomes arbitrary when we take into consideration the performativity of identity is not identity itself, but rather the *power* ascribed to dominant norms versus minoritarian norms. The salience of identity on an individual level remains intact; what is fractured is the hegemony of normative notions of identity.

## Conclusion

As Romani Studies as a discipline begins the difficult work of disentangling ourselves as scholars from the destructive colonial episteme – walking in step with scholars such as Acton, who has argued that, “scientific racism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century continues to shape our discourses” (Acton, 2017: 1187) – it will be imperative to re-suture “identity” and “subjectivity”, correcting centuries of thought which rend these categories asunder. My intervention into this emerging discourse is the need to ground it epistemologically in an understanding of a particularly socially-located *Romani* identity/subjectivity. I hope to have made clear that normative, hegemonic, universalizing rhetoric, like Butler’s, relies on the silencing of minority/identity discourse. The power of identity as a tool for political and social advocacy is tantamount. Shedding “identity” for the sake of universal humanism slows the larger project of true social economic and political justice for Romani people. It is not by accident that Foucault locates *counterhistories* in the margins, among those who have no rights. Contra to Butler’s conception of “plural rights”, the struggle for rights belongs, first, but not only, to those who have been denied those rights. It cannot be conceived of from the center, from the locus of the hegemonic; the struggle must come from the margins. The movement of progress is centripetal; it is not a force which originates from the center outwards, as Butler purports “to expand the ‘we’” – rather it is an encroachment from the margins on the center, with the ultimate intention of sublating it.

The *counterhistories* of the Roma in whatever medium, transcription or form tell a continuous, heterogeneous history of the Roma. They insurrect hegemonic history and offer a post-positivist conception of Romani identities from which a movement towards increased political and social representation may spring. The Romani struggle for social justice will move forward when we are able to build solidarity among ourselves with an understanding of Romani identity that is broad enough to include all of us and re-claim Romani-ness in all its intersectional permutations (Crenshaw, 1991). This questioning of what it means to be interpellated as Roma in the twenty-first century and the shift toward an answer that affirms all Romani identities and histories not only combats the myth of restrictive identity, it also paves a path toward even more widening circles of solidarity with other marginalized groups in a shared struggle for liberation.

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# Assessing the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society in Light of Romani Subaltern Challenges

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## Abstract

Contemporary scholarship in the fields of Romani Studies and antigypsyism (i.e., anti-Gypsyism or antiziganism), increasingly recognizes the centrality of location or “standpoint” in the discourse around representation and legitimacy. Deriving from a conceptual understanding of antigypyism, this paper analyzes Gypsylorism, in the sense of constructions of “the exotic Other within Europe” (Lee, 2000). The trajectory of knowledge production from the early days of “Gypsyology” to (critical) Romani Studies is analyzed: first, by means of a historiographical analysis of Nordic literature, which establishes the analytical dichotomy between subalternity and Gypsylorism, and second, by a scrutiny of recent academic debates in the field. The paper argues that the emergence of authors from the Romani standpoint in fictional and academic literature has contributed to a change as well as provoked counter-reactions. The paper illuminates debates and trajectories by discussing the failed attempts to make the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) claim historical responsibility for its Gypsylorism/Orientalism at its Istanbul conference in 2012 and the compromise resolution of GLS in Stockholm in 2016, which avoided an apology and maintained the unresolved antagonism.

## Keywords

- Antigypyism
- Antiziganism
- Gypsylorism
- Roma
- Gypsy Lore Society
- Historical responsibility

## Introduction<sup>[1]</sup>

This article primarily aims at pinpointing historiographical trends in the trajectory of developing knowledge from “Gypsiology” to Romani Studies and the relatively recent emergence of “Critical Romani Studies”,<sup>[2]</sup> in the light of subaltern challenges, arguably since Hancock’s *The Pariah Syndrome* (1987; 1991). However, as the article is situated in the context of various debates regarding the role and responsibilities of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS), particularly in terms of contributing to a racist paradigm that led from the romantic “Gypsy” to the gas chambers of the Nazi racial state, I will begin with a discussion of the defeated proposal to the GLS Board of Directors in Istanbul in 2012, calling on the GLS to acknowledge and apologize for its racist past. Then, I will return to the original focus of my article, discussing examples primarily from the Nordic context. Finally, I conclude by discussing the GLS compromise resolution from the GLS Stockholm Annual General Meeting and Conference in 2016, which, in content and intention, was a defensive “memory” statement made to appease all parties.

At the GLS Board meeting in Istanbul in 2012, Thomas Acton, the Secretary of the GLS Board of Directors, supported by Colin Clark and Margaret Greenfields, both members of the Board, proposed the following motion:

That this Board [...of Directors...] recommends the General Meeting to acknowledge that, despite its undoubtedly scientific contribution, there was an historic complicity of the early Gypsy Lore Society with racist ideas and practices while it [was] still based in England, and that as the successors of those earlier members, we apologise for harm done, and resolve to build upon the positive elements of their work to build those inter-communal historical understandings which can transcend past conflicts.

Prior to the meeting, Acton had briefed the Board Members with facts and academic references, supporting the allegation of racism. The cited examples were published after 1945 and included the publication of racist content in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (JGLS), with Herman Arnold’s article “The Gypsy Gene” from 1961 being the most blatant example. Acton also cited the impact of the GLS on antigypsyist policies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The reactions of some Board Members to the proposal indicate both the principal complexity of historical responsibility and an unresolved antagonism within today’s GLS.<sup>[3]</sup>

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1. Acknowledgment: Dr. Adrian Marsh has provided valuable information and advice for this article.

2. I use these labels to indicate scholarly paradigms in the field: starting with the unanimously othering discourse formation of Gypsiology over the diversified field of Romani Studies to the hegemonic intervention of scholars inspired by critical theories in the field of Romani Studies.

3. The subsequent AGM (Annual General Meeting) of the GLS in Istanbul also revealed other antagonisms: the meager representation of Romani people in the organization, the uncritical acceptance of support from the Turkish authorities, and the setting of the conference at a place that was gentrified at the expense of local Romani communities, was criticized. Mariushakova responded that “[...] every single government in Europe can be accused of racist policies”, and that “[...] those who are dissatisfied with the policy [sic] of Turkey should find a country where there are no problems in this regard and organize a conference there” (GLS Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 2012).

Sheila Salo (Treasurer) opposed the resolution since it would be wrong “for contemporary scholars to apologize for actions in which they were not personally involved”. Board Member Anne Sutherland dismissed the motion as “silly”. President Elena Marushiaikova distorted the perspective by saying that she “could not feel guilty for the British Empire’s racism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Board Member Matt Salo did not want to “fix the blame for the past” and wished instead to concentrate on the future. Yaron Matras (Editor of the GLS journal, *Romani Studies*) opposed the resolution by arguing that “the facts had not been well enough established” and suggested instead to commission those who proposed the motion to submit a factual report to the 2013 conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Acton responded that the facts were already established, delivered by the information presented and available in his own book, *Gypsy Politics & Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology & Pressure Politics among British Gypsies* (Acton 1974). Neither the proposals to present the case in Glasgow nor the motion was accepted. During the discussion Matras claimed that Acton was “[...] not actually interested in discussing racism, but hypocritically pursuing a personal agenda, caused by a psychological need to feel influential” (GLS, 2012).

These defensive maneuvers missed the point in several ways. First, there are a number of states and organizations that have apologized for wrongs against Romani people in the past.<sup>[4]</sup> In these kinds of apologia, the question is not about guilt but historical responsibility. This is always a collective endeavor, in the sense that one collective identity, which builds on tradition and continuity, through a historical apology invokes commitments for the future, thus opening negotiations with those who may identify with its legacy (Selling, 2007).<sup>[5]</sup> This may mean a state, church, institution, or organization. In this particular case, one issue is the inclusion of Romani scholars and self-critical perspectives in the most prestigious body within the field of Romani Studies. Second, GLS Board Members missed the point that the proposed motion did not identify the discourses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “when scientific racism was the norm”, but “[...] the post-1945 era, when people should have known better”.<sup>[6]</sup> From an ethical and philosophical standpoint, this should have made it more acceptable to apologize, since the scholars of that period must be seen as “morally competent” (Schefczyk, 2012). (Scientific racism was under assault, for its associations with racial biology and the Nazi death-camps.) However, the personal connections to the actors and the practice of honoring long-standing members made the matter sensitive.<sup>[7]</sup> The outcome was, primarily, an article by Acton (2016), where he again established the facts and defined the matter,

4. Amongst the small number of states to have apologized for the historical injustice of their treatment of Romani people are Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey, when, in 2010, then Prime Minister Erdogan, at a large “gathering” (*bulusmasi*) of 16,000 Romani people in Zeytinburnu Abdi Ipekci Sports Stadium on March 14, apologized on behalf of the Turkish state. The 2012 GLS AGM and Conference took place in the wake of this declaration but also during the continuing demolition of Romani neighborhoods and forcible displacement of communities (p.c. Adrian Marsh).

5. A prominent example is the declaration of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1998 that the Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe signifies “[...] the core of our self-understanding as a nation”, in the sense of a recognition that “[...] Germany carries a particular responsibility for maintaining the memory of the Holocaust” (cited in Selling, 2007: 252).

6. Justification letter for the motion, circulated to Board Members ahead of the GLS Board meeting (Anonymous source).

7. As a parallel, the story of Interpol shows that the tendency to one-sidedly defend the oeuvre of “the fathers” in elite organizations that build on tradition and personal networks can prohibit a break with a cultural codes, such as that of antigypsyism (Selling 2017a).

and second, a compromise resolution proposed and adopted at the GLS Annual General Meeting and Conference in Stockholm in 2016, and to which I will return.

## 1. Scientific Racism, Gypsylorism, and Antigypsyism

The critical intervention at the GLS 2012 meeting was directed against “scientific racism”, which Acton defined as a “[...] view that there are originally distinct, and still clearly bounded categories of human being, to be called ‘races’, who are genealogically linked and whose distinct physical appearance and/or social characteristics, are passed on by biological descent” (Acton, 2016). This is a deliberately narrow definition. The notion of antigypsyism (frequently described in European Romani Studies as “antiziganism”) was neither used in the Istanbul proposed motion nor in Acton’s article from 2016. Reflecting on the evolution of research, I define antigypsyism (i.e., antiziganism) as excluding and discriminating discursive practices, which are centered around the constructed image of a “conceptual Gypsy” (Selling, 2015; cf. Selling et al., 2015; Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017). Further, I differentiate between different forms of antiziganism, each of which, in social reality, have resulted in different policies directed against Roma and other persons who historically have become associated with “the conceptual Gypsy”. Notably, a mixture of these forms is often the case. Nevertheless, such a distinction of these modes brings analytical clarity.

**Table 1. Modes of Antigypsyism: A Tentative Model**

	Basis	Historical consequences
The social	Social contempt, classism, Social Darwinism	“Sozialrassismus”, forced assimilation
The ethnographic	Culturalism, orientalism	“Deprogramming”
The racialist	Racial biology	“Apartheid”, sterilization, genocide
The structural	Structures which prolong of consequences of other kinds of antigypsyism	Social, cultural, and political disadvantages for Roma
Philoziganism	Orientalism; essentialist and excluding discourses on “the eternal Gypsy” as anti-modern counterpoint: not to be persecuted, but also not allowed to develop or integrate as equal.	Enclavization, cultural exploitation, appropriation.
Secondary antigypsyism	Discourses of disrespecting Romani voices and blaming the victim: “no smoke without fire”, and so on.	Rejections of Roma claims for rectification. Politicians’ fear of being labelled as pro-Roma.

In an earlier essay, I equated *philoziganism* and Gypsylorism and defined this as non-hostile but nevertheless essentialist and excluding discourse built upon “the conceptual Gypsy” (Selling, 2015). However, in the context of the debate at the GLS Annual General Meeting (2012), the notion clearly has other meanings. To me, the most operational definition of Gypsylorism as an analytical concept is

that developed by Ken Lee, “Whilst Orientalism is the construction of the exotic Other outside Europe, Gypsylorism is the construction of the exotic Other within Europe – Romanies are the “Orientals within” (Lee, 2000: 132).

In this sense, Gypsylorism is a discourse of othering, which historically has been – and still is – being performed in literature, arts, mass media, scholarship, and other arenas of culture. However, in the still ongoing antagonism, the meaning of this notion has also been reversely understood:

The term Gypsylorist (or: Gypsiologist) is used on a wholesale basis to refer to the Other – the other scholar who investigates Gypsies, but whose scholarship is rejected, because it does not lead to the same conclusions or engage in the same activism as that of the author him/herself. ‘Gypsylorist’ or ‘Gypsiologist’ is thus essentially a denunciatory term, rather than a descriptive or analytical one that refers to any particular point of view, methodology, affiliation, or era (Matras, 2005: 1).

In this article, I first argue that Gypsylorism, in the sense that Lee defines it, is a necessary but insufficient constituent of antigypsyism, including forms of antigypsyism that are not “scientifically racist” in the view of Acton. Obviously, this perspective places the GLS in an unfavorable light. Second, not only the notion of “Gypsy Lore” but that of “the Gypsy” becomes contested; this is an *exonym* which has been rejected as self-description by many Romani groups, because it is considered stereotypical and pejorative (Rodell, p.c.).<sup>[8]</sup> It is possibly a reason for the fact that the journal and the conference changed names, in accordance with the changing self-denomination of scholarship from Gypsiology (*Ziganologie*, etc., in other languages) to Romani Studies. Third, the GLS definition of the field of enquiry as “[...] the study of Gypsy, Traveller, and analogous peripatetic cultures worldwide...” (Sheila Salo p.c.; Cf. Acton, 2016; Trehan, 2009; and Lee, 2000)<sup>[9]</sup> must be questioned, since an essentialist ascription of nomadism is conflated with the concepts of Gypsylorism, and thus scientific racism (Cf. Acton, 2016; Trehan, 2009; Lee, 2000).

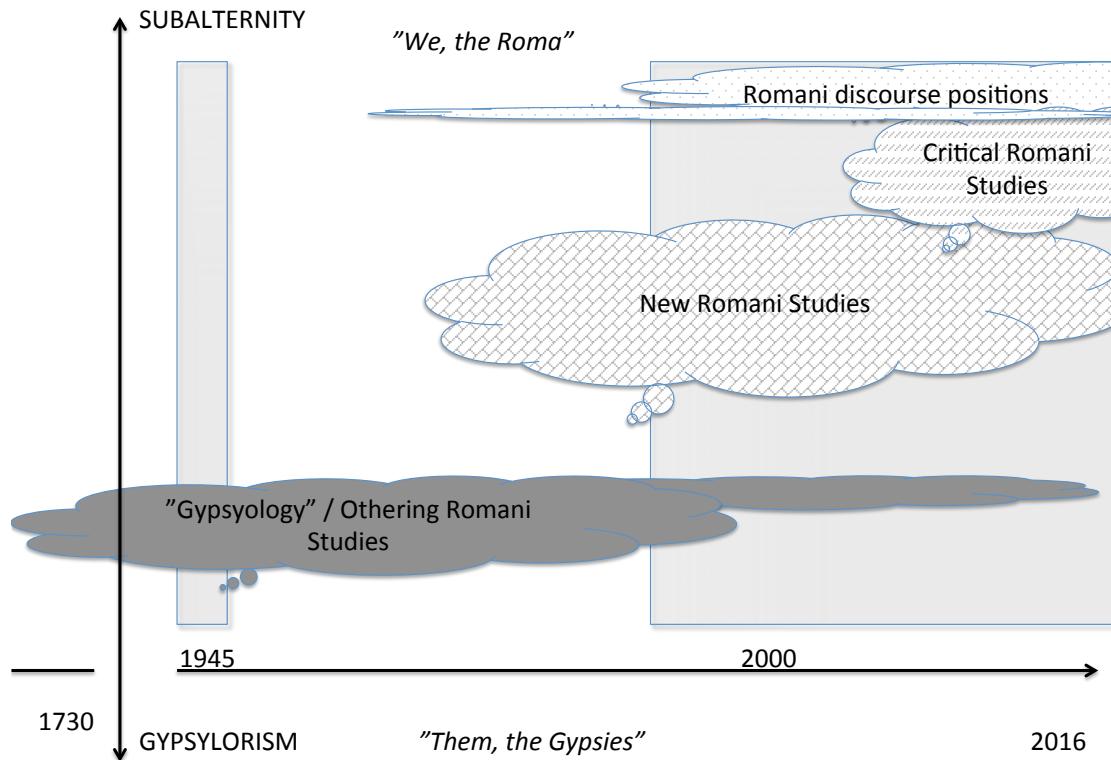
## 2. Contesting Antigypsyist Hegemony through Interventions

My topic is how narratives about Romani groups have changed from the early days of Gypsiology to a diversified field of Romani Studies, gradually including Romani voices and *gadjé* or *gorgio* (non-Romani or Traveller) self-reflections on antigypsyist hegemony, as expressed through this discipline.

8. Christina Rodell Olgaç p.c. Some groups accept or have consciously reclaimed the label “Gypsy”, as a political label (such as the UK Gypsy Council for Culture, Welfare, and Education), following models of ethnic activism from the United States, but we need to differentiate and respect the rights of self-identification and self-ascription. This point was communicated to the GLS Board by Romani students of Södertörn University, who attended the conference in Stockholm in 2016.

9. Sheila Salo p.c.; Cf. Acton, Trehan, Lee. Compare also Romani Rose, “The nomadic has nothing to do with our cultural identity” (Digital recording from ODIHR/OSCE meeting, Berlin, September 6, 2016). Is Rose wrong or is the GLS definition the view of the outsider?

This trajectory corresponds with societal change and is indicated by Romani-related discursive events among the elites of majority society, such as political debates and policy documents.



This matrix tries to give an idea of the changes over time and the dimension of positionality (subalternity <-> Gypsynorm) in selected works and policy documents. Breaking points: (a) post-war implosion of scientific racism; (b) post-millennium discourses on historical justice and Roma rights.

I mainly will refer to the Nordic context, with a few outstanding exceptions. On the bottom line, we see the perspective of *Othering*, which is indicated by a we/they juxtaposition, and the unreflective use of exonyms. On the top line, we see the evolving Romani voices in academic and cultural discourses about Romani people.

In between, there is a rapidly expanding field of what might be called New Romani Studies, mainly *gadje* scholars who, to a differing degree, strive to listen to Romani voices while deconstructing colonialist discourses (e.g., Acton, 1974 and 2008; Hazell, 2002; Lindholm, 1995; Lucassen, 1996; Martins Holmberg, 2014; Montesino, 2002; Pulma, 2015; Rodell Olgaç, 2005; Tervonen, 2010; Willems, 1997). There is also the field of critical research on antigypsyism and the Roma Holocaust, which mainly deals with majority society.<sup>[10]</sup>

10. Zimmermann, Wippermann, 1997; Lewy, 2000; End, 2011 and 2013; Gress, Selling, 2013 and 2015; Bunescu, 2014; Rosvoll, 2015; Ericsson, 2015; Ohlsson Al Fakir, 2015; Fings, 2016; Kaveh, 2016.

Many intense debates are hidden in the matrix, to which I will return below. There is also societal change, indicated by acts of state's recognition of Roma rights and their historical responsibility for promoting antigypsyism. This process started around the millennium. The process was enhanced by transnational discourses on principles of universal human rights and historical responsibility. Examples of this can form a timeline that is presented below:

- 1982 German Chancellor recognition of the Nazi genocide of Sinti and Roma.
- 1995 Germany recognizes Sinti and Roma as national minorities.
- 1995 Finnish Church apologizes for its historical role in the discrimination against Roma.
- 1998 Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted on November 10, 1994, by the Committee of Ministers and it entered into force on February 1, 1998. It has 39 member states as signatories, to date.
- 1998 Norwegian government's and the Norwegian church's apologies to the Romani people of Norway (the *Reisende*).
- 1998 Finland recognizes Roma as a national minority.
- 1999 Sweden and Norway recognize Romani groups as national minorities.
- 2000 Swedish government apologizes to the *Resande* and the Swedish church apologizes to Romer (Roma).
- 2003 Finnish memorial for Romani soldiers who died during the Second World War, fighting for Finland.
- 2010 Prime Minister of Turkey apologizes to 16,000 *Romanlar* (Romani people) at a major government-sponsored event on March 14 in Istanbul.
- 2012 The Berlin "Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism".
- 2014 Swedish "White Paper on Abuses and Rights Violations of Roma during the 1900s".
- 2015 EU Parliament declaration to commemorate the "European Roma Holocaust Day" and vows to "[...] combat anti-Gypsyism" [sic].

These discursive events would not have happened without the pressure exerted by Romani activism. My hypothesis is that the emergence of Romani voices in different kinds of literature, especially since 2000, also challenges the self-understanding of academics working in Romani Studies and raises new questions around epistemology and the political responsibility of scholarship (Cf. Kawczynski 1997; Acton 2000; Kovats 2001). Obviously, these voices may or may not be included in policymaking. Yaron Matras, who over the years has been involved in debates with some of these challenges, suggests, "Hancock [...] and other activists view the historical discourse as an instrument toward changing the image of the Rom and their status in present-day society" (Matras, 2004). This is an important observation, but I would frame it otherwise; Hancock and other Romani intellectuals involved in these debates are part of a counter-hegemonic intervention that invites us to reconsider the understanding of Roma or "Gypsies", which has been produced for centuries by

*gadjé* scholars and in many cases provided a justification for racist and antigypsyist persecution. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve deeper into traditional and emerging critical narratives; my aim is solely to argue for this dimension of analysis, which invites further research.

My argument is not that everything written by *gadjé* scholars before 2000 was prejudiced, and even if it was, that this renders the work useless. On the contrary, the oldest Swedish dissertation on the subject by Bjöckmann (1730) was ignorant and based on proto-racist thinking of the time, but it provides some empirical material on the use of *Rromani-chib* (Romani language) spoken in Sweden in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Björckmann, 1730). Another Swedish dissertation about *zigenare* (Gypsies) was published by Laurentius Rabenius in 1791 and shows not only the first influence of scientific racism but also the establishment of an international intellectual arena. Rabenius refers to an early race classification system of Carolus Linnaeus (who published his *Systema Naturae* in 1735), as described in the *English Magazine*, but also to the *magnus opus* of Heinrich Grellmann published only a few years before (Grellmann, 1787). Grellmann, in turn, was not the most original scholar but the most influential Gypsiologist of his time. He offered a fascinating picture of “the Gypsy” in tune with the political culture of the ruling classes. Even in the 20th century, he was frequently quoted and his concept of cultural de-programming as preferable to genocide influenced the Norwegian forced assimilation concept against “the Tater” (the Norwegian Romani group *Resande*) that lasted well into the 1970s (NOU, 1980: 42). As in many other parts of Europe, scientific racism was perceived as “common sense” by the educated public of Nordic countries up to 1945. However, in Sweden this was challenged when the then head of the Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala, Herman Lundborg, was replaced by a young Gunnar Dahlberg (1935). The latter was convinced that racism was a mistake in science, and in 1951 he was one of the scholars behind the UN “Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Differences” (UNESCO), which declared that there are “no scientific grounds whatever for the racialist position regarding purity of race and the hierarchy of inferior and superior races” and that “genetic differences are of little significance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of men.”<sup>[11]</sup>

As racial biology became seriously questioned, this had an impact on real people: for example, the Swedish state was carrying out inventories and registrations of “Zigenare” and “Tattare”. Based on the research of the scientific racist Allan Etzler (1944), it appeared clear who and what was a “Zigenare”; it was roughly equated with the *Kelderash* minority, which was physically excluded from society and easy to spot. But who was a “Tattare”? As this group (mainly consisting of the Swedish Romani group *Resande*, who partly speak Scandoromani and consider themselves to be descendants of the earliest Roma immigration to Sweden in the 16th century) was hard to distinguish from the majority, there evolved an intense debate on the group’s origin and nature. Were “Tattare” people from a racially mixed group, as Etzler said, or a socially isolated, underclass, or outcast group, as his opponent Adam Heymowski claimed? Ultimately, the state’s 1945 “Tattare” report appeared confused and unconvincing, relying upon a circular definition of “a *tattare* is who is like a *tattare*” (Socialstyrelsen, 1945; see also Selling, 2013), becoming the last inventory

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11. UNESCO statement at: [http://www.honestthinking.org/en/unesco/UNESCO.1951.Statement\\_on\\_Race.htm](http://www.honestthinking.org/en/unesco/UNESCO.1951.Statement_on_Race.htm)

of “Tattare” carried out in Sweden. The registering of “Zigenare”, however, went on until recently,<sup>[12]</sup> but the “Tattare” label continued to damage individual life opportunities, due to the discriminating practices of authorities – whether based on social or racial antigypsyism (Selling, 2013). Interestingly, as late as 1975 a regional morning newspaper stated that the debate was once and for all decided: the *Resande* were outcasts, but since the social structure which created the group was transformed into the modern *folkhemmet* (“People’s Home”), the group no longer existed. The *Resande* community was, until the Roma rights discourse of the 2000s, not in a position to speak up, since anonymity had become a strategy for survival (Selling, 2013). A backlash occurred in the 1990s when a widely discussed book by ethnologist Birgitta Svensson described the *Resande* in the tradition of Heymowski, i.e., as a social rather than an ethnic group, concluding that criminality is the core of *Resande* identity (Svensson, 1993).

In the 1960s another famous debate developed, novel in that a Romani woman was speaking, the Swedish Kelderash author, Katarina Taikon. The documentary author Lo-Johansson claimed that a “Gypsy” who integrated or who adapted, beyond his own exotic view of them, was no longer a “real Gypsy”. Katarina Taikon claimed equal social and civil rights and the right for Swedish Roma to be part of the modernization going on in Sweden (Lo-Johansson, 1963; Taikon, 1963, 1967). Lo-Johansson questioned Taikon’s position by claiming that she was only “half Gypsy”, having a *gadji* mother. At the same time, he claimed that “a Gypsy lived in him” (Arnstberg, 1998: 85). This debate influenced real people; the 1956 “Zigenare” report had laid the ground for a paradigmatic policy shift – from persecution to assimilation, but it also explicitly declared Lo-Johansson’s Gypsylorist perspective as a real threat, which might confuse the target group and therefore needed to be encountered through a campaign (Selling, 2013), the message of which being that only voluntary *assimilation* would make the Swedish Roma part of the socially equal *Folkhemmet* project. However, policymakers did not involve Roma representatives; instead it was designed and implemented by a growing caste of “Gypsy experts” (Montesino, 2001). This policy ultimately was deemed a complete failure and one of the main reasons for existing structural antigypsyism in 2010 (SOU, 2010: 55). Interestingly, both Taikon’s *Zigenerska* and Lo-Johansson’s *Zigenare* were reprinted in 2015 although the publisher Bonniers did not appear to know the story from the 1960s, as it advertised the Lo-Johansson book as “[...] a historical perspective on the debate around a people who, even today, are targeted by discrimination” (Taikon, 2015).

Also in 2015, the ethnologist Arnstberg published an extremely antigypsyist book called *Romer i Sverige*. Already in his widely quoted book *Svenskar och zigenare* from 1998, he echoed Grellman’s conclusion that “Zigenare” are people who are impossible to integrate into wider society, which is why their “Zigenare identity” must be removed through “strong assimilation”. This case illustrates a different kind of antigypsyism than that of Lo-Johansson, who found “Zigenare” so fascinating and argued that they *must not* integrate. In 2015 Arnstberg had radicalized and subscribed to the discourses of the Swedish far right, as illustrated by this textbook example of secondary antigypsyism:

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12. Officially, the last “Zigenare” inventory was carried out 1962, but the social authorities kept registers well into the 1980s. In 2013 it was revealed that the police were still registering Roma without any legal justification (Selling, 2013; Westin et al., 2014; Ohlsson al Fakir, 2015; SOU, 2016: 44).

Their sense of purity is described and explained [...in this book...], as well how they preserve their form of life. The criminality of Roma is given a separate chapter. The beggar invasion, which Sweden is exposed to, through the EU-policy behind it, is discussed in detail. The book concludes with a scrutiny of the costly ‘victim’s industry’, which one-sidedly investigates how racist, prejudiced and discriminating Swedish people are in their treatment of the Roma.

However, the fact that Arnstberg published this work privately indicates that he has become part of the academic fringe.

### 3. Romani Intellectuals Enter the Scene

A growing field of authentic or fictionalized life stories of Swedish Romani authors has started to contest Gypsylorist images of Romani and Traveller people. Artists and authors such as Rosa Taikon and Hans Calderas have had an impact as respected individuals rather than representatives of a movement. Soraya Post, from the Swedish Romani community, was elected to the European Parliament as a representative of a Feminist party and she became a driving force behind the European Parliament resolution on Holocaust commemoration and antigypsyism from 2015. However, it is striking that, despite examples such as Rosa Taikon, Hans Calderas, and others – in comparison with the broader international picture – there exists little recognition of international Romani intellectuals in Sweden. The works of Ian Hancock are an exception, but he has been followed by only a few academic Romani voices in Nordic Romani studies.<sup>[13]</sup> One reason is that structural antigypsyism is an obstacle to Romani educational success; another reason is that persisting prejudice in academia sometimes blocks and discourages Romani students.<sup>[14]</sup> This is also an international phenomenon, and a major reason for some Romani education and cultural initiatives which explicitly challenge antigypsyist and Gypsylorist hegemony through promoting emerging Romani scholarship.

One of these initiatives is the Digital Archive of the Roma (RomArchive), which I am personally involved in as a curator. The Archive is supported by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma as well as by the European Roma Cultural Foundation. It is, in its initial phase, financed through the German Federal Cultural Foundation. Its mission statement declares:

While ‘hegemonic’ archives have almost exclusively portrayed Roma in stereotypical ways, RomArchive focuses on their self-representation. New narratives will emerge, reflecting the heterogeneity of the Roma’s diverse national and cultural identities.

Some of the scholars working with the RomArchive are involved in the much-discussed European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), supported by Roma leaders such as Dr. Nicoleta Bitu and Romani Rose, as well as Roma academics such as Tímea Junghaus and Ethel Brooks. The importance of this initiative was underlined at a high-level meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

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13. See Kwiek, Brisenstam, Wallengren, Stenroos, Friman-Korpela, Lundqvist.

14. Compare Kyuchukov, 2015; SOU, 2016: 44; and ERRC, 2016.

Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in 2016 assessed by Thorbjörn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, in the following way:

ERIAC is extremely important, led by Roma people, it will educate and inspire and give Roma a sense of pride. We can look at other oppressed groups and their strategies to liberate themselves. We can look at the workers' movement, the Afro-American civil rights movement. It shows that when a critical mass of blacks entered the universities, then things changed. The same happen with Roma. This is why ERIAC is important and we hope it will open soon.<sup>[15]</sup>

Jagland's statement attaches to an understanding of the field as a de-colonizing project, which learns from the African-American experience. As Angéla Kóczé puts it:

Romani scholars, in contrast to Black intellectuals, have only recently arrived to the stage when they have to confront and challenge the academic establishment. Right now Romani intellectuals are in a historical moment when they use their epistemic privilege to 'speak back' to the dominant cluster of scholars who created discourses and knowledge systems about Roma that objectify them (Kocze, 2015: 86).

Inevitably, this "speaking back", in turn, provoked a reaction in the field of Romani Studies. In a statement in April 2015, also quoted by Kóczé, Matras claimed:

The group seemed to come from nowhere. They had no track record of local leadership, no experience in cultural management, and no academic publications to their names. But they claimed a connection to Romani ancestry and appeared to have powerful friends (Matras, 2015).<sup>[16]</sup>

The first part of the statement can be refuted instantly by reading the curriculum vitae of the persons to whom he referred. The second part hints at a widespread insecurity in academia, where the challenges from subaltern voices often result in existing groups closing ranks and avoiding self-reflection.

## 4. Epilogue: The Stockholm Compromise

Compared to the meeting in Istanbul in 2012, the setting of the Gypsy Lore Society's meeting and annual conference was different in Stockholm in 2016. The Swedish state had previously recognized the problem and challenges of antigypsyism and acknowledged Romani minority rights and the need for inclusion. Södertörn University was awarded the state commission to deliver programs for Roma university tertiary

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15. Tape recording from ODIHR/OSCE meeting 2016 (Selling 2017b).

16. Matras, "Why plans for a European Roma Institute might be a setback for Europe's Roma" (LSE blog, April 16, 2015).

level education.<sup>[17]</sup> More than 20 Swedish Roma students attended the 2016 conference. However – this must also be said – very few Romani scholars were found among the presenters. The Istanbul experience was not forgotten, and, in this context, the GLS Board adopted the following “compromise resolution” at its meeting, which had been agreed to previously by Thomas Acton and Yaron Matras:

The Board of Directors of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS)

1. Looks back with pride at more than a century of GLS scholarship that has contributed to raising international awareness of the history and culture of the Romani people, and which has set the foundations for what has become a thriving scholarly community devoted to Romani Studies;
2. Acknowledges that like other institutions, the Society and its publications have not been immune over the past century to occasional statements and attitudes that may be interpreted as overtly patronising, disenfranchising, or otherwise biased toward the people whose culture was at the centre of the Society’s attention;
3. Equally regrets that such statements made decades ago continue to be used by some to try to discredit the Society’s work and its efforts to promote engagement with Romani culture today. It considers the undifferentiated denunciatory use of the term ‘Gypsylorist’ to be counterproductive to a fair and open discussion;
4. Recalls that at her opening speech at the GLS Annual Meeting in Istanbul in September 2012, the President of the GLS, Professor Elena Marushikova, pointed out how negative stereotypes against Roma go hand in hand with a stigma that is directed at the study of Romani culture. She emphasised that this makes the Gypsy Lore Society an even more crucial space where academic knowledge can be maintained and encouraged. She said: “In the field of Romani Studies, the most important thing that should never be forgotten by all of us is that our research and its impact should not in any way harm the community that we are studying.” The GLS Board stands by this statement and remains committed to promoting knowledge of and engagement with Romani communities.

This was not an apology. It is questionable whether anyone will be proud of this resolution and whether it will be adhered to as a statement that invites a re-negotiation of the collective GLS identity. First, it appears strange to “look back with pride”, if this is not paired with remorse for the patronizing, disenfranchising, and biased statements of that past. Second, the critical content of the proposed Istanbul motion was diluted into the passive phrase, “have not been immune”, which denies the agency of the GLS as producer and distributor of racist ideology. Third, the resolution avoids reflecting upon self-criticism by denouncing “anti-Gypsylorism”. Fourth, it appears odd to include one of the President’s Istanbul statements but to ignore those that might be more problematic. All in all, it is a resolution that aims at covering up an unresolved series of antagonisms, in the interests of the defense of the academic “ivory tower”.

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17. It should be noted that Matras also has contributed to this development.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Assessing a large body of scholarly, fictional, and political texts referring to Roma, “Gypsies,” and so on, primarily from the Nordic context, this article offers a model for a diachronic analysis of the dimension of positionality in the field of “Gypsyology”, Romani Studies, and Critical Romani Studies. At the one end of the scale is Gypsylorist othering: different variants of romantic, ethnographic, anthropological, and scientific racist discourses on actual Roma and the fictional “conceptual Gypsy”. Romani subaltern discourses are situated at the other end: scholarly, literary, and political texts and emancipatory praxis expressing Romani discourse positions. In between is a growing field of, in a wide sense, post-colonial and inter-culturally sensitive scholarship, still dominated by non-Roma.

This article observes that the complete domination of Gypsylorist discourse in the early days of “Gypsyology” has become questioned at different stages, particularly in connection with two breaking points: first, the implosion of scientific racism after the Second World War, and second, the turn of the millennium discourses around minority rights, Holocaust memory, and historical responsibility. As for the present, an expanding field of Romani scholars and activists are gaining momentum in political processes around Roma rights as well as in academic debates and Roma-lead cultural initiatives which contest antigypsyist hegemony. This subaltern challenge is fruitful ground for the development of future research in the field.

The debates and antagonisms that have evolved in the described field should be taken seriously, since they both reflect and influence social reality in each historical situation. This is the context in which this article interprets the recent debates of the Gypsy Lore Society, and whether or not it should apologize for its historical role in producing, distributing, and legitimizing racist discourses on Roma and other related or associated groups. As this was proposed at the 2012 Istanbul meeting, the GLS Board majority turned it down and refused to even acknowledge the problem. When measured against the model suggested above, this incident represents a failed hegemonic intervention, with the result that the Gypsylorist tradition was defended. Four years later, at the GLS meeting in Stockholm a compromise resolution was accepted. This compromise celebrated GLS tradition as something to be “proud of” and at the same time acknowledged in a diminishing way the problematic GLS discourses of the past as “occasional statements and attitudes” of “patronizing, disenfranchising” and “bias” to which the GLS “had not been immune”. Further, the critical understanding of Gypsylorism, which this article also represents, was denounced.

It would be a mistake to consider the GLS Board reactions to the critical interventions as atavism. As argued above, the retrospective loyalty of GLS traditionalists is one explanation. But a more powerful explanation is that the GLS Board actually represents the field and acts as a defender of cultural hegemony: structural antigypsyism lets only few Roma into academia, and the ones who succeed have to fight their way through the gates and speak back loudly to be heard at all. Further, to paraphrase Adorno (1963): as long as the conditions which engendered antigypsyism in its different forms continue to exist, approaches which aim at its deconstruction merely in the sense of working through the past will not be successful.

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# Roma Integration ‘All the Way Down’: Lessons from Federalism and Civil Rights

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**Critical  
Romani Studies**

## Abstract

This article argues that critical Romani studies should examine the EU's top-down policies of Roma integration as an exercise in federalism, since the EU's quasi-federalist structure both accommodated and co-opted the fight for Roma rights. To bolster its analysis, this article draws comparisons to the actions of the United States ("U.S.") federal government during Civil Rights. Of course, both Roma integration and Civil Rights are still inchoate projects. However, the longer arc with which scholars have assessed Civil Rights, including its periods of progress and retrenchment, can help develop a framework for predicting how Romani rights within the EU's federalist system might fare during similar cycles. Three lessons flow from the comparison. First, integration policies spurred by the top rung of the federalist architecture can foment a populist backlash, especially if disparities in competence or enforcement prompt deficits in legitimacy. Second, governmental efforts are necessary for integration but not sufficient; they must work in tandem with advocacy at the grass-roots level. Finally, pushing federalism "all the way down" to incentivize local experimentation with Roma policies might counteract obstructionism to Roma integration at the national level, but this is not a panacea. Local experimentation might take the form of self-governing districts and economic set-asides, but they can just as easily permit local institutions to perpetuate exclusion and marginalization.

## Keywords

- Civil Rights
- Competence
- Conditionality
- Enforcement
- Federalism
- Integration

## Introduction<sup>[1]</sup>

Roma integration was a prominent part of the European Union (“EU”) accession process for the candidate countries of Central and Southeast Europe (“CSEE”). While the policies dating to that period are now a quarter century old, scholars have yet to explore the federalism dimensions of the EU’s Roma integration mandate. This deficit is understandable and unfortunate. While the EU expanded EU membership into post-Communist CSEE during its fifth, sixth, and seventh rounds of enlargement, it also pushed for Roma integration. Scholars have also begun to speculate why Roma integration occurred when it did, as a buffer against Romani migrants into Western Europe (Wiener and Schwellnus, 2004: 32). Yet far less has been written about the competence, or authority, of the EU in mandating Roma integration. Consequently, Romani studies has sidestepped the question of how this competence shapes the sense of legitimacy harbored by the accession countries toward the EU. Similarly, the infringement proceedings initiated by the European Commission against certain CSEE members for discriminating against Roma have been welcomed (Amnesty International, 2014; Open Society, 2015; European Roma Rights Centre, 2016a). Yet Romani studies has not explored the functional role of infringement proceedings in mediating relations between the EU and its CSEE constituents – or how remedies for discrimination can be crafted without continuous judicial oversight or enforced without “traditional military power” (Ashton, 2011).

This article argues that critical Romani studies should examine the EU’s top-down policies of Roma integration as an exercise in federalism. I define Roma integration as the EU’s push for socio-economic integration of Roma into mainstream society, particularly during the accession process for candidate countries in post-Communist CSEE. Confronting the federalism dimensions of Roma integration can help explain the conundrum at the heart of the broader Roma inclusion movement:<sup>[2]</sup> Why does reality for Roma lag so far behind sweeping legal change? Superficially, the last 25 years have ushered in a golden period for Roma rights in CSEE. Despite the flurry of inclusion initiatives, the gaps between Roma and non-Roma in most areas remain; improvements have been modest, while the situation for many Roma has worsened (Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2015: 12–19).

Other efforts predate the EU’s fifth round of enlargement. For instance, in education, where some of the most paradigmatic battles over integration have been fought, the European Community adopted a resolution on schooling for Romani and Traveller children in 1989 (89/C 153/02).<sup>[3]</sup> Focusing here on the period of post-Communist accession enables a fuller exploration of federalism’s effects on CSEE countries, where most of Europe’s Romani populations reside. This region constitutes a liminal and marginalized

1. I thank Mathias Möschel, Lan Cao, Deepa Badrinarayana, Jamila Jefferson-Jones, David Noll, and two anonymous reviewers at *Critical Romani Studies* for their thoughtful comments. Thanks, too, to the copyeditors at *Critical Romani Studies* for their thorough work. This article benefited greatly from the “Critical Approaches to Romani Studies” Conference at Central European University and the Inaugural Junior Faculty Workshop at Chapman University Fowler School of Law. Above all, I am grateful to Márton Rövid and Iulius Rostas for their work on this journal and in the field of critical Romani studies.

2. During the accession process, Roma rights were usually phrased as “integration.” Later, the Roma rights moved from *integration* to the more sweeping *inclusion* (Sobotka and Vermeersch, 2012: 807).

3. The European Community was one of the “pillars” of the EU before its merger into the EU in 2009, through the Lisbon Treaty.

Other within Europe (Wolff, 1994: 3–9; Bjelić, 2005: 3–6; Todorova, 1997); hence, the efficacy of top-down policies depends on how the EU navigates its complicated relationship with Eastern Europe. The focus here on the EU sidesteps the roles played by the European Community and its prior incarnations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and civil society. This gloss on Roma integration is a narrowly focused top-down (rather than bottom-up) perspective that leaves grass-roots efforts and other institutions for subsequent discussion. As a trade-off, the focus on the EU during its eastern enlargement allows for an exploration of federalism's dynamics within the European "South" (or, more appropriately, the European "East") – while also facilitating comparisons with the United States ("U.S."), another federalist system that has struggled to rein in its South.

In law, federalism is understood to be the division of power "between a central authority and the component entities [...] so as to make each of them responsible for the exercise of their own powers" (Lenaerts, 1998: 748). Roma integration fits within this rubric: in post-Communist CSEE, the undertaking frequently was spurred by initiatives imposed by the top level of the federalist hierarchy, the supranational EU, upon constituent and prospective members. Yet the failure to frame Roma integration as an exercise in federalism means that scholars have lost an opportunity to connect with the rich body of literature on race and federalism. This literature is well-developed in the U.S., an older federalist system that has alternated between excluding and protecting minority groups. In the U.S., the evolution of minority rights has often tracked the balance of power between federal and state governments. Under the version of federalism which tips that balance toward states, racial minorities have fared badly (Charles and Fuentes-Rohwer, 2015); unsurprisingly, actions to protect minorities have often – though not always – emanated from the federal level.<sup>[4]</sup>

To help elucidate the virtues and trappings of EU federalism, this article draws comparisons to the actions of the U.S. federal government during the Civil Rights Movement. Three lessons flow from the comparison. First, because of the EU's federalist architecture, EU Roma integration mandates often have been counterproductive, fueling populist antipathy at the member-state level. Second, top-down EU policies must be paired with bottom-up grass-roots efforts. Social movements are usually spurred at the grass-roots level and elicit government response only after pressure (Bell, 1980; Dudziak, 2000). Laws and policies may therefore be necessary, but they are hardly sufficient. Third, this article considers whether federalism may be an antidote to its very own problems. Specifically, if power and autonomy are pushed down to the local level, through initiatives such as set-asides for minority businesses and majority-minority (or self-governing) districts, then localities might serve as "sanctuaries" from hostility in national government or the larger society (Gerken, 2009; Issacharoff & Karlan, 2003). Here recent examples from CSEE are as mixed as their transatlantic predecessors. Federalism is merely a design of governance, but it is not outcome-determinative; pushing federalism "all the way down" (Gerken, 2009) can result in minority integration just as likely as minority exclusion.

In comparing Roma rights to American experiences with federalism, particularly where federalism intersects with Civil Rights, this article follows a broader trend. Over the last decade, scholars have

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4. Before the Civil War, however, African-Americans looked to state legislatures and courts in the North, rather than the federal government, for advocacy (Kennedy, 1998: 83).

drawn parallels between Roma rights and Civil Rights with greater frequency – and looked to American scholarship in doing so.<sup>[5]</sup> For instance, influenced by critical race theory, scholars have argued that Roma and African-Americans share a legacy of structural discrimination (Rövid and Kóczé, 2012; Matache and Oehlke, 2017), that anti-Roma racism inheres in EU law (Möschel, 2014), and that Roma integration was the product of interest convergence between the Roma and political elites (Eliason, 2016). Yet these disparate strands have not coalesced into a unifying framework on Roma integration from the field of law or legal studies.

Romani studies is therefore at a curious juncture. As several conferences at the Central European University have illustrated, the field is developing its critical approach and depth (Roma Access Programs, 2017; Central European University, 2015). Along with that evolution, borrowings from Civil Rights have become more frequent. Yet we must still ensure that the borrowings are precise – and useful. This article makes the case for comparing Roma integration and Civil Rights. Its focus on governmental actors does not suggest that laws and policies are determinative for the success of either movement; however, government involvement is often necessary, especially in enforcing minority protections (Cunningham, 2013 184–214).

Of course, Roma integration cannot be analyzed solely through the lens of Civil Rights.<sup>[6]</sup> Although both the EU and the U.S. sit at the top of federal or quasi-federal hierarchies, they are bound by different sets of competences, composed of members with different types of sovereignties, and governed by entities wielding different enforcement mechanisms. Parallels must therefore be drawn cautiously.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, it makes the case for the appropriateness of the Roma integration–Civil Rights comparison. Second, it examines the federalism dimensions of Roma integration. Third, it compares the role of federalism in Roma integration and Civil Rights. The article finishes by extrapolating some general lessons from the comparison.

## 1. Utility of Comparing Roma Integration and Civil Rights

This section lays the groundwork for comparing Roma integration and Civil Rights as an exploration of how top-down expansion of minority rights succeeds (even if short-lived) or fails (more often than not) in the face of local resistance. It begins with an analysis of the similarities between the comparators, as well as their divergences. To interrogate the comparison's fundamental assumptions, this section considers alternate comparators in the manner of legal comparativists like Hirsch (2014) and Choudhry (1999).

This section then briefly engages with the motivations behind the EU's Roma integration policies. Derrick Bell's interest convergence theory, which has influenced decades of Civil Rights scholarship, provides a

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5. Precursors of this trend include, of course, Ian Hancock (1998; 2000).

6. American legal scholars who have written on the Roma frequently compare *Brown* and the 2007 European Court of Human Rights case *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* (Greenberg, 2010; Minow, 2013). Of course, this court is a Council of Europe institution, not an EU institution.

useful model here. In 1980, Bell posited that it was a convergence of interests among whites and blacks (and between the federal government and civil rights groups) that enabled school desegregation. Bell's theory has been vindicated by historians such as Mary Dudziak (2000) and Thomas Borstelmann (2001) who documented the connections between Civil Rights and the Cold War. A full probe of interest convergence in Roma integration is beyond the scope of this article, which focuses instead on the EU's *method* of integration. Yet one cannot fully comprehend the method of integration without knowing the motivations for integration. Because interest convergence tracks government motivations, it is an apt framework for exploring top-down trends animating the EU and the U.S.

## A. General Themes, Similarities, and Differences

Several common trends justify the comparison of Roma integration and Civil Rights. First, Roma integration and Civil Rights occurred during periods that either saw the downfall or dealt with the aftermath of seemingly immovable ideologies – Jim Crow and Communism. These two ideologies dominated the American South and CSEE, where African-Americans and the European Roma often had been most numerous. Vis-à-vis the U.S. and Europe, these two geographic areas also comprised an ideological and cultural “South,” marred by legacies of war, division, and interethnic or interracial problems.

Second, the policies which expanded rights for African-Americans and the Roma were often spearheaded from the top of the federalist hierarchy – that is, the U.S. federal government and the supranational EU.<sup>[7]</sup> Thus, the heady momentum of integration can be understood as part of a larger endeavor in the legal and cultural construction of the U.S. and Europe. This endeavor framed the American “South” and European “East” as points of contradistinction from the egalitarian and democratic ideals that the U.S. and Europe were pursuing.

Third, Roma integration and Civil Rights fit within the schema of center-periphery relations, which implicates the tropes of hegemony, resentment, and hypocrisy. For majority populations in the American South and CSEE, the pluralism espoused in minority rights was associated with incursions of outside, elitist authority in the U.S. federal government and the EU. These tensions render populism inevitable.

Yet this is a diachronic comparison. While both Roma integration and Civil Rights were counter-majoritarian, temporal differences and historical contexts distinguish the two. The march toward Civil

7. E.g., the Voting Rights Act of 1965, codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 1973 et seq.; Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, codified at 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq. (prohibiting race, color, and national origin discrimination in programs receiving federal financial assistance); Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, codified at 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq. (prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, or religion); Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act), codified at 42 U.S.C. § 3601 et seq.; *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964) (legislative districts must be equally apportioned by population); *Brown v. Topeka Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); *Sweatt v. Painter*, 399 U.S. 629 (1950) (separate law school inadequate); *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 399 U.S. 637 (1950) (striking the separation of a black student admitted to a white graduate school); *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, 392 U.S. 409 (1968) (housing discrimination by private providers banned under existing law); *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967) (striking down state law prohibiting interracial marriage). For EU policies, see section II *infra*.

Rights began in the 1940s (if not earlier), when segregation was socially acceptable and endorsed by law.<sup>[8]</sup> Segregation was headed for a collision with foreign policy imperatives and decolonization around the world (Dudziak, 2000; Borstelmann, 2001). The Roma integration initiatives of the EU's eastern enlargement, by contrast, date to the 1990s. In the 50 years that elapsed between Civil Rights and Roma integration, international discourse on race relations has coalesced around a baseline that segregation and discrimination are wrong.

Do these differences between Civil Rights and Roma inclusion render their comparison too "thin" and "ahistorical" (Hirschl, 2014: 152)? To determine this, consider some of the alternatives which do not present the same problems – but which might be ruled out for other reasons.

The EU is a unique polity that hovers between federation and confederation, as well as between intergovernmental and supranational, models (Schütze, 2009: 2–8; Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 2–3). For all the similarities between the U.S. and EU brands of federalism, any comparator for Roma integration would have raised problems because the EU has no precise analog. For instance, racial integration or equality policies in European countries organized as either federations or confederations might provide a counterpoint to EU-driven Roma inclusion by keeping the comparison within Europe. However, EU governance defies precise comparison because, again, the polity is neither wholly a federation nor a confederation.

Because the EU is inimitable, an easy comparison can be found in political conditions (e.g., democracy and rule of law) or expansions in rights (e.g., same-sex rights) mandated by the EU, particularly through the conditionality process for Eastern European accession candidates (Kochenov, 2007a: 481–92; 2007b: 87; 2008: 28) which are now member states. Even comparing Roma inclusion to how CSEE states expanded rights for other ethnic minorities, especially minorities who can look to kin-states for advocacy, could have taught profound lessons on how the Roma are protected (or not) (Wiener & Schwellnus, 2004: 32). What all of these alternate comparators offer, then, is the ability to keep the comparison within the EU.

What those comparators lose, however, is the gravitas of race. Racial and ethnic conflict is a particularly thorny issue for Europe, where the twentieth century began with empire and colonization and ended with violent secession to create "ethnically pure" states. For another society to evoke a legacy this entangled with racial strife, the U.S. is a natural choice. America was built upon slaves who were forcefully brought from Africa and excluded from liberties protected by the Constitution.<sup>[9]</sup> Post-Civil War Reconstruction failed to achieve equality for emancipated slaves (Foner, 1988), who, in the hundred years after emancipation, endured legalized segregation and disenfranchisement (Berman, 2015), extrajudicial killings (Cunningham, 2013), and mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010). These legacies shaped the struggle for equality during the Civil Rights Movement.

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8. Some would trace the roots of Civil Rights to even earlier developments, such as the NAACP's anti-lynching efforts (Francis, 2014).

9. The constitutional order also divides and excludes other groups, including Native Americans. As an example of Tribal Critical Race Theory analysis of this dynamic, see Brayboy (2005: 431–434).

A marked difference, of course, is that Civil Rights and Roma rights occurred at very different time periods. In this respect, other contemporary struggles for minority inclusion might be more appropriate benchmarks. However, the comparator must be geographically large enough to allow the physical distance between center and periphery to translate meaningfully into cultural distance. In Europe, this takes the form of a longstanding cultural and political division that aligns with the geographic assignments of East and West; in America during Civil Rights, between North and South. The criterion of geographic scale rules out smaller countries with vibrant minority rights movements.

## B. Interest Convergence

As one of the most iconic products of Critical Race Theory, interest convergence has progressed from a provocative axiom to well-documented fact. Interest convergence is simple and accessible, but it is also a clear-eyed approach that tends to trample on dearly held myths. It challenges schoolbook accounts of Civil Rights by contending that the majority conveys rights to minorities only where doing so furthers the majority's interests (Dudziak, 1998: 62–63).

Applied to the European context, interest convergence upends the conventional version of Roma integration, a version which upholds the effort as part of a march toward democratic principles and fundamental human rights. In fact, the historical setting of conditionality belies this gloss. During the mid-1990s, the EU's preparations for enlargement into CSEE coincided with the violent breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The ensuing wars in Europe's "backyard" and the outward flow of refugees raised both the profile and stakes of ethnic conflict. Consequently, the EU called upon the post-Communist accession candidates – all of which had sizeable minority populations – to improve their minority policies.

In the early and mid-1990s, Roma were not subjects of concern for the EU, which was preoccupied with violent interethnic conflicts that had the potential to overrun borders or catalyze secession (Vermeersch, 2006: 196). Anti-Roma discrimination simply did not fit that model. As late as 1998, the European Commission's accession monitoring reports did not devote much space to the Roma issue.<sup>[10]</sup> By 1999, however, the Commission had pivoted to address major influxes of Roma refugees into Western Europe and Canada. The treatment of Roma by both CSEE governments and majority populations had escalated to unbearable levels. Incidents such as the burning of Roma homes by vigilantes in Romania in 1993 were becoming more common, often implicating the state (Merlino, 2006). As persecution intensified in the late 1990s, the Roma began fleeing for Western Europe and North America (Vermeersch, 2006: 138–140; Beaudoin, 2015).

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10. This is not to say that the plight of Roma was wholly ignored. See, e.g., European Commission, *Hungary: Accession Partnership* (1997); European Commission, *Monitoring Report on Slovakia's Progress toward Accession* (1998). Ironically, in Slovakia's monitoring report, the Commission even noted that ill treatment of Roma substantiated in Slovakia the decisions of British authorities to grant refugee status to Slovakian Roma applicants.

Alarm over Roma refugees spilled over to the accession process. One by one, the Commission's monitoring reports began to take note of the exodus.<sup>[11]</sup> As Western Europe and Canada tightened immigration policies, the CSEE candidate countries were enlisted to stem the tide by integrating their Roma populations, to address the root causes of their westward flight (Cooper, 2001/2002: 73; Wiener and Schwellnus, 2004: 32).

Thus, a momentary confluence of interests brought otherwise indifferent elites to the Roma's side. For the EU, it was the fear that if candidate countries were admitted without improving the lives of their most vulnerable minorities, then a vast underclass would enjoy free movement across Europe. For CSEE governments, the motivation to integrate their Roma lay in joining the EU. More often than not, these interests were aligned only briefly, during accession negotiations; as soon as the candidates became members, the force of conditionality dissipated.

Application of the interest convergence theory to Roma integration is hardly airtight; for this theory raises other questions and counterarguments. One corollary of interest convergence theory is that Roma integration suffers from charges of hypocrisy. The high-minded language of political conditionality renders this inevitable. Slovakia, for example, deflected criticism over anti-Roma discrimination by pointing out that the EU members themselves had not all ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities ("FCNM"), which had been imposed as a condition to EU membership (Vermeersch, 2006: 199). Indeed, the policies of Western Europe signaled to candidate countries that the EU could be flexible about its political conditions.<sup>[12]</sup> This weakened the EU's legitimacy in promulgating Roma integration, exacerbating problems inherent in the Union's federalist architecture.

Another implication of interest convergence is the power of civil society in driving minority rights. After all, there must be some group for political elites to converge *with*. With both Civil Rights and Roma integration, civil society often came to embody the priorities of minority populations, regardless of whether it truly reflected local preferences (Brown-Nagin, 2011: 7–10; McGary, 2010: 122–127).

Further, interest convergence cannot fully encapsulate the EU's motivations or fully explain its failures. Throughout the course of post-Communist *European* integration, the EU has attempted to inculcate "European" values of democracy and fundamental rights. Minority protections were not solely a utilitarian calculus to keep migrants at bay; they espoused broader aspirations built into conditionality, aspirations of an idealized Europe (Sasse, 2008; Sassatelli, 2009). For all its ethereal aspirations, conditionality did score victories. As a result of the accession process, some countries managed to incorporate aspects of EU political conditions into national law and culture (Sedelmeier, 2008; Kelley, 2004).

11. See, e.g., European Commission, *supra* note 130, at 17 (citing the rejection by Finland of Roma migrants from Slovakia); *supra* note 131, at 21 ("The outflow of Slovaks of Roma origin to a number of EU countries has continued and outflows to the Czech Republic have equally been detected. This has resulted in the imposition of visa requirements in certain cases. . .").

12. One of the more recent examples is France's deportation of Roma "back" to Romania and Bulgaria between 2009 and 2012 (European Commission, 2010).

Finally, conditionality lingers. Despite joining in the sixth and seventh rounds, for instance, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania have yet to formally enter the Schengen zone (Stone, 2017). In some respects, the pressures of conditionality – and therefore the convergences of interest – have not yet dissipated.

Yet the messy conclusions of interest convergence are not necessarily a failing. They suggest instead that interest convergence must be paired with other explanations for a complete and nuanced explanation of Roma integration.

## 2. Roma Integration as Federalism

There is a rich body of literature examining the EU's parallels to American federalism (Siedentop, 2001; McKay, 2001; Nicolaidis and Howse, 2001; Tushnet, 1990; Cappelletti, 1986; Backer, 2001; Bermann, 1994). In both the U.S. and EU, power is divided between central and constituent authorities. Of course, the constituents of the two comparators are vastly different: the EU is comprised not of states but nations with full-fledged sovereignty. Consigning that sovereignty to a supranational body is a proposition that nations can find difficult to accept.<sup>[13]</sup> At various times even in the last two decades, the national impulse to retain sovereignty has stymied European integration, from the drafting of a European constitution to threats to break with the Union (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 21–24; European Commission, 2017). Despite the seeming incongruence of federalism and sovereignty, the federalism analogy appears to hold when the EU is examined with a functional lens (Isiksel, 2016).

To frame the EU as a federalist enterprise, this section examines Roma integration during a span of 12 years in CSEE, from approximately 1992 to 2004, when EU integration deepened the Union's competences while expanding its membership. During this time, the EU pursued Roma integration, particularly through the accession process for CSEE states. The coincidence of EU integration and Roma integration meant that the Roma rights movement was indelibly associated with the EU for majority populations in CSEE; thus, Roma integration became a problem for the supranational body, the EU, rather than the nations themselves, to resolve.

### 2.1 The Deepening of EU Power

The question of whether the EU is a federation has inspired endless debate (Schütze, 2009). Despite protestation to the contrary, the federalism of the EU is not *sui generis*, and comparisons to other federalist paradigms can be instructive (Kochenov, 2017: xxvii). For all its vacillation between federation and confederation, as well as intergovernmental and supranational, models, the Union has steadily centralized power at the top of the federalist hierarchy (Weiler, 1991). Thus, as integration took the European Coal

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13. Strikingly, even as Germany's Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer argued in 2000 for a "European federation" with division of sovereignties to facilitate the EU's enlargement and integration, he was careful to avoid the word "federalism" (Fischer, 2000).

and Steel Community (“ECSC”)<sup>[14]</sup> into the European Community<sup>[15]</sup> and then into the EU,<sup>[16]</sup> the overall trajectory was that the authority of the polity deepened as its membership broadened. During these decades, the polity was coming into its own as a constitutional order featuring judicial review. In several landmark decisions, the highest court, the European Court of Justice (“CJEU”), vindicated the federalist paradigm by proclaiming the supremacy and direct effect of European law over member states (*Van Gend en Loos*, 1963; *Costa v. ENEL*, 1964).

On the eve of the execution of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, scholars still were pondering whether the European Community – what was to become the European Union – was in fact a federation. The Union seemed to foster no cultural identity, body politic, or strong central administration (Mackenzie-Stuart, 1990: viii–ix). At most, it was an “incipient” federalism, as compared with America’s “mature” federalism (Tushnet, 1990: 139–142). That distinction lost much of its force with the execution of the Maastricht Treaty, which created the Treaty on the European Union (“TEU”). Among its many innovations, the TEU established the EU, expanded the competences of the supranational body, enshrined the principle of subsidiarity (which delineated the national and supranational spheres of authority), and introduced the notion of European citizenship (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 13–24).

Over the next 12 years, the EU would repeatedly attempt to draft a constitution through treaties and intergovernmental conferences, including the Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), and Nice (2001) treaties and the Laeken Declaration (2004). Only some of these efforts were successful, but ultimately the Constitutional Treaty produced by the Laeken Declaration would fail.<sup>[17]</sup> Nonetheless, enough law had amassed over the decades – as treaties, directives, regulations, case law, and soft law – to form a robust set of guiding principles for the EU. Commonly known as the *acquis communautaire* (the “*acquis*”), these principles survived the failed attempt to draft and ratify a written constitution (Kochenov, 2007: 43; Delcourt, 2001).

In functional terms, the absence of a formal constitution matters little because the EU wields constitutional mechanisms to augment its governing capacity. The supranational body can convince member states to entrust it with the power to adopt, monitor, and enforce policies, often at the expense of members’ sovereignty (Isiksel, 2016: 8). Members must also submit to the EU’s system of judicial review, and the CJEU has shown a willingness to exploit ambiguities in the treaties and invent new principles to expand the Union’s authority. Through all of these mechanisms, the EU has the capacity to reconfigure the constitutional systems of its member states.

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14. The ECSC was created by the Paris Treaty in 1951.

15. The EC was created by the Merger Treaty in 1965. It incorporated the ECSC and two other bodies—the European Atomic Energy Community (“EURATOM”) and the European Economic Community (“EEC”).

16. The EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. It incorporated the EC and two other “pillars” – Justice and Home Affairs (“JHA”) and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In 2007, the Lisbon Treaty abolished the three-pillar structure.

17. The ratification effort was derailed by Dutch and French rejection.

Yet the EU is a very different type of federation than the U.S. The EU is ultimately an economic union; its antecedents such as the ECSC were economic blocs designed to facilitate trade and organized around the principle that economic interdependence would spur political interdependence – and, therefore, prevent another war. As testament to the primacy of the economic union, the CJEU often has exhibited greater vigor in upholding the free movement of goods, services, persons, and capital under EU law (which the Court calls *fundamental freedoms*) than in defending the “basic human interests enshrined in most domestic constitutions, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights” (which the Court calls *fundamental rights*) (*Ibid.*: 96). This does not mean that the EU completely avoids human rights – to the contrary, the EU has enacted rights protections into law,<sup>[18]</sup> and the CJEU has sometimes shown creativity in vindicating EU competence in this area. However, the centrality of cross-border economic activity within the EU legal order means that forays into human, civil, and minority rights are all the more controversial.

## 2.2 The Enlargement of EU Membership

As it reconfigured its constitutional order while sharpening its delineations of power in the 1990s and early 2000s, the EU also expanded eastward, into post-Communist CSEE (European Commission, 2013; Emmert and Petrović, 2014: 1373–1385). In 2004, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the EU, along with several other countries. Formal accession into the Union was preceded by a decade of monitoring by the European Commission (the “Commission”) to ensure compliance with a set of conditions called the “Copenhagen criteria” that the EU had imposed upon candidate countries (European Union, 1993). This process of monitoring, censure, and negotiation was commonly known as “conditionality.”

The Copenhagen criteria included a set of political conditions that required the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and *respect for and protection of minorities*” (*Ibid.*: 13). These conditions became the fulcrum of Roma integration. For all its transformative potential, political conditionality – and, therefore, Roma integration – suffered from two major deficiencies. First, the mandate to protect minorities was as vague as it was aspirational, and the Commission struggled to translate the mandate into precise, measurable objectives. Second, apart from the basic challenges to implementation, the very design of the EU, whose enforcement structure was intended to incentivize economic cooperation, hampered any ability to penalize the infringement of minority protections.

Compared against the EU’s extensive guidance on economic conditions, the ambiguity of political conditionality is glaring (Kochenov, 2007: 91). For Roma integration in particular, the Commission’s monitoring reports sent incoherent and inconsistent messages to all candidate countries. Year after year, these reports excoriated candidates for failing to remedy the deplorable treatment of Roma (Sasse, 2008: 24). Here Roma integration – or, more accurately, its shortcomings – was featured prominently.<sup>[19]</sup>

18. Examples include the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Race Equality Directive.

19. The oft-cited example is Slovakia, which the Commission had assessed as failing in the Copenhagen criteria’s political conditions in 1997. The Roma situation was even cited as a priority in the 1999 Accession Partnership between Slovakia and the EU. The national government instituted some cosmetic changes, all beset by implementation problems, but ultimately Slovakia was admitted into the EU in step with the other candidates.

Simultaneously, however, the reports also strained to commend the candidates' progress (Vermeersch, 2006: 197).

Worse yet, existing EU members had themselves not met some of the minority protections that the Union was demanding of CSEE candidates (*Ibid.*: 198–199). For instance, a condition of EU membership was ratification of the FCNM. The framework convention set high-level goals for achieving equality for national minorities in law, cultural expression, language rights, and education while also fostering intercultural communication between minority and majority groups.<sup>[20]</sup> Embarrassingly, it had not been ratified by all Western European countries (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 362).

Not only did this gap signal that the EU was half-hearted about minority protections, it also entrenched the resistance of national leaders who were playing to xenophobia and Euroscepticism to galvanize their electorates. The most glaring evidence of conditionality's hollowness was the timely admission of all CSEE candidates into the Union.<sup>[21]</sup>

### 3. Roma Integration and Civil Rights Compared

The policies which expanded rights for African-Americans and Roma were often spearheaded from the top of the federalist hierarchy – that is, U.S. federal government and the supranational EU. The Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act were paradigmatic federal civil rights legislations, while the Justice Department frequently filed *amicus* briefs on the side of plaintiffs in desegregation cases. Federal courts, too, played a prominent role, especially in desegregating public institutions and spaces. Similarly, the EU was an early mover in legal protections for the Roma by conditioning the admission of CSEE candidate countries upon the integration of their Roma populations.

Yet while federal and quasi-federal supremacy fostered Civil Rights and Roma rights, just as often the federalist architecture inhibited progress. For much of American and European history, the powers reserved for the central government were weak; even when the central government committed itself to minority rights, implementation and enforcement were inconsistent. Tempting as it may be to read Civil Rights as a blueprint for Roma integration, both projects are incomplete – each in its own way. Civil Rights is a story of progress and retrenchment, while EU-driven Roma integration resembles a parable of aggressive mandates and empty promises.

This section provides a simple framework for comparing how the federalisms of the EU and U.S. affected the implementation of Roma integration and Civil Rights. Specifically, it compares the competences as

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20. The FCNM covers all national minorities, not just the Roma. Notably, “national minorities” is not defined in the FCNM. See *FCNM Factsheet*, *supra* note 152. Article 3(2) provides that national minorities “may exercise the rights and enjoy the freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present framework Convention individually as well as in community with others.” In its interpretation of Article 3(2), however, the COE restricts this “collective dimension” to the right to use of a minority language (Council of Europe, 1995: para. 31).

21. The literature is not uniformly downbeat on conditionality. For glimmers of hope, see Sedelmeier (2008) and Kelley (2004).

well as the remedies and enforcement record (and deficits) of each legal system. To furnish a concrete example, this section concludes with school desegregation, which not only stands as an iconic symbol for integration but has also amassed a substantial body of case law and scholarly analysis.

### 3.1 Competences

Prior to the Civil Rights era and the fifth round of EU enlargement, minority rights had had a tenuous lineage in the U.S. and EU. In the U.S., the federal government had seldom treaded upon the authority of states, where Jim Crow laws often reinforced segregation and racial hierarchies.<sup>[22]</sup> In fact, as one of the most notorious examples of the deference of federal judicial review, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the racial segregation of public spaces under the “separate but equal” fallacy (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896; Klarman, 2008: 256–257). As for the EU, minority protection was seldom a priority in the economically minded Union. The foundational treaties mentioned neither minority rights nor the less controversial principle of equality (Toggenburg, 2000). Yet during respective Civil Rights and post-Communist enlargement, the U.S. and EU would begin a transformative process to affix equality principles firmly at the center of their competences.

Change came slowly in the U.S. Despite generations of action at the grass-roots level (Lau, 2004), the federal government only assumed a more active role in curtailing discrimination during the Cold War (Dudziak, 2000; Borstelmann, 2001). Even when it took action, the federal government moved at an agonizing pace, only responding when violence or racial conflict had shocked the national (or white) conscience (Klarman, 2008: 261). For instance, it took a decade for the Voting Rights Act and two Civil Rights acts to follow on the heels of *Brown*. Nonetheless, although federal hesitancy was rooted in deference to state sovereignty, federal victories in the Civil War and the Reconstruction Amendments – where Southern states had lost the sovereignty-based argument in favor of slavery – should have obviated that concern (Charles and Fuentes-Rohwer, 2015: 133–135). Indeed, as Congress passed Civil Rights laws to redress discrimination at the state level, the Supreme Court upheld an expansive view of federal power by virtue of the Reconstruction Amendments.<sup>[23]</sup> More recently, the Court has backpedaled on the scope of Congressional authority;<sup>[24]</sup> yet the ability of the federal government to remedy discrimination has come to be viewed as within the core of its authority (Charles and Fuentes-Rohwer, 2015).

Minority rights in the EU charted an altogether different but similarly uneven path. Prior to the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), EU primary law did not offer a single treaty provision on the protection of minorities

22. Of course, there were prominent exceptions to the contrary. The Reconstruction Amendments and the use of federal troops to protect African-Americans in the U.S. and economic prospects of Roma during Communism (though this does not implicate EU federalism) stand out as bright spots in otherwise bleak histories (Hall, 1984; Marushakova and Popov, 2015: 21).

23. See, e.g., *City of Rome v. United States*, 446 U.S. 156, 173 (1980); *Fitzpatrick v. Bitzer*, 427 U.S. 445, 456 (1976); *Heart of Atlanta v. U.S.*, 379 U.S. 241 (1964). The glaring precedents to the contrary, which today are recognized as anomalous, are *The Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883), and *The Slaughter-House Cases*, 83 U.S. (16 Wall.) 36 (1872).

24. See, e.g., *United States v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549 (1995); *Printz v. United States*, 521 U.S. 898 (1997); *United States v. Morrison*, 529 U.S. 598, 613 (2000); *Shelby County, Ala. v. Holder*, 133 S.Ct. 2612 (2013).

(Toggenburg, 2000). To be sure, the half of minority rights lineage that was rooted in the human rights principle of nondiscrimination was better developed within the EU's constitutional framework (*Stauder v. City of Ulm*, 1969). Starting in the mid-1990s, a concatenation of further developments deepened and extended EU law on equality. The Amsterdam Treaty amended the TEU to reflect that the Union was founded on respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Article 6); that respect for these principles was a condition for EU membership under Article 49 TEU; and that if the European Council found a "serious and persistent breach" by a member of Article 6 principles, it could suspend some of the member's rights under the Treaty (Article 7). After the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Race Equality Directive also joined this constellation (de Búrca, 2004).

Admittedly, minority rights cannot be fully subsumed within fundamental human rights (Hillion, 2004: 719). Negative rights such as freedom from discrimination are well established in both U.S. and EU constitutional law; however, affirmative rights, of the kind and magnitude needed to truly incorporate historically enslaved and marginalized groups into society, rest upon shakier foundations. Here, the minority rights jurisprudences of the U.S. and EU diverge. American institutions experimented for several decades with various forms of positive rights programs. This includes the use of affirmative action in employment and university admissions decisions, set-asides for minority businesses in government contracting, and majority-minority districts and cumulative voting in elections. Over time, many of these practices have been overturned in challenges under a plethora of constitutional arguments,<sup>[25]</sup> but when they stood, they managed to combat structural inequities in ways that anti-discrimination measures could not (Guinier, 1991; Gerken, 2009). By contrast, these measures could not be foisted upon member states by the EU due to a lack of competence (Wiener and Schwellnus, 2004: 11–15; Hillion, 2004: 726).

However, during the accession process, the EU was free to demand a more muscular form of Roma integration than what it was entitled to require of its members. Minority protection under the Copenhagen criteria was far broader than the scope of the *acquis* (Kochenov, 2007: 82). This discrepancy has inflamed the perception of duplicity on the part of the EU; while the Union proscribed anti-Roma discrimination for CSEE candidates, its members were engaging in the very same behavior without sanction (*Common Market Law Review*, 2012).

### 3.2 Remedies and Enforcement

It is axiomatic that EU governance does not fit neatly within American preconceptions about separation of power among the legislative, executive, judicial, and administrative branches (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 31). For instance, the Commission, which is charged with applying EU law (TEU Article 17(1)), retains and exercises legislative, executive, and judicial powers (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 37–39). Yet the Commission has no access to a standing army, so it cannot enforce a judicial remedy

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25. See, e.g., *City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 (1989) (minority set-aside program); *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630 (1993) (majority-minority districts); *Fisher v. Univ. of Texas*, 133 S.Ct. 2411 (2013) (affirmative action); *Shelby County*, 133 S.Ct. (preclearance under the Voting Rights Act).

for desegregation the way American Presidents did or threatened to, with a display of military might. Due to both the Commission's hybridity and its limitations, analogies between the Commission and U.S. federal executive branch are imprecise.

For our purposes, however, a better starting point might be judicial remedies devised for persistent segregation in one realm – say, public schools. After all, judicial review is central to delineating the boundaries of state and constituent power under federalism. In Judge Lenaerts' formulation, federalism is present "whenever a divided sovereign is guaranteed by a national or supranational constitution and umpired by the supreme court of the common legal order" (1998: 263). From this perspective, what emerges from American federal courts is a trajectory of progression on desegregation remedies since *Brown* that peaked in 1973 and then steadily backpedaled. By contrast, what emerges from the EU is a nascent problem that may never develop into a body of case law precisely because other institutions can take the judiciary's place in devising remedies.

The celebrated decision in *Brown* that had overruled the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy* was followed the next year by a decision calling for desegregation "with all deliberate speed" (*Brown II*, 1955). Some of the most iconic images from the Civil Rights era, in fact, came from President Eisenhower's forcible integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, after *Brown II* (Lewis, 1957). Yet the pace of school desegregation remained glacial; in 1968, the Supreme Court admonished school systems to immediately eliminate traces of segregation "root and branch" (*Green v. New Kent County School Board*). In the way of remedies, the Court authorized cross-district bussing in 1971, along with the use of quotas and reassignment of teachers (*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*). Two years later, the Court extended its school integration jurisprudence to the American West (i.e., beyond the South and border states) and to Hispanic as well as African-American students (*Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 1973). The following year, however, the Court struck down a multi-district school desegregation program in Detroit, which touched off years of retrenchment in the federal courts (*Milliken v. Bradley*, 1974). Today, American schools have reverted to the same levels of racial segregation as during the era of *Brown*.

EU courts, by contrast, have not taken up the issue of school desegregation. While the European Court of Human Rights – which is *not* an EU institution – has found several CSEE states to have discriminated against Roma schoolchildren (*D.H and Others v. Czech Republic*, 2007; *Sampanis v. Greece*, 2008; *Orsus v. Croatia*, 2010), this issue has not percolated up to the CJEU. This may be in part because, from a functional perspective, other EU institutions (e.g., the European Council, European Parliament, European Commission, and Fundamental Rights Agency) have formulated policies and recommendations to integrate Roma into schools (Danka and Rostas, 2012: 72–82). Yet many of these initiatives do not have any teeth.

One promising development is the Commission's recent decision to pursue infringement proceedings under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union against three CSEE states for perpetuating segregated education. The infringement procedure consists of four phases: (1) initial dialogue between the Commission and the member, (2) notification by Commission formally alleging an infringement, (3) delivery by the Commission of a reasoned opinion of infringement, and (4) referral of the matter to the CJEU (Craig & de Búrca, 2011: 413). Appearance before the CJEU is reserved as the last step. While these proceedings may lead to CJEU jurisprudence on anti-Roma discrimination in education, this is not likely to happen. By design, the Commission's enforcement authority under

Article 258 TFEU encourages “friendly settlements” with members accused to have violated EU law (Andersen, 2012: 18). Prior to CJEU referral, there are several opportunities for the state to resolve the matter with the Commission, as well as for the Commission to drop the proceeding. Indeed, the vast majority of cases are concluded with friendly settlement prior to the last phase (Andersen, 2012: 18). In essence, the charge of the Commission under the EU Treaties is to promote the “general interest” of the Union (TFEU Article 17(a)), a charge that is “inherently political” and may steer the Commission toward selective enforcement or premature settlement during infringement proceedings (Andersen, 2012: 18). Thus, when the Commission finally brought infringement proceedings against members for failing to integrate Romani minorities, skeptics contended it was predictable that the Commission selected the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. These are three CSEE states that do not carry the political clout of, say, France. In fact, the ultimate result of these proceedings may well be settlement before the CJEU has the opportunity to weigh in and impose monetary penalties.<sup>[26]</sup>

Of course, pre-litigation posturing and negotiation also unfolds behind the scenes in the U.S. For instance, in 1963, after James Meredith secured an injunction compelling the University of Mississippi to enroll him, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett orchestrated state-level legislation and executive decrees preventing Meredith’s enrollment (*Meredith v. Fair*, 1962; *U.S. v. Barnett*, 1964). President John F. Kennedy and Governor Barnett hurtled toward confrontation, ultimately with U.S. Marshals entering the university campus in Army trucks. Before the clash, however, a series of placatory conversations took place between Barnett and U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy (Conversation of Attorney General and Governor Ross Barnett, 1962).

Nonetheless, the fact remains that the U.S. federal government possesses the power to dispatch federal troops and also to federalize state troops. At various times in American history, this power has conveyed a minimum level of protection for African-Americans by preventing them from being killed by an unruly majority, but, on the whole, the federal government has seldom utilized it (Hall, 1984). Barebones as that protection seems, it can make all the difference (Klarman, 2005: 257). By contrast, the Commission is much feebler. Even at the height of its powers to demand concessions (i.e., during the accession process), the Commission railed against anti-Roma persecution but seemed incapable of much more.<sup>[27]</sup> After accession, the Commission only could resort to the politicized process of infringement proceedings, whose design was meant to accommodate the sovereignty of member states.

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26. See TEFU Article 260. In another sense, it can be said that the infringement proceedings against these three CSEE states are precisely the investigations that the Commission envisions: these infringements undermine the rule of law and implicate the failure to implement directives. See European Commission, *European Governance – A White Paper*, COM/2001/248; *Better Monitoring of the Application of Community Law*, COM/2002/725.

27. In the early monitoring reports on Romania, for instance, the Commission could only note, with a sense of helplessness, that Roma were direly exposed and their situations needed to be vastly improved (European Commission, 1999). The plight of Roma did not significantly improve even up to the point of Romania’s accession (European Commission, 2006: 11–12). Notably, this came on the heels of several well-publicized and particularly brutal episodes of killing and persecution (Merlino, 2006).

## 4. General Lessons

If a movement for equality and integration relies too heavily on laws, policies, and programs spearheaded from the top rung of the federalist hierarchy, government involvement may prove counterproductive. The federalist architecture will spur charges of hypocrisy and inflame populist resistance. These dynamics are especially volatile for the EU, whose enforcement powers are comparatively limited while the sovereignty of its constituent members is comparatively broad. Roma are aware of the predicament. Romani activists have shied away from being identified with EU integration measures, out of the fear that these measures delegitimize Roma integration (Vermeersch, 2006: 200).

However, two caveats can be extrapolated from the Civil Rights comparison. First, if civil society is strong, then it can act as a bulwark against minority rights retrenchment. It was a grass-roots push in the U.S., after all, that spurred Civil Rights legislation. Analyzing Civil Rights exclusively from the standpoints of legislation and litigation only feeds into the "great man" narrative of history, which views the movement as a product of visionary lawmakers and courageous lawyers (Brown-Nagin, 2004). Contrary to this top-down narrative, grass-roots participation was pivotal not only to the advocacy and local enforcement of desegregation cases, but also to the orchestration of reactionary violence that shocked the popular conscience into action (Issacharoff & Karlan, 2003: 37–38).

The obstacles to a similar coalescence of Romani civil society are formidable but not insurmountable. Fracturing of the Romani community due to weak ethnic identity, infighting, and poor leadership is compounded by throngs of NGOs claiming to represent Roma interests (McGary, 2010: 104). Hundreds of Roma rights NGOs are scattered across CSEE; many of them merely entrench a narrow group of elites who specialize in procuring EU grants (Rövid and Kóczé, 2012). While this challenge of authenticity for civil society is not unique (Brown-Nagin, 2004: 230), Roma are a transnational group; their advocacy groups must traverse national borders to concentrate political power while staying true to local concerns. The most effective coalition might be assembled from local and international organizations, paired with national and supranational governments (McGary, 2010: 165–170), but the proper balance of these constituencies will have to be tackled in future research.

The second foil to populism might reside in federalism itself. If the central government exhibits antipathy to minorities, they can rally at the state level for support; if states become hostile, then they can rally at the local level. Translated to Roma integration, this means that the solution to obstructionism at the national level may well be to empower Roma at the local level – to push federalism "all the way down," so to say (Gerken, 2009). This can take the form of self-governing Roma districts or majority-Roma schools that are held to high academic standards. As American experimentation shows, the political power of self-governing districts can translate into economic power if those districts adopt set-asides for Romani businesses (Issacharoff & Karlan, 2003: 47–48). Further, majority-Roma schools can neutralize the stigma that comes from being subsumed within hostile majority-majority schools (James, 2014: 451–452; Bell, 2003).

Of course, these measures are harder to coordinate among the plethora of sovereign EU members than within the U.S. Further, the rationale that federalism inspires local experimentation to serve

“laboratories of democracy” (*New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, 1932) misses the mark. At the local level in CSEE, innovation has taken the form of creative measures to circumvent integration mandates, such as establishing religious or neighborhood schools and separate buildings or classes for Roma pupils (European Roma Rights Centre, 2016b). Innovation also has taken the form of deliberate measures to integrate the Roma into municipal life (Goethe-Institut, 2017; Lyman, 2017). Thus, pushing federalism “all the way down” can make minority integration just as likely as minority exclusion.

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# ‘Neither bloody persecution nor well intended civilizing missions changed their nature or their number’: A Postcolonial Approach to Protestant ‘Zigeuner’ Missionary Efforts

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## Abstract

Christian missionaries played a major role in the process of Othering Sinti and Roma. This “Other” was – like the colonial subject – mainly viewed as primitive, uncivilized, superstitious, and heathen. From the early nineteenth century, Protestant missions were established in Germany to “civilize” and educate Sinti and Roma. This paper takes a critical stance on these Protestant missionary efforts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting the relevance of postcolonial studies for Romani studies. Firstly, I outline interconnections between stereotypes related to *Zigeuner* in the colonial metropole and “primitives” in the peripheral areas, which is then followed by an analysis of Protestant views on these two subordinate groups and the ways in which knowledge was transferred between Protestant missionaries across time and space. Finally, this analysis is followed by a methodological reflection on the benefits and limitations of postcolonial studies for critical Romani studies.

## Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Colonialism
- Colonized
- Mission
- Protestantism
- Post-colonialism

# Introduction

This article contributes to broader discussions about how to bring perspectives from postcolonial studies to bear on issues pertaining to minorities and their relation to the majority.<sup>[1]</sup> By viewing the relation between Protestant *Zigeuner*<sup>[2]</sup> missionaries and Sinti and Roma through the prism of postcolonial studies, we are able to perceive how spheres of contact are reciprocal, rather than focusing only on the influence of the majority on the minority.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Metropole and periphery can thus be seen as existing in a state of entanglement. In 1978, the literary critic Edward W. Said published *Orientalism*, which is regarded as the foundational study in a diverse research approach called postcolonial studies. Employing Foucauldian discourse analysis and his own notion of the interrelation between knowledge and power, Said describes how dominant cultures, such as Western colonizers, represent and construct subordinate cultures, and thereby manifest relative power positions. Said argues that the “Orient” was not solely imaginary but also became an integral part of European material civilization and culture, such as through the creation of specific institutions, vocabularies, and bureaucracies (Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2015: 97). He concludes that “Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1979: 3). In German research on antigypsyism, similar strategies can be observed when analyzing this phenomenon (End, 2016; Maciejewski, 1994; 1996). The literary scholar Klaus-Michael Bogdal has clearly demonstrated that from the period of the European Enlightenment onwards, the discursive representation of *Zigeuner* evidenced striking similarities to the construction of the colonial Other (Bogdal, 2014: 148–174). Furthermore, Yvonne Robel has already produced a methodological reflection on the benefits of postcolonial and critical whiteness studies for research on antigypsyism (Robel, 2015).

The novel approach of this article is its specific focus on Protestant missionaries, who participated in colonial encounters on the African continent or in the social and geographic peripheries of their home countries, where they also conducted *Zigeuner* missions.<sup>[5]</sup> By focusing on this group of agents,

1. The quote in the title is taken from a theological pocket dictionary from 1962. The German original entry on “Zigeuner” reads: “Weder blutige Verfolgung noch wohlgemeinte Gesittungsbestrebungen haben ihr Wesen verändern noch ihre Zahl vermindern können.” (N.a., Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Gegenwart, “Zigeuner”). I thank Dr. Frank Reuter, Ben Robbins, Nadine Blumer, and Elisabeth Luy for the constructive feedback on this paper.

2. The term “Zigeuner” is used here as a historical term that the majority of society used and still uses in German language to construct a group of Others and project stereotypes onto them. This constructed group does not align with the diverse groups of Sinti and Roma. The German term “Zigeuner” was chosen over the English term “gypsy” because of different connotations and implications in different regional contexts, as was discussed at the conference Critical Romani Studies.

3. The focus of this paper is on Protestant missionaries. There were also, of course, Catholic missionaries, in relation to which the research perspectives I present here could be enriching.

4. Yvonne Robel has already engaged in a similar reflection; her focus was not only on postcolonial studies but also critical whiteness studies. She conducted a general analysis of these research perspectives and their possible contributions to studies of antigypsyism, but she did not focus on specific groups of knowledge brokers and agents within colonial settings. See Robel, 2015.

5. In general, research on Protestantism and antigypsyism is very patchy and more empirical research needs to be conducted. See Meier, 2017.

striking similarities between the mechanism of Othering Sinti and Roma and colonial subjects become evident. This comparison also highlights what was distinct about the Protestant *Zigeuner* missions and the processes of Othering Sinti and Roma. Furthermore, this analysis reveals that these agents acted in a global discursive<sup>[6]</sup> and personal network, and were often familiar with missionary practices in the colonies, as well as in the peripheries of their home countries.

## 1. The Processes of Othering *Zigeuner* as *homines educandi*

One of the major points of relation between the stereotypes of *Zigeuner* and “Orientals” or African “primitives” is that these groups were regarded by majority society as culturally and intellectually backward. Through this discursive process of Othering, inferiority was ascribed to them and dominance was exerted over them, thereby legitimating “civilizing missions”. During the period of the Enlightenment, philosophers, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and other scholars broke with religiously grounded explanations for social phenomena and replaced pre-modern Christian *Zigeuner* stereotypes with scientific ones, which were, nevertheless, characterized by new and modern forms of antigypsyism (Wippermann, 2014: 120). In 1783 Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann wrote an influential study about “gypsies”. His work highlights intellectual points of connection between the stereotypes of the colonial or “Oriental” Other and *Zigeuner*: “*Zigeuner* are a people of the Orient and have an Oriental mindset. It is inherent to brutish people in general, and Orientals in particular, to cling to what they are accustomed” (Grellmann, 1783: 3).<sup>[7]</sup> Furthermore, Grellmann highlighted the unchanging nature and lack of development of this population: “A *Zigeuner* does not easily stop being whatever he is, according to their Oriental origin and the associated mindset” (Grellmann, 1783: 3).<sup>[8]</sup> Grellmann highlighted their dark skin, which clearly distinguished *Zigeuner* from other Europeans, and explained that experience had shown him that this color was the result of a certain kind of upbringing and lifestyle. He concluded that *Zigeuner* could be much less easily distinguished “if they were taken as a child in the first days of their lives from their unclean mothers and raised by much cleaner hands” (Grellmann, 1783: 31).<sup>[9]</sup> Grellmann propagated a sociographic understanding of the term *Zigeuner*. He discursively contrasts minorities with the majority by premodifying *Zigeuner*

6. Discourse is considered to be more than just written texts or oral speeches. It is viewed as a social practice that not only represents the world but also constitutes social realities, such as the exercise of power, domination, prejudice, and so on. On the other hand, discourse is also determined by social phenomena; as such, there is a bidirectional relationship and interdependence between discourse and society. Social identity, alterity, and Otherness, as well as stereotypes, can be regarded as dynamic, relational, and multilayered socio-cultural phenomena that emerge within social interaction rather than static and substantial social categories.

7. German original: “Die Zigeuner sind ein Volk des Orients, und haben eine orientalische Denkart. Rohen Menschen überhaupt, vorzüglich aber den Morgenländern ist es eigen, fest an dem zu hängen, wozu sie gewöhnt sind.”

8. German original: “[D]er Zigeuner hört, vermöge feines orientalischen Ursprungs und der damit verbundenen Denkart, nicht leicht auf zu sein, was er einmal ist.”

9. German original: “Wie viel weniger würde man Zigeuner erkennen, wenn er als Kind in den ersten Tagen seines Lebens, seiner unsauberer Mutter genommen und von reineren Händen erzogen würde.”

mothers as being “unclean”, suggesting that an upbringing by “much cleaner hands” – these belong to *pars pro toto* mothers from the majority or European societies in general – would lead to a less deviant lifestyle and change the outward appearance of *Zigeuner* children. Thus, Grellman described *Zigeuner* as *homines educandi* (Zimmermann, 1996), since he believed they could be assimilated into the majority were they to be educated in how to live in a way that was regarded as “proper”.

One year later, in 1784, the German poet and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder published *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* and made the following remark in his chapter on “Foreign Nations in Europe”:

I pass over the Armenians, whom I consider only as travellers in our quarter of the globe; but then I perceive a numerous, foreign, heathen, subterranean people, the gipsies, in almost all the countries of Europe. Whence came they? How did the seven or eight hundred thousand persons, at which they have been estimated by their latest historiographers,<sup>[10]</sup> come hither? A reprobate indian [sic] caste, removed by birth from everything they esteem to be divine, honourable, and civil, and still remaining true to this degrading destination after the lapse of ages, for what in Europe are they fit, except for military discipline, that produces the most speedy changes in manner? (Herder, 1966: 486–487)<sup>[11]</sup>

Here, the author upholds the us-versus-them distinction very strongly. Firstly, the use of pronouns such as the possessive pronoun “our” in “our quarter of the globe” and the personal pronoun “they”, delineates clear boundaries between Europeans and *Zigeuner*. *Zigeuner* are depicted here as “foreign”, “heathen”, “subterranean”, and “reprobate”, which implies that Europeans were in contrast native, Christian, more highly developed, civilized, and endowed with good civic morals. Furthermore, Herder stressed that *Zigeuner* carry these traits from birth and can only be civilized through military discipline. The distinct aspects of stereotypes pertaining to *Zigeuner* in this process of Othering become evident when one compares this passage on *Zigeuner* with those describing other groups Herder names, for example, those who have “resided in our quarter of the globe for a more or less considerable space of time”, namely Arabs, Turks, and Jews (Herder, 1966: 485–487). The power structures within which Europeans and these other groups were situated play an important role in how these groups were depicted by Herder. In Herder’s depiction of all these groups and the process of Othering, a contribution to European culture is another important factor; he was only able to highlight scientific contributions to European culture by Arabs and Jews, whereas Turks were described as barbarians who had destroyed the cultural heritage of Europe (Herder, 1966: 485–486). Herder did not mention any cultural contribution that *Zigeuner* had made, but instead asked for “what in Europe [are] they … fit?” (Herder, 1966: 487).

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10. Here Herder refers back to Grellmann, 1783.

11. German original: “Ich übergehe die Armenier, die ich in unserem Welttheil nur als Reisende betrachte; sehe aber dagegen ein zahlreiches fremdes, heidnisches, unterirdisches Volk fast in allen Ländern Europas, die Zigeuner. Wie kommt es hierher? Wie kommen die sieben bis achttausend Köpfe hierher, die ihr neuster Geschichtsschreiber zählt? Eine verworfene indische Kaste, die von allem, was sich göttlich, anständig, und bürgerlich nennt, ihrer Geburt nach entfernt ist und dieser erniedrigen Bestimmung noch nach Jahrhunderten treu bleibt, wozu taugte sie in Europa als zur militärischen Zucht, die doch alles aufs schnellste diszipliniert?” See Herder, 1869: 101.

A temporal dimension is closely linked to a cultural one: Cultural status is conceptually linked to a civilizing progress over a course of time. Whereas the Europeans are portrayed as having achieved a civilizing and cultural progress other peoples such as *Zigeuner* are portrayed as being culturally backward in time in this civilizing progress. Turks are characterized here as “foreigners in Europe, who, after thousands of years have elapsed, are still resolutely Asiatic barbarians” (Herder, 1966: 486). *Zigeuner*, in contrast, are described as not being civilized at birth and “still remaining true to this degrading destination after ages have elapsed” and only being suitable for military discipline, which Herder considered to produce “the most speedy changes in manner” (Herder, 1966: 487). Consequently, the temporal dimension functions as a signifier for a possible or potentially impossible assimilation process, which takes the perceived development of European culture as a reference point (cf. Fabian, 2014).

These images of *Zigeuner* as being distinctively and “essentially” different had practical implications. Regulations relating to *Zigeuner* in the eighteenth century forced those people who were associated with *Zigeuner* stereotypes – among them Sinti and Roma – to remain in workhouses (*Arbeitshäuser*), prisons (*Spinnhäuser*), or penitentiaries (*Zuchthäuser*). The aim of theoretical thinking behind them and their practical implementation was to educate and civilize *Zigeuner* into becoming fit and economically “useful” citizens and proper Christians (Zimmermann, 1996: 56–57). Therefore, Protestant missionaries worked within a network of thinkers and practitioners who similarly regarded *Zigeuner* as dehumanized objects to be educated and assimilated.

## 2. The Beginnings of the Protestant “Zigeuner” Mission in the Peripheries of the Metropole

Very few publications have paid attention to the Protestant missionary societies in Germany that were involved in the *Zigeuner* mission (Exceptions include: Danckwortt, 1995; 2008; Gilsenbach, 1988; 1998; Margalit, 2000; Neumeister, 2008; Reuter, 2014: 346; Spohn, 2016: 54, 71–72, 277–278, 282–299; Zimmermann, 1989: 34; 1996: 58–59). There were two early contexts for the Protestant mission: The first of these was the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association (*Naumburger Missions-Hülf-Verein*), which was founded in 1829 and an offshoot of the Missionary Society in Berlin for the Advancement of Christianity among the Heathens (*Berlinische Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Heiden*) (Wippermann, 2014: 124–125). This association put its missionary efforts into practice in Friedrichslohra in Prussia between 1830 and 1836. The second of these was the City Mission in Berlin (*Berliner Stadtmission*), which began to missionize “*Zigeuner*” from 1910 onwards (Thieme, 1927: 81–86).

The Prussian government had created the conditions for the impoverishment and criminalization of Sinti and other groups that were associated with the stereotype of *Zigeuner* through their harsh regulations. This included measures such as refusing to issue them trade certificates or prohibiting them from camping in forests and thereby, removing their means of earning a living (Danckwortt, 1995: 280–281). Baron Theobald von Wurmb, who encountered a group of Sinti in a forest in Friedrichslohra on a hike in 1827 undertook initiatives to educate and assimilate them into the area (Danckwortt, 1995: 278). A newspaper

article from 2 December 1833 concerning the mission in Friedrichslohra describes the beginnings of these initiatives and reveals points of connection between the processes of Othering *Zigeuner* and “primitives” in Africa. The *Eisenbergische Nachrichtenblatt* depicted *Zigeuner* as a group of indisputably different and backward people who needed to be civilized: “In the time of the former kingdom of Westphalia, each citizen had to choose a particular place to live, and the largest part of this horde thus chose the Catholic village of Friedrichslohra. But they continued their old way of life,<sup>[12]</sup> as nobody took care of these savages” (Nützer, 1833: 385).<sup>[13]</sup> It is then stated that everything changed in 1829 when the first civilizing efforts took place. Furthermore, it makes the remark that the baron “now [1833] lives in the African Wupperthal, in the Horn of Africa, where he philanthropically looks after the unfortunate Hottentots and bush men” (Nützer, 1833: 385).<sup>[14]</sup> This quote highlights two different aspects relating to Protestant missionaries: First, this group worked as colonial agents with a paternalistic mindset long before German colonial societies or governmental institutions acquired colonies (Gründer, 2008: 94–103).<sup>[15]</sup> In 1829, Theobald von Wurmb and his wife were sent with a group of missionaries to South Africa by the Rhenish Mission Society (*Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*) in Barme. There the missionaries founded the village of Wupperthal in 1830 but without having official permission from the mission society (Altena, 2003: 33–38; Bilbe, 2009). As men on the spot they were a driving motor for imperial forces. Second, the quote shows the personal and ideological interrelations between the Protestant mission in the distant colonies and the Protestant *Zigeuner* mission in the metropole. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that these Protestant missionaries and colonial agents were part of a global exchange and worked within a closely linked network.

Before setting off for South Africa, Baron Wurmb was a key figure in the missionary efforts in Friedrichslohra. After his hiking trip, during which he encountered impoverished Sinti around Friedrichslohra, he wrote a letter to the Missionary Society in Berlin for the Advancement of Christianity among the Heathens (*Berlinische Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Heiden*) and published an article in Basel’s missionary magazine (*Baseler Missionsmagazine*), in which he summarized his impressions (Danckwortt, 1995: 278). The baron’s publication had far-reaching practical consequences:

Now the Royal Prussian Ministry became aware of these savages and set up the government of Erfurt to carry out close investigations. They found that the *Zigeuner* certainly were brutish people but they were not heathens. Since this horde had become a subject within

12. This old way of life is described by the author in the previous paragraphs; it includes primitive housing in huts and caves; swindling, begging, fortune-telling; and having genuinely different customs and outer appearances. The description of this lifestyle generates a frame in which the process of Othering is discursively carried out.

13. German original: “Zur Zeit des vormaligen Königreichs Westphalen musste jeder Bewohner desselben sich einen bestimmten Wohnort wählen und der größte Theil der Horde wählte demnach das katholische Dörfchen Friedrichslohra, setzte aber übrigens, da sich weiter Niemand um diese Wildlinge kümmerte, die alte Lebensweise fort.”

14. German original: “Baron v. Wurmb – der jetzt im afrikanischen Wupperthal, am Kap, sich der unglücklichen Hottentotten und Buschmänner so menschenfreundlich annimmt.”

15. Nicola Lauré al-Smarai (2008) argues differently in Weder “Fremde” noch “Ausländer” (94–103), positing that the foundation of the German nation-state in 1871 became a driving motor for processes of Othering. But this argument neglects the work of men on the ground, such as Protestant missionaries that had worked in this way long before.

public opinion, missionary students from Basel, Bremen, and Berlin arrived there. But they made them nervous and blocked their own way to the hearts of the *Zigeuner* by approaching them hastily, as well as by giving them harangues and penitential sermons (Nützer, 1833: 281).<sup>[16]</sup>

The stereotypes of the so-called backward or less educated Sinti are presented in this quote when they are described as “savages” and “brutish people”. However, this commission also reported that several of the children were able to read and write (Danckwortt, 1995: 281).

This closely linked network of agents and the points of connection between missions targeting “primitives” and *Zigeuner* is further highlighted by looking at additional writing on the mission in Friedrichslohra. Richard Pischel published “Contributions to Knowledge about German *Zigeuner*” in 1894 (Pischel, 1894: 5–19). Pischel, who was a professor of comparative linguistics and Indology, depicted *Zigeuner* as groups of people without a permanent settlement, who parasitically took over the religion of their hosts and generally tended towards lying and criminal activity (Pischel, 1894: 7–9). Before describing the Naumburg mission and their “efforts to benevolently bring the *Zigeuner* to an ordered lifestyle”, he explained how he gathered his sources on this topic (Pischel, 1894: 9). He named a network of people with whom he worked and who provided him with archival material and other sources. Among this group of people were the Reverend Johannes Speicker, teacher at the Rhenish Missionary Society (*Rheinsche Missionsgesellschaft*), and the Reverend Gustav Warneck from Rothenschirmbach, who can be considered a founder of a systematic science of missionaries and had been an inspector for the Rhenish Missionary Society in Barmen, a teacher at missionary seminars, editor of the General Missionary Magazine, and, from 1896, professor of missionary science in Halle (Pischel, 1894: 9). This group of people evidences the close points of contact between Protestant missionaries in Africa and *Zigeuner* missionaries in the metropole; they are interdependent in terms of the forms of mission they pursue, but also possibly in regard to the transfer of knowledge between missionary practitioners and the leaders of missionary societies.

Furthermore, Pischel’s interest in this subject points to connections between the field of Protestant missions and other scientific disciplines, such as linguistics. Pischel concludes his article, after having mentioned all the difficulties missionaries faced in Friedrichslohra, by outlining the benefits this missionary project had for science. He gives the example of the school inspector Graffunder, who visited Friedrichslohra in the Erfurt government’s name in November 1834. According to Pischel, Graffunder was impressed by the Romani language and conducted further research upon his return to Erfurt. In 1835 he published his initial analysis of the “language of the *Zigeuner*”. In addition, the missionary named Wilhelm Blankenburg created a list of *Zigeuner* words on behalf of the inspector and Reverend Heinrich Eduard Schmieder from Schulpforta. After 1854, his list came into the possession of the linguist August

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16. German original: “Nun wurde das königl. Preußische Ministerium auf diese Wildlinge aufmerksam und beauftragte die Regierung zu Erfurt, genaue Untersuchungen anzustellen. Das Ergebnis derselben war, daß diese Zigeuner zwar durchaus rohe Menschen, aber doch keine Heiden waren. Da indessen die Herde nun einmal Gegenstand der Öffentlichkeit geworden war, langten bald nachher aus Basel, Bremen und Berlin Missionszöglinge an, sollen es aber durch hastiges Zufahren und durch Straf- und Bußpredigen versehen, die Zigeuner kopfschew gemacht und sich so den Weg zu ihren Herzen versperrt haben.”

Friedrich Pott, who wrote a thorough linguistic analysis of Romani (Pischel, 1894: 17; Pott, 1844: 67). This excursus highlights how Protestant missionaries not only acted within a discursive network but also a personal one with other intellectuals and institutions that were also involved in the process of Othering.

Blankenburg, a former cobbler, was sent to Friedrichslohra by the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association (*Naumburger Missions-Hülf-Verein*) as an “educator of the *Zigeuner*” in 1830 (Nützer, 1833: 386; Danckworr, 1995: 284).<sup>[17]</sup> In a letter from 20 July 1830, Blankenburg reported on his first encounter with “black-brown children” and how his “heart inflamed with love” (Danckworr, 1995: 285). From the beginning, Blankenburg and his wife, who arrived a little later, focused on educating children in the values of Protestantism and work: “At first, the honorable couple tried to accustom the savages to work. A difficult task to undertake, as the *Zigeuner* thought that they were not made for work” (Danckworr, 1995: 285).<sup>[18]</sup> This first stage of instruction carried out by the missionaries become apparent in Pischel’s linguistic and anthropological article. The missionaries were to “guide the unfortunate *Zigeuner* in and around Friedrichslohra towards Christian morality through work and education, prayer and their example with the help of God” (Pischel, 1894: 11).<sup>[19]</sup> According to Pischel, Blankenburg told the adults that the children were to be educated and learn to work, “in order to make them useful members of the civic society” (Pischel, 1894: 12).<sup>[20]</sup> This stated aim is linked to the ideals contained in the previously quoted thoughts of Herder, who also posed the question of what *Zigeuner* were fit to do in society. Herder concluded that they were only fit for military discipline. This mission in Friedrichslohra was also an attempt to foster the assimilation of *Zigeuner*. Christian values and a Protestant work ethic served as a value framework for missionaries to conduct their “civilizing mission”.

In 1831 an educational institution (*Erziehungsanstalt*) and quarters for the re-education of adults (*Sittigungshaus*) was founded for students and their families in Friedrichslohra. Initially, parents were free to send their children to this school, but during the course of time the missionary efforts were strengthened and education was increasingly forced upon them. Children were no longer allowed to live with their parents, as this was believed to have a negative impact on the process of civilizing them and ensuring their assimilation. Furthermore, the missionaries also criticized the “uncivilized” behavior and poor work attitude of the parents and requested to have them put in workhouses, which was implemented by force in November 1833 by the government in Erfurt (Danckworr, 1995: 288–292). On June 16, 1834, a decree signed by the Ministry of the Interior, the police, and the Ministry of Ecclesiastical, Educational, and Medical Affairs was issued by the governor. *Zigeuner* who could not prove that they were doing “proper” and regular work within four weeks were to be put into workhouses in Groß-Salze in the governmental district of Magdeburg.

17. German original “Bildner der Zigeuner”.

18. German original: “Zunächst suchte das ehrenwerthe Paar die trägen Wildlinge an Arbeit zu gewöhnen. Ein schwieriges Unterfangen, da sie die Meinung hegten, zur Arbeit nicht geschaffen zu sein.”

19. German original: “Sie sind deshalb von dem Naumburger Missionsverein nach Friedrichslohra gesandt, damit Sie unter Gottes Beistand, durch Arbeit und Lehre, durch Gebet und Beispiel die unglücklichen Zigeuner in und um Friedrichslohra zur christlichen Sittigung führen sollen.”

20. German original: “Er [Blankenburg] hielt ihnen vor, ob sie nicht wünschten, dass ihre Kinder besser unterrichtet würden und dass sie arbeiten lernten, um nützliche Glieder der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu werden.”

Children under the age of 14 were to be put into the educational institution in Friedrichslohra, and children aged 14 or older were to be sent to the Marienstift in Erfurt (Danckwortt, 1995: 292).

Conflicts between parents and missionaries in Friedrichslohra increased when the former asked to have their children brought back so they could stay with them. They opposed the Protestant educational efforts and being separated from their children, and eventually asked the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II for help (Pischel, 1894: 125). On 20 April 1836, Franz Mettbach, who was Sinto, wrote a plea to the Prussian king that his six-year-old girl be removed from this institution, in which she was forcefully installed to be educated according to Protestant beliefs. The father highlighted his aim for his daughter to be educated, but in a way he agreed to. He stated the following:

[U]pon my arrival in Friedrichslohra, my one and only child was pried away from me and given to a certain teacher named Blankenburg, who was the director of an educational institution for children; these children were taken from their parents without their consent. I have never and will never refuse for my children to receive good education at school. But I wish to have them raised in the Catholic religion, which cannot be guaranteed by this Protestant teacher. I do not dare to put into words the pain parents feel when their child is forcefully taken from them. But I do dare to make this plea – out of deep grief – to His Royal Majesty with bended knee and humbly: Give me back my child through your most gracious words, while I faithfully pledge to send my child to school and church (cited in Danckwortt, 1995: 273–274).<sup>[21]</sup>

This plea highlights the agency of the oppressed and is a rare early document written by a member of the minority. It also shows that they were not silent and passive victims.

Finally, the educational institution that was run by the Naumburg mission was closed down by the government in 1837. The government in Erfurt instructed children to be returned to their parents once they had proved that they were residents and able to support their children. The Royal Government in Erfurt ordered that "those *Zigeuner* who can prove that they have settled, and are able to honestly nourish and support their children, were to be exempted from this institution" (n.a., n.d. [1939]).<sup>[22]</sup> This support from the Royal Government, however, contained implications of similar antigypsyist tendencies: they

21. German original: "[N]ach meiner Ankunft in Friedrichslohra wurde mir mein einziges Kind [...] gewaltsam entrissen und einem gewissen Lehrer Blankenburg übergeben, welcher der Vorsteher einer Erziehungsanstalt ist für Kinder, die ihren Eltern [...] ohne Zustimmung derselben genommen sind. Ich habe mich nie geweigert und werde mich nie weigern, meinen Kindern guten Schulunterricht geben zu lassen; aber ich wünsche daß sie in der katholischen Religion erzogen werden, welches durch jenen evangelischen Lehrer nicht geschieht. Den Schmerz der Eltern, welchen eine gewaltsame Trennung von ihrem einzigen Kinde erzeugen muss, [...] wage ich nicht mit Worten zu schildern, aber ich wage es im Gefüle des tiefsten Schmerzes, der Verzweiflung nahe, Ew. Königliche Majestät fußfälligst und unterthänigst zu bitten: mir mein einziges Kind durch Ihr Allergnädigstes Wort wieder zu geben, wogegen ich mich verpflichte auf das Gewissenhafteste mein Kind zur Schule und Kirche zu schicken."

22. German original: "Jetzt hat nun die Königl. Regierung zu Erfurt verfügt, daß diejenigen Zigeuner, welche nachweisen, daß sie sich ansäßig gemacht haben, redlich ernähren und ihre Kinder zu unterhalten imstande sind, diese aus der Anstalt zurückhalten sollen."

restricted this order to *Zigeuner* whom they regarded as partly assimilated. The missionaries justified the termination of their work by referring to the inability of the *Zigeuner* to adapt to the civic ideals, norms, and lifestyle of the majority. In their eyes, this inability was partly explained by their nature and a deep-rooted inability to live a lifestyle that was perceived as “civilized”. Consequently, attempts from the minority to speak out against the “civilizing missions” of the Protestants were countered with additional acts of stereotyping and strategies of Othering that permanently fixed perceived differences by highlighting a certain inherent *Zigeuner* inability to adapt. Once they were permitted to return to their parents, the number of children shrank in the educational institution, which was then eventually closed down (n.a., n.d. [1939]: 295).

Deficit-oriented *Zigeuner* stereotypes and paternalistic attitudes characterized the missionary efforts of not just the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association but also of the City Mission in Berlin. There were similar elements in their “civilizing mission”, and strategies of Othering are also present in the writings by representatives of the *Zigeunermission* of the City Mission in Berlin. In the Berlin City Mission’s first publication from 1910, Maria Knak stated that *Zigeuner* were “stealing and lying”, “brutish, reluctant to work, immoral, superstitious, and very dirty” (Knak, 1910: 65; cf. Zimmermann, 1996: 58–59). The work aspect played a major role for missionaries in the African colonies as well as in the metropole when missionizing Sinti and Roma and other groups of people associated with “*Zigeuner*” (Maciejewski, 1996: 23; Hund, 1999; Robel, 2015: 192). In both processes of Othering, the Other was perceived as “reluctant to work”. A specific element of the image of the *Zigeuner* image was the link to perceived criminal activity as a means to sustain oneself. Walther Thieme, director of the City Mission in Berlin, gathered together many different *Zigeuner* stereotypes in his article from 1927, published upon the 50-year anniversary of the City Mission in Berlin:

Yes, there might indeed be some romantic aspects, when one sits outside – at the periphery of the city, where the trees of the Tegel forests greet you and where autumn mist rises at dusk – by the campfire, sees the brown fellows and the passionate eyes of the women with their red and yellow garments, and observes these travelling people with their foreign customs and gestures. But come closer to them? No. Not only because of the dirt. Their fortune-telling and stealing, their casualness and sluggishness do not give one any confidence in permanent change (Thieme, 1927: 81–86, here 82).<sup>[23]</sup>

Thieme lists romantic stereotypes that suggest a lifestyle of closeness to nature and characterizes *Zigeuner* women as the exotic Other. He also describes this group as being genuinely different in nature and culture, and sees no hope for assimilation as he concludes that stealing, fortune-telling, and the lack of a work ethic seem to be inherently fixed character traits among this group. He also marks them as different

23. German original: “Ja, etwas Romantisches mag es ja haben, draußen an der Peripherie der Stadt, wo die Bäume des Tegeler Waldes herüber grüßen und die Herbstnebel bei Abenddämmerung aufsteigen, am flackernden Feuer zu sitzen, die braunen Gesellen und die leidenschaftlichen Augen der Frauen mit ihren roten und gelben Gewändern zu sehen und das fahrende Volk in seinen fremdländischen Sitten und Gesten zu beobachten. Aber ihnen zu nahe kommen? Nein. Nicht nur um des Schmutzes willen. Ihr Wahrsagen und Stehlen, ihr Schlendrian und ihre Trägheit lassen so gar keine Zuversicht auf dauerhafte Umänderung.”

by ascribing a brown skin color to them, a strategy of Othering that was also conducted by Blankenburg when he described his first encounter with "black-brown children" in Friedrichslohra (Thieme, 1927: 85). Benjamin Niederhauser, a member of the Swiss *Zigeuner* mission, wrote an article after his visit to the *Zigeuner* mission in Berlin in the magazine *The Friend of the Zigeuner* (*Der Freund der Zigeuner*), which was published by the Swiss Committee of the *Zigeuner* Mission in 1929, where he also referred to *Zigeuner* as his "brown friends" (Niederhauser, 1929: 3).<sup>[24]</sup> Again, these quoted examples of similar strategies for discursively Othering Sinti and Roma by ascribing a dark skin color to them shed light on the broader entanglements of these missionary agents across the borders of nation states.

When one looks at the documents produced by these Protestant missionaries in relation to *Zigeuner* missions, another aspect becomes evident: their representation of *Zigeuner* varies depending on the addressee, and the function and context of the written text. In 1914, Maria Knak, a missionary at the *Zigeuner* City Mission in Berlin, published a pamphlet on *The Gospel among Zigeuner in Berlin (Evangelium unter den Zigeunern Berlins)*. She portrayed *Zigeuner* as a people who were really different, followed heathen cults and customs, and did not know that God watches over all people and that Jesus would bring salvation to everyone, including *Zigeuner* (Knak, 1914: 12, 14). Knak described *Zigeuner* as a part of the Christian community that was treated equally by God. She then explained in different passages how she read stories from the Bible to adult Sinti and Roma. She describes two individuals: Muschurka, who – according to Knak – could not stop lying when he was doing business, although he knew that it was a sin, and an elderly woman, who was a fortune-teller. Knak reported how she read an excerpt from the Bible to her, in which it stated that fortune-telling is to be punished with death. In her report, Knak continued to describe how this woman was surprised that no one had ever told her this before; Knak made reference to the Bible again, specifically where it is written that lying and stealing are forbidden and that God sees and hears everything the woman does (Knak, 1914: 14–15). These two Sinti in Knak's publication function as figures in a parable. They demonstrate through their actions, with the context of Knak's lecture to the reader, that God's commandments need to be adhered to and that he is omniscient. Knak ends the chapter and the pamphlet with the following appeal: "But we want to – with the help of Jesus' power of love – serve, since He loved and served us in the first place. So, come let us bring His Gospel to the waiting *Zigeuner*!" (Knak, 1914: 15).<sup>[25]</sup> Once again, *Zigeuner* are described as backward here, not in their own development, but in having not received the Gospel. It also becomes evident that Knak is inferring that the missionaries and their Protestant readers have already received the Gospel and now need to work on the advancement of the *Zigeuner*. She asks her readers to be part of this "civilizing mission", but does not clearly state what their contribution could be. This is expressed more clearly in a postcard from the same mission that shows a picture of the missionary Kurt Süßkind who was part of the mission from 1930 to 1940 (Vorstand der Berliner Stadtmission, 1941). This postcard asked the Christian community for material help for the *Zigeuner*, and it showed the missionary with a group of children, who the missionaries considered to be *Zigeuner*. The poem under the photograph reads as follows:

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24. German original: "braune Freunde"

25. German original: "Wir aber wollen dienen in Jesu heiliger Liebeskraft, nachdem er uns zuerst geliebt und gedient hat. Komm' mit uns, bring' sein Evangelium den wartenden Zigeunern!"



Ohne Gott, ohne Heimat und Brot  
Vom harten Leben geschlagen,

Leiden sie oft große Not  
Im armen Zigeunerwagen.  
Wir tragen des Glaubens Licht  
Hinein in das Kinderleid.

Und Du? Du hilfst uns nicht?

Romm, hilf uns, sei auch bereit!

Und sende, was Du gestern wolltest an Kleider, Lebensmittel und Spielzeug an **Kurt Süßkind**, Berliner Stadtmission, Berlin SW 61,  
Am Johannisthal 5. Geldsendungen werden auf das Postfachkonto von  
Herrn **Pastor Ehimec**, „Berlin Nr. 39525“ mit dem Vermerk:  
„Abt. Zigeuner-Mission, erbeten.“

Mit „Sprüche 10, Vers 17“ grüßt

**Die Zigeuner-Mission der Berliner Stadtmission**  
**K. Süßkind**, Stadtmissionar.

Without God, without home and bread  
Hit by a hard life,  
They often suffer great distress  
In the poor *Zigeuner wagon*.  
We bear the light of faith  
Into the suffering of children  
And you? You're not helping us?  
Come, help us, and be ready!

And send what you want to contribute  
in the form of clothes, food, and toys  
to Kurt Süßkind, Berlin Stadtmission  
[...] (Zigeuner Mission der Berliner  
Stadtmission, n.d.).

Finally, it can be concluded that Protestant missionaries were governed by a paternalistic or maternalistic attitude toward Sinti and Roma, seeing them predominantly as *homines educandi*. Nevertheless, their representations of *Zigeuner* varied depending on the writing's context, function, and addressee. Furthermore, Protestant missionaries acted within a global network of people who dealt with *Zigeuner* and/or colonial subjects. I have observed this in both missionary settings (Friedrichslohra and Berlin), but the writings from the mission in Friedrichslohra, where representations of *Zigeuner* became increasingly negative when missionary efforts failed, were passed on and altered during the National Socialist period.

### 3. Transferring Knowledge: The Protestant *Zigeuner* Mission during the National Socialist Regime and after 1945

Although the *Zigeuner* mission in Friedrichslohra in the 1830s was brought to an end after several years due to external factors, it still had a great impact: writings produced there demonstrate that the knowledge gained in the institution was transferred down throughout subsequent generations. This can be observed in the dissertation of Eva Justin, a medical professional, who worked with Dr. Robert Ritter at the Racial Hygiene Research Unit (*Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle*) from 1936. Together, they conducted anthropological and genealogical research on *Zigeuner* and worked in close collaboration with the police. Their classifications were the basis for subsequent deportations of Sinti and Roma. On

5 November 1943, Justin was awarded a doctoral degree by the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin for her thesis *Life Fates of Zigeuner Children and Their Descendants Who Were Raised by Different Races* (*Lebensschicksale artfremd erzogener Zigeunerkinder und ihrer Nachkommen*). In her thesis, Justin also referred to the "attempt to educate" (*Erziehungsversuch*) *Zigeuner* in Friedrichslohra. She bases her observations primarily on archival sources from the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association in Berlin and Naumburg, as well as an article by Pischel, the linguist, which was published in 1894, but she also refers to Carl Heister (Justin, 1943: 20, 25).

The archival material from the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association was given to the Racial Hygiene Research Unit on 7 March 1939 (Hermann, 1940; 1941). The latter did not return the material until at least March 1942, although the record office of the Missionary Society in Berlin for the Advancement of Christianity among the Heathens (*Berlinische Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Heiden*) – the mother association of the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association – kept asking for its return (Hermann, 1941).<sup>[26]</sup> Upon being asked to lend these sources and send the material to the Racial Hygiene Research Unit on 7 March 1939, the Missionary Society in Berlin contacted Dr. Ritter again. One day later, the representative from the Record Office wrote in a letter to the director of the Racial Hygiene Research Unit that a further source had been found, which might be of interest to his institution: "On the assumption that this document – newly found by the Record Office and penned by the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association – concerning the termination of their work might interest you, you will find enclosed a transcript thereof" (Hermann, 1939).<sup>[27]</sup> This letter clearly shows the initiative and effort taken by the Missionary Society in Berlin in order to provide the Racial Hygiene Research Unit with more material, although they were not specifically asked to hand over more sources. Furthermore, the content of these sources – particularly the concluding statement – from the Record Office of the Missionary Society in Berlin is important as these writings became a reference point for Justin.

The committee of the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association stated in this justification and conclusive comments on the termination of its work that its intention had been "not only to train the children of *Zigeuner*, but also these [parents] themselves to realize a Christian, civilized, and hardworking life" (Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association, n.d. [1939]).<sup>[28]</sup> This aim, however, had to be renounced because of "insurmountable difficulties, partly due to a deep-rooted disposition among this people to lead a roaming and wanton life, to a degree attributable to the resistance of neighboring Catholic priests and their followers" (Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association, n.d. [1939]).<sup>[29]</sup> This piece of writing further states that the adults resisted these missionary efforts and the

26. The last request by the Missionary Society in Berlin can be found in a letter from the record office to the Racial Hygiene Research Unit from 22 March, 1941.

27. German original: "In der Annahme, daß Sie ein von der Registratur noch gefundenes Schreiben vom Missionshilfsverein Naumburg betr. Abschluß der Zigeunermission interessiert, lassen wir Ihnen selbiges in Abschrift anliegen zugehen."

28. German original: "nicht bloß die Kinder der Zigeuner, sondern auch diese selbst zu einem christlichen, gesitteten und arbeitsamen Leben heranzubilden."

29. German original: "eine unüberwindliche Schwierigkeit, teils in dem tief eingewurzeltem Hang dieses Volkes zu einem herumschweifenden, liederlichen Leben, teils in den Widerstrebungen der benachbarten katholischen Priester und ihrer Anhänger."

education of their children by the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association: “They regarded the placement, diet, and upbringing of their children in this institution as an intrusion on their right to rear the children according to their nature, namely in jugglery, begging, stealing, and a vagrant life” (Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association, n.d. [1939]).<sup>[30]</sup> These images of *Zigeuner*, contained in the writing by the committee of the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association, were predominantly negative. One reason for this negative depiction might be that both writings were made within the context of failed attempts to “civilize” and impose an education and way of life on *Zigeuner*, which was perceived by missionaries as the right thing to do but was taken by the affected group as a violation of their rights. Justin mainly referred to this concluding statement from the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association when explaining why the missionary efforts failed. In agreement with the Missionary Assistance Association’s statement, which was also sent to the Racial Hygiene Research Unit by the Missionary Society on 8 March 1939, Justin explained in her thesis that the reason for the failure of the mission in Friedrichslohra had been the “natural inability to improve” the *Zigeuner* (Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association, n.d. [1939]; Justin, 1943: 25). To contrast with this view, Justin highlighted that Pischel and Heister viewed the forced separation of this group into a specific educational institution as the reason for the failure of these missionary efforts.

Justin’s description of the mission in Friedrichslohra is neither a direct copy of what she found in the archival material from the Missionary Society in Berlin nor of what she found in Pischel’s or Heister’s publications. Instead, she alters their perspectives by making reference to genealogical and racial-biological explanations. Such explanations are a clear break with the Enlightened ideas of seeing *Zigeuner* as *homines educandi* as well as the paternalistic mindset of the Protestant missionaries. The aim of Justin’s dissertation is to answer the question of “whether it is really not possible to [...] raise *Zigeuner* children – who frequently reveal themselves to be cheerful, lively, smart, and often very clever – out of their primitive *Zigeuner* life through German schooling and education and usefully deploy them according to their nature” (Justin, 1943: 7).<sup>[31]</sup> Justin analyzed reports by teachers in Friedrichslohra over a time span of seven months in 1835, during which 20 children were educated in the institution. According to these reports, steady “improvement” after the third month of the investigated period could be observed but the accomplishments of the children fluctuated. Progress was much more evident in “civil education” rather than in its “Christian” variant (Justin, 1943: 21–22). These reports also demonstrated that none of the children were uneducable (Justin, 1943: 24). Justin argued that these observations are further supported when one turns to the scientific field of genealogy:

Were one to chart the clan-like relationships of the 90 families (including their children) and collect their biographical data from the sources, as well as the success of their education, one can observe that both complement each other and that there were markedly gifted families,

30. German original: “Dabei hielten sie die Aufnahme, Ernährung und Erziehung ihrer Kinder in der Anstalt für einen Eingriff in ihr Recht, diese Kinder nach ihrer Art selbst, das heißt zu Gaukeleien, Betteln, Stehlen und vagabundierendem Leben zu erziehen.”

31. German original: “[O]b es denn wirklich nicht möglich sei, Zigeunerkinder, die [...] sich meist als aufgeweckt, lebhaft, schlau und oft als recht anstellig und hilfsbereit erweisen, durch deutsche Schulung und Erziehung ihrem ‘primitiven Zigeunerleben’ zu entziehen und – wenn auch artentsprechend – nützlich einzusetzen.”

as well as significantly inferior and unremarkably ordinary ones, most of whom had 'fled' (Justin, 1943: 23).<sup>[32]</sup>

Justin concluded that the educational and missionary efforts failed and that the group's descendants still live as their uneducated ancestors in Friedrichslohra did. Possible descendants of these families were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as indicated in the entries in lists for the *Zigeunerlager* (State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1993). Among the key grounds for deportation were the classifications Justin and her colleagues made at the Racial Hygiene Research Unit.

The *Zigeuner* mission at the City Mission in Berlin continued under the National Socialist regime; I dealt with the writings produced there in the previous section of this article. Kurt Süßkind was a missionary there from 1930 until 1940, at which point the consistory decided that this branch was no longer needed (Vorstand der Berliner Stadtmission, 1941). He and Frieda Zeller-Plinzner worked as the main missionaries in collaboration with Lovari Jaja Sattler, who translated the Gospel of John into Romani and thereby did the groundwork for further *Zigeuner* missions, and was a contribution that was internationally acknowledged by linguists and other missionaries (Miskow, 1931; Ackerley, 1931).<sup>[33]</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, this *Zigeuner* mission worked in close collaboration with the Mission for South-East Europe (*Mission für Süd-Osteuropa – MSOE*) and was on a personal and intellectual level connected to other missions and societies, such as the Gypsy Lore Society, which was founded in Great Britain in 1888 and was took an interest in gypsy and traveler studies.<sup>[34]</sup> Georg Althaus, who was pastor of various parishes around Brunswick in Germany, also had a close relationship with Zeller-Plinzner and the *Zigeuner* mission in Berlin. He worked with Sinti during the National Socialist regime, an activity which intensified after the war when he founded the Ministry in the Service of Israel and the *Zigeuner* (*Pfarramt für den Dienst an Israel und den Zigeunern*), which was officially recognized years later in 1957 by the Evangelical Church.<sup>[35]</sup> Althaus played an instrumental role in Justin's trial in 1960, in which the mistaken identification of Zellner-Plinzer as Justin was also discussed (Spohn, 2016: 284–285, 292–294).

Zeller-Plinzner retired early after the Sinti and Roma of Berlin were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau at the end of February 1943; among them was Jaja Sattler and his family, including children who were

32. German original: "Zeichnet man sich nämlich die sippenmäßigen Zusammenhänge der damaligen 90 Zigeuner (einschließlich ihrer Kinder) auf und trägt die lebensgeschichtlichen Daten, die aus den Akten zusammen getragen wurden, und die Erziehungserefolge der einzelnen ein, so sieht man, daß sich beides ergänzt und daß es ausgesprochen begabte Familien, ebenso deutlich minderwertige und unauffällige mittelmäßige meist 'geflüchtete' Sippen gab."

33. Editions of the Gypsy Lore Society Journal from 1888 to 1999 are available online through the HathiTrust Digital Library. For the Miskow and Ackerley editions, see <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iu.30000105045276;view=1up;seq=1> Accessed: 10-09-2017.

34. See the homepage of the Gypsy Lore Society: <http://www.gypsyl oresociety.org> Accessed: 10-09-2017.

35. For more information on this Ministry, see later in the article. The Ministry in the Service of Israel and the *Zigeuner* (*Pfarramt für den Dienst an Israel und den Zigeunern*) was created after 1945 as an attempt to help survivors of the National Socialist genocide of the Jews as well as Sinti and Roma. Similarly, there was an aid center for those were persecuted for their race (*Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte*) overseen by Minister Majer-Leonhard in Stuttgart. See Evangelisches Zentralarchiv (EZA), 2, 14290.

going to be educated by the Protestant missionaries (Spohn, 2016: 292–294). The possible involvement of missionaries such as Süßkind, Zeller-Plinzner, as well as Sattler, in the creation of lists of all the Sinti and Roma families, which later fell into the hands of the local police and served as deportation lists, is extensively described in a work on missions during the National Socialist regime by the Protestant theologian, missiologist, and historian Elmar Spohn (Spohn, 2016: 292–294). According to Spohn, the missionaries at the *Zigeuner* mission in Berlin underestimated National Socialist policies of discrimination, which eventually culminated in exterminatory actions against all people who had been declared *Zigeuner* (Spohn, 2016: 285). Spohn analyzed the extent of action taken by missionaries and highlighted, in his concluding statements, their passivity, singling out Zeller-Plinzner in particular: “The ‘Zigeuner friendship’ propagated in the missionary reports did not develop into political solidarity with Sinti and Roma or even subversive forces of resistance” (Spohn, 2016: 299).<sup>[36]</sup>

Additional continuities in the thinking on the process of “civilizing” Sinti and Roma and transfers of knowledge down the generations can be seen in the writings of the aforementioned pastor Althaus, who made use of similar stereotypes in the 1950s and 1960s, as was observed in the earlier writings of the Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association or the City Mission in Berlin. He not only remarked that they “maintained the legacies of antiquity alongside their tendency toward a Catholic popular piety”, but also highlighted their backwardness in a cultural sense: “Gypsies live on a different cultural level than us. Generally, they are foragers, not only gatherers, but foragers, who acquire with trickery and skillfulness whatever they discover and regard as needed” (cited in Margalit, 2000: 63).<sup>[37]</sup> Althaus also propagated similar stereotypes to the hegemonic discourse on “gypsies”. For instance, the Brockhaus Encyclopedia entry on gypsies from 1957 reads as follows: “They have preserved their specific character everywhere [in the places where they live], in particular they follow a primitive, unsettled lifestyle, and are closed off from the host nation, whose culture they reject. [...] The women scavenge for their basic upkeep through door-to-door selling, begging, and ‘finding’ food” (n.a., 1957).<sup>[38]</sup> In his newspaper article “Give Centers to the *Zigeuner!*” (“Gebt den *Zigeunern Mittelpunkte!*”), Althaus described the long history of persecution of *Zigeuner* by the majority, which culminated in the “attempts at extermination by the Nazis [...], [which mark] the climax and termination of this epoch” (Althaus, 1960).<sup>[39]</sup> He also mentions the “civilizing” efforts in Friedrichslohra and explains that they failed due to violence and the little financial aid given to support

36. German original: “Die in den Missionsberichten propagierte ‘Zigeunerfreundschaft’ hatte keine politische Solidarität mit Sinti und Roma oder gar subversive-widerständische Kräfte entwickeln können.”

37. German original: “Im Allgemeinen ist die Neigung zu einer katholischen Volksfömmigkeit [...] geblieben, daneben haben die Zigeuner ihre alten, aus dem Altertum stammenden Erbtümer beibehalten.” [...] Die Zigeuner leben auf einer anderen Kulturstufe als wir. Grundsätzlich sind sie Wildbeuter, nicht nur Sammler, sondern Wildbeuter, die sich mit List und Geschicklichkeit das aneignen, was sie entdecken und zu brauchen zu können meinen.”

38. German original: “Es hat seine Eigenart überall bewahrt, bes. die ganz primitive, unstete Lebensweise, Abschließung vom Gastvolk, dessen Kultur es anlehnt. [...] Dendürftigen Unterhalt ergattern die Frauen durch Hausieren, Betteln und ‘Finden’ von Lebensmitteln.”

39. German original: “Furchtbaren Ausrottungsversuche der Nazis [...], [die] den Höhepunkt und Abschluß dieser Epoche [bedeuteten].”

the mission, but most importantly as a result of the missionaries' "failure to caringly understand the *Zigeuner's* special nature and to develop methods that align with it" (Althaus, 1960).<sup>[40]</sup> Althaus then continues to explain that the contemporary moment – post-1945 – is a turning point, and he offers methods that seem more fruitful to him. He first describes their special nature by employing familiar stereotypes, such as being family-oriented and having a mobile lifestyle, and then elaborates on his ideas for how to civilize *Zigeuner*. A central idea of his is to establish community centers at the sites where they rest or settle, which would ideally have a room for church services, prayers, Bible readings, and lectures, as well as a room for sewing, another room for a kindergarten where "the lovely *Zigeunerwildlinge* [little *Zigeuner* brutes] can gather and be kept busy by hardworking and happy female educators" (Althaus, 1960).<sup>[41]</sup> He concludes that these missionary efforts will be successful if the *Zigeuner* are met with complete dedication and regarded as brothers and sisters of distinctive character. While he emphasizes a certain degree of unity at the end, he also calls them *Fremdsoziale* (foreign social elements) when he contrasts them with antisocial people (Althaus, 1960). He thus engages in a process of Othering a group of people characterized as *Zigeuner* in order to justify the need for a civilizing mission. He uses various tropes as a way of Othering this group of people and relies on stereotypes that have been passed down over centuries. His writings clearly demonstrate a benevolent and paternalistic undertone to his depiction of *Zigeuner*, whom he views as *homines educandi*.

While, on the one hand, Althaus assisted Sinti and Roma by helping to provide them with supplies, such as clothing, as well as to gain official recognition as victims of the National Socialist regime, he also made clear antigypsyist remarks in his depiction of *Zigeuner* in his public writing. His writing that was addressed to a smaller, private audience, such as his piece to the Inner Mission and the Aid Organization of the Evangelical Church in Germany (*Innere Mission und das Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*) from 5 October 1960, reveals less negative antigypsyist stereotypes, but his depiction of the "fosterlings" seems intended to gain sympathy and pity for them from the institution from which he was asking for financial and material help: "Yet, my Polish *Zigeuner* – not enough clothes for the men – were in some cases arriving in such deplorable clothing that anyone would take pity on them. The worst of all were the children. It was not possible to look upon how pitifully they were dressed" (Althaus, 1960).<sup>[42]</sup> Consequently, when one considers how minorities were depicted by Protestant missionaries one needs to clearly differentiate between the different contexts for the writing, and its purpose as well as its audience.

Furthermore, as an individual and in his writings, Althaus links the colonial context to the missions targeted at Sinti and Roma in Germany. Althaus was born in 1898 in Mamba, German East Africa, where his father

40. German original: "Unvermögen, die Zigeuner in ihrer besonderen Eigenart liebevoll zu verstehen und Methoden zu entwickeln, die dieser Eigenart entsprächen."

41. German original: "in dem die leiben Zigeunerwildlinge von tüchtigen, fröhlichen Kindergärtnerinnen gesammelt und beschäftigt werden."

42. German original: "Dabei liefen meine polnischen *Zigeuner* – nicht genug für die Männer – z.T. in so erbärmlichen Zeuge einher, dass es einen erbarmen musste. Am allerschlimmsten waren die Kinder daran. Es war einfach nicht anzusehen, wie erbärmlich gekleidet sie waren." Althaus then continued to describe the women's clothing, depicting it as extravagantly rendered in delicate fabrics.

and mother worked as missionaries for the society in Leipzig and Christianized Wachagga (Althaus, 1960: 59–60). In an entry on the *Zigeuner* mission from a Protestant church encyclopedia from 1959, Althaus himself wrote that the *Ministry in the Service of Israel and the Zigeuner* worked according to the “role model of the Lutheran heathen mission” (Althaus, 1962; Margalit, 2000: 65). Three years earlier, he had published an essay titled “Thoughts on the Education of *Zigeuner*”, where he argued that the education system should be built according to the mission targeting “primitive and exotic peoples” (Margalit, 2000: 65). Gilad Margalit wrote an article on Althaus that analyzed his amalgamation of *Zigeuner* stereotypes and how these influenced his work. Margalit’s aim was to reveal the motives behind Althaus’s early commitment to this marginalized group after the Second World War and reveals the ambivalence in such attempts to provide support. Margalit also has a strong focus on discourse analysis and examines the images of *Zigeuner* deployed by this minister, contrasting them with images from the hegemonic discourse in the Federal Republic of Germany. Margalit highlights that there were not only negative but also positive images illustrating their equal status “in the eyes of God” or romanticized views of *Zigeuner* music (Margalit, 2000: 64). This fruitful biographical approach, which fuses a critical discourse analysis of a minister’s or missionary’s writings with their social practice, is still lacking for other missionaries from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but critical Romani studies would benefit from further research in this area.

This section has shown that there are clear ideological and personal connections between the mission in the African colonies and the *Zigeuner* mission in the heart of the metropole, as well as a transference of knowledge across time and space between missionaries in addition to other intellectuals such as linguists, anthropologists, and genealogists. When knowledge was passed on, it was mostly altered depending on the writing’s context, its purpose, and its audience, as well as the overall dominant discourse and political situation. In the following section, I will outline a methodological reflection on what needs to be considered when one analyzes *Zigeuner* missions from a postcolonial perspective.

## 4. Methodological Reflection

One could argue that stereotypes pertaining to the colonial Other and *Zigeuner* reveal similarities since both are linked within a “system of representation” or “conceptual map” (Hall, 1997: 17–18). This link is established through the function of both as a concept that stands in opposition (alterity) to the social identity that is created by the dominant group(s). There are also several similarities within the deeper structures of meaning for both processes of Othering, which can be found in the categories power, space, time, and education. At the heart of both images of the Other lie unequal power relations that are constituted and manifested through discourse, as well as violent practices by the dominant group. Both, the colonial subject, as well as Sinti and Roma and other groups that fell under the category *Zigeuner*, were regarded as “primitive” by the majority. This conceptualization is closely linked to a perceived backwardness, lack of development over time, and the state of remaining in an unchanged “primeval” state that is close to nature. The dominant group positions itself at the other side of this regression-progression relational construct, with the connotation that this group has become “civilized” and gone through a long process of development over time (Antliff and Leighten, 2003: 217). Norms and values, as well as cultural achievements, are closely linked to this notion. The analysis of Herder’s image of *Zigeuner* at the beginning of this article showed that these aspects played a major part in his cultural rankings.

Herder described *Zigeuner* as “foreign”, “heathen”, and “removed by birth from everything [...] civil”, yet “still remaining true to this degrading destination after ages have elapsed”, to the extent that only strict military discipline will help them to adjust to European culture and enable them to contribute to societies (Herder, 1966: 486–487). Similar attitudes can be found in the writings of Reverend Althaus during the 1950s and 1960s, such as when he stated that gypsies lived on a “different cultural level” or “maintained the legacies of antiquity” (cited in Margalit, 2000: 63). Consequently, education was considered a fundamental instrument in civilizing “primitives” and assisting them through cultural improvement, in which a deficit-oriented educational approach was taken that dated back to the Enlightenment (Barth and Osterhammel, 2005; Osterhammel, 2005). In Friedrichslohra, one major goal was to “make [*Zigeuner*] useful members of civil society” (Pischel, 1894: 12). Missionaries and publications aligned with the hegemonic discourse portrayed *Zigeuner*, as well as colonial subjects, as not pursuing “proper” work. Here the concept of “work” had cultural and moral valence. A characteristic of the *Zigeuner* stereotype was that the group was often portrayed by the dominant discourse as earning a living through theft and trickery, whereas colonial subjects were predominantly represented as lazy. Missionary efforts were therefore focused on Christianization but with a particularly heavy emphasis on cultural and moral dimensions. This ideological mixture can be seen in the instructions that were given to Protestant missionaries in Friedrichslohra, who were to “guide the unfortunate *Zigeuner* [...] towards Christian morality through work and education, prayer and their example with the help of God” (Pischel, 1894: 11). Finally, the analytical category of space is crucial for both Othering processes. From a geographical perspective, spatial similarities between both images in the process of Othering do not seem particularly evident, as the African continent is a distant place, whereas Sinti and Roma communities live within German society. Nevertheless, the writings on *Zigeuner* settlements by the missionaries and other intellectuals reveal a rigid and distinct understanding of culture and the idea that these settlements were impermeable entities. As a result, the majority and dominant discourse regarded *Zigeuner* and different African ethnic groups each as an enclosed entity and fundamentally different from what was perceived as German culture. Furthermore, emotional distance was created by using different pronouns in the process of constructing identity and alterity, such as “us”, signifying closeness, and “them”, signifying distance. Space was also a relevant category in terms of perceiving the influence of these groups on the dominant society. In some public writings, missionaries portrayed *Zigeuner* as “parasitical”, “criminal”, and “a threat” to the surrounding people in order to justify the need for civilizing missions.

Even after the Second World War, such negative stereotypes and discrimination against Sinti and Roma continued. In a handbook for theology from 1962, the entry on *Zigeuner*, with regard to missionary efforts, read as follows: “Neither bloody persecution nor well-intended civilizing missions changed their nature or their number” (n.a., 1962).<sup>[43]</sup> A transfer of knowledge becomes evident in the public writings of missionaries, as similar tropes and stereotypes in the depiction of *Zigeuner* were used across a wider time span. Reinhart Koselleck’s metaphor of layers of time (*Zeitschichten*) seems fitting to describe this transfer of knowledge. He argues that there is a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) and that several layers of time of different lengths and origins are always present and

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43. German original: “Weder blutige Verfolgung noch wohlgemeinte Gesittungsbestrebungen haben ihr Wesen verändert noch ihre Zahl vermindern können.”

effective at the same time (Koselleck, 2000: 9). The same is true for these ideas and stereotypes about the Other, which were constructed during different time periods but remain present as layers in collective memory and are altered depending on the context.

The study of antigypsyism, however, should not be reduced to a mere analysis of images in the writings of missionaries and other intellectuals over time. A closer look at different types of writing reveals that textually produced *Zigeuner* stereotypes not only varied depending on the time they were written, but also on other factors, such as different purposes and the addressees of the writing, even within the work of one author. Furthermore, the close network of agents, such as missionaries and other intellectuals in the metropole, as well as men on the ground in peripheral areas, needs to be analyzed more extensively. In terms of missionaries, studying their path of education might provide further insights. Spohn pointed out that the *Zigeuner* missionaries of the City Mission in Berlin were mainly driven by a Christian sense of duty but had little theoretical background in the field (cf. Spohn, 2016), whereas the missionaries in Friedrichslohra had been specifically trained by institutions and probably teachers that also trained missionaries for service in the colonies.

Missionaries and their specific antigypsyist stereotypes need to be analyzed in greater depth, for example through a comparative analysis with other agents that voiced antigypsyist tendencies or took action against gypsies, such as the police, medical professionals, or civic society. In an anniversary publication of the City Mission in Berlin from 1927, the principal missionary in the city, Thieme, highlighted different antigypsyist attitudes by two other groups of people: civic society in general and the police:

A distant person often too quickly reaches their judgment on the nature of this people. Indolence, adversity to work, mischievousness, crudeness, and a happy-go-lucky nature are undeniably the character traits that are initially observable. A person who is closer is more likely to add the following traits: modesty, good-naturedness, cheerfulness. The *Zigeuner* are a primitive people at an underdeveloped stage in nature, and the locals' strict rejection of this foreign element and excessive regulations by the police force these people that are driven out again and again into new vices (Thieme, 1927: 82).<sup>[44]</sup>

It could be argued that each group – missionaries, police, and the general population – has a specific perspective on Sinti and Roma, and therefore uses slightly different Othering methods in relation to *Zigeuner*. The feminist theorist Donna Haraway calls these partial perspectives “situated knowledges” and highlights that the object of knowledge should also be regarded as an active agent in relation to the knowledge producers, and not only as the surface of the latter’s projection (Haraway, 1988). In relation to antigypsyism research and Romani studies, this not only means that the heterogenous group of people

44. German original: “Der Fernstehende ist oft zu schnell mit seinem Urteil über den Charakter dieses Volkes fertig. Trägheit, Arbeitsscheu, Verschmitztheit, Rohheit, Leichtlebigkeit sind ja unleugbar die oft zuerst sichtbaren Seiten. Der Näherstehende ergänzt dann aber wohl diese Beurteilung und fügt noch hinzu: Genügsamkeit, Gutmütigkeit, Frohsinn. Die *Zigeuner* sind ein primitives Volk auf unentwickelter Naturstufe, und die rigorose Abkehr der Einheimischen gegen diesen Fremdkörper, die überaus scharfen Polizeiverordnungen drängen die Hinausgestoßenen immer von neuen in die Untugenden hinein.”

that fall under the construct *Zigeuner* or the ethnic groups Sinti or Roma must be diversified, but so too must the majority population who conducts the process of Othering. The binary of majority versus minority, however, no longer seems like a productive one for future research on antigypsyism. Instead, one should take a closer look at diverse groups within the majority and minority, and their relation to each other, as a more fruitful method of establishing the constituent elements of the multifaceted phenomenon of antigypsyism and avoiding binary black-and-white thinking.

When using a postcolonial approach for the study of Protestant *Zigeuner* missionaries and the images of *Zigeuner* they construct, one has to bear in mind the complexity of social realities across time and try to reconstruct their fine nuances rather than perpetuating binary oppositions. In terms of the colonial context, Catherine Hall highlights the agency of colonial subjects in speaking against this pattern for establishing positions. She makes the clear remark that “[t]he framework of them/us, or what is absolutely the same versus what is absolutely other, will not do. It is not possible to make sense of empire either theoretically or empirically through a binary lens: we need the dislocation of that binary and more elaborate, cross-cutting ways of thinking” (Hall 2002: 16). Hall also refers to different colonial experiences, that is, to those that depend on class and gender, and thereby she highlights intersectional modes of oppression, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak conceptualized with the term “subaltern” in relation to the oppression of the female colonized (Hall 2002: 15–16; Spivak, 1988). Furthermore, one needs to take into account the perspective researchers bring to analyses of the process of Othering. They mainly draw on previous sources and take on the perspective of the dominant groups; as a result, groups that are represented in images of the Other are not given a voice. Social reality is more complex and thus, reciprocity between subject and object plays a significant part; these are aspects that are omitted when one simply makes reference to one kind of source (Richardson, 2000: 210). In relation to German Protestant missionaries on the African continent, for example, Altena points out, that,

The mission was never a one-way street that was delivered by an ‘active’ missionary to a ‘passive’ person who was to be missionized. Instead, agents from both sides found themselves in a situation of cultural encounter as parts of a specific transcultural constellation, which was influenced by mutual acquisitions, deformations, or entirely new definitions of cultural elements and had reciprocal effects on all participants (Altena, 2003: 3).

Reciprocity is thus highly relevant when one analyzes images of the Other. Altena clearly demonstrated that direct contact over a long period of time leads to more nuanced and objective writings from missionaries on the ground about the colonial subject, which correlates with studies of prejudice in social psychology. Research on antigypsyism would therefore profit from a more differentiated and nuanced view if it took reciprocity into account. Spivak asked whether the subaltern could speak, concluding that they were not heard, and that their speech acts were flouted by male-dominated society. Nevertheless, the oppressed do have a voice, but they are repeatedly silenced by the majority; academia has helped to perpetuate this by focusing on binary oppositions and pursuing an approach based on monodirectional contact. The inclusion of sources from the oppressed groups themselves, which have their own perspectives on such encounters, could make a key contribution in this regard.

## Conclusion

This paper's empirical analysis and methodological reflection have demonstrated the important contribution that a postcolonial framework can make to critical Romani studies and research on antigypsyism more generally. First of all, the encounters between majority and minority or colonizer and colonized should be analyzed as bidirectional relationships that take into account the reciprocal influence of each group on the other. In order to do this, we need to consider the voices of the oppressed and highlight the extent of their actions.

By focusing on a specific group of "men on the spot" – that is, Protestant missionaries – I have highlighted the similar strategies of Othering Sinti and Roma as well as the colonized that were employed among these agents. Missionaries were predominantly driven by a paternalistic aim of "civilizing the primitives", whom they regarded as *homines educandi*, both in the colonies and the socially and geographically peripheral areas at home. These agents were not only connected by the similar ideological frameworks they adopted, but they also came into close contact with each other. Although the writings these missionaries produced varied greatly according to its purpose and addressees, there was a clear transfer of knowledge across time and space, and between intellectuals within the majority. Within this transference, the image of the *Zigeuner* was altered, most obviously in Justin's racial-biological explanations for the failure of the civilizing mission in Friedrichslohra.

Finally, this article highlighted that antigypsyism is not a monolithic phenomenon within a homogenous majority or a dominant society. Different agents voiced different kinds of antigypsyist attitudes. Additional comparative studies could productively organize specific forms of antigypsyism according to the different groups that held these views and compare Protestant missionaries with the police, medical professionals, or members of civic society. A genre analysis of different kinds of discourse, such as those from religion, arts and popular culture, or medicine, would also be beneficial here. The example of Friedrichslohra also showed that the Protestant mission was conducted in an ecclesiastical context too. As such, a deeper analysis of the Protestant mission in relation to the Catholic *Zigeuner* mission might provide important insights for Critical Romani Studies and processes of colonization more broadly.

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Mihai Surdu, *Those Who Count: Expert Practices of Roma Classification*, Central European University Press, 2016

Book review by

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**Critical  
Romani Studies**

## Introduction: Surdu's Choices and Position

Mihai Surdu's book *Those Who Count. Expert Practices of Roma Classification*, published by the CEU Press in 2016, is, according to the author, "not another book about Gypsies or Roma". Rather, the author claims that it is a book about "the history of their classification and about their classifiers" (1). Surdu aims to uncover various interests – scientific, political, and those of Roma entrepreneurs – in "constituting Roma groupness", a process which is "terribly mundane if one considers money, power, academic, and managerial positions that circulate in political and academic networks" (1). He claims that he "wrote this book from the position of [a] critical reader of Roma-related literature" (2) as he considers himself to be neither a scholar nor an activist (1). However, in his book Surdu clearly demonstrates that he also belongs to the "epistemic community" (14) that has been producing knowledge about Roma. Contrary to his positioning as "a critical reader", he approaches the topic from the specific nominalist and constructivist traditions in the social sciences (32–33).

Who are the Gypsies/Roma<sup>[1]</sup> (in an ontological sense)? How are they constituted as an object of scientific and policy research (in an epistemological sense)? These seem to be the central questions of Surdu's book. Surdu approaches these questions by expressing scepticism and disbelief that the concept of ethnicity indicates a distinct social reality. He chooses nominalist and constructivist approaches against realist and essentialist ones, making it clear that Roma are, in fact, "a *fiction*" brought into existence merely by "concepts", "classifications" or "categories" by those who researched or counted them (48).

Moreover, in his view, current Romani ethnicity is a product of classification and categorization or simply – a construction – by those who have had interests in doing so, be they scholars, policy experts or entrepreneurs, among them Roma entrepreneurs. He adds that in the case of Roma, this process has not been "primarily driven by the Roma political community but by external or academic expert and political community" (51). He asserts his position clearly: "I do not affirm that Roma people do not exist, but I assert that the Roma population exists as a negative and oppositional construction made by dominant groups and self-internalized by many of those labelled as Roma" (33).

Surdu selected two case studies based on reports from the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in order to illustrate this argument. Linked to the book's main subject, he strongly criticizes both institutions for their methodologies of data gathering and for promoting stigmatizing messages about Romani ethnicity that are associated with poverty and welfare dependency (175–200).

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1. I do not reflect on the terminology Surdu is using in his book as that would require a separate essay. It may suffice here to note that national legislators in a number of countries regulated this issue of nomenclature already and they have followed on the demands of Roma representatives and leaders as to how they want to be named according to the law. It therefore renders discussions on terminology rather redundant. Surdu is also using, as do many others, the argument that there are groups who do not identify as Roma, e.g. Ashkalia and Egyptians in the Western Balkans, Boyash in Hungary, etc. He forgets to notice, however, that those who do identify as Roma dominate in Europe. See, for example European Union-Council of Europe, 2009: 11. In this paper, Roma make up 85% of the total estimated number of this population (11).

# 1. Dealing with Roma Diversity and Sameness

The notion of diversity and its opposite – the sameness of Gypsies/Roma – and how it is approached by academics and policy-makers drives Surdu's analysis. He assigns diversity to a constructivist approach and sameness to an essentialist one. Arguing for the former and criticizing the latter, Surdu follows the tradition, present among many scholars, of viewing Gypsies/Roma as a predominantly diverse population (Chapter 3 "Disciplinary Traditions in the Study of Roma" is devoted to critics of past and essentialist studies or Gypsologist studies). The selection of authors he refers to or quotes to support his thesis is clear: they are mainly those authors who are critical of essentialist narratives, including the ones on Roma origins in India who share the same culture, language, and traditions (Chapter 3, sub-chapter 2, "Anthropological, Historical, and Linguistic Accounts of Roma").

Surdu criticizes the opposite approach, that of the essentialists (the title of a sub-chapter is telling: "Ethnicity as a fiction made by science", 44–49), which has been foundational for collecting and comparing data about Roma in the last two decades. Surdu largely criticizes methodologies of data collection because, according to him, they are often "flawed and untrusted" and "rooted in [an] essentialist approach" (44–49). Surdu accepts, uncritically, that the "mainstream sociological perspective regards ethnicity as a social construct" and argues that this approach dominates present-day social theory (44).

For those of us interested in the topic of ethnicity, especially in the context of ethnic identity in a globalized world, there are many other theories of ethnicity that may better serve to describe the situation of Roma. To make it clear, I am in favour of a more "middle ground" position regarding ethnicity and approaches to it. I associate with Aronoff and Kubik, who observe that, "Although some scholars consider ethnicity to be primordial or at least perennial, it is neither wholly chosen nor assigned. [...] The acquisition of ethnic identity is generally associated with the growing sense of self-consciousness linked with so-called modernity" and in this process, identity is "deliberately politicized, especially, when it is threatened by forces of domination and /or assimilation (like colonialism or globalization)" (Aronoff and Kubik, 2013: 158).

Therefore, there is nothing threatening in "politicizing" ethnicity, in this case, Romani ethnicity, something that Surdu is arguing against and following in the footsteps of Martin Kovats.<sup>[2]</sup> Surdu refers to Kovats in

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2. It is important to notice that in his *Acknowledgements* Surdu thanks Martin Kovats, among others. In 2003, Kovats suggested that it is a deliberate state action to recognize Roma as an ethnic minority. He argued that "The 'prohibitive' costs of improving these people's living conditions and of returning their labour to 'profitability' provides a strong incentive for the state to define 'Roma' as a distinct community, thereby allowing policy to focus on the far cheaper promotion of ethnic 'difference...'. He further adds that, "It conserves the political isolation of 'Roma' people and supports the ideology of segregation..." and that, "[A]s a statement of fact, the nationalist claim is the most amazing nonsense" and "Roma nationalism does not represent the emancipation of a suppressed people in the tradition of anti-colonial struggles, but the promotion of an authoritarian nationalist tradition in which a political community is constructed through the manipulation of vulnerable people, to secure the interests of an unaccountable elite." He concludes: "[T]hus, Roma nationalism is music to the ears of racists who have always believed that the Gypsies are alien to and incompatible with majority society... The reality is that a growing number of Roma people are trying to resist the fate being prepared for them, but the progressive instinct of their politics is being suppressed by the imposition from above of the agenda and institutions of segregation. They are being forced into a nationalist framework that guarantees more frequent and violent conflict. *This road to Hell is paved with good intention*" (Kovats, 2003).

arguing that Roma intellectuals have been “imposing Roma nationalism and, together with it, the term Roma as a political category” and that, “Roma identity is highly politicized by promoters of Roma nationalism” (96).

In Surdu’s view there is an “epistemic community” and a specific type of policy community (i.e. state institutions, such as the state police from the eighteenth century, see the sub-chapter “From police profiling to policy research profiles”, 72–81) and the expertise of both is used in producing knowledge about Roma. He adds, however, that it is predominantly the prevailing political field or type of regime that constitutes Gypsies/Roma as a political entity and creates a “Roma issue which afterwards is objectified by various academic disciplines” (15).

In other words, Surdu is arguing that the academic construction of Roma as an object of study is dependent on the political context or type of regime. Here, knowledge about the Roma is a by-product of political will-power and what is being said about Roma is authoritative because it is associated with those holding the power and thus it afforded an authority of truth (17).

For Surdu, the categorization of Gypsies and later of Roma should be seen in its historic context in order to understand the epistemic claims made by authorities that then led to the social formation of the group (17). He claims that the authorities’ categorization has led to the social formation of the group.<sup>[3]</sup>

The literature review on general classificatory practices related to ethnicity or minority identity and those specifically tied to Roma, leads Surdu to the conclusion that, “those labeled as Roma (in the process of the standardization of Roma identity) internalize the scientifically constructed stereotypes”. These stereotypes are mostly negative, though he also adds: “Of course, there are also positive stereotypes in the expert and scientific production of knowledge on Roma, such as those related to artistic abilities and especially music” (6).

Surdu’s key arguments are revealed in Chapter 3, where he elaborates on the title of the publication, *Those Who Count...* He claims that, “In most of the Roma-related studies, Roma ethnicity is set as an independent and categorical variable” (958) and as “explanatory of various social phenomena such as poverty, cultural consumption, educational status, and social mobility” (59). As a result, “ethnicity, instead of being explained as a product of processes of social differentiation, is treated as a cause of such processes: ethnicity is a cause of poverty and not *vice versa*” (59). Further, he adds that, “What is omitted is individual mobility in the social hierarchy, and the fact that when such mobility happens, the poverty label is removed, and in most of the cases the ethnic label is also removed together with it” (59). According to Surdu’s logic here, individuals who, thanks to social mobility, manage to climb up in the social hierarchy and get out of poverty, in fact, cease to be Roma anymore. The reality on the ground, however, falsifies such assertions. There are Roma who are rich and at the same time proud of being Roma just as there Roma activists who climb up in the

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3. However, a few pages later Surdu maintains just the opposite: “Under the influence of epistemic communities together with pressure from the Romani movement, the policy-makers bodies, such as governments, international organizations and the bodies of European Union (EU) adopted essentialist classifications of Gypsies/Roma and consequently, developed inappropriate essentialist list of policy answers” (21).

social hierarchy but keep their Roma ethnicity and engagement in Roma issues. Surdu concludes that there is major gap and, in fact, opposition between the constructivist social theory of Roma ethnicity and the essentialist practice of applied sociology or empirical studies collecting data on Roma, which is especially relevant in cases of census or survey data collection on Roma. In fact, research on education and Roma makes it clear that “social status descriptors are used to depict Roma as an ethnic group” (61).

This explains Surdu’s critical reading of census and surveys as a main instrument which results in the “reification”, “racialization” and “stigmatization” of Romani ethnicity (62). Therefore, he postulates, following the study by Ladanyi and Szelenyi, the need to see Romani ethnicity as a dependent variable. Surdu adds “that [Roma identity] is built through the influence of other variables” (61) and that it is not considered as explanatory or taken for granted. Surdu heavily criticizes the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) surveys and sampling procedures that are, in his views, “manipulated” and “crafted” in a way to serve “essentialist” assumptions in their research. As a consequence, WB and UNDP reinforce stereotypical images and stigmatize Romani ethnicity as a “poverty-ridden and under-developed and somehow deviant group” (68–72). Surdu holds that the state and its “police science” and later on, “policy research”, were decisive in defining “Gypsies as [a] unitary group that should be targeted in order to change their behavior, making them conform with the state’s logic of economic productivity” (78).

He specifies that the police act towards Gypsies with the “repressive force of the state, whereas, policy research appeals for Roma integration through benevolent action of the same state. Repression and paternalism are carried out by different institutions of the state based on shared understanding of who Gypsies are” (77).

He claims that state institutions used ethnic profiling to “isolate Gypsies as a group that is different from others” (78). He concludes that “police research” about Gypsies “started in eighteenth century in Western Europe gradually incorporated scientific methods and theories of identification, classification, counting, description”, all of which could be seen as a precursor to modern policy research on Roma populations (81). These assertions are nothing new; they uphold the views attributed to the Dutch school of social historians (Lucassen, Willems and Cottard, 1998). In fact, Surdu quotes and relies on their views heavily in the book. However, many scholars do not agree with the Dutch school’s findings and positions (Matras, 2013: 5, see also Van Baar, 2011).

Surdu also follows on Judith Okely’s arguments which scrutinized and challenged many aspects of the “orthodoxy of Gypsy studies” (90), including those related to the Romani language (Okely, 1983). He recalls what she noted in this regard, namely that, “language is a matter of learning and not one of biological descent” (90), meaning that the essentialists’ assertions based on a shared language are scientifically weak. It is significant to notice that in Surdu’s book the sub-chapter on Romani language is only a page and half (91–92). This is contrary to commonly accepted scientific views which consider one’s mother tongue as a key marker of any identity.

How then does Surdu see the Romani movement within the dichotomy of constructivist versus essentialist or difference versus sameness? He stresses that the concept of Roma identity in current meaning – as a political category – emerged as a result of the interaction between the mainstream political establishment

and the Romani movement in the 1970s (161). Referring to findings from Simhandl (2006), Surdu points to the way in which Roma were re-categorized in this process: from “nomads” to “disadvantage group” and “ethnic minority”. He upholds the view of Simhandl when arguing that “coining the term Roma and applying it to the ethnicization of certain segments of Eastern Europe populations by Western institutions is a typical example of orientalization of the East” (94).

Surdu also recalls Martin Kovats in this context, who emphasizes that although Romani identity is framed by powerful outside institutions, Romani organizations are complacent in imposing an acknowledgement of Romani identity in political circles.

Similarly, Surdu further recalls the work of Peter Vermeersch who stresses the stigmatizing and counter-productive efforts of the Romani movement, for example, by framing Roma as a “unitary transnational group sharing common identity markers (such as a common descent, language, and culture) and having the same problems (poverty, unemployment, etc.)” (97–98).

In this context, Surdu quotes Vermeersch who has argued that, “Roma activists run the risk of reifying, politicizing and perhaps even intensifying the boundary between minority and majority identities” (Vermeersch, 2005: 454 cited in Surdu: 98). Surdu thus asserts that Romani identity is “rather the result of an external construction than a mobilization coming from the grassroots” and that Roma civil society tends to promote and impose “essentialist” Romani ethnicity markers (99).<sup>[4]</sup> However, Vermeersch (2006) does not question the existence of a distinct Roma ethnicity and identity, though he is critical of the Romani movement and its strategies of doing politics.

## 2. Data Collection on Roma – Pitfalls and Advantages

Surdu’s criticism against the *essentialist* approach is most vividly presented in those sections of his book that refer to the Roma census or survey design and implementation. The main question here is to what extent do these practices “create and fix ethnicity by generating ethnic data for the use of discourse and political action” (105)? For Surdu, the census contributes to the *essentialist* assumption by making “ethnicity” objective and measurable.

He holds that the “census is a scientific and administrative practice with the greatest power to objectify ethnicity” and further, that it provides “the ground for action of ethno-political entrepreneurs, who by virtue of ethnic statistics can reclaim themselves as representatives of an ethnic group (...) measured and hence constituted through scientific methodologies” (117).

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4. Surdu writes: “The basic conflict in research about Roma is not that the *Roma* category appears as a natural, obvious, self-evident kind of entity for scientists and policy-makers, but that they are using this category in opposition to an even more obscure and abstract one, that of *non-Roma*. If it seems difficult to answer the question ‘Who are the Roma?’, it is even more complicated to define who the non-Roma are, as they are built in contradiction to an elusive and fluctuating socially constructed entity” (38). I would therefore ask: What about Jews in this regard? What about the in-group and out-group notion that seems to be a universal feature to any group? In general, these kinds of statements lack a comparative framework and this can be considered one of the major weaknesses of this book.

Surdu sees this data collection method as having “extreme consequences” for the subjects of the census. He provides examples from Nazi Germany and South Africa, wherein “the ethnic/racial categories created through administrative and scientific exercise” functioned afterwards as criteria for generating state policies of exclusion and discrimination and, ultimately, genocide (106).

Surdu points out that, “In the academic community and policy circles the size and profile of the Roma population are considered as facts, even as scientific” (140). On the contrary, Surdu considers the size and profile of the population as “highly circumstantial and dependent on political interest of those who count” (140). He concludes that “In the long history of Roma enumeration, police and sociologists seem to have been standing side by side as enumerators” (141).

It may appear interesting, indeed, to see what evidence is used and by whom as a “legitimate source” for numbers or estimates in various expert reports (WB, UNDP or that of the Council of Europe). According to Surdu, expert reports mostly use and refer to the data and estimates of the Roma population provided by J. P. Liegeois. He points out (in the reference to Liegeois, 1983) that the numbers “are provided without any reference to a source of data, not indicating the type of source (official or unofficial), neither in the text nor in bibliography” (144). Further, he criticizes surveys because they use unreliable data from a census. Hence, the title of his sub-chapter: “Representative survey samples based on unrepresentative census data” (148–152).

Surdu claims that, “quantitative research on Roma proceeds to the conceptualization of its population of the study from a census considered unreliable, and yet uses this census for asserting representativeness of its sample” (150). He concludes that, “In producing Roma-related numbers, all parts involved (NGOs and representatives of international organizations, activists, politicians, journalists, researchers, etc.) present data about ‘Roma issues’ in accordance to their interests” (152).

Let me also bring here another example of data collection, this time on Roma in Poland. The first and sole available statistical data on Roma there was collected by the police in the 1960s during the communist period (Romano Atmo, 2014). This data is reliable simply because the majority of Roma were easily distinguishable: over 10,000 travelling Roma (with horses and wagons) were registered by the police, accompanied by representatives of local authorities and party members in the 1960s. The other part of the Romani population, the one to which I belong, was settled by visibly marked communities or settlements in villages or outskirts of the cities (Mirga, 1998). The majority, if not everyone, was using the Romani language as a mother tongue. New data was then provided by the census in 2011, based on self-ascription and mother tongue (Ludność, 2011). More insight into the way Surdu approaches data collection can be found in Chapter 6, particularly in his two case studies (out of four) of WB and UNDP reports. I will limit myself here to review the WB case study, referring only to the report from 2005 while also addressing some of Surdu’s interpretations of this report (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005).

Within the constructivist versus essentialist frame, Surdu views the WB’s approach as an essentialist one, asserting that the WB attributes to Roma “a common and reluctant-to-change Roma culture” that is “widely shared by these diverse populations” (181). Further, he critically reviews the assumption that, “Roma culture seems to transcend countries’ boundaries, and it seems to be a monolithic and

autonomous entity detached from local cultural influences and completely deterritorialized from its proximate environment" (181). Surdu claims that instead of addressing "systemic" issues faced by Roma, the WB reports transfer responsibility for those issues onto Roma themselves (186). As a result, Surdu maintains that, "through recycling the statements used in previous reports" (184) the WB reinforces "negative representation of the Roma group by using a poverty frame and ethnic boundary frame" (188).

The issue of Roma culture and diversity seems to be key in what Surdu sees as the WB bias in relation to Roma. However, the WB report is unequivocal about it. To quote:

Efforts to create, define, or represent a single Roma community will similarly founder on the rocks of internal cultural diversity. Roma tend to have distinctive problems of integration and access, but the situation of different communities and individuals varies immensely and cannot be reduced to a single, simple set of answers or policy responses (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005: 11).

Furthermore, the WB recognizes fully the issue of diversity and how it may impact various groups of Roma:

The diversity of Roma impedes generalizations at the regional and country level. In addition to notable ethnic differences, there is significant diversity among Roma settlements – rural and urban, assimilated and non-assimilated, homogenous and heterogeneous – as well as in religious affiliation. Some groups speak variations of the Roma language, while others do not. Given the striking diversity of Roma communities, generalizing about the nature and characteristics of Roma culture is extremely difficult. [...] However, it is clear that aspects of Roma social organization and values affect the interactions of Roma and non-Roma, the dynamics among Roma subgroups, and many aspects of their welfare (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005: 11).

Surdu focuses on two specific parts from this fragment – "aspects of Roma social organization and values" and "aspects of their welfare" – and concludes that, in fact, the WB blames Roma themselves for their poverty and disadvantage.

According to him, the WB is also fully aware that, "Measuring poverty is an inherently subjective task fraught with methodological complexities. There is no correct or scientific method" (WB Report, 2005: 26). In this context, it is important to note that the WB commissioned its first Roma survey in 2000 to the Sociology Department at Yale University (WB Report, 2005: 28). As stated by the WB, "The survey was the first of its kind to address the ethnic dimension of poverty across countries and allows for a comparative quantitative assessment of the living conditions of Roma in the region" (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005: 29). With regards to these findings, the WB states that,

The evidence suggests that the roots of pervasive Roma poverty are closely linked to low education levels, limited employment opportunities, and unfavorable health status [...] With their situation compounded by discrimination and low expectations of employers, Roma have had more difficulty reentering the job market than other groups

and consequently have become caught in a vicious cycle of impoverishment (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005: 53–54).

The key question here is what do we get as outcomes from such surveys – fraudulent and misleading data, as Surdu concludes, or simply imperfect data produced by scientific methods that reflect reality out there? Should we object to data that indicate that a large portion, though not an entire population, is subject to disadvantage due to various reasons and suffers disproportionately, for example, from poverty?<sup>[5]</sup> If I learn from a survey that the majority of Roma has no higher education and that there is a problem with those who even manage to finish primary school, then is this an accurate reflection of reality or rather false and stigmatizing data about that reality?<sup>[6]</sup> Furthermore, the WB as an organization has been tasked with the responsibility for global poverty-reduction. Its mandate and capacity are dedicated to poverty issues. It is therefore rather fortunate that it does address the aspect of Romani poverty in Europe which is eventually what helped to establish of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (DRI) 2005–2015. Alongside George Soros, the Open Society Foundations and a number of governments of Central and Eastern Europe, the WB was one of the founders of the DRI, which was officially launched in 2005 in Sofia, Bulgaria. And in turn, one of the most visible outcomes of this initiative was the establishment of the Roma Education Fund (REF). REF is currently active in 16 countries (including Russia and Turkey) and its mandate is to support the emergence of an educated Roma class. It was the WB among other organizations advocating for the idea that increasing the number of educated and skilled Roma in the region is of central significance. Most Roma leaders continue to endorse this idea.

### 3. Relevance of Genetic Studies for Roma Policy Making

I was curious to know how Surdu deals with genetic studies in the context of Romani studies, census and surveys data and analyses. His third case study reveals both his motivation for studying it and the way he approaches it. In essence, genetic studies (medical and population genetics) serve to reinforce Surdu's arguments raised against essentialist approaches to Roma. He uncovers the biases of genetic studies, which are related to circular or tautological reasoning regarding Roma genetics, treatment of Roma as "*population isolate*", unchanged, originating from India, prone to endogamy, etc.

He critically assesses this practice as follows:

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5. In particular, the WB report makes clear that data provided illustrate the situation of many Roma groups but there are also those who are not facing poverty issues or are in fact part of the middle class. The 2005 WB report states that, "Poverty rates for Roma in all three countries (Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania) are strikingly high – in all cases several times higher than among non-Roma" (Ringold, Orenstein, and Wilkens, 2005: 29). In the case of Bulgaria, the report says that, "The highest absolute poverty level among Roma households lies in Bulgaria, followed closely by Romania. Even at the lower line, 41 percent of all Roma households in Bulgaria and 38 percent in Romania are found to be poor – a strikingly high proportion" (Ibid., 30).

6. The 2005 WB report states that, "Another unique challenge of research on Roma is the legacy of biased research. Early studies on Roma in the late nineteenth century in Western Europe sought to confirm theories about genetic inferiority (Fraser, 1995). Recent works reviewed in the Czech and Slovak Republics were found to have a social Darwinist slant (ECOHOST [European Centre on Health of Societies in Transition], 2000). More recent scholarship on Roma may suffer from political biases. Roma leaders and activists have an interest in portraying the situation as worse than it may actually be, while government reports may gloss over failings to present a more favorable picture (Bárány, 2000)" (Cited in Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2005: 26).

In order to choose a genetic isolate as an object of study such a population must be postulated a priori as an isolate (with arguments of endogamy and/or geographical separateness) and then it must be reconfirmed a posteriori through genetic research as a biologically unitary and consistent entity (207).

Above all, however, why are genetic studies, which Surdu discredits in his analysis anyway, considered important by Surdu and in what area? Chapter 5, titled “Influencers of academia and expert discourse about Roma” (153–173), attempts to answer this question. Surdu chooses the Google Scholar search engine as a tool for mapping out the scientific field regarding the most-quoted publications about Roma, and thus, the most influential; all together he reviews 251 publications for the period 1990 until 2013. Genetic studies emerged as relevant in this search (see Table 2 on p. 166). The mentioned table summarizes the scientific and expert interest in Roma as an object of study and ranks them according to number (percentage) of papers per category/discipline and the average number of citations per paper in each category/discipline (165). Elsewhere Surdu adds that, “I have chosen to analyze in depth the representation of the Roma in genetic papers from the sample because I found Genetics to be most efficient field in the construction of Roma-related discourse” (201).

In contrast to Surdu, throughout my own many years of engagement with the Romani movement (since the 1980s), I have never discussed, debated or raised questions pertaining to (Roma) genetics because I have not found these to be relevant considerations for our “political” struggle in the Romani movement.

## Conclusions

Mihai Surdu hoped to introduce a new paradigm for studying the Roma people by shedding light on those who “constructed” the Roma through scholarship, expert-type analyses or policy research. What he chose to include in his book is meaningful but not quite as meaningful as that which he left out of his analysis.

First of all, Surdu elaborates on how Gypsy/Roma ethnicity is “fluid”, “contextual”, “diverse” (44) and thus, hard to define. But, he does not mention that many countries have included Roma in their national legislations on minorities, and thus created preconditions for this population to be named and for rights to be conferred to them. It is my opinion that national legislators are more decisive here than experts and scholars (Council of Europe, 2002).

Secondly, any serious study that looks at ethnicity and ethnic identity cannot leave out the views and efforts of the affected groups who actively shape the notions of their own ethnicity and ethnogenesis (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997). In other words, despite their powerless position, Romani leaders and representatives play an active role in determining who they are and how national legislation should define and address them. This is especially the case in the former CEE countries following the fall of communism in Europe in 1989.

It shall be stressed here that Romani activists have been using the available data for advocacy purposes. There is a significant difference in how data about Roma are collected versus how they are interpreted. I

would argue that although the methodology of collecting data can be always improved, it is its use and integration that distorts the reality (Open Society Foundations, 2010).

Thirdly, Surdu's book is missing a comparative perspective, both regarding ethnicity research and social or ethnic movements. The reader is not always sure whether Surdu's assertions are generally applicable to all ethnic minorities or specifically to the Roma minority. How might the key issues discussed in Surdu's book about Roma be relevant to, for example, the current literature on Black Americans struggling with notions of white supremacy or critical race theories that point to the existence of structural discrimination?

Fourthly, Surdu has failed to engage with the emerging Romani scholarship aiming to become part of the "epistemic community" of knowledge-producers on Roma. This is a noticeable aspiration among a rising number of educated Roma who are engaged in research and part of the academy. They want to contribute to the knowledge about their community and resist being seen only as passive objects of study by others while also committed to questioning existing notions of dominance in research and knowledge about their community (Bogdán *et al.*, 2015; Ryder, 2015; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015; Matache, 2016; Kóczé, 2009; Jovanović *et al.*, 2015; Kóczé, 2015).

Finally, although Surdu raises important questions in his book, he does not propose any clear alternatives. Rather, he presents several overused ideas in passing, such as the de-politicization, de-ethnicization, or de-racialization of Roma and the citizenship rights perspective (247–253). It is an unconvincing approach especially since the trends in majority society and among Roma communities in many countries in Europe and in the EU are just the opposite; ethnic cleavages and fragmentations, nationalism and political factionalism are all on the rise today.

I choose to discuss Surdu's book because, as a Romani person, I object to being seen simply as an ethnic subject who is constructed by those in power, be it for reasons of power, interest or prestige. I also oppose the attempt by non-Roma to define the Romani movement and its activists as self-interested ethnic entrepreneurs who are somehow responsible for perpetuating a notion of ethnicity that, according to Surdu, is "stigmatizing" (32). More profoundly, I also object to Surdu's assertions that undermine the existence of Roma as distinct social and ethnic groups wherein ethnic and primordial ties and attachments are reduced to the "mundane" interests of "Roma entrepreneurs". I hope that policy makers and law makers, instead of recognizing what some scholars (or, the "epistemic community") come up with regarding Roma, respond to the requests of *Roma* leaders and representatives about their own legal status as a legitimate minority group (Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, 2002).

It is hard, indeed, to review a book written by someone who used to advocate for the Roma cause and who benefited from being part of the movement (Surdu's writing was supported by the OSF, among others) but who concludes that, in reality, there is no such thing as Romani ethnicity or that, "ethnicity appears as a fictitious object" (48). Who am I, therefore? What should I think about myself, my siblings and parents, all of us born in small a community, different and separated from the surrounding majority and speaking our mother tongue – Romani, the same way the parents of my parents did in the past? What about all of the other social categories, social groups or ethnic minorities, are they also but "fictitious objects" constituted by those who classified them as such?

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hooks, bell. (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press

Book review by

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**Critical  
Romani Studies**

Published nearly 30 years ago as the Berlin Wall fell and Eastern Europe emerged from Communism, bell hooks' 1989 book, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* has never been more relevant to the plight of Roma as it is today. The book represents the desire to challenge oppression and to speak up against racism, bigotry, and white supremacy from the perspective of the oppressed; thus, the collection of essays is a compelling combination of personal and theoretical arguments. Similarly, there is a growing need in Romani Studies to take a more critical look at the field, accounting for past and present injustices from within – theorized, analyzed, and recounted by Roma themselves. As the inaugural volume of *Critical Romani Studies Journal* emerged from a series of discussions, debates, conferences and constructive meetings, bell hooks' writings returned to mind.

Writing about the oppression of Black women and their craving to speak in their own voice, hooks discusses the struggle of self-identification, self-representation, and self-realization of marginalized groups. The parallels between the subjugation of the silenced Black women and contemporary forms of oppression of the Roma run on many levels; in many ways the Black feminist movement enlightens while also raises constructive questions about the Roma struggle.

hooks defines "talking back" as "speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (5). Silence – or an inability to speak for oneself, to object practices of domination, and to challenge the existing social hierarchy – is viewed as the "right speech" for the oppressed (6). "The context of silence is varied and multi-dimensional" (8) and can be found within family, community, or society. Silencing, in other words, happens nearly everywhere, as "we live in a world in crises – a world governed by politics of domination" (19). Silence itself is not the lack of speaking; instead, it is an act of submission. To overcome this submission means not only to "emerge from silence into speech" (6), but to make speech heard.

The act of domination means maintaining control over a group. There are many forms of domination that can be based on class, race, or other characteristics. Reminiscent of Marxist ideology, hooks argues that these forms of domination necessarily result in oppression and exploitation, pushing oppressed groups to the margins. "To be in the margin", hooks writes, "is to be part of the whole but outside of the body" (1990: 341), where the body can be seen as the society.

For hooks, achieving critical consciousness, when forms of oppression are brought to the surface and, importantly, acted upon, is an important turning point. "To speak when one was not spoken to was a courageous act – an act of risk and daring", hooks writes (5). Indeed, talking back is empowering. It is empowerment. It is "the expression of [...] movement from object to subject – the liberated voice" (9).

hooks does not view marginality as an incapacitating state. On the contrary, in her other work (1990) She sees marginality as "much more than a site of deprivation [...] it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" for the "oppressed, exploited and colonized people" (1990: 341–2). Marginality is the precondition for a struggle to emerge that generates counter-hegemonic discourse, which in turn may become the voice constituting critical consciousness.

hooks is not so much concerned about the consolidating effect of this consciousness: does it turn into a mobilizing platform for all the oppressed? Does it tie together their grievances in a coherent agenda

in order to challenge the oppressive system? Spivak, for instance, distinguishes collective consciousness from other forms. She sees “strategic use of positivist essentialism”, or in other words the subaltern groups embracing essentialism, as a way to gain political voice (1988: 13). In turn, strategic interest is the framework for collective consciousness to emerge.

There is an acute need to speak, according to hooks, about the discriminating hierarchical structure but also to express varied dimensions of life interpreted by those who live it, rather than the mere observers. Expressions may come in words – such as poetry or fiction writing – in images, such as paintings, or through music and lyrics. Language, images, and sounds are all places of struggle.

Just as hooks contemplates whether Bob Marley’s lyrics, “We refuse to be what you wanted us to be” (14) is appreciated fully by white people, so one can wonder whether the words of *Jelem, Jelem*, the Roma anthem, now commonly played at Roma-related events of all sorts, are properly honored, respected, and acknowledged. Perhaps fully appreciating these words would require an intimate knowledge of the past and present forms of oppression that such groups endure. The anthem is seeped in pain and pride simultaneously, about being an outcast while maintaining happiness; the anthem is a strong message to act, “Now is the time, rise up Roma now”.

Several further questions arise: if feminism is the liberation struggle for women, what is the liberation struggle for Roma women? Or, more generally, for all Roma? Is it part of a larger struggle to eradicate all forms of domination and racial differences, or a unique struggle distinct from others? These questions are at the heart of debates inside and outside of academia today. What is certain, according to Hooks, is that an organized liberation movement is a precondition for critical consciousness, which is necessary for a mindful rethinking of white supremacy and giving agency to the subaltern.

Furthermore, awakening Black women to the need for change (33) is critical for Hooks as much as awakening Roma is critical for the Roma Rights movement. For Hooks, academia and academicians play an imperative role in fostering a critical consciousness among those who are oppressed. Hooks naturally turns to academia as an academic herself. Education can be a “practice of freedom”, a platform where critical discussions and debates take place (62). Increasingly, we see Roma scholars assume similar roles by promoting Roma arts, culture, scholarship, films, and many other forms of self-expression.

Scholars can also participate in the liberation of the oppressed by theorizing the struggle. Hooks writes: “We are not rushing to create feminist theory and I for one think that is tragic. We may not be doing so precisely because of our fears of articulating that which is abstract” (39). Whether it was fear, inability, or unwillingness in Romani Studies to articulate certain forms of oppression (such as the predominantly white cohort of academics writing about Roma and consequently the inherent biases), in recent years the discipline has been maturing side by side with a growing awareness about the injustices Roma face.

Educating the oppressed is another aspect of developing critical consciousness. Just like the feminist struggle needs feminist education, “Women’s Studies [...] can be places where education is the practice of freedom, the place for liberatory pedagogy” (51).

The role, responsibility, and actions taken by advocates who belong to the white majority must be well thought out. Ethical considerations are imperative when writing about oppression and the oppressed: "When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination" (43). Importantly, *how* and *why* we talk about otherness distinguishes oppressive talks from liberating ones; "we fear those who speak about us who do not speak to us and with us", hooks writes (1990: 343). The continuing bias even in academia that should be more aware of injustices is "overvaluation of work done by whites" (43–44) at the expense of works done by Blacks, Roma, or other minorities.

At the core of the struggle is the celebration of diversity, gaining voice, while insisting on eradication of oppression in society. hooks highlights that diversity exists within groups as well, and Black communities vary in their culture and lifestyle (121). While these goals are noble, Hooks acknowledges that strategies of inclusion have not been developed. Hooks also falls short on defining equality and how equality can be attained through the struggle against oppression and domination. What is certain is that assimilation is never the answer, since it carries the white-supremacist normative logic: "While assimilation is seen as an approach that assures the successful entry of black people into the mainstream, at its very core it is dehumanizing" (67).

There is much to learn from the path of others' struggle. What unites these struggles is the subaltern position of the silenced, whose very marginal position can be a source of empowerment, and out of which a struggle is borne that strives to confront issues of discrimination.

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# African-American and Romani Filmic Representation and the ‘Posts’ of Post-Civil Rights and Post-EU Expansion

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Romani Studies**

## Abstract

In this article I explore linkages between the evolution of African-American filmic representation and the patterns of Romani representation in films from Central and Southeast Europe (CSEE). More specifically, I use the 1970s Blaxploitation movement and subsequent shift of African-American representation into films reliant on a realist aesthetic to contextualize analysis of the shortcomings of the Civil Rights Movement to provide broad integration for African-Americans. Given other similarities between the racialized positionalities of African-Americans and Roma, I argue that Blaxploitation can illuminate trends in the cinematic depictions of CSEE Roma, since the Roma Rights movement has had to contend with similar shortcomings in achieving political, social, and economic inclusion. The films I analyze in this piece include *Romning* (2007), *Just the Wind* (2012), *Episode of an Iron Picker* (2013), and *Bravo!* (2015).

## Keywords

- African-American
- Film
- Roma
- Race
- Representation

## Introduction

Despite the distance in their disparate histories, geographies, and cultures, African-Americans in the United States and Romani peoples in Central and Southeast Europe (CSEE) share much in common when it comes to their representation and treatment within majority societies. Both groups are defined by histories that frame them as internal others bound by marginalization. The effects of segregation linger on for both groups. Both groups are defined by way of their difference that is imposed, most notably, by structural barriers and the racialization of blackness and whiteness. The representation of African-Americans and CSEE Roma in film historically has employed “race” as a means to illustrate difference and engaged in stereotype recycling to reinforce the narratives of their universally marginalized positionalities. By “race” I refer to a manufactured “global color line” that burdens Roma and African-American representation and structural hierarchies that “rely not necessarily on biological conceptions of race but on institutional and biopolitical mechanisms, which differentiate populations into subgroups having varied access to means of life and death” (Mazrui, 1991; Sharad and Verdery, 2009: 12).

Within contemporary representations, it is possible to locate nuanced images of African-Americans and Romani peoples. Contextualizing African-American representation against a backdrop of socio-historical realities reveals how the movement from caricature to realist representation parallels the history of the Roma Rights movement and evolution of Romani representation in the cinemas of CSEE. Although the recycling of stereotypes in film certainly persists, representations now exist among a multiplicity of genres, characters, and situations. Of particular importance is the movement toward to realist aesthetics that developed alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, Blaxploitation, beginning in 1973, as it allowed for a multiplicity of experiences and verisimilitude that did not just rely on easily accessible stereotypes. For the purposes of this article, I define realism as the attempt for verisimilitude on the screen, as a means of giving the viewer an unvarnished glimpse into lives and cultures outside of the purview of dominant society. In films from CSEE with Roma-majority casts, we can detect a dialogue with the European Union focus on the “Roma Question”, where the inclusion of Romani people has moved from an issue of human rights to a question of economic and social inclusion (Rövid and Kóczé, 2012; Bhabha, Mirga, and Matache, 2017). While diverse African-American representation now has a history that spans decades, that was not always the case. In fact, this shift in cinematic image tracks African-American achievement and failures of aspects of Civil Rights, which itself was the result of a shift in focus of economics to human rights. Given that Blaxploitation film arose in the 1970s as an African-American response to the shortcomings of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, I posit that the shortcomings of the Roma Rights movement, from the early 2000s, to advance Romani social and economic inclusion in CSEE countries provides a foundation for the evolution of Romani representation to move from predictable stereotypes and metonymic symbols to more realistic, and diverse, portrayals. Numerous scholars address filmic representation of people of color and race; however, there has been minimal comparative work on screen representations of African-Americans and Romani peoples.<sup>[1]</sup>

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1. The list of scholars is long, but those referenced in this piece include Aniko Imre, Nikolina Dobreva, Dina Iordanova, Stuart Hall, Donald Bogle, Paula Masood, and Ed Guerro.

The 1970s African-American cinematic movement of Blaxploitation and its immediate aftermath offers a compelling point of reference for the trajectory of Roma representation. Blaxploitation arose out of a confluence of realities, including a realization of African-American economic power and the shortcomings of the Civil Rights movement, that superficially produced a (legal) means to realize equality but spurred little meaningful inclusion. Also important was the growth of an African-American educated class that challenged African-American representation. Among this group were filmmakers, activists, and an engaged viewing public. The output of African-American filmmakers contributed self-representation as the primary framework for diverse portrayals and even film genres.

The EU Eastern Enlargement (2004–2013) profoundly affected the Roma Rights movement, as the position of Romani communities in CSEE states has become a focal point for EU directives, Council of Europe initiatives, and NGOs. New concern for the socio-political position of Romani communities in CSEE provides a firm platform to move away from static Romani images dependent on long-standing stereotypes. This shift in focus corresponds well to changes in Romani representation in CSEE cinema, which, similar to Blaxploitation, is in dialogue with the unfulfilled social, economic, and political goals of Roma Rights.

This article employs an interdisciplinary approach to both analyze and catalog film history. The article contributes to a transatlantic dialogue by exploring similarities in the cinematic representations of African-Americans and Roma – two racialized transnational communities. In offering this comparison, I aim to dissect how racialized images of African-Americans and Roma are coded to articulate difference. I begin by engaging with the literature addressing the uses of race in film. Then I analyze how African-American cinema responded to a post-Civil Rights social insistence for assimilation with Blaxploitation, which, in turn, was challenged by even more diverse portrayals in the decline of Blaxploitation. I continue by analyzing post-2004 CSEE films with significant Romani casts to illustrate how similar histories and social trajectories of marginalization make Blaxploitation and its immediate aftermath illuminating counterpoints to the Romani cinematic image. Finally, I address Romani self-representation as a means of complicating the stereotypical images common to the Romani filmic image.

## 1. Framing Difference: Encoding/Decoding and Representation

Stuart Hall's reinterpretation of the communications model of encoding/decoding illustrates how images are created for and processed by the viewing public, including a space for individual interpretation beyond what is prescribed or assumed true based on dominant constructs. He illustrates how images work unconsciously for viewers and reinforce ideologies that are created and nurtured by societies (Hall, 2001). Thus, ideologies produce social consciousnesses and not the converse, such that ideologies can be “taken for granted” as true and appear on screen as natural. Hall recognizes race as one such ideology, manifesting in both *overt* and *inferential* forms. Overt racism happens when “open and favourable coverage is given to arguments, positions, and spokespersons who are in the business of elaborating an openly racist argument or advancing a racist policy or view” (Hall, 1995). By contrast, inferential

racism privileges *unquestioned assumptions*, that allow for unchecked statements about “race relations” and neutral language about race that fails to check its intricacies, applying language “impregnated with unconscious racism” and “the unstated and unrecognized assumption is that the *blacks* are the source of the problem” (Hall, 1995).

In the American context, “race [...] has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture” (Omi and Winat, 2012). In European contexts, however, race has ceased to be a dominant organizing principle since the Second World War. Nevertheless, I choose “race” in reference to Roma, as opposed to the term “ethnicity” used more regularly in the region because similar “mechanisms of racist exclusion in the United States and the rest of the world are not [...] completely different” (El-Tayeb, 2011: xxi). Moreover, as Catherine Baker points out, race has been an “undeniable category of analysis for Romani migration” (2018). Given that race manifests itself in “racialized hierarchies of power” and relies on a social structure and cultural representation, racism has become a globalized feature underpinned by local features (Batur, 2006: 5).

While it is true that the CSEE states tend to form understandings of belonging and distance on “ethnicity”, it is also necessary to understand that race affects the position of Romani people. Race is a construct imposed from the outside, informing daily interactions, European Union directives, and the perception of Roma as outsiders. Moreover, discourses of Roma difference continue to be linked to migration narratives – real or imagined – to a “mythical arrival to Europe from India” illustrating how “racism and discrimination have been a constant feature of their history” (Moschel, 2014: 141). Thus, their filmic image as different contributes to a well-established system of racialized signifiers encoded by way of forms of racism – both overt and inferential – that position Roma outside of the discourse and culture of the majority.

As an aspect of media, film acts as a “language” that reinforces ideologies, advancing the difference of African-Americans and CSEE Romani populations, offering “one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated” (Hall, 1995: 20). Images and collective notions of race, and groups defined by their race(s), can constantly be in flux, as cultural imaginaries dictating the constructs of race can change. However, images reinforce inferential racism in employing a predominance of recycled stereotypes. Film responds to the dominant discourses related to the dislocated position of African-Americans and Roma, and tends to reinforce difference and, in doing so, ensures the distance of minority groups from the majority. Such deprecating portrayals of people of color code minorities as outside the structural mechanism of the majority, which reflects the desires and imaginings of the nation as homogenous. Both Europe and America are bound by whiteness and social mechanisms that buttress its dialectic (Rucker-Chang, 2018).

While whiteness has connections to power and access as well as imagined progress and humanism, the uses of whiteness within the U.S. and Europe, particularly CSEE states, varies (Mills, 1997; Imre, 2005). In American cinema, the prevalence of whiteness reflects long-standing social hierarchies that privileged dominant means of articulating the nation, leaving minimal expression for minorities and people of color. African-Americans have contributed to the cinematic landscape since the early days of cinema. However, the presence of African-Americans on mainstream screens relied on stereotypes

and caricatures that presented African-American actors, and therefore Blackness, as reducible to a small set of expected stereotypes that illustrate African-American inferiority. Visual difference offers an easily decodable signifier in that there is little need for nuance. Donald Bogle highlights the tried and true archetypes of African-American caricatures as toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks, while Ed Guerro and Paula Massood account for variation in representation throughout different time periods (Bogle, 2016; Guerro, 1992; Massood, 2011).

Encoded Romani difference has roots in Socialist and Communist films where Roma are connected to the pastoral, a lack of progress, criminality, and rootlessness. Through the frameworks referenced above, we can better understand that, despite some legal and cultural inroads in society, the marginalization of African-Americans and CSEE Roma are reinforced through the reproduction and reinterpretation of on-screen stereotypical portrayals.

These Romani stereotypes serve as a basis for the representation of Romani peoples on screen, including a distance from whiteness, and therefore the national imaginary, which motivate the structures of power and illustrate a relationship to whiteness that establishes who belongs and who does not. Given that East Europeans are considered conditionally European, or, at least believe that they are viewed from the outside as such, the need to tie into transnational flows and mechanisms of “race” to solidify their whiteness has become incredibly important in the region (Todoorova, 1997; Imre, 2004).

Aniko Imre, Dina Iordanova, and Nikolina Dobreva have provided useful categories of Romani filmic types. Imre, recalling Erzsébet Bori, highlights how Romani filmic portrayals default to “**Screen Gypsies**”: metonymic presentations of Romani people, who are imagined as “quite alike all over the world”. They have “souls [...] made of songs, and [...] hearts are made of gold; they live in picturesque and photogenic poverty, and survive on the surface of ice; they fear God and the police, because their passionate temperament and indestructible vitality make them prone to violating the Ten Commandments and state laws” (Imre, 2003: 16). These filmic “gypsies” stand “in contrast with real ones who are extremely diverse in their languages, lifestyles and values” (Imre, 2003: 16). Similarly, Nikolina Dobreva describes representation of Roma as “**Celluloid Gypsies**”, and Dina Iordanova argues that Southeast European films featuring Roma on screen are mere allegorical symbols relating to the outside status of the Balkans to “Europe” (2008; 2001). In the film *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*, Radmila Mladenova sees a translation of literary “gypsiness”, or “European non-Whiteness” into “imaginary gypsies [who] gain visibility only as deviant creatures, their bodies and identities providing a symbolic space on which the boundary of Europeaness (=whiteness) is inscribed” (Mladenova, 2016: 3–9). While these scholars converge broadly, there are important differences, namely, they trace Romani portrayals to specific spaces: Iordanova and Mladenova focus on filmic images originating from the Balkans, whereas Imre works primarily on Central European Romani representation, especially Hungarian. These similarities suggest, however, that the regional specificity need not constrain analysis.

These portrayals of Romani peoples parallel images of African-Americans on screen; outside representations fill the role of racialized internal other, despite multiple generations of existence within the lands of their citizenship and virtually no historical memory or cultural connections to the spaces of their defined origins – West Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Further, the rise of diverse images of

Roma on screen bear a similar relationship to the rise in diverse African-American images all of which were facilitated by historical, political, and legal battles.

## 2. Blaxploitation and the Failure of Civil Rights

In the 1960s, the target period of political activity that lead to Civil Rights, African-Americans “created a political and cultural atmosphere in which the issues of race and freedom could not be ignored” (Guerro, 1993: 29; Scott, 2012: 173 – 75). These protests of “interpretive activism” carried over to film (Scott, 2012: 174–220). In addition, the National Associations for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pressuring Hollywood to “upgrade the cinematic image of blacks” resulting in a number of changes in representation, most notably the portrayals of slavery (Guerro, 1993: 29–31). This period of the mid-1960s saw the rise of Sidney Poitier in the role “ebony saint”, a favorable portrayal previously evaded by black actors. Despite being well-paid and in possession of a brand all of his own, Poitier represented for many African-Americans the superficiality and failures of Civil Rights in that it afforded legal equality on the condition of assimilation for acceptance. Poitier’s early characters lacked depth and sexuality and, “the revolution in black consciousness very quickly rendered Poitiers saintly roles as laughably out of touch with the rising demand for assertive, realistic, black images on the screen” (Guerro, 1993: 76).

What followed then were more masculine and assertive roles for men and eventually women in the Blaxploitation films in the 1970s. Melvyn Van Peebles “ushered in a new Black aesthetic” in the 1970s with his film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) that asserted black “sexuality, violence, and freedom” (Bausch, 2013: 263). The film was independent, directed by an African-American, and created for an African-American audience. It featured an African-American lead in a powerful position, unafraid of the law, and unapologetically Black. The film proved groundbreaking: and as an independent film with minimal funding, it surpassed any and all expectations for profit. It responded to a desire to be seen as not simply subjects but as individuals previously not accommodated in representations by white directors and studios (Masood, 2011; Bausch, 2013). Thus, in *Sweet Sweetback*, the possibility of self-representation was realized, and what followed was nothing short of an explosion of self-representation, what would come to be known as Blaxploitation film. This 1970s movement paved the way for a multiplicity of African-American filmic representation, proving impactful and even influential in films that followed in the 1980s and even in the New Black Realism of the 1990s (Bausch, 2013; Masood, 2003). The movement would be known for its reinterpretations of genre films through powerful portrayals of masculine testosterone-driven action, overtly sexual, and powerful “black superwom[e]n” (Bogle, 2016).

In many Blaxploitation films, stereotypes appeared alongside rectifying structural and racialized violence directed at Black bodies. Therefore, in analyzing African-American representations as a window into the possible trajectory of on screen Romani representation, it becomes necessary also to unpack some of the wealth that Blaxploitation film offers in its frequent unabashed exploration of structural injustice and inequality deployed on African-American populations. There are hundreds of Blaxploitation films spanning various genres. Many critics of these films dismissed them as extended explorations of the worse stereotypes associated with African-Americans, including criminality, hyper sexuality, and drug activity. Among those actively opposing the proliferation of these films were Civil Rights figures and

organizations including Jessie Jackson, NAACP Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) (Guerrero, 1993: 100–101). Nevertheless, these portrayals of African-Americans on screen were empowering and enjoyable for many, offering “compensatory fantasy” in urban settings (Symmons, 2015: 293).

While Blaxploitation films engaged in some of the worst stereotypes about African-Americans, these Hollywood productions were open for broad consumption and helped to pave the way for variation of African-American screen representations, carving space for African-American inclusion into mainstream films for mass consumption. What this transition illustrated, however, was that African-Americans would only be offered a place in mainstream cinema if the actors and directors provided a framework that was familiar to diverse audiences. In other words, the images in Blaxploitation cinema could be decoded differently depending on the audience. What was created for Black consumption relied on some of the worse stereotypes projected on Black people and communities for generations: hypersexuality, violence, and criminality. Nevertheless, for some African-Americans, these Blaxploitation films finally offered visual redemption for the oppression their powerful, white co-nationals had inflicted on them for generations and visually represented through powerful white men: police, business owners, government officials, and even members of the Ku Klux Klan. White audiences, and some activists, including African-American author and poet Amiri Baraka, saw in these films simply the fantasy of triumph over oppressive power systems (Symmons, 2015: 285). Of the 1971 Blaxploitation film, *Shaft*, for example, film critic Clayton Riley stated that it “provide[d] whites with a comfortable image of Blacks as noncompetitors, as people whose essential concern in life is making Mr. Charlie happy” (1971). John Semley similarly argues that the films created an outlet for white filmgoers to enjoy visualized segregation since the casts were dominated by black actors (2010). Baraka argued that films like *Super Fly* “gave the specious appearance of black empowerment, when in fact they reinforced dominant ideology and disguised black America’s continuing subjugation under white patriarchal capitalism” (Symmons, 2015: 285).

Blaxploitation expression relied on a familiar trope of playing to expectations for a white ethnographic gaze, or a means of seeing someone as a subject who is distant from the immediately familiar surroundings of the viewer, by way of self-Orientalizing and self-Othering. These films simply updated Bogle’s stereotypes of the imbecilic child-like non-threatening figure, the oversexed female, and the brutal buck, but within time and space frames relevant to the then contemporary audience. These films opened a space for audiences – both Black and White – to become accustomed to seeing African-Americans on screen, arguably initiated by Poitier, and fostered the inclusion of diverse African-American portrayals in the 1970s, visible in the following films: *Lady Sings the Blues* (1974), *Boy and Man* (1971), *Sounder* (1972), *Black Girl* (1972), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and the film adaptation of Sam Greenlee’s *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973). These films offer a stark departure from the Blaxploitation films that debuted alongside them, because of a desire to distance images of Blackness from stereotypes. Representation afforded in these films remains limited, but they offered what Guerro defines as a “viable black alternative” to images associated with Blaxploitation cinema (1993: 130). These films diversified the cinematic Black-American experience without the overlay of the stereotypes. Arguably, this diversity of experience offered in film would not have been possible without Blaxploitation, both conditioning audiences to seeing African-Americans and African-Americans continuing to seek broader representation beyond experiences imagined as real and endemic to the Black experience.

### 3. Romani Screen Representation

Films with large Roma casts from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia illustrate that a long history of stereotypes, including criminality, a lack of progress, poverty, and rootlessness inform Romani filmic representation. These representations engage in inferential racism emphasizing Romani inferiority, and in doing so, enforce the position of the majority group, which correspond to transnational mechanisms of racial hierarchies based on articulations of visual difference, even in their absence. In the case of Roma, as is true for African-Americans, this positionality is supported by an association with Blackness, which, of course, works in opposition to whiteness – a European ideal.

Romani and African-American representation overlap in many ways because of their historically marginalized positions in society and legacies of posts: post-colonialism, post-socialism, and post-Civil-Rights, which, despite historical differences, engage with western mechanisms of power, social, and racial hierarchies. This proves particularly true in considering the movement of the European Union's Eastern expansion that began in 2004. This movement toward Western systems included disrupting Socialist and Communist social orders where discourses of neutrality toward race and difference dominated generations, and operated with an understanding that the acceptance and incorporation of diversity was a strength of Communist and Socialist systems. In fact, this advertised acceptance of diversity functioned as a counterpoint to Western mechanisms of discrimination (Dudziak, 2000). With the incorporation of Western structures into the East, however, the rhetoric of racial equality was revealed as questionable and even meaningless in light of the disparities, physical abuse, and social inequities faced by minorities and people of color in those societies (Imre, 2004; Matusevich, 2008; Bhabha, Mirga, and Matache, 2017). This “long shadow of discrimination and exclusion” continues to affect Romani communities and motivate the force behind Roma Rights – an ongoing movement pushing for broad Roma equality (Bhabha, Mirga, and Matache, 2017). The setting of EU expansion brought heightened attention to the dislocation and discrimination faced by Romani communities, prompting the EU, Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, various NGOs, and even the World Bank to take action. Most agree, however, that, for various reasons, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful. One of the most salient aspects of these failures is a general lack of social acceptance and inclusion of Roma in Europe as indicated in the two Special *Eurobarometers* on Discrimination from 2012 and 2015. However, “Roma activism has forced EU policy makers to engage with the Roma community on more equal terms” (Bhabha, Mirga, and Matache, 2017). However, accommodation of this parity must exist beyond the political and legal: images and interactions must relay similar forms of sameness as representation can play a powerful role in deconstructing presumed difference.

As such, the filmic representations of Roma on screen are in dialogue with conflicting political, social, and arguably cultural trends: The European Union is advocating and pushing for “unity in diversity” while CSEE states are keen to illustrate their European bona fides – i.e., whiteness. Thus, the challenge of filmmakers is to project an image of inclusiveness while simultaneously illustrating Romani distance from the majority. It is a delicate balance to maintain but has parallel precursors in the Blaxploitation movement where Black directors employed stereotypes to quell white viewers and simultaneously satisfy black visual desires. There are, of course, differences between the filmic images of African-

Americans and Roma, chief among them that the films relevant for this discussion are about Roma but not by them, reflecting an importance difference between not only about the films I analyze but also the Roma Rights movement.

The post-2004 CSEE films with majority Romani casts that I analyze below are not made by Romani directors but respond to external pressures, nevertheless – namely, the EU and the push for Romani economic and social inclusion. Interestingly, this dominance of non-Roma directors producing rich films with Roma-majority casts, parallels the broader movement of Roma Rights, which experts have long-recognized as dominated by non-Roma actors (Kóczé and Rövid, 2012; Bhabha, Mirga, and Matache, 2017). They also respond to the stereotypical images of Communist/Socialist films much in the way that films following the height of Civil Rights engaged in stereotypes, but the films that followed debunked them. Similar to the films that followed Blaxploitation, these films about Roma employ a realist aesthetic and evoke empathy for the viewer. Thus the immediate cinematic output reacting to the social movements of Roma and Civil Rights possess a character similar to the movements themselves, whereby those seen as the dominant stakeholders are the ones producing the films. As a result, these films necessarily differ from Blaxploitation in their transmission; however, they similarly engage with stereotypes of the time as a means to address the positionality of Roma. In that way these films illustrate a movement away from the overt racism of films from the Communist/Socialist period to inferential racism used to evoke sympathy, pity, and even empathy. In that way, these films correspond to those produced alongside Blaxploitation films that pushed back against stereotypes to offer more diverse and varied images of African-American life. These films differed from the earlier Poitier films, however, as the casts were overwhelmingly African-American, but the goal was to seek other forms of African-American entertainment, not to assimilate or diffuse the African-American experience through the gaze of the majority.

The films I analyze below respond to Roma social inclusion in that they employ realist narratives to reflect on contemporary Romani positionality by way of docudrama and a variety of other genres. If the 1960s renewed African-American stereotypes as irascible, militant criminals, then the image of Sidney Poitier helped to diffuse those fears. Blaxploitation confronted those stereotypes and provided sources for multiple ways of decoding those messages, and the films that followed provided even broader means of analysis. The image of Romani characters in recent film similarly addresses stereotypes by offering characters with whom the outside can sympathize and question a basic denial of general human rights, including equality, standard of living commensurate adequate for health and well-being, and education, returning to the movement of Roma Rights articulated above (UN Charter for Human Rights). These films rely on a history of filmic marginalization and overt racism on screen that dates from the Communist period. These films respond primarily to the “Roma Question” articulated earlier in the paper. However, they also interact with a Roma image predicated on a history of stereotypes and image of alterity.

Jiří Vejdělek’s *Roming* (Czech Republic/Slovakia/Romania) premiered only a few years after the European Union began its eastern expansion in 2004 and marks a transition from stereotypical to nuanced Romani portrayals. *Roming* is an example of the road film genre. It confronts stereotypes but simultaneously reinforces them, and in this tension exists the encouraging and frustrating aspects of the film. However, to understand how *Roming* confronts the ossified stereotypes of Roma, it is necessary first to illustrate how it is also engaged in contradictory images of Roma and therefore, supports and challenges the

position of Roma within the Slovak imagination as a broader question of the relationship of CSEE to Europe (McCormick, 2010).

The film focuses on two generations of a Romani family and their trip from the city to the country: a son Jura, a father Roman, and the father's old friend, Stano. There is great contrast in these two generations: the father is an unemployed widower who depends on his son for financial support. The father is a combination of Roma stereotypes: he is able bodied but does not work, likes to drink, and is a romantic dreamer. He is shown in at least one scene paying the postman in refundable recyclable bottles instead of cash and turns off the lights as an act of solidarity with other Romani people who cannot afford electricity. Roman will define his Romani credentials by penning a Romani epic structured around Somali, the Roma king whose story serves as a backdrop for the entire film. Stano and Jura are at odds with one another: Stano because he claims to be "Gypsy" and regularly challenges Jura to prove his "Gypsy" bona fides while Roman serves as a foil to Somali but is otherwise a passive observer of events.

Jura provides an example of a character type that I would classify as an "educated Rom", but this privileged position comes by way of his assimilation. When he is introduced in the film, extreme close up shots only show his hands and a city skyline in his window that frames him. The camera then pans back to reveal Jura packing for his journey home. He is revealed, first by his books in his hands, his arms, and then his body as he puts the books into his rucksack. Jura has been obfuscated and is then shown in reference to his girlfriend who is watching him pack. In both frames in which Jura appears, he is not his own, but rather he is defined by something (the city) or someone (his girlfriend Vera), who, like Jura, is not framed for who she is, but by what she is – a white female. She also enters the film, by way of extreme close ups of her naked midriff, her hand, and the door. These scenes introducing Jura highlight the prevalence of whiteness as a contrast to Roma blackness in the film. Other examples include an abundance of blonde hair as an assertion of Slovak Europeananness and whiteness, Somali as the only Romani individual who actually works in the film, which he performs in secret, and, perhaps, most shockingly the well-known Slovak actor, Marián Labuda and Czech actor Bolek Polívka, who engage in "Gypsy face", or "brown face" to play the characters of Stano and Roman (Perez, 2016; Piero, 2012). This portrayal presupposes an inability of Roma to fulfill the cultural expectations of the majority and resonates with other minstrel acts of brown face, which, in turn, relates to the long-standing tradition of Black face in American cinematic history (Perez, 2016).

Thus the humor of the film relies on inferential racism whereby Romani culture is predictably coded as inferior and worthy of ridicule. If being "Black" or "Brown" is simply a matter of painting one's face, it minimizes the experiences and lives and experiences of "Black" people, rendering them irrelevant and unimportant, and reaffirming the position of the majority and perpetuation of Romani exclusion. Even if race itself exists by way of signifiers and structural imposition, those whose lives are affected by race will not explain daily racism as symbolic or constructed. As such, performing race is an act of cultural appropriation without the burden of experiencing daily racism. In an interview, Polívka and Labuda joke about which one of them plays "the Romani spirit" best – as if Romani lives, culture, and "spirit" are something that can be performed, akin to a costume that you can take on and off at will (Čorna, 2007).

There is a great deal more that can be said about this deeply rich film, but in considering the frames of Europeananness, the nation, and "race", the film creates an overall space for Romani peoples to be

incorporated into the nation – all films referenced here do. What *Roming* promotes, however, is limited belonging based on the confines of the nation, Europe, and whiteness. Roman, Stano, and all others in the Romani cast cannot enjoy the benefits of incorporation as they are. In fact, Romani participation in the nation is categorically limited and embodied by performativity such that it can only be claimed by those who are deeply assimilated, which is the case with Jura.

*Just the Wind* (Benedek Fliegauf, Hungary/Germany/France, 2012), *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* (Danis Tanović, Bosnia and Herzegovina/France/Slovenia/Italy 2013), *Bravo!* (Radu Jude, Romania/Bulgaria/Czech Republic/France, 2015)

Three films that debuted after further European expansion eastward and track the increased interest in NGO and governmental focus on Roma are *Just the Wind* and *Bravo!* Both films mostly abandon broad character typologies for their Romani actors and opt instead for a dialogue with the past to offer commentary on the current state of Romani affairs throughout CSEE by way of a categorization that I would define as the “documented Rom”. Characters that I consider “documented Rom” appear in films that are based primarily on historically accurate event(s) and or situations. They exist as a result of generations of struggle to be recognized as individuals and members of the nations in which they were born and live and also for possible inclusion into the mainstream. Roma featured in the films are presented as subjects worthy of pity while based on reliable stereotypes and expectations. Members of the Romani community are primarily screened as cultural outsiders, working against endemic barriers of structural and daily racism that seems only to affect them. The “documented Rom” tracks the ethnographic gaze projected on Roma and uses historical settings to comment on the present.

*Just the Wind* is a docudrama that focuses on the personal narrative of one family to recount actual events from 2008. The film documents the tragic lives of members of the community who are under attack and being murdered simply because of what they are. The narration unfolds in such a way that we become familiar with the protagonists, and empathize with their experiences and their struggle for existence despite a multitude of obstacles including social ostracism, underemployment, general vulnerability, and social hostility. The film is shot in muted colors and uses intertitles at the onset of the film to convey the veracity of events.

The mise-en-scène provides a context for the drab, documentary feel of the film, positioning the protagonists as “documented Roma”. The film is shot primarily through medium and close up shots to evoke feelings otherwise not present in the film owing to the film's documentary-like quality. The close up shot, paired with cool, drab colors, hint at the depth of feeling the film evokes. These features define the mood of the film, particularly in the final scenes as they are marked by virtual silence except for the sounds a worker creates diegetically from moving clothing and shoes from a rustling plastic bag as he dresses the lifeless bodies of the killed Romani family in preparation for their funerals.

Roma characters in Bosnian director Danis Tanovic's film, *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* (2012) are also “documented Roma” in which the film explores fictionalized accounts of actual events. In this film, the wife nearly dies from lack of access to healthcare; the “actors” are the family to whom the horrific events actually occurred. This verisimilitude personalizes the experiences of these characters making

their actions, experiences, and reactions to their settings seem universal, but the empathy is primarily a result of the symbolism of the Romani experience that is encoded by misfortune as evidenced by the examples above. What these film share is that the Romani characters have ceased to be the stereotypes of generations past as the characters parallel developments and trends in diverse representations and probes into historical settings. These portrayals help inform and challenge flat narratives of the present much in the same way that directives, initiatives, and Roma Rights organizations are insisting for dynamic narratives for the Romani people.

*Bravo!* is a 2015 film that blurs the road, heritage, and western genres by Romanian director Radu Jude. The black and white film is set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and tells the story of a policeman charged with finding and returning a fugitive slave guilty of having an affair with his master's wife. In *Bravo!* the focus is on the distant historical record. In this discussion of history and slavery, the film enters into a dialogue about the complicated roots of Romani difference and ostracism from Romanian society in which they live as well as their distance from positions of power. By properly historicizing the roots of the contemporary Romani positionality in Romania to slavery, the film forces the spectator to "confront [...] mentalities, prejudices and biases" that he or she may hold (Barsan, 2016). This notion can be extended through the region, to parallel the generational dislocation of Romani populations in Europe to a history of *de facto* marginalization. That the fugitive slave is guilty of having sexual relations with the master's wife connects this film with reliable racial stereotypes of hypersexualization and racialized peoples. This provides the Romani slave character with depth: he is simultaneously worthy of pity as he is a slave and has no agency but has committed what would be an irredeemable crime at the time.

*Bravo!* provides a causal link between Romani slavery and contemporary Romani positionality. The film demonstrates the harsh reality for slaves in Wallachia, so that the status of internal other that Romani populations in CSEE occupy is directly related to Wallachian history. This dislocated position of Romani populations informs a contemporary reality, and provides a context for understanding the distance of Romani populations from the majority. This approach is new, and offers a positive point to begin a dialogue about systemic inequality as a contributing factor to the contemporary marginalization of Romani peoples in Romania. Debuting in 2015, *Bravo!* coincides with the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (Decade), a non-governmental directive with a number of ambitious goals for Romani economic and social inclusion. The Decade concluded with an acceptance of its failures, as there was no significant difference in the economic and social inclusion of Roma throughout CSEE. *Bravo!* relies on this post-Decade period to explore slavery as one historical source of Romani distance from the majority.

There are a number of post-Civil Rights era American films with narratives centered on African-American slavery including *The Slaves* (1969) and *Roots* (1977). These early examples engaged with distant history to open important dialogues about race in the United States, and helped establish a connection between African-American marginalization and the history of slavery, serving a similar function to *Bravo!* These early forays into slavery and the connections that it has to African-American cultural and national ostracism offer compelling comparison points to explore the role of a film like *Bravo!* in creating new narratives of the sources of Roma Otherness. These American films differ from *Bravo!* in narrative point of view, but converge in the harsh reality of slaves and their inhumane treatment. Though aesthetically different, the films converge in connecting dislocation and marginalization to the abhorrent and dehumanizing practices of slavery.

The importance of the introduction of *Bravo!* into Romanian new wave cinema cannot be understated. Rade Jude, the film’s director, stated in a *Calvert Journal* article that, “The topic of the film is not the past nor the present but the connection between them” (Goff, 2015). *Bravo!* is the first Romanian film to address the history of slavery and hint at its connection to contemporary Romani marginalization in Romania. In Romania, unlike in the United States, there is little formal recognition of Romani slavery – it does not appear in textbooks, documentaries, or public discourse, so this film could be a catalyst to not only begin a discussion of Romani slavery recognition, but also make connections between the structural roots of Romani marginalization. *Bravo!* begins a long path of recognition and reconciliation so necessary for a collective understanding of the lingering effects of slavery on those who suffered under that system. That Romanian Roma have a history of slavery based solely on their difference further implicates Romanian Roma as affected by racialized hierarchies of superiority and inferiority based on “race”.

While the contemporary period does not directly correspond to the Blaxploitation movement of the 1970s, there are compelling similarities in the cinematic reaction to social injustice. Neither presented as stereotypes nor as the butt of a joke, Roma in these films are seen as members of their societies. Both *Just the Wind* and *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* focus on injustice and everyday racism that the characters experience. Given that these stories are based on true events, one can assume that they simply represent the broad discrimination, ostracism, and racism that Roma face on a daily basis. These events simply caught the attention of the press and therefore the filmmakers who chose to immortalize them. These films operate on a universal condemnation of the denial of Human Rights for Romani communities, much in the same way that films focusing on slavery functioned in the post-Civil Rights years and sparked a broad conversation about race and the American project.

What remains missing from this discussion, however, are examples of self-representation as a means to change the dialogue. CSEE Romani filmmakers similarly are responding to their inaccurate portrayals by providing examples of self-representation to challenge long-standing stereotypes and static images associated with Romani peoples. Clearly, there is much work to be done in facilitating diverse portrayals of Roma, but it is encouraging that some filmmakers are moving into that direction. In fact, within CSEE, Roma filmmakers Sami Mustafa, who is from Kosovo but based in France, and Katalin Bársóny, who is from Hungary, use their art to actively push back against Romani stereotypes. Mustafa, whose NGO, FOCUS – Roma Cinema Youth Project – encourages young Romani filmmakers to create films that actively challenge stereotypes and assumptions about the Romani community. Both Mustafa and Bársóny have each founded their own production companies, Romawood and Baxt Films, respectively, which produce documentaries and sponsor film festivals throughout Europe to showcase other Romani filmmakers. In addition, Bársóny directs the NGO Romedia foundation, which similarly works to push back on static stereotypes of Roma. Past work of the Romedia foundation includes an advertising campaign running throughout CSEE countries to change the image of Romani women, training young women to become filmmakers, and their program “Mundi Romani” features documentaries showing the world “through Romani eyes”. This work is promising as it highlights the potential in a younger generation to contribute to a new cache of images and expectations of Romani communities. Their work illustrates what is to be reaped from the struggles, sacrifice, and hard work of the Roma Rights movement. Romani filmmaking currently abounds in documentaries, which seem to respond to the NGO and European imagination where Roma persist in relation to stereotypes

associated with poverty and helplessness. As such, documentary films relate to Blaxploitation in that these films respond to an ethnographic gaze. By taking control of the “language” of the documentaries, these Romani directors can encode their own images, paving the way for self-representation, and if Blaxploitation can be a model, Romani directors can and will use their racialized positions to advance dialogue and challenge their current positions through their filmmaking.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have illustrated how images have tracked the position of African-Americans and Roma in the U.S. and CSEE states. Following the period of Civil Rights, African-American representation became more varied and nuanced to reflect the market demands of a recognized African-American audience. As Roma Rights has come to the fore of European policy and the focus of European directives and initiatives, Romani filmic representation also has become more nuanced, and representations are beginning to highlight a variety of experiences and forms. That is not to say that filmic representations have completely abandoned the stock characters of earlier periods that were limited to stereotypes and outside projections of Otherness, or even earlier films that equate the Romani experience with the pastoral. It also remains true that European Romani peoples remain outside the constructions of whiteness and therefore outside of the dominant paradigms of belonging, but these contemporary representations hint at a process of renegotiation and interpretation of the positionality of European Romani peoples much in the same way that African-American filmic images became more nuanced and varied as self-representation comingled with long-standing external representations and the dictates of political and social change such as the Civil Rights movement and its immediate aftermath. If the history of post-Civil Rights filmic images of African-Americans can serve as a comparison, an assertion that the author supports, perhaps the continued persistence of diversity in African-American images, despite the contemporary erosion of Civil Rights, can offer insight into the trajectory of Romani representations and inclusion into diverse genres. There remains a great deal of work to be done on the relationship of the movement of Roma Rights and how accompanying cultural changes might be analyzed alongside other more established political and social movements. This work offers only an introduction on the subject, but with the goal of expanding the content in a future piece to track continued developments in Roma filmic representation throughout CSEE states.

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# A Critical Approach to Roma Design: Analyzing Objects by Meşteshukar ButiQ

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Ágota Szilágyi-Kispista majored in design at the University of Arts and Design of Cluj, then studied management of arts and design at MOME Budapest. Since the beginning of her studies she has been interested in criticality in design. During an exchange program at Elisava Barcelona she was co-curator of a critical design exhibition at the London Design Festival. She became familiar with Roma contemporary art while working at the Gallery8 in Budapest. Currently she is a freelance project manager in various international projects.



## Abstract

In his 2016 book *Notes on the Ontology of Design*, Arturo Escobar asks whether it is possible to talk about the existence of a “critical design theory”. He states that if by “critical” we mean the application of a series of critical theories and approaches in the fields of design, and a certain connection to cultural studies, then we can talk about the ongoing development of a “critical design theory”. Based on an analysis of a set of objects by the social enterprise Meșteshukar ButiQ (Bucharest, Romania), I analyze the role of design in the construction and representation of Romani identity. Generally, design is interpreted as a representation of the self, however it has a significant role in constructing it too. According to Penny Sparke, “design is seen as being part of the dynamic process through which culture is actually constructed, not merely reflected” (2013: 4). Through an analysis of the products created and sold by Meșteshukar ButiQ and its collaborators, I examine the role of design not just in expressing but also in creating meanings, and thereby, I emphasize the design process’ importance in identity politics.

## Keywords

- Critical design theory
- Design studies
- Self-empowerment
- Roma design
- Cultural representation

## Introduction

This paper aims to be a theoretical experiment on the possibility of critical analysis in design theory as applied to two case studies of objects belonging to the category of *Roma design*. As we will see, this approach is problematic in many ways, since there is neither a widely accepted definition of what exactly *Roma design* means, nor an acknowledged theoretical framework for critical analysis in design; both are merely emergent fields. As such, an article on a *critical approach to Roma design* can only be an experimental one. Yet, considering the significance of design in contemporary society, I argue that a critical approach is urgently necessary.

For my master's degree at the Moholy-Nagy University (Budapest, Hungary) I examined the role of design management in sustainability, arguing that sustainability is a complex ecological, social and cultural issue while design management is an important tool for the synchronization of these different aspects. The analysis of Mesetshukar ButiQ as a kind of "best practice" was part of this research, and whilst in the thesis there was no room for experimenting with a possible "critical design studies" approach, this paper is the implementation of the questions that rose in the original research.

In the first chapter of his book *Design and Culture* (2010), Márton Szentpéteri uses the definition of "design studies" by Rachel Cooper and Mike Press, which characterizes it as a field that examines the social, philosophical and cultural aspects of design, and uses methodologies from design history and cultural studies.<sup>[1]</sup> Szentpéteri (2016) analyzes the evolution of how design history and cultural studies relate to one another, and examines how design studies, which he describes as a "relatively new discipline" (14) was born out of these two, and also covers many of the theoretical aspects of this new discipline which are still quite unclear. He talks about two processes which have been central in the emergence of design studies: the "design turn" in cultural studies, when everyday objects became the interest of cultural analysis, and the "cultural turn" in design history, when theoreticians of design became more interested in the social, cultural, political, economic context in which objects are born. Referring to Clive Dilnot, one of the foundational figures of design studies, Szentpéteri (2016) writes that the "real meaning of design is not to be found inside the design world but rather in the broader social context which provides the circumstances that define the work of the designers, and the conditions which influence the emergence of certain designers" (62).

Recently, significant research has been carried out on Roma cultural practices and cultural representation, as well as on the emancipation of contemporary Roma art and culture.<sup>[2]</sup> Postcolonial approaches have created space for defiant Roma intellectuals – authors, artists, scientists – seeking to dismantle stereotypes about the population. On this level of consciousness, the following questions arise: how can Roma

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1. Szentpéteri refers to the article by Copper and Press, "Academic Design Research", which was published on the British Design Council website, but is not accessible anymore. For further reading see Cooper and Press, 2003, *The Design Experience*.

2. Here in particularly I refer to: Junghaus, 2013, *Az „episztemikus engedetlenség”*, Kovács, 2009, *Fekete testek, fehér testek*, and to the presentations given at the international conference, *The Image of the Roma in Art History*. Goethe Institute of Budapest, 3–4 April 2017 (<https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf117/conferenceprogrammev9.pdf>) Accessed 21-03-2018).

traditions be passed down from one generation to the next? How can Roma knowledge be preserved but also modernized? This latter question is particularly important as we see the emergence of Roma design projects such as the fashion brand Romani Design (Budapest) and Meseshukar ButiQ (Bucharest). We are no longer talking about a constricted ethnographic interpretation of traditional Roma culture, where Roma people are the subject of ethnographic and folklorist research conducted by majority society; rather, Roma are now themselves the initiators of a progressive interpretation of their own heritage. As stated by Tímea Junghaus in an interview conducted by Szilvia Artner (2016) of Hungary's Goethe Institute:

‘The decolonization movement means the totality of all initiatives for the cultural, political, economical equality of Roma. In cultural terms this means that Roma art comes up with concepts on how to reveal and exhibit the Western colonial discourse imprinted in our minds – by depriving it of its energy and unveiling it as a historical legend.’

In my attempt to engage in a critical analysis of Roma design I will follow Márton Szentpéteri's theoretical framework of design studies as presented in the above-mentioned book, combined with viewpoints borrowed from the analysis of representation of Roma in art history and in contemporary Roma art. Thus, my focus is on creation / representation of the identity and self-representation. My aim is to highlight some connection points between the two disciplines, which could serve as starting points for the development of a critical design theory.

## 1. What is Design?

All men are designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity. The planning and patterning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process. Any attempt to separate design, to make it a thing-by-itself, works counter to the fact that design is the primary underlying matrix of life. [...] Design is the conscious effort to impose meaningful order (Papanek, 2006: 3).

Design is a process that is strongly embedded in the sociocultural context in which it takes form. Although not new to the field of design, the idea of social responsibility of design is gaining more and more popularity today.<sup>[3]</sup> Since the 1990s numerous movements and trends have started to take form, contradicting the idea of design as a means of sustaining capitalist consumer culture and emphasizing instead that design should find alternatives. This has given way to concepts such as: ecodesign, slow design, open design, critical design, inclusive design, circular design, recycling, upcycling, new craft, design for all and so on. “Social design”, in particular, is becoming trendy today and the term itself reflects the biggest problem with these movements: it suggests that only design projects belonging to the category of “social design” have an impact on society.

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3. The term “socially responsible design” originates from the 1960s–70s, its most well-known advocate being Victor Papanek (2006). See also: Clarke, 2016, *The Humanitarian Object*.

If we take Papanek's definition of design as a "conscious effort to impose meaningful order" (2006: 3), an important question arises: whose order are we talking about? This should be one of the key questions of critical design studies.

## 2. Critical Design Studies

In his 2016 book *Notes on the Ontology of Design* Arturo Escobar asks whether it is possible to talk about the existence of critical design studies. He states that if by "critical" we mean the application of a "panoply of critical theories and approaches" in the fields of design, and "a certain kinship with the project of cultural studies as a whole", then we can state that the field of *critical design studies* is emerging: the critical analysis of design's relation to capitalism, gender, race, development and modernity is not yet done, however we can certainly talk about a growing interest in these fields (Escobar, 2016: 28).

Escobar points out that this interest in criticality is increasingly emerging from practitioners, rather than from academics alone.<sup>[4]</sup> As examples for design practice which incorporate a critical approach, Escobar talks about design as emerging through interaction, informal technologies and creative practices, the overturn of the reductive dogma of the form-function relationship, or rethinking design's relation to ecology (some of these approaches are related to the "social design" trends that I mentioned above, but with more emphasis on a critical approach).

Based on examples from Latin America, Escobar analyzes power relations between globalization, alternative modernization and non-capitalist / non-liberal actions, and argues that the development of an "ontological" or "autonomous design" is a way towards more collaborative practices and thus, more sustainable and capable of promoting a fairer social order. He elaborates a complex system of principles and values for "autonomous design", from which the relation to the history of decolonial efforts of indigenous and Afro-descended people in Latin America I found useful in my attempt to create a critical analysis of Roma design.

## 3. Creating Identities through Design

Meșteshukar ButiQ is a social enterprise from Bucharest, born in 2011 with the aim of reinterpreting and promoting traditional Roma crafts, and is a project of the Romano ButiQ association. It is a network connecting Roma craftspeople with international designers who create products that are sold under the brand name of Meșteshukar ButiQ. The project was preceded by research about traditional Roma crafts in Romania (2010),<sup>[5]</sup> which resulted in a study that identified 14 different crafts across the country: coppersmiths, cast pot makers, ironsmiths, tinsmiths, silversmiths, brick makers, woodcarvers, spoon

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4. Perhaps the most well-known example for critical thinking in design practice is IDEO (<https://www.ideo.com> Accessed 19-02-2018), which, together with the Allan MacArthur Foundation developed a platform to support designers in creating more sustainable projects. See: The Circular Design Guide (<https://www.circulardesignguide.com> Accessed 19-02-2018).

5. <http://romanobutiq.ro/proiecte-2/dezvoltarea-retelei-Meșteshukar-butiq> Accessed: 24-02-17.

makers, weavers, florists, harness makers, sievers, hat makers, fiddlers. According to the authors of the study, traditional craftsmanship is a “welcome capital of appreciation, which could contribute to changing attitudes towards the Roma, and an equally welcome economic capital which, once revitalized, could turn into the right answer to the poverty problems that many Roma communities are faced with” (Chirîtoiu, Ivasiuc and Necula, 2013: 8). In the collective consciousness of Romanian people the idea is still alive that, “among Roma there are honest, skilled craftsmen” (*ibid.*).

Meşteshukar ButiQ’s initial concept of connecting an active craftsperson with a potential customer through an online or offline platform did not prove to work, however. One of the key steps in the development of the Meşteshukar ButiQ was thus to include designers in the project from the beginning: the initiative started to be successful once the craftspeople started to collaborate with designers in the creation of the objects. This is an example of how design works as a connecting link between production and consumption, facilitating the customer’s desires to be satisfied by the products available on the market (Sparke, 2013: 56).

### 3.1 7000 blows

The title of the exhibition held on the occasion of Vienna Design Week in 2015, *7000 blows*, refers to the technique used by coppersmiths in which they create their products exclusively through blows of their hammer. This exhibition was a collaboration between designer Nadja Zerunian, coppersmith Victor Calderar and Meşteshukar ButiQ, and consisted of a limited-edition copper, silver and brass collection. As described on the designer’s website:

7000 blows is our first limited edition in copper, silver & brass. chased by hand. complemented by found treasures. reworked objects create small sensual landscapes, based on the traditional competence of the caldarari – a roma community in transylvania, working for centuries in metal crafts. It takes 7000 rhythmic blows & seventy times in the fire until the final shape evolves. a year-long cooperation with victor clopotar redefining traditional forms. the result: a collection of product-landscapes that examine material, an ancient craft & a new cultural reference (Zerunian and Weisz, n.d.).

Designers Nadja Zerunian and Peter Weisz, who have experience creating high-end products, joined Meşteshukar ButiQ for this exhibition.<sup>[6]</sup> In an interview Nadja Zerunian talked about how she sees a way of reinventing the luxury market through collaborations with traditional craftspeople, especially in light of current trends that see a growing consumer need for products that “tell stories” (Observator TV, 2016). Specifically, she explained how products created by Roma craftspeople in hidden Romanian villages and working with traditional techniques represent exactly what luxury consumers are looking for. This raises the

6. Nadja Zerunian previously worked as a senior designer for Kelvin Klein and as a creative director for Georg Jensen and Swatch. Peter Weisz has worked as a creative director and stylist for brands like Scaufenster / Die Presse, Diva, Woman, Aheas, Attitude / GB, and Palmers. Since 2015 both of them have worked as experts with the Erste Foundation and they also founded the design group zerunianandweisz.

issue, however, of the cultural representation of Roma, as well as issues concerning responsible, sustainable design. One of the risks of so-called “social design” is that “the strategy built behind the principles of sustainability or traditionalism creates a process contradictory to those: overpriced, fetishized products” (Schneider, 2018: 28) where sustainability becomes more an element of branding than a principle. Even though a postcolonial approach created the space in which Roma intellectuals could express attitudes of resistance, including for example methods for rejecting being stereotyped, the art of the Roma minority in Europe is still typically categorized as naïve or folk art. This leads us to one of the challenges Roma design must face: are the objects made by Roma craftspeople today – specifically those marketed in the world of luxury goods as an item that tells an “exotic” story – in fact any different from the nineteenth century image of Roma communities as a kind of “wild” entity that fed the artistic imagination (Kovács, 2019)? Design, as a relatively new discipline brings new possibilities; however, it also carries the risk of re-creating existing stereotypical patterns. It is not my goal to answer this question in this essay, but rather to point out the necessity of such a question in the critical analysis of a design object.

## 3.2 PICNIC

With the occasion of the 2016 Vienna Design Week, Mešteshukar ButiQ and the design group zerunianandweisz presented the PICNIC collection, which was inspired by the nomadic lifestyle:

Permanent movement plays a momentous role in the history of the Roma people. The new product group by Mešteshukar ButiQ harks back to this nomadic tradition, simultaneously demonstrating a cross-section of the Roma people’s centuries-old handicraft skills. So just as friends meet for a picnic the PICNIC series represents a meeting place: works by different craftspeople complement one another, sets can be used themselves alone or in combination – individual parts of them even in the household (Mešteshukar ButiQ, n.d.).

The collection consists of stools, bowls, glasses, plates, spoons, etc., wherein these objects are related to a meal and mostly made of wood, copper or created through a weaving technique. Such objects which are taken from the “traditional world” and brought into the “design world” become means of self-representation for the Roma community. Thus we must consider the issue of representation in the context of contemporary design culture. In his book *Design and Culture*, Márton Szentpéteri examines the relationship between cultural research and design, asking whether design is a cultural product, a cultural representation, or even both at the same time? As Szentpéteri highlights, following Peter Burke’s (2004) thoughts, cultural representations do not simply reflect social reality, but rather the actual *creation* of reality, which include realms such as, knowledge, class, disease, time, identity and so on.

When talking about the above-mentioned collection as being inspired by the nomadic lifestyle, it is important to state that this is not an attempt to preserve the nomadic lifestyle (as in an ethnographic collection, for example); its intention is instead to render it contemporary. By using traditional techniques and the shapes resembling traditional objects, the pieces of PICNIC collection bring to life values connected to a lifestyle of permanent movement. It embodies elements and values of the Roma community, which are represented through the objects in symbolic ways.

In terms of design theory, we can say that referring to the key elements of a particular cultural heritage in the creation of a set of contemporary objects is an example of the principle of using local resources and already existing knowledge in creating sustainable products.<sup>[7]</sup> According to Escobar, sustainability is the protection of a whole lifestyle, that is, the complex system of living-knowing-acting (Escobar, 2016: 78). In other words, “recycling” techniques, shapes, ideas or values that represented a community in the past, in the creation of objects for daily use, reveals to us how objects, according to a cultural studies interpretation, also create certain cultural values and thus, shape the values system of a community.

## Conclusion

The two examples discussed above show design’s possible roles in cultural representation as well as the potential of identity-formation through design. As stated in the introduction, this essay is an experiment that aims to bring together ideas and approaches from critical studies, design theory and contemporary art by analyzing objects of Roma design.

To sum up, I’d like to emphasize two questions: what role does design have in the self-representation of a community? What role does self-representation have in the creation of a good product? In regards to the two cases presented here, we are left to ponder several other important questions: does the involvement of traditional Roma craftspeople in the design process provide a certain “authenticity” to the stories behind the objects? Does the *7000 blows* collection have extra value beyond of the luxury design world *because* of this “authenticity”? Are these products, or the ones in the PICNIC collection, objects of “resistance”? It is such questions, I believe, that should be asked as the starting point for a critical analysis of design.

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## Appendix

Image 1. *PICNIC*, Meşteshukar ButiQ. Photo by mbq.ro



Image 2. Full House. Limited edition, zerunianandweisz. Photo by Raphael Sammer





This journal is a product of Central European University's Roma in European Societies Initiative. The initiative, launched in 2016, is an interdisciplinary effort to support existing work to improve the situation of Roma in all sectors through teaching and research, leadership development, and community outreach. The VELUX Foundations, the Open Society Foundations' Roma Initiatives Office, and the Roma Education Fund are funding this initiative.

Introducing the New Journal *Critical Romani Studies*

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Mihai Surdu, *Those Who Count: Expert Practices of Roma Classification.*

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