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Racism and Romani Studies

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Critical Romani Studies

Aims and Scope

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 policymakers.

Scholarly expertise is a tool, rather than an 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 barriers in engaging with academic knowledge production. The Journal considers only unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research.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 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. The Romani Studies Program at CEU organizes conferences annually where draft papers are presented and discussed before selecting them for peer review.

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Foreword – Moving beyond Gypsylorism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moving towards Cultural and Academic Emancipation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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‘Antigypsyism Does Not Exist’ and Other Assessments. Romani History by a Romani Historian Evaluated at the White Academy

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Critical Romani Studies

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Abstract

Romani Studies in Spain has yet to reach a satisfactory degree of development and faces many limitations within the Spanish Academy. To demonstrate this issue at hand, we will start with a special case: the challenge of writing the history of Roma as a Romani historian. Reconstructing Romani history and memory are fundamental tasks to encourage inclusion, but carrying out these tasks is challenging due to the negative views of a non-Romani scientific society weighed down by a legacy of stereotypes, epistemological limits, and scientific racism. Roma naively have been scrutinised from a colonial point of view – where both conscious and unconscious objectives knit together to excuse negative representations associated with Romani populations. Starting from the author's recent experience as a Romani historian, this article aims to account for racism within the Spanish academy. It also intends to discuss benefits in the social and human sciences of situating Romani thought within a larger creation and dissemination of knowledge.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Decolonisation
- Marginalisation
- Romani history
- Romani studies
- Self-representation
- Spain

Introduction

This article aims to reflect on the dichotomy between Romani representation and Romani self-representation in the Spanish Academy (the latter being understood as the scientific society, mainly universities and their humanities departments).[1] The case analysed in this article is based on the experiences of the author, a Spanish Romani historian, during two different evaluation processes in the early stages of his research career: one committee evaluating a final undergraduate degree project and another committee evaluating a master's dissertation. Both committees had been presented with earlier studies related to the history of the Spanish Roma. In both processes, committee members unconnected to Romani Studies constructed part of their critiques based on stereotypical representations of Roma or "Gitanos".[2] Furthermore, the figure of a professor-to-be as a citizen affected by such racism elicited unreflective opinions from the committee, a product not only of antigypsyism but also due to a historiographical gap and the limited development of Romani Studies in Spain. The present text aims to critically characterise a Spanish academic ecosystem, mainly humanities and memory projects, "focused" on the study of Romani communities. This critical point of view allows for an exploration of both how the self-representation of a Romani academic – who focuses on the critique of these representations – works and what kind of interactions this research generates across the Spanish Academy.

The contribution here is organised around three main points. First, it will critically characterise the Spanish academic ecosystem that works on the history of Roma – distant from Romani Studies and even more distant from Critical Romani Studies. Many projects that have tried to address the "Roma question" in Spain usually do not include Romani researchers or do so anecdotally and are criticised by social activists focused on the defence of Romani people. Such projects, in turn, are related more closely to old structures of knowledge production about Roma, usually anchored in folklore or in fieldwork with non-representative samples. All this, in turn, can be approached in relation to the emergence and development of voices located within the Academy itself that, being members of the communities studied, debate the benefits and needs related to the author's subjectivity.

1 When we speak of "representation" as applied to this case, we refer to the set of images, narratives and discourses on Roma that were elaborated by non-Roma with academic pretensions. The main problem is that these types of representations, validated by scientific society, in turn justify and argue for other representations already established by folklore, colonial discourses, or the contributions of scientific racism prior to the twentieth century. "Self-representation" refers to the exercise of combating misrepresentations of Roma that have reinforced white normativity (Matache 2016).

2 Throughout this article, reference will be made to Romani Studies and Critical Romani Studies. The term Romani Studies will be used here to refer to the field of studies that became professionalised especially during the second half of the twentieth century and which brought together a majority of non-Romani academics, in which approaches normally associated with folklore studies, epistemologically limit the various disciplines that addressed the subject. It also refers to a first stage of development of Romani academics who participated in the already established structures from which they had traditionally been excluded. Critical Romani Studies, on the other hand, refers to the approach and academic spaces that, since the creation of the *Critical Romani Studies Journal* in 2018, have made possible a new stage in the development and consolidation of Romani thought in social and human sciences (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018).

Second, the two evaluation experiences will be approached by organising some of the committee's comments into modules and analysing them to expose the roots and contradictions of their expressions. For example, the assessment that "antigypsyism does not exist," and the contradiction between "the desire to see a history of the marginalised" and "the duty not to make a history of victimhood" will be addressed.

Finally, a small amount of space will be dedicated to evaluating self-representations of researchers of the community of belonging itself. This has a positive influence on the construction and dissemination of situated Romani thought but also – which is not so positive for the Romani scholar – on the discovery of the tension between power-taking and representation. The latter is fundamentally due to the danger of pigeonholing researchers as simple quotas at the mercy of groups and projects led by non-Roma.

In conclusion, this contribution is based on an ongoing dialogue among young Romani researchers, whose initial analyses ideally should start from a kind of "egohistory" or "embodied anthropology" to explore the interactions between representation and self-representation. In additions, such academic and personal reflection may prevent new forms of academic racism based on the tradition of denial and invisibility.

1. Spanish Historiography Prior to Romani Studies: Theoretical Gaps and Bureaucratic Obstacles?

Romani Studies in Spain is underdeveloped and has remained so to the present-day. Since the 1960s, interest has increased in some sectors, but this growth was linked to certain topics such as art or representations. Thus, beyond the first writings on Roma in Spain from the nineteenth century by travellers and folklorists such as George Borrow (Galletti 2021), only a few twentieth-century attempts – also from folklore – were made to define their life and customs from an academic perspective. These early reports regurgitated common themes, such as their mysterious origin, the exoticism of Romani femininity, witchcraft, the picaresque, criminality, or art as their sole virtue.

Here, we can cite the contributions of Domingo Manfredi Cano (1959), José Carlos de Luna (1951), or the anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja (1985), all of whom published during Franco's dictatorship, a time when Roma were exploited as a brand of Spanish national tourism (Rothea 2014; Holguín 2019). From 1960 onwards, other types of studies arose, mainly sociology, which included Roma in the category of marginalised people and approached their social status from stereotypes and imaginaries not found in previous folklorist studies. These studies never investigated much beyond basic assumptions and justified them with limited analyses based on general health, housing, literacy or population data (Buhigas 2024). These works were followed by some of the first anthropological studies of Roma in Spain, especially communities in large cities like Madrid and Barcelona, the most significant being the work of Teresa San Román (1976, 1984), which was not exempt from general and categorical statements about Roma from the romantic imaginary. When we say that these studies persisted with these approaches, we refer,

for example, to the consideration of Roma as nomads or with natural tendencies towards nature (a euphemism for barbarism or social disorder).[3] It is also worth mentioning the contribution of early researchers in the creation of categories that were later transferred to society-at-large as new stereotypes or adjectives that carried a deeply negative charge for interactions between Roma and non-Roma, such as the words "patriarch", "clan", "endogamy", "ghetto", and so on.[4] Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the results of such research came from data obtained in highly specific areas, representative of a single reality – usually associated with urban degradation or rural poverty – and translated colonially by academics from outside the community.[5]

Later, more studies emerged in the field of anthropology which, if not directed by early researchers such as San Román, in most cases saw their fieldwork made possible thanks to being in or near her "field". This generated a significant intertextuality and a large number of reciprocal references among those academics, who were in turn influenced by that folklorist past.[6] However, although all these studies are valuable, especially from the perspective of the time in which they were published and the stage of development of Romani Studies, they focused above all on "discovering" and explaining to non-Roma the social organisation and "customs" that Roma apparently taught them. They translated these without regard to the "cultural ontology" or "Romani perspectivism" of these Spanish Romani communities.[7]

A renewed interest in Roma, often expressed through oral history projects related to the Spanish Civil War or the Franco dictatorship, relates Roma to key issues associated with other social groups. Indeed, today's political context is more interested in the traumatic past and also holds a more friendly view about Roma. Nonetheless, academics who have never worked on the subject but are showing renewed interest continue to fumble with the same questions. For example, Carmen Cañete Quesada argued: "How can academics interact with a still-alienated ethnic group without their approach being perceived as an act

3 At the same time as San Román, between the 1970s and the 1990s, the anthropologist Tomás Calvo Buezas (1980) also suffered from the above-mentioned tendencies. However, further study would be pertinent to rescue, analyse, and evidence in all its complexity the set of narratives, methods, and conclusions formulated in the colonial text of these researchers.

4 In Spanish: "patriarcado", "clan", "endogamia", "gueto".

5 This refers to what the Roma anthropologist Iván Periáñez defines as "an ill-intentioned dismemory that implies the exercise of denying, displacing, disidentifying or suppressing; and discards in its discourses, representations and narratives, any possibility of recognising other plural worlds enunciated in the exterior of its criteria" (Periáñez 2023, 44). In short, these early studies only defined "marginal Gypsies", without addressing the reasons why these processes of marginalisation took place outside the community and renouncing the possibility of explaining the Roma reality beyond the epistemological limits imposed by the research led by non-Roma experts.

6 For example, the thesis supervised by San Román of Carmen Méndez López (2005), as well as the book resulting from the doctoral thesis of Paloma Gay y Blasco (1999) whose author notes that "Teresa San Román facilitated my stay in the Madrid ghetto of Plata y Castañar". (See https://congresoantropologiavalencia.com/programa/ponentes-invitadasos/paloma-gay/. By intertextuality we refer to Edward Said's concern about the intention of researchers to be more coherent with other previously published studies than with the reality they were analysing (Said 1976). Here, we could also mention the work of Juan F. Gamella (1999).

7 "Cultural ontology" or "Roma perspectivism" are some of the concepts used by Romani researchers to situate the *Romanipen* and the independence of Roma situated thinking in a global context focused only on the non-Romani majority society (Motos 2020; Periañez 2023).

of exoticism, snobbism, or even opportunism?" (Cañete 2020, 41). Such a question could perhaps be answered by more questions: Which Romani ethnic group is still alienated? Do Roma constitute a single group? Would not exoticism and opportunism be solved by opening the way for Romani researchers who have freed themselves from the supposed yoke of alienation simply by incorporating their approaches? The truth is that all these questions are already answered and knowledge about them has been produced with some assiduity (Taba, Ryder, and Bogdán 2015). In this sense, one should note the absence or anecdotal citation of academic works elaborated by Roma both inside and outside Spain and interaction with the dated and critiqued studies cited above.

A few years after the first anthropological studies were published, so too were the contributions of some historians such as José Moreno Casado (1969), María Helena Sánchez Ortega (1988), and Antonio Gómez Alfaro (1993). These added to the style of historical studies on Roma based on very specific sources like the judiciary to examine the legislative repression of this population within the framework of the monarchy and the power of the Catholic Church. Thus, a first wave was characterised by political history and the handling of primary sources mainly connected to legislation. This wave lasted almost two decades, until the 1980s, and a detailed reading indicates that there has been no progress made in the field, despite some efforts to incorporate the analysis of Romani presence in the literature as well (Leblon 1987; Martínez-Dhier 2007). All these early studies approached their sources with a somewhat positivist approach that excluded Roma from the narrative because the way in which Roma were punished, disciplined, or expelled based on the provisions of legal texts remained the subject of analysis. Roma only were characterised on the basis of their mysterious origin and their condition as victims of laws that judged their ethnicity in relation to their occupation, mobility, or residence, issues that have been represented satirically, humorously, or hyperbolically in literature since Miguel de Cervantes' "La Gitanilla" (1613). In other words, the complexity of the "cultural ontology" of Roma was not studied, thus raising questions such as those proposed by the Romani historian Adrian Marsh: "Do origins matter? Or are they just a narrativisation, a projection backwards of current ideologies of identity?" (Marsh 2010, 27). But that well-trodden path of revisiting origins and laws continued to be followed at the turn of the century, even by those who came from outside Spain to research the subject (Pym 2007).

However, a break can be noted in second wave of (proto) Romani Studies in Spain. Although the interest was still to analyse repression inspired by the laws, it also intended to delve into the matter from a social history perspective concerned with the subjects who suffered from those laws. We speak here, for example, of historians such as Manuel Martínez (2013) and David Martín Sánchez (2017) who began to work on issues such as deportations to the colonies or the Great Spanish Raid (previously studied by Antonio Gómez Alfaro – avoiding the social consequences of the conflict on the material life of the Romani population). It is true that both authors, joined by others, continued to work along the lines of a political history that emulated British, French, and Germans in their treatment of "anti-Roma persecution". But their studies were inscribed in a social history that renewed approaches to the interpretation of the past and that even made use of new approaches such as microhistory and gender history. Other similar studies considered the Great Raid of 1743 (Martínez 2018), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) (Fernández and Rodríguez 2010; Bustamante 2016), Francoism (1939–1975), or simply everyday life through orality (Doncel 2018).

Finally, a third and recent scholarly wave has been devoted to urban history, cultural history, and the history of emotions. These innovative proposals at the historiographical level pay greater and more complex attention to the field of representations as well as to other forms of repression beyond the law, such as segregation in cities, control devices (police, surveillance groups, and so on), and political participation among others (García 2019; Sierra 2019; Buhigas 2021). Many of these studies, moreover, have been elaborated by Romani anthropologists and historians in Spain who, with an interdisciplinary approach, examine their objects of study from the perspective of Critical Romani Studies (Cisneros 2023; Vargas 2023).

In short, all these contributions lay the foundations on which to rethink the place of Spanish Roma in history and their involvement in processes of cultural, economic, political, and social transformation in different periods. However, if we had to point out a pending challenge, it would be to overcome the discrediting of Romani Studies, both because of its segregation within the academic world and its general rejection among the vanguard of Romani political activism.[8] In relation to the latter, the debate on authorial subjectivity can be seen as having much to do with how "located thought" is valued both in the Academy and in social movements (Britos and Zurbriggen 2022). For this reason, the present article aspires to situate itself within conversations already undertaken in other fields of scholarship such as Black or indigenous production. Several commonalities stand out in these fields, but three issues should be highlighted: first, the recognition of epistemological limits by racialized communities themselves; second, the need to recognise and avoid erasure and exclusion; and third, something that has yet to be brought more forcefully into the debate, as Karina J. Vernon (2008 and 2020) points out, for example, like the possibility of turning Archives into sites for the recovery of memory and counter-history.

Approaching Archives and History from these epistemological limits contributes to sustaining and creating new approaches to understanding the categories used in social analysis. For example, "Negritude" – a concept that could also apply to "Gypsyism" – is approached from an essentialised, monolithic, and impermeable subjectivity. In this sense, the aim should be to break down and transform historical meanings and dimensions because of the innate diversity offered by the experiences of adaptation, change, and subversion of the oppressed. These are analysed by members of these communities themselves as scholars with direct access to other tools of interpretation and research for materials (Stevens et al. 2017). The above is followed by the emergence and valorisation of a cultural ontology connected to racialized communities; here would be inscribed, for example, in the clearest Gitano-Spanish case, the work of Romani anthropologist Iván Periáñez Bolaño (2023). For her part, Izaballe Monteiro (2023), a Tremembé indigenous scholar, points out that indigenous knowledge – as we could also point out for Black or Roma – is not only in itself a decolonial contribution. That is, by simply appearing in spaces traditionally restricted to privileged voices, but that such indigenous knowledge allows us to understand how the practices of imposing knowledge on the oppressed and subalternised acted from resistance. As a result of this resistance, intergenerational memories and practices have materialised that transcend the territory and form an agency of thought in their own right.

8 With "Romani political activism" we refer, in the Spanish case, to activism that takes the form of associations or individuals who fight for the visibility of Roma and their rights.

The last part of this sequence would be an increasingly established approach to the creation of a colonial critique. This is related to disruption and subversion of those Other cultural ontologies that transgress knowledge from new pluridiverse and autochthonous approaches, without taking for granted that the mere alternative to hegemonic epistemological models already implies a fair and real ascertainment of the functioning of the world (Chipato and Chandler 2022). That is to say, the aim of these conversations situated at the margins is noting these margins and exposing their complex relationship with a centre also situated at the margin from the point of view of those forced into marginalisation. Doing so is to contribute to the effort to recover "the human", as Khanyile Mlotshwa (2021) wrote, and/or to create a cognitive justice useful to lead thought to the creation of liberating policies that require a prior intellectual framework (De Sousa 2021).

In summary, this article adds to the idea proposed by the Afro-Brazilian researcher Jéssica Nogueira (2022) from her work in Europe, which uniquely synthesises the need to situate oneself intentionally as an author, to take into account colonial legacies of exploitation and location in the processes of academic writing, and to distance oneself from what has been studied, but at the same time to enunciate the difficulty of not burdening discourse with values. Therefore, autoethnography is a responsible approach to the study of oppressed groups that have also been epistemologically oppressed in the narratives about their existence. This is something that is also expressed in much other research, especially related to Black autoethnographies in university spaces, most recently by Deanne Bell et al. (2020), Toyin Falola (2022), Mtisunge Isabel Kamlongera (2023), and Brandi Stone (2023), among others. To this can be added autoethnographies produced predominantly by indigenous women academics, such as those of Tayse Campos (2021) or Mariany Martins (2023). Thus, autoethnography – and also "embodied anthropology" or "egohistory" – articulated as places of enunciation from decolonial thought in the university – and that also can be understood as a primary sources of analysis – allow, as the Aboriginal Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop (2021) points out, a creation of new spaces to combat the colonialism of the Academy and discuss normativity in the research process that also affect the academic careers of indigenous, Black, or Romani researchers.

For all these reasons, this article has a dual purpose of presenting an unpublished place of enunciation in the Romani-Spanish case in a contesting and disruptive way with respect to the limits pointed out at the beginning of this section. It is by no means the first contribution in this respect. On the one hand, there are already several studies that address anti-Roma racism within the production of knowledge and the Academy, such as the works of Ethel Brooks (2015), Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2015, 2023), Marius Taba (2015), Angéla Kóczé (2021), Dezso Mate (2021, 2023), and Iulius Rostas (2021), among others. They all share the idea that the crystallisation of Critical Romani Studies not only confronts scientific racism but also contributes to re-constructing, re-naming, and re-signifying Romani histories around the world by achieving the justice and reparation that usually has been denied to our communities. On the other hand, in the Spanish case, contributions elaborated by Romani scholars have already begun to be disseminated, for example, on anti-Roma racism and its influence on education or social work as investigated by Cayetano Fernández (2021) and Sebijan Fejzula (2022); the analysis of Romani academic-epistemological contributions by Iván Periáñez Bolaño (2021); the Romani perspectivism of Isaac Motos (2020) discussing ways of understanding the past; Sarah Carmona's (2012) critique of the denial of identity in academia; or reflections on epistemic violence in the press and politics by

Ismael Cortés (2020), among others (Buhigas 2023). All these contributions, which are only a sample of a broader panorama, confirm that in the last decade a common vision has emerged regarding the place of Romani researchers in the academy, and it is now – when we are beginning to occupy these spaces backed by employment contracts and institutional guarantees – that new analyses, concerns, and experiences are coming under scrutiny. All this has contributed to the fact that the history of Roma, elaborated or not by Romani historians, finds limitations in all the schools of the world, where the problem they represent has also already been raised (Belton 2005; Marsh 2007; Matthews 2015; Sabino 2021; Fernández 2021; Lee 2022; Ostendorf 2024).

2. My Experience, My Field. An Example of (Anti)gypsy Representation in the Spanish Academy

In 2016 a group of researchers connected to this subject assembled at the University of Seville for the first workshop of the "History of the Gypsies Research Group". At that time, I was still an undergraduate, and I attended as a speaker to talk about the dissemination of Romani history at the university radio of Madrid. The conference flowed relatively normally, until the main axis of the discussion began to pick apart differences between Romani and non-Romani academics and activists. There, I took advantage of the space allowed by my paper to reflect critically on overcoming this debate: including new methodological perspectives would embolden thinking about Roma beyond their subalternised position in new historical studies from contributions of Romani intellectuals that had not been translated into Spanish. However, I was disappointed when the issues that I raised were ignored and pushed aside. Perhaps it had to do with my youth or that I was not yet a university graduate. In any case, I now believe that one reason why the debate was avoided on the terms that I proposed is the same reason why, years later, a hopeful nucleus of co-participatory work has faded away again. Undoubtedly, non-Romani academics who lead this work see it as successful, but it fails from the point of view of collective, pluridiverse, and intergenerational discussion. Notably, the reason for this failure is that scientific vocation of "Romology" focuses more on the reproduction of symbolic capital than any subsequent transfer of knowledge to accelerate the inclusion of Romani people. This has led a large number of Romani political activists to look askance at Romani scholars in the Academy, including Romani researchers themselves. Therefore, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka is correct when she points out the conflict caused by "the emergence of scholars who have typically been treated as objects of study" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 44). Although according to this anthropologist, this "does not necessarily have to be confrontational" (*Ibid.*), the truth is that the personal contributes to so much in what is apparently free of political and emotional implications, and it is presupposed that academic research must be so, that one cannot, and should not, fail to position oneself. Interestingly, such a statement usually results in: "I am not Roma, but". However, we must ask what follows "but" once the study is presented, the project ends, or the "informants" are no longer needed? These brief notes speak for themselves in deducing why many Roma, even those closest to Romani researchers, do not want to be concerned with in the interest of the affairs of the Academy.

This autobiographical excursus is important if one wants to understand the status of Romani Studies in Spain, which, in my view, for all that has been said, does not exist. Or, minimally, the work that does exist might be understood as a prelude to its creation, since it does little more than repeat the dilemmas

of the last century. For example, my own circumstances did not allow me to move from Madrid to Seville to join a specialised research group, which conditioned my decision to continue my graduate studies at Complutense University where I received my doctorate nested within urban history. Here, making Romani Studies visible did not take root for many reasons, including disagreement about the idea that Roma should be studied within a field of their own. For all these reasons, an outstanding need exists to set up a body of scientific production in Spain that has Romani Studies at its centre. It should bring together diverse experts in the field with two clear criteria: (1) a methodology that ensures intellectual honesty, in which what matters is the production of knowledge to transform the reality of this oppressed population and not to obtain symbolic capital, and (2) it should unravel how structural antigypsyism affects the production of knowledge and the organisation of Roma within the Academy, specifically those who dedicate themselves to self-representation. Moreover, in Spain's case, the generation gap is very important, since a significant number of Roma, who all identify the same contradictions, are entering graduate schools from different social positions.

In short, Spanish scientists of all stripes, Roma and non-Roma, have a task: to address this contradiction and generate a new space to produce knowledge under the guidelines of scientific ethics that understand the plurality of the Romani subject and his or her condition as subaltern. Thus, we must allow new studies that are concerned with the behaviours, discourses, perceptions, practices, and values of the members of Romani communities who, from another position, bring us closer to answering what and who are Roma (without silencing our voices). At this point in Spain, it is not possible to raise, beyond highly specific circles, the vision offered by Critical Romani Studies; in some spaces Romani Studies does not even have a presence, and in many cases its relevance as a field of study is denied.

2.1. Context of the Undergraduate Degree Project and Master's Thesis

Two academic committees defined my career during the defence of my undergraduate and graduate history degrees in 2017 and 2018, respectively. The first committee reviewing my final work was composed of five members, each a historian who specialised in a specific historical period. For my master's degree in contemporary history, the second committee was composed of evaluators specialised in different areas within that chronology. Interestingly, none of the members of either committee had been involved in the study of Roma nor issues related to ethnic minorities and racial discrimination. Some, however, were experts from social and cultural history.

Each defence session consisted of a classic fifteen-minute presentation, pointing out the methodology, sources and results of the research. Both committees then proceeded to critique the respective degree projects based on the presented text, presumably read by all the members of the committee. These works were titled "Los gitanos en la historia. Un estado de la cuestión transnacional hasta la actualidad" and "Los gitanos de Madrid (1880–1936). Representación y realidad en los bajos fondos de la ciudad moderna" (Buhigas 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).[9]

9 "The Roma in History. A transnational state of the issue to the present day" and "The Roma of Madrid (1880-1936). Representation and reality in the underworld of the modern city".

My first work consisted of a critical review of the existing bibliography on Romani history around the world based on chronological, geographical, and thematic organisation, and my second work was constituted of research focused on archives holding primary sources where the state of the question was again problematised. I had studied the daily life of Roma in the Spanish capital, the city of Madrid, between the late nineteenth century and the Civil War (1936–1939). It attended to the dichotomy between the representation of Roma and the "reality" of their social fit in the urban world by combining sources and incorporating an interdisciplinary approach which investigated history from the point of view of anthropology and vice versa.

Although both research papers were awarded the highest grade and, in the case of the first one, even an honorary distinction, during the committee proceedings, debates took place based on several shared comments made by most committee members. These comments fundamentally questioned anti-Roma racism as a cause of persecution. In doing so, Roma were held responsible for the social consequences of racism against them. In response, I confronted the academic power hierarchy and my possible inclusion in the department where I eventually finished my PhD thesis. My response was conditioned by (1) the need to argue methodologically some questions without any previous theoretical route in Spain and with (2) the handicap of having to deal with structural and normalised anti-Roma racism. The latter was witnessed by Romani family and friends who attended the reviews as observers.

The most relevant comments can be organised into three interrelated modules. The modules began with a phase of denial, followed by a central phase of substitution and/or appropriation, and ended with an offensive phase. While the denial phase occurred as part of the corrections made by the committee, the next two phases were part of the recommendation section. What follows next is an explanation of each of these modules and an observation of how the comments contribute to a representation of Roma within the Academy and more specifically to the production of knowledge that is intimately related to the representation of Roma in a society strongly affected by antigypsyism. In Spain, antigypsyism only become evident after the 1978 Constitution, which for the first-time recognised Roma as full citizens. It was not until 2022 that anti-Roma racism was introduced into the law as a hate crime.

2.2. Analysis of Modules

2.2.1. Denial: 'Antigypsyism does not exist.'

The first phase of denial refers precisely to the denial of racism materialised in this specific case in academic evaluation, which is used as an excuse and under a pretended theoretical critique. The denial of racism not only has implications in the political and institutional articulation of a contradictory discourse that leads to its elimination (Nelson 2013). It also has repercussions on the production of knowledge itself since the very denial of racism comes from ignorance of history, as Nelson, Adams, and Salter (2013) have pointed out for the African-American case in the United States. The latter indicate how less historical knowledge – by not discriminating between historical fact and fiction – amplifies racism. Applied to our specific case of antigypsyism, this hypothesis

seems to be operative and is expressed with greater severity when taking place in an academic court formed by professionals of history. Thus, there is, for example, a complete lack of knowledge in the Spanish educational curriculum (also at the university level) of phenomena such as the Great Raid or extermination project against the Spanish Roma (1749–1763) or the *Porrajmos* (Roma genocide) during the Nazi regime, to cite just two relevant examples that do not do justice to the extensive local history of persecution. This lack of knowledge does not only materialise as a curricular or individual training gap but is supplemented by the fiction of a long tradition of anti-Roma representations based on negative stereotypes – or positive discrimination through art – especially promoted in Spain during the forty years of Franco's dictatorship (1939–1978). All the above conditions, as we will see in the following modules, allow for the survival of analyses anchored in a racist perspective – "unclean" as the Spanish Romani intellectual José Heredia Maya (2000) said – and influence suggestions or recommendations on the type of study that should be carried out on Roma.

Before going into this in this phase of denial, the most obvious examples during both committees were statements that "antigypsyism does not exist" when referring to past histories under investigation – without entering a discussion about their opinions about the present. This does not only constitute a type of epistemic violence towards the student but also towards those Romani observers (family and friends) confronted by a denial of real racism suffered individually. By virtue of occupying a space presumably reserved only for non-Romani white society, they are indirectly made invisible by not being treated or read as Roma by both committees. Without further argument the evaluators themselves ultimately enable an uncomplicated discourse by suggesting that antigypsyism does not exist with insensitive comments like "Institutional violence cannot be suffered by those who do not belong to the State," "There can be no systematic racism towards those who had no fixed residence and whose whereabouts were unknown," or "Being marginalised, they suffer from aporophobia but not from antigypsyism."[10] Except for the last statement, which could be discussed because of the debate on the contradiction between class and ethnicity – without one excluding the other – the first two statements were based precisely on historical ignorance and the filling of this gap with the fiction of Roma as an eternally wandering group, anarchists without conscience who were also foreignised. For all these reasons, stating in a committee that "antigypsyism does not exist" is part of what some authors such as Aidan McGarry have defined as "the last acceptable form of racism", that is, a historically rooted discrimination that nevertheless survives and is rooted in the system by means of very specific mechanisms (McGarry 2017).This example also reinforces the approach to antigypsyism as a type of structural racism that contributes to the racialization of Roma (Kóczé 2021). This is expressed paradoxically in the statement that antigypsyism does not exist, since the racial character of persecution is denied, while at the same time the racialization of Roma is incurred to disassociate them from the relationship of power with the state. In short, we are not trying here to enter into a conceptual debate on these issues, but the mere problematisation of these issues justifies the fact that historical ignorance and antigypsyism adhered to the perspectives of the evaluators, giving rise to a tension – which needs to be resolved – between the representation of Roma and self-

10 All the statements in quotes were collected in my correction notebook during the evaluation courts and in some way, it became a field notebook with the perspective of analysing the experiences.

representation within the Academy. Added to this is also the fact that the evaluators not only lacked any historical knowledge about Spanish Roma but also seemed to lack knowledge about what racism is and how it works.

2.2.2. Substitution/Appropriation: 'What about the history of the marginalised?'

This second module of substitution or appropriation refers to the critical recommendations made by some evaluators about what they thought it would be interesting to address and/or what they expected to find when reading the work. The most obvious example in this case, because of its relevance to the conceptual debate and to the methodological assumptions that have traditionally been used as a starting point, is the statement that in reading the work one expected to "find a history of the marginalised" and that "it seems more interesting to make a history of the marginalised". These suggestions start from a functionalist perspective, and it is no coincidence that the sociological functionalism of Talcott Parsons and company were the reference for a generation of Spanish scholars (Pecourt 2014) who published the first reflections on Roma in Spain relating them as social outcasts.[11] They were alien to the class system itself and were disassociated from society by a supposed "Gypsy psychology", which referred mainly to the lack of morals in a context where the national-Catholicism of the Franco's dictatorship prevailed. This type of sociology influenced political and media discourse both in his time (1940–1970) and in subsequent decades and was also influential as a methodological reference for the first historians who approached the history of Roma in Spain, such as María Helena Sánchez Ortega (1979) and Antonio Gómez Alfaro (1982). In this way, the persecution, exclusion, and power relations between Roma and majority society were explained by taking as a reference the marginalised condition of Roma – marginalisation that in some way they fostered themselves with their apparent "unadaptability". In this way, in an exercise of intertextuality, historians and other social researchers have reproduced the same narratives with an absence of critique and without complexifying the historical marginalisation of Roma as a conglomerate of social factors related to the diverse political experiences of each specific time and space.

In this sense, expecting to find a history of the marginalised reveals an intuition and a prejudiced view of what constitutes Roma in their representation within the Academy. The researchers, like society in general, do not expect to find a different history that, as was the case in my master's thesis, did not refer to social outcasts but to Roma inserted in the labour movement of the new industrial city who, in addition to their condition as factory labourers, had to face the social stigma of being Roma and being treated differently from their counterparts, non-Romani workers. This did not mean that they represented a separate class or group, in that their marginalised status set them against the State and historical processes taking place at a particular time. In the face of this approach, which formed part of the defence to these comments, it was also argued that at the time, "We were not talking about Gypsies" or that, without a source that explicitly identified them as such (usually a census), it did not seem prudent to "assure that they are Gypsies". "Gypsy" became over time an operative sociological category to designate

11 As for Spanish scholars who published works on marginalisation and Roma, we refer, for example, to Juan J. Ruiz and Julio Iglesias (1980), Jesús Gutiérrez (1984); Teresa San Román (1986); and Aurelio Cebrián (1992).

that which fell within the representation of what should apparently constitute a Romani person (that is, the racialization of Roma). In this way, anyone that fell outside this category, such an industrial worker, sedentary, Catholic, and with school-going children, could not be designated as a Roma. This denotes an aggravating factor that goes beyond conditioning the phenomenon of *passing* to have a place in society but rather influences the denial of identity and, therefore, once again, the denial of antigypsyism when some of these Romani industrial labourers, to continue with the example, received a lower salary or were dismissed for no reason when their ethnicity was known.

Finally, the proposal to make a history of the marginalised follows the same steps as the previous one, so this proposal leads to two questions. On the one hand, pretending to make a history of the marginalised already situates Roma as such, given that the archival work or fieldwork will be developed only with this objective of justifying their marginality. On the other hand, by excluding a broader and more complex history, we continue to reproduce those old narratives about Roma to which we alluded at the beginning of the article and stimulate representations about them under the pretext of historical science. This ultimately leads to the dissemination of stereotypes within Academy and society in general. In conclusion, in discussing the two statements that came to light, the tension between the representation of Roma or the desirable representation of Roma versus the denial of self-representation is once again evident, no matter whether in the past, which did not leave a trace due to the inaccessibility of communication channels, or in the present, in the face of the denial of Romani identities outside the sociological category with which the dominant power defines what a Roma is.

2.2.3. Offensive: 'Don't make a victimhood story'

The third offensive phase is based on harsh "criticism" that is ideologically charged. In this case, the mass media has conditioned and contributed to feeding antigypsyism into general society, for example, when highlighting ethnicity when reporting crimes and fights (Ramírez-Heredia 2004). Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an increasing political articulation of Roma in different platforms while their presence in institutional public life within newspapers, political formations, and universities has increased. At the same time, self-representation within social networks has allowed numerous Spanish Romani activists to create content for thousands of followers. Such examples are read from an anti-Roma perspective as a victimhood narrative by Roma who not only enjoy the "benefits of their self-marginalisation", to paraphrase the headline of a Spanish newspaper in the 1980s, but also victimise themselves.[12]

In the same way, in both committees, the final comments pointed out that subjectivity was dangerous. Being a "Romani historian" seems antagonise academic committees, thesis directors, and researchers in general, who warn that one should avoid doing a "militant history", something they presumably would not say to another historian who works, for example, on the monarchy while being a monarchist. This may seem strange, but it is the order of the day in Spanish universities. We Romani historians face multiple discriminations, including the marginalisation of Romani Studies and prejudices about the type of history we produce, especially because a critical post-colonial approach is still largely unknown in Spain.

12 The newspaper in question is *El País,* 28 December1980.

Therefore, more specifically, those final comments warning about the dangers of subjectivity suggest "not to make a victimised story". This is interesting for two reasons. First, the "dangerous subjectivity" came from my defence of not pursuing a history of the marginalised because there was also a part of the Romani population that was not marginalised or should not be read as such. Second, in relation to the above, this defence was interpreted as "victimhood" for wanting to remove Roma from a framework of negative representations in which they have been confined without exception. Paradoxically, however, they did not interpret that the real victimhood perspective was to force them to see Roma as marginalised people who organised their daily lives and their social strategies from this exclusive position.

In conclusion, it appears that antigypsyism in the eyes of the evaluators first judges a historian who enunciates history by the fact of being Roma and then judges the content's access with an interpretation loaded with prejudice because, remember from previous points, Roma cannot be Roma if they are not marginalised.

3. Romani Self-representation in the Academy – Opportunity and Tension

To review our progress so far, tension between the representation of Roma and self-representation in the Academy has been underlined through a concrete example, the evaluation committees of works on Romani history done by a Romani historian. However, this is only one materialisation of this tension. In the following, based on the Spanish case, two ways of resolving this tension are proposed: a theoretical justification and a practical one.

3.1. Positioning the Thinking, Broadening the Results

Over the last few years, several Romani authors have been emerging in Spain who, indirectly and based on specific cases, have been articulating a way of thinking that leads to taking Roma out of their isolation as an object of study and granting them the category of active subjects in the treatment and use of their own memory (Motos 2009; Carmona 2010; Garcés 2016; Fernández 2021). This has been interpreted by the Romani anthropologist Iván Periáñez (2021) as a process of recovery and repair of historical narratives about Roma that inevitably lead to the formulation of a Romani-situated thought, that is, the conscious production of knowledge from their own places of enunciation that allow visiting and revisiting, constructing, and reconstructing Romani memories.

In this sense, thus situating one's thinking makes it possible to broaden results precisely because a Romani researcher can access places of memory that are difficult to perceive and understand for non-Romani; moreover, they also possess tools such as the recognition of being Roma before the object of study itself, trust inherent to belonging to the community, and bonds of solidarity already established by family. In short, doing history or anthropology of Roma while being Roma turns your own social, spatial, and temporal context into fieldwork (Buhigas 2023). In this way, Romani-situated thinking can allow us not only to go beyond the classic history of the marginalised but also to think beyond and

even start from Romani microhistories that are unknown to general society due to a lack of written documentation and communication due to rejection. This can lead to revealing unstudied enclaves of memory and avoid the notion that Roma have not taken part in different historical processes, for example, with a historical analysis of how they fit into political formations and war conflicts in different time periods. In short, making history as a Roma does not necessarily lead to a story of victimisation or victimhood. Instead, by assuming critical approaches from the social sciences, it is, on the contrary, a methodological stimulus with which to access new information and give another meaning to interpretations far from the narrow margins in which the way of "investigating by representing" Roma has been pigeonholed.

3.2. From Quota to Leadership: Critical Romani Studies and the Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network in Spain

Throughout 2023 an initiative for Critical Romani Studies in Spain emerged, led by the author here. Critical Romani Studies in Spain aims at the incorporation of this current of study and methodology in the country. In this way, it intends to contribute to the Spanish-speaking Ibero-American space but also to the international framework. Although the creation and development of this approach had been developing since the situated thinking of the first Romani researchers in Europe who critically approached the production of knowledge about Romani communities, it was not until a few years ago when it began taking shape with the launch of the journal *Critical Romani Studies* (Central European University) in 2018. The editorial team, formed mainly by Romani women researchers, set out to address racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and human rights abuses of Roma from a critical stance. That is, without leaving aside scientific traditions and procedures, we wanted to build a space dedicated to the production of knowledge that would bypass the dilemmas and limitations of the primitive niches in which the study of Romani population still operates today, mainly by using and leaving the latter as a mere object of study, without its own agency and on which to continue pouring an accumulation of representations – legitimised under the umbrella of science – often based on speculative approaches and the result of the study of non-representative samples. In this sense, anthropology, artistic studies, educational theory, history, and sociology are some of the areas most affected by the above. In turn, the rise of interest – both academic and cultural – in Roma and the Romani question is leading to the reproduction of practices that, which in many cases are incorporating innovative tendencies and free of some of the most obvious prejudices, may still be compromised both in their theoretical approaches and in the actual management of projects and field or archival work.

As in its matrix, this proposal advocates the enrichment of Romani Studies in its intersection with other areas of research on the colony, critical race, critical politics, decolonisation, diasporas, gender and sexuality, and the post-colony. There is also a perceived need to contemplate Romani participation, either within the academy or from collaboration with broader societal actors (for example, associations and social leaders). Thus, it is expected to (re)think the ways of understanding and developing research on traditionally marginalised communities and on which the narrative of marginalisation and the prejudices associated with them also involve relationships in research centres and research careers of Romani social scientists themselves. However, at present this proposal does

not take concrete form through any research project and/or university department – a desirable aim in the future – responding only to individual efforts of the research team to incorporate this current in Spain and create a network of researchers based on these assumptions.[13]

This initiative aims to overcome the incorporation of Romani researchers as a quota within research projects undertaken by non-Romani academics who, for a short period of time (duration of the project), focus on Roma as an object of study: not only in the face of the existing gap in history but also with respect to obtaining state and institutional financing. In these few, scattered projects there is a strong tendency to have some Romani researchers included in the form of a quota, with no program or strategy to close the gap in the unequal incorporation of Roma and minority groups into the Spanish Academy. On the contrary, it is another expression of antigypsyism where research groups or projects seek to legitimise themselves through quotas – without the researchers in question, in most cases, benefiting from the privileges of the group or project.[14] In all these projects and groups based in Spain over the last few years, the same discussion has taken place, pointing out those responsible for them. But the problem of epistemological and ontological legitimacy when producing discourses from the point of view of the decolonisation of knowledge has never been recognised. To make matters worse, to mention just one case, in Spain the first and only Chair of Gypsy Culture was created at the University of Alicante. The position did not consider numerous Romani experts in the field, beyond an associative corporatism that does not fit the real needs of Roma, as the Romani sociologist Nicolás Jiménez (2018) has insisted on denouncing. Moreover, once the initial funding was extinguished, the chair position was eliminated in 2024 without any positive benefit for Romani Studies or Romani academics.[15]

The seriousness of the matter also lies in a repeated accusation that if such academic projects do not prosper with a common dialogue, it is the fault of Roma. To move forward, we must stop playing a blame game and assume that this recurring tension between social science and fierce activism deserves criticism. The contradictions within Romani Studies must be exposed. On the one hand, academic projects must come to terms with the coloniality of their reason and, on the other hand, Roma should not disdain Romani Studies for its genesis – positivist and folkloric traditions since the Gypsy Lore Society. In both cases, the problem must be faced from the point of view of scientific ethics, firmly placed at the helm of production.

13 Some of the members, in addition to the author, are Romani researchers Iván Periáñez Bolaño, Fernando Macías Aranda, Miguel Ángel Vargas, Rafael Silva Veigas, Carmen Heredia, Noelia Cortés, María García, Sarah Carmona et al.

14 It is not intended here to provide information, data, and names in this regard, which would allow for a detailed investigation of this issue with other tools. What is intended is to account for the problem and reflect on the critical terms that have been raised throughout the text.

15 "La Cátedra de Cultura Gitana de la UA cierra este lunes su proyecto, que arrancó en 2017, al suprimir la Generalitat la línea de financiación con la que contaban", Cadena Ser. See online: https://cadenaser.com/comunitat-valenciana/2023/12/17/la-catedra-de-cultura-gitana-de-la-ua-cierra-este-lunes-su-proyecto-que-arranco-en-2017-al-suprimir-la-generalitat-la-linea-de-financiacion-con-la-que-contaban-radio-alicante/.

In this sense, as an exercise in self-representation, in addition to the Critical Romani Studies group in Spain, a network called Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network has been proposed, originally designed by the Romani pedagogue Fernando Macías Aranda (2017), an expert in the development of educational plans and projects with a Romani perspective. Macías, who in turn coordinates the Campus Rom de Barcelona, an entity aimed at facilitating the transit of Romani people between secondary education and universities, has included this proposal within the group.

The purpose of the network is to channel the concerns of those Romani students who, in the stages prior to university postgraduate studies, are planning to pursue a PhD and to serve as a reference point for those who are not yet thinking about such a career. In this way, especially with those students who want to undertake research on the Romani population, they can count on the support of the Critical Romani Studies group and establish contact with other researchers through conferences, seminars, and workshops. In the future, they will be able to form part of the work team and join forces in the construction of curricula and the development of projects and publications that support the independence of Romani researchers in an Academy in which antigypsyism persists and leads Romani researchers to positions of subalternity in the form of quotas. In this way, both Critical Romani Studies in Spain as a group and the Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network intend to be a spearhead for Romani self-representation within the Academy from the institutional point of view and also for those results produced within the Academy and its members in recent years.

Conclusions

This text's revelation of what happens in academic evaluation committees is indicative of a phenomenon that extends across the educational journey, from tutoring during degree preparation and to other stages prior to the completion of a doctoral thesis where Romani students begin to relate to the academic system. All of this can condition novice Romani researchers' abandonment of their studies as they cannot find support spaces within the Academy. In addition, the world of representations about Roma created from above by majority society has been added a new attribute in other spheres, that of victim. As the Romani historian Sarah Carmona points out, it is true that there is a risk of "creating an identity based on victimhood, the memory of suffering is woven and imposed on history. Emotion surpasses comprehension. Suffering becomes edifying and predominates over the fundamental elements that form the idiosyncrasy" (Carmona 2012, 28). The lives of the past are commodified, and the monopoly of suffering is mediated, reducing Roma to a mere history of persecution that hides the daily lives of the communities and the ability to understand their role in society. The assumption of victimhood places the subjects on the margins of history and creates archetypes within the investigation itself. This prevents us from seeing beyond what is wanted to be told and what is understood as official memory, since it is built from "gadyicentric perspectives [that give] shape to an image [that] had the perverse effect of being assimilated by Roma themselves" (Carmona 2012, 27). The pressure to make a history of the marginalised and to marginalise Romani Studies as a field of study with its own entity contributes to the latter. This is not the case with the gaze of the Romani researchers who are paradoxically blamed for assuming a victimising narrative.

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Racialization of Roma, European Modernity, and the Entanglement of Empires

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Abstract

The article explores how anti-Roma racism results from the complex interplay of imperial histories and is influenced by racial thinking shaped by colonialism. Looking at the diverse primary and secondary historiographic resources about Romani people across Europe, the article shows how intra-European hierarchies set the stage for racial logic and points out the complex interplay of factors contributing to anti-Roma racism. Specifically, the article delineates how race, religion, and the rise of capitalism intersect in the racialization of Romani people in Europe, including Eastern Europe. In doing so, I interweave the fields of critical race and critical Romani studies to explore the mechanisms leading to the racialization of Roma. To understand the roots of anti-Roma racism, I examine historical processes of intra-European othering of Romani people as entangled with European modernity and colonialism. The article illuminates how Roma were placed among racialized and itinerant groups of valuable labor while they simultaneously were ostracized and persecuted as "vagrants" and "barbarians," deemed "unwilling to work," and inscribed with markers of non-whiteness, foreignness, and criminality. In this way, the capitalist logic established a white European norm in relation to which Roma were constructed and positioned.

Keywords

- Anti-Roma racism
- Critical Race Theory
- Eastern Europe
- European Modernity
- Imperialism
- Racial Capitalism

Introduction

Scholars note high rates of discrimination and violence against Romani people across Eastern Europe (Demeter et al. 2000; Crowe 2007; Law and Kovats 2018; Kóczé 2020).[1] In anti-Roma attacks, despite any facts, Romani people are often accused of criminality by virtue of being perceived as Roma. Importantly, most anti-Roma assaults are committed against Roma who live below the poverty line or who migrate for seasonal work. Although the presence of a racial logic in Eastern Europe often is denied, the assumption of criminality and blame for potential fraudulent behavior are imposed onto Romani people who are racialized as non-white and non-European (Matache 2016). In response to the persistence of systemic violence and exclusion, Romani scholars have developed diverse theorizations, for example, the concept of antigypsyism, to highlight how anti-Roma racism is not merely contemporary prejudice but deeply rooted in European history, functioning as a foundational element of racial capitalism and neoliberal governance (Taba 2021). Similarly, this article highlights that anti-Roma racism points to a long-lasting system of racialization in place that relegates Romani people to the margins of society.

Intra-European hierarchies set the stage for racial capitalism and a racial logic that was later reworked when European expansion left the continent and encountered distant "others" in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. This reworked racial logic returned to Europe when conquistadors engendered colonialism and transatlantic slavery. Therefore, contemporary practices of race-making in Europe, including Eastern Europe, are the products of early modern intra-European hierarchies and a "boomerang effect of colonization" (Césaire 2000). In particular, a logic of anti-Blackness haunts the European imagination of what constitutes the human, which underlies racial capitalist formations across Europe and globally. I suggest that Eastern Europe also is entangled with racial fabrications of European modernity. Specifically, this article points out a complex interplay of factors contributing to anti-Roma racism in Europe.

This article approaches Eastern Europe as a place that has borrowed and reworked the racial logic of European modernity and contributed to it in specific ways due to its social, political, and historical contexts. I argue here that anti-Roma racism is the effect of entanglements of imperial formations and is intertwined with a transnational flow of colonial racial logics. To do so, I zoom in on the historical narratives and policies that produced and maintained the racial order historically impacting Romani people across Europe. I also explore the relations between anti-Roma racism and anti-Blackness, pointing out that the racial logics of anti-Blackness have iterations in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, I situate European racial thinking about Roma within racial capitalism.

I position this work within critical race theories developed in North American and Caribbean contexts (Sylvia Wynter and Cedric Robinson), while also drawing on Eastern European Romani scholars such

1 I use the term "Roma" as it is widely used by Roma activists, scholars, international actors, and the general public. Introduced by Romani activists in the late twentieth century, it serves as a political and self-identifying label aimed at countering the stigma of pejorative terms. While not universally accepted among all Roma, many Romani communities continue to use different terms. The diversity of naming used across different communities, such as Sinti, Kale, Manoush, Rudari, or Travellers, further complicates the landscape of Romani self-identification and categorization, highlighting the complexity of how Romani ethnicity is understood and experienced.

as Margareta Matache and Angéla Kóczé. Rather than aligning with the Frankfurt or Dutch schools of thought – which conceptualize antigypsyism as a function of ethnoclass constructs and emphasize the socio-economic positioning of Roma within modern capitalist society – I argue that racial and ethnic hierarchies, including anti-Roma racism, cannot be fully understood through class-based or solely social lenses. Instead, they require a deeper historical analysis of the production of race, rooted in colonialism and Enlightenment thought. Continental theorists often underplay the foundational role of anti-Blackness and coloniality – issues that I seek to center in the conversation. While these continental frameworks do engage with such topics, they tend to do so only sporadically, rather than as part of a sustained dialogue with Black radical thought. In contrast, Black critical theory helps critique not only racism or policy but the entire epistemic and political order that produces Romani and Black people as non-/sub-human or surplus life. It offers a global, decolonial perspective that allows us to see Romani racialization not simply as a European prejudice but as intimately entangled with slavery, empire, and racial capitalism.

From this standpoint, race is not derived from class or discourse; rather, it is co-constitutive with capitalism. This perspective positions my work beyond the Frankfurt and Dutch schools, while still in dialogue with them. I also acknowledge that fully integrating Black radical theories into debates around anti-Roma racism and antigypsyism in Europe – as informed by Frankfurt or Dutch school traditions – would require a separate, more extensive treatment, which lies beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, my analysis both recognizes and departs from existing continental framings. For instance, I engage with the Dutch school later in the article to explore the relations between anti-vagrancy politics and racial capitalism. While my approach might be perceived as "importing" race into Europe, I argue that it instead restores attention to Europe's historical role in generating racial categories that later acquired global significance. My framework also aims to contribute to the understandings of anti-Roma racism and antigypsyism by centering racial formations as foundational to modern social and political relations in Europe. Through a global lens, I aim to bridge diverse perspectives by acknowledging the divergent historical experiences of Roma across East and West Europe. While this work is a starting point, it invites a more in-depth relational exploration of South-East and North-West European histories as well as practices of assimilation, exploitation, exclusion, and genocide across geographies. Meanwhile, this article underscores the importance of a theoretical model that accounts for structural racialization and its entanglement with capitalism across geographies and imperial formations – highlighting entanglements, resemblances, and parallels without erasing differences (for similar inquiry, see Parvulescu and Boatcă 2022). Further work is necessary to explore these distinctions in more depth, but my contribution lies in foregrounding the interwoven nature of racial and economic structures. Ultimately, I propose that race is not secondary to class but co-constitutive to modern systems of domination and exclusion in Europe.

1. Uneasy Historiographies and Entangled Empires

Historian Angus Fraser (1992) notes that negative attitudes toward Romani people in Western Europe began to grow in the mid-fifteenth century and spread to Eastern Europe. Ian Law and Martin Kovats

state that Roma were described as "black" and "dirty" as early as 1422 (2018, 78). Other scholars also note that fifteenth-century texts depicted Roma as foreigners, vagabonds, "ugly people whose skin was burnt black by the sun" (quoted in Shahar 2007, 5), and "ugly in appearance and black as Tartars" (quoted in Fraser 1992, 67). These descriptions of Roma emphasized their dark skin and rendered them outlandish, barbaric, and heathen (Fraser 1992). Their distinct appearance made them eternal foreigners, non-Europeans, and targets for anti-vagrancy laws and accusations of espionage and infidelity to Christendom (Demeter et al. 2000, 31–32). As Edward Said (1978) argued in *Orientalism*, European colonial powers constructed imagined geographies that positioned the "other" as morally and culturally inferior to justify control and exclusion. Similarly, Roma were portrayed as internal outsiders – rootless, alien, and morally suspect – within Europe's own borders, drawing on orientalist logics to justify legal violence and racial exclusion.

These histories support Cedric Robinson's (2000) argument that the invention of race originated within Europe, predating Europe's encounters with African and "New World" peoples. Racism evolved from "'internal' relations of European peoples" and the construct of "barbarians" created by Western European feudal nobilities (*Ibid.,* 2, 21). This construct, fueled by fear of "Blackamoors" and the demonization of Islam, laid the groundwork for "the extension of slavery and the application of racism to non-European peoples as an organizing structure by first the ruling feudal strata and then the bourgeoisies of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries" (*Ibid.,* 67).

Furthermore, many scholars (Wynter 2003; Shohat and Stam 2012; Baker 2018) underscore the 1492 expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain as pivotal in producing racial/ human difference. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (2012) discuss "the two 1492s," when the conquest of the "New World" converged with this expulsion. They argue that Christian demonology, the Inquisition's *limpieza de sangre*, and the expulsion "set the tone for racialized colonialism, equipping the conquistadores with a ready-made conceptual apparatus to be extended to the Americas," providing "a template for ethno-religious cleansing and the creation of other racial states" (*Ibid.,* 155).

Notably, Sylvia Wynter (2003) emphasizes the shift in the "major Other figure" for Christian identity with the rise of the modern Spanish state in 1492, which aimed for religious unification. Conversion to Christianity became crucial for establishing "the norm subject of the Spanish religio-political monarchical state as a 'clean' and therefore rational subject," replacing the earlier focus on spiritual redemption (*Ibid.,* 309). In turn, the "Black Other" was fundamental "in the construction of Europeans as racially 'pure,' secular subjects" (*Ibid.*). Wynter explains how the early constructions of "purity of faith," enforced through the conversion of Jews and Muslims, transformed into the metaphor of "purity of blood," leading to biological and scientific racism. With Europe's expansion in the fifteenth century, the "Negro" started to replace Jews and Islamic Moors as the major Other. In the sixteenth century, an emerging projected human taxonomy positioned the "Negro" at the bottom (*Ibid.*). Importantly, while Wynter's argument reflects broader transformations in Western European thought, it is important to examine further how such shifts operated – or were resisted – within Eastern European intellectual and political contexts, which may reveal different timelines or racial logics.

Fifteenth-century Western colonialism, along with the complex relations between "Eastern" empires, also affected the racialization of Roma. Ian Law notes that anti-Roma racism stemmed from "early associations between the Roma and an Islamic threat" and "the equation of Roma skin color with darkness, sin, dirt and evil, with accusations that they were spies, carriers of the plague and traitors to Christendom" (2012, 37–38). Perceived as Turkish spies and non-Christians, Roma were described as a "thievish race of men" (quoted in Fraser 1992, 85). The Ottoman Empire's conquest of Constantinople in 1453 increased fears of Muslim invasion in Christian Europe, worsening attitudes toward Roma. Moreover, the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries brought a shift in attitudes toward Roma and other wanderers as alleged "social parasites" avoiding work.

Fraser (1992) illustrates the deteriorating attitudes toward Roma in Germany, the heart of the Holy Roman Empire, from the 1440s onwards. Romani people often were denied entry or expelled from German towns, with the Holy Roman Empire issuing edicts in 1497, 1498, and 1500 accusing Roma of espionage for the Ottoman Empire and singling them out for expulsion (Fraser 1992; Crowe 2007). Those edicts legitimized violence against Roma. Later acts harshened punishment for the nomadic lifestyle. In Spain, the Catholic kings issued a decree in 1499, after the expulsion of Jews and shortly before the forced conversion of Muslims, ordering Roma to settle and serve a local lord or face expulsion. Charles V, King of Spain (1516–1556), later Holy Roman Emperor (1519–1556) and a head of the rising House of Habsburg, repeatedly renewed these provisions and ordered Roma to be sent to the galleys if not settled or expelled. Persistent "offenders" risked enslavement (Fraser 1992, 100).

From the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, European powers uniformly responded with violence to the presence of Roma (Fraser 1992, 130). In the sixteenth century, several Italian states, the Swiss Confederation (1510), England (1530), and France (1539) banned Roma from entry. The Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire did not consider the murder of a Romani person a crime (Crowe 2007, 34). Anti-Roma hostility extended to denying Roma burial in Christian cemeteries (Mróz 2015, 96). In 1619, Spain mandated settlement or expulsion of Roma on pain of death (Law and Kovats 2018, 78–80). Moreover, the anti-Roma discourse constructed paganism and thieving as inherent to Romani existence (*Ibid.,* 80).

The ideologies underlying these policies affected Roma in Eastern Europe due to various geo-historical changes, including shifts between imperial formations, modernization, aspirations for alignment with Western Europe, and the spread of the European Enlightenment. The disenfranchisement of Roma in Eastern Europe formed gradually and unevenly over time and territories. For instance, from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, Roma could work as smiths, musicians, and soldiers across Eastern Europe, with significant enrollment in the military in Hungary, where King Sigismund granted them travel privileges in 1423 (Crowe 2007). In the Polish Kingdom, Roma could own land or a house and settle in the fifteenth century (Mróz 2015). Similarly, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania/Litva, Roma were known as good smiths, stablemen, musicians, and fortune tellers (Červinski 2008). However, socio-political changes, including the threat from the Ottomans and anti-Roma hostility in Western Europe, also contributed to a negative shift in attitudes toward Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

In Moldavia and Wallachia[2] (modern-day Romania), Roma were enslaved from the late fourteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century (Hancock 1987; Gheorghe 1991; Achim 2004; Matache 2020). Romani people enslaved by the monasteries and the boyars/landlords were considered chattel, with their children also treated as chattel (Fraser 1992; Achim 2004). They could be sold or exchanged. Only in the early nineteenth century, Moldavia's ruler Ghica outlawed the separation of enslaved Romani children from their parents (Crowe 2007, 118).

The defeat of Hungarian forces by Turkey at Mohács in 1526 and subsequent Ottoman expansion into Central and Eastern Europe heightened fear of Muslim advancement in Europe, altering public attitudes toward Roma in the region (Crowe 2007). Perceived as Turkish spies, Roma faced restrictive policies. For example, in Royal Habsburg Hungary in the fifteenth century, Roma were increasingly segregated from Hungarian peasants and limited to less profitable craftwork. Their situation worsened in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, with the Habsburg emperor introducing entry restrictions and severe punishments for Roma in Habsburg domains in the early eighteenth century (*Ibid.*, 72–73). In the late eighteenth century, Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa changed policies from physical extermination to coerced assimilation of Roma (Horváthová 1964, 375–376; Demeter et al. 2000, 49).

From the mid-sixteenth century, Mróz (2015) highlights the drastic shift in the perception of Roma in Poland. Among the surrounding territories, the earliest decree expelling Roma was issued in 1538 in Moravia (then part of the Austrian Habsburg domains), followed by repressive laws in Poland in 1557 (Fraser 1992; Zinevych 2001; Mróz 2015). The Polish Diet Constitution of 1578 persecuted those who sheltered (nomadic) Roma. Around 1557, the tone of letters sanctioning Romani wandering also changed, losing any mention of a religious mission imposed by the pope to fulfill the penance (Mróz 2015, 118–119). Furthermore, by the mid-sixteenth century, or even earlier, dark skin and hair became distinguishing features used to identify Roma (Byelikov 2003; Mróz 2015, 17, 58).

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania/Litva, attitudes toward Roma also shifted in the late sixteenth century (Červinski 2008). An order in 1566 mandated that Roma unwilling to leave the country must settle in lands of nobility and serve landowners. The Third Statute of Lithuania/Litva (1588) confirmed the expulsion of all nomads, including Roma, due to suspicions of espionage (*Ibid.*; Mróz 2015). Additionally, evidence suggests that some Romani families and groups led settled lives and worked as craftsmen and servants, undergoing considerable assimilation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Byelikov 2003; Mróz 2015). In the seventeenth century, Romani people in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth increasingly became defined as untrustworthy and condemned for their nomadic lifestyle (Mróz 2015, 161). In the eighteenth century, they were increasingly perceived as thieves and criminals, fueling anti-Roma hostility and violence (*Ibid.*, 254–255).

Emphasizing the impact of European Enlightenment and imperial "inspiration of racial thinking" (Law and Kovats 2018, 81), scholars note forced sedentarization and assimilation in the eighteenth

2 Under Ottoman rule, Wallachia and Moldavia remained Christian principalities and retained control over their internal affairs (1992, 81; Crowe 2007, 109).

century as key to emerging politics in Eastern Europe towards Roma (Demeter et al. 2000; Zinevych 2001; Mróz 2015). These measures aimed to disrupt Romani people's communal relations and ways of life, with devastating consequences (Byelikov 2003). For instance, historians note the influence of neighboring countries' laws (particularly, Austria's) on Russia's imperial policies to settle Roma (Zelenchuk 1979, 213). Catherine II, German-born Empress of All Russia (1762–1796), embraced Enlightenment ideals and pursued modernization along Western European models, building on Peter I's reforms (Demeter et al. 2000, 186; Shaidurov 2018, 204). Russia's encounter with Roma, starting with the late seventeenth-century annexation of some Ukrainian lands from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, led to the development of policies towards Roma later than in other countries. Yet these policies shared commonalities with European regulations alongside unique features.

Imperial Russian rulers, fearing the nomadic lifestyle of Roma and their alleged "harmful" influence on local populations, implemented settlement measures that compelled Roma to work as peasants on land. For example, from 1765 in Left Bank Ukraine, all Roma were ordered to settle permanently, with nomadic Roma outlawed (Zinevych 2001, 44). Legally, Roma were positioned as inferior to regular residents, with penalties for bodily injuries, wounds, or murder of a Romani person set at half those for harming a peasant (Kistyakovskiy 1879, 820; see also Zinevych 2001; Byelikov 2008). In the early nineteenth century, the Russian Empire ruled to settle Roma on state lands to farm and breed cattle, enrolling those on private or state lands as serfs. Anti-vagrancy acts of 1809, 1811, 1818, and 1839 persecuted nomadic Roma, including punishment by exile to Siberia (Zinevych 2001; Shaidurov 2018). Such policies labeled all Roma as vagrants and fugitive serfs/peasants (Smirnova-Seslavinskaya 2021, 85).

Upon Bessarabia's accession by the Russian Empire in 1812, the government implemented measures to improve conditions for Roma enslaved by the state (Crown) and to collect taxes from them. However, the Russian government did not change the situation for Roma enslaved by boyars and monasteries, allowing masters to retain control (Zelenchuk 1979; Achim 2004; Byelikov 2008). The empire compelled nomadic Romani people, many formerly enslaved by the Crown or who had escaped slavery in the Romanian principalities, to settle as peasants and state serfs, thus changing one form of exploitation into another (Zelenchuk 1979, 213–216).

The Soviet Union also imposed a policy of forced sedentarization on Roma, attempting to involve them in the agricultural and industrial labor force (Byelikov 2003, 87). In 1956, the state adopted laws under which Romani people were sentenced to five years of forced labor for "vagrancy" and a "parasitic lifestyle." These provisions caused Roma to hide their ethnicity (Zinevych 2001, 48).

Thus, the development and spread of racial logics across borders perpetuated the marginalization of Romani people in early twentieth-century Eastern Europe, where they still faced violence (Crowe 2007). Understanding these historical dynamics is crucial for grasping the connections between contemporary racial violence in Eastern Europe, race-making, and European colonialism. The next section explores how knowledge about Roma was formed during the Enlightenment rooted in preexisting texts. This corpus of knowledge also illuminates the circuits of racial logics.

2. Logics of Anti-Blackness

In 1783, Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann published *Die Zigeuner* [Dissertation on the Gipseys], a book on Romani people in Europe.[3] It provided a foundation for a longstanding racialization and homogenization of Roma, contributing to race-making as part of cultural common sense. Grellmann, among the first Enlightenment scholars to study Romani languages, classified Roma as originating from India, what allegedly explained their "vices." He advocated for Enlightenment-driven interventions to "reform" and integrate Roma into a "civilized" society. Widely circulated and translated, Grellmann's work became an authoritative text on Roma, considered of great value to ethnographers, historians, linguists, and philosophers (Willems 1997; Shmidt and Jaworsky 2020). Grellmann left a deep imprint by establishing a foundational set of ideas about Roma that constantly persisted in publications in the following centuries and until the present-day (Willems 1997).

For instance, in 1794, an extensive essay on the origin of Roma was published in Russia, summarizing Grellmann's work on Romani customs and way of life (Kirey and Serdyuk 1984, 113–114). Russian imperial ethnographers echoed Grellmann's idea that Romani people are inherently prone to theft and unwilling to work (*Ibid.*, 118). In 1804, Grellmann worked as a professor of universal history and statistics at the University of Moscow (Willems 1997, 44). He was highly revered by the Russian intelligentsia. This example of Grellmann's work travel illustrates the circulation of ideas and logics, including about race and what constitutes a (civilized) human. In his explorations, Grellmann also relied on works from Central and Southeastern Europe.

Grellmann belonged to the Göttingen school of pragmatic history (Shmidt and Jaworsky 2020, 57). He studied and taught in Göttingen, which, "in the 1780s, was considered to be the academic center of the German Enlightenment" (Willems 1997, 24). His work on Roma reflected prevalent Enlightenment views and coincided with the rise of scientific disciplines. Referring to Grellmann's book, Romani scholar Ian Hancock asserts:

> […] the need to categorize the plants and animals being encountered in the new European colonies overseas quickly extended to the classification of non-European human populations as well, and the nineteenth century saw a plethora of dissertations dealing with "race" and the ranking of human groups (2008, 183).

For example, studying the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Mróz highlights the intellectual upheaval in Europe during the late eighteenth century that made this period "a time of fundamental transformation," including in thinking about Roma and policies towards them (2015, 11).

3 While Grellmann used the term "Zigeuner"/ "Gipsey," I use "Roma" throughout this article, as explained in note 1, to reflect a self-identifying term widely used by Romani activists and scholars. I acknowledge that this is not a historically precise translation. Grellmann's category encompassed not only Romani people but also other marginalized and mobile groups – including non-Romani Travellers and homeless people – and was deeply embedded in Enlightenment discourses of classification, population control, and racialization. His terminology reinforced perceptions of these groups as irrational, foreign, and socially deviant, based on social, cultural, and biological markers. I aim to foreground the lasting effects of these constructions on Romani communities, while recognizing the broader reach of Grellmann's categorization.

Claiming to produce the first comprehensive work about Roma, Grellmann (1807) synthesized pre-existing perceptions about Roma, entrenching their othering by portraying them as evil, heathen, irrational, lazy, uncivilized, unwilling to work, and wild. His book sketched a kind of Romani archetype that "held sway for centuries, admitting only slight variations without anyone ever challenging the portrait's historical merits" (Willems 1997, 24). He drew heavily on a series of articles about Hungarian and Transylvanian Roma written by a Protestant minister and scholar of Hungarian descent, Sámuel Augustini ab Hortis, missing the nuances and generalizing his findings to all Romani groups (*Ibid.,* 63–65). The minister aimed to "civilize" Roma and turn them into good Christians. Furthermore, Grellmann was an ardent supporter of Enlightenment reforms towards Roma, particularly the assimilation policies of the Austro-Hungarian sovereigns Maria Theresa and Joseph II.

Grellmann emphasizes Europeans' perceived ability to civilize non-Europeans and draws an analogy between Roma and enslaved Africans. Historical references to Roma as "black" predate Grellmann's work. Before the sixteenth century, colonial rhetoric already named Romani people as external "racial others," non-white, non-European, uncivilized, and wild (Fraser 1992; Shahar 2007). While Roma were often described as dark skinned, swarthy, or black, they were also compared to African people in travelogues, chronicles, and other writing of Westerners, who apparently felt an urge to find a resemblance to Blackness, other physical traits, and character of African people. This resemblance led the authors to conclude about irrationality and "uncivilized nature" of Romani people, banishing them to the archipelago of Human Otherness.

Importantly, Grellmann developed his ideas in the late eighteenth century amid the peak of the transatlantic slave trade and European colonial expansion, which contributed to and came along with reinscribing the human in biologized terms. Sylvia Wynter (2003) theorizes that the overrepresentation of the (Western) European conception of "Man" as the Human itself was foundational for European modernity from the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries onwards. This conception, containing racial and colonial difference at its core, serves to ensure the (Western) European Man's interests and well-being and to sanction the subjugation of human "others." Having had a tangible effect globally, European modernity and its social order safeguarded the "rise of the West" and instituted Western thought as the most enlightened, modern, and progressive. This Eurocentric worldview, reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers, constructed race as a tool to maintain a hierarchy of human difference, associating superiority with whiteness and Europeanness, and inferiority with non-whiteness and non-Europeanness.

The invented category of race became the ground for projecting and rebuilding a new secularizing human/subhuman distinction. This "new mode of being human" was redescribed as the rational political subject of the state in the place of the human as the religious subject of the (Christian) Church (Wynter 2003, 265). Wynter continues that in this descriptive statement of the human:

> […] it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the "racially inferior" Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as "natives," now being assimilated to its category – all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others – if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic "normal humanness," ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West (*Ibid.,* 266).

This framework designates Blackness as the extreme position of subhuman and determines the European Man as the only referent of the human, a universal representative of "pure reason," a rational and civilized self, rendering non-European ways of being and thinking as barbarian, incapable of reason, irrational, subhuman, and uncivilized.

As European colonialism unfolded, the preoccupation with Africans' Blackness became evident in the colonial descriptions of Roma. For example, in 1646, English scientist Thomas Browne described Roma as "artificial Negroes," attributing their dark complexion to sun exposure (Shahar 2007, 7). Although the modern conception of race was yet to be scientifically invented, the black-and-white binary became typical in defining the human hierarchy. For instance, seventeenth-century German philosopher, jurist, and theologian Jacobus Thomasius asserted about Romani people: "these black-looking heathen foreigners speaking a strange tongue, were not fully human" (cited in Lewy 2000, 2; see also Fernández 2021). In 1848, Vladimir Dal', a famous ethnographer, lexicographer, and writer of the Russian Empire, portrayed Roma as "black-complexioned," contrasting "white Russian face" with "black face" of Roma and emphasizing their "savageness" (1883, 140–142).

Likewise, Grellmann (1807) emphasized the difference between Europeans and Romani people as follows: "the one is white, the other black; – this clothes himself, the other goes half naked; – this [one] shudders at the thought of eating carrion, the other regales on it as a dainty" (viii). He further noted that Roma were "famed […] for being plunderers, thieves, and incendiaries" (*Ibid.*). Throughout the book, the remarks of blackness and dark skin of Roma constantly reappear to solidify them as subhuman and racial other. Grellmann equates Roma's "blackness" with "primitive" and "wild" attributes (Clark 2004, 231). Hence, the haunting images of Blackness integrated into humanist thought since the Renaissance explicitly manifest in Grellmann's conceptualization of the long-lasting archetypal image of Roma. This image has served as the racial other in Europe and led to the construction and reinstitution of white West European Man as the human itself and the European in particular. These constructed meanings also further demonize Blackness in general.

Roma, once considered heathens and infidels, as I showed in the earlier section, carried over this marker into the modern conception of human/subhuman, redescribed by Renaissance humanists and later Enlightenment thinkers along a rational/irrational divide and physical properties. Grellmann describes Roma as inherently irrational, who remain unchanged across time and space, "neither time, climate, nor example, has, in general, hitherto, made any alteration" to Romani peoples' way of life (1807, i). This irrational stagnation and stuckness in the past are sutured to their non-European origin, dark complexion, and "wild" and "vagabond" way of life. These factors lead Grellmann to conclude that Romani people need "civilizing" through European interventions of Enlightenment thought, reform, and governance. Moreover, according to Grellmann, the civilizing mission of bringing "irrational savage" Roma towards humanity can and should be effected by means of their divestment of the dark complexion and enforced sedentarization into steady employment to make them "useful citizens" and "profitable subjects" to the state and landowners.

"Blackness," embodied by Romani people, in Grellmann's logic, has the following avenues of non/existence in Europe: (1) it must never appear in Europe; (2) if appeared, it must be made invisible under the police/

carceral regime, "till the police officers get hold of him, and make him again invisible" (1807, 6); (3) or it must disappear through assimilation and hard work for the European Man (*Ibid.*, 13). In any way, the European conception of the Human insists on the disappearance of Blackness, including when projected onto the Romani body. Insisting that Romani people's dark complexion can be changed, Grellmann maps a "way out" for Roma to leave their "savageness," peripatetic way of life, and racial difference behind. Only through this conversion, settlement, and steady work can they become "rational," "civilized," and therefore human. He argued that Roma, serving in the imperial army in Hungary or as musicians who kept themselves loyal to the state and committed to forgetting their descent, had lighter skin. In a way, sedentarization was also part of "whitening."

Importantly, Grellmann concluded that the alleged inherent irrationality of Romani people rendered them unable to be political subjects and govern themselves properly. He calls Romani people "deficient in thought or consideration," "childish," "guided more by sense than reason" (1807, 89). Romani political institutions such as Romani chiefs are considered "merely a ridiculous imitation of what they had seen and admired among civilised people" (*Ibid.*, 72–73). Moreover, Grellmann asserts that music is "the only science" in which Roma can participate, relegating them either to heavy work or entertainment, furthering Roma on the scale of sensuality away from reason. Thereby, he reworks the image of Roma, non-European and heathen, into the irrational Human Other, who is unable to be a rational political subject of the state. Furthermore, Grellmann blames Romani women for not abiding by white European gender norms – "improperly" doing domestic work and caring for their children – and, as a result, for reproducing an "uncivilized," "irrational" way of life (*Ibid.,* 25).

Thus, the racialization of Roma in Europe, including Eastern Europe, was influenced by the logic of anti-Blackness, which affects and shapes racial distinctions. Anti-Roma racism is a result of inter-imperial and colonial relations and the circulation of ideas between different imperial formations. However, one more aspect that influenced the racialization of Roma is the development of racial capitalism. Colonization and Enlightenment ideas about race both contributed to and were affected by capital accumulation and its forms of governance, which sustain capitalism as the primary economic system.

Thus, while this article primarily focuses on the entanglements between anti-Roma racism and anti-Blackness, it is important to acknowledge that the racialization of Roma has also historically intersected with antisemitic logics – beginning at least with the expulsion of Jews from Spain and continuing into the Enlightenment. Scholars such as Wolfgang Wippermann (1997) have shown that anti-Roma and antisemitic discourses emerged in parallel and often operated through structurally similar mechanisms, positioning both Roma and Jewish populations as internal outsiders: mobile, morally suspect, and resistant to state control. For instance, in the seventeenth century, Johann Christoph Wagenseil propagated the idea that "Zigeuner" were actually Jews in disguise – an assertion that reveals how anxieties about alterity were projected onto multiple racialized and marginalized groups. These parallels – along with resonances with the treatment of Indigenous peoples – offer important avenues for future inquiry. While I do not explore these intersections in depth here, they point to the need for further scholarship that examines how anti-Roma racism has been co-constructed with other forms of racial and religious exclusion within European modernity.

3. Racial Capitalism, Land Enclosure, and Criminalization of Vagrancy

Alongside establishing a normative Human/Man, the development of racial capitalism created a profitable subject, obedient to the law and capital. Ian Law and Nikolay Zakharov state that the "multi-faceted racial discourse about the Roma constructed key ideological linkages between the central elements," including the portrayal of Roma as "a parasitic group that fed on 'real' workers" (2019, 119). This portrayal demonstrates the intertwining of racism and capitalism and justifies actions against Roma, ranging from ethnic profiling and hyper-surveillance to demolition of their homes, dispossession, eviction, and school and residential segregation. Unsurprisingly, the question of assimilation of Roma is often tied to their integration into a capitalist economy, which historically involved forced sedentarization despite many Romani communities already being sedentary.

Besides justifying violence, the production of a racial "other" also created preconditions for the economic exploitation of Romani people. Capital accumulation depends on the production of labor power that can be commodified, thus alienated from traditional, self-sufficient production and re-cultivated into labor practices and skills suitable for modern, industrially centered mass production. At the same time, labor power is racialized. As Jodi Melamed (2015) notes, racism enshrines the unequal differentiation of human value that capital requires for its accumulation through loss and disposability. For example, contemporary attacks on Romani settlements illustrate the extreme vulnerability of Romani poor and seasonal labor migrants. At the same time, Romani people often are pushed to do the hardest, most shunned work, while limited access to social services and institutions (such as education) prevents them from overcoming this labor division. In this regard, Enikő Vincze notes that the impoverished Roma both "proved to be redundant or useless on the formal labour markets" and "kept in total economic dependence and under control, could be always abused as a cheap labour force ensuring that they would never resist their exploitation" (2015, 28). Moreover, the alienation of land and the enclosure of the commons historically proved to be a means of capitalist accumulation.

Specifically, Robinson's concept of "racial capitalism" reveals the interconnected roots of racism and capitalism. Robinson (2000) asserts that racial capitalism evolved based on and together with racism and has been dependent on colonialism, genocide, imperialism, slavery, and violence. Furthermore, starting from the twelfth century, state power administrators and elites sustained myths of egalitarianism while seeking every opportunity to dominate various groups of people by dividing them. Robinson emphasizes that "race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation, and/or extermination of non-'Europeans' (including Slavs and Jews)" (*Ibid.*, 27).

While I draw extensively on racial capitalism to trace the historical entanglement of anti-Roma racism with processes of accumulation, exploitation, and colonial governance, I recognize that this framework – particularly as theorized through Robinson – has its own limitations. Scholars such as Jenkins and Leroy (2021) have pointed out the tendency within racial capitalism theory to center transatlantic slavery and the black/white binary in ways that risk marginalizing other racialized experiences, including those

of Indigenous and Romani populations. In response to such critiques, I seek to extend rather than merely apply the racial capitalism framework by situating the racialization of Roma within both intra-European hierarchies and global colonial logics. This approach aims to foreground how forms of racial subjugation in Europe, including the criminalization of Roma, were mutually constitutive with global processes of dispossession and labor extraction. Rather than treating racial capitalism as a totalizing or universally explanatory model, I use it as a heuristic to examine how Roma were racialized through specific mechanisms – such as anti-vagrancy laws, labor control, and sedentarization – that resonate with but are not reducible to or equated with other formations of racial violence. In this way, my analysis both engages with and builds on critiques of racial capitalism, advocating for a more relational and multi-sited understanding of how race and capital co-construct social hierarchies across geographies.

Thus, for instance, Robinson summarizes the development of racial capitalism through four moments: first, the racial ordering of European society; second, the Islamic (that is, African, Arab, Persian, and Turkish) domination of Mediterranean civilization and the consequent impediment to European social and cultural life; third, the incorporation of African, Asian, and peoples of the "New World" into a world system emerging from late feudalism and merchant capitalism; and fourth, the dialectic of colonialism, plantocratic slavery, and the formations of industrial labor and labor reserves (2000, 67). The capitalist modes of production and ideology created distinctions and oppositions among races, ethnicities, and nationalities and between skilled and unskilled workers (*Ibid.*, 42).

Robinson notes that the analysis of racism in Western societies often starts with the third moment while much less attention is paid to intra-European roots of racial capitalism. In his analysis of racial capitalism, he omits Roma, despite their presence in Western Europe since at least the early fifteenth century and their enslavement in Romania since at least the late fourteenth century. I argue that Roma, racialized as non-Europeans, were part of racial capitalist relations. I suggest that land enclosure and the criminalization of vagrancy, crucial for racial capitalism (see Melamed 2015), contributed to the racialization of Roma, alongside the projection of Blackness onto them, as discussed here earlier. Despite Roma historical contributions in various occupations, they were considered "not profitable citizens" in need of civilizing through sedentarization and full control of their labor (Grellmann 1807). Since the sixteenth century, with another peak in the late eighteenth century, Roma in Europe became increasingly associated with vagrancy, criminalized, and forced into sedentarization to serve local landlords or states (Willems 1997; Lucassen 1998).

The spread of the criminalization of Romani people and their association with vagrancy in Europe occurred amid the colonization of the Americas and the rise of the transatlantic slave trade in the mid-sixteenth century. Silvia Federici (2004) emphasizes the cross-fertilization of repressive mechanisms between Europe and the Americas in the development of capitalism. Resembling colonial politics, the Christian Church utilized "heresy" charges to suppress social dissent in Europe, including revolts against feudal authorities, landlords, and employers. By the end of the fourteenth century, mass peasant revolts in Western and Central Europe, with significant women's involvement, sought alternatives to feudal relations and resisted the growing money economy (*Ibid.*, 46).

In response, feudal nobilities toughened up the repressive measures, attempting to increase labor exploitation through different forms of serfdom and slavery (Federici 2004, 45). State centralization

also emerged to quell social conflicts and protect the wealth of the lords (*Ibid.*, 49). With the onset of colonialism in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Eastern Europe saw a "second serfdom," while Western Europe witnessed "the Enclosures, the Witch-Hunt, the branding, whipping, and incarceration of vagabonds and beggars in newly constructed work-houses and correction houses, models for the future prison system" (*Ibid.*, 64). Federici continues, "[…] on the horizon, we have the rise of the slave trade, while on the seas, ships are already transporting indentured servants and convicts from Europe to America" (*Ibid.*).

Having started in thirteenth-century England, the *enclosures* designate land privatization through a set of strategies the lords and wealthy farmers used to expropriate peasants and workers from their common holdings, eliminate communal land property, and expand lords' assets for their sole use. Enclosures involved abolishing the open-field system, where "villagers owned non-contiguous strips of land in a non-hedged field," and also included fencing off the commons and pulling down "the shacks of poor cottagers who had no land but could survive because they had access to customary rights" (Federici 2004, 69–70; see also Acton 1974). Federici notes that land privatization boosted capital, enabling landlords to exploit land for accumulation rather than subsistence. Landlords granted peasants and workers access to some means of subsistence only when directly employed, increasing their dependence on monetary relations and capital owners.

Land enclosure led many people to travel in search of work from the fifteenth century onwards. In response, many authorities introduced regulations to fight vagrancy, "which, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, was perceived as one of the most pressing social problems of the day and coincided with a peak in state activity against vagrants" (Lucassen 2008, 430). In authorities' eyes, "vagrants" embodied the protest to the ruling capitalist economic system, "their behavior, often depicted in strong moral language, generated anxiety because they could encourage others to follow their example and so undermine the social order" (Willems 1997, 8). Melamed explains the racializing work of anti-vagabond laws that mark wageless people as criminal and qualify them as "useless, immoral, and disposable" (2015, 81). Therefore, the "vagrant" becomes a racialized status designated as criminal and disposable. Importantly, "vagrants" are blamed for their dire situation and cannot claim their way of living and subsistence, as well as their presence on the land. Capital owners and nobility intensified penalties for crimes against property to force "vagrants" into the imposed jobs (Robinson 2000; Federici 2004). In the eighteenth century, this criminalization became one of the state's main tools to fight the mobile poor.

Racialization and repression of Romani people were also part of these broader politics to control the unwanted mobility of the poor (Lucassen 2008). Wim Willems suggests that governments used the word "[G]ypsies" to designate those groups of "vagrants" who were not practicing Christians and were perceived as foreigners (1997, 8–9). At the same time, an image of "[G]ypsies" became largely defined by their "heathen condition" and "criminal way of life," concerned with the lack of sedentariness and ties to steady work and land (*Ibid.*, 14–15). Thus, sixteenth-century sources on Romani people demonstrate an anti-vagrancy shift of that time with Roma being increasingly criminalized. They were perceived as potentially disturbing the socio-economic order with their itinerant way of living. Supported by state and church, the image of Romani people as vagrants increasingly marked them as lazy and crime-prone and overshadowed the multiplicity and complex reality of Romani lives (Willems 1997; Lucassen 1998).

Many historians note the impact of Western European tendencies on Eastern Europe. For example, Western intellectual currents reached Poland and fundamentally changed the attitude towards wandering people, in particular, Roma (Zinevych 2001; Mróz 2015). The 1510 Polish Diet resolution signaled these changes, ordering itinerant people to be captured and exploited in fortification works. Although this law predominantly targeted vagrant runaway peasants, in the mid-sixteenth century, state institutions started targeting Romani people. For example, in 1553, four years before the first anti-Roma legislation in Poland, the Polish Chancellor Ocieski sent a letter to the authorities in Vienna to cooperate in expelling Romani people from Poland, as well as the lands of present-day Czechia (Mróz 2015, 128).

Also in 1553, Jakub Przyłuski, a Polish political and law scholar, published the *Leges seu statuta ac privilegia Regni Poloniae* (from Latin, *Laws, statutes and privileges of the Kingdom of Poland*). This work portrayed Romani people as lazy wanderers, thieves, and much less useful for military or domestic services than regular vagrants (quoted in Mróz 2015, 129). He claimed the immorality of accepting Roma and their nomadic lifestyle, calling for strict regulations regarding Roma and other vagrants. Furthermore, in 1564, Polish chronicler and historian Marcin Bielski published *The Chronicle That Is the History of the World*, a Polish literary-historical text presenting a negative image of Roma. The fragments devoted to Romani people in *The Chronicle* are similar and sometimes copied from the broadly circulated work *Cosmographiae Universalis* (1544) of Sebastian Münster, a German cartographer and cosmographer (Mróz 2015, 131). Bielski portrayed Roma as lazy, wandering, wild, and cunning thieves, emphasizing their non-compliance with capitalist labor norms and Eurocentric gender roles, and associating them with espionage for Muslim Turks (quoted in Mróz 2015, 131–132).

These ideas illustrate several important moments. First, the impact of Western European Renaissance thought, particularly German thinkers,[4] on the intellectual thought in Central and Eastern Europe. Second, the thinking about Roma in Poland retranslated the Western logic of othering of Roma. In the eighteenth century, Romani people were increasingly perceived as thieves and criminals in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Importantly, this process took place along the expansion of the cities and the growth of the bourgeois stratum (Mróz 2015, 233–234). The construct of laziness was especially projected onto non-white bodies, including Romani people, despite their occupation, which strongly resonated with ideas developed by Grellmann.

German criminologists, court officials, and investigators referenced Grellmann's work to identify Roma and propose "rehabilitating" measures to make them "profitable citizens" (Willems 1997, 22–23). The image of Roma as non-sedentary vagrants stemmed from the belief that they refuse to work and are prone to stealing. This belief linked criminality to the racialization of Roma, on one hand, and reflected authorities' anxiety about protests against the capitalist system, on the other (*Ibid*., 8). The capitalist incorporation of Roma through their forced sedentarization by criminalizing vagrancy reinforced the formation of a profitable subject. Commending the assimilation policies of Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, "for the purpose of civilising, and rendering good and profitable citizens," Grellmann regards the wandering Roma as "scarcely deserving to be considered as human beings" (1807, 108). In this logic,

4 Germany was the cradle of violent anti-Roma laws.

sedentary Roma chose the "civilized"/ "rational" path that would make them assimilate, therefore, "reform into useful citizens" and become "better men" (*Ibid.*, 26, 85).

Grellmann asserts that, in order to become human, Romani people must work more and be useful/ profitable to the state and landowners. For this purpose, he insisted that state authorities must make sure that Romani people did not waste any time in idleness and "shall be compelled to work for hire" (1807, 87). Denouncing a wandering mode of life of Roma and praising their "healthy robust bodies," Grellmann states that "their skill and ingenuity might render them very profitable subjects to the state, but their disposition makes them the most useless pernicious beings," preventing a state and landowners from "reaping advantage" from Roma (*Ibid.*, 69–70).

In line with the predominant racial logics, the Russian imperial government also claimed to implement the "civilizing" mission towards Romani people by changing their way of life and incorporating/ converting them into a controlled labor force, mainly in land cultivation. Along with these policies, most Roma remained disenfranchised, and their way of life was criminalized, as "the imperial regime perceived sedentarization as a necessary precondition for the primitive 'nomads' to advance to a higher civilization stage as settled agriculturists or artisans" (Smirnova-Seslavinskaya 2021, 91). Ethnographers of imperial Russia perceived the politics of sedentarization as rational administration seeking social order and converting Roma into "useful citizens" (O'Keeffe 2014).

Further, denouncing tsarist oppression of non-Russian peoples, the Bolsheviks declared themselves the rational leaders of a multiethnic Soviet Union. While early Soviet policies – especially during the 1920s *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) period – did support national cultures, languages, and political autonomy to a certain extent, this recognition was often instrumental and uneven. Soviet officials aimed to integrate non-Russian peoples as "conscious, 'socially useful' citizens invested in a distinctly Soviet way of life" (O'Keeffe 2014, 125). Roma were, at times, officially recognized as a "special nationality" and engaged in efforts of cultural production and political organization. Notably, this period also saw the emergence of critical Romani voices, including the coining of the term *antiziganism* by Romani activist Aleksandr German (Holler 2015, 84). However, these policies did not escape the broader Soviet aim of producing socially useful, sedentary, and ideologically aligned citizens. For example, Barannikov (1931), an Orientologist based at the Russian Museum and Leningrad University, claimed that the Russian Empire had aimed at depriving Roma of their distinctiveness, leading to the conclusion that only the Soviet Union had governed Roma rationally and benevolently, both modernizing them through sedentarization and recognizing them as a "special nationality" (74). Yet this modernization was deeply ambivalent. Early Soviet ethnographers continued to underline civic inclusion and sedentarization of Romani people as "the hallmark of rational, tolerant, and ideologically righteous governance" (O'Keeffe 2014, 126), even as state policies often criminalized itinerant lifestyles and undermined traditional trades and occupations (Zinevych 2001; Byelikov 2008). Romani individuals who did not conform to the Soviet model of the productive, settled worker could be targeted under anti-vagrancy laws or other legal pretexts (see also Thomas 2018 on Soviet politics of sedentarization of nomads in Central Asia). Thus, while *korenizatsiia* opened limited spaces for recognition, Roma still were compelled to conform to Eurocentric and state-defined ideals of labor and citizenship, disrupting longstanding relations of kinship, mobility, and space.

Conclusions

This article shows differences and similarities as to the racialization of Roma across spaces and in relation to the colonial racial formations. Delineating various imperialisms helps see the similarities, their travel and formation, as well as illuminate how the distinctiveness of the racialization of Roma differently informs larger racial structures. The early histories of the intra-European racialization of Roma help locate the marginalization of Roma in the racial matrix, as well as prompt to look at the contemporary making of the normative profitable subject informed by historical legacies. As this article shows, among other factors, the racialization is produced through ordering social life according to the dictates of private property and land enclosure, as well as through labor alienation, criminalization of vagrancy, and the formation of the profitable subject. Overall, this article illuminates how the racialization of Roma historically combined the fear of Blackness, non-Christianity, and non-compliance with the capitalist logic of labor exploitation and with Eurocentric gender prescriptions.

Future research could examine whether the status of Roma under other imperial formations – such as the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires (Marsh 2008), or within socialist Yugoslavia – supports or challenges the trajectories outlined here. These cases may complicate or nuance the dominant patterns discussed, offering productive ground for rethinking how different political-economic systems mediate the racialization of Roma. Additionally, further work is needed to trace how colonial and historical tropes – such as associations with criminality, Blackness, impurity, and parasitism – were not only instrumental in enabling the Holocaust, the Porajmos, and other instances of genocidal violence but also persist in shaping mechanisms of exclusion today (Césaire 2000). Building on this article's historical framing, such inquiry could deepen our understanding of how long-standing racial logics continue to structure contemporary state violence and social abandonment targeting Romani communities.

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Darkland, Fairyland, Gypsyland: 'Gypsy' Heterotopias and Barthesian Prestidigitation

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Abstract

This article examines myths that have been disseminated through arts and culture about so-called "Gypsies", confining them to "anti-worlds". There is always a "glamour that enwraps the Gypsy race" (Sampson 1935a, 10). Romantics and some nineteenth-century writers considered them to be positive symbols of resistance to newly born capitalism and rampant industrialization. This constituted a sort of "légende rose" (Descola 2019, 13), or pink legend, as Philippe Descola put it about Achouars, that is, a very positive gaze upon a people yet labelled "primitive". However, this article intends to focus on the negative "black legend" (*Ibid.*), the idea that "Gypsies" form a dark and hostile people belonging to a dark and hostile fantasized territory. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playwrights first depicted "Gypsies" as thieves, monsters, or inferior beings displaying dubious morality. They were ascribed mysterious powers, and "Gypsy" women were depicted as witches connected to their natural and dangerous territory, an occult Gypsyland. In all cases, they were shown as somewhat uncivilized (Grellman 1787, 24) and primitive beings, very much attached to their own traditions: a figure of the "Orientals within" (Lee 2000, 132). This Gypsylorism – understood here broadly as an orientalism about "Gypsies" – imposed a vision about them, now deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the *gadjos*. "Gypsies" of fiction have been created and re-created until they occupy, in the Western imagination, foreign and/or dark territories yet these are situated inside Europe. Surprisingly, they can be found to this day wandering in books and movies, in other spaces or "espaces autres", and in fetishized beyonds or heterotopias (Foucault 1966, 31). "Gypsy" characters inhabit the margins of the dominant societies of the countries in which they settled centuries ago, as if constantly bringing along with them, in the fantasies of the *gadjos*, their own frontiers which would isolate them from the rest of the population; or they live in exotic Gypsylands inside the very West. Their assigned territories are "absolutely different", they are counter spaces, or "contre-espaces" (Foucault 1966, 24), constituting a huge reserve of imagination, "une grande réserve d'imagination" (Foucault 1967, 36). A "Gypsy" para-history thus has been told and written over and over again, "evacuating" (Barthes 2010, 240) the history of *Gypsies*, and questioning the role of artists and responsibility of social players. This article will also seek to raise the issue of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903, 8) among "Gypsy" Travellers.

Keywords

- Gypsylorism
- Heterotopias
- Mythology
- Romani Studies

"Kon mangel te kerel tumendar roburen chi shocha phenela tumen o chachimos pa tumare perintonde."
"He who wants to enslave you will never tell you the truth about your forefathers."
Ian Hancock (1942–)

"It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments."
Franz Boas (1858–1942)

Introduction

In his foreword to *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes (1915–1980) exposed his project: he sought to track down, "in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse […]" (Barthes 1957), "l'abus idéologique" (Barthes 2010, 9), which has helped broadcast "the falsely obvious", "de fausses évidences" (Barthes 2010, 9), in the press, pictures, and films. To Barthes, these discourses formed a set of myths, which imposed themselves on the public, and revealed some aspects of the societies that generated them. This article seeks to look into myths which have been imposed onto what Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) called the "collective consciousness" (Émile Durkheim 1893, cited in Engel 2015, 95) about so-called "Gypsies" in the West, and more particularly in anglophone countries. The terminology "Gypsy" Travellers will be used to speak of real-life "Gypsies". As we shall see, the imagery conveyed and imposed is somewhat similar when it comes to non-"Gypsy" Travellers: Irish Travellers. Their embodiments in fiction belong to the same category in the mind of their creators, that of the "exotic Other[s]" (Lee 2000, 132). Those myths are made of stories told and retold, forming, in the words of the French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) a "collective work":

> *Je ne veux pas dire par là qu'à un certain moment, à une certaine époque, il n'y ait pas eu quelqu'un qui ai d'abord raconté une histoire, mais cette histoire n'est devenue un mythe qu'à force d'avoir été entendue, répétée, entendue, répétée, réentendue, et rerépétée, et ainsi de suite, et être devenue une création collective par toutes sortes d'ajouts, de suppressions […]* (Lévi-Strauss, quoted in Maniglier 2018, 16'07").
>
> I don't mean that at a certain point, at a certain time, there wasn't someone who first told a story, but this story became a myth because it was heard, retold, heard, retold, heard again, and retold once more time, and so forth, until it became a collective work with all sorts of additions and removals […] (author's own translation).

Throughout this collective work they have been depicted as somewhat uncivilized and primitive, in a manner that reminds the reader of Orientalist attitudes towards the Orient. "Gypsies" of fiction indeed have been created and re-created to systematically inhabit in the Western imagination foreign and/or dark territories yet situated inside Europe. In books and movies, they can be found wandering

spaces simultaneously real and imaginary, alternative realities, what Michel Foucault (1926–1984) would define as *heterotopias:* "Heterotopia had the power to juxtapose in one real location several spaces" (Foucault, 1967/1984, 46–49). I would like to argue that in the mind of the *gadjo* (non-*Gypsy*), "Gypsy" Travellers live in those alternative realities hovering between reality and fantasy, and, as the Irish linguist John Sampson (1862–1931) put it, there is a perpetual "glamour that enwraps the Gypsy race" (Sampson 1935a, 10). The dominant societies where they live have thus defined themselves in opposition to what Radmila Mladenova calls the "'gypsy' mask", that is, "a meta-term to denote an abstract cluster of attributes that underwrites the 'gypsy' role and its universe, the mythic anti-world of *gypsies*" (Mladenova 2022, 217). Mladenova's anti-world echoes Foucault's "contre-espaces" (1966, 24), or counter spaces, places of utter transgression. For the *gadjos*, it is a *mundus inversus* gone wrong. Those myths have little by little concealed the socio-historical existence of "Gypsy" Travellers, replacing it with a "Gypsy" para-history. A "prestidigitation" (Barthes 2010, 240) took place, an "evacuation" (*Ibid.*). Their existence seems to be now fixed forever in "absolutely different" territories, dreadful spaces constituting a huge reserve of imagination, "une grande réserve d'imagination" (Foucault 1967, 36). The persistent making of this occult Gypsyland questions the role of artists and the responsibility of social players. It also raises the issue of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903, 8) of "Gypsy" Travellers. The sociality of the arts lies at the heart of both issues, the resolution of which may very well also be a "collective work".

Figures of Wicked 'Gypsies'

In fifteenth-century Paris, a group of beggars belonged to the criminal underworld. They lived in one of the city's numerous *courts of miracles*. They elected a king of the beggars – reminding us of such characters as Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera* by Berthold Brecht (1928), Charles Dickens's Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1838), or Clopin Trouillefou, king of the criminal outcasts in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831). They were depicted as fake beggars and crooks and were much feared. Authors of the time, such as the poet François Villon (1431–1463?) placed the so-called "Gypsies" – or "Gipcians/Egipcians" newly arrived in Paris (probably as early as 1437) at that time – within those *courts of miracles* and the Parisian underworld:

> *A Paris, au cabaret de « zygaut »*
> *Je passais hier en partant au boulot*
> *Chez les tziganes on travaille a chaud […]*
> *Quand tout à coup, je vois jouer l'escroc […]*
> (Villon cited in Manolesco 1980, 99)

> In Paris, yesterday,
> I walked by the « Zygaut » cabaret
> At the Gypsies', we work promptly […]
> When suddenly, I see a crook act […]
> (author's own translation).

Several books were written about the Parisian underworld of the time, such as *La Vie généreuse des Mercelots, Gueuz et Boesmiens* [The generous life of the hawkers, paupers and bohemians] (1596). Books written about the Parisian underworld of the time, as well as those "courts of miracles" were a source of inspiration for Victor Hugo (1802–1885) when writing *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. The terms "hawkers" (notions dealer) and "bohemians" are vague. In Hugo's novel, Quasimodo is said to have been born into a tribe of "Bohemians" or *Gypsies*, whereas Esmeralda is said to be the daughter of French-Romani street dancer, a "gitane". Yet, a plot twist has it that if Esmeralda is a virtuous character, she proves to be not "Gypsy" in the end, and Quasimodo, born into a Romani tribe, is of monstrous appearance. This monstrous appearance may remind readers of Caliban from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611):

> What have we here? a man or a fish? dead or alive? […] A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man […] Legg's like a man! And his fins like arms! (Shakespeare 1610, 96).

He is deformed as well as immoral; his name Caliban suggests the colour black, or blackness, in Angloromani: "Caliban appears to be derived from the Gipsy cauliban, 'blackness'" (Chambers 1930, 494). Darkness indeed came to be a real leitmotif when it came to "Gypsy" characters, and darkness of the skin often meant darkness of the soul. For example, Ellis Wynne (1671–1734), in 1703, referred to the "Gypsies" as a "lying, tawny crew" (Wynne 1703, cited in Jarman and Jarman 1991, 36), thus linking their complexion to their tendency to lie, or, in another passage, to their madness: "'Throw the tan-faced loons to the witches', bade the King" *(Ibid.)*.

In 1605, Ben Jonson wrote *A Masque of Blackness*, in which actors appeared in blackface to pass as Africans. In order to get rid of their blackness, three African ladies must find a country ending in "-tannia": "That they a land must forthwith seek, Whose termination, of the Greek, Sounds TANIA" (Jonson 1605, 546). The country proves to be neither "Black Mauritania", "Swarth Lusitania", nor "rich Aquitania" (*Ibid.*) but England: "This land that lifts into the temperate air, His snowy cliff, is Albion the fair" (*Ibid.*). It is an earthly paradise: "Britannia, this blest isle" (*Ibid.*), as well as an island, that is, a heterotopia *par excellence*, "A WORLD DIVIDED FROM THE WORLD" (*Ibid.*). England is a central, localized utopia, surrounded by purifying waters:

> […] You shall observe these rites:
> Thirteen times thrice, on thirteen nights,
> […]
> You shall […] steep your bodies in that purer brine,
> And wholesome dew, call'd ros-marine:
> Then with that soft and gentler foam,
> Of which the ocean yet yields some
> Whereof, bright Venus, beauty's queen,
> Is said to have begotten been,
> You shall your gentler limbs o'er-lave,

> And for your pains perfection have:
> So that, this night, the year gone round,
> You do again salute this ground;
> And in the beams of yond' bright sun,
> Your face dry, – and all is done *(Ibid.)*.

Andrea Stevens speaks of "Britannia's whitewashing waters" (Stevens 2009, 409), a comment which is relevant to the Elizabethan attitudes towards exotic peoples, should they come from Africa or internal peripheries such as the fantasized Gypsyland. In 1621, Ben Jonson wrote a masque entitled *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* in which a group of "Gypsies" sing and dance to entertain the court. In this second masque, *gadjos* also played *Gypsies*. They painted their faces, probably aided and abetted by the apothecary John Wolfgang Rumler (?–1650), who had created a walnut-based greasepaint or makeup for this effect – so it was this time an early example of yellowface. In the masque, "Gypsies" are stereotypical – thieves and fortune-tellers – and again of monstrous appearance, being compared to a ''wretchock", that is, an imperfect creature, or to an evil spirit, and to an animal living off cheese mould:

> The famous imp yet grew a wretchock; and though for seven years together he was carefully carried at his mother's back, rock'd in a cradle of Welsh cheese, like a maggot, and there fed with broken beer (Jonson 1621, 620).

"Gypsies" in Ben Jonson's masque are sometimes designated as *Moon-men*, whereas Caliban, in *The Tempest*, is a "Mooncalf". Superstition had it during the Renaissance that the moon would cause foetal deformities. Thus, "Gypsies" in the Elizabethan era were depicted regularly as deformed creatures, which supposedly reflected their dubious morality. Indeed, the pseudoscience of physiognomy was very much considered valid at the time, so showing "Gypsies" as deformed amounted to marginalizing them both physically and morally, rejecting them outside of the sphere of the respectable noblemen they had come to entertain. The "metamorphosis" of the title is the transformation, both physical and moral, of "Gypsies" through contact with the noblemen, thus cleared of their yellowness:

> The gipsies were here,
> Like Lords to appear,
> With such their attenders,
> As you thought offenders,
> Who now become new men,
> You'll know them for truemen (Jonson 1621, 620).

Living in England alone could trigger a physical reformation of *Gypsies*, a belief still ingrained well into the nineteenth century:

> The climate of England is well known to be favourable to beauty, and in no part of the world is the appearance of the Gipsies so prepossessing as in that country. Their complexion is dark, but not so disagreeably so (Smith 1880, 18).

But if "Gypsies" were not lucky enough to be reformed by *gadjos*, they would take their deformities to hell along with them:

> Shortly there appear twenty demons, like Scotchmen […] which turned out to be Gypsies. 'Ho, there!' cried Lucifer, 'How was it that ye who know the fortunes of others so well, did not know that your own fortune was leading you hither?' No answer was given, for they were amazed at seeing here beings uglier than themselves (Wynne 1703, cited in Jarman and Jarman 1991, 36).

English landscape painters always depicted them on the margins, and often *on the dark side of the landscape*, as in *Sketch on a Bank with Gipsies*,[1] by J. M. W. Turner (1809). Damian Le Bas notes about this painting that "you can barely see the "Gypsies" referred to in the title. They're in an area of land and shadows so dark, that it could be underground. It could be an underworld" (Le Bas 2022, 3'52"). To Peter J. Howard, "the boundaries […] are so often the critical interest. […]. The outlaw and highwaymen, from Robin Hood to Dick Turpin, lurked in forests and operated on heaths" (Howard 2016, 219).

From the first decades of their arrival in western Europe, fictional "Gypsies" have been wrapped in metaphorical darkness. They were thus associated with criminal outcasts or described as monsters/immoral beings. They were demonized and rejected into other territories, other spaces, yet inside Europe, thus becoming foreigners in their own land. When "Gypsies" left those other space and crossed the borders separating them from Gadjoland, the world of *gadjos*, they brought along with them blackness/yellowness and abomination. Yet, *gadjos* believed they could reform them and rid them of their Gypsiness. In Foucauldian words, those "Gypsy" territories are heterotopias of sorts: they are mostly real, but they are also composite figments of *gadjos*' imagination. They are fantasy spaces: a "court of miracles" (almost Russian dolls, a heterotopia within a heterotopia like a "Gypsy" cabaret in Villon), or an island (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). For instance, Ben Jonson's "Gypsies" have just returned from a fair, a word whose etymology is revealing. Coming from the Anglo-French *feyre* (late thirteenth century), it became in modern French "foire", and the adjective "forain", meaning showmen Traveller. It also gave the English adjective "foreign", circa 1300, *ferren*, *foran*, *foreyne*, in reference to places, "outside the boundaries of a country".[2] If Paris is a moveable feast, fairs are moveable heterotopias, situated outside of town yet inside a territory, at the edge of Gadjoland. They are enclaves inhabited by eldritch creatures, spaces shrouded in mystery and places of many fleeting fantasies:

> *Telles sont les foires, ces merveilleux emplacements vides au bord des villes, qui se peuplent, une ou deux fois par an, de baraques, d'étalages, d'objets hétéroclites, de lutteurs, de femmes-serpent, de diseuses de bonne aventure* (Foucault 1967/1984, 48).

1 *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-sketch-of-a-bank-with-gipsies-n00467.

2 Online Etymology Dictionary, "foreign", https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=foreign.

And thus are the fairs, these wonderful empty sites on the edge of towns, inhabited, once or twice a year, by shacks, stalls, heterogeneous objects, wrestlers, snake-women, fortune tellers (author's own translation].

To Washington Irving, "Gypsies" are idle creatures "always to be found lurking about fairs and races" (Washington Irving, cited in John Sampson 1935, 11). These "Gypsies" are folk figures, looming and hovering at the frontier between the two worlds, sometimes even creeping into Gadjoland or hiding in the middle of it. They betray fear of the outsider, threatening the social order and the morality of the space they are depicted as invading or feeding upon.

Figures of Wild and Occult *Gypsies*

We already mentioned Irish linguist John Sampson (1862–1931) who wrote that there is a "glamour that enwraps the Gypsy race" (Sampson 1935a, 10). Some sort of mystery. The term has first had to do with magic and has indeed come to be associated with the (*Gypsy*) Travellers: "glamour was a literal magic spell […] associated with witches and gypsies and, to some extent, Celtic magic" (Strawinska 2013, 168). Walter Scott (1771–1832) himself mentions this association, which he attributes to the "Scottish peasants":

> Besides the prophetic powers, ascribed to the gypsies in most European countries, the Scottish peasants believe them possessed of the power of throwing upon by-standers a spell, to fascinate their eyes, and cause them to see the thing that is not. Thus, in the old ballad of Johnie Faa, the elopement of the countess of Cassillis, with a gypsey leader, is imputed to fascination:
>
> As sune as they saw her weel-far'd face,
> They cast the *glamour* ower her (Scott 1838, 245).

And the ballad *Christie's Will* (1825) "includes the phrase 'glamour'd gang' used to describe a group of *Gypsies*, which uses the power of a spell to ruthlessly trick a certain teacher (Strawinska 2013, 168). Thus, many "Gypsies" of fiction proved to be "enwrapped in glamour". This is, for instance, the case of Meg Merrilies, who became a stock "Gypsy" character in Victorian Britain. Sometimes she matches the romantic ideals of a life outside industrialization; she is a noble savage, living freely and in harmony with nature:

Her brothers were the craggy hills,
Her Sisters larchen trees –
Alone with her great family
She liv'd as she did please (Keats 1818).

Or she seems to inhabit an interspace between nature and the supernatural:

> […] her tall figure […] seemed almost of supernatural stature. We have noticed that there was in her general attire […] somewhat of a foreign costume, artfully adopted perhaps for the

> purpose of adding to the effect of her spells and predictions, or perhaps from some traditional notions respecting the dress of her ancestors. On this occasion she had a large piece of red cotton cloth rolled about her head in the form of a turban, from beneath which her dark eyes flashed with uncommon lustre. Her long and tangled black hair fell in elf-locks from the folds of this singular head-gear. Her attitude was that of a sibyl in frenzy, and she stretched out in her right hand a sapling bough which seemed just pulled (Scott 1815, 71).

A female oracle, a "sibyl", she is also repeatedly depicted as a witch. The stick she is holding is later in the book said to be a "wand" (Scott 1815, 472). She is also called an "Gipsy-hag" (Scott 1815, 37) by the Dutch captain in the book. Being an old woman, wearing a foreign cloak, and holding a "sloethorn cudgel" (Scott 1815, 20), she has all the attributes of a modern Cailleach, the Hag of Beara, a Celtic divinity (see, again, the definition of the word "glamour" above). Her hair, "dark elf-locks", "shot out like the snakes of the gorgon between an old-fashioned bonnet" (Scott 1815, 20). In European folklore, "elf-locks" are made by fairies on sleeping people, so she also belongs to the world of fairies. Just like heterotopias "had the power to juxtapose several spaces", her character seems to be the result of a composite construction, some sort of juxtaposition of mythological characters (prophetess, witch, sybil, hag, Cailleach, gorgon) belonging to several folklores (Greek, European, Celtic…), besides her character being inspired by a real-life "Gypsy" queen or Phuri Dai[3] Jean Gordon. On top of it all, her character, having "traditional notions" and wearing "an old-fashioned bonnet", betrays the Orientalist or rather Gypsylorist(ic) attitude of the author in her supposed attachment to traditions, theorized at the end of the eighteenth century: "The Gypsies are an eastern people, and have eastern notions. It is inherent in uncivilized people, particularly those of Oriental countries, to be strongly attached to their own habits" (Grellman 1787, 24). Elaborating upon it, Ken Lee defined Gypsylorism as such:

> Whilst Orientalism is the discursive 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).

Meg Merrilies belongs to the community of *Border Gypsies*, that is, "Gypsy" Travellers living between England and Scotland, at the farthest reaches of the kingdom, a kingdom at the edge of the kingdom. To the *gadjos* in the novel, beyond the aptly named river Eden, marking the frontier between Meg's Gypsyland and Gadjoland, lies hell. Ellis Wynne, again, wrote: "Shortly there appear twenty demons, like Scotchmen" (Wynne 1703, cited in Jarman and Jarman 1991, 36). So, Border "Gypsies" are twice outcasts: as Scots, then as "Gypsies", thus belonging to a periphery within a periphery. Unjustly accused of kidnapping the young Bertram, Meg is expelled from the domain: "Yes; there's thirty yonder, from the auld wife of an hundred to the babe that was born last week, that ye have turned out o' their bits o' bields, to sleep with the tod and the blackcock in the moors!" (Scott 1815, 72). Meg is a "Gypsy" queen whose gypsydom is limited to the moor, her supposed natural environment, as in Keats. Heathcliff, too, is a "gipsy brat" (Brontë 1847, 37), and he belongs to the moor, or heath, as his name suggests. Moreover, he does not only belong to the Yorkshire moor, but he also becomes one with this wild landscape:

3 "Phuri dai: a senior woman in the band. The *phuri dai*'s influence was strong, particularly in regard to the fate of the women and children", in *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/phuri-dai.

> *Il y a le roc de Penistone, c'est Heathcliff. Le roc de Penistone fait rêver la petite Catherine Linton, […] mais bien sûr elle n'a pas le droit d'y aller. Le parc du manoir où elle vit est fermé par une grille, et cette grille, on ne doit pas la franchir. Le roc de Penistone, c'est encore une fois Heathcliff, qui lui-même est une concrétion de la nature. Il est le roc, il est l'aridité du désert, dira Catherine, […]. Il est la dureté du silex […]* (Jordis 2017, 45'22").

> There is Penistone Crag, this is Heathcliff. Little Catherine Linton dreams of the Penistone Crag […] but she is not allowed to go there. The park of the manor house where she lives is closed by a gate, and one must not cross it. Penistone Crag, this is once again Heathcliff, himself a natural concretion. He is the Crag, he is the barrenness of the desert, says Catherine […]. He is himself the roughness of the flint […] (author's own translation).

His enemies try to reject him out of doors, to the untamed wildness: "Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous: for that cause, and to prevent worse consequences, I shall deny you hereafter admission into this house" (Brontë 1847, 114). In one of the filmic adaptations of the novel, Hindley addresses him in those terms: "Get that Gypsy out of here […] You're not for a civilized house!" (Kosminski 1992, 24'30"). According to Pauline Nestor, Heathcliff inhabits a British Frontier between civilized and uncivilized realms:

> The high level of violence in the novel, accessible it seems to almost every character, also challenges assumptions about the restraining limits of civilized behavior. Perhaps Heathcliff occupies such a liminal position, perceived as bordering at times on the beast, at other moments on the devil, that we are not shocked by his 'half-civilized ferocity' (Nestor 2003, xxviii).

He is depicted by *Gadjo* as an inferior being, half-beast/beast, half-human, dweller of an untenable ontological heterotopia:

> 'Off, dog!' cried Hindley, threatening him with an iron weight used for weighing potatoes and hay. […]. 'Throw it,' he replied, standing still, 'and then I'll tell how you boasted that you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died, and see whether he will not turn you out directly.' […]. 'Take my colt, Gipsy, then!' said young Earnshaw. 'And I pray that he may break your neck: take him, and he damned, you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. – And take that, I hope he'll kick out your brains!' (Brontë 1847, 39).

Heathcliff is an "imp of Satan": he is thus bestowed the same offensive moniker as "Gypsies" during the Renaissance (Ben Jonson 1621, 620), and at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Wynne 1703, 36). At the end of the twenty-first century, the imagery remains similar. "Gypsies" are "savages" whom *gadjos* endeavour to keep at bay, in an outside space, as iterated in the series *Peaky Blinders*. Here, Darby Sabini, a British-Italian gangster at war with the eponymous gang of Travellers, loses his temper:

> **Darby Sabini** Everybody makes fucking jokes. I didn't know you had no sense of humour! […] So, for a few fucking jokes you fucking invite a tribe of savages into the city and just fucking clog the fucking gates! (Knight 2014, 37'41").

The "'Gypsy' mask" is not solely worn by actual ethnic "Gypsies" but more widely by those considered as exotic Others. This is the case with Irish Travellers. Gypsyland and "Tinkerdom" (McPhee 2017) are neighbouring territories. In the movie *Into the West*, a neighbour of the Reilly family, trying to have them evicted, exclaims: "We have to keep things civilized!" (19'48"); at a later stage, a business and horse trainer fumes: "Those Travellers have the devils on their side!" (Newell 1992, 1.09'13"). The two heroes, Tito and Ossie, are looking for an Irish Frontier, a mythical West (as the title suggests), a "land of eternal youth", precisely the translation in English of the magical horse, Tír na nÓg, which appears to take them there, whereas a group of *gadjos* call their dad's friend "a squaw" (Newell 1992, 1.09'13"). They are depicted by *gadjos* as "savages" of Ireland, echoing the words of Washington Irving (1783–1859), who, almost two centuries before, drew the same parallel, likening "Gypsies" and "Indians": "They seem to be like the Indians of America", he wrote, quoted by John Sampson in a chapter of *The Wind of the Heath* revealingly called "The Dark Race" (Sampson 1935, 11).

In another example, in Marina Carr's play *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), Irish Traveller Hester Swane is first introduced to the reader as a witch:

> **Hester** Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here.[…].
> **Catwoman** […] You're my match in witchery, Hester, same as your mother was…
> (Carr 1998, 273–274)

She is then labelled a "Jezebel witch" (Carr 1998, 280), being thus compared to a foreigner and an intruder from another territory to sow discord and corrupt the king. She possesses soothsaying skills and is connected to the impenetrable and esoteric realm of the bog and its plants – to both of which she owes her power:

> […] Hester's connection to the Pagan spiritual world is also a real one. The ghost of Joseph Swane asks the Catwoman of Hester, 'Can she hear ghosts?' 'Oh aye', responds the Catwoman, 'though she lets on she can't' (2.301). Later Joseph approaches her, and, just like the Catwoman, who readily admits her place in the Pagan landscape, she can hear but not see him. Moreover, she can both see and hear the Ghost Fancier when other characters clearly do not. While these instances reveal Hester's psychic ability, she also demonstrates her association with specific Irish folk traditions. When she is defending her right to stay by the Bog of Cats she tells the wedding guests, 'I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile. I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue' (2.314). As Angela Bourke points out a number of times in *The Burning of Brigit Cleary*, the traditional uses of herbal medicine were specifically the traditional uses of herbal medicine were specifically the esoteric knowledge of the fairy doctors. Moreover, Hester's claim to a secret knowledge of these herbs and the bog itself marks her inert connection to both folk tradition and to the natural landscape from which that tradition derives (Kader 2005, 181).

She occupies a liminal space suggested by the onomastics itself, as in the case of Heathcliff: she is the animalistic Swan/Swane, and semi-mythological Meg Merrilies, made up of several ontological layers. Finally, it should be noted that she, too, is facing injustice and is driven by a desire for vengeance. However, *gadjos* and the pillars of the social and patriarchal order in the play are trying to evict her from

her own heterotopia, the bog, and to take possession of it. They are obsessed with her departure: "Now what I'd really like to know is when are ya plannin' on lavin'?" (Carr 1998, 333), says Xavier Cassidy, a rich farmer, threatening her with a shotgun; while she is only begging to stay: "All I ever wanted was to be by the Bog of cats. A modest want when compared to the want of others. Just let me stay here in the caravan" (Carr 1998, 281). This colonial attitude already lies at the heart of Said's Orientalism, and echoes the connection recently noted by Damian Le Bas between Gypsylorism and its somewhat "colonial tone" (Berkham 2018) adopted towards "Gypsy" Travellers, "a group that exists simultaneously within and outside European society" (Berkham 2018).

The *Gypsies*' language, too, is marginalized: "The *Critical Review* must lament that 'Guy Mannering' is too often written in language unintelligible to all except the Scotch" (Scott 1815/1893). The remark echoes Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights, in a passage also resuming the association of "Gypsies" with blackness and the underworld:

> […] it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil.
> We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk: indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's; yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand (Brontë 1847, 37).

Ellis Wynne, already, spoke of their "barbarous chatter" (Wynne 1703, cited in Jarman and Jarman 1991, 36). There is something rotten, something devilish in the kingdom of *Border Gypsies*. Meg needs exorcising, and it is the local Sheriff this time who endeavours to do so by his judicial jargon. So three centuries after Ben Jonson, *gadjos* were still depicted as having the power to strip fictional "Gypsies" of their supposed Gypsiness:

> The Sheriff received also the depositions concerning what had passed at their meeting the caravan of gypsies […] The speech of Meg Merrilies seemed particularly suspicious. There was, as the magistrate observed in his law language, damnum minatum – a damage, or evil turn (Scott 1815, 73).

However, the narrator in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* carries out a reversal of sorts, making the centre the periphery. Indeed, according to Meg Merrilies, a supposed foreign and exotic outsider, it is Dominie Sampson, a minister and tutor, thus a representative of English education and religion, who speaks a "French gibberish", and it is the minister who seems to be now enwrapped in "glamour":

> 'Get thee behind me!' said the alarmed Dominie. 'Avoid ye! Conjuro te, scelestissima, nequissima, spurcissima, iniquissima atque miserrima, conjuro te!!!'
> Meg stood her ground against this tremendous volley of superlatives, which Sampson hawked up from the pit of his stomach and hurled at her in thunder. 'Is the carl daft,' she said, 'wi' his glamour?' […] 'What, in the name of Sathan, are ye feared for, wi' your French gibberish, that would make a dog sick? (Scott 1815, 467).

Walter Scott, one of the "substrates" (Durkheim 1893, cited in Engel 2015, 95) of this mythologizing collective work, depicts a "Gypsy" heroine, Meg Merrilies, who occupies at once the margins and the centre. Even if the supposed pillars of the social (and patriarchal) order ceaselessly endeavour to reject her towards the edges, her exoticization does not exclude her from the Scottish cultural centre, as Deborah Epstein Nord explains:

> In his novel *Guy Mannering, or, the Astrologer* (1815), Walter Scott offers his readers a version of the history of Gypsies that emphasizes their deep and mystical presence in the Scottish past, their intermingling with the Scots themselves, and their vulnerability to the vagaries of historical, political, and economic change. His are not Gypsies of a static and constant character, impervious to alteration and untouched by other people and ways of life, as many commentators in this period imagined them. […] Scott's Gypsies also occupy an iconic place in the collective memory of the Scottish people and seem, at times, to stand in for the prized national past that Scott, as an antiquarian, was committed to retrieving. Their association with an ancient and dimly remembered history, a memory of origin, and a complex identity is played out in the novel on the level of the individual experience of the young hero, Harry Bertram, and his connection to the "Gypsy" "sibyl," Meg Merrilies, one of Scott's most charismatic and celebrated characters. The memory of this primal figure links Bertram to his past, helps him reconstruct his nearly erased identity, and serves as a confirmation of the need to preserve – or, at least, remember – the cultural amalgam of which the "Gypsy" is a part.
>
> Meg Merrilies, "harlot, thief, with, and Gypsy," had a life of her own outside Scott's novel throughout most of the 19TH century and played an archetypal role in popular culture, the meaning of which is all but lost to us. She was the subject of the poem "Meg Merrilies" (1818) by John Keats, inspired another called "The Gipsy's Malison" (1829) by Charles Lamb, became the central character in a successful dramatization of Guy Mannering that featured the fames Sarah Egerton as Meg, and was painted in at least seven portraits between 1816 and 1822. This "Meg-mania," as one critic has phrased it, underscored the powerful, imposing, and exotic visual qualities of this figure: her great and mannish height; her wild-haired and red-turbaned head; her garb, which combines "the national dress of the Scottish people with something of an Eastern costume"; and her air of "wild sublimity".[4] She is written as a virtual stage character, compared explicitly in the narrative with Sarah Siddons, and always evoked pictorially, as though Scott meant her for the subject of a picturesque tableau.[5] But Meg Merrilies also captured the imagination of Scott's audience as an emblem of fate and a reader of the future – she is referred to an ancient "Sybil" – and as an ancestral figure; neither wholly

4 Author's note: See Peter Garside, "Meg Merrilies and India", Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference in Edinburgh, 154–71, 1991.

5 Katie Trumpener discusses the European tendency, whether in literary texts or in visual displays, to imagine Gypsies in static set pieces or tableaux "The Time of the Gypsies: A 'People Without History'". In Identities, edited by Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 341–343. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

> female nor wholly male, she is a woman of "masculine stature", with a voice whose "high notes were too shrill for a man, the low… too deep for a woman".[6] Hybrid in a variety of ways – male and female, Scottish and "Eastern" – she transcends distinctions of sex and nation and occupies the position of an ur-parent of original forebear (Epstein Nord 2006, 25–26).

Today, another "Gypsy" character who at once occupies the margins and the centre is enwrapped in an aura triggering a "mania", from attire to speech: Thomas Shelby, leader of the Peaky Blinders gang in the eponymous series. As with Heathcliff, *gadjos* (his enemies) go to great lengths to confine him in "Gypsy" heterotopias. They do so through guns and also language, saturating their verbal exchanges with excluding names: "Gypsy", "Tinker", "Pikey", "Diddicoy"… As Ian Hancock put it, language is a place of "struggle for the control of identity" (Hancock 2007, 1). The one who possesses the power to name the other(s) masters "the representation of Otherness" (Hancock 2007, 1), as Stephano et Trinculo repeatedly naming Caliban a "Moon-calf" (Shakespeare 1611, 98–105), patriarchs calling Meg Merrilies a "Gypsy" "hag" (Scott 1815, 37–38) – which is also how the white master Prospero calls his dark slave Caliban: "A freckled whelp, hag-born – not honour'd with a human shape" (Shakespeare 1611, 74) – and finally Thomas Shelby's enemies defining him by the above-mentioned names, often doubled with a reference to the body, the lower body, such as "fucking *Gypsy* scum" (Knight 2013, S1E2, 54'25"). The "Gypsy" protagonist represents the low, as Said's Oriental. Yet, Thomas Shelby is an intruder, just like Heathcliff is an "interloper" (Brontë 1847, 39), constantly conquering new territories. "A tent, then a boat, then a house, then a mansion. This is something", says Winston Churchill in glowing terms (Knight 2019, S5E6, 4'51"). Heathcliff and Thomas Shelby are chiaroscuro characters, navigating between the known and the unknown and thus threatening to erase the borders between the centre and heterotopias, and to destroy the established social order. As Camilla Fojas observes from her filmic perspective:

> From the northern perspective of Hollywood, border zones evoke a negative sublime: fear and anxiety about crossing-over into the unknown or of the unknown crossing-over and infiltrating the known. […] These films generate fear of invisible machinations, that while no one was looking, something or someone has permeated the boundary that keeps things known intact (Fojas 2007, 82).

"Anti-world" and "negative sublime": "Gypsy" characters are *Gadjos*' "old-purpose monster[s]" (Halberstam 1993, 337), demonic and deformed. They are the dwellers of counter spaces, Foucault's "contre espaces" (Foucault 1967, 24). But instead of being "localized utopias" (Foucault 1967, 24), those spaces rather are, in the case of *Gypsies*, localized dystopias. They are also heterotopias of "deviation" (Foucault 1967, 21): "Gypsy" characters are old, mad, immoral, or monstruous, and at times, all of the above at once. They embody *gadjos*' total fears and taboos, at times being associated with one of the most widespread and fearsome of them all, cannibalism. We know that Shakespeare had read Montaigne and his *Essay*, *Of Cannibals* (1580), when his imagination begot the character of Caliban. The name is probably not innocent. Two centuries later, when Meg Merrilies appears as a witch in the eyes of Guy, an impressionable *gadjo*, Walter Scott once again deconstructs this mythologizing stance:

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6 George Eliot quotes Meg Merrilies at least twice in letters to close friends, on 27 April 1852, and 30 December 1859, and does so without referring to her source […] This suggests a certain familiarity with the novel and character.

> 'Sit down there,' she said, pushing the half-throttled preacher with some violence against a broken chair […]
> Meg in the meanwhile went to a great black cauldron that was boiling on a fire on the floor, and, lifting the lid, an odour was diffused through the vault which, if the vapours of a witch's cauldron could in aught be trusted, promised better things than the hell-broth which such vessels are usually supposed to contain. It was, in fact, the savour of a goodly stew, composed of fowls, hares, partridges, and moor-game boiled in a large mess with potatoes, onions, and leeks, and from the size of the cauldron appeared to be prepared for half a dozen of people at least. 'So ye hae eat naething a' day?' said Meg, heaving a large portion of this mess into a brown dish and strewing it savourily with salt and pepper (Scott 1815, 469).

Heathcliff is described by Nelly as having "sharp cannibal teeth" (Brontë 1847, 178), whereas according to her, "his black countenance looked blightingly through" (Brontë 1847, 178). This strange occurrence of the adverb "blightingly" rejects Heathcliff towards a heterotopia of strangeness, an "uncanny valley" (Masahiro 2012, 28). Approaching the Orient, Mina Harker expresses a similar fear: "There was something wild and uncanny about the place. We could hear the distant howling of wolves" (Stoker 1897, 321). The border between Gadjoland and Gypsyland is once there again marked by a river, the Danube. There is something *Unheimlich* about *Gypsies*, literally at once foreign and necessarily concealed. Characters coming from this uncanny territory carry with them the possibility of contamination of the cultural centre. Bram Stoker's Dracula is helped by "Gypsies" in his project to travel to London. They are confined in the courtyard of his castle, and when they are allowed into it, it is to commit "some ruthless villainy" (Stoker 1897, 47). Critics have often underlined the fear of reverse colonisation (Arata 1990, 623) to be found in the novel. This fear betrays *gadjo* feelings of guilt:

> This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where perhaps for centuries to come he might … satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless (Stoker 1897, 54).

Nearly 120 years later, g*adjos* continue to collude in confining the *Gypsies*:

> **Darby Sabini** Now admit it. The Peaky Blinders is out of control.
> **Alfie Solomons** Yeah, they are out of fucking control, mate. They came down the canal and spread like the fucking clap. […] Just write down peace between the Jews and the Italians.
> **Darby Sabini** And war against the Gypsies (Knight 2014, S2E4, 38'40").

In other words, and as Sabini wondered earlier in his burst of anger, who let in those creatures? This dread of foreign invaders manifested itself in the wolf metaphor or lycanthropy (Arnds 2015, 69), not only about "Gypsies" (who seem to turn into wolves in Stoker's *Dracula*) but about all ethnic minorities threatening Gadjoland. They have all been demonized. Eventually, a few "Gypsy" and Traveller characters (Meg Merrilies, Heathcliff, Hester Swane, Thomas Shelby) display more complex features than the usual "'gypsy' mask" and seem to find favour with the narrator/author/reader. Nevertheless, the presence of similarly emancipated "Gypsy" characters in literature and the cinema is much too rare to signify a real change in the perspective. They only seem to show a "mere temporary suspension […] of hierarchical rank" (Jenks 2003, 165), an incidental transgression of *Gypsy*/*gadjo* order and that of Romani heterotopias.

'A World Divided from the World': 'Gypsy' Heterotopias, 'Gypsy' History, and 'Gypsy' Double-consciousness

The fetishization of "Gypsies" never failed. Fascinated by "Gypsy" Travellers (and the Irish Travellers), *gadjos* of Western Europe have written and rewritten stories and discourses about them now deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the majority culture: "the lorists have handed down as their main legacy a picture of the racial *Gypsy* which has been imprinted firmly in the popular consciousness" (Mayall 2004, 179). According to these myths, they inhabit an exotic Gypsyland, populated with uncivilized beings, or ghastly and dark spaces, situated within Europe, in domestic peripheries.[7] Yet, research shows a very different picture of the history of the "Gypsy" Travellers. This is particularly true of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for which there are a plethora of pictures and evidence how the "Gypsy" Travellers played an important role in the economy as well as in the social life of the kingdom. For instance, they fought in the First World War, having their fair share in the defence of the British Empire and the Allied forces:

> When news of war came in 1914, many were thrilled: here was a chance to get caught up in great events, to support right against wrong, and […] to show what you were made of. Abraham Ripley enlisted with the 7TH Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment); his nephew and best friend, also Abraham Ripley, signed up with the 4th battalion, Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment). The family were stopping at Weybridge when they left:
>
> > Everyone went out of the yard to see them off. The two young Abrahams laughed as they waved and walked away into their uncertain future. The family stood in silence until the two had disappeared, then they went back to the yard until only my mother stood looking down the empty lane, even after the sound of their boots and their laughter had died away (Keet-Black 2013, 43).
>
> They never came back. Young Abraham died on the first day of the Battle of Passchendaele, his body torn up by shells, or slipping unnoticed into the treacherous mud, and all that remains is a name on the Menin Gate. His uncle fought on until 1918 and then, only six weeks before the Armistice, he too was killed, and rests in the Quarry Wood Cemetery at Sains-lès-Marquion, east of Arras.
>
> > They were not the only Gypsies caught up in the remorseless machinery of war. […] normally Gypsies supported the war. […] The Romany did their bit, no better or worse than their *gorjer* brothers-in-arms (Harte 2023, 154–156).

Some of them became national heroes – a fact, however, shown in the BBC period crime drama *Peaky Blinders* (Steven Knight, 2013–2022) through portrayals of the Shelby brothers. The show has been described both as a historical drama and an epic, so again straddling the line between reality and fantasy. Welsh Kale were very active in the field of music. Moving around, they played an important role in preserving traditional Welsh folk ballads. They were among the best musicians of the country,

7 See in this matter Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, "Les Indiens d'Europe" [The Indians of Europe], 2011, Lignes 2 (35): 180–203.

especially harpists – such as Mary Ann Roberts, born in 1841, a harpist, daughter of John Roberts (1816–1894), a renowned harpist as well. Or violinists, such as Matthew Wood, a descendent of Abram Wood (1699?–1799), a Welsh Kale storyteller and himself a fiddler. Welsh Kale regularly won prizes at local Eisteddfodau (Yates 1953, 84); John Wood Jones "gained the silver harp at the Brecon Eisteddfod of 1826 and performed on the harp with applause before her majesty Queen Victoria at the Royal Palace in 1843" (Jarman and Jarman 1991, 68). The Roberts family also performed in front of Queen Victoria at Palé Hall, Llandderfel on 24 August 1889. They were once celebrated. They were not the dwellers of a separate, remote and exotic periphery of the kingdom; at times, they occupied its very centre. In the 1950s and 1960s, many documents show that the (*Gypsy*) Travellers in the UK, in Ireland as well as in the USA not only took a great part in the local economy but also mixed with local people, and so did not belong to those exotic heterotopias constructed by the writers' Gypsyloristic attitudes. Lois Brookes-Jones, for example, underlines the (Gypsy) Travellers' "intersection with the local mining community, and how working-class history intertwines with […] Gypsy and Traveller history[8] (Brookes-Jones 2022, 7'37").

Pictures also confirm these very testimonies. Nonetheless, why does the majority population continue to favour myths over such tangible objects as photographs? Photographs seem to attest to the fact that "Gypsy" Travellers were there amongst the rest of the population and took part in local economies: "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (Sontag 1977, 5). Roland Barthes spoke of a "certificate of presence":

> *C'est une prophétie à l'envers : comme Cassandre, mais les yeux fixés sur le passé, elle ne ment [...] Toute photographie est un certificat de présence […] comme l'ectoplasme de « ce qui avait été »* […] (Barthes 2010, 135).
>
> It is like a backwards prophecy. Like Cassandra, but the gaze fixed on the past, it never lies […]. Every photograph is a certificate of presence […] like the ectoplasm of what once was […] (author's own translation).

Songs do, too, such as *The Berryfields of Blair*, written by Belle Stewart (1906–1997) and sung by her daughter, Sheila Stewart (1937–2014), two traditional Scottish singers belonging to a community of Scottish "Gypsy" Travellers. Again, the song describes the non-segregated yearly gatherings:

> When berry time comes roond each year
> Blair's population's swellin,
> There's every kind o picker there
> And every kind o dwellin.
> There's tents and huts and caravans,
> There's bothies and there's bivvies
> And shelters made wi tattie-bags
> And dug-outs made wi divvies.

8 See in this matter Chris Killip's photographic book *Seacoal* (1984).

There's corner-boys fae Glesgae,
Kettle-boilers fae Lochee,
There's miners fae the pits o Fife,
Mill-workers fae Dundee,
And fisherfowk fae Peterheid
And tramps fae everywhere,
Aa lookin fir a livin aff
The berry fields o Blair.
There's travellers fae the Western Isles,
Fae Arran, Mull and Skye;
Fae Harris, Lewis and Kyles o Bute,
They come their luck to try,
Fae Inverness and Aberdeen,
Fae Stornoway and Wick
Aa flock to Blair at the berry time,
The straws and rasps to pick.
There's some wha earn a pound or twa,
Some cannae earn their keep,
There's some wid pick fae morn till nicht,
And some wid raither sleep.
There's some wha hae tae pick or stairve,
And some wha dinna care
There's comedy and tragedy
Played on the fields o Blair.
There's faimilies pickin for one purse,
And some wha pick alane,
There's men wha share and share alike
Wi wives wha's no their ane.
There's gladness and there's sadness tae,
There's happy herts and sare,
For there's some wha bless and some wha curse
The berry fields o Blair.
Before I put my pen awa,
It's this I would like to say:
You'll travel far afore you'll meet
A kinder lot than they;
For I've mixed wi them in field in pub
And while I've breath to spare,
I'll bless the hand that led me tae
The berry fields o Blair.[9]

9 Belle Stewart (1906–1997), "The Berryfields O Blair", Songs of the Travelling People, Saydisc Records, 1994, https://youtu.be/RBHMCTucV8Q.

On a more tragic note, whereas they have been depicted since the renaissance as criminal outcasts, (*Gypsy*) Travellers have rather been the victims of the criminal underworld, mostly because of their vulnerability. They consistently have been designated as kidnappers of children of *gadjos*, until today, whereas research shows than vulnerable (*Gypsy*) Traveller children have been kidnapped by non-Roma and forced to beg in Milan, London, or Paris, or steal, under threat of being molested by their non-Romani persecutors, such as the Hamidovic family, who were arrested recently.[10] In this case, a tragic reversal of values took place, as Canadian Traveller Ronald Lee explained in a passage of his autobiography:

> Of all the unwritten histories, that of the Gypsy is the most extraordinary. Our music, our art, our crafts, our fashions have been stolen to be presented in the concert halls and museums of the world as Spanish, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Russian, French, and so on. All that we have created through the centuries has been taken from us, and yet in popular myth we are the "thieves" (Lee 1971, 181).

The endurance of such imagery can have devastating professional consequences for "Gypsy" Travellers:

> I was convinced I had ability and enough training to be a successful ship model builder or maritime historian with some museum and I had other specialized talents that should be worth something like the five languages I spoke fluently […] Gypsies aren't ship model builders […] Gypsies aren't artists, they're fortunetellers or violin players like Jilko, horse thieves or knife-wielding avengers of the slurs against their women. Whoever heard of a Gypsy expert on maritime history and naval architecture? (Lee 1971, 234).

Harrowing social consequences are also generated by this dissonance:

> The age-old myth of the violins, the caravans, the earrings, blazing campfires and the savage knife fights over the tribal virgin would come back into its own on T.V., in novels and in the movies, while the real Canadian Gypsies were becoming hoodlums, dope addicts, prostitutes and alcoholics following the natural process of the Canadianization of off-white minority groups (Lee 1971, 233).

Eventually, another troubling consequence of the lasting imagery of Gypsylorism is the way the fantasies of *gadjos* about the "Gypsy" Travellers make their way through the minds of the (*Gypsy*) Travellers themselves. It has indeed worked so well, that Gypsylorism has given birth to a case of internalized orientalism, or internalized Gypsylorism, by which (*Gypsy*) Travellers have internalized the categories of European Orientalism towards them. For example, when Ronald Lee seems to be convinced of the power of Kalderash *Gypsies*:

> The old people were just finishing supper when we arrived. The old lady knew we were coming and had made enough for us. The more I lived among these Kalderash Gypsies the more I

10 See in this matter Olivier Peyroux, *Délinquants et Victimes, la traite des enfants d'Europe de l'Est en France* [Offenders and victims, human trafficking of Eastern European children in France] (2013).

> became convinced that they had some kind of telepathy that enabled them to communicate with one another […] (Lee 1971, 29).

Or when Johnny Dogs (Packy Lee), a "Gypsy" character in *Peaky Blinders* reproaches Thomas Shelby with his alliance with the "Gypsy" Lee family: "Tommy, his people are fucking savages. You know, heathens, Tom, they don't even let them in the fair" (Knight 2017, 9'32"). The fair is another of those fetishized beyonds par excellence, heterotopia and heterochronia, possessing, as all heterotopias, "an opening and closing system" (Foucault 1966, 32), supposed here to hold the savages at bay. And again, when Polly Gray, matriarch of the clan, adds: "So, this is the plan, Thomas? This is the plan. Bullet with a name on it, help from a bunch of savages" (Knight 2017, 9'52"). This expresses a self-fetishization which English "Gypsy" Traveller writer Damian Le Bas is aware of:

> […] artists often fetishize certain things about Gypsy and Traveller culture […] I can't help but take a slightly wry view of it because I feel like we often fetishize the same things ourselves when it suits us. We're drawn to the same semi-unrealistic images of ourselves as other artists […] I've found that interplay within myself quite interesting (Le Bas 2022, 0'44").

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), or Paul Gilroy (1956–) have all tried to understand the concept of double-consciousness and "what it meant to be a minority group within a majority culture" (Rutledge 2003, 14). Are "Gypsy" Travellers systematically:

> […] born with a veil […] in this […] world […] a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois 1903, 8).

Like Black history, the history of the "Gypsy" Travellers seems to be made of "two unreconciled strivings; Two warring ideals […] whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self" (Du Bois 1897). What is the role of the mythologist and what should be done to help reconcile these two selves?

Discussion and Conclusion

The persistence of the imagery of the "Gypsies" (and Travellers) of fiction is extraordinary. For instance, four centuries after the monstruous Caliban took the stage, and Ben Jonson depicted their metamorphosis, they still are portrayed as freaks, such as Irish Traveller Brackets Sonaghan (Corbett 2013, 36). (See above about the confusion in the myths between "Gypsy" and non-"Gypsy" Travellers, and the superposition of two counter-spaces: Gypsyland and "Tinkerdom".)

> He lit up another cigarette and smoked it quiet to himself, sipping slow the xeres and his eyes squinting. […]. When it was midnight and Brackets was drunk and relaxed they done something terrible to him. They put the pitch cap on him and Brackets was in agony. They put him on one of their horses and the lord's friend took Brackets' horse and they followed in behind Brackets whose head was on fire. The horse Brackets was on knew the way back to the city and the lads were behind shouting and whooping and following this ball on fire that was Brackets. But when Brackets' horse got near the city the fire went out and Brackets was able to concentrate on his horse not his head. He was able to turn the horse into a field and the men went on straight didn't know where Brackets had went. Poor old Brackets fell off the horse and he cooled his head in the swamp that was in the field. When he woke up the next morning he seen that in the field was a fair being set up, all the tents, the ovens cooking the chickens. The people in the fair they took pity on him because his head was black. A man with a tent said he would give Brackets a cut if sat in the tent and let the people come in and looked at him (Corbett 2013, 36).

Or, like Kusturica's *Gypsies*, they are consistently considered to be living "on the edge of modern life"[11]: Hancock has traced the manner in which fundamental errors originating with Grellmann have been transmitted through successive writers. He notes that two centuries after Grellman's assertion that "Gypsies" had "no care about futurity" (1783, 68) and "pass[ed] through every day lively and satisfied" (*Ibid.*), Stewart, an anthropologist who studied Romanies in Hungary, assumes that:

> For the Gypsies there is no angel of history, nor is there a past to be redeemed. They live with their gaze fixed on a permanent present that is always a becoming, a timeless now in which their continued existence as Rom is all that counts (1997, 246) (Lee 2000, 137).

Through various "substrates" (Durkheim 1893, cited in Engel 2015, 95), fictional *Gypsies*, living somewhat outside of history, in a temporal no-man's-(Gypsy)-land, have become stock characters who seems to have replaced their counterparts of the real world. Deborah Epstein Nord speaks of a "dissociation" (Nord 2006, 15), whereas Frances Timbers speaks of a "disconnect" (Timbers 2016, 5). "A prestidigitation took place, which turned reality upside down […] The function of myth is to evacuate reality […] It is an evaporation" (Barthes 2010, 240). Their history has been stolen and replaced by a "pseudo-history"

11 *Time of the Gypsies*, "trailer", 0'25", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cyBXPMurJY.

(Timbers 2016, 145). Habits (like the "'gypsy' mask") and beliefs die hard. To avoid the prestidigitation that has replaced the history of "Gypsy" Travellers with myths, one can only encourage giving voice to these communities, opportunities for self-representation, as suggested by Ronald Lee:

> When he died, the last link with the Gypsy past would go with him except for the manuscripts of folklore, laws, customs and traditions that I had documented. Nobody wanted it here. It was biased, but it might come in handy soon in Europe to light the fire as non-Gypsy authors wrote books telling all about the Gypsies they had never met (Lee 1971, 134).

Indeed:

> Although no absolute line can be drawn between mythology and history, it is fair to say that, without history, mythology is allowed to stand in for the written record. In the case of the Gypsies, the absence of writing – especially by the Gypsies themselves – feeds the dominance of the myth in the representation und understanding of Romany existence (Nord 2006, 173).

Thus, an efficient option would be to encourage general audiences to read "Gypsy" Travellers' autobiographies or semi-autobiographic narratives written by "Gypsy" Travellers, for the most part (but not always) easily purchased or borrowed from local libraries. Let us mention, for example, *Goddam Gypsy* (Ronald Lee 1971); *The Horse of Selene* (Juanita Casey 1971); *Traveller: An Autobiography* (Nan Joyce 1985); *The Last of the Tinsmiths: The Life of Willie McPhee* (Sheila Douglas 2006); *Gypsy Boy* (Mickey Walsh 2010); *Gypsy Boy on the Run* (Mickey Walsh 2011); *Gypsy Princess* (Violet Cannon 2011); or *The Stopping Places* (Damian Le Bas 2018). Recently, Scotland-based and Romanian-born Romani writer Madeline Potter published *The Roma: A Travelling History* (2025). The book was praised by the *Travellers Times* as, "A unique blend of memoir, travelogue and history of an othered and misunderstood people – and a celebration of resistance and resilience" (*Travellers Times* 2025). Yaron Matras described it as, "A book that will inspire and inform. Potter helps us absorb the atmosphere of Romani communities through the stories of prominent Romani individuals sharing engaging and illuminating experience that spans different places and times and offers insights into culture and history" (*Travellers Times* 2025). Or else mythology will always prevail, and "Gypsy" Travellers will always be "[…] stuck in representational limbo, a literary or mythic place unconnected to history or geography, [and remain] in some fundamental way primitive or atavistic" (Nord 2006, 122). Nord then goes on to quote Welsh poet Arthur Symons (1865–1945), who represents the "Gypsies" "as people moved by pure instinct: they live by 'rote and by faith and by tradition,' and they remain unchanged and untouched by history or by 'us'" (Nord 136). Folklorists contributed to the establishment of a "pseudo-history" of the "Gypsies" by lack of a critical attitude towards traditional literature that had been written about the Gypsies:

> Whether drawing on popular conceptions of gypsies or inventing a new category of vagabond, rogue literature cemented the stereotype of the gypsy figure. Building on the categories of vagrants, which were a major concern in the late Middle Ages, authors of rogue and cony-catching pamphlets elided the distinction between vagabonds and gypsies. Legendary leaders and a hierarchical organization combined to create the concepts of a dangerous fraternity […] Not only did this affect the understanding of the gypsy in the 16TH and 17TH centuries,

> but much of the material from rogue literature was accepted at face value by the 19TH and 20TH centuries gypsiologists and folklorists, who laid the foundation for the history of gypsies (Timbers 2016, 152).

Artists may be the first to blame for this prestidigitation, always favouring the "'gypsy' mask", but it is also the case for journalists:

> He'd just done a story on me […] he handed it to me. He had taken his usual colorful approach. I'd be lucky to get a job washing dishes in Canada after this thing was published. Yanko, the drunken hard-fisted Gypsy intellectual, stood portrayed in all of his barbaric sensitivity (Lee 1971, 234).

Efforts should be made in the field of education of the general public. Ireland recently announced that Traveller culture soon would enter the school curriculum. Indeed, the "collective work" which helped establish the "'gypsy' mask" in the collective consciousness has not only been the work of artists but also the work of the general population:

> The general population also contributed to the construction of the identity of the gypsies. The public recognized the group's distinct nature, but reconfigured gypsies predominantly as fortune-tellers and entertainers. A disconnect developed between the stereotype of the dangerous pickpocket and thief and the traveler who offered a variety of services to the countryside. In both instances, gypsies were constructed as marginal members of society, which granted them characteristics that were in opposition to ideal Englishness. In general, they were viewed as an occult and dangerous fraternity of vagabonds (Timbers 2016, 5).

An ironical stance on this theft of history was recently displayed in the *gadjology* section of the Barvalo exhibition in Marseilles, imagining a "Gadjolorism" of sorts, that is, the construction of the *gadjo* identity by the *Gypsies*. Cultural institutions have a critical role to play. A "*Gypsy*, Roma and Traveller celebration" takes place in June 2025 at Manchester Factory International. The Museum of Fine Arts in Besançon, France, will host an exhibition about Austrian Romani artist Ceija Stojka (1933–2013) in 2026.

Yet, one can wonder: is exposing myths a way to deconstruct or to reproduce them, by repeating them, thus taking the risk to add yet more lines on the vast book of the "fake" history/History of the *Gypsies*? What is the mythologist's role?

The lasting power of discourses reminds one of the sociality of texts that socio-criticism tried to theorize:

> It is in their aesthetical specificity, the value dimension of texts, that socio-criticism endeavours to read the presence of texts in the world, which it names sociality.
>
> *C'est dans la spécificité esthétique même, la dimension valeur des textes, que la sociocritique s'efforce de lire cette présence des œuvres au monde qu'elle appelle la socialité.*
>
> (Popovic 2014, 153)

Between the lines lies a photograph of the period and society that allowed such a discourse to see the light of day. There is a possibility of a shared responsibility of the artists and the consumers of artistic products, who are "consumers of myths" (Barthes 2010, 234). In any case, it is important to be aware of the power of literature and arts in general, which are not autonomous but have an impact on reality through imagination and language, possibly fostering mechanisms of exclusion and oppression (Haupt 2023, 17–18). Is it possible, as Frantz Boas (1858–1942), put it, that "mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments" (Boas 1898, 18)? When authors and directors find themselves outside of the mythologizing tradition, are they offering a permanent reversal, a revenge of sorts against the age-old fetishization of *Gypsies*? The "Gypsy" characters who are invested by their creators with the power to escape their traditional Gypsylands or "Gypsy" heterotopias are all driven by revenge against injustice perpetuated by *gadjos* (Meg Merrilies, Heathcliff, Hester Swane, Thomas Shelby), becoming sympathetic villains. Or is it a "mere temporary suspension […] of hierarchical rank" (Jenks 2003, 165), in the manner of a carnival or a fair? As Johnny Dogs puts it about Thomas Shelby, are the fictional "Gypsies" "the wild Gypsy boy[s] […] forever" (Knight 2017, 54'12"), or do these outstanding characters embody a lasting renewal of representations?

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Discursive Exposures of Exclusion through the Figure of the Traitor

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Abstract

In this article, I present a historical conceptualization of the Hungarian-language term *hazaáruló* / traitor while contextualizing it within the emigration of Roma from Hungary to Canada and their subsequent return from Canada. I discuss how speakers emplace Roma in Hungarian society through the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor, a term often employed in political debates to delegitimatize opponents and also directed at Roma who returned from Canada, both by Roma and non-Roma. In tracing the concept historically, I take into account its legal definition and usage as codified in the Hungarian Criminal Code and contexts in which, for example, rulers operationalized calls of treason as a linguistic device for disarming a political opponent (Cornwall 2015). Then, I describe a prominent contemporary example of the discursive usage of the term *hazaáruló* / traitor in the case of the Roma from the town of Zámoly who fled Hungary to seek asylum in Strasbourg, France. Finally, I include relevant findings from ethnographic fieldwork during which Romani families frequently recounted instances of being named a *hazaáruló* / traitor for having migrated to Canada. In my analysis, I contend that the very act of Roma from Hungary seeking refuge were public exposures of the normalized relations of exclusion.

Keywords

- Exclusion
- Forced return
- Racializing discourse
- Refugees
- Roma
- Whiteness

Introduction

In this article, I consider the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor and offer a historical conceptualization of the term while contextualizing it within the emigration of Roma from Hungary. I focus on the discursive ways in which local and national actors use this term to exclude and marginalize Romani communities. The study aims to provide a historical conceptualization of the term *hazaáruló* / traitor by tracing its legal and political uses in Hungary, particularly in moments of regime change, war, and political upheaval. Additionally, I investigate how the label of *hazaáruló* / traitor has been applied in recent times to Roma who emigrated to Canada seeking refuge and were later forced to return due to unsuccessful refugee claims.

First, I situate the case of Romani migration within broader European discourses on refugees and migration. I examine how anti-refugee rhetoric in Hungary, particularly during the 2015 European "refugee crisis,"[1] intersected with existing anti-Roma discourses and reinforced exclusionary national narratives. The Hungarian government's framing of refugees as threats to national security and Christian identity resonated with longstanding depictions of Roma as internal outsiders, linking the treatment of Romani returnees with the broader politics of migration control. Furthermore, I consider how these racializing discourses have shaped European migration policies, including the differential treatment of Romani refugees from Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion. I also highlight how the *hazaáruló* / traitor label intersects with public health narratives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Romani communities were scapegoated as health threats, further entrenching their racialization and exclusion from national belonging.

I then expand this analysis by exploring the historical development and legal codification of the term *hazaáruló* / traitor and outline its function in political rhetoric and governance. I analyze how Hungarian rulers, political figures, and legal frameworks have used accusations of treason to consolidate power, discipline dissenters, and define the boundaries of national belonging. This section draws on historical legal texts and political discourse to establish the broader ideological function of treason in Hungary. Next, I introduce the case of Romani asylum seekers from Zámoly, a significant contemporary example of the term's application in political and public discourse. Through this case study, I examine how the term *hazaáruló* / traitor was used in parliamentary debates and media narratives to delegitimize both Romani asylum seekers and their non-Romani allies who advocated for their rights. This section situates the contemporary usage of the term within a broader framework of racializing discourses and nationalist politics.

1 In much of Europe, governments have treated the large movement of people as an "illegal migrant" issue rather than people fleeing war. Some critics claim that the real refugee crisis is Fortress Europe's inability and unwillingness to develop a humanitarian resettlement plan and the racist backlash refugees encounter across Europe (Fotiadis 2016). I place the phrase *refugee crisis* within quotation marks to highlight this and to indicate that the use of such a term places the burden of war on those fleeing it rather than on those powerful global actors who (1) participated (at various levels and stages) in the provocation, spread, and escalation of the Syrian war; and (2) have the capacity to offer protection via resettlement to those people who have been displaced by it.

I then present ethnographic findings from my fieldwork with Romani families who migrated to Canada and were subsequently forced to return to Hungary due to unsuccessful refugee claims. During my research, I conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation in rural Hungarian cities and towns where returnee Romani families faced exclusion, hostility, and economic hardship. Many returnees recounted being labeled *hazaáruló* / traitor by both non-Roma and Roma who had remained in Hungary, revealing the paradoxical nature of their exclusion. While they were marked as outsiders before leaving, their return further solidified their marginal status, as their departure and refugee claims were framed as betrayals of the nation.

Through this analysis, I argue that the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor operates as a racializing discourse that not only aims to discipline Romani individuals but also exposes the broader structures of exclusion and discrimination they face. By labeling Romani returnees as traitors, local and national actors reinforce the precarious position of Romani citizens within Hungarian society and highlight the contradictions in their legal and social belonging. Ultimately, this article contributes to scholarship on racialized migration, political discourse, and the intersection of nationalism and exclusion and demonstrates how accusations of treason serve as a tool for maintaining social hierarchies and reinforcing racialized notions of citizenship. By integrating historical analysis with contemporary case studies and ethnographic insights, I illustrate how the *hazaáruló* / traitor label functions as a racializing discourse shaping the lived experiences of Romani returnees and their "reintegration"[2] struggles.

1. Roma as Refugee

Throughout its history, Hungary has been a crucial transit zone and a site for occupations (for example, Ottomans). It has hosted a cyclical succession of invasions that reworked the contours of the countryside and the make-up of its population (for example, Tatars), borne the weight of enlightened absolutisms that outlawed certain ways of speaking and forced assimilation (under Habsburg rule), stirred with revolutions that tried but failed (1848 and 1956), and struggled with forty years of communism and devastating wars. The Treaty of Trianon, in particular, stripped Hungary of nearly three-quarters of its territory and more than half its population, leaving about a third of all Hungarians outside its new, re-established borders. During the Second World War, Hungary's Jewish and Romani populations were deported and sent to concentration camps. Today, Hungary lies at a crossroads between East and West and shares borders with seven countries. Perhaps more importantly in the context of Europe's 2015 "refugee crisis," it sat at the southern edge of the European Union (EU), positioning it as a strategic passageway between Serbia and Austria and making it one of the main entry points into the EU Schengen Area.[3]

2 I choose to put the term "reintegrate" in quotation marks because here I prefer the term refamiliarization to describe what happens during a forced remigration since as Sarah Turnbull (2018) points out, "The notion of 'reintegration'… incorrectly assumes that these informants, and migrants, more generally, are 'integrated' to begin with" (45). That is, it is for the very reason that efforts to integrate non-Roma and Roma have failed that such forced migrations become necessary in the first place.

3 The Schengen Area was expanded with Bulgaria and Romania joining fully at the beginning of 2025, making Hungary's southern border no longer the most southern edge of the Schengen Area.

During the summer of 2015, Europe experienced hundreds of thousands[4] of refugees and migrants moving into and through its territories from conflict and war zones in the Middle East and Africa by crossing the Mediterranean Sea or by land via the Balkans. Syrian refugees were joined by Afghans, Bangladeshis, Eritreans, Iraqis, Kurds, Libyans, and Pakistanis. In mid-June 2015, the Hungarian government announced plans to build a razor-wire fence along its border with Serbia (Dunai 2015). Employing contractors and soldiers, the construction of the fence began on 13 July. During this time, the Hungarian government continued to openly resist taking in more migrants and refugees. In early September, a record number of people, almost 6,000, arrived in Hungary as its fence neared completion (Fry 2015). Soon the first stage of construction was done. With the erection of the 103-mile, 13-foot-high razor-wire section of fence along the border with Serbia was sealed, and Hungary declared a state of emergency. On 14 September, new laws came into effect making it a criminal offense punishable with several years of prison to cross into Hungary without permission or to damage the fence (amendment to section 353/A of the Hungarian Criminal Code). Anyone assisting refugees or harboring them also faced prison time if caught. On 18 September, the construction of a second stage of fence began along Croatia's border with Hungary.

During the movement of refugees and migrants across Hungary's borders and into Hungary's territory, Hungarian politicians regularly depicted them as threats to Hungary's, and Europe's, Christian identity and to the Hungarian nation itself. This latest outsider-as-threat discourse is related to and resonates of Hungary's historical role as an occupied, invaded, and traversed territory. Discourses othering and scapegoating Roma continued to circulate throughout this period, and concurrent discourses reproducing anti-refugee sentiments became highly visible. In the summer of 2016 when I arrived in Hungary to begin my fieldwork, the Hungarian government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and a supermajority *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség* / Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance parliament, had recently unveiled its latest billboard campaign that would become iconic of the Fidesz government's response to the large number of refugees and migrants attempting to cross into Hungary. Ahead of the national referendum the Hungarian government was planning in October 2016, they had produced a landscape of blue billboards that blanketed the country with state messaging that warned citizens of the menace of the "*migráns* / migrant" figure. The Hungarian government had decided to hold a referendum on whether to accept the European Union's plan for relocating migrants throughout EU countries via a quota system despite the fact that as an EU member state Hungary was obligated to abide by it. By the time the billboards appeared, the anti-migrant rhetoric had become a normalized phenomenon in Hungary and the word *migráns* / migrant had taken on a negative, bordering on pejorative, connotation.

Hungarian political discourse continuously redefines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, whether for Romani citizens or foreign refugees (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016). Similar to political

4 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the organization mandated to register, support, and protect refugees, has said that "the number of people driven from their homes by conflict and crisis has topped 50 million for the first time since World War II, with Syrians hardest hit" (UNHCR 2014). In fact, people fleeing Syria since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 constitute the largest human displacement globally. At the writing of this article, according to the website of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the total number of people displaced outside of Syria's borders stands at 6.6 million in addition to 6.7 million internally displaced people. According to the Pew Research Center, by the end of 2016 approximately 650,000 Syrians had applied for asylum in the European Union (Connor 2017).

discourse regarding migrants, political parties and other powerful groups in Hungary have used discourses, rallies, social exclusion, intimidation, and violence often to scapegoat its Romani minority as threats to its national unity. Historically, Roma, Europe's largest ethnic minority, have been one of the most marginalized and persecuted ethnic groups in the world. Since the earliest appearance of the ancestors of Roma in Europe 700 years ago after migrating from India, countries have enslaved, deported, and assimilated them by force. Efforts to integrate Roma into Hungarian society have been largely unsuccessful as most continue to live in dire poverty, face discrimination in acquiring housing, experience a disproportionately high unemployment rate compared with the general population, and struggle to get access to equitable educational opportunities. Alongside the 2008 global economic downturn, there was another escalation in violent attacks and intimidation against Roma and the resurgence of extremist groups with explicit anti-Roma agendas across Europe. Moreover, people in positions of power used racializing discourses that perpetuated stereotypes about Roma, working to further marginalize them.

Over the course of the arrival of refugees and migrants at Hungary's borders, anti-refugee and anti-Roma discourses began to merge in the public speeches and texts of members of the Hungarian government shaping the "refugee crisis" narrative. That is, the burden of "inheriting" and "having to live with" (Fábián 2015) approximately half a million Roma who are portrayed as impossible to integrate was being publicly linked in and likened to objections about fulfilling refugee resettlement quotas due to similar concerns over integrating refugees into a national "we" (European Roma Rights Center [ERRC] 2015). Underlying these objections is the deeply ingrained stereotype of the Roma as eternal wanderers – a people who are rootless by nature and therefore incapable of belonging. This framing not only reinforces their perceived incompatibility with the nation-state but also serves to justify their exclusion by denying them claims to national identity, homeland, or territory (Fiałkowska, Garapich, and Mirga-Wójtowicz 2019). In Eastern European contexts, Romani migration is framed not as a legitimate response to structural discrimination but as a transgressive act that justifies their exclusion from national belonging. Herein lies the paradox of Romani mobility: although legally sanctioned within the EU, it is socially and politically constructed as deviant (Yıldız and De Genova 2017) and thus reinforces their marginalization within nation-states and across Europe.

Anti-Roma racism has shaped European migration policies with legal and discursive strategies (Piemontese and Maestri 2023) operating in tandem to discipline Romani migration and maintain the precarious social position of Roma, including the treatment of Romani refugees from Ukraine since the 2022 Russian invasion. While non-Romani Ukrainians received broad humanitarian support, Roma faced discrimination at border crossings and within refugee aid systems (Mirga-Wójtowicz, Talewicz, and Kołaczek 2022; Shmidt and Nadya Jaworsky 2022; Iyer 2023; Eredics 2024), which echoed long-standing exclusionary practices across Europe. "The marginalization of Roma refugees from Ukraine reflects broader trends in racialized governance across Europe, where selective inclusion reinforces structural inequalities" (Eredics 2024, 4). This pattern emerges in the forced return of Hungarian Roma from Canada, where they were dismissed as "bogus refugees" (Diop 2015) despite fleeing racial violence. In both cases, Romani mobility is criminalized or delegitimized and reinforces their precarious status. The label *hazaáruló* / traitor has historically been used to discipline dissenters in Hungary and was similarly applied to Romani returnees, marking them as both internal and external outsiders. This process intersects with public health narratives, as seen during COVID-19, when Romani communities

were scapegoated as health threats, further entrenching their racialization and exclusion (Holt 2020; Korunovska and Jovanovic 2020; Lee 2020; Matache and Bhabha 2020; Mihalache 2020; Rorke and Lee 2020). In this article, I show that the discursive framing of Romani returnees as traitors and undeserving refugees exposes how migration control, nationalism, and racial exclusion operate together to maintain Romani marginalization within and beyond Hungary. To fully grasp the power of this label, it is essential to examine the historical roots of *hazaáruló* / traitor and how it has been used as a political tool to delegitimize and exclude certain groups. In the following section, I trace the legal, political, and rhetorical evolution of the term in Hungary by highlighting its role in shaping national belonging and exclusion over time.

2. Origins of the Figure of the *Hazaáruló*

In Hungarian, the word *hazaáruló* translates as traitor. *Hazaáruló* is a compound word made up of the free morphemes *haza* (homeland) and *áruló* (betrayer). Moreover, the term *áruló* is the noun form of the transitive, imperfective verb *árul*, which means to sell, but specifically, spending time trying to sell. That is, the sale has not yet been completed nor has it been successful. *Hazaárulás* (treason) is properly a legal term, too, and its definition and consequences are encapsulated in the current Hungarian Criminal Code in Section 258, paragraphs 1–3. In this legal definition of treason, the actor who commits treason is a citizen of Hungary and can commit it in three ways via contact with a foreign entity by threatening Hungary's autonomy, land, and law. The sentences are then detailed for each of the three degrees of a treasonous act.

Historically in Hungary, there have been numerous revolutions, interruptions, and occupations that took place during the years leading up to the First World War, during the politically tumultuous interwar period, in the aftermath of the Second World War, and following the defeated 1956 Revolution. Although a Hungarian Criminal Code has been in place since the rule of Hungary's first king, Saint Istvan, those who seized power after or over the course of each war, revolution, and conflict with Hungary's neighboring states were the ones who usually charged others with treason. In fact, under such circumstances, those newly in power often interpreted dissent as treason. The term *hazaáruló* / traitor, therefore, not only has a legal definition and usage, but those in power have also been, and still are, using it discursively to publicly name their political opponents or the losers of revolution or war as such. In describing how rulers operationalized treason in the late stages of the Habsburg monarchy,[5] Mark Cornwall (2015) writes:

> [t]reason, of course, is historically ubiquitous and the ultimate political crime. It always involves some kind of power struggle, a perceived challenge to existing authority, or a threat to an established political community that may endanger state security. The cry of 'treason' or 'traitor' has consistently been invoked over the centuries as a linguistic device with which

5 The Kingdom of Hungary came under Habsburg rule in 1526 that lasted until 1867 after which it became a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918 when it broke up after the First World War.

> to disarm a political opponent, a way of publicly branding some disloyalty to a cause or community. But more concretely, the concept of treason was and is embedded in most states' criminal codes, constituting there 'the heaviest and most cumbersome weapon in the fight for political power' (114–115).

Ultimately, the treason trials of the twentieth century in the Habsburg empire were public show trials based on a struggle for control and power. Judges and jurists demonized accused traitors publicly since in "cases of treason the struggle for power is interpreted in moral terms: allegedly, the moral universe of the community, the collective, has been violated by one of their own who has become a traitor" (Cornwall 2015, 115). In fact, Cornwall (2019) identifies within the Habsburg monarchy "the types of treason that could be mapped on to the criminal code in order to pursue a successful prosecution and conviction" (8) with there being three in the late Habsburg era: the assassin (that is, an attack on the monarch), the socialist or anarchist (that is, an attempt to violently change the form of government), and the nationalist (that is, the stirring of unrest in order to break off from the empire).

After the Second World War, Mátyás Rákosi, a Hungarian communist politician who aspired to Joseph Stalin's model of governance, took power, oversaw the imprisonment and deaths of thousands of Hungarians, and put on show trials conducted by newly formed People's Tribunals in Budapest, sentencing to death the convicted. In fact, the language used in one high-profile Stalinist show trial described the traitors as the "scum of society" who had turned to treason "because of their cowardly and vacillating characters" (Cornwall 2015, 115–116). Despite Rákosi's intent to use show trials and accusations of high treason by the secret police (Ötvös 2014) to serve the Communist take-over, a transitional government brought the People's Tribunals into existence at the end of 1944 through Decree No. 81/1945. M. E. of the Transitional National Government, with subsequent legislation in the forms of laws passed in 1946 and 1947 to regulate the process of "bringing to justice the people that had given the orders under the former regime" (Pető 2020, 3). Nevertheless, the "justice" tribunal judges meted out during these trials was manipulated via bribes and threats as the verdicts and punishments that judges handed down were not always consistent with the crimes committed. After the failed anti-Soviet Revolution of 1956, a new law re-established such People's Tribunals for the purpose of punishing those people who had been responsible for and participated in the uprising (Pető 2020). After the revolution, the Soviets installed János Kádár to lead Hungary, and he began his tenure in power, as did Rákosi, with a political purge during which his government imprisoned and executed those who had participated in the revolution. Show trials in post-Second World War Hungary were a fundamental part of politics (Ötvös 2014) and during Rákosi's reign Kádár himself had been falsely accused of being a spy for Miklós Horthy's police and was then tried, convicted, and sentenced prior to coming to power. After Stalin's death in 1954, the then leader of the one-party socialist state, Imre Nagy, released Kádár from prison. From the failed revolution until the fall of Communism in 1989, Kádár was the leader of Hungary. This period in Hungarian history was marked by one of the highest standards of living in Eastern Europe. During this time, the show trials that had marked the turbulent war, interwar, and post-war years became altogether obsolete. In the twentieth century prior to the fall of communism, those who took over employed the term *hazaáruló* / traitor to morally censure those who had participated in quelling dissent or revolt under the previous regime.

3. The Case of Zámoly and the Traitor as Anti-progress

A prominent contemporary example of the discursive usage of the term *hazaáruló* / traitor was in the case of Roma from the town of Zámoly who fled Hungary to seek asylum in Strasbourg, France in July 2000 (Hell and Törzsök 2001; Hell 2002). The series of events leading up to Romani families from Zámoly seeking asylum in France began in the fall of 1997 when a storm damaged the roof and walls of a house to such an extent that the local government declared it life-threatening and therefore uninhabitable. The municipality moved the families who occupied the house to the theatre hall of the town's cultural center. While the families lived in the cultural center until July 1998, the mayor of Zámoly ordered the demolition of their home, and because the families were unable to pay the electricity, gas, and water fees in the cultural center, the utilities were all shut off (albeit the water only temporarily after complaints were filed). During this period, residents from surrounding municipalities who had gone to the town to socialize attacked the families living in the cultural center. Around this same time, politicians across the country and in Parliament had been using an overtly anti-Roma discourse. Zámoly residents collected signatures on a petition demanding that the local government expel the Roma families from the cultural center. Eventually, with the assistance of the National Roma Council and the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, construction began on new houses for the families living in the cultural center and the National Roma Council provided the families temporary housing in wooden houses on the Romani settlement until construction could begin on their permanent housing.

In the late summer of 1999, after several young men from a nearby town entered the settlement in Zámoly where many Roma lived, a fight broke out between these men and local Romani residents. While fleeing, one of the men suffered a serious head injury from an alleged attack and died in the hospital the following day. Consequently, non-Roma from around the country called in death threats against Roma in Zámoly. A few went so far as to burn down a house in which Roma lived. The perpetrators were never found. In the following months, these actions escalated with more politicians making public, overtly anti-Roma comments to the media. By the spring of 2000, the promised permanent housing had still not been completed, so Romani families from Zámoly moved to Budapest and from there to Csór into the barns and sheds on the property of József Krasznai, at the time the vice-chairman of the Roma Parliament, chairman of the Fejér County Independent Roma Organization, chairman of the Székesfehérvár Roma self-government, and also the eldest son in the Krasznai family affected by the events in Zámoly. Around this time, unidentified offenders vandalized Krasznai's home with a swastika and other racist texts. It was after such increasingly violent acts that the affected Romani families from Zámoly made the decision to flee Hungary and seek asylum in a Western European nation. Meanwhile, Katalin Katz, a professor of social work, was conducting research on the Roma Holocaust in Hungary and met Holocaust survivors from Zámoly. Hearing of their situation, she offered József Krasznai USD 4,000 to help him escape. Katz traveled with the group that embarked on the trip to Strasbourg, France. The group was comprised of about fifty Roma individuals from Zámoly, and the French government eventually granted them asylum status in March 2001.

The day after the Hungarian media reported on the successful asylum applications, thirty-eight Hungarian intellectuals wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister of France Lionel Jospin thanking

him for granting asylum to Roma from Zámoly. The undersigned intellectuals included such people as Ágnes Daróczi (news writer and activist), Péter Eszterházy (writer), Aladár Horváth (then president of the Roma Civil Rights Foundation), Miklós Jancsó (film director), István Kemény (sociologist), Angéla Kóczé (then director of the Human Rights Education Program of the ERRC), and Tamás Miklós Gáspár (philosopher) (Origo 2001). Shortly after the letter's publication, Loránt Hegedűs, a Calvinist priest, the vice-president of the *Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (MIÉP)* / Hungarian Justice and Life Party, and a far-right parliamentary representative, in his speech to Parliament used the term *hazaárulók* / traitors when referencing the letters written by the intellectuals. My translation of part of his speech where he names the intellectuals *hazaárulók* / traitors is below:

> After so many kicks [to the Hungarian nation], it could not come as a surprise to the nation that a group of 40 ultraliberal, so-called intellectuals – who all had the urge to deliver another kick – thanked the French nation and the French prime minister for accepting a group that presumably beat to death a young Hungarian man from Csákvár. We cannot call them traitors only because they have never identified with the Hungarian people, their fate, history, culture or life. We must declare that among them a minority wants to take hostage the country's largest stigmatized minority in order to live out their lowly, anti-Hungarian instincts: using their Israeli comrades, grossly violating the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary via ethnic and racial incitement (Kováts 2002, 151).

Hegedűs's comments are a political maneuver to make illegitimate the act of solidarity expressed by Hungarian intellectuals. Though he ultimately names them traitors, he begins by remarking how they are not worthy of such a label "because they have never identified with the Hungarian people, their fate, history, culture or life." Yet, the undersigned are precisely those figures in Hungarian society who have made significant contributions to Hungarian history, culture, and society. Despite denying them the traitor label, he nonetheless goes on to describe them as such by accusing them of "grossly violating the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary," just the criminal infraction that makes one a traitor, and essentially equating it with "racial incitement" against non-Romani Hungarians, which is what a number of Roma have been charged with in more recent frictions with the far-right. Hegedűs goes as far as invoking a long-standing trope of antisemitism when he suggests that "Israeli comrades" assisted in divided loyalties in Hungary, not only by inciting physical violence against a non-Romani Hungarian man but also showing gratitude for France's acceptance of a group from "the country's largest stigmatized minority." In his speech, it is possible that Hegedűs was referencing the definition of traitor that Endre Ady, one of Hungary's most revered poets who was writing around the turn of the twentieth century, conceptualized in 1905:

> *Aki ellensége a haladásnak, a jobbra törésnek, az emberi szellem feltétlen szabadságának, hazaáruló, ha örökösen nem tesz is egyebet, mint a nemzeti himnuszt énekli.*
>
> He who is the enemy of progress, of better pursuits, of the unconditional freedom of the human spirit, is a traitor, if he does nothing forever but sing the national anthem.

If we consider Ady's concept of traitor with Hegedűs's comments, the intellectuals then become characterized as "enemies of progress" through which they are traitors. It was during the early 2000s

that Hungary was being considered a candidate for membership in the European Union. Events such as Roma fleeing from Hungary to seek asylum in France, and France granting their asylum requests, compounded with Hungarian intellectuals publicly acknowledging the course of events through an open thank you letter to the French prime minister for protecting Hungarian citizens, did not depict Hungary in a favorable way and could potentially risk their accession to the EU. At the time, Hungarian leaders and the public considered accession to the EU a significant sign of progress and so, according to Hegedűs, the intellectuals had potentially become an obstacle, if not enemies, to such progress.

Instances of politicians publicly naming their opposition as traitors is not uncommon in current parliamentary debate and in the media. In recent years, politicians such as Máté Kocsis, president of the Fidesz party faction in the European Parliament (EP), during a 2018 press conference named those EP representatives who voted in favor of the Sargentini Report[6] traitors (Haszán 2018); László Kövér, speaker of the Hungarian Parliament since 2010, regularly labels opposition party members traitors (Haszán 2018); and Tímea Szabó, a parliamentary representative for the liberal Dialogue for Hungary Party, named Prime Minister Viktor Orbán a traitor during her remarks in Parliament in May 2021 (Czinkóczi 2021). These are just a few examples, but there are many more. Again, the politicians using the term were not using it in its legal sense but were wielding the term discursively to delegitimize the political maneuvers of politicians who they perceived as standing in the way of the realization of their agenda or were attempting to shed light on worrisome issues such as those named in the Sargentini Report that would tarnish Hungary's image before the European Parliament. If we consider such public remarks in light of Ady's conceptualization of "traitor," each politician was naming their target as enemies to the agenda they perceived as progress.

4. Exposures of Normalized Relations of Exclusion

During my fieldwork, Romani families would recount instances of being named a *hazaáruló* / traitor for having moved to Canada. Especially in the rural areas of the country, in small towns and villages where most of the townspeople knew each other well, it became public local knowledge as to who had departed for Canada. Upon their return, Romani families frequently encountered the hostile discursive acts of being labeled traitors. Such usage of the term is paradoxical in the sense that it was being used as a slur against Roma, yet one must be a citizen to commit treason. So, Roma only become "citizens" insofar as they have "betrayed" Hungary, but it is precisely their lack of protections as citizens that motivates their refugee claims in the first place. As such, I contend that the very act of Roma from Hungary seeking refuge is a form of indirect resistance in response to racializing discourses conducting Roma lives. The claims of refuge Roma submit in Canada or other countries are acts that ultimately expose the everyday inimical conditions Roma must face and survive every day. Thus, Hungary risks being publicly reduced to a "sending" nation for refugees according to those non-Roma (and Roma) who encounter former

6 The Sargentini Report authored by Member of the European Parliament Judith Sargentini investigated whether Article 7 Proceedings should be triggered against Hungary due to an "existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded" (European Parliament 2018). The report enumerates concerns about freedom of expression, academic independence, the protection of minorities, and the fairness of the judicial system.

refugee claimants returning to Hungary and at whom they direct the traitor pejorative. I include here another usage of the word *hazaárulás* / treason. It is an excerpt from the poem "Numero XXXVII" written in 1986 by Romani poet Attila Balogh, which Aladár Horváth included on the final page of his 2021 study on the city of Miskolc. Horváth provides a historical overview of the segregating practices that the city of Miskolc enacted against its Romani residents. He describes in detail how the Roma Civil Rights Movement originated from organizing to resist the planned eviction of Romani residents to inadequate housing on the outskirts of the city. Below are the original Hungarian and my translation of the excerpt from Balogh's poem:

– bennem már csak a hazaárulás	– within me now only treason
szépül,	is attractive
szívem sarkához	into the corner of my heart
épül,	it builds,
ragyog az	emigration
emigráció,	it shines
jaj, de	oh, how
jó.	good.

In this brief excerpt, Balogh connects *hazaárulás* / treason with *emigráció* / emigration as the single, secret thing in his heart that grows and shines. The implication is that this so-called "treason," that is, emigration – departure from his homeland – is the only thing that "shines" and is a possible "good" now in his life. Balogh transforms the negative connotations associated with treason to a more optimistic one. Because this treason-emigration coupling builds in the corner of his heart, well inside of him (symbolically internalizing it), it suggests the complexities involved in leaving one's home. He ends the excerpt with "*jaj, de / jó*" / "oh, how good," which leaves the reader with a resigned tone. I interpret this brief verse as commentary on the good that emigration has the potential to bring ("it shines") and the ties that bind one to their country complicate this because leaving would be a so-called betrayal. Balogh's poem diverges from the previous usages of *hazaáruló* and *hazaárulás* I have included so far in my analysis since it is not included in the poem as an utterance used in speech to accuse. Rather, the verse gives insight on how feelings of treason develop in someone and how they dwell on them. Horváth's inclusion of this excerpt at the end of his study is evocative because it points to the feelings that the treason-emigration coupling generates in, for example, someone about to be evicted. The placement of the excerpt in his study also calls up the conceptual history of the term *hazaáruló* / traitor included so far in my analysis and the ways in which it has been invoked by monarchs, tribunal judges, politicians, and locals in town. Loyalty to one's nation is breached if one's actions take the form of dissent or opposition to the prevailing political order. This is what it means to be a traitor in public life in Hungary. In the case of Roma, to be a traitor meant to expose normalized relations of exclusion.

In the following sections, I describe the circumstances of two families' return from Canada back to Hungary after their refugee claims were rejected. They fled both from towns where men dressed in black military garb marched down their streets and from everyday microaggressions of hostile neighbors and locals. Each of the families struggled financially, in finding work, securing housing,

and with stigmatization, all of which are common experiences for deportees regardless of their specific forced return-migration trajectories (Khosravi 2018). The *hazaáruló* / traitor term took on significance in my fieldwork when I learned that locals used it pejoratively against Roma who had returned from Canada. I discuss the usage of the term in this context and analyze the ways in which Roma at whom it was directed respond.

5. Methodology: A Discourse-centered Approach

Before I turn to my analysis of my ethnographic findings, I will briefly describe the fieldwork I did and methodology I used for this study. I conducted fieldwork for this research for 21 months from September 2016 through May 2018. I was in Hungary at an opportune time as issues for Roma and refugees were prominent in the Hungarian national press. Northeastern Hungary serves as the primary field site and backdrop for this study. I chose the northeastern region of Hungary as my field site for the fact that a large proportion of refugee claims submitted by Hungarian citizens in Canada originate from this region (OSCE 2016). According to a recent World Bank report (2016), this area is also one of the most economically depressed regions of the country. The high poverty rate in the region is due to insufficient infrastructure, limited economic activity, and an unskilled workforce.

During the 21 months living with a Romani community, attending community events, volunteering in a high school, interviewing, meeting with community leaders, and talking with many community members of all ages, I collected observational data, interview data, data on meetings and on spontaneous conversations, and narratives of removal. I spent most of my time conducting research at the office of a local Roma self-government, visiting Romani families' homes, and at a local Romani-majority high school.

My methodology for this study primarily consisted of a discourse-centered approach to participant-observation analysis at families' homes and informal interviews with Romani families and individuals who had returned from Canada after submitting refugee claims and community members who had not traveled to Canada but often had some indirect connection to Canada. I spent a great deal of time actively listening to what they wanted to share with me about their lives and experiences. I developed a collection of narratives that were spontaneously and repeatedly told by family members as they sought to rejoin the communities they had once left behind. The narratives have proven to be a way to access how my interlocutors make sense of what happened to them, as well as how they perform counter-conduct, or their indirect confrontations for creating "new forms of conducting themselves" (Yılmaz 2021, 208). I conducted participant observation and recorded interviews with three main families, two of whom lived in different villages in rural areas and one of whom lived in an urban area. In the next section, I examine how the term *hazaáruló* / traitor emerges as a racializing discourse, shaping the lived experiences of returned Roma in northeastern rural Hungary and reinforcing their exclusion within the very communities they once called home. To ensure their confidentiality and privacy, I have taken care not to disclose any distinguishing features of the people with whom I interacted and the places where they lived and worked.

6. Traitor as a Form of Racializing Discourse

The afternoon walk I took through the small town of Tiszaháza in which Béla and his family have lived for generations and the short car trip to the neighborhood on the periphery of the town where Béla grew up offers a glimpse at the processes of a forced return. It makes legible how forms of evictability (Van Baar 2016; Kóczé 2018; Kóczé and Van Baar 2020) emerge in the lives of people who do not choose to migrate or return, how slowly or quickly they must deliberately attune themselves to their new worlds, in spite of the still familiar noises and textures and motions of a place they once left. This family's experiences of returning to the small town they had fled undergirds the "feelings of un-belonging" (Kasmir 2018) and the existential precarity that Roma experience in the very spaces to which they have deep social ties. The spatial practice of pushing Romani residents to the edge of a town, evicting them from their homes, or the mere existence of a separate cemetery for Roma evidences some of the exclusions Roma encounter in ordinary life. According to Béla, the way their next-door teacher-neighbor conducted herself in relation to her Romani neighbors produced a pressing, everyday uneasiness for him and his family. Given this context and the political environment from which Roma have fled, such relations among neighbors bears a resemblance to the conduct of some ordinary Hungarians during the Second World War and its aftermath.

Béla and his family left for Canada in the summer of 2011 where they submitted a refugee claim but returned to Hungary near the end of 2012 after their claim was rejected by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). To this day, Béla is searching for a way back to Canada. When they returned from Canada, their house was repossessed by the National Tax and Customs Office (NAV) because, while the family was gone, they had left the house in the care of Béla's brother who could not afford to pay the electricity and water bills. Since then, every month, they have had to make payments on a house that was once theirs and inspectors visit, take pictures, and assess its upkeep. Shortly after their return, a young non-Romani man had come to their door and warned them to destroy all the original documents they had used as evidence in their refugee claim hearing because, he presaged, if *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom* / Movement for a Better Hungary – or Jobbik[7] for short – Hungary's radical right-wing nationalist political party, won in the coming elections and they learned that they had been to Canada, they would have their kids taken away. So, they got rid of all that evidence. Ilona, Béla's wife, asked the young man why they would do this, and he said because they were *hazaárulók* / traitors. She insisted that she was not that. The seizure of their house by an official body and the discursive act of warning Ilona and her family to disappear their Canadian past by naming them *hazaárulók* / traitors both function to isolate them from and within the place to which they have generational and familial ties. Such material and symbolic acts recall the historical-racial schema (Fanon 2008) of Roma. Examples of removal via property seizure and the threat of taking children out of Romani families are numerous throughout the history of Hungary and its territory and recur into the present.

Another family with whom I spent time during my fieldwork experienced being called *hazaáruló* / traitor regularly. Prior to leaving with his family for Canada to submit a refugee claim, Csaba had only worked

7 The word *Jobbik* in Hungarian means "better" and "to the right" or "on the right," essentially a play on words in Hungarian.

in the Public Works Program when he was out of work, otherwise he had been usually employed as a mason by a local businessman. That all changed once they returned. To the local businessman, he had become a *hazaáruló* / traitor and the town of Bükkhelye where they lived would no longer employ them locally. As Csaba made clear, "for those who are not stigmatized like we are and they go up there [to town hall] looking for work they'll get it immediately after a day or two." He paused and added, "There are two stigmas for us now." This is especially apparent when locals label them as *hazaárulók* / traitors, one of the harshest forms of disloyalty someone can commit against their country, in public spaces. "Deportees are a stigmatised group because they are seen as criminal, failed in the migratory project and 'culturally contaminated'" (Khosravi 2018, 3). Fleeing Hungary and submitting a refugee claim in Canada is one such traitorous act in the eyes of locals provoking Csaba's family's departure and thus they are left vulnerable not only to the state, but also ordinary citizens (Khosravi 2018). For example, not only are Csaba and his wife denied work opportunities locally, but the town no longer provides them with a Christmas grocery package. Such packages, along with firewood, are given out to families in need during the holidays and supports them in celebrating the holidays in dignity.

Csaba often described how his movements were limited in town because when he appeared in public spaces locals would taunt him, threaten him, and make it a very unpleasant experience. His "anticipations" of such "inevitable kinds of interpersonal situations in which the gulf between feelings and civilities become particularly foregrounded" (Basso 2009, 134) are the everyday ordeals of language he experienced since his return. As Ellen Basso notes, situations in which one chooses to silence their voice do not always take place because of a recognition of asymmetrical power relations, but as a sensitivity to having "violated some form of coded sociality" (Basso 2009, 134). For Csaba, the coded sociality he and his family violated was having submitted a refugee claim in Canada. Csaba's choice to silence his voice and limit his movements followed from his sensitivity to having violated this particular coded sociality. The rejection of the refugee claim and their subsequent return only compounded this violation to which locals dialogically responded with cries of *hazaáruló* / traitor at Csaba and his family. "One important consequence of inadvertent violations or dramatic and sudden changes in the performance of coded sociality… is a kind of deep embarrassment [i.e., shame] and withdrawal" (Basso 2009, 134). He described how his corporeal comportment had shifted since "before" they left and "now." Shame "is organized around a retraining and a reteaching of bodies" (Schaefer 2020, 6), and for Csaba this is manifested in his cautious movements around town and in reducing his facial communication as he notes in one of our interviews: "*azelőtt jártam felütött fejjel most leütött fejjel* / before this I went with my head up now my head is down." The shame he is made to feel in public by locals is expressed in how he enters any space in town outside of his home.

Csaba's was doubly a body-not-at-home in its world, as he was kept from co-habiting spaces in town with a corporeal intimacy for being Roma and for being a former refugee claimant who almost became a refugee but did not. As I noted earlier, in another interview, Csaba had voiced that he and his family were now doubly stigmatized – once for being Roma and twice for having fled to Canada. An equivalence between being out-of-place due to their ethnicity and being out-of-place geographically intersects in the hostile discursive construction of *hazaáruló* / traitor as it is used by locals to further exclude Roma who returned to Hungary due to unsuccessful refugee claims. That is, if they had not left for Canada and been forced to return to Hungary, but stayed in Bükkhelye and endured what others who could not flee

and had little choice but to endure, at least there would only be one stigma. Such a racialized usage of *hazaáruló* / traitor as that employed by locals at Csaba and his family is constitutive of covert racializing discourses that attempt to control where the doubly stigmatized do or do not belong. When he is named *hazaáruló* / traitor even Canada is not supposed to be a "space for action" (Ahmed 2006) for Csaba and his family, thus extending their deportability (Van Baar 2016; Kóczé 2018; Kóczé and Van Baar 2020) in their return and refamiliarization with Bükkhelye. For Csaba, this added loss exacerbated his inability to move without hesitation. The disjuncture of deportation (De Genova 2018) has bodily effects on how returned families move through familiar spaces. Neither he nor his wife Kati could partake in ritualized communication that would make the anxiety-producing event of being called a *hazaáruló* / traitor more manageable as the taunting precluded greeting and departure speech. Moreover, publicly both Csaba and Kati "[became] responsible for their own abnegation due to the necessity of viewing the world as existing through experiences of inequalities, of which [they were] the repeated target" (Basso 2009, 134), and so it was only in an intimate space, their home, that they felt at ease in talking with me extensively about their experiences. The space of their home became a space of appearance through narrative action, the performances of indirect resistances around their kitchen table or in the yard while smoking cigarettes and eating sunflower seeds. In the space created through the narrative, speakers questioned the way things took place in the past and interacted in the world surrounding them by not forgetting "all the things that have previously been existentially meaningful to them" (Horst and Lysaker 2021, 71). These things tied them to Bükkhelye. Given this, their remaining-in-place evidences the Arendtian figure of the "refugee as vanguard," here represented by people who attempted to become refugees but did not. Such narratives intimately connected them to the town, and despite the ordinary hostilities they encountered they remained in place, beginning anew there, (re)making the place they once left.

Whiteness becomes marked in the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor when locals labeled Csaba as such, with returned Roma only becoming "citizens" through their "betrayal." Prior to submitting refugee claims in Canada, it was the lack of protections from the *Magyar Gárda* / Hungarian Guard[8] that motivated Roma from the town to flee Hungary. Here, I want to circle back to my earlier discussion of the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor and specifically revisit the idea that in Hungary today to be a *hazaáruló* / traitor is analogous with being an "enemy of progress." I combine Bakhtin's (1981) chronotope concept and Johannes Fabian's (1983) denial of coevalness to show that the figure of the *hazaáruló* / traitor is a racializing discourse through which whiteness is marked. As noted previously, the term *hazaáruló*

8 The *Magyar Gárda* / Hungarian Guard was fundamentally part and parcel with the Jobbik Party (Gubicza 2008) and became known for their mutual anti-Roma attitudes. The Guard were regularly present at marches, rallies, and other events organized and held by Jobbik. A little over a year after it was formed, the Guard was ordered to disband by the Metropolitan Court of Budapest in December 2008 because its activities were found to be in violation of the human rights of minorities groups guaranteed by the Hungarian constitution. Two other separate courts, including the Supreme Court of Hungary, also ordered the Guard to disband. They appealed both decisions. By the summer of 2009, the Guard officially no longer existed as an organization but took their process of appeals all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, which eventually upheld the ban in 2013 – all the while their threatening presence and activities took shape in other forms. Derivatives of the Guard continued to threaten violence against Romani communities with a number of them adopting dress, tactics, and ideologies akin to that of the banned Guard. Such organizations included *Véderő* / Hungarian National Defence Association, *Betyársereg* / Army of Outlaws, *Nemzeti Őrsereg* / National Garrison, and *Szebb Jövőért Polgárőr Egyesület* / Civil Guard Association for a Better Future, all of whom attended various demonstrations, marches, and housing forums organized by Jobbik following the ban of the Guard.

in Hungarian is a compound word that incorporates "homeland" in its first free morpheme *haza*, thus connoting its connection to space. The second morpheme *áruló* or seller, implies the disconnection from the space of "homeland" through a transaction in which the connection is given away. The equation of *hazaáruló* / traitor with being an "enemy of progress" is a temporal distancing that constructs its referents (the returned Roma of Bükkhelye and Tiszaháza) as subjects with whom time is not and cannot be shared (Fabian 1983). That is, progress here implies that there is a particular linear temporal trajectory that leads to evolution over time, thus anyone who is anti-progress is behind, lagging, static. Taking Fabian's Typological Time, or the form in which it "is measured, not as time elapsed, nor by reference to points on a (linear) scale, but in terms of socioculturally meaningful events or, more precisely, intervals between such events," I apply it to the utterance of *hazaáruló* / traitor as a pejorative term used by locals against the returned Roma of Bükkhelye and Tiszaháza. In terms of the *hazaáruló* / traitor, Typological Time underlies the qualifications of progress vs. anti-progress that ultimately makes a comparison on a temporal scale of the returned Roma of Bükkhelye and Tiszaháza to the West as the standard for progress. In other words, the temporal and spatial distancing that constructs its referents in the utterance of *hazaáruló* / traitor is a denial of this particular shared chronotope. This denial was not only achieved rhetorically, but through, for example, the way Csaba self-limited his movements about town. It is once I incorporate the second free morpheme of *hazaáruló* / traitor "*áruló* / betrayer" into my analysis that the term takes on a doubly negative connotation – firstly as anti-progress and ultimately as treason.

Concluding Remarks

The public cry of traitor at former Romani refugee claimants returned from Canada transforms the bodily comportment of those targeted and it makes all the difference in whether one walks with their head up or down, whether they leave their house at all. Over the course of the narratives they performed, the unmarked becomes marked as its material, palpable consequences are discursively constituted and made visible. Both families' experiences of exclusion in the forms of evictability and deportability (Van Baar 2016; Kóczé 2018; Kóczé and Van Baar 2020) evidence the ways in which practices of dispersal (Van Baar et al. 2021) scatter community members across spaces, making it difficult for the public voices of Roma to endure in a way that they are heard. Despite this, as former Romani refugee claimants who almost became refugees, but did not, narrators demonstrate their political agency in unexpected, dynamic ways in (re)making the places to which they have returned and challenging the exclusionary structures that seek to silence them.

I include here again Mark Cornwall's (2015) assertion that "[t]he cry of 'treason' or 'traitor' has consistently been invoked over the centuries as a linguistic device with which to disarm a political opponent, a way of publicly branding some disloyalty to a cause or community" (114). Here, it is the returned Roma of Bükkhelye and Tiszaháza who are being disarmed for their "disloyalty" to the local community to which they never truly belonged because of the racialized tensions between Romani and non-Romani community members even prior to their families' departure from the towns for Canada. Through this racializing discursive act, locals publicly acknowledged – thus marking it – the consequences of whiteness: refugee claims that threaten to undermine the notion that Hungary is a democratic EU member state and "safe country" for all its citizens. For Romani returnees with whom I completed this research, their "return"

was more often "only another arrival" (Peutz 2006, 225) as they were met with a doubled discrimination (Brosnahan 2016) – a form of discrimination that was both anti-Roma and anti-refugee. This particular anti-refugeeism entangled with anti-Roma racism was one based more so in perceived betrayal than xenophobia. Specifically, Roma who had returned from Canada were labeled traitors – more often by non-Roma, but Roma who had not left and returned did so as well – for having fled Hungary for Canada in the first place thus exposing everyday, normalized relations of exclusion.

This study contributes to critical migration research by highlighting how forced return does not simply mark a geographic relocation but reshapes social belonging, reinforcing exclusion even upon return. It exposes how deportation and forced return operate as racializing mechanisms that extend beyond state borders, shaping community attitudes and reinforcing structural marginalization. These findings have significant implications for policy, particularly in shaping a more nuanced understanding of forced migration and return migration. Policies that assume returnees can simply "reintegrate" into their home communities ignore the persistent stigmatization they face and suggest a need for stronger social support systems for returnees, particularly those who belong to already marginalized groups.

Moreover, this study highlights the power of discourse in shaping national belonging and exclusion. Labels such as traitor serve as tools of social control, shaping the public's perception of who is deserving of rights and inclusion. This phenomenon is not isolated: the COVID-19 pandemic saw Romani communities across Europe scapegoated and subjected to restrictive measures that deepened their marginalization, while the war in Ukraine has further exposed how racial hierarchies influence the treatment of refugees. Roma fleeing Ukraine have faced systemic discrimination and have been denied access to the same humanitarian support as their non-Roma counterparts. These parallels reveal how racialized exclusions persist across crises, migration regimes, and national contexts. This has broader implications for how states, media, and local communities shape narratives around migration and displacement. A better understanding of these discursive practices can inform efforts to combat xenophobia, anti-refugee sentiment, and racial discrimination in migration policies and public discourse.

Future research should explore similar dynamics among other forcibly returned populations across different national and regional contexts to examine whether and how these discursive patterns hold elsewhere. Additionally, comparative studies of the refamiliarization experiences of different marginalized groups – both Roma and non-Roma – could further illuminate the intersection of racialization, forced migration, and socio-political exclusion. By broadening the scope of inquiry, scholars and policymakers can develop more comprehensive strategies to address the challenges of forced return and critically re-examine the assumptions that underpin migration governance.

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Beyond Tuition: Addressing Structural Barriers for Romani Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

This article critically examines the effectiveness of Bulgarian national educational policies in promoting educational equity for marginalised Romani communities. While recent policy shifts toward reducing financial barriers to higher education represent a significant step toward increasing access to higher education, they fall short of addressing the broader structural barriers that hinder the educational advancement of Romani students. These barriers include poverty, limited access to quality education, low academic expectations, cultural biases within educational institutions, and scarce opportunities for academic and career development. Drawing on quantitative analysis of enrolment rates, socio-economic indicators among Romani students, and qualitative insights via document analysis and an examination of stakeholder engagement, this paper explores how the Bulgarian education system continues to reproduce social inequalities, particularly within a neoliberal framework that focuses on meritocracy and individual effort rather than structural factors. The article argues that to effectively challenge these barriers and promote social equity, it is essential to adopt holistic and community-centred approaches that empower Romani communities.

Keywords

- Affirmative action
- Bulgaria
- Higher education
- Institutional racism
- Roma
- Socio-economic inequality

Introduction

Access to higher education provides opportunities not only for the development of individual human capital but also for individual social capital by serving as a gateway to influential forums, granting individuals the opportunity to be heard in the most significant societal arenas. By ensuring equitable educational opportunities for Romani students, governments empower them to participate actively in societal discourse and advocate for their rights and interests (Strike 2006, 185–199). Despite progress in recent years, the participation of Romani students in higher education across Europe remains significantly below that of the general population. In Central and Eastern Europe, about one per cent of Romani youth attain university-level education, compared to much higher national averages. Structural barriers such as poverty, early school leaving, discrimination, and the lack of inclusive support systems continue to limit Romani students' access to and retention in universities (OECD 2020, 18–25). A 2021 survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that just 22 per cent of young Roma (aged 18–24) had completed upper-secondary education, making progression to higher education exceedingly rare. While some countries have introduced targeted scholarships and affirmative measures, these initiatives remain fragmented and insufficient in addressing the deeply rooted inequalities affecting Romani youth (FRA 2022, 32).

Romani participation in higher education has risen steadily in Bulgaria for the last 15 years, with recently published data indicating that participation rates have now reached 2.6 per cent and even risen to 5.4 per cent for the 21–25 age group (Angelova et al. 2020). For the most part, such patterns mask continued social inequality in access and entry to higher education, while clear socio-economic disparities continue to exist and persist. At the onset of 2024, the Bulgarian government introduced a proposal for the elimination of tuition fees applicable to students and doctoral candidates enrolled at state-funded higher education institutions (voted in the National Assembly, but later dropped). The proposal to abolish university tuition fees may have represented an attempt to increase access to higher education for Romani students, however, it fails to address the broader structural challenges that hinder their educational advancement, such as poverty, limited access to quality education, lower academic expectations, cultural biases within educational institutions and scarce opportunities for academic and career development, and so on.

Access to education, theoretically, is a core part of the legal basis underlying the Bulgarian education system. At the same time, access to education in Bulgaria is not a legally defined concept (Kashamov et al. 2022), which is crucial for a strongly centralised and unprogressive system such as Bulgaria's education system. Numerous factors have a huge impact on a child's poor/high performance at school: in/adequate living conditions (running water, heating, secured housing, among others); in/accessible infrastructure in particular neighbourhoods (streets, sidewalks, street lights, and so forth); in/convenient and/or free/paid school transport (involving walking several kilometres to reach a bus stop); un/available textbooks and school supplies; un/available in/adequate school nutrition; speaking a minority mother tongue in first grade (and respectively, insufficient command of the Bulgarian (instruction) language); and living in a small settlement among others. These factors impact self-perception and prospects but are not regarded and perceived as factors triggering or hindering a child's potential through the access to education paradigm. The reason being that prevalent neoliberal narratives emphasise individual agency over

structural determinants of success (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). This ethos of competitive individualism and "self-responsibilisation" has shifted liability from the state to the individual student and, as a result, blame for educational underachievement is often placed on the victims of neoliberalism rather than its architects (Reay 2022, 12). Over the years, this ideology, which recognises privilege as merit, has led to a thorough appropriation of meritocratic norms (Littler 2018). Despite the systemic disadvantages faced by Romani students competing for universities with their non-Romani peers, outcomes are often perceived as meritocratic, which reaffirms and further legitimises social hierarchies.

This article bridges critical gaps in understanding the systemic barriers and opportunities shaping Roma's access to higher education in Bulgaria by exploring the intersection of socio-economic disparities, cultural stigmatisation, and educational policies. Moreover, the text provides an analysis that exceeds simplistic narratives of inclusion. It highlights the limitations of neoliberal policy frameworks that often prioritise assimilation over equity in the light of Bulgaria's stratified education system which conserves intergenerational inequalities while applying an limited-impact affirmative action limited in both scope and impact in an attempt to address these same inequalities.

However, beyond identifying challenges, this study offers new knowledge by contextualising the invisible aspects preceding access to education, such as parental educational attainment, early childhood conditions, and institutional ethnocentrism. It enriches the discourse by shedding light on the ways structural inequalities accumulate via cultural marginalisation. Moreover, its emphasis on fostering aspirations through mentorship, role models, and success stories centres this text as a way of rethinking Romani inclusion strategies. By advocating for transformative change through systemic reforms, better teacher training, and targeted policies, it calls for an education system that not only accommodates Romani students but actively values their cultural contributions and nurtures their aspirations.

1. Methodology

The methodology of this study integrates a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore the intersection of socio-economic disparities and cultural capital within Bulgaria's educational landscape with a focus on the Romani community. This study employs a secondary data analysis approach, drawing on peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, official statistics, and prior empirical research. This facilitates critical synthesis and contributes to the advancement of knowledge by integrating insights from diverse and authoritative materials. To analyse the impact of socio-economic status on academic performance and access to education, quantitative data is drawn from international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), along with national demographic statistics and educational attainment rates in different ethnic groups. Furthermore, qualitative data is collected through desktop research of a broad array of academic literature, including surveys and interviews with educators, parents, and students, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of Romani families and the systemic barriers they face. The research emphasises the role of educational content, teacher attitudes, and institutional practices, employing critical discourse analysis to uncover the underlying ethnocentric narratives within Bulgaria's education system. By triangulating these methods and providing a nuanced perspective on

the challenges of, and opportunities for, Romani educational inclusion, the study aims to shed light on the complex dynamics of cultural capital, educational access, and affirmative action. That is to say, how the research aims to fill the existing knowledge vacuum in academic literature on the higher educational integration of Romani communities in Bulgaria.

2. Intersection of Socio-economic Disparities and Cultural Capital in Bulgaria's Educational Landscape

Household income distribution significantly influences people's positions within the social hierarchy, shaping their opportunities for advancement, with wealthier households investing more in their children's education and development. Therefore, a person's position within a social structure largely determines their capabilities and constraints (Bourdieu 1998), with educational systems playing a significant role in perpetuating social and cultural inequalities by establishing hidden connections between academic aptitude and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, according to PISA 2018, the share of academically resilient students (or top-performing disadvantaged students) in Bulgaria is the lowest in Europe, while school segregation is among the highest, with inter-school differences accounting for 54.7 percent of the total variation in student performance (Hristova 2021, 235). Parents' socio-economic status (differences and inadequate home conditions) can manifest in children's abilities even before they go to school and hinder their consistent engagement in education later on, resulting in opportunity inequality and increased risk of future poverty (Institute for Market Economics 2021). Hence, it is no surprise that, according to PISA, parental socio-economic status and ethnicity continue to be primary determinants of student achievements (OECD 2019). Partially because of Bulgaria's schooling system's failure to effectively address inequalities and provide equitable conditions for all students, it is evident that the lower economic activity among parents of Romani students places them in a more vulnerable position compared to their mainstream counterparts. It becomes evident that the education system not only perpetuates existing disparities but also validates cultural heritage as a natural endowment, reinforcing the status quo (Bourdieu 2018).

Data also indicates that Romani students' parents have significantly lower rates of finishing at least lower secondary education (64 per cent) compared to mainstream students' parents (79 per cent), with economically inactive parents of Romani students having, on average, a lower level of formal education in comparison with economically active ones, and this is true for both mothers and fathers (Garaz 2014). While the direct relationship between parents' educational attainment and that of their children may not be unequivocal, numerous researchers contend that parental education significantly predicts their offspring's educational achievements (Dubow et al. 2009), with socio-economic background of tertiary-level students being commonly evaluated through an examination of their parents' level of formal education. Empirical evidence across various European countries supports this assertion, indicating a correlation between parents' educational attainment and that of their children (Eurostudent IV 2011). In this regard, *cultural capital*, within the context of Bulgaria's educational landscape, emerges as a critical family-based asset that significantly influences intergenerational educational probabilities, particularly impacting a marginalised Romani community.

3. Multiple Invisible Dimensions Preceding Access to Formal Education

In 2022, the highest relative share of impoverished people in Bulgaria was found in individuals who self-identified with the Romani ethnic group, at 63.2 per cent. About 25.9 per cent of children aged 0–17 in Bulgaria were at risk of poverty, with 43.5 per cent of children living in conditions of material deprivation also at risk of poverty. The extent to which children's needs are met varies significantly by ethnicity. Among Bulgarian children, 23 per cent experience limitations in meeting certain needs, compared to 33 per cent of Turkish children and 76.2 per cent of Romani children. Additionally, a complete inability to meet any needs, as defined by restrictions across all thirteen indicators (total multiple deprivation), affects 1.2 per cent of Bulgarian children, 0.8 per cent of Turkish children, and 9.0 per cent of Romani children. About 24 per cent of children living in conditions of material deprivation from the majority Bulgarian ethnic group are also at risk of poverty. For other groups, the relative share is as follows: 37.5 per cent for children from the Turkish ethnic group, and 69.4 per cent for children from the Romani ethnic group (NSI 2022). The difference in living conditions between Romani children and their peers from other ethnic groups is drastic.

The reality of prejudice and dominant stereotyping of the Romani community in the educational environment also result in limiting access to education. Unfounded statements, such as "This is how they are," "This is their culture," "This is not part of their values," "This is their limit," and so forth, contribute to institutional bias, also reflected in professional pedagogical practices. The uniformity of the educational environment and the neglect of children's need for self-recognition arise from the perception that factors such as ethnicity, community culture, language, and socio-economic background do not influence children's attitudes toward education or impact their starting point. The marked discriminatory attitudes and bias about Bulgarian Roma, as well as widespread race-based hate speech are major obstacles to equal access to education, hindering acceptance of Romani children into an ethnically desegregated educational environment, including kindergartens (Pamporov and Angelov 2020). Conclusions drawn from a survey on teachers' attitudes to Roma raised serious concerns, with a disturbingly large group of teachers exhibiting discriminatory attitudes. According to nearly half of the surveyed teachers (47 per cent), Romani children face significant challenges in integration, while one quarter (25.4 per cent) believe they should be educated separately from their Bulgarian peers. Close to one-fifth (19.5 per cent) also believe that children of different ethnic backgrounds possess different cognitive abilities (Commission for Protection against Discrimination 2011). Such beliefs are often reflected in inefficient pedagogical practices both at individual and system levels (Lambrev et al. 2020). This is associated with low levels of engagement (cognitive, behavioural, emotional) and low self-assessment, namely among Romani children (Hristova et al. 2020). The performance of Romani students in national assessments, together with the outcomes of Romani pupils in international testing, should not be viewed as neutral indicators of ability. Rather, they are symptomatic of the broader structural conditions within the education system – conditions that either enable or constrain the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Isaev 2023).

In Bulgaria, learning content does not feature "significant adult(s)" to Romani children from the very beginning of school. Textbooks in history, literature and geography and economics, for example, do not

contain information related to, not only, Romani children but to all children from minority communities (Spielhaus et al. 2020). It is hardly a coincidence that this results in limited prospects for development and fulfilment, as well as questioning the existence of their own primary identity and the respective minority as a group. Research suggests that Romani communities are often portrayed in ways that lack successful, relatable role models (Commission for Protection against Discrimination 2011). It is worth considering whether this reflects a true absence of role models or a failure to recognise and promote them within mainstream discourse. This further reinforces the fact that, despite substantial contributions by Roma to the establishment and development of the Third Bulgarian State from its inception to the present, their role remains predominantly unrecognised (Marushiakova et al. 2023), especially in history and literature. Generally, the narrative about Roma (often when out-of-class projects are assigned) runs along the lines of: they are funny, merry, happy-go-lucky, unruly (Bahníčková 2014), cunning, and sometimes rather remote and even unreal. These are images with which a Romani child barely associates as they do not feature in their primary environment. However, "stories matter… stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. How they are told, whose name and voice are behind the story. What context they are told in. How many stories are told, and son" (Adichie 2009). According to Adichie, all of this is dependent on power. In most cases, the story of a minority is being written and told by a majority, which holds the power. And a majority, no matter who it is, is prone to render the narrative about itself as positive and, often, to describe a minority in negative terms (Adichie 2009). Additionally, stereotypes allow one narrative as the only perspective, further consolidated by systemic ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism is an established phenomenon in the Bulgarian education system. As early as 2004:

> The use of the word "Bulgarian" […] tips the balance to the development of an ethnocentric approach in the way topics are presented in school. […] The accent of the curricula can leave students with the impression that there is a single ethnic and religious group in Bulgarian society: Bulgarians and Orthodox Christians […] The underestimation of the achievements of individuals from other ethnic groups in Bulgarian society, when presenting the multifaceted social reality, is most striking in the presentation at national level of Bulgaria's contribution to world culture, without considering the achievements of the representatives of ethnic communities, such as Turks, Roma, Jews, Armenians and Russians (Totseva et al. 2005, 87–88).

Attitudes to every child's first language is also of crucial importance since it makes up their burgeoning identity. Every child discovers the world through their first language (mother tongue, family tongue). If a child senses a belittling or denial of their community's language and culture, there is great risk that they will fail to integrate, since s/he is ready to acquire new knowledge and skills mainly in their mother tongue, through cultural communication models, community philosophy, and so forth, which the child has internalised during the primary socialisation by their family and neighbourhood. The Bulgarian education system is far more appreciative of students whose mother tongue is Bulgarian than Romanes or Turkish and who benefit very little from their time at school (Downes et al. 2017). The general linguistic attitude plays an important role here, whereby the promotion of multilingualism was reduced to "promoting the learning of Bulgarian" to minority children, who are expected, as indigenous citizens

of Bulgaria, to know the national language – and their parents should teach them to speak it. In addition, there is a linguistic-ideological attitude that some languages are less important than others. Moreover, there are earlier preconceptions against preschool foreign-language teaching for children who grew up communicating in one language, in other words, "not to confuse the child" (Angelova 2018, 32). The data from Bulgaria's last census (2021) reveals unequivocally the gap in long-term educational achievements among the various language and ethnic groups in society (Baev 2023). PISA results reveal that Bulgaria fails to compensate for the negative impact of students' social and economic family environment (this group includes not only poor students but also students whose first language is not Bulgarian or who belong to ethnic minorities). According to an OECD report (2023), Bulgaria is one of only 10 countries in the survey where at least half of the achievement gap is explained by differences among schools. Additionally, the success of students from prestigious secondary schools is based on private lessons the students take, not on the approaches, efforts, and so forth of the teachers in the schools where they are enrolled (Yordanova 2023).

The fact that the Romani language has not been taught for years in Bulgarian schools is made light of. It is claimed that no requests to this effect are submitted by Romani parents (even in fully segregated schools). However, even if there were such applications, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) or respective schools are unable to provide a Romani-language teacher since no Bulgarian university[1] nor educational institution currently offers such a specialisation or further education qualification (Ministry of Education and Science 2018). Hristo Kyuchukov (2018) examines the establishment and closure of the Primary School Pedagogy and Romani Language specialty at the University of Veliko Tarnovo St. Cyril and St. Methodius as a case of systemic discrimination against Roma in Bulgarian higher education. Founded in 2003–2004 to provide academic training in Romani language and culture, the programme achieved significant success, graduating 54 students with high academic marks and fostering international collaborations. However, Kyuchukov argues that institutional racism, political interference, and academic opposition led to its closure in 2010. He contends that the National Accreditation Agency's negative assessment was based on racial bias rather than academic merit, and that resistance extended beyond academia to include certain Romani activists. Political actors further weaponised the issue for electoral and institutional purposes. Despite the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) identifying procedural violations, Bulgarian courts and the European Court of Human Rights failed to recognise the discrimination.

The statistics show that between 25–30 per cent of young children entering their first year in Bulgaria's school system have mother tongues different from Bulgarian (Georgieva 2019). They come mostly from Bulgaria's Roma and also from other language minority communities. Given this language disadvantage at such an early age, many of these vulnerable children do not make it to middle school, much less high school. In the case of Roma, the total enrolment rate to secondary education is 57 per cent while this ratio is 87 per cent for the general population in Bulgaria (FRA 2016). As of 2019, 22.7 per cent of Roma have

1 From 2004 to 2009, there was a special stream in Elementary School Pedagogy in Romani Language available at Veliko Tarnovo University. It was closed by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. Currently, no university offers special Elementary School Pedagogy in Romani Language.

graduated from high school and 2.6 per cent from university. This represents a significant increase from the previous decade (as for 2011, respectively – 13.5 per cent and 0.4 per cent) (Angelova et al. 2020), but there is still a way to go to narrow the educational gap. As of 2021, the average for the whole country is 54 per cent high school graduation and 29 per cent university graduates (Regional Profiles 2021).

A significant percentage of twelfth-graders in Bulgaria face challenges graduating from high school, which involves successfully passing state exams on Bulgarian language and literature, as well as in a second subject. More than 17 per cent (more than 8,000 students) of twelfth-graders achieved low marks in the last state exam in Bulgarian language and literature, after the 2022/2023 school year. The share of students with low marks was similar to previous school years and is increasing every year. Additionally, geographic variance in the quality of the education provided by primary and secondary, including vocational schools, is very high, with schools in smaller towns and villages and less populated areas unable to attract high-quality teaching staff. Many young Roma face serious difficulties in mastering school material due to the poor quality of their prior education. Substantial differences persist in performance at state exams in Bulgarian language and literature among students from different types of schools. Students graduating from vocational and sports schools have significantly lower average results compared to those from prestigious high schools. Not least, the percentage of students in schools with a concentration of students of Romani origin is increasing – almost every second child/youth from the Romani ethnic origin is enrolled in a school where Roma predominate (Lambrev et al. 2020).

The Bulgarian National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma (2021–2030) outlines a range of education policies aimed at addressing educational disparities faced by Romani students, including measures to improve early childhood education access, enhance inclusive and intercultural education, and support Romani students in transitioning through primary, secondary, and higher education. Key policies include the professional development of educational mediators who work to bridge gaps between Romani communities and schools, and preparatory courses for Romani candidates pursuing university degrees in pedagogy to increase representation in the teaching profession. However, while these initiatives are positive, the strategy lacks specific, measurable targets to assess progress effectively, often framing goals in broad terms without sufficient accountability mechanisms (Government of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021). Notably, the strategy's focus on higher education is limited to the professional development of educational mediators, rather than targeting the broader Romani population. This exclusive focus on the teaching profession overlooks the potential for broader access to higher education across various academic disciplines for Romani students. Moreover, the strategy's emphasis on "continuing education" and vocational pathways does not fully address systemic inequalities in primary and secondary education, where high dropout rates among Romani students persist. This focus on vocational over academic routes may unintentionally perpetuate educational segregation, limiting Romani students' access to the broader labour market. Overall, despite its ambition, the strategy risks falling short without more adequate monitoring, a deeper emphasis on reducing early educational disparities, and clear pathways for Romani students into diverse fields of higher education.

Comparative insights from other Central and Eastern European countries could provide valuable lessons, for example, Hungary's scholarship programmes for Romani students and Serbia's affirmative action

policies in university admissions. These offer more targeted approaches to higher education inclusion and demonstrate that explicitly addressing barriers to higher education can lead to improvements in participation rates. In contrast, Bulgaria's strategy remains largely aspirational, without sufficient mechanisms to ensure implementation or accountability.

4. A Systemic Perspective on the Pathways to Romani Access to Higher Education

The issue of Romani access to higher education is deeply intertwined with broader systemic challenges. Despite efforts across Europe to address these barriers, research consistently reveals gaps in both the design and implementation of educational policies. A recurring theme is the tension between neoliberal policy frameworks, which prioritise economic outcomes and market-driven approaches, and genuine inclusion, which demands structural changes to dismantle deep-rooted inequalities. For example, Leyton (2020) critiques EU inclusion policies for their focus on economic utility rather than equity, arguing that such frameworks often perpetuate a biopolitical model that assigns Roma to predefined economic roles without addressing the systemic exclusion they face. Similarly, Themelis (2020) underscores how globalisation-driven higher education systems pressure Romani students to assimilate into mainstream academic norms, sidelining their identities and cultural contributions.

Central to the discussion is the concept of epistemic inclusion, which advocates for recognising Romani students not merely as recipients of education but as active contributors to knowledge production. Morley (2020) challenges deficit-based narratives that frame Romani communities solely through the lens of deprivation and marginalisation, calling for educational systems that affirm Romani resilience and cultural strengths. This shift is particularly crucial in countering stereotypes and fostering environments where Romani students can thrive without compromising their identities. Comparative research highlights effective practices in other European contexts. For instance, Gkofa (2020) identifies family support and mentorship as critical factors in the success of Romani students in Greece, while Jovanovic (Matache et al. 2020) points to Serbia's struggles in bridging access gaps due to systemic socio-economic inequalities. These studies underscore the importance of targeted interventions such as mentorship programmes, anti-discrimination training for educators, and community-driven initiatives to support Romani students' academic journeys.

Building on these insights, Garaz and Torotcoi (2017) draw attention to the stark underrepresentation of Romani students in STEM fields, linking this disciplinary gap to unequal employment outcomes and limited socio-economic mobility. Their work underscores the need for interventions that not only increase access but also diversify Romani students' academic and professional opportunities. Meanwhile, Pecak and Torotcoi (2019) explore the impact of antigypsyism on Romani educational aspirations, emphasising the critical role of family and community support in fostering resilience against systemic discrimination, while Gologan, Kurysheva, and Torotcoi (2020) advocate for integrated measures combining financial assistance with mentorship and counselling, demonstrating the importance of holistic, context-sensitive approaches to reducing educational inequities.

As evidenced both here and daily within Bulgaria's education system, singular measures are insufficient without broader systemic reforms. In this regard, early education, often marked by segregated schooling and high dropout rates, must be a focal point to ensure that Romani students have the foundation needed to pursue higher education. Mirga and Redzepi (2020) emphasise that addressing these foundational disparities is critical to breaking the cycle of exclusion that Romani students face across generations. Lessons from Spain's inclusion plans (Padilla-Carmona et al. 2020), which blend systemic reforms with targeted support, or the Nordic countries' policy silences on Roma in higher education (Helakorpi and Isopahkala-Bouret 2020) illustrate the need for policies that balance inclusive rhetoric with tangible, equity-driven actions.

Ultimately, fostering Romani access to higher education requires a multifaceted approach that integrates structural reforms, targeted interventions, and the recognition of Romani voices in shaping policies. As Roberts (2020) argues, empowering Roma as knowledge producers not only addresses biases in academia but also enhances the transformative potential of higher education as a pathway to equity and social mobility. Bulgaria's policies could benefit from such an approach, incorporating mentorship, systemic accountability, and active participation of Roma in shaping and implementing educational reforms.

5. Affirmative Action in Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Romani Educational Inclusion

Affirmative action, guided by the principle of liberal egalitarianism, exemplifies the belief that addressing inequalities is essential for maximising the position of the most disadvantaged within a society and, as an approach, acknowledges that treating individuals as equals does not always mean providing identical treatment (Moses 2006, 567–586), particularly in contexts marked by historical oppression (Detchev 2024) and social disparities.

Targeted educational support for Romani students addresses historical discrimination and exclusion faced by Roma, while simultaneously aiming to remedy present-day social injustices and structural disparities when it comes to accessing opportunities and resources. Moreover, by prioritising Romani individuals, who have historically been excluded from these various societal dynamics, affirmative action aims to promote social cohesion by addressing systemic injustices in the distribution of social rewards (Pantea 2015, 896–914).

In Bulgaria, the discourse surrounding affirmative action is complex, with advocates for colour-blind educational policies arguing against what they perceive as government-sponsored discrimination and invoking national legislation that prohibits discrimination in all forms. However, the Bulgarian Protection against Discrimination Act states that "special measures aimed at equalising opportunities for individuals or groups of individuals in disadvantaged positions based on the characteristics listed in Article 7, paragraph 1 (including gender, race, ethnic origin, descent, religion, education, and so forth.) are not considered discriminatory, as long as these measures are necessary" (Law for Protection against Discrimination 2003). Additionally, there are objections asserting that affirmative action contradicts

meritocratic principles and violates highly respected values such as self-reliance, individualism, discipline, and hard work, labelling it as "modern racism" (Pantea 2015, 896–914).

The Roma Education Fund (REF) is a nongovernmental organisation dedicated to advancing education opportunities for Roma, serving as a landmark in the downfall of affirmative action in Bulgaria. It was created in 2005 within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, aiming to provide Roma with access to quality education. Its initiatives spanned pre-primary, primary, and secondary education levels, complemented by four scholarship programmes tailored for ethnic Roma enrolled in higher education across Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, as well as Turkey. Annually, REF received approximately 2,500 scholarship applications, admitting up to 1,500 recipients based on academic criteria and predetermined country quotas. These quotas considered factors such as scholarship demand, existing alternative programmes, and the Romani population within each country relative to the broader region (REF 2012). Scholarship support from REF primarily covered tuition fees and offers a stipend for living expenses, supplemented by access to a national alumni e-community facilitating communication among former and current beneficiaries. Furthermore, select students received additional financial assistance for conferences, language courses, trainings, and small-scale community development projects.

In Bulgaria, the Roma Education Fund and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) provided monthly stipends to 763 Romani adolescents enrolled in secondary education between 2016 and 2018, reflecting the systemic barriers that continue to hinder equitable access to schooling.. However, the scholarship initiative faced scrutiny due to alleged discriminatory practices and consequently legal challenges arose, initiated by the Bulgarian association Azbukari, arguing that the scholarships discriminated against non-Romani Bulgarian children. This contention led to a protracted legal battle, started as a lawsuit filed at the Commission for Protection against Discrimination and culminating in a Supreme Administrative Court ruling affirming claims of discrimination.[2] Throughout the proceedings, the initiative was defended by a former Bulgarian Minister of Education, who described it as vital support for high school students facing socio-economic barriers. Nonetheless, the Supreme Administrative Court of Bulgaria upheld the discrimination verdict due to concerns over equal treatment and adherence to anti-discrimination laws (MoES 2018).

Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the effectiveness of affirmative action measures for Roma, particularly regarding their ability to reach the most marginalised segments of the population. To determine whether affirmative action has the capacity to reach the most disadvantaged Roma, one needs to delve deeper into socio-economic disparities and compare the degree of involvement in economic activities of Romani students' parents with those of the broader Romani population in Bulgaria, which could provide insight into the backgrounds of Roma most affected by high unemployment rates. Such a

2 Commission for Protection against Discrimination is a Bulgarian national independent specialised quasi-judicial body for the prevention of discrimination, protection against discrimination, and implementation of a state policy of equal opportunities and equal treatment of all citizens in the Republic of Bulgaria. It was established during the EU accession period and serves as an equality body which promotes equal treatment by providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination, conducting independent surveys, publishing independent reports, and making recommendations on matters relating to discrimination. It was first established by the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC).

comparison indicates that the former demonstrate higher levels of economic engagement. Furthermore, gender disparities in economic participation are more pronounced within the general Romani population than among the parents of Romani students. The contrast is particularly striking in terms of gender and parental status: 66 per cent of mothers of Romani students are employed, compared to just 20 per cent of Romani women in the same age group more broadly. Similarly, 63 per cent of fathers of Romani students are economically active, while only 27 per cent of Romani men overall participate in the labour force (Garaz 2014). These figures reveal a notable socio-economic differentiation within the Romani community – particularly in relation to families engaged with higher education – which raises important questions about who is actually being reached by educational and employment-related policies.

In regard to the ratio of Romani students' parents with at least a secondary education against the ratio of the general Romani population, the findings again indicate a significant disparity: Romani university students' parents exhibit considerably higher levels of formal education compared to the general Romani population in Bulgaria, with 64 per cent of Romani students' parents having completed lower secondary education (Key Stage 4 in the United Kingdom), contrasting with 10 per cent of their counterparts (Pantea 2015, 896–914).

REF data confirms the mainstream perception that affirmative action often benefits solely the more economically privileged within disadvantaged communities (*Ibid.*). Despite this, the data also reveals that supported Romani students encounter significant socio-economic barriers compared to both mainstream students and the general population which, in turn, highlights the need for targeted support in facilitating their access to and retention in higher education, as they continue to struggle with factors such as lower parental economic activity and education levels.

Affirmative action has a great potential to cultivate a critical mass from within a disadvantaged group, particularly among those who possess greater economic, social, and cultural capital which, in turn, puts them in a better position to leverage the initiatives they have been a part of and advocate for their community's causes. These individuals can serve as critical agents of change (Garaz 2014, 295–311) within their communities, advocating for their rights and challenging negative stereotypes through their professional trajectories, as they become valuable social capital for their less fortunate peers and as a gateway to addressing systemic barriers to inclusion.

6. Free Does Not Always Mean Affordable or Accessible

Educational stratification and disparities in professional achievement are pronounced and reflected within Bulgarian schools, mirroring broader societal inequalities, the harsh reality of which is that social mobility remains out of reach for many, evidence of the role of the education system in entrenching privilege and meritocracy's failure to address structural inequalities (Institute of Market Economics 2016). Economic hurdles are just one aspect of a multi-dimensional spectrum of issues impeding the inclusion of underprivileged groups in post-secondary schooling. Therefore, efforts must go beyond easing monetary hardships and centre also on inspiring and advising those at risk. To connect universities with secondary institutions, attended predominantly by marginalised pupils, an initiative might need to present practical

approaches, such as establishing transitional schemes, engaging in community involvement initiatives, or organising summer programmes.

In the last decade, admissions to most state universities in Bulgaria have gone against all market and academic logic. The idea and privilege of being a student and belonging to an academic community has undergone a transformation. As of 2023, out of 415,472 vacant places, there were 200,871 places taken by university students in Bulgaria (Rumenova 2023). This means that 52 per cent of student places remain vacant, despite drastically lowered enrolment criteria for most degrees. This inevitably leads to a significant decrease in the quality of education: poorly developed skills and little knowledge of future professions.[3] Students also share the defeatist acceptance by teachers that graduates will choose to move abroad for professional employment.[4] This leads to a stated lack of desire on the part of teachers to train quality experts and undermines the motivation of students who have consciously selected their future professions.

Additionally, very often Roma graduating from university are portrayed as an exception, which leads to false internalisations among prospective Romani students that "University is not valued by Roma, and I cannot afford it because I am Roma." Educational attainment among Romani individuals aged 21–25 exceeds that of the broader Romani population, indicating modest intergenerational educational progress. Within this younger cohort, 5.4 per cent have attained a higher education qualification – defined as either a two-year or four-year post-secondary degree – while 35 per cent have completed upper secondary education. In comparison, only 2.6 per cent of the overall Romani population possess a higher education degree, and 23 per cent have completed secondary education (Angelova et al. 2020). These disparities suggest a positive, though limited, trend toward increased educational participation among younger Roma. Nevertheless, the attainment levels remain markedly lower than national averages, underscoring enduring structural barriers to equitable access and completion in both secondary and tertiary education.

Tuition fees are only one small aspect of access to higher education. The root of accessibility to higher education, however, is buried in primary, and subsequently, in secondary schools. Children from poorer families, who often happen to be children from Romani families, attend schools that are partially or completely segregated (city segregated schools or rural segregated schools). Segregated schools often push kids from grade to grade with huge educational gaps that pile up each year. The results from external assessments or state matriculation exams are notably low (for example, about 10 points in Bulgarian language and Mathematics, when the threshold is 29 points). In the last few years, poor grades in matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature have risen steadily. The results of the matriculation exams, on the one hand, verify the receipt of a secondary education diploma and, on the other hand, act as entry to various tertiary schools. There is a steep trend in a lack of basic knowledge and skills in secondary school graduates and university entrants. This trend is also found among university graduates. The student who achieved the best result at the matriculation exams in the summer of 2023, publicly acknowledged that from fifth grade to twelfth grade she had attended private lessons (Kostova

3 In the 2023 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, only two out of 52 Bulgarian higher education institutions managed to secure a spot: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking.

4 TSA's experience under the project "Mentoring Support for Students of Romani Origin Studying Health Specialties".

2023). We can conclude that the educational system requires more from students than it provides – this gap is expected to be covered by students and their families.

The low results in matriculation exams also determine the trajectory in higher education. Is it because students will apply for a better-quality university, as well as greater competition for places, or universities recruiting students with tempting offers? If a student wishes to pursue medicine, they must take private lessons in biology and chemistry from the ninth grade.[5] Usually, only youngsters from medical families or high-income earners can afford this investment. Financial independence creates conditions for students to focus fully on their studies.[6] However, targeted remedial classes funded under specific programmes can enhance preparation for national exams (especially in remote or marginalised settlements), while bettering students' performance relative to their local schools can identify potential candidates initially overlooked by national assessments. Students from poor families who receive targeted support for vocational education and training (despite the gaps they had in the secondary education stage) graduate with high marks and enter their first-choice university.[7]

7. Cultivating Aspirations beyond Stereotypes

Policies in education often are subordinated to the labour market and business, which is not necessarily wrong. However, market engagement and entrepreneurship should be the effect, and not the goal, of education systems. According to Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director of Education and Skills, "potential talent is being wasted because children as young as seven already assume their gender, ethnicity or social background restricts their job or life choices – including stereotypes about science and engineering careers being better suited to men". Primary pupils need "light bulb moments" about their future from the time they start school – otherwise their horizons risk being limited to what their parents or carers do, what their teachers advise, or what they see on TV, films, or social media. By the age of seven, children are already facing limits on their future aspirations in work, according to a report from the OECD (Schleicher et al. 2019).

Primary pupils need access to inspiring role models from a full range of industries, professions, and sectors, if society and economy are to harness the full potential of the next generation – and here we will repeat the philosophy of the American children's rights activist Marion Wright Edelman that, "You can't be what you can't see" (Education and Employers 2019). In recent years, role models and success

5 In the last year, TSA resumed preparatory courses for applying to medical universities for more than 20 Romani youth and high school students wishing to join the competition for admission to the specialties of medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry. Without this intensive and high-quality training provided by Professor Turnev's team, some of these young people would only dream of the medical professions, let alone be able to enter medical universities.

6 Observed within TSA's "Scholarship Support for Romani Students Enrolled in Medical Studies". All scholarship students successfully complete the academic year and continue to a higher course. Rather, it is an exception for someone not to finish the academic year or to repeat the year.

7 This is shown by the results of the "Terni Zor: Comprehensive Support for Young Roma for Access to University" project, which the Trust for Social Achievement (TSA) Foundation has been supporting for over a decade.

stories are seen as a spark that can ignite the potential of any young Romani person. The key question is how this tool for learning and inspiration is used to utilise aspirations for higher education among Romani youth. Very often, in these sugar-coated, abbreviated stories, the difficulties, unknowns, and failures of the initial start-up are absent. Therefore, these narratives often feel unreal and detached from the everyday realities of young people – especially when they dare to follow the same path and discover that many of the hardships and setbacks have been conveniently left out. This perpetuates the illusion of a seamless path to success, reinforcing meritocratic notions and overlooking the systemic barriers faced by marginalised communities. Bringing success stories and role models to real life – telling them realistically – contextualises young people's aspirations and dreams. On this path, mentoring (and tutoring) can help unlock the potential of young people who come from smaller settlements or poor families. Once enrolled, these students might receive mentoring support, vital for students transitioning from different educational backgrounds, especially those for whom university was not considered previously. This helps promote their adaptation, their academic achievements, and even contributes to building a sense of belonging to a new community and environment.[8]

The uncertainty of what comes next after young people graduate from university is no less important. The most critical aspect of this measure is the elimination of semester tuition fees without a clear strategic vision for training future professionals to address the shortage of key specialists in small towns. Comprehensive financial and academic support could be laid on for future teachers, doctors, and other key professionals – for instance, with the provision that they return to work in their localities. Outside the big cities, there is an acute shortage of health professionals and teachers (Employment Agency 2024). A large proportion of teachers are of pre-retirement age. Many health professionals leave the country after graduation because of a lack of employment opportunities. Geographical areas with an acute shortage of teachers and health professionals would be among the most welcoming professional and personal places for young people if they could find the right conditions for social and professional life there. If there is predictability and certainty, prosperity will come slowly but surely. For this purpose, young people need a credible narrative about why they should stay, a scenario in which they feel supported, understood, and can constantly learn and contribute.[9]

After university graduation, a glass ceiling often limits the opportunities of even highly-qualified Romani professionals to occupy semi-professional roles and becoming a mediator (health, labour, educational, and so on) are sometimes the only options for them. Roma are underrepresented in STEM fields (Garaz and Torotcoi 2017). Furthermore, in many *de facto* segregated schools – with a high share of Romani student and in Romani neighbourhoods – there are no employed teachers of Romani origin. But there are Roma among non-teaching service staff. In one of his public statements the anthropologist and researcher Haralan Aleksandrov states (DW 2013) the following: "I know talented and capable Romani youth who were enrolled in integration programmes at prestigious English-language universities,

8 Reported and observed in TSA's initiative "Romani Opportunities for Leadership, Education, and Success" and the "Young Romani Teachers" initiative.

9 "Young Romani Teachers" is an initiative of the TSA, which is focused precisely on this aspect of education and the realisation of young people.

such as the American University in Blagoevgrad. None of the participants in these programmes not only did not return to their communities, but many did not even remain in Bulgaria." These kinds of utopian expectations exist mainly for Romani higher education graduates in Bulgaria – to return to their communities and bring/make the change, to take power into their own hands. This type of expectation is verbalised publicly mainly toward Romani youth. This extra expectation becomes a further future barrier and impacts the self-prospects of Romani students with aspirations in higher education.

Although some graduates in big cities manage to find high paying jobs without having higher education, the added value of university studies comes from the social environment/networks and the connections students make. Undoubtedly, there is a visible, marked correlation among income from contacts, degrees, contacts, and social and life skills that students gain during their studies. Admission to university is a transformative journey that not only provides numerous opportunities to acquire social and cultural capital but also unlocks new pathways to personal and professional growth.

Conclusions

The challenges faced by Romani children in accessing quality education in Bulgaria are multifaceted, encompassing a plethora of factors such as discrimination, institutional bias, and poverty. Despite continuous efforts to improve educational outcomes, the persistent obstacles Romani students face, such as inadequate living conditions, limited access to resources, and linguistic inequality, continue to hinder their educational attainment.

In order for policymakers to tackle these complex issues and structural barriers, as well as create an environment for Romani children to thrive academically, comprehensive and multisectoral national reforms, including the implementation of inclusive policies, community involvement initiatives, and efforts to combat prejudices and stereotypes, are needed.

Overall support for university studies can be differentiated according to students' socio-economic status and academic achievements, but also according to their personal experience as part of a particular minority, subject to discrimination and exclusion. Furthermore, addressing the educational disparities faced by Romani students requires the implementation of tailored support systems, encompassing various measures and instruments such as financial assistance programmes, mentorship, academic tutoring, and cultural sensitivity training for educators.

Not least, the active involvement of Romani communities in the design and implementation of educational policies is also crucial. Empowering Romani stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes ensures that policies are better informed and more responsive to the unique needs of Romani students, whilst this collaborative approach simultaneously fosters a sense of ownership and agency within Romani communities, leading to more sustainable and impactful interventions.

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Old Blouses, Old Houses: Hauntings of Romani Slavery in the Production of Romanian Nationalism

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Abstract

International organizations often hide under a veil of multiculturalism and inclusivity to enable neoliberal and nationalistic governmentalities in postsocialist Eastern Europe. In the context of UNESCO's admittance of Romania's hand-embroidered blouse on its Intangible Cultural Heritage list, I symptomatically read a project coordinated by Eugen Vaida, an influential architect famed for restoring heritage sites in Romania. Vaida's project engages in a selective erasure of Romani women's oppression by validating their subaltern's experience only through their saving of nationalistic elements of the dominant culture. Further, I make conscious the unconscious intentions behind Vaida's project and behind the ideology of international standards. Through this critique, I address the often-marginalized Eastern European spaces in academia and foreground the history of Romani people's oppression in Europe.

Keywords

- Heritage
- *Ia cu altiță*
- Ideology
- Nationalism
- Postsocialist Romania
- Romani slavery
- UNESCO

Introduction

While perhaps not as immediately recognizable as Ukrainian borscht or French baguettes, but certainly just as symbolic of national pride, the Romanian *ia cu altiță* took its place of honour on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in December 2022. *Ia cu altiță,* a hand-embroidered blouse, has been worn by Romanians for centuries and is a quintessential part of their folkloric traditions and customs. While the motifs of this blouse vary across Romania's regions, villages, and even families, the distinctive features they share have helped stitch together a common sense of identity, one that is highly specific to Romania's historical experiments with nationalism. Recently, this nationalism has been driven by the desire for belonging in a post-Cold War neoliberal order – and particularly for the prestige and economic growth that such belonging supposedly entails. With the advent of democracy and globalism, the country's elites became enticed by the profitability that progressive ideologies such as "inclusivity" and "diversity" might bring. The blouse's addition on UNESCO's Heritage list is part and parcel of Romania's larger turn towards Western modernity, which includes the push to turn the blouse into a leading symbol of a traditional and mythical, yet modern, Romanian identity – an identity that also happens to be tailored to the preferences of multilateral institutions and international investors.

A year before the blouse's inclusion on UNESCO's list, Eugen Vaida – a renowned Romanian architect known for his restoration of medieval cities and Transylvanian houses – inaugurated his research project "*Salvând Cultura Celuilalt*" or "Saving the Other's Culture." While the official purpose of the project is to show the beauty and originality of these blouses as a symbol of Romanian-ness, Vaida also claims it is an effort to highlight the way they are a piece of "shared heritage" between white, or *gadjo,* Romanian, and Romani communities. Ultimately, the team concluded that Romani women "saved" this blouse out of reverence for its aesthetics.

By including the often marginalized and discriminated Romani community in his project, Vaida's efforts appear to be in concordance with the progressive, liberal characteristics that are promoted by the Romanian government in its attempts to Westernize the country through alignment to international standards and principles. Behind this project's thin veil of multiculturality, Vaida and his team have neatly buried centuries of oppression and injustice as well as the material and intangible exploitation of the Romani community in Romania. Such a project is also consistent with an expression of Romania's neoliberal turn, which involves transforming the ongoing oppression of Roma into an exchangeable commodity that is being traded for profit and prestige to gain currency within the multilateral order enacted by international organizations. Neoliberalism allows for conditions of racialized oppression to be subordinated anew to the logic of the market – a market that depends on the ongoing refinement of categories of difference for the perpetual accumulation of wealth and power.[1]

1 While I contextualize neoliberalism in the geopolitical landscape of postsocialist Eastern Europe and analyze how it acts through various systems of power in Romania (some more overt and some more covert than others), it is not in the purview of this article to undertake a deeper analysis or historiography of neoliberalism. For more on neoliberalism, and neoliberalism's entanglement with anti-Roma racism, see Harvey (2005), Picker (2017), and Singh and Trehan (2009).

What are Vaida and his team not saying by perpetuating the vague and elusive language of UNESCO? How are they doing exactly that which they condemn – discriminating against and excluding Roma – by building their team with only white Romanian academics and professionals? This essay examines the ideology behind a nationalistic infatuation with the superiority of Romanian identity, whereby Vaida and his team overlook how Romani women were part of a group of people who had been enslaved for almost five centuries on the former principates which make up present-day Romania (Achim 1998; Petcuț 2016; Furtună 2019). This essay will show what Vaida fails to show – the non-vision that constitutes the vision of his project. As Althusser (2001) notes in his writings on the ideological nature of myopia, the failure to see something that exists in plain sight is always constitutive of the act of seeing. Therefore, it is not what Vaida and his team's project does not see, it is what it does see; "it is not what it lacks, on the contrary, it is *what it does not miss*. The oversight, then, is not to see what one sees, the oversight no longer concerns the object, but *the sight* itself. The oversight is an oversight that concerns *vision*: non-vision is therefore inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision" (21).

Roma have been continuously ostracized by Romania's majority white community as Romania became a nation-state in the early twentieth century. They never were provided any reparations for their enslavement, especially as institutionalized power structures erased memories of those times by excluding Romani history from any national, public, or official historical narratives. Therefore, Vaida's project is *symptomatic* of the way in which Romanian society is structured upon the building of a national myth grounded in the exclusion and marginalization of the Romani Other – a national myth that also aspires towards Western ideals of modernity and progress through the pursuit of relations with international entities that help dress up its oppressive endeavours into the synthetic clothes of inclusivity and diversity.[2]

While this essay engages in a close reading of a particular object, namely the "Saving the Other's Culture" monograph-catalogue, it argues that this close reading is contingent upon a symptomatic analysis of the project to examine its underlying conditions of possibility. The essay will emphasize how the project is one of many examples that are framed by nationalist yearnings that necessitate to be examined through a symptomatic reading. Ultimately, this article will show how the same neoliberal governmentality Vaida perpetuates with his work is born out of socio-economic contexts in which Romania, with its collapsed government after 1989, came under the control of American imperialism and Western capitalist policies in which international organizations imposed regulations and norms for establishing and sustaining their hegemony in the region.

This article employs a symptomatic reading approach to uncover the ideological work performed by "Saving the Other's Culture." Symptomatic reading allows us to interrogate not only the explicit claims of Vaida's work but also the silences, omissions, and ideological underpinnings that sustain its narrative. Drawing from the tradition of Marxist critique and Althusserian theory, this method reveals

2 While this article focuses on the exclusion and instrumentalization of Roma in the formation of Romanian national identity, it is worth noting that the national myth also marginalizes other ethnic minorities such as Hungarians, Motts, and Saxons. A full analysis of these dynamics exceeds the scope of this article but remains crucial for understanding the layered nature of Romanian nationalist discourse. For more on these dynamics, see Verdery (1991), Todorova (2006), Imre (2016), and Boia (2017).

how the project's seemingly progressive multiculturalism operates within a neoliberal framework that instrumentalizes Romani identity while erasing the histories of oppression that structure contemporary racialized hierarchies. My intervention situates itself at the intersection of anthropology, critical theory, and cultural studies, engaging with scholarship that examines the entanglements of nationalism, neoliberal governance, and race. Theoretically, I extend the insights of postcolonial and postsocialist critique by demonstrating that the racialization of Romani communities is not an incidental by-product of Romanian nationalism but a necessary and constitutive element of its historical development. While Eastern Europe is often treated as peripheral in conversations about race and empire, I argue that Romania's national mythmaking operates through processes akin to settler-colonial racial formations, albeit through a distinct set of historical conditions. By bringing together symptomatic reading, ideology critique, and transnational approaches to race, this article contributes to a broader theoretical project that challenges a Eurocentric framing of race and nationalism, foregrounding Eastern Europe as a critical site for understanding global structures of racialization.

1. The Building of a National Myth

Postcolonial critique and nationalism studies show that ethnicity-based nationalism can be an ever-present force behind the shaping of a country's historical narrative. Partha Chatterjee (1960) addresses the complicated ways that legacies of colonialism affect the building of new nation-states: on the one hand, emerging nation-states must define themselves against their previous colonial dominator by surpassing its own standards, while, on the other hand, they must also keep true to certain traditional ways as markers of their identity, which are also paradoxically rejected because of their supposed backwardness. This contradiction between two types of nationalisms, one modernity-aspiring and one ancestrally rooted (Plamenatz 1960), is a colonization-like phenomenon essential to understanding the way Romania has used the Romani Other in the building of its national identity.

Although not a postcolonial state *per se*, Romania also built its national myth through pre-existing notions of ethnicity, race, language, identity, and its aspirations to Western standards of modernity. For example, the unification of Romania's territories – Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia – is in keeping with the many European independence and nationalist movements of 1848. The abolition of Romani slavery in Wallachia began with partial emancipation laws in 1843 and was fully realized by 1855, while in Moldavia, complete abolition was finalized in 1856 (Achim 2004; Petcuț 2016). During the Second World War, Romanian nationalism was expressed through fascism. Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu, arguably Hitler's closest ally after Mussolini, provided 585,000 troops to the Nazi war efforts and became Germany's main supplier of petroleum and wheat (Kaplan 2016; Chiriac 2018). During Nicolae Ceaușescu's socialist regime, nationalism took on the face of industrialization. It is also worth mentioning that many socialist Eastern European states, including Romania, built their nations through "a process of homogenization to which unruly nationalities posed potential obstacles" (Barany 2001, 422). Roma are an example of such "threats" and became the Other against which national identity was formed as early as the incipient building of the Romanian nation-state in the late 1840s (Barany 2001). After Ceaușescu's fall in 1989, nationalism put on the ideological clothes of Western modernity, neoliberalism, inclusivity, and multiculturalism. This nationalism marks the current predicament in which Romania's aspiration

towards the West and its lean towards ideologies of multiculturalism – like current efforts to cultivate support from multilateral institutions and international investors – is supported by the manipulation of ideas and symbols representing *das Volk* (Plamenatz 1960), an imagined community based on common ethnicity or race, religion, and ancestral ties to the land.

Ia cu altiță is an example of a *Volk* symbol throughout Romanian history. Now, the blouse is visible in Romanian public spaces, appearing on national sports teams' uniforms, celebrities' outfits, and supermarket ads. Museums have exhibitions dedicated to the blouse and universities offer courses on how to embroider it. Politicians publicly wear it, as was done by George Simion, the leader of Romania's neofascist party, Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor (AUR). Simion held his wedding publicly with over 4,000 blouse-wearing guests in attendance. Many likened it to the wedding of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, a leader of Romania's 1930s fascist party, for which the bride and groom also invited thousands of Romanians and wore blouses as their ceremonial garments (along with swastikas on their head garb) (Șerban 2022).

On UNESCO's website, the entry about this blouse is tagged within the categories of "gender equality," "women workers," and "social inclusion," among others (UNESCO 2022b). It seems UNESCO's take on the *ia cu altiță* fits with the ethos of diversity and inclusivity that sits at the core of the organization's seemingly well-intended practices, but what does UNESCO not say when it chooses to take this position?[3] How is it ignoring the historical and political implications behind this nationalistic symbol, and why?

International organizations have had a significant presence in Romania ever since the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989, assuring the propagation of Western influence in the formation of a neoliberal, democratic government. One example is Romania's first independent television station, *Societatea pentru Organizarea unei Televiziuni Independente* (SOTI), which was financed by the Washington-based International Media Fund, and by a CIA and Department of State-funded "NGO," the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) (U.S. Department of State n.d.).[4] Western propaganda continued to grow as Romania tried to gain membership in organizations such as the EU and NATO. By now Romanians are used to international corporations putting local farmers out of work, for example, to build the largest NATO and US military complexes in Europe on their land. In this context, Romanian state agencies, but also newly founded NGOs, have been receiving finances for development projects from international sponsors. Recent studies and investigations have shown how problematic Romania's management of such funds has been, pointing to corruption not only in the way the money was allocated and used on the ground (such as cash being spent on purchases of premium vehicles or bribing of political appointees) and also pointing to lacklustre procedural compliance by the international sponsors themselves when it came to keeping agencies accountable for dedicating the funds to the designated projects (Prisacariu and Ozone 2018; Rettman 2019). As was discovered in May 2023, approximately twenty million euros were money laundered by Romanian public authorities, exemplifying how the fraud that came packaged with democracy continues to be seen (L 2023).

3 I am not seeking to engage in a thorough exploration of UNESCO's history and heritage politics in this article. For more information on the complex nature of its activities, see Hafstein and Skrydstrup (2020).

4 For more on the problematics of the NED see, Søndergaard (2022).

Pertinently, scholars have also brought attention to the way these international organizations perpetuate not just neoliberal corruption through their implementation of these projects but also the oppression and marginalization of Roma throughout Europe. Romani scholar Magda Matache (2017) shows the way the policies put forth by the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies are, at best, merely performative since Roma continue to maintain a "racialized and exotic 'other' status" in society. Moreover, Enikó Vincze (2019) writes about the way international policies depoliticize the poverty of Roma in precarious situations through their neoliberal nature. This research brings to the fore the question of race and ethnicity, and the way they are weaponized in the Romanian context, together with the way they have shaped Eastern European identity and wider international politics.

Dimensions of race and ethnicity change from moment to moment, but they are categories of difference that are entangled in the making of a superior sense of nationhood for dominant groups at the expense of the subaltern's oppression. Race and ethnicity often are used in complementing and intersecting ways, and to better understand the role of these slippery terms, it is necessary to examine the scholarship that has (or has not) addressed them. Eastern Europe has time and again been seen as ambivalent, considered part of Europe, and at the same time its periphery (Baker 2018). The concepts of race and whiteness have been excluded from critical histories and scholarship about Eastern Europe since such conversations most often are framed as pertaining to those parts of the world that have had direct contact with, or have been affected by, colonialism and imperialism (Spivak 1988). Despite that, recent scholarship is showing that an internal orientalist and colonial process has been taking place in Eastern Europe wherein an unspoken racism has not only permeated aspects of identity politics and nationalism but has sustained them as founding pillars of these phenomena (Gilroy 1991; Todorova 2006; Shared and Verdery 2009). Anikó Imre (2016) writes that the concept of race is obscured from view by the concept of ethnicity, which is often synonymous with nationality because of its association with culture, language, and religion as indicators of identity.[5]

> [Race] has a hidden trajectory in Eastern Europe because the region's nations see themselves outside of colonial processes and thus exempt from the post-decolonization struggles with racial mixing and prejudice. As a result, Eastern Europe may be the only, or the last, region on Earth where whiteness is seen as morally transparent, its alleged innocence preserved by a claim of exception to the history of imperialism (Imre 2016,110).

Because history does not take place on parallel tracks but rather resembles a spaghetti junction, the *global* and systemic structure of race (Mills and McCoy 2015) has silently affected the Eastern European region under the guise of ethnicity, as is also analysed by postsocialist feminist scholarship, one of the few perspectives that has criticized the non-existence of whiteness and race as a prevailing concept in the region (Baker 2018). This scholarship emphasizes transnational connections that establish Eastern Europe as a global "contact zone" to illuminate its ties to the historiography of race and racism (Pratt 2008). To begin looking at how Roma have been racialized, feminist scholar Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) describes the way this phenomenon takes place even in other parts of Europe such as in France and Italy, where mass

5 For more, see Fatima El Tayeb's (2011) work, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe.*

expulsions of Roma happened in 2008 and 2010 despite their purported citizenship status and associated rights to move freely across European borders. El-Tayeb writes that, in fact, despite these citizenship or long-term residency statuses, foreigners – Others – are only guaranteed their right to live in Europe based on the "majority's goodwill" (El-Tayeb 2011, xvii). Angela Kóczé's research also highlights how racialization processes position Romani communities within hierarchical classifications, rendering them as "other" or sub-human. These processes are reinforced through both discursive practices and structural mechanisms, leading to systemic marginalization. Kóczé emphasizes that such racial oppression is deeply embedded in societal structures, affecting Romani people's everyday lives (Kóczé 2020).

Clearly these processes are at play in Romania and are visible in the continuous racialization of Roma in the building of Romanian national identity. Margareta Matache (2016) further theorizes whiteness as a concept in Europe by introducing the term *gadjo*-ness, which emphasizes "a Euro-specific form of whiteness that grants social, economic, cultural and institutional privileges and entitlements to non-Roma, or more precisely, to dominant majority groups." To echo Ioanida Costache's (2019) allusion to Sylvia Wynter, this racialized ethno-nationalist ideology is based upon the marking of the Romani figure as an "internal Orient" against which Romanian-ness is built.

2. A Symptomatic Reading of Saving the Other's Culture

This section turns to the project "Saving the Other's Culture," and how it is symptomatic of larger phenomena that are imbricated in the perpetuation of oppression and corruption in Romania. This project's vision – both what it sees and what it fails to see – is best understood in the context of Eugen Vaida's activity as an architect through which he is known as an avid defender of Romanian culture and identity. He has been restoring and preserving historically significant buildings throughout Romania that have been in danger of collapsing or being destroyed. Some of his accomplishments include restoring remote Transylvanian Saxon villages, churches built in the twelfth century, medieval city gates in highly visited areas of the country, and even UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Vaida's rendition of patriotic zeal in his work plays along with the state-backed building of Romania's national myth by upholding notions of ethnicity, race, and Western progress, while at the same time maintaining a distinctiveness of the original Romanian *Volk*. I argue that, in fact, *Volk*-based nationalism is at the core of "Saving the Other's Culture."

Supporting Vaida for his project were ethnologists, professors, sociologists, and three renowned ethnographic museums. Their focus was to record the way the Romanian *ia cu altiță* had survived through the ages in villages along the Hârtibaciu River Valley. The project culminated in a monograph-style catalogue, in which the team published five essays, along with a photography collection of the blouses they saw in villages on their research journey. This research is presented as a scientific effort backed by official institutions of knowledge production. In this way, Vaida used the *institution* of science and the power of its systemic influence to enact his ideology.

A symptomatic reading of "Saving the Other's Culture" encourages the understanding of knowledge as a process of production, a process of which the causes and effects are rarely acknowledged or discussed by those who enact it (Marx 1857). A symptomatic reading makes the unconscious conscious through problematizing the way acknowledgment of ideological influence in the act of reading further informs and shapes this act. A symptomatic reader asks, what is a text saying by choosing to say what it does (and what it does not)?

The "Saving the Other's Culture" monograph-catalogue starts with an introduction by Vaida in which he reminisces about his childhood in the same villages where the team conducts the study. Following this piece is a geographic description of the Hârtibaciu River Valley by ethnologist Elena Găvan, which includes a brief mention of the "multiethnic population made up of Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, and Roma" (Găvan 2021, 18). The next essay is co-authored by two museum directors and includes a historical reconstruction of the *ia*'s "survival" in the region. This survival was predicated on the importance placed by the Romanian state in ensuring the "construction of Romanian identity, of which a big part was the promotion of the popular peasant costume by the elites of Transylvania and the region" (Fulga and Crețu 2021, 20). Without analysing the overwhelming nationalistic context of these historical facts, the authors move on to emphasize that these identity-constructing efforts were solidified by state-sponsored programs in which young women in these villages were "educated and re-taught" sewing and embroidering techniques, after which state- and church-sponsored educational institutions in the area opened exhibits displaying their work in urban centres (*Ibid.*). (This is similar to a contemporary NGO, Semne Cusute, in which Ioana Corduneanu, one of the contributors to Vaida's project, organizes educational programs and workshops for women to learn how to produce the hand embroidered blouse) (Semne Cusute n.d.). Continuing their essay, the two museum directors hastily move past problematic examples of how women were exploited by the state apparatus in the reproduction of the Romanian nation and instead emphasize how Eugen Vaida's collection of blouses in his own private museum is reminiscent of early elite-sponsored exhibits from the early twentieth century (Fulga and Crețu 2021, 31).

The next 165 pages of the book are mostly concerned with a photo-catalogue of these blouses. Only in the last third of the book do the authors start mentioning the Romani community, with an essay written by ethnologist Doina Ișfănoni (2021). She starts out by painting the Roma romantically, as a nomadic people, who would only stop and work in villages for three weeks at a time while camping in tents and caravans at the edges of the community, without giving any sources for her historicizing. She claims that Romani women were particularly interested in old, unused clothing and would have rather been paid in these items than money in exchange for their labour. Ișfănoni writes that there were periods throughout time in which people stopped wearing the blouses because they went out of fashion, but because of Romani women's interest in the blouse, it was saved from oblivion. In the online launch of the project, Ișfănoni expresses awe at how "well" Roma had taken care of this piece of white Romanian culture when they very often are "known for throwing out their clothes" (Asociația Monumentum 2021). She then claims that Romani families paid amounts such as a horse, other livestock, precious metals, and hard physical labour to obtain these blouses from white Romanian peasants who had handcrafted them. Even though Ișfănoni emphasizes the way Roma have been "safekeeping" this blouse for centuries, she never mentions the history of Romani enslavement in Romania. She speaks for Romani women and tells the audience how this blouse represented more than just a fashionable object but also gave "dignity" to a Romani

"clan" by allowing them to associate with the majority white Romanian population (Işfănoni 2021, 55). A symptomatic reader now would inquire, what is Işfănoni not saying by choosing to highlight these findings from her team's research? What ideological function does this selective representation serve, and how does it align with broader nationalist and neoliberal narratives that instrumentalize the Romani past while erasing the material conditions of their historical oppression? By engaging in symptomatic reading, this article uncovers the implicit logic that undergirds Işfănoni's framing – one that privileges a sanitized vision of Romani cultural participation while occluding the coercive structures that shaped their engagement with Romania's heritage. This approach allows us to interrogate not only the omissions in Işfănoni's text but also the deeper ideological mechanisms that make such omissions appear natural or even necessary in the construction of Romania's national identity.

3. The Hauntings of Romani Slavery

This unconscious, guilty reading of the research that the team has chosen to produce as knowledge is best juxtaposed to the material, historical conditions of Romani people in Romania – conditions that "do not belong" in official state narratives of Romania's history.

Roma were enslaved for almost half of a millennium from 1385 until abolition in 1865 (Achim 1998). One way to better understand the conditions of this slavery that paralleled the nature of transatlantic slavery is to consult abolitionist Mihail Kogălniceanu's accounts of the conditions of slaves:

> Even on the streets of Iasi, in my youth I saw human beings wearing chains at their hands or feet, and even some of them wearing iron horns clenched on their forehead and connected by columns around their neck. Beatings, cruel condemnations to hunger and fumigation, placed in private prisons, thrown naked in the snow or in the frozen rivers, that is the fate of the Gypsyes! (Kogălniceanu 1891, quoted in Furtună 37, 2019).

After abolition, continuing exclusionary policies targeted Roma and ensured they were not assimilated into the peasantry. Roma were forced to settle in segregated communities outside cities, had few options but to continue working for former masters, were denied schooling, and were generally rejected from public life. The current marginalization of Roma, with many communities living in extreme poverty at the borders of towns in ghettos without running water or electricity, or some, without walls or a roof above their heads, can be seen as having started after slavery's abolition in the late 1800s (Barany 2001).

Marginalization and oppression of Roma continued with eugenics policies during the 1930s and '40s when Romanian scientists and politicians conducted academic exchanges in Germany where they were influenced by Nazi eugenicists. One such example is that of Iordache Făcăoaru, an anthropologist who studied in Munich in 1931 and who researched the supposed racial inferiority of Roma and the perceived threat they posed to Romanian racial purity. Upon his return to the country, he joined the rising Legionary Movement (a religious, militaristic movement that demanded the creation of an "ethnocratic state" in which pure Romanian-ness was based upon ideas of kinship, racial purity, and Orthodoxy) (Crainic 1997).

By the late 1930s, Roma started being targeted by various state policies. For example, during the Holocaust, around 25,000 Roma were deported to Transnistria where they were either immediately executed or subjected to forced labour, extreme cold, hunger, and contagious diseases (Turda and Furtună 2021).[6] Later, during Romania's socialist regime led by Ceaușescu, Roma had no political representation in the Communist Party, continuing a long history of underrepresentation in the country's political processes (Barany 2001). This erasure of Romani presence was reflected in the state policy of the socialist regime which strongly pushed towards the "integration" and "assimilation" of Roma and other minority groups into the cultural and social standards of white Romanians. Racism and hate towards Roma only worsened after Ceaușescu was ousted from power, as exemplified by a pattern of violence, with lynching, murder, and group-led arson in many regions of the country. Ironically, seventeen days before Romania was admitted into the Council of Europe in October 1993, a group of white Romanians:

> (…) attacked four Gypsies. While fleeing, one of the Gypsies fatally wounded an attacker with a knife. The Gypsies took refuge in a house across the road. The pursuers, who by then numbered most of the non-Gypsy population of about 750 ethnic Romanians and Hungarians, sprayed the house with gasoline and set it aflame. Three Gypsies were lynched as they tried to flee; the fourth managed to escape. Thirteen Gypsy homes were burned to the ground; four more were wrecked and ransacked. Most of the Gypsy population of about 130 fled (Kamm 1993).

The trials following these crimes only ended in 2012, with most of the perpetrators left unpunished, despite the involvement of international organizations (such as the UN and Human Rights Watch). Moreover, a strongly nationalistic discourse that continues to be diffused in the cultural, political and economic space of the country is only strengthened by the lack of accurate historical accounting of the material reality in which people live.

Despite its ostensible embrace of multicultural belonging and tolerance, these trends are nonetheless highly visible in the "Saving the Other's Culture" project. Romani women looked after the hand-embroidered blouse – which could symbolize their integration and belonging to white Romanian culture. In fact, while the historical experience of Roma is not uniform, and the experience of passing varies a lot among different Romani communities, scholars argue this is still the case, with many Roma denying their background to assimilate (Matache 2021a). In Vaida's project, Romani identity is rendered valuable to the extent that it helps consolidate a falsely inclusive, national, Romanian identity that presents itself as embracing of difference. The narrative of "Saving the Other's Culture" fails to acknowledge that Romani people assimilate under conditions of domination and not for a benevolent desire to protect the cultural heritage of greater Romanian society. By omitting the violent and oppressive conditions that coerced Romani people to interact with the hand-embroidered blouse in the first place, Vaida and his team only contribute to justifying that violence and oppression.

Through my symptomatic reading of "Saving the Other's Culture," I examine the silences that pollute the study's findings. Through this process, I notice that the focus on this blouse as a national symbol

6 For a survivor's account of the deportation, see Kelso and Cioabă (2009).

strengthens the neoliberal system that sustains entities like UNESCO but also the historic oppression of the lower class and, particularly, a Romani lower class. The injustice rings true especially in the contemporary living situations and conditions of Roma. According to the 2022 Romanian census, Roma represent the largest minority group in the country, making Romani home to Europe's largest Romani population. The 2022 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports about Roma in Romania are staggering: 70 percent of Roma live with no running water, sewerage, or electricity, and lynchings, police brutality, and everyday acts of racism and discrimination abound in the Romanian space beyond what these statistics depict.

These present circumstances have roots in the repressed past of slavery, which has become the unspoken trauma of contemporary Romanian society. By pervasively hiding behind discourses of conviviality, Vaida and others who entertain such nationalistic projects engage in the perpetuation of this trauma and only deepen the chasms between Roma and white Romanians in contemporary society. Ultimately, Vaida's project and state-led efforts to work with international organizations, which purport to spread "human rights, freedom, and democracy," engage in what Asli Iğsız (2018) calls the museumization of culture.

4. Heritage Politics

The museumization of culture is a process in which "official policies appropriate the notion of cultural heritage and transform it into a liberal mode of culturalism informed by humanist discourses that reduce visibility to recognition" (Iğsız 2018, 175). This process, accompanied by the lack of historical and political context, manages to overlook subversive power imbalances, socio-economic disparity, and systemic violence and oppression. Postsocialist policies developed in Romania after 1989 carry the shadow of this phenomenon for which UNESCO, the EU or other multinationals are responsible. From Timişoara and Sibiu being awarded the title "European Capital of Culture," to Vaida's project and UNESCO's recognition of the blouse, these efforts exemplify the museumization of culture in Romania.

A symptomatic reader might now ask: how is this phenomenon produced by international organizations such as UNESCO? Iğsız argues that such organizations turn "alterity into human capital for display," through the marketing of "diversity, coexistence, and tolerance" (Iğsız 2018, 191). These sorts of neoliberal motivations are evident from the very first appearances of the United Nations, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), or the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Romania, which happened simultaneously with the arrival of multinational corporations. Among some of the first companies operating in the country after the fall of Ceauşescu's regime were Japan Tobacco International (JTI), International Business Machines (IBM), Monsanto, and Pfizer; since then, the list has only continued to grow (USAID 1996). "Aid" organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or USAID partner with corporations who use these relationships to influence public policy and break into new economic markets in places such as Romania (Kennard and Provost 2016). For an example of how these corporations are also directly in relationship to the process by which "culture" is made available for profiteering, one can look at how JTI is a major sponsor for two of the most important cultural events in Romania: the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF) and the Sibiu International Theater Festival (FITS) (TIFF n.d.; JTI n.d.). Today, instead of overtly pushing neoliberalism to the forefront of their

agendas, multinational corporations obscure these sorts of intentions with language that claims "culture" to be a field ripe for capitalist exploitation.

These efforts, as present in postsocialist Romania, and symptomatically in Vaida's project, instrumentalize alterity into a ready-to-consume material by detaching the Other from the historical oppression to which they have been subjected, essentially vacuum-sealing them from the political context as to objectify them for "a neoliberal window display" (Iğsız 2018, 196). While UNESCO and Vaida claim to be bringing to the fore the Romani community, they recklessly ignore that "recognition cannot be reduced to visibility, and commodification and popularity rarely point toward social justice" (Iğsız 2018, 196).

Figure 1. "Elisabeta Căldărar."
Source: Salvând Cultura Celuilalt. 2021. Edited by Eugen Vaida, Ioana Corduneanu, Mirela Crețu, Ligia Fulga, Elena Găvan, Doina Ișfănoni, and Sebastian Paic.

To further think about what "Saving the Other's Culture" is not saying by choosing to say what it does, the audience can engage visually with the monograph-catalogue that was published as the culmination of the project. Visually, the book further emphasizes the separation of Roma and white Romanians with the images it has selected for display. For example, the blouse is portrayed as being worn by white Romanian models, or even faceless, plastic mannequins as opposed to being held in front of the bodies – but not on them – by the Romani women who were interviewed (Figures 1 and 2). In line with the eugenicist tradition that marked Romania's progress through modernity, from the murders of the Holocaust to the neo-fascist movement of the late 2010's, "Saving the Other's Culture" seems to be avoiding a soiling of the purity of the Romanian blouse by keeping it as separate from Romani women's bodies as possible. The othering of Roma is so extreme in this case, even a faceless mannequin was deemed a better choice for wearing and displaying the blouse than the Romani research participants they interviewed and credited with "saving" the blouse as the ultimate signifier of Romanian culture and nation. First, all images in the catalogue are photographs of women. Not once do any of the authors address this fact, and not once is the

Figure 2. "Costum de nevastă cu păstură cu conci."
Source: Salvând Cultura Celuilalt. 2021. Edited by Eugen Vaida, Ioana Corduneanu, Mirela Cretu, Ligia Fulga, Elena Găvan, Doina Ișfănoni, and Sebastian Paic.

question asked: what does naming the Romani woman as a saviour of white Romanian identity say about how women are used as vessels of reproducing national identity and the nation itself? What does it say about the legacy of Romani enslavement? This is a continuation of the othering of Romani women, and another brick in the wall of nationalist myth building. The following questions are therefore indispensable and must be analysed through a feminist lens: how has the state crafted an image of the woman as the maker of the Romanian nation through time, especially when considering that only women are the creators of the hand-embroidered blouse – a symbol of traditional roots and ethno-racial purity? How is gender weaponized in the making of modern, white Romanian identity? Second, the gender- and race-based segregation of Romani women reaches its climax when their alterity is deemed less worthy of wearing the blouse than an inanimate object such as the mannequins that appear in most of the catalogue. Furthermore, the Romani women who participated in this study are not only instrumentalized but also silenced, as the reader does not gain any insight into how they might have perceived their role in the preservation of the blouse. Did they present themselves as saviours of this tradition? Vaida's study leaves these questions unanswered. The project's portrayal and representation of Romani women reinforces the class, gender, and race separation between Roma and white Romanians instead of exemplifying conviviality or gender equality as the project claims to do in the name of UNESCO's international values and standards.

Conclusion

The neoliberal governmentality Vaida perpetuates is born out of socio-economic contexts in which Romania, with its collapsed government after 1989, came under the control of American imperialism and Western capitalist policies in which international organizations imposed regulations and norms for establishing and sustaining their hegemony in the region. "Saving the Other's Culture" is a project rooted in a UNESCO-perpetuated ideology that engages in a selective destruction of historical, political, and socio-economic backgrounds. As is typical of a neoliberal order, which commodifies French baguettes, Ukrainian borscht, and, lately, Romanian blouses, oppression is hidden under seemingly progressive values such as post-racist myths of diversity that relegate historic oppression to the void of history.

Romanian national identity has its roots in the systemic domination and exclusion of Romani people. Nationalism is dressed in the clothes of multiculturalism while getting political and economic support from international organizations. This phenomenon is dictated by the contemporary conjuncture of a neoliberal democracy that has spread its tentacles in Romania, a nation that emerged out of a deeply problematic past entangled with fascism and slavery. The Roma and their "deviant" lifestyle have never fit into the fabric of Romanian nationalism, and they have been used as the subaltern scapegoat against which to build an ideal, pure-blooded Romanian citizen ever since the making of the Romanian nation-state after the abolishment of slavery. By considering how white Romanian elites aspired to Europeanness and Western ideals early in the nineteenth century, while also perpetuating an ethno-racial nationalism with which to upholster Romanian identity in ideas of ancestral roots, blood, and country, this paper shows how these concepts heavily shape the status quo in which fascism and eugenics are continuing to wreak havoc while swiftly hidden under a veil of diversity and inclusivity that is promoted by neoliberal international organizations.

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Reclaiming Folk in Discourses about Music. Kotel Roma's Strategies against Antigypsyism

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Abstract

This article analyses how Romani residents of Kotel, a small Bulgarian town presented by its municipality as a "model of [..] Roma integration" (Kotelnews 2022) challenges essentialist narratives that are rooted in antigypsyism. In particular, I observe how some of my interlocutors reappropriate the Bulgarian adjectives "*chisto*" (clean/pure) and "*authentichno*" (authentic) – used in the communist past to describe what was constructed as "*narodna muzika*" (folk music) – to talk about their musical practices. I explore how they site themselves in relation to the established contemporary discourse of "integration" and to the society in which they live but are not always considered as totally belonging. Through the analysis of a corpus consisting of video excerpts and tape recordings collected during fieldwork, I argue that Kotel Roma claim their place in Bulgarian society as active contributors to the transmission and development of culture, not so much by reproducing the ideology of "purity" and "authenticity" but rather by using tools that a plurality of musical styles and genres can provide.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Bulgarian Roma
- Music
- Performance
- Reappropriation

Introduction: Antigypsyism – A Matter of Shared Beliefs

Antigypsyism,[1] Antitsiganism (Piasere 2015), or Romaphobia[2] (McGarry 2017) is a social phenomenon and an ideology (Kruszelnicka 2018) that has been extensively discussed and analysed by scholars, activists, and social workers, especially in terms of appropriate terminology. It is agreed that it is a "specific type of racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and those who are labelled as 'Gypsy'"[3] (Alliance against Antigypsyism 2016,[4] 3) based on essentialised narratives and misrepresentations. In his book *L'Antitsiganismo*, Piasere (2015), underscoring that socio-cultural beliefs are antecedents to antigypsyist attitudes, observed that "Antigypsyism fights against Gypsies but in order to fight against them, it must have previously invented them" (Piasere 2015, 11, author's own translation). Indeed, how is it possible to express prejudice and violence against someone without having identified them? It is primarily a matter of naming, defining, and identifying who is "Gypsy" and to whom.

For centuries Roma have been defined as the "quintessential other" (Silverman 2012) in both Western and Eastern Europe and in the Americas. Theories of their origin from India were developed by scholars, many of them non-Roma who joined the Gypsy Lore Society (1888), based on historical and linguistic analysis of their migration route and language. Their aim was to explain some missing points in Roma's history, but these theories "[…] have often been reduced from historical narrative to a source of stereotypes about India projected onto Roma" (Lemon 2000, 84). By locating their "homeland" far to the east and explaining their "peculiarities" as remnants of their Eastern origins, scholars have "orientalized" (Said 1978) Roma and created stereotypes that, perceived as positives or negatives, have influenced relations between Roma and non-Roma. Indeed, the assumption that Roma are thieves, unwilling to work, dependent on welfare, lack their own culture, and so on fuels and justifies *Tsiganofobia* (Piasere 2015), while *Tsiganofilia* (Piasere 2015) is based on the assumption that Roma are free nomadic spirits, sensual dancers, and excellent musicians. Both these attitudes result from the entailment of a series of processes such as generalisation, essentialisation, and categorisation (Canut et al. 2019) in which Roma are not considered as individual subjects but rather as a homogeneous whole where every difference is erased (Gal and Irvine 2019). How do Roma themselves respond to stereotypification? In this article, I will attempt to answer this question by exploring how discourses on musicality and music genres, if voiced by Roma themselves – though reproducing essentialist stereotypes created by non-Roma – can also deconstruct these same representations by means of

1 For further references, see Knudsen 2005; Wippermann 2005; Nicolae 2006; Piasere 2010; 2011; 2015.

2 The author defines it as follows: "Romaphobia is a system of structural inequalities and prejudicial attitudes and signifies a historical process created and recreated through practices (McGarry 2017, 93).

3 In this article I will use the term Roma as chosen by the representatives of the IRU (International Romani Union). However, I will switch to the term "*Tsigani*" ("Gypsy") instead of Roma when reporting on other people's speech. Indeed, in Bulgaria the word "*Tsigani*" is used in everyday discourse by Bulgarian non-Roma mostly with negative or neutral connotations. However, the term "*Tsigani*" can also be used by Bulgarian Roma to identify themselves and to express personal claims, such as above, in the title's quotation. For instance, Katerina, a Romani woman from Kotel, told me "Well, I am a Gypsy, it is not a problem for me to say that I am a Gypsy" (field notes, May 2022). It could be argued that in this way she not only re-signified (Butler 2006) the term but also manifested her pride rather than shame.

4 Available at https://antigypsyism.eu.

reappropriation and resignification. This entails "transcend[ing] historically constructed stereotypes about Roma and attend[ing] closely to the self-representations of Roma themselves" (Fremlova 2022, 2). I will draw on the discourses of Romani residents of Kotel, a small town in the eastern Stara Planina (Balkan Mountains) in Bulgaria, which is promoted by its municipality as "a successful model for partnership and an example of Roma integration into society" (Kotelnews 2022).

1. Summary

First, I will briefly describe the phenomenon of the construction of social *personae* (Bakhtin 1981) of the *Tsiganin* (Bulgarian[5] for "Gypsy") in post-1989 Bulgaria. Second, I will analyse how this phenomenon manifests itself in Kotel, a town where different groups seem to coexist harmoniously. In particular, I will observe how the *Kotlenski Tsigani* ("Gypsies from Kotel") – in their daily interactions and also on stage during the "Festival of the Ethnicities, Colours, and Kotel Carpet"[6] – re-employ the label of *Muzikanti* (musicians) to perform their self-presentation in front of non-Roma, including myself. This is done by reproducing a contrast with 'other' Roma to whom negative stereotypes are attached and then self-identifying with the positive ones of *dobri* (good) and *kulturni* (educated). I will argue that, despite the fact that Kotel Roma are also portrayed as such by their non-Romani neighbours, prejudices still subtly affect their relationships and daily interactions. My point is to observe how some Roma in Kotel enact a "performance [that] depend on metadiscourse about them" (Lemon 2000, 93) and to explore whether they are able to construct counter-narratives. Drawing on previous research on Roma's self-presentation (Tremlett 2012; Silverman 2012; 2020; Fremlova 2022) and wishing to provide new insights on this process, based on fieldwork data and analysis, I will argue that some of my interlocutors – reappropriating (Silverman 2012) the adjectives "*chisto*" (pure/clean) and *"autentichno*" (authentic) to describe their language,[7] music, and form of *bit*[8] (being) – challenge an essentialist narrative on Bulgarian folk which is rooted in communist policies and ideologies about "*narodna muzika*" (folk music). Indeed, Romani musicians – creating a new artistic material by combining different musical styles (Bulgarian, Roma, and Turkish music, contemporary jazz and pop) and still labelling it "*narodna muzika*" – are claiming recognition by underlying their role in the preservation, circulation, and transformation of this genre. In this endeavour, I attempt to foresee an opportunity for Roma to produce their own self-representation by re-appropriating meta-discourses on art and culture previously produced by non-Roma.

5 Almost all the terms in italics are in Bulgarian, their English translation given in parentheses. When the term in italic is not Bulgarian, its origin and translation are indicated.

6 The festival has been going since the summer of 2016. However, for its first two occasions – the second organised in cooperation with an NGOs from Sofia where I volunteered as part of an EVS (European Voluntary Service) project – its name was simply "Festival of Kotel Carpet", and its objective was to show tourists and visitors the richness and variety of Kotel handmade carpets. It was only in 2018, when the organisation was again handed over to the local municipality, that the word "ethnicities" and a new scope, that of creating a "bridge" between them, were added.

7 In Kotel the majority of my interlocutors referred to their linguistic practices as "*Tsiganski*" ("Gypsy"). However, when engaged in conversation in institutional settings, some of them shifted to the term "*Romski*" ("Romani").

8 For uses of the term, see also Lemon (2000).

2. Methodology

This article is based on selected interviews (six of a total of thirty) made during several fieldwork sessions. The aim is to observe the sociolinguistic processes – a definition is given in the footnotes – through which Romani residents of Kotel perform their self-representation. This includes their interactions with strangers, such as with me, as well as their performances at concerts and festivals. Additionally, it seeks to identify the strategies that Kotel Roma employ in response to antigypsyist attitudes that, despite the town's reputation as a "model" (Kotelnews 2022), still affect relations among residents. To this end, I employ a critical (Heller 2002) and political (Canut et al. 2019) sociolinguistic approach. This means considering how words relate to the context of the interaction and to the broader social context where it takes place, the interlocutors' positions and the influence of discourses and categorisations that, being socially shared, are "already there" (Canut et al. 2016, author's own translation).

3. The Construction of 'Tsigani'. Historical Background and Contemporary Narratives

To gain insight into the construction of the social *personae* (Bakhtin 1981) of the so-called *"Tsigani"* ("Gypsies") in Bulgaria, it is necessary to provide a brief historical overview. From 1948 to 1989 Bulgaria was under communist rule. During this period, the state authorities implemented special measures for the assimilation of the so-called "minorities" (Stoyanova 2017). These measures encompassed the recognition of each *natsia* (nation) and *natsionalnost* (nationalities/ethnicities) but eventually progressed to their assimilation. Indeed, during the initial period of the communist regime (1948–1956), state authorities recognised that the languages, traditions, and folklore of Armenians, Jews, Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims who retained the Bulgarian language), Roma, and Turks needed to be preserved, and children were therefore instructed in their native language (Marushiakova and Popov 2017). However, in the second period of the regime (1956–1989), these groups were compelled to become an "indistinguishable part of the Bulgarian population" (Zhivko, cited in Marushiakova and Popov 2004), and any difference was erased: It was forbidden to speak a so-called "mother tongue" in institutions and in public, Muslim names were changed to Bulgarian, the wearing of *shalvari* (loose pyjama-like trousers worn by Bulgarian Muslims, Muslim Roma, and Turks) was banned and "nomadic" people were forced to settle (Stoyanova 2017). Roma were a particular target of this policy. They were led to settle in the rapidly industrialising urban centres or in rural areas where they worked in agricultural cooperatives and were encouraged to become active contributors to the construction of a supposedly 'equal' society. Some educated Roma, such as Gospodin Kolev and Shakir Pashov, active members of the Communist Party and advocates for the "enlightenment of the Gypsy tribe" (Pashov 1957, 5), defended this ideology. Additionally, during this period, true "ideological work" (Gal and Irvine 2019) was carried out in the field of culture. Specific institutions, both political and academic,[9] had the role of "direct[ing] and control[ling] musical creativity,

9 Some of the most important ones were the KK *(Komitet za Kultura)*, the TDNT (Tsentralen Dom na Narodno Tvorchestvo) – affiliated to the BKP *(Bŭlgarska Komunichestva Partiya)* – the Institutes of Musicology and Folklore and the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Studies within the IEFSEM *(Institut za etnologiya i folkloristica)* – both affiliated to BAN, the Bulgarian Academy of Science *(Bŭlgarska Akademya na Naukite)*.

performance, education and research" (Buchanan 2006, 160) at the state level, while the *chitalishta* (public reading centres) directed cultural life in every town and village. The goal of the Communist Party was to reinterpret traditions as "one of the instruments of the state [...] organised, embellished and purified village forms and practices were returned to the people as a symbol of national pride" (Rice 1994, 28). This would help create "a future style of Bulgarian musical and dance folklore […] in a new type of stage presentation for the audience" (Krŭstev 1986, cited in Buchanan 2006, 142). This reconstructed reality implied a radical contradiction to what was presented on stage as "*authentichno*" and "*chisto*" and was rather the result of a threefold process of "westernisation, standardisation and rationalisation" (Peicheva 2008, 96) of village dances and tunes. Indeed, "village music of the Slavs was reaffirmed as authentic folk music, to the exclusion of urban music and the music of minorities" (Silverman 2021, 28). It was exactly at this period that schools for the teaching of "Bulgarian music and folklore" were opened. The oldest and most renowned ones were in Shiroka Lŭka in the Rodhope Mountains and in Kotel in the Stara Planina or Balkan Mountains.

Following the collapse of socialism and the transition from a state-run economy to free market in 1989, social differences and inequalities reappeared or, more accurately, became more visible. The privatisation of state-owned factories and agricultural cooperatives resulted in the unemployment of numerous low-skilled workers, predominantly Roma. These workers were compelled to seek alternative sources of income through the informal economy, social benefits, and migration to Western Europe and the Americas. According to my interlocutors, from the *gastarbeiteri* (guest workers) it was mainly Roma who returned to Bulgaria after a few months to build new houses for their relatives, while most non-Romani Bulgarians never came back. This phenomenon is interpreted by many non-Roma as a sign of *tsiganizatsiya* ("Gypsification"), a xenophobic term used to warn against a perceived "invasion" and "degradation" of Bulgaria by the so-called "*Tsigani*"[10] in all areas of social life – including music. This narrative is fed by a sense of threat that is rooted in Romaphobia (McGarry 2017) and instrumentalised by far-right parties, such as *Ataka* (Attack) who fuel their rhetoric of hatred and racism with slogans such as "*Ne iskam da zhiveiya vav tsiganska derzhava*" (I don't want to live in a country of Gypsies). This discourse reflects the phenomenon of "ethnicisation – or racialization – of poverty" (Canut 2016; Van Baar 2017), a process by which social phenomena, such as poverty and marginalisation, are explained through the lens of a supposed "race" or "ethnicity". Indeed in Bulgaria – a country that, according to recent ERRC reports, is violating human rights by not providing equal access to health system and demolishing "illegal" houses in so-called "Gypsy neighbourhoods[11] – some persons, no matter if they are Roma or not, are labelled as "*Tsigani*" because of a set of characteristics that are considered as signs[12] of 'Gypsiness': they appear as *cherni* (dark) – in contrast to the majority as *byali* (white) – as

10 In this regard, McGarry (2017) noticed that "Gypsy" term has changed in meaning, it is still pejorative and oppressive but nowadays carries with it "a sense of threat" (*Ibid*., 101).

11 See https://www.errc.org/news/bulgarian-helsinki-committee-condemns-illegal-mass-demolition-of-romani-homes-as-a-blatant-violation-of-basic-human-rights).

12 Here the socio-linguistic phenomenon of enregisterment (Agha 2004; 2005; 2007) is at work. It consists of "a social regularity of recognition whereby linguistic (and accompanying nonlinguistic) signs come to be recognised as indexing pragmatic features of interpersonal role (persona) and relationship" (Agha 2005, 57).

well as *mrazni* (dirty), *loshi* (bad), and *ne gramotni* (illiterate) because they allegedly speak Bulgarian on a very basic level with a peculiar accent and they listen to and play *chalga.*[13]

4. Constructing Kotel as a 'Model Town' through Discursive Practices.

Antigypsyism however is not expressed openly everywhere in Bulgaria. In the small town of Kotel the coexistence among various "ethnic groups" such as Bulgarians, Karakachans, Roma, and Turks,[14] seems to be peaceful and harmonious. The main reason for this, according to some residents, is that Roma in Kotel are *po dobre* (better): they are educated, their children attend school, they do not steal, they are Christians believers (mostly evangelical), and they work with other groups in the municipal offices, in social centres for children, and at NUFI (National School for Folkloric Art). To gain further insight into how Kotel Roma are described by their non-Romani neighbours, I will rely on fieldwork interviews.[15] One of my interlocutors, Valeria,[16] who lives near the *dolna mahala* (lower neighbourhood) or *Muzikanskata mahala* (musicians' neighbourhood) spoke to me as follows:

1. VAL <((softer voice))> in kotel (.)gypsies are respected (.)gypsies are totally different from the other (.)villages
2. CAM yes (.) they are FAMOUS
3. VAL YES (.) because they are musicians (.) and they dress: like bulgarians (.) they are already included in our society
4. CAM (.) has it ALWAYS been like this\
5. VAL yES(.) i have been here forty-five years (.) i was married in kotel (.) i live here yes and when i arrived (.) i am from merava
6. CAM yes i remember
7. VAL yes <((softer voice))> there the gypsies are (.)<((softer voice))> dirty:: bad <((laugh))> they steal (.) and here (.) totally different (.) still when i came here (.) these years (.) before forty-five years

13 The word *chalga* comes from Ottoman Turkish where its original meaning was simply instrumental music (Peicheva 1999; Buchanan 2006; Seeman 2012; Silverman 2012). After 1989, its meaning shifted since in Bulgaria *chalga* is associated with a negative connotation to Roma music. Technically, *chalga* could be defined as "a pan-Balkan fusion of Romani, folk, and popular music (Silverman 2012, 19). For more detailed information regarding the debate surrounding *chalga,* see Peicheva 1999; Levy 2002; Rice 2002; Silverman 2012.

14 The Turks living in Kotel and in the surrounding villages are mainly *kazalbashi* (Turkish k*izilbaiş,* redhead), as they are called by non-members of the community. They are considered unorthodox Muslim because their celebrations are not held in mosques, music is performed, and there is no separation among men and women. Since the word *kazalbashi* could be regarded as offensive, the terms *Alevi, Aliani* (worshippers of Ali), or heterodox Muslims are preferred in scholarly discourse.

15 All the selected interviews (six of a sample of thirty) were conducted in Bulgarian. The transcriptions follow the ICOR system (https://icar.cnrs.fr/ecole_thematique/tranal_i/documents/Mosaic/ICAR_Conventions_ICOR.pdf).

16 In order to respect their privacy, all names of persons and places have been anonymised.

(.) here they lived with the gypsies (.)here isn't it (.) they are musicians (.) they seem more like this (.) they are included in the society (.) they dress well yes <((laughs))>

(Valeria, Kotel, summer 2022, author's own translation from Bulgarian)

Valeria argued that Kotel Roma "are respected" (line 1) because they are" totally different" (line 1) from other villages or towns. This is because they master the profession of "musicians" (line 3 and 7), they "dress: like Bulgarians" (line 3), and "they are already included in the Bulgarian society (line 3). Note the use of the deictic "here" (line 5) as opposed to "there" (line 7) to mark the difference with Roma living in Gradets, her hometown, who, according to her, are "dirty", "bad", and "steal" (line 7). In Valeria's speech various processes of categorisation (Canut et al. 2019) and differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) can be remarked. First, she lumped together Kotel Roma under the "professions" (Marushiakova and Popov 2014) of *Muzikanti,* despite the fact that some are not working as such. Then she enregistered[17] (Agha 2005; 2007) Kotel Roma. This means, she assigned them a given 'social type' because of recognisable signs that are supposed to be vital to it: "They are better because they are musicians, and they dress well" (line 3), for dress code and profession are visible signs of *kulturnost* (being cultivated). Conversely, she recorded Roma from Gradets by attributing them supposedly "quintessential" Roma qualities of "dirtiness" and "badness" and the negative attribute of "stealing". In doing so, she reiterated the cultured/ not cultured contrast between the two groups in a process of "fractal recursivity"[18] (Gal and Irvine 2019). Indeed, in common discourse non-Romani Bulgarians often differentiate themselves from Roma on the basis of a level of *kulturnost* (being cultured) that Roma are supposed to lack: this entails having a job, being educated at school, being properly dressed, and speaking Bulgarian properly, without mistakes or accent (for a similar dynamic but in a different context, see Telep 2019). In her speech, Valeria reproduced this contrast but changed the pole of comparisons: Kotel Roma are the "cultured" ones, in opposition to Roma from Straldzha. The result is that, although Valeria's aim was to present Kotel Roma in a positive light and the city as an example of *razbirateltsvo* (understanding),[19] she tacitly alluded to some assumptions and prejudices – both negative and positive – about so-called "*Tsigani*".

As mentioned above, Kotel is renowned for its affiliation with NUFI Filip Kutev. Founded during the communist period, the school currently maintains a significant presence on the national stage, with its performances frequently broadcast on BNT (Bulgarian National Television). The school is attended mainly by non-Romani students, but during my fieldwork I was able to observe that in recent years

17 By "enregistered", I refer to the application of "enregisterment", the sociolinguistic process identified by Agha (2005), see footnote 12 for a compete definition.

18 As illustrated by Gal and Irvine (2019), "fractal recursivity" consists of reproducing the contrast between two poles of a given dichotomy by situating it on different scale level, that is reproducing it on one side of the axis of differentiation by individuating new poles but leaving the contrast unaltered.

19 For an ethnographic account of a similar situation in Eastern Slovakia, see Ort 2022.

some Romani students enrolled and also some Roma were employed *as korepetitori.*[20] This might have led the director to present a false picture: The school as an example of *razbirateltsvo* (understanding). Nevertheless, from the point of view of Katya, a former vocal instructor, a clear separation remains:

1. KAT oh the gypsies NO
2. CAM ah (.) why
3. KAT only: humm
4. CAM listening
5. KAT yes (.) listening
6. CAM why according to you\
7. KAT because they are: (0.2) they are (.) they are(0.4) aah (.) yes (.) they don't want to study
8. CAM aah:: ((embarrassed)) why\
9. KAT (0.4) other (.) oother: (.) oother:: humm… (.) nature (.) other nature
10. CAM and what nature (.) of what [kind]\
11. KAT [nature](0.2)humm… how to say it (.) they are lazy
12. CAM why\
13. KAT (0.2)humm (.)bulgarians yes (.) bulgarians yes they are the first but (0.2) after the bulgarians (.) karakachani
14. CAM and also the [gypsies]\
15. KAT nOoo…the gypsies NO/
16. CAM why\
17. KAT oh i don't (0.2)i don't like them

(Katiya, Kotel, May 2022, author's own translation)

Katiya reproduced an established hierarchy – according to which those so-called 'ethnic' Bulgarians are at the top and Roma at the bottom by saying that "Bulgarians, yes, they are the first " (line 13). Then come Karakachans and Turks, dancers with a good sense of rhythm, and "the Gypsies NO" (line 1; 15) because, according to her, their nature is "other" (line 9), and they are "lazy" (line 11). This passage illustrates how Katya enacted an antigypsyist stance by interdiscursively echoing a discourse that validates stereotypes and prejudices about Roma, especially that of "laziness". Indeed, Katya's – through the process of 'othering' – not only differentiated her students on the basis of a supposed "nature" (line 9) but also justified the exclusion of the so-called "*Tsigani"* (line 1) from the students she valued because they are good also at studying written music and not only learning it by listening. This attitude still pervades in Kotel, despite the narrative of "integration". Indeed, when asked about the relationship between Roma and non-Roma in Kotel there, Sara, a former colleague who is Roma herself, revealed to me:

20 Répétiteur player. Musicians that play musical backing at dance performances.

1. CAM ((tell me)) about the life here in kotel (.) because i know that here everyone lives together and i think that they live well(.) what is your: experience (.) what is your: point of view\

2. SAR well ((to a colleague)) close please (.) well:: YES they live together (.)they work together but:: still bulgarians (.) they stay away a little from (.) roma (.) well:: with you they speak well:: this and that (.) but later:: they speak differently (.) do you understand \
3. CAM hum hum
4. SAR they have (0.4) ah (.) how to say it\ (.) they have respect towards (.) towards themselves (.)they have disregard (0.2) disregard for them
5. CAM h (0.2) disregard i don't know what it is
6. SAR disregard is (0.2) hey (.) this gypsy <((grimace of disdain))>
7. CAM hm <((nodding))> but not everyone
8. SAR well to you they say not everyone but in any case, it is like this
9. CAM hum hum: ok
10. SAR, they eat (.) they drink with you they laugh (.)they sit they drink coffee they speak (.) but still they have something in their minds

(Sara, Kotel, May 2022, author's own translation)

After some hesitation, Sara explained that, despite the fact that in Kotel people live and work together, "still the Bulgarians stay a little away from Roma" (line 2) because "they have disregard towards them" (line 4). When asked about the meaning of this term, Sara responded with an expression that is significant in itself: "Hey (.) this Gypsy" (line 6) accompanied by a grimace that conveys a sense of disdain.[21] Finally, in response to my attempt to specify that not everyone is like this, she simply stated that: "Well, to you they say not everyone, but it still is like this" (line 8). The "but" (line 10) explains a situation in which appearances are negated by the state of things: prejudices in Kotel become manifest in attitudes that, despite outward appearances, continue to keep Roma apart. Indeed, after a few months of fieldwork, remembering that racism can also be covert (McGarry 2017; Parsons Dick and Wirtz 2011), I observed that in Kotel antigypsyism is not only covert but also intra-visible, since it is only possible to detect it after spending an extended period there and building interpersonal relationship with both Romani and non-Romani residents. Indeed, after a few months, I noticed that, although the non-Romani residents outwardly conform to the official discourse of Roma "inclusion" in Bulgarian society, they do not interact with Roma in their private lives and still harbour prejudices

21 Notice here a two-level indexicality (Silverstein 2003) through which a visual (the expression on the face) and linguistic sign (the use of the term "Gypsy") are employed to describe a discriminatory attitude.

against them. This attitude is also evident in some of the graffiti on the public walls which, although partially erased, is still legible: "Kotel *na bŭlgarite*" (Kotel for Bulgarians) and "*smŭrt na Tsigan*ite" (Death to Gypsies).

5. Performing Romaniness/'Gypsiness'. Between 'Authenticity' and Creativity.

I will now examine how Kotel Roma respond to stereotypes by reappropriating but also challenging categories used by non-Romani Bulgarians. Indeed, many Kotel Roma with whom I spoke adopted the category of "*Muzikanti*" to describe themselves but, unlike non-Roma, also gave me historical reasons for this self-identification. Anthropological and sociological studies (Kenrick 1968; Kazalarska 2006) report that the first Roma arrived in Kotel at the end of the nineteenth century: They worked mainly as wool-spinners, filling a niche in the local traditional activity of carpet making, traders and musicians, as well as an economic niche. Indeed, it was precisely during this period that "a new type of urban Gypsy music appeared in Bulgarian lands, with a modern repertoire" (Marushiakova and Popov 2001, 66). Kotel Roma, mainly employed in urban ensembles and brass bands, left the profession of itinerant musicians and settled permanently in the region. Soon, the profession of *muzikanti* and some peculiarities in the music played – such as the '*staccato*' in clarinet solos, the "exact and correct performance" (Peicheva 1999, 90) when compared with the style of Romani musicians from other regions – became a mark of difference for Kotel Roma. This is what Kiro, the organiser of the stand *Tsigansko Katyn* ("Gypsy Camp") or *Romsko selo* ("Romani village") at the "Festival of Ethnicities, Colours and Kotel Carpets", explained to me:

1.1.1.1.KIR in kotel (.) in kotel a long :: time(.) ago(.) already huh humm(.) at the time of :: the second world war (.) when the russians passed through(.)here(.) huh hum :: hum (.) they had wind instruments (.) and somehow they were absorbed by our (.) huh (.) gypsies here (.) and they started to (.) to use (.) they started to know these instruments
2. CAM only wind \
3. KIR wind and moderns <((a woman sings))>
4. CAM and maybe percussion
5. KIR AH NO NO NO
6. CAM no\
7. KIR at the time there were none yet (.) there was *tapan*
8. CAM hum hum:: yes yes
9. KIR *baraban*
10. CAM yes yes *tapan (.) baraban*
11. KUR and that's it
12. CAM yes
13. KIR and since it started here(.) hum:: then music was introduced hum… (.) music in kotel (.) and this music already (.) hundred years /

ss-started to:: b-become a profession and a way of (.) of life
14. CAM and education[.] isn't it that there are roma in kotel [who deal with] music and what are the others: : traditional (.) occupations\
15. KIR YES YES YES (.) there are (.) different categories:: hum (.) of gypsies in kotel (.)i mean:: some deal with wood processing: because of *balkana*[22] (.) the mountain [.] and they collect :: wild berries(.) and (.) herbs with which they feed themselves
16. CAM and mushrooms \
17. KIR YES (.) most of the people (.) deal with (.) with business (.) with (.) commerce(.) also isn't it[.] businessmen(.) mostly(.) they are musicians(.) BUT(.) every hum (.) caste if we can say that(.) we {live:
18. CAM together\]
19. KIR yes

(Kiro, Kotel, July 2022, author's own translation)

Kiro told me that during the Second World War, when Russia's army arrived in Bulgaria, music "was introduced in Kotel" (line 13) and became a profession and a "way of life" (line 13). Indeed, it was at this historical conjuncture that the Bulgarian brass band acquired 'modern' (line 4) – here used as a synonym for western – wind instruments and integrated them with local percussion such as the *tŭpan*[23] (line 7) or *baraban*[24] (line 9). Then, prompted by my question about other "traditional occupations" (line 14), Kiro employed the term "category" (line 15) to distinguish between the *muzikanti* (musicians) – a professional niche mastered by Roma since the time of the Ottoman Empire – and the dŭrvari (wood cutters) who collect wood, herbs, and wild berries in the forest. The line of differentiation between these groups is marked by two radically different ways of making a living, one associated with physical work and the other with performance. However, this line does not prevent contact since "every caste (.) uh if we can say we live" (line 17) – on my suggestion – "together" (line 18). In this conversation, Kiro, as other interlocutors met during fieldwork, differentiated Kotel Roma from "other" Roma – contextually identified with Roma living in other neighbourhoods, villages, and towns – and referred to the profession as one of the criteria for marking the difference.

In winter 2021, while traveling on a minibus from Sliven to Kotel, two Romani men from Kotel and Gradets approached my partner and I began to talk about musical genres, expressing pride in the fact that numerous Romani residents of Kotel are professional *muzikanti* who, while listening and playing

22 Ottoman Turkish for "mountain".

23 Large double-headed drum that is played with mallets commonly used in the Middle East and the Balkans.

24 Another term used in Bulgarian for describing a drum set.

folk music (field notes, January 2022),[25] tend to preserve the "authentic" folklore of the region while the younger generations prefer *chalga,* a musical genre often associated with the so-called "*Tsigani"* and regarded as a "degradation" of Bulgarian music.

At this point, it is necessary to contextualise their argument by recalling that, during the communist period, another genre – called *svatbarska muzika*[26] – was banned from the radio, television and public concerts by state authorities because it did not meet the criteria of "*chista*" and "*authentichna*". However, as Silverman (2012; 2021) showed in detail, *svatbarska muzika,* though considered "kitsch" by intellectuals, soon achieved great success as a counterculture phenomenon: Ivo Papazov, from Kardzhali, leader of the famous *Trakya* orchestra, became known worldwide, while clarinettists Mladen Malakov and Orlin Pamukov, from Kotel, were nationally known stars of the genre. With the fall of communism, a new genre – called *chalga* – emerged and reflected the ideals of capitalism and consumerism – while being also largely associated with the mafia. In contrast, wedding music became ironically associated with "folk". Indeed, as Silverman (2021) observed: "…in the last fifteen years, there are indications that wedding music is making a significant comeback; it is attracting larger audiences in Bulgaria and is being marked as folk genre" (*Ibid.*, 106). The two men on the minibus, by reproducing the contrast between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Bulgarian music on different scales – in a process of "fractal recursivity" (Gal and Irvine 2019) – reappropriated the communist narrative of musical "purity" and "authenticity" in order to assert their difference from 'other' Roma. Similarly, Michi one of the performers at the *Tsigansko katyn* ("Gypsy camp") – the Roma stand at the festival – told me:

1. MIC in kotel the school has been set up (0.3) near (.)the gypsy neighbourhood so that the students learn (0.2) from (.) the gypsies folk music [.] this means from the SOURCE [.] because this is as if you learn *jazz* from the negros[cfr.] and not to learn it *jazz* to learn *jazz* for example where (.) somewhere where there is no tradition of *jazz*
2. CAM yes…yes (.) you learn DIRECTLY from
3. MIC directly from the SOURCE and kotel (.) is typical (.) MOSTLY they like bulgarian folk (.) they DON'T like GYPSY music that much they like (.) to play (0.2) bulgarian music (.) and this means that bulgarian music (0.2) is (.) preserved by the gypsies (.) if (.) tomorrow (.) you say (.) <((gesturing away with his hands))> all the gypsies <((gesturing away))> no[
4. CAM no music]
5. MIC there will be no music (.) folk music

(Michi, Sofia, December 2023, author's own translation)

25 Unfortunately, on this occasion I did not have the opportunity to record. I am thus relying on my field notes.

26 As Silverman (2007; 2021) illustrates, *svadbarska muzika* (wedding music) "is defined by a combination of instrumentation, repertoire, context and style" (Silverman 2007, 70) where Bulgarian rhythms such as *pravo horo* (2/4), *rachenitsa* (7/16, 2-2-3), and *lezno* (7/8, 3-2-2) are combined with Romani rhythms such as *kyuchek* and modern instruments such as clarinet, saxophone, and drums are used for jazz-style improvisations". For a definition of *kyucheck,* see note 31.

According to Michi, the NUFI school is near the *dolna mahala* "so that the students learn (0.2) from (.) the Gypsies (.) folk music" (line 1) which means "from the SOURCE" (line 1; 3). In a process of "fractal recursivity" (Irvine and Gal 2019), Michi reappropriated the term *izvor* (source), used in folklorists' discourses about *chista* and *authentichna muzika,* but employed it to describe the music played by Kotel Roma. Then he resignified (Butler 1997) the word "negros" (cfr.) to compare Black people's mastery of jazz with Roma's mastery of folk. Indeed, it has been observed that the situation of Roma in Europe is comparable to that of Blacks in the USA (see Lemon 2000; Lie 2021): Both are marginalised and racialized, but are celebrated for their musical abilities, via a paradoxical attitude from the majority. Moreover, according to Michi, Kotel Roma like and preserve folk music to such an extent that, if one day all Roma were expelled from Bulgaria, there would be no folk music left. Michi's argument, though historically wrong, is rhetorically convincing. Indeed, through the reappropriation of the essentialised narrative of 'naturally gifted musicians',[27] he is able to claim Roma's role in the transmission of so-called "Bulgarian folk" and challenge an antigypsyism narrative aiming at "purifying" it of Romani and Turkish influences.

At this point, it is necessary to ask ourselves to what extent claiming "purity" and "authenticity" is effective in countering antigypsyism since such a discourse also may reproduce the same ideologies on which this attitude is based. I will show that other strategies are developed by disinventing[28] musical "authenticity" to create something new and artistic that is still rooted in 'folk' music but also creatively reinvents it. This means, deconstructing the idea of a homogeneous and "pure" music by stating its "polylingualism" (Peicheva 1995) and recognising the role that minority groups had in the transmission and transformation of particular genres. Indeed, music like language is the result of a combination of heterogeneous practices and styles resulting from the encounter and exchange among people in different historical conjunctures. The following section illustrates two examples of these practices, drawing on interviews made during my last fieldwork (July 2023). One summer afternoon, I had an enlightening discussion with Carlo, a trumpet player, and Ivo, a piano and synthesizer player:

1. CAM isn't it (.) and this [referring to the music played on the background by other musicians] this how is it called as:(.)music style
2. IVO what do you mean (.)by STYLE \
3. CAM yes(.)isn't it folk but with MODERN instruments \
4. IVO it is still folk music
5. CAM hum: hum
6. IVO there there are no: this::
7. CAM folk music (.) classical music and (.) and folk music
8. IVO GENRE (.)jazz and folk (.)here it doesn't matter what the instruments are (.) it is still folk music (.)well one music is performed with *kaval gaida* and *gŭdulka*

27 We can see here a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1999).

28 I refer here to the approach taken by Makoni and Pennycock (2007) in their work on "disinventing and reconstructing languages". I argue that a similar approach can be applied to music, considered as a semiotic practice.

9. CAM yes (.) just because I (.) i spoke with someone and [.] someone told me (.) no no (.) in theory this is not folk music because it is not with :: instruments which are:: hum: *gaida:: kaval:*
10. IVO and what is it\ IT IS NOT TRUE NO
11. CAM YES/ there are different
12. CAR folk music is played with clarinet (.) with accordion with:
13. CAM YES YES
14. CAR hum (.) violins
15. CAM this is not:: from the instruments (.) this is simply hum
16. CAR yes (.) from the genre [.] and classical you can play (.) and everything
17. CAM hum hum
18. CAR the fact that (.) hum (.) it doesn't matter which instruments are used(.) it could be *gaida* and play classical (.) it could be hum (.) accordion and play again (.) *kyuchek* and other different genres of music (.)this is not::
19. CAM: mostly you experiment with something don't you \
20. CAR nothing (.) since it is an instrument you can use with every music style (.) do you understand\
21. CAM hum hum
22. CAR with the trumpet i can play classical (.) and i can play folk:::

(Carlo and Ivo, Kotel, July 2023, author's own translation)

From the outset of the conversation, I sought to direct the discussion towards the concept of "authenticity". After inquiring about their musical style, I was informed that it was *narodna,* which translates to "folk" and is associated with "traditional" music. I then attempted to adopt the perspective of numerous non-Romani Bulgarians who argue that "authentic" traditional music can only be performed with traditional instruments like the *gaida* (bagpipe), *kaval* (chromatic end-blown flute), *gŭdulka* (vertically held fiddle), and *tambura* (plucked lute). However, they suddenly challenged me by expressing the idea that it does not matter which instruments are used, but the genre is the focal point (line 16). They provided examples from their own lives and works where they combine various musical styles and genres and perform 'traditional' Bulgarian music with 'Western' instruments, including trumpet, clarinet, drums, and accordion. Their argument was that "since it is an instrument, you can use it with any music style" (line 20), even *narodna muzika* (lit. folk music). I then spoke with Jimmy, who also plays the synthesizer, and he told me:

1. CAM and as style (.) what style do you play \
2. JIM well (.) to tell you the truth (.)i am the only person who (.) created his own style (.) and almost half of those who are (.) piano players (0.5) play (.) my style
3. CAM and how is it (0.2) this style \
4. JIM a style that (.)they don't know it (.) style (.) immy style (.) jimmy style

5. CAM yes (.) but if you have to:: how can i understand how it is\
6. JIM in which sense (.) well there is (.) it's on YouTube (.)all the young ones (.) copy me (.) my style
7. CAM yes yes (.) but to say (.) is it something like this\ <((gesturing to the music in the background))>
8. JIM yes *rachenitsi:: hora:*: (.) EVERYTHING (.) *kyuchtesi*
9. CAM and this (.) simply (.) you mix (.) a little…
10. JIM yes i mix (.) this is called (0.2)balkan music
11. CAM yes (.) balkan means:: what does it mean\
12. JIM the balkans this is (.) greece:: hum
13. CAM serbia:: bulgaria::
14. JIM turkish we mix:: many things (.) many (.) styles (.) many nations in one place (.) and so you have (.) balkan music
15. CAM yes (.) very interesting that::
16. JIM yes

(Jimmy, Kotel, July 2023, author's own translation)

Jimmy not only said, like the other musicians, that he combined a variety of styles and genres, but also claimed that he is the only one that has created his own style (line 2). This is "Jimmy's style" and via YouTube (line 6) is accessible to everyone, especially the younger generations who emulate it. This music includes Bulgarian dance rhythms, such as *rŭchenitsa* (line 8) and other *hora* (dances), as well as *kyuchek*[29] (line 8) and Turkish elements (line 14). To describe it, Jimmy employed a term previously used by other musicians: "Balkan" (lines 10 and 14). He provided an explanation by naming some countries located in the Balkan peninsula and saying: "many things, many styles, many nations in one place, this is Balkan music" (line 14). This statement interdiscursively reproduced a multiculturalist discourse that is increasingly exploited in the contemporary musical scene and market (see Silverman 2015) and in politics: it is also overstated by Kotel municipality to promote the summer "Festival of Ethnicities, Colours and Kotel Carpets".

Conclusion

This article aimed to explore how Roma in Kotel challenge essentialist narratives produced by non-Roma, which are at the root of antigypsyism. The initial section highlighted that antigypsyism is a social process whereby discrimination is enacted and justified on the basis of sociolinguistic processes such as categorisation, stereotypification, and enregisterment[30] (Agha 2004; 2005; 2007; Telep 2019). To address

29 *Kyucheck* is a "rhythm characterised by a sequence in 2/4 and 9/8 (2-2-2-3)" and "a genre associated with Roma and Turks accompanied by solo dancing utilising torso isolations" (Silverman 2007, 7; see also Silverman 2012).

30 I refer here to the technical concept of Agha (2005). "Enregisterment" consists in a process by which linguistic or behavioural features become socially recognised, typified, and ideologically linked to a particular group, making them available for reproduction, evaluation, and stereotyping. For the definition given by the author, see footnote 12.

this, it is necessary to deconstruct the socially shared beliefs that underpin it. One of the strategies employed by Kotel Roma is to reappropriate (Silverman 2012) terms and expressions used by non-Romani Bulgarians to exclusively define "*narodna muzika*" as essentially Bulgarian and therefore non-Turkish and non-Roma. I illustrated that, in a process of "fractal recursivity" (Gal and Irvine 2019), Kotel Roma musicians use the terms of "*authentichno*" (authentic), "*chista*" (pure/clean) and "*izvor*" (source) to describe musical performances where they put together elements of jazz, pop, Turkish and Romani *kyuchek,* and Bulgarian rhythms. Employing reflexivity (Silverstein 1993; Lemon 2000; Canut et al. 2019) and engaging in meta-discourses on performance (Silverman 2012; Lemon, 2000), they are challenging the established narrative about the "authenticity" of Bulgarian music and claiming their ability to preserve but also reinterpret it by easily switching from one genre to another, including Western, Balkan, and Romani music. In so doing, they are able to produce their own self-representation, a fundamental step in challenging antigypsyism.

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Book review by

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The reviewed book follows in the footsteps of *Eugenics and Nation in Early Twentieth Century Hungary* (Palgrave 2014), translated into Romanian with the title *"Războiul sfânt" al rasei. Eugenia și protecția națiunii în Ungaria, 1900–1919* (Școala Ardeleană Publishing 2022), for which Marius Turdu received the Nicolae Bălcescu award from the Romanian Academy.[1] I remember the words of Sorin Antohi at the launch of the book in Bucharest: when will a book about eugenics in Romania come out? Here it is!

In previous works, Marius Turda demonstrated that eugenics and biopolitics were global phenomena, and that there were eugenic currents and programmes, whether American, German, or South American, which established scientific racism. This work, as the title indicates, deals with the specific Romanian case.Turda proposes a novel method for understanding and explaining the foundations of Romanian nationalism in the years 1880–1950. The argument advanced in the paper is that a eugenic and biopolitical culture also existed, which established scientific racism in Romania. The aim of this culture was to protect the Romanian race or nation.

The study of Romanian eugenics was prompted by Maria Bucur in her work *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, published in 2002. Turda's work is a valuable addition to the field, as it draws attention to the direct links between eugenics and biopolitical thought on the one hand, and the measures taken against Jews and Roma during the Holocaust in Romania on the other. Furthermore, it explores the re-invention of eugenics after 1947.

Today, the idea of creating a perfect human seems like a utopia to many of us. But at the beginning of the last century, it was not. A significant number of scientists and intellectuals believed it possible to improve the human race through social selection and the protection of biological capital. This belief fostered a robust dialogue between scientists and politicians, guided by a mutual need for support and recognition. And yet, as we look at the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) today, we might ask ourselves: what is AI if not our modern attempt to create the perfect human – complete with all the flaws and biases we once sought to eliminate?

I will review the book from the perspective of the relationship between history and memory. This history has so far been silenced. Eugenics, scientific racism, and Romanian biopolitics have been excluded from studies on Romanian nationalism and the Holocaust. The argument was that they had a very low impact and enjoyed little popularity at the time. Is that so? The novelty, variety, and overwhelming number of historical sources cited by Turda will shock the reader, emphasising its exact opposite!

Until now, "scientific" research and biopolitical and racist thinking produced by so many important Romanian anthropologists, demographers, doctors, ethnographers, journalists, jurists, priests, serologists, sociologists, and statisticians was swept under the rug of national history. Turda exposes this farce by showing how rooted in Romanian nationalism it was and, how this, in turn, was legitimised via the results of this research.

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1 A shorter version of this book review by Adrian-Nicolae Furtună was published in Romanian in *Sociologie Românească* 22 (2): 156–162. https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.22.2.9.

I will look at how the names of some of the most important eugenicists and strategists of Romanian racism were able to seep through the politics of memory filter, emerging "clean" and laundered onto the map of national memory today. To this end, I will highlight the research of several prominent scholars whose work is widely discussed by Turda. I will then link their names to current memorial practices.

In 1942, theology professor Liviu Stan published the seminal work *Race and Religion*. Turda confirms that "For Liviu Stan, professor at the Andreian Theological Academy in Sibiu, blood was not only the 'essential (biological) physical characteristic of the race', but it was the very 'carrier of the race'." He stated that blood was "the element that maintains it; the most important cause of the persistence of a breed" (Turda 2024, 93). In his 1941 article "Racism towards the Gypsies", Liviu Stan clearly expressed his views on the purity of the Romanian race, stating that "we must affirm the racist principles towards this heterogeneous, toxic, dissolving and destructive group as well" (Stan 1941, 1).

The way in which Liviu Stan's name is presented to the current generation is clear. On 20–21 September 2023, on the fifth anniversary of his death, the Patriarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church organised an extensive scientific symposium in his honour. It was entitled "Canonical Theology and Church Law in Orthodoxy: The Contribution of Father Professor Liviu Stan, Ph.D. (1910–1973)" (Dumitrașcu 2023). Numerous Orthodox press articles lauded the contribution of Professor Liviu Stan to theological studies and, by extension, to Romanian culture.

Turda definitively shows that the history of scientific racism in Romania cannot be discussed without acknowledging the pivotal role of Sabin Manuilă, director of the Central Institute of Statistics and a close friend of Ion Antonescu. During the Holocaust in Romania, his position and involvement in the "Roma problem" were very clear: the "… Gypsy problem is the most important, acute and serious problem of Romania. […] The Gypsy mixture in Romanian blood is the most dysgenic influence affecting our race" (Turda 2024, 220).

Sabin Manuilă's name is still prominent in Romanian society. In the village of Sâmbăteni in Arad County, where Sabin Manuilă was born, the school in the locality is named after him. An article in the *Glasul Aradului* newspaper, entitled "The History of the 'Sabin Manuilă' General School in Sâmbăteni" proves so: "One former student, of whom the school is particularly proud, is Sabin Manuilă (1894–1964). At the request of the director, Prof. Cornelia Foster, the school was renamed 'Sabin Manuilă' [Sâmbăteni general school] on 1 September 2008, to honour this great man. The article provides comprehensive details of S. Manuilă's scientific contributions as a doctor, statistician, demographer and eugenicist at both national and international levels (*Glasul Aradului* 2013).

Iuliu Moldovan was without doubt the most prominent of the Romanian eugenicists. He was Director of the Institute of Hygiene and Social Hygiene and author of the work *Biopolitics* (Biopolitica), in which he stated: "Natural and social selection through the external physical and social environment retains its overwhelming importance for the course of biological evolution. They will have to be helped, not in the sense of brutally suppressing the defective, but in the sense of eliminating them from procreation and giving maximum assistance to those with superior biological qualities" (Moldovan 1926, 18). Marius Turda provides a comprehensive overview of Moldovan's contributions to the development of Romanian

eugenics and biopolitical thought, highlighting the pivotal role he played in the adoption of biopolitics and eugenics as state policy. On 8 October 1943, Moldovan was appointed head of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Nation's Biological Capital, under the authority of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers led by Ion Antonescu.

The Institute of Public Health in Cluj-Napoca is currently named after Iuliu Moldovan.

Other examples include Gheorghe Marinescu, the founder of the Romanian school of neurology; Constantin I. Parhon, the founder of the Romanian school of endocrinology; and the hygienist and anthropologist Petru Rămneanțu.

In 1935, in the article "Eugenics and Romanianism", Gheorghe Marinescu stated that eugenics is "the basis, the foundation of a people". For Marinescu, "a people" is "a synthesis: race + culture. Environmental hygiene and education are of great importance, but they cannot achieve anything if something is not done against degeneration." Turda shows that, against a background of discussions on eugenic sterilisation, the Society of Eugenics and the Study of Heredity was created in Bucharest in May 1935, under Marinescu's leadership (Turda 2024, 66).

Today, a street in an exclusive neighbourhood of Bucharest is called Gheorghe Marinescu Street.

Constantin I. Parhon was president of the Union of Eugenic Societies in Romania and President of the International Federation of Latin Eugenics Societies. Marius Turda proves that Parhon had already applied therapeutic sterilisation as early as 1936 to a patient with sexual impulses and to two patients with epilepsy (Turda 2024, 155–156). After political regime change at the end of the war, he continued his activity, becoming a founding member of the Romanian Association for the Strengthening of Ties with the Soviet Union. In 1948, he was invited to write the introduction to the first work about the human experiments carried out by Nazi doctors in the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau. He was a key supporter of the "construction of socialism" and participated in the conference "New Conceptions in Biology. Miciurin's Soviet creative Darwinism" organised by Vasile Mârza, Minister of Health.

Currently, the National Institute of Endocrinology in Romania is named after Constantin I. Parhon.

Petru Rămneanțu was one of the scientists who tried to prove through serological research that the Szeklers and Csangos are in fact Hungarianised Romanians. His argument was well received by authorities at the time. Turda shows that Râmneanțu's research was based on two serological concepts: Hirszfeld's "biochemical race index" and the "gene-specific blood index" proposed by the Austrian mathematician Sigmund Wellisch (Turda 2024, 107)

Currently, a street in Timisoara is named after him.

I conclude this short list with the physiologist Nicolae C. Paulescu, about whom Turda shows that his activity in the field of science "does not prevent him from being classified as an anti-Semite and racist" (Turda 2024, 64) Paulescu published the work *The Degeneration of the Jewish Race* in 1928.

A monitoring report by the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania – Elie Wiesel (INSHR-EW) reveals that in 2022 Cluj-Napoca City Hall unveiled a proposal to name a street in the city after Paulescu. However, the project was ultimately thwarted following various interventions (INSHR-EW 2022, 15). His name had already become a part of the national memory long before this initiative. The National Institute of Diabetes, Nutrition, and Metabolic Diseases in Bucharest, a post-secondary nursing school in Râmnicu Sărat, and two streets, one in Bucharest and the other in Timisoara, are already called "Prof. Dr. Nicolae Paulescu". Furthermore, the monitoring report indicated that on 21 July 2021, the Romanian Academy in collaboration with the "Bartoc" Cultural Foundation organised a commemorative event to mark the centenary of the discovery of insulin. The central focus of the event was the unveiling of a bas-relief sculpture of Nicolae Paulescu. Two days after the event, the title of an article in an online newspaper informed the public: "The eminent scientist Nicolae Paulescu, the Romanian who saves 10% of the world's population from death every day, honoured at the Romanian Academy 100 years after the discovery of insulin. The event featured an impressive testimony, the unveiling of a bas-relief, a collection of medals, and a commemoration of the anniversary" (Anghel 2021). The participation of the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Culture, Irina Cajal, who is Jewish, prompted a group of intellectuals to react in the press, demanding her resignation. The presence of Mr Aurel Vainer, honourary president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, also elicited a strong reaction. The president of the Romanian Academy, Aurel Pop, stated that the two participants had been "extraordinarily complimentary". Furthermore, the president of the Romanian Academy elucidated the rationale behind the event: "It seems to me a fair step when compared to the epochal scientific discovery that a Romanian made a hundred years ago, he has primacy, even if the Nobel data recorded two other scientists" (INSHR-EW 2022, 19).

At first glance, Marius Turda's work does not appear to be a work of cultural memory, but rather a history of how ideas about race and its improvement influenced and shaped Romanian society and determined the debate about national specificity between 1880 and 1950. An examination of select paradigms shows the endurance of certain foundational figures in the national consciousness. These figures endure without any taint of their racist, antisemitic, or anti-Roma activities; instead, they are recognised as founding figures of the nation, defined by their academic research. It is important to note that each figure can be viewed critically and ranked by the extent to which their activities in the medical field were intertwined with that of anthropology, which prompted ideas and, ultimately, biopolitical action. The explanation for why these figures persist in the canon of Romanian national memory is provided by the author himself: "Significant Romanian eugenicists, including Iuliu Moldovan, Aurel Voina, Grigore I. Odobescu, Gheorghe Marinescu, Gheorghe Banu, Liviu Stan, Iordache Făcăoaru and Sabin Manuilă, positioned the Romanian peasant family at the core of the nation's eugenic and biopolitical transformation. The Romanian peasant family was synonymous with the Romanian nation" (Turda 2024, 16).

The historiographical preconception that the circulation of scientific racism ideas reduced in the interwar period was also encouraged by the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, which drafted its Final Report in 2004. A close inspection of the document reveals that the term "eugenics" is mentioned on a mere three occasions. The exclusion of the contribution of eugenics and biopolitical ideas to the formation and strengthening of Romanian nationalism led to a lack of in-depth understanding of the decisions taken by the Romanian state towards Jews and Roma in the

early 1940s. This paucity of understanding has, over time, contributed to the formation of collective memory surrounding the persecution of both Jewish and Romani communities. While the memory of the Holocaust of Jews was clearly subscribed to racist state policy, the historiography regarding the Roma presented them as second-rate victims, portrayed as persecuted on social criteria, at most ethnic in the cultural sense: "The selection and deportation took into account only those Roma who led a 'Gypsy' way of life" (Friling, Ioanid, and Ionescu 2004, 231).

The Roma deported to Transnistria had been designated by the state as "useless to society" or as people "who cannot justify their existence". The rationale behind the selection of only 25,000 Roma for deportation to Transnistria, out of a total population of approximately 230,000 Roma residing in Romania during that period, remains ambiguous. The chapter "Roma and 'Romanians by blood'" – an extension of an article co-authored with Turda in 2021, "Roma and the Question of Ethnic Origin in Romania during the Holocaust" – demonstrates how both categories of Roma who were deported, that is, all nomadic Roma and all those Roma who had a criminal record or "could not justify their existence", were in fact eugenic categories. Roma who identified as "Romanians" and who were regarded as "good" could be retained and amalgamated with the remainder of the national biological body. Conversely, those deemed "undesirable" or "dysgenic" were to be deported to Transnistria. Those who survived in Transnistria were to bear the stigma of being deemed "useless to society" and of passing this on to their descendants.

Turda's work invites us to consider analytically the internal causes that led to the Holocaust. Moreover, it demonstrates that the conceptualisation of a eugenic society did not cease with the Holocaust but rather persisted during the communist era through the implementation of a pronatalist policy, manifesting as "non-racist eugenics". This work contributes to the understanding of cultural figures from the interwar period who espoused eugenic ideas and proposals, as well as to social justice and the process of reconciliation with the historical past. This is no mere act of historical amnesia but rather encourages a process of introspection and critical examination of the past. It is an endeavour to learn from the past, to understand the conditions that led to abhorrent deeds, and to take action to ensure that such atrocities are never repeated.

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Book review by

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Felix Chang and Sunnie Rucker-Chang's *Roma Rights and Civil Rights: A Transatlantic Comparison* delivers a carefully framed and well-researched examination of the resonances between the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the mobilisations for increased recognition and protection of Roma in Europe. The book illustrates why, precisely in our present times and despite the risk of oversimplification, we must not shy away from difficult comparisons. Connecting the dots across time and context bears the fruit of deep introspection and sets the stage for mapping out globally-oriented anti-racist strategic thinking. Concise but erudite, *Roma Rights and Civil Rights* makes many points, but most central and, for me, most revelatory is: the comparison *itself* makes a great deal of sense.

The book is structured in a way that, across its chapters, builds a solid knowledge base for the reader to then fully engage with the more interdisciplinary latter chapters. Chapter 1 engages in pre-Second World War comparisons of the two contexts while Chapter 2 examines the period from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement onwards, including the political and social transformations in Central and Southeast Europe over the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 engages with the question of otherness in the context of the constructs of minorities vis-à-vis a sense of European and American identity, respectively. Chapter 4 compares the constitutional protections afforded African-Americans and Romani people, while Chapter 5 examines more acutely the role of federalism in both the European Union and the United States of America. Chapter 6 then makes a bold but convincing methodological departure from the previous chapters and analyses film to "track the social perceptions of Roma in CSEE since 2004" (17).

The authors illustrate in the book's introductory chapter what the central comparison of Roma and Civil Rights movements could reveal about state violence, rights movements for racial justice, and the role of federalism. It draws parallels between the emergence of new legislative competencies in the European Union and the United States' federal government, which undergirded the expansion and promulgation of anti-discrimination provisions and other rights-based measures. It also suggests elements of a trajectory of global conversations on race and racism as providing important context for understanding part of the reason states opted to try and legislate anti-discrimination federally or in a top-down manner. Chang and Rucker-Chang write that in "the fifty years separating Civil rights and eastern enlargement, colonization and apartheid fell, and an international consensus emerged against state-sanctioned exclusion of conationals" (5). They posit that, at least prior to recent financial crises, countries in Central and Southeast Europe (CSEE) were incentivised to find non-racial justifications for de-facto segregation. This certainly resonates with the context of civil rights laws, whereby debates still take place about how explicitly race can or cannot be legally deployed even in the service of addressing the impacts of racism. Historical lessons regarding movements for racial justice, then, still have contemporary relevance that we can use in real time, despite differences in language and context, as we navigate familiar analytic, political, and legal dimensions of our current instantiations of those movements.

The authors make a good case for theorising scholarship on Roma, given it is currently underexamined. They contend that the U.S. Civil Rights context serves as a useful counterpart, as there is extensive and robust scholarship on this movement. Additionally, given overlapping frames of analysis such as racialization, "dominant constructs of the nation, their experiences, histories and cultures" being excluded from the mainstream, and given certain resonances in the legal and political context around federalism, the co-examination of Romani rights context alongside Civil Rights is useful. Equally, examining the

Romani context may help identify strategic and conceptual shortcomings of civil rights in the U.S., past and present.

Chang and Rucker-Chang are also careful to specify they are not interested in advocating for a U.S. model of civil rights to be imported on CSEE countries and that the political shift to the right is a shared European and American phenomenon in contemporary times (116). This is important, given the cross-application of ideas from the hegemonic narrative of racial state-making in the United States but also given the consistent and often justified claim that the way one narrates racial violence in the United States tends to overshadow and profoundly influence discourses on race, racism, and state violence in other locations around the world. In fact, an important feature of the text is that it strives for conceptual clarity in lifting the stories of Roma out of the shadow of more dominant histories of (racial) repression. Part of this is a contextualisation of the persecution of Roma in European history, including acknowledgment of the Romani name for the killing of up to 1.5 million Roma during the Holocaust – *Porrajmos* (the Devouring) (16).

The authors refreshingly do not opt for a simple direct comparison of the experiences of Roma and Black Americans. They identify common ground in a considered way – examining the processes of racialization that Roma and Black Americans have encountered in their respective contexts, including the different ways in which class, nationality, and culture are layered on top of the already complex concepts of whiteness, Americanness, and Europeanness. They provide analytical tools for a more critical understanding of the comparison of the Civil Rights and Roma Rights movements as well – namely, interest conversion, a concept coined by critical race theorist Derrick Bell in 1980. The authors reference Bell's assertation that, in the U.S. context, "desegregation was spurred by a convergence of interests among whites and blacks, especially the U.S. government's interests in containing Communism abroad and black radicalism at home". The concept is well placed in this book, as it gives the reader a way to advance a more sophisticated understanding of social progress than one that simply moves the dial of inclusion and equality in a linear fashion towards social equity; instead, it lays bare that, in both civil rights and Romani rights contexts, states were interested in maintaining a degree of moral legitimacy and credibility in their own systems of governance, striking a balance between national and federal or supranational initiatives, and effectively managing ethnic conflict (52). In a way, the book, demonstrates how interest conversion, as a mode of theorising states' management of racial progress, can serve a useful if only partial lens for understanding how social movements in different contexts relate and diverge from one another.

The final chapter of the book, on filmic representations of Roma and Black Americans, provides an important coda to the focus of law in the rest of the book. It returns the reader to the social dimension of ascription and reminds the reader why race plays such a central role as an organising concept in the social movement for Romani rights. Most of the chapter focuses on films made after 2004, which correspond with timeframes on EU expansion and its articulation of goals for inclusion. For example, the 2018 film *Genesis*, by Arpad Bogdan, is examined as a film that indicates an important move from "outside representation" to "Romani representation" (164). The chapter contends that the world of cultural production, social movements for justice, and legal and political shifts are all connected, and that they must be understood together as a point of intellectual rigour but also as a point of strategy. For those interested in racial justice, we certainly need to take seriously the analytic and strategic connections made

in this book, including those across law and the humanities, if we are to have real hope at achieving the type of social change we envision.

Finally, it is important to stress the importance of examining these two movements, though they are geographically, temporally, and culturally distinct. It is not self-evident that a comparison between the Civil Rights movement in mid-twentieth-century United States and contemporary struggles for social and political progress for Roma in Central and Southeast Europe would be an appropriate terrain of legal and historical analysis. One is compelled to make the case, with a high level of clarity and distinction, or run the risk of oversimplification. In conventional legal scholarship, and even in historical scholarship, this comparison has been kept at arm's length, and this is no surprise. The social and cultural contexts are vastly different. The central political and legal challenges are complex. The bulk of the two struggles, as social and legal movements, take place half a century apart. Conceptions of nation, race and identity – crucially important in both contexts – are very different. Transnational comparisons are difficult by their nature, and to do them poorly compounds the double-headed Hydra of essentialism: the flattening of groups and their struggles into stereotypes on one hand, and the reduction of the respective legal and political debates that frame and help constitute struggle on the other. A poor comparison can be worse than nothing at all; but the careful and rigorous one found in this book are well worth intellectual investment and should be included in curricula on contemporary rights movements.

Iulius Rostas. 2019. *A Task for Sisyphus: Why Europe's Roma Policies Fail*. Budapest: Central European University Press

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A Task for Sisyphus

Iulius Rostas's book *A Task for Sisyphus: Why Europe's Roma Policies Fail*, published by Central European Press in 2019, investigates the everlasting question of why policies towards Roma fail despite countless "Gypsy issue" advocacies, projects, and initiatives over the decades.[1] The monograph addresses the development of the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (hereinafter: EU Framework for Roma; European Commission 2011) and its implementation in three European countries, particularly the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania. The author critically examines the policy failures aimed at supporting Romani people. The book presents a critical theoretical framework for analysing policymaking related "issues" to Roma by incorporating social sciences, including racial, ethnic, policy, and Romani studies. This necessitates an interdisciplinary approach; therefore, Rostas examined policy failures from multiple perspectives and disciplines, utilising critical race theory and policy design theory, as well as interviews, policy, discourse, content, and legal analyses.

In 2025, people around the world face various forms of social inequality, racism, and oppression (United Nations. n.d.). This constant issue has defined our history over the centuries, posing a threat not only to long-term economic, political, and social development but also restricting individuals' access to social goods. Meanwhile, it is undermining their economic status, harms poverty reduction efforts, and destroys individuals' sense of fulfilment and self-esteem as underlined in Strategic Development Goal 10 (United Nations. n.d.). Inequality can be measured and assessed through several factors, including age, background, disability, ethnicity, income, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and social class (*Ibid.*, n.d.). "Confronting inequalities has moved to the forefront of many global policy debates" (*Ibid.*, n.d.) has become one of the main goals outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 10: "Reduce inequality within and among countries"), which are part of the global development agenda adopted by all Member States of the United Nations from 2015 to 2030 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, n.d.). These goals not only serve as an overall framework to guide global and national development policies but also offer opportunities to build bridges between human rights and development (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. n.d.). Furthermore, inequality is not only a critical debate at the international level but also prominently integrated in European policy discussions. Despite the countless initiatives, policy developments, and measures that aimed for Romani "inclusion, integration, and assimilation" in Europe, Romani people are facing structural antigypsyism through racism, including deprivation, discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation (Rostas 2019, 8).

A Task for Sisyphus consists of five chapters. Chapter 1, "Ethnic Identity as a Social Category and Process", examines the definition of ethnic identity by analysing it within sociology, anthropology, and critical social studies. It explains why scholars reach no consensus on the definition of identity, its components

1 The views and opinions expressed in this book review are solely those of the author, who writes as an independent and unaffiliated researcher. They do not reflect the positions or policies of any current or former employer, institution, or organization. This review is the product of the author's professional research and scholarly analysis.

or scope. This chapter also points out the heterogeneity of Romani ethnic identity and how it has been shaped over the centuries, with a special focus on antigypsyism. To support, from an identity perspective, analysis of policies towards Roma, Iulius Rostas approaches the "issue of Roma" ethnic identity as a social category as well as a process. To conclude, the author proposes an operational definition of ethnic identity in policymaking based on four dimensions:

1. Ethnic group participation in the policymaking process;
2. Ethnic claims and grievances expressed formally by social actors who speak on behalf of the group;
3. Representation of the group or the problems faced by this group in the public sphere by the different social actors involved in policymaking: policymakers, researchers, representatives of the group, among others.
4. Causal relationships that determine the current state of affairs identified by analysing public policy documents (Rostas. 2019, 39).

In Chapter 2, Rostas addresses the questions of policymaking and policy models in relation to Roma through critical approaches. Furthermore, this chapter gives information about public policy processes that focus on theoretical difficulties – in framing Roma – as part of broader policy paradigms. Certain concepts, such as social integration, multiculturalism, social inclusion, or combating poverty, are often used in a biased manner by authorities.

Chapter 3 critically examines "Policies towards Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania" by focussing on Romani representation models in national and transnational contexts. Moreover, readers can learn in detail about the development and implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015), a joint commitment to advance action plans in favour of Roma. Under this lens, Rostas provides a historical perspective as to how Roma have been framed and categorised within the policymaking process in the region. The book considers a constant burning issue about a lack of Romani participation in policy and decision-making processes – alongside the effectiveness of Romani movements. More particularly, it illuminates how the challenges faced by Roma were addressed after the fall of communism and before the three countries' EU accession, including internal and external peculiarities that influenced policymaking and decisions concerning Roma.

Rostas is not alone in this belief. Ismael Cortés Gómez also confirms the failure of strategies for economic inclusion due – to a large extent – to the lack of political involvement of Romani communities at both national and local levels (Cortés Gómez 2019, 381). As Cortés Gómez noted in 2019, the European Parliament lacked mechanisms to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities (*Ibid.,* 378). Specifically, the representation of minorities, particularly Roma, is blocked by the EU's institutional design (*Ibid.*, 381).

Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of the EU Framework for Roma and its implementation in the three EU member states examined in the research. In 2011, the EU Framework for Roma set minimum standards for their member states, which is regarded as the most intricate policy arrangement targeting Roma. However, considering those standards of the EU Framework for Roma which were met, the author evaluated and critically inserts into academic debates the point where the policymaking process and

content of the EU Framework for Roma failed – as Sisyphus failed when condemned to roll a rock to the top of a mountain. Rosta's key criticisms include:

1. The failure of policymakers to learn from past policy implementations and their inability to define the policy objectives, problem statements, or the target group clearly.
2. The absence of reliable data – in alignment with the applicable data privacy laws and regulations – for policymaking and a lack of indicators and effectiveness monitoring continue to pose a significant challenge.
3. The EU Framework for Roma lacks a human rights approach, and it does not address intersectionality either.
4. It fails to mention antigypsism or the structural discrimination faced by Romani communities.
5. It does not consider the migration of Romani people, which has caused pressure on certain EU member states. Furthermore, Rostas argues that this migration issue has been used as a justification to compel Central and Eastern European countries with large Romani populations to implement appropriate measures.
6. Since the EU member states received a short deadline to submit their national strategies, the national adaptation process resulted in negative consequences, inconsistencies, limited participation from Romani communities, and insufficient involvement of relevant local authorities.

In Chapter 5 ("Conclusion: Failure, Data, and What Comes Next"), Rostas concludes the research findings based on a critical review of the implementations of the EU Framework for Roma, which is unlikely to significantly improve the situation and social positions of Roma in Europe. Rostas notes that to achieve meaningful change, a paradigm shift is necessary. Otherwise, policies aimed at supporting Roma are expected to fail again, which could result in dissatisfaction from both Roma and society-at-large over time.

Although the book provided many comprehensive answers as to why Roma policies fail, Chapter 3, based on my practice and experience, might have benefitted from an introduction to the new Fundamental Law of Hungary from 2011 (as in force on 23 December 2023), particularly Article 30, in addition to Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of National Minorities (hereinafter: the new National Minority Act) in Hungary that were already in force when the book was published in 2019. The new National Minority Act replaced Act LXXVII of 1993 on the rights of the national and ethnic minorities analysed in the research. In line with the new Fundamental Law, the new National Minority Act offers an improved framework and some progress as a result of negotiations among policymakers, representatives of national minorities, relevant stakeholders and experts (Kállai 2014, 1, 4). For instance, it introduces the preferential quota system that provided a real chance to obtain preferential mandates in parliament for Roma and German national minorities – taking into account the population of national minority communities living in Hungary, their election activity, and the rules concerning preferential seats (Sándor-Szalay and Kiss 2022, 65). However, in reality, the amendments failed to address numerous regulatory deficiencies and made no substantial changes to the system, except to diminish the previously independent status and role of minority ombudspersons (Kállai 2014, 5–6).

Rostas acknowledges how significant these ethnic claims and grievances are –expressed by social actors representing specific groups – but criticises the fact that these injustices are often unheard or unrecognised.

Here, the research might have taken a more in-depth turn to analyse the different remediation mechanisms through which grievances can be raised and investigated, with particular concern for the importance of equality bodies and ombudsperson-type institutional practices.

Equality bodies in the EU promote equality and combat discrimination concerning one, some, or all grounds of discrimination pursuant to the EU law.[2] The ombudsperson is an independent public sector institution, preferably established by the legislative branch of government. Its primary role is to supervise and monitor the administrative activities of the executive branch by investigating complaints impartially received from citizens, free of charge. An ombudsperson can act as a human rights ombudsperson with administrative oversight and human rights functions. In addition, some ombudsperson may have responsibilities related to anti-corruption, enforcing leadership codes, or protecting the environment. Overall, ombudsperson institutions play a crucial role in protecting and promoting human rights (Reif 2004, 1–2).

Moreover, the causes of failures listed in EU policy implementations, summarised in the last chapter, could be expanded by considering policymakers' willingness to act, and the extent to which they wish to address the "issues" faced by Roma.

Updating Knowledge in Practice Today

In my case, Rostas's book enables the recognition of corresponding patterns between policymaking and human rights due diligence conducted by business enterprises as required by international standards, namely United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, or applicable laws and regulations at EU and national level.

Business enterprises are specialised organs within society that perform specific functions, they are also required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights (United Nations 2011). They are also required to avoid violating the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts in cases in which they are involved. This responsibility is independent of the ability or willingness of States to fulfil their own human rights obligations and does not diminish those obligations (*Ibid.*, 13). The purpose of human rights due diligence in the field of business and human rights is to identify and address potential and actual adverse human rights impacts – by using a risk-based approach – that a business enterprise has caused, contributed to, or is linked to.

This process – just like policymaking – requires reliable information and data that comply with applicable data privacy laws and regulations. One of the tools for information gathering is the so-called human rights impact assessment. In addition to the geographical, sector, product and service specific risks; claims, notifications, and grievances should also be considered as valuable information sources, that were raised through, for example:

2 Equinet, "What are Equality Bodies?". Available online: https://www.archive.equineteurope.org/-Equality-bodies-. Accessed 9 March 2025 at Equinet – What are Equality Bodies?

- state-based judicial mechanisms (for example, prosecution, litigation, and arbitration)
- non-judicial remediation mechanisms (for example, specialist government bodies, consumer protection agencies, equality bodies, ombudsperson),
- operational grievance mechanisms of business enterprises (OECD 2018).

It is fundamental to identify what rightsholders may be affected by business activities – they could be Romani people, as well – and catalogue the relevant human rights standards and their violations (UNGP 2011, 19). These assessments help define target groups and what adverse impacts they may face. Meaningful consultation with potentially affected individuals, groups, other relevant stakeholders and experts is also essential for effective information gathering (*Ibid.*, 22).

Once the findings have been obtained, assessed, and prioritised based on severity and likelihood, business enterprises should take appropriate measures to prevent potential adverse impacts, mitigate or bring actual adverse impacts to an end, and provide remedies where necessary.

To verify whether adverse human rights impacts are adequately addressed, businesses should monitor and track due diligence processes and responses. This should be done using suitable qualitative and quantitative indicators, along with meaningful consultations with affected stakeholders, including rightsholders, to evaluate the effectiveness of these processes (*Ibid*., 19; OECD 2018, 89). As is expected in the context of policy implementation. Hence, there are similar patterns between policy-making and human rights due diligence, policymakers and business enterprises could mutually learn from each other how to adequately identify and respond to human rights violations.

A Task for Sisyphus uniquely integrates answers into the academic and human rights agenda as to why Europe's Roma policies fail. Even if the EU Framework for Roma has been considered a remarkable achievement in Romani "integration" policies, it is not in practice.

Considering the practical usage of the book, including language style and structure, I am confident that this monograph is easy to follow, accessible to anyone, regardless of their prior knowledge of ethnic identity and policymaking. It clearly explains the historical background and dimensions of Romani identity (politics), as well as the process and challenges of policymaking and how to interpret the reasons for failures. As the school of Critical Romani Studies has developed since the publication of Iulius Rostas's book, some terms have been changed to meet current contemporary standards.

This book not only meets high academic standards, but it is also a changemaker in public policy development and human rights protection. Therefore, it may be valuable reading for:

- Policymakers who can benefit from the analysed lessons of past experiences in policy development and implementation;
- Scholars who can gain advanced critical knowledge on ethnic identity, antigypsyism, and intersectionality, which might be considered during policy analyses;
- Civil society organisations, movements, and grassroots initiatives that could have a constructive and feasible understanding of the power of collective action and structures;

- Lawyers and legislators who can gain a clearer understanding of how legal frameworks should provide real solutions for marginalised communities;
- Business enterprises are also encouraged to benefit from critical frameworks and experiences to adequately identify and address adverse human rights challenges and impacts in which they are involved.

A Task for Sisyphus was published in 2019, which was followed by the release of the new EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation in 2020 (hereinafter: new EU Roma Strategic Framework) to achieve greater and faster progress by promoting effective equality, socio-economic inclusion, and meaningful participation of Roma (European Commission 2020, 2). This new EU Roma Strategic Framework states: "[…] nevertheless, overall progress in Roma integration has been limited over the past 10 years, even if there are significant differences across policy areas and countries".

Following the publication of the new EU Roma Strategic Framework, the ERGO Network published its analysis and commentary in 2020 – in order to provide recommendations for national governments as they were required to develop their national strategic frameworks (hereinafter: NSFs) in the first months of 2021 (ERGO Network 2020, 4). In their publication, the ERGO Network points out that some progressive changes are noticeable when compared to the previous Framework. These changes include – reflecting also on Rostas's criticisms – for example:

- Finding a better balance between social inclusion, human rights and empowerment objectives;
- Asking EU member states and enlargement countries to develop their NSFs;
- Proposing an intersectional approach to tackle discrimination;
- Defining intersectional discrimination as such – for the first time;
- Including a good reference to antigypsyism by using the spelling as suggested by the Alliance against Antigypsyism (*Ibid.*).

Despite these positive developments, the ERGO Network challenged the new EU Roma Strategic Framework and its guidelines based on their policy and monitoring work findings. They presented numerous findings and constructive recommendations regarding the lack of specific links to relevant initiatives (such as the Social Pillar, the European Green Deal); objectives and targets that are too low, inadequate, or missing; and horizontal and sectoral priorities. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of Romani participation multiple times throughout the publication (*Ibid.*, 4–31).

In 2025, nearly five years have passed since the European Commission (hereinafter: Commission) adopted the new EU Roma Strategic Framework. During this time, several monitoring activities have been conducted. In January 2023, the Commission released a so-called 'stock-taking report' that assessed the national Roma frameworks against the commitments made by member states and provided guidance on any improvements where needed (European Commission 2023). The Commission published another report in 2024 which assessed specific areas identified in the initial 'stock-taking report' (2023) as requiring further improvement and monitoring. The second report also briefly covered other sectoral areas and the use of funds (European Commission 2024).

Two cycles of civil society country monitoring assessment have been conducted since 2020 under the umbrella of Civil Roma Monitoring (a consortium of Central European University, ERGO Network, Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), and European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)). The first cycle, in 2022, focused on the quality of the new national Roma strategic frameworks developed by the member states. In 2025, the second cycle's monitoring reports assess the implementation of those new national Roma strategic frameworks (Roma Civil Monitoring 2021–2025). Additional reports and statements are also available from various civil society organisations, movements, grassroots initiatives emphasising the need for systematic changes. These organisations also provide valuable data, strong grassroots evidence, and present best practices related to the sectoral priorities outlined in new EU Roma Strategic Frameworks, for instance, accessing to quality and affordable housing (ERGO Network 2023).

It would be highly beneficial to continue research with a particular focus on the national implementation of the previous and new (current) EU Roma Strategic Frameworks in various European countries, including some Western European countries. It would be also interesting to explore how the three examined countries designed and implemented their national strategic frameworks for equality, inclusion and participation after 2020.

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Producing Knowledge from within – Critical Romani Studies and the Institutional Role of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC)

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Abstract

For centuries, the production of knowledge about Romani communities has been dominated by non-Romani scholars, institutions, and power structures. This monopoly has created a distorted and racialized understanding of Romani identity, history, and culture; an understanding that has profoundly shaped European scholarship, public policy, and everyday perceptions. This article examines the historical trajectory and ongoing consequences of this knowledge regime. It explores the roots of Gypsylorism, the influence of eugenics, the role of ethnographic bias, and the persistent structures of antigypsyism that shape how Roma are represented in academia and society. Then the article analyses the emergence of Critical Romani Studies as an intellectual response to these structures, emphasising Romani positionality and the development of Romani epistemologies as crucial interventions. It further explores the creation and role of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) as a transnational institutional space designed to support Romani cultural and intellectual agency. ERIAC's priorities in knowledge production, such as the development of educational platforms, critical bibliographies, and projects on resistance, are examined as examples of how Roma-led institutions can contribute to epistemic justice, historical reparation, and the transformation of academic canons. Finally, the article reflects on future directions for Roma-led research, arguing that reclaiming knowledge production is not merely an academic endeavour but a political and cultural act. By asserting Romani epistemologies and institutional presence, Critical Romani Studies challenges centuries-old hierarchies of representation and opens pathways for new, plural, and equitable forms of understanding. The article is based on an intellectual dialogue between the authors that took place on 19 September 2025.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Critical Romani Studies
- Knowledge production
- Romani positionality
- Gypsylorism
- European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture

Introduction

Scholarship on Roma has historically been developed through asymmetrical relations of power. For most of modern history, Roma were not the authors of their own narratives but the subjects of external observation, classification, and biases (Surdu 2016, Mate forthcoming). Non-Romani scholars constructed and disseminated ideas about Romani identity, defining how Roma were perceived in cultural imaginaries, academic discourse, and political frameworks. This monopoly of representation has left deep marks on European societies, shaping both scholarly disciplines and social policies that often marginalised or pathologised Romani communities (Matache 2016; Selling 2018).

The lack of Romani agency in knowledge production is neither accidental nor neutral. It reflects broader systems of structural antigypsyism, exclusion from education, and racialized epistemologies that position Roma outside of legitimate knowledge-making institutions. Roma were rarely present in universities as scholars, professors, or recognised intellectuals. Instead, their identities were narrated by others, often through the lens of exoticism, criminalisation, or deficiency. In recent decades, however, a significant shift has begun to occur. The emergence of Romani scholars across Europe, and beyond, has given rise to new epistemological frameworks grounded in lived experience, historical consciousness, academic agency, and scholarly rigour (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 2018; Bogdan et al. 2018). The development of Critical Romani Studies marks a collective effort to challenge and transform dominant discourses, while institutions such as the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) provide crucial platforms for Romani intellectual and cultural production. This article examines these transformations through a critical lens. It first situates the historical context of Gypsylorism and eugenics, showing how early academic frameworks established racialized narratives of Roma. It then discusses the significance of Romani positionality and epistemology as tools of resistance and innovation in knowledge production. Finally, it focuses on ERIAC's role in institutionalising Romani cultural and scholarly agency, and its contribution to shaping new educational and research agendas.

1. Gypsylorism, Eugenics, and Bias in Academia

The historical roots of Romani misrepresentation can be traced to early modern Europe, when Roma were portrayed through stereotypes that oscillated between fascination and fear. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Roma were depicted in art, literature, and scholarship as either romantic outsiders or dangerous deviants. This duality formed the basis of Gypsylorism, a specific form of knowledge production about Roma characterised by exoticisation, racialization, and othering in social sciences (McGarry and Mirga-Kruszelnicka forthcoming; Mate forthcoming). The foundation of the Gypsy Lore Society in the late nineteenth century (1888) marked the institutionalisation of these perspectives. Many of the Society's founding members operated within racial science and early eugenics, classifying Roma through pseudoscientific hierarchies. The aim was not to understand Roma on their own terms but to fit them into pre-existing racial categories that justified their marginalisation. This period coincided with the rise of ethnography as a scientific discipline. Ethnographic methods, while claiming objectivity, often objectified Romani people, treating them as static and ahistorical subjects of study. Scholars documented customs, appearances, and languages with little regard for agency, complexity, or political context. These

studies circulated widely and became authoritative references, even when they reproduced deeply biased and racialized narratives.

The twentieth century brought further entrenchment of these biases. Academic studies often framed Roma as a "problem", emphasising perceived social deficits rather than historical injustices. Research was frequently used to justify assimilationist or exclusionary policies, reinforcing stereotypes and legitimising antigypsyist practices. Even as the language of racial science faded after the Second World War, many of its underlying assumptions persisted in policy and scholarship (Acton 2015). The impact of this epistemic legacy is not merely historical. It continues to shape how Roma are represented today in education, media, and politics. Stereotypical narratives remain embedded in public consciousness, while Romani scholars still face structural barriers in gaining recognition and authority in academic spaces. Challenging this legacy requires both historical critique and the active construction of alternative narratives grounded in Romani epistemologies.

2. Knowledge Production and Romani Epistemology

Knowledge production is never neutral – it is embedded within social hierarchies, institutionalised power structures, and culturally legitimised systems of knowledge (Brooks, Clark, and Rostas 2021). The historical construction and representation of Romani people exemplify how such relations operate, revealing the persistent intersection of authority, knowledge, and marginalisation. For centuries, knowledge about Roma was produced *about* them but not *by* them (Bogdan et al. 2015; Ryder 2015). This external standpoint created not only inaccurate and stereotypical portrayals but also structural barriers that kept Romani epistemologies invisible or delegitimised. Romani epistemology refers to knowledge grounded in Romani positionality, to the social, historical, and cultural experiences of Romani people. It is rooted in collective memory, oral histories, linguistic diversity, and lived experiences that challenge dominant Eurocentric frameworks. This epistemology does not reject academic rigour; rather, it redefines it by insisting that situated perspectives are sources of legitimate knowledge (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2023).

Romani scholars are frequently regarded as occupying an "outsider within" positionality, formally trained within academic traditions structured by non-Romani frameworks. According to Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins, who coined the term, "Outsiders within" possess tools, knowledge, and critical training to be able to re-examine their own personal and cultural experiences, and at the same time to illuminate some of the existing academic anomalies, shortcomings, and gaps (Hill Collins 1986). Likewise, Romani scholars draw on lived experiences and culturally situated knowledge, enabling critical re-examinations of dominant scholarly canons. This positionality enables Romani knowledge-producers to uncover and challenge historical and social biases, stereotypes, and omissions embedded in mainstream Romani Studies. Furthermore, Romani epistemology is marked by a methodological focus on translation that avoids the erasure of knowledge and context. Placing Romani experiences into academic discourse does not mean assimilating them into dominant frameworks but creating new conceptual tools that reflect Romani realities.

This approach values the plurality of Romani agency and recognises that knowledge is produced not only in academic institutions but also in communities, families, artistic spaces, and political movements. Romani

epistemology is inherently dialogical, emphasising reciprocal engagement, relational understanding, and the reconstruction of knowledge across cultural and experiential contexts. It does not seek to exclude non-Romani voices but to create spaces where Romani perspectives have equal authority and visibility. It destabilises traditional academic hierarchies and promotes co-creation of knowledge that respects difference and complexity. In so doing, it provides a critical foundation for rethinking how knowledge is structured, who has access to it, and whose histories are considered and recognised.

Critical Romani Studies represents an epistemological shift from that of being studied to actually producing knowledge. It builds on the understanding that Roma have long been excluded from defining their own identities in academic contexts. This exclusion has not only distorted Romani representation but also impoverished the disciplines that study them (Acton 2015; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015; Garapich, Fiałkowska, and Mirga-Wójtowicz 2020). Furthermore, Romani scholars navigate universities that are often unwelcoming and hierarchical, where their expertise may be questioned or overshadowed. They frequently experience epistemic isolation, being the only Romani scholar in their department or institution (Buhigas forthcoming). This positionality is both a challenge and a source of strength. It allows for a double vision, the ability to critically examine dominant academic frameworks while articulating alternative perspectives rooted in lived experience. An essential part of Romani positionality is the reversal of the research agenda. Instead of asking why Roma are different, backward, or problematic, Romani scholars interrogate how majoritarian societies construct stereotypes, marginalisation, and exclusion. They examine how institutions and discourses shape Romani identities externally, while recovering histories of resistance and contribution that have been erased or ignored.

Romani positionality also embraces the entanglement of scholarship and public visibility. The critique that Romani scholars are "too activist" reveals enduring biases that privilege detached, so-called objective scholarship. It also reifies scientism and the problematic understanding of academia as detached, objective exercises where nothing is at stake (Ryder 2015). In reality, all scholarship is situated. Romani scholars openly acknowledge their positionality as a strength, allowing them to conduct research that is ethically grounded and socially relevant. The growing number of Romani scholars, including those outside traditional Romani Studies, signals a broadening of perspectives. Many scholars, who previously concealed their identities due to stigma, are now openly identifying as Roma, contributing to an increasingly confident and self-determined intellectual community. Moreover, a growing number of non-Romani scholars (including Vajda 2015; Dunajeva 2018; Fremlova 2018; and others) also critically acknowledge their own positionality and reflect on questions of privilege and power dynamics,

3. From Discourse to Institutions – The Establishment of ERIAC and the Expansion of Critical Romani Studies

The idea of establishing a Roma-led cultural and intellectual institution, which could effectively counter dominant cultural and academic (mis)representations of Roma can be traced back as far as the late 1960s (Junghaus 2006; 2007). For decades, Romani activists, artists, and intellectuals envisioned creating an international space that would provide Roma with the tools and a joint platform to define their own

narratives. This vision gained momentum in 2013–2014, when a group of Romani scholars, cultural leaders and public intellectuals began lobbying for what would become the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC). This group, catalysed by Zeljko Jovanovic, then director of the Roma Initiatives Office at the Open Society Foundations, eventually formed the Alliance for ERIAC – an informal, voluntary network which became the driving engine behind the establishment of ERIAC, securing the support of intergovernmental partners. Finally, together with the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Alliance, ERIAC was officially established in 2017 as a transnational institution dedicated to promoting Romani arts, culture, and knowledge. It represents a unique intervention: Rather than relying on temporary projects or fragmented initiatives, it provides a stable institutional structure for Roma-led intellectual and cultural production. ERIAC emerged as a response to centuries of exclusion and also as a proactive step toward shaping Romani futures. Its mission was clear: Fight antigypsyism among the majority and encourage ethnic pride among Roma through arts and culture, knowledge-production, history and commemoration, media, and work on the Romani language.

The process of calling ERIAC to life was not without controversy. Some non-Romani scholars, institutions, and networks (including the European Academic Network on Romani Studies, EANRS) expressed concerns that ERIAC might exclude non-Romani voices or impose political agendas (Magazzini 2016; 2021).

> Arguably, the heated and often personal and confrontational debates that this debate triggered go beyond the set-up of the ERI itself. Revolving around the concepts of Roma authenticity, legitimacy, ethnic representation and cultural hegemony such exchanges have tapped into a complex set of underlying assumptions that often go unproblematized, and whose analysis can help bring some clarity to understanding wider struggles around Roma identity politics (Beck and Ivasiuc 2018, 4).

These criticisms often revealed underlying fears about losing control over knowledge production and interpretive authority. Despite these challenges, ERIAC established itself as an influential platform. By creating an institution rather than a temporary network, ERIAC increased Romani visibility and authority in cultural and intellectual spaces. Today, it engages with multiple audiences, such as scholars, artists, educators, policymakers, and communities bridging the gap between academic research and public discourse. This institutional presence also provides Romani scholars with a sense of collective belonging in spaces where they have historically been isolated.

Although ERIAC is not a university or research institute in the classical sense, knowledge production is one of its central pillars. As a membership-based organisation, ERIAC brings together Romani and non-Romani individuals and organisations, including many scholars; ERIAC's membership community is organised in five thematic sections, including one explicitly dedicated to knowledge-production. ERIAC functions as a hub connecting scholars, artists, activists, and community members, whose work focuses on transforming how Romani knowledge is produced, disseminated, and accessed. Moreover, ERIAC's dedication to knowledge-production is also reflected in its strategy. In fact, since its establishment, ERIAC has acknowledged the importance of generating impact in academic and educational fields. This commitment is aimed at ensuring the development of Romani scholarship, particularly in Critical Romani Studies, and enhancing the visibility of Romani academic narratives and scholars. The ultimate objective of ERIAC is to

become a referential source of knowledge about Romani culture, history, and identity for higher education institutions, governments, and the Romani community itself. Indeed, one of ERIAC's strategic objectives for the years 2021–2025 is to build on a recent breakthrough: Council of Europe (CoE) Recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials. This involves positioning ERIAC as a key institutional partner providing policy input to the CoE secretariat and its member states. Simultaneously, ERIAC aims to establish enduring partnerships with educational institutions, particularly universities. To achieve this, ERIAC has launched several academic initiatives and continues to forge partnerships with academic institutions all over Europe.

One of ERIAC's flagship initiatives is the Barvalipe Roma Online University, created during the COVID-19 pandemic. Barvalipe Roma Online University is an online educational platform where Roma and non-Roma can access knowledge about Romani identity(ies), history(ies), and culture(s) thorough a collection of high-quality lectures delivered by leading Romani scholars on topics ranging from the Roma Holocaust to Romani cultural productions. This initiative, developed as part of the International Roma Cultural Outreach Programme, is financed by the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO). The first course of the Barvalipe Roma Online University launched on 1 September 2020. The inaugural course, "Introduction to Roma Cultural History", begins with the history of Romani arrival in Europe, traces Romani cultural, social, and political presence in Europe, and ends with a reflection on the importance of contemporary Romani knowledge production. The second course was launched on 21 September 2021. Throughout that year, each week a new lecture was livestreamed on Facebook. Following each lecture premiere, we moderated a discussion with the lecturer and invited guests in which the audience also had a chance to ask questions. Starting in 2022, ERIAC focused on the production of educational videos in a conversational tone that are easier to digest for larger audiences. The idea of the Barvalipe Masterclass was born from a desire for more appealing presentation and higher-quality production.[1] The Barvalipe Roma Online University brings together leading scholars and practitioners to offer lectures, workshops, and masterclasses to broad audiences (ERIAC 2020a). By providing free and accessible educational content, ERIAC democratises access to knowledge and counters the exclusivity of academic institutions. It also bridges the gap between scholarly research and community learning, ensuring that Romani knowledge circulates beyond narrow academic circles. Another significant contribution is the Critical Romani Studies Library,[2] a curated bibliography highlighting foundational works authored by Romani scholars. This resource challenges the dominance of biased, non-Romani-centric literature and offers researchers and students a reliable entry point into Roma-led scholarship. It is not merely a library but a statement, as Romani scholarship exists, thrives, and deserves to be central to the field.

ERIAC also works on addressing Romani representation in formal education. Romani history and culture remain largely absent from European school curricula, despite more than seven centuries of Romani presence in Europe. This absence not only marginalises Romani students but also perpetuates ignorance and stereotypes among majority populations. ERIAC responds by developing educational

1 See: https://eriac.org/barvalipe-roma-online-university.

2 See: https://eriac.org/digatal-library-of-curricula-roma-scolarship.

materials, curricula, and methodologies that can be integrated into national education systems, aligning with broader European recommendations on Roma inclusion in history education. In this sense, ERIAC also serves as a policy adviser by releasing position papers (see, for example, Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Mate, and Greku 2023).

Finally, a key element of ERIAC's agenda is the reframing of Romani history through resistance and agency. Projects like *Rethinking Roma Resistance* (ERIAC 2020b) have sought to overturn narratives of victimhood by documenting and celebrating Romani contributions to European societies. This includes resistance to persecution, participation in political and cultural movements, and creative production that has enriched European culture. Similarly, ongoing research under the European Commission–funded JEKHIPE project (ERIAC 2024) examines how Romani communities in six countries have responded to antigypsyism through academia, activism, arts, and cultural mobilisation. Through these initiatives, ERIAC positions itself as both a catalyst and a connector. It amplifies Romani voices, shapes research agendas, and provides spaces for dialogue and co-creation. Its approach embodies the belief that knowledge production is not confined to academic institutions but thrives in the intersections of culture, activism, and education.

3. Directions and Methodological Reflections for Romani Knowledge Production

As Romani scholars and institutions advance into new grounds of research and practice, methodological reflection becomes indispensable. Critical Romani Studies advocates for methodologies that not only articulate Romani lives but also fundamentally reshape the epistemic conditions under which such knowledge is produced. This transformation requires a deliberate departure from paradigmatic frameworks that claim neutrality while perpetuating inequality, emphasising ethical reflexivity, participatory engagement, and epistemic accountability. By foregrounding Romani positionality, lived experience, and culturally situated knowledge, Critical Romani Studies challenges entrenched hierarchies of representation and opens pathways for more inclusive, dialogical, and socially just forms of knowledge production. Future Roma-led scholarship must therefore articulate methodologies grounded in ethics, participation, and reciprocity. The growing number of non-Romani scholars embracing critical approaches contributes to expansion and the growing acceptance of Critical Romani Studies as a separate scientific branch.

Methodological renewal in Romani Studies begins with ethical reflexivity, acknowledging that research has historically been extractive, with data and stories collected from communities without their consent or tangible benefit. Future methodologies must reject this legacy by embedding accountability to the communities being studied, with participatory and community-based research models offering frameworks in which Roma are treated as collaborators rather than objects, actively shaping research questions, interpretations, and outcomes. Language and research vocabulary remain a critical methodological concern, as much Romani knowledge exists in oral, local, or performative forms that do not easily conform to academic norms. Translating these standards into scholarly discourse requires careful attention to meaning and context, privileging multilingualism and oral traditions as sources of

epistemic innovation, rather than erasing cultural expression to conform to established epistemic canons. Together, ethical reflexivity and attentive engagement with language form the foundation for Roma-centred methodologies that are both rigorous and socially responsible. These considerations should eventually be reflected in a Code of Ethnical Conduct in Romani Studies, yet to be developed.

Future directions must also prioritise the creation of Romani archives, addressing the historical absence of Romani agency in institutional repositories and the resulting epistemic voids. Initiatives such as those undertaken by ERIAC point toward alternative spaces where documents, testimonies, and artworks are preserved and interpreted under Romani curatorship. These efforts ensure that Romani histories are not only preserved but also understood through Romani perspectives. Romani research must be situated within broader critical engagements with academic antigypsyism and systemic social exclusion. Intersectional approaches link Romani experiences to intersecting gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity that could fill this scholarly gap. In this process, it is worthwhile looking into experiences of other subaltern and racialized groups, seeking inspiration from their own journey to intellectual emancipation (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015; 2018).

Concurrently, transnational collaboration among Romani and allied scholars enhances collective capacity to shape and influence global discourses on decolonisation, reparations, and social justice. For Romani epistemology to thrive, it requires sustainable institutional foundations, prioritising the creation of academic programmes, research, and funding mechanisms that support Roma-led inquiry, as exemplified by ERIAC and the Critical Romani Studies Department at Central European University. Providing the necessary infrastructure for continuity and legitimacy, with the long-term goal of not merely achieving representation but ensuring permanence, will make Romani scholarship an enduring and integral component of the European intellectual landscape. As successive generations of Romani scholars emerge, their methodological innovations are poised to continually redefine prevailing conceptions of ethics, evidence, and expertise.

Conclusion

The history of Romani knowledge production is marked by exclusion, bias, and asymmetry. For centuries, Roma have been represented by others, often through lenses of exoticisation, criminalisation, and deficit. This history has shaped academic disciplines, informed policy frameworks, and structured public imaginaries. Yet, the growing movement of Romani scholars, intellectuals, and institutions signals a profound epistemological and political shift. Critical Romani Studies and ERIAC represent the pillar of this transformation. While Critical Romani Studies reconfigures the theoretical and methodological foundations of knowledge production, ERIAC provides an institutional framework to sustain and disseminate this new knowledge. Engaging with critical Romani scholarship enables ERIAC to challenge centuries-old structures that marginalised Romani agency and, parallel to it, opens pathways for more equitable, plural, and self-determined narratives rooted in Romani subjectivity. This development is not merely about increasing the visibility of Roma in academia. It is about rethinking what counts as knowledge, who produces it, and whose perspectives shape collective understanding. Romani epistemologies, grounded in positionality, experience, and historical consciousness, offer new

tools for academic inquiry and cultural reflection and pave the way for a critical re-reading of a Romani historical past – and future. They enrich scholarship, democratise knowledge, and promote more ethical and inclusive forms of representation.

The work ahead remains challenging, as structural antigypsyism persists in education systems, research institutions, and cultural spaces. Romani scholars still face epistemic marginalisation, and Romani knowledge remains under-recognised. Yet, the emergence of Roma-led institutions like ERIAC demonstrates that change is both possible and underway. By building our own archives, institutions, and epistemologies, Romani communities are reshaping our place in Europe's intellectual agenda. In the long arc of history, reclaiming knowledge production is a form of resistance and self-determination. It is an act of imagining futures in which Roma are no longer merely subjects of study but equal participants, authors, and leaders in shaping shared human knowledge. ERIAC and Critical Romani Studies are vital components of this ongoing process, a paradigm shift that is not only academic but profoundly cultural, political, and transformative.

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Reclaiming the Narrative: A Critical Turn in Romani Studies

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Abstract

This article explores the evolution of Romani Studies from a frequently stereotyped field that reified Romani people and fostered several grave misconceptions and biases, such as "Gypsies" are thieves, criminals, or beggars, to a more compounded and interdisciplinary academic field. Initial studies conducted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often romanticised and differentiated Romani people. However, from the mid-twentieth century, studies have encompassed a wider range of perspectives and a more critical examination of the experiences of Roma. Today, studies on Roma aim to dispel prejudice while critically analysing their social realities, histories, and cultural heritages. Through activism, policy involvement, and interdisciplinary research, it seeks to advance Romani agency, inclusion, and rights.

Keywords

- Critical Romani Studies
- Decolonisation
- Gypsylorism
- Intersectionality
- Knowledge production

Introduction

Traditional academic methods, which have their roots in Gypsylorism, have reinforced essentialist views and biases about Romani people, limiting them to symbols of cultural difference and exoticism, rather than recognising their diversity. These reified portrayals have reinforced discriminatory policies and practices that have marginalised Romani people throughout Europe (Hancock 1997; Lee 2000).

However, studies on Roma have undergone a radical change and prevailing, external narratives led to the birth of Critical Romani Studies (CRS). A historic meeting at Gólya Presszó (a café) in Budapest in 2015 marked the beginning of Critical Romani Studies (CRS) as a separate academic and political discipline. Dissatisfied with the limitations of traditional Romani scholarship, frequently dominated by external, Eurocentric, or paternalistic perspectives, this conference brought together Romani and non-Romani activists, educators, and students. This change prompted a more self-reflective, inclusive method that prioritises Romani voices and perspectives; it also emphasised the historical, political, and social struggles of Romani people, challenged conventional scholarship, and gave priority to Romani agency (Kóczé, Rövid, and Zentai 2018). A deeper comprehension of Romani identities has been demanded by academics promoting this movement, including Ethel Brooks, Nicolae Gheorghe, and Ian Hancock. This understanding must acknowledge the historical oppression that Roma have endured and their agency, resilience, and active roles in determining their own futures (Hancock 1997; Brooks 2017).

The path from reification to critical engagement in Romani Studies is examined in this article. It investigates how "Gypsylorists" used to characterise, romanticise, criminalise, or labelled orientalist portrayals that historically affected a large scholarship on Roma (Hancock 2002). This method presented Romani people as disconnected from history and modernity, ignoring their socio-political realities (van Baar 2011b). These romanticised portrayals supported institutional prejudice and exclusionary policies. The traditional framework, namely Gypsylorism, is questioned by Critical Romani Studies, which also disputes its reductionist perspectives and makes the case for the significance of Romani-led research in changing perceptions of Romani people. Critical Romani Studies presents a framework for increased social justice and empowerment in academic and policy circles through this alteration, in addition to redefining how Roma are studied (Gheorghe 2001; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Mate, and Greku 2023).

Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Studies, and Social Justice Research (I will elaborate on them later) have all influenced the development of Critical Romani Studies which calls for proactive, emancipatory research practices, methodological reflexivity, and a priority for Romani voices and experiences (Matache and Bhabha 2020). In addition to being the focus of research, CRS academics contend that Roma should also be the creators of knowledge, influencing scholarly and policy discussions that have an impact on their communities (Kóczé 2019). This paradigm change has real-world ramifications for social justice, action, and legislation; it is not merely theoretical. Critical Romani Studies offers a more multifaceted and equitable academic and policy environment by dismantling reified ideas of Romani identity and past, replacing them with those that recognise the diversity and agency of Roma (Brooks 2017).

Early Scholarship on the 'Gypsy'

The concept of Orientalism which was introduced by Edward W. Said (1978) garnered significant scholarly attention by revealing that Western depictions of the East were not neutral or objective, but rather intricately linked to colonial power dynamics. However, the roots of Orientalist ideology were established during the height of European colonial expansion long before Said. In the late eighteenth century British jurist and colonial researcher Sir William Jones contended that maintaining imperial and economic interests necessitated a thorough comprehension of the culture, customs, and language of the colonised people. By 1784 he had suggested that this kind of knowledge was necessary for a more effective administration, and exploitation, of colonised society (Mate 2024).

Orientalism grew at the same time as economic capitalism. States also set up systems that increasingly controlled and manipulated cultural and creative expression, as well as knowledge creation. In order to support colonial power and commercial interests, these factors combined to create racialized and exoticised perceptions of the "Other especially non-Western peoples (Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Mitchell 1991; Shohat and Stam 1994; Appadurai 1996).

The way colonial administration engaged with, approved points of view on, explained, instructed, and governed over the colonised is extensively examined in Edward Said's ground-breaking work *Orientalism* (Said 1978). John M. MacKenzie's theory, which builds on this paradigm, emphasises how Orientalism still permeates contemporary academic knowledge creation, political views, and cultural representation (MacKenzie 1995).

Academic antigypsyism, highlighted in Dezsô Mate's work, has been a constant in Romani people's lives since the publication in 1783 of Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann's "Dissertation on the Gypsies". For hundreds of years, their historical records and memories have been shaped and obliterated by the manifestations of antigypsyism in social sciences (Mate 2024). The way the Romani people were described and managed in academia had a significant impact on national and international practices throughout Europe, ranging from forced assimilation to the Roma Holocaust. Academic antigypsyism, as a result of Grellmann`s publication, spread around the world and had a substantial influence on social sciences and political decision-making over the previous 240 years (Willems 1997; Mate 2024).

Ian Hancock's scholarship on "Gypsylorism" examined the historical memories and misrepresentation of Romani people. His studies demonstrate how "Gypsylorists" have created and maintained misconceptions about the "Gypsy", frequently depicting them as exotic, enigmatic, criminal, or archaic (Hancock 1987; 2002)

According to Angela Kóczé, "Gypsylorism is a contemporary challenge to Roma self-representation in an increasingly globalised world, in addition to being a legacy of historical misrepresentation" (Kóczé 2010). As Nicolae Gheorghe notes, pushing Roma into a single, fixed identity, Gypsylorism has historically denied them autonomy and the right to self-determination. He urges Roma to be empowered via representation, education, and active involvement in all societal decision-making processes (Gheorghe 2004).

Gypsy Lore Society

The scholarly interest in Roma is longstanding, dating back to the establishment of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) in Great Britain in 1888 (https://www.gypsyloresociety.org). This society was the first of its kind, dedicated to the systematic study of various ethnic groups, including Cale, Irish Travellers, Ludar, Rom, Romanichels, Romungre, Scottish Travellers, Sinti, and others. Initially, the society published the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, which focused on scholarly customs, folklore, and linguistics.

A complex web of colonial officials, writers, artists, media, legal organisations, and academics created and maintained stereotypes about Roma, which led to a deeply ingrained set of false beliefs that went beyond the GLS or "Gypsylorists" alone. But their influence was widespread because they presented themselves as a community of scientists and academics offering scientific "truths" and denigrating opposing views (Hancock 1987). As a result, their work became the foundation of Gypsylorism. In fact, in a 2000 article, Deborah Lee notes:

> [...] for any understanding of Gypsylorism, the foundation and operation of the GLS and publication of the GLS in 1888 and the constitution of 'The Gypsies' as specific subjects for study must be the starting point. The members of the GLS and GLS claimed a privileged epistemological position, asserting that they were the only intentionally recognized source of scholarly information about 'The Gypsies' (Lee 2000, 133).

By portraying Roma as dishonest, untrustworthy, or prone to criminal activities, several studies strengthened negative stereotypes. These representations strengthened ingrained social preconceptions and legitimised discrimination. The fact that many Roma were compelled to live nomadic lives due to socio-political factors, including persecution, exclusion, and displacement, was not taken into consideration in these early depictions. Colonial attitudes that portrayed marginalised or non-Western cultures as essentially alien or primitive and disinterested in modernity were linked to these depictions. Numerous people have criticised this type of academic romanticism for dehumanising Roma, denying their agency, and causing them to be marginalised in modern European societies (Selling 2022).

Non-Romani academics predominated in the GLS, studying Romani people without including Romani perspectives in scholarly discussions (Acton 1974). Roma were not regarded as intellectual contributors to science but rather as passive subjects of study for many years (Brooks, Colin, and Rostas 2019). The concept that Roma were objects of curiosity rather than active participants in their own history, knowledge production, and self-representation was strengthened by this exclusion. Gypsylorism ignored Roma's cultural, linguistic, and historical memories in favour of portraying them as a single, static community. Numerous academics have described Roma as-people who have not been impacted by history, and who do not participate in contemporary political conflicts or national identities. The ways that Roma have adapted, fought against persecution, preserved their cultural heritage throughout history were overlooked by these essentialist opinions (Acton 1998, Hancock 2002; Mayall 2004; Selling 2022).

Academic discourse has traditionally perpetuated antigypsyism by promoting essentialist and homogenised portrayals of Romani communities. In her scrutiny of the roots of Romani Studies, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka underlines how scientific racism and frequently silenced Romani voices shaped early scholarship. She promotes a more plural, and context-sensitive approach to ethnic identification and highlights the significance of Romani scholars in dismantling these narratives. Mirga-Kruszelnicka urges a critical reframing of the area, rejecting essentialism, embracing theoretical and methodological diversity, and placing Romani agency at the centre of knowledge production, as opposed to dictating a strict research agenda (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018).

Research from the GLS has occasionally been used to support discriminatory practices against Roma. For instance, multiple European governments supported forceful sedentarisation programmes, assimilation practices, and even racial profiling by citing linguistic and ethnographic research conducted by Gypsylorist researchers. Gypsylorist studies were cited by racial anthropologists in Nazi Germany to classify Roma as a racial "problem", which aided in their persecution during the Holocaust (Willems 1997; Lewy 2000; Hancock 2002; Selling 2022).

Societies and academic circles were slow to embrace Romani-led perspectives when Romani intellectuals like Ian Hancock, Ronald Lee, and Nicolae Gheorghe appeared and began challenging GLS narratives. Hancock specifically criticised the GLS for its archaic and patronising practices, arguing that Romani self-representation knowledge productions should be run by Roma themselves (Hancock 1987; Lee 1997; Hancock 2002; Gheorghe 2007).

These critiques illustrate why many Romani academics and activists have turned away from the Gypsylorist legacy and sought to establish Romani-led research institutes that place an emphasis on community-driven scholarship, political activism, and self-representation.

Development of Critical Romani Studies

The flaws in conventional Romani studies, particularly those that were carried out under the influence of Gypsylorism, gave rise to the academic discipline of Critical Romani Studies. These conventional studies were criticised for maintaining essentialist and stereotyped views about "Gypsies" and frequently were directed by Gypsylorist academics. Critical Romani Studies, on the other hand, place a strong emphasis on Romani agency, self-representation, and the historical, social, and political memories of Roma (Lee 1997; Hancock 2002; Gheorghe 2007). Through the perspectives of Romani researchers themselves, the field aims to challenge the marginalisation of Roma in academic discourse and policymaking by showcasing Romani cultures, histories, and voices (Ryder 2019). Romani communities initially began to question prejudice and misconceptions in the 1960s and 1970s, in the spark of Romology, in which Critical Romani Studies had its origins (Hancock 1987; Lee 1997; Gheorghe 2007). Romani academics like Nicolae Gheorghe, Ronald Lee, and Ian Hancock started challenging conventional methods of studying the Romani people and promoting a new paradigm that would give Romani self-representation top priority.

The official recognition of a collective Romani identity and memory was an important breakthrough in the field. During the 1980s and 1990s, academics such as Nicolae Gheorghe contributed to the development of a shared Romani recognition, while recognising the cultural, linguistic, and geographic variety within the Roma people (Hancock 2002; Gheorghe 2007). This was a departure from the one-dimensional representations that prevailed in previous studies.

As Romani activism and political movements gained momentum, particularly with the First World Romani Congress (1971), scholars began to examine Roma not merely as objects of anthropological inquiry but as active participants in shaping their own future. So, with an emphasis on topics like prejudice, forced assimilation, the Romani Holocaust (*Porajmos*), and the struggle for political representation, Critical Romani Studies started to converge with Romani rights organisations. In the 1990s and 2000s Romani scholars began to become more prominent in academia. Grattan Puxon, Ian Hancock, and Ronald Lee all played a significant role in promoting Romani-led scholarship, which favours internal perspectives above external, frequently paternalistic ones. This change highlighted the importance of Romani perspectives in scholarly settings and public policy debates.

Over the last 10–15 years Critical Romani Studies has addressed how historical processes such as colonialism, racism, and nationalism have influenced Romani identity by applying postcolonial theory, intersectionality, and other critical frameworks (van Baar 2011b; Tremlett, McGarry, and Agarin 2014). To make linkages between the challenges Roma and other marginalised groups face, scholars started addressing topics such as gender, class, and the experiences of Romani women (Trehan and Kóczé 2009; Matache 2016; Kóczé 2018). Ioanida Costache argues that although oppressive classifications have historically defined Romani identity, it also gives Romani communities a sense of empowerment and unity. Recognising the intersections of racist and gendered experiences, she highlights the significance of rethinking Romani identity as both performed and embodied. She fosters a new Romani subjectivity based on counter histories and cultural narratives that reject prevailing standards by referencing post-Hegelian hermeneutics and post-positivist realism (Costache 2018).

Scholars like Frantz Fanon (1961), Edward Said (1978), and Gayatri Spivak (1988) gave rise to postcolonial theory, which looks at the long-term implications of colonialism, notably the historical oppression of racialized and marginalised groups by dominating forces. Despite not being colonised in the conventional sense, some academics contend that the treatment of Roma in Europe can be examined via a postcolonial perspective (Acton and Ryder 2013). For example, enslavement in Romania until 1856, forced assimilation, expulsions, and genocide (*Porajmos*) have all been experienced by Romani communities; these events reflect systemic oppression also observed in colonial history (Hancock 2002; Achim 2004; van Baar 2011a; Matache 2016).

Regarding intersectionality, which was first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, it studies how overlapping social identities – like class, gender, and race – give rise to certain kinds of privilege and oppression. Margareta Matache (2016) highlights the importance of intersectionality in comprehending the experiences of Romani women, whose voices have traditionally been excluded in both male-dominated Romani movement and mainstream feminism (Matache 2016). Angela Kóczé (2018) criticises how gender-specific concerns such as domestic violence, education for Romani girls, and reproductive rights are frequently ignored by EU

initiatives (Kóczé, Zentai, Jovanović, and Vincze 2018). Critical Romani Studies ensure that Romani women's perspectives are not neglected but rather are at the forefront of scholarly and policy debates by employing an intersectional approach. Within Critical Romani Studies there is also recognition of LGBTQ+ individuals. Dezso Mate points out the most noteworthy change is the increased visibility and recognition of feminist activists and Romani LGBTQ+ individuals within both activist and academic domains since mid-2010s. Mate claims the change is rather the consequence of a more profound counter-intellectual current challenging systemic subjugation, such as antigypsyism, anti-Romani racism, and LGBTQ-phobia (Mate 2021).

In addition to these theories, Critical Race Theory is also used in Critical Romani Studies, which questions the notion that racism is merely personal prejudice. It makes the case that racism is systemic and ingrained in organisations, laws, and policies. According to Trehan and Kóczé (2009), Romani exclusion is ingrained in economic and legal systems that systematically disadvantage them, going beyond prejudice while, as stated by van Baar (2011), EU security initiatives frequently portray Roma as a "threat" to the stability of Europe. By employing Critical Race Theory, academics assert that Romani exclusion is the product of deeply ingrained institutions that require active dismantling rather than a mere chance phenomenon.

Another aspect of Critical Romani Studies is the decolonisation of Romani Studies. In her work Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka argues that non-Romani perspectives have historically influenced Romani Studies, reinforcing stigma and structural exclusion (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2022). Critical Romani Studies advocates for a decolonial shift in Romani study and criticises Eurocentric and paternalistic scholarly methods (Kóczé, Rövid, and Zentai 2019).

In the inaugural issue of the *Critical Romani Studies Journal* (Vol.1, No.1, 2018), the authors challenge the historical marginalisation of Roma in scholarly discourse by articulating the need for a forum that prioritises Romani voices and perspectives. In order to address the complexity of Romani experiences, they stress the value of multidisciplinary approaches and the incorporation of critical perspectives. The journal seeks to support scholarly work that empowers and emancipates Romani communities while simultaneously advancing academic understanding (Bogdan et al. 2018).

Critical Romani Studies and Activism

Political and social activism are integrally linked to Critical Romani Studies (CRS), which goes beyond a mere academic trope. By highlighting the importance of knowledge production in empowering Romani communities and influencing policies that address systematic inequalities, scholars at CRS actively seek to close the gap between research and practical activism.

Antigypsyism is a structural and institutionalised kind of racism that influences public attitudes, government acts, and policies, according to CRS researchers. CRS supports advocacy campaigns against racial profiling, police brutality, housing discrimination, and obstacles to education and employment by recording and evaluating these unfair systems (Matache and Bhabha 2020). In the 1990s, for instance, Nicolae Gheorghe (2001) played a key role in promoting Romani political mobilisation, calling for political participation and civil society organisations led by Roma. CRS researchers frequently cooperate

with grassroots movements, international organisations, such as the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to promote legal frameworks that safeguard Romani rights in addition to promoting academic knowledge production.

The notion that Romani people should actively promote their memories and lived experiences within knowledge production rather than being passive objects of foreign study or official programs is one of the fundamental principles of CRS. Increasing the number of Romani in academia, government, and civil society leadership is one way to achieve this. Romani intellectuals including Ethel Brooks and Ian Hancock have maintained that policies impacting Roma should be created *with them*, not only *for them*. Initiatives like the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) and the EU Roma Frameworks that followed, which aimed to involve Romani voices in decision-making processes, reflect this point of view. Nonetheless, top-down strategies that tokenise Romani involvement without actual impact, or that do not question established power systems, continue to draw criticism from CRS researchers.

The significance of solidarity between Romani activism and that of other marginalised groups is also emphasised by CRS researchers. According to scholars such as Mate (2021), who draw on intersectionality and decolonial theory, the oppression of Roma is comparable to that of other racialized and marginalised communities. For instance, analogies have been made between postcolonial disputes and Romani experiences, especially regarding marginalisation, racialized poverty, and forced assimilation. The struggle against anti-Black racism and antigypsyism, with academics emphasising the necessity of inter-movement unity against systematic discrimination and police brutality, feminist movements and Romani women's activism, emphasising the dual prejudice Romani women experience because of their ethnicity and gender (Brooks 2017).

This wider critical involvement guarantees that Romani advocacy is not isolated but rather contributes to the worldwide struggle and call for social justice and human rights. In contrast to traditional Gypsylorism, which frequently disassociated itself from political fights, Critical Romani Studies places strong emphasis on political and social activity. Critical Romani Studies strive to eliminate structural oppression and build a more equitable society for Romani communities by shaping policy, advocating for Romani self-representation, and establishing partnerships with other social organisations.

Conclusion

The shift from reification to Critical Romani Studies marks a significant change to the way Roma are viewed, represented, and discussed in scholarly and policy contexts. Conventional Gypsylorist methods, which presented Roma as a homogenous and ahistorical people, have long been used to support discriminatory practices and perpetuate prejudices. The dynamic, introspective framework provided by Critical Romani Studies (CRS), on the other hand, acknowledges Roma as an active participant in politics, history, and the creation of knowledge.

CRS opposes paternalistic scholarship and promotes a more egalitarian academic environment that recognises the historical injustices, structural disparities, and current hardships faced by Roma by elevating Romani voices and perspectives.

This paradigm change has been facilitated by Critical Romani and pro-Romani academics, who have argued that intersectionality, self-representation, and political participation are essential components of Romani scholarship.

Ultimately, the shift to Critical Romani Studies is not only a change in academia but also an essential step towards Romani communities' acknowledgement, empowerment, and justice. It is crucial that Romani-led research keeps expanding in order to completely eradicate historical distortions and systemic discrimination, guaranteeing that Roma are no longer subjects of study but rather creators of knowledge and agents of change in their own right.

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Revisiting Tools for Change: Reflections on Methodologies and Desire-based Approaches in Roma-related Research

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Abstract

In this article, I revisit some of the main critiques, questions and suggestions in relation to methodological approaches emerging alongside the discipline of Critical Romani Studies. Drawing from Indigenous Studies scholar Eve Tuck's notion of desire-based research, I apply the three goals that Tuck set to foster emancipatory methodologies as a framework to reflect on the strengths and limitations of previously proposed methodologies in Romani-related research. By establishing counterhistories of Roma, Romani scholarship, a reconfiguration of the archive, and reflections on critical whiteness as the main topics in the epistemological paradigm shift unfolding over the past decade, I suggest some further points for methodological consideration that could advance the discipline. In particular, I discuss the possibility of co-researching as a mode of participatory knowledge production and propose digital platforms as a potential site of research, as well as call for further reflections on how to make research results more accessible to wider audiences.

Keywords

- Archive
- Authorship
- Counterhistories
- Desire-based research
- Methodology
- Paradigm shift

Introduction

The academic canon of Romani-related research has historically been dominated by non-Romani scholarly voices and institutions, resulting in a dynamic where Roma themselves are reduced to research subjects with limited agency over the production of knowledge (Acton 2015; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015; Costache 2018; Selling 2018; Mate 2024). The growing academic discipline of Critical Romani Studies has functioned as an intervention in the hegemonic canon of Romani-related research by advocating for theoretical and methodological approaches which resist and render visible the antigypsyist legacy of previous scholarship. The origins of the paradigm shift can be traced back to the early 2010s, when a group of Budapest-based activist scholars started gathering to discuss what kind of collective action should be taken to establish scholarship that centres on Romani voices. The informal meetings expanded into workshops and conferences, which fostered collaboration and discussions on a wider scale (Bogdan et al. 2018, 3).

The topic of Romani-related knowledge production was among the main themes of a 2014 workshop held at Corvinus University in Budapest, which resulted in the publication of a pivotal issue of *Roma Rights, the Journal of the European Roma Rights Centre,* entitled "Nothing about Us without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production" and edited by a group of activist researchers that included Mária Bogdán, Jekatyerina Dunajeva, Tímea Junghaus, Angéla Kóczé, Márton Rövid, Iulius Rostas, Andrew Ryder, Marek Szilvási, and Marius Taba. The establishment of the *Critical Romani Studies* journal in 2018 officially introduced the discipline in the canon of Romani-related research, providing a platform for peer-review knowledge production which fosters new approaches in Romani Studies. In this article, I will revisit some of the main critiques, questions, and suggestions on methodological approaches in these publications which laid the foundations for the discipline of Critical Romani Studies through the framework of desire-based research, coined by Indigenous Studies scholar Eve Tuck. In an effort to reflect on how the methodological tools proposed in the "early" contributions to Critical Romani Studies have been applied and could continue to be applied in future academic knowledge production, my discussion is arranged around the three separate but overlapping goals that Tuck has set for fostering research which is beneficial to communities being researched.

1. Establishing Tools for Change: Centering Romani Identities in Knowledge Production

In the first volume of *Critical Romani Studies,* Ioanida Costache problematises academic discourse which understands 'subjectivity' from an exclusively "hegemonic, Eurocentric and universalizing perspective" and the category of 'identity' as only pertaining to minority groups and debating its ontological validity (Costache 2018, 32). Rejecting the idea that 'subjectivity' has a stable essence which can remain unmarked by external factors such as social location, Costache states: "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" (*Ibid.,* 33). To combat hegemonic canons which silence the voices of Roma and other

marginalised people, Costache proposes a shift in academic knowledge production which utilises Michel Foucault's concept of counterhistories and countermemories to "tell a continuous, heterogeneous history of the Roma" which acknowledges Romani identities as intersectional, plural and diverse (*Ibid.,* 42).

Costache's call to centre on Romani identities in the quest to decolonise Roma-related research resonates with of Eve Tuck's concept of desire-based research, defined as frameworks "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck 2009, 416). In their "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," Tuck discusses how some communities, such as Native Americans, have historically been portrayed in academic discourse as "defeated and broken," hence defined merely through a framework of oppression (*Ibid.*). They appeal to researchers, educators, and marginalised communities to adopt desire-based approaches to resist damage-centered research, which "operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (Tuck 2009, 413).

The first goal Tuck sets for dismantling the tradition of damage-centered research is to *"re-vision our theories of change"* b*y* asking "What can research really do to improve this situation?" (Tuck 2009, 423). Tuck notes that rather than the research itself, what might matter more is "who participates in the research, who poses the questions, how data are gathered, and who conducts the analysis" (*Ibid.*). Similar questions around the relationship between agency and authorship are among the main topics discussed in the articles included in the *Roma Rights* issue on policymaking and knowledge production. One of the journal's subjects of criticism is academic discourse rooted in scientism, defined by Mária Bogdán, Andrew Ryder, and Marius Taba as "claims of expertise and objectivity, and a corresponding disparagement of getting too close to the researched" (Bogdán et al. 2015, 34). Supporting Romani scholarship is recognised as especially important in resisting the idea of scientific objectivity, which has contributed to the dominance of non-Romani scholarly voices in the field.

Drawing from a critical feminist understanding of knowledge as "never detached, but rather embedded in a specific social, political and historical context," Angela Kóczé discusses how Romani scholars must often navigate within epistemological hierarchies which delegitimise their knowledge (Kóczé 2015, 83). In order to critically assess how scientific racism and power relations play into how knowledge about Roma is validated, Kóczé points to the distinction between epistemic authority and privilege. Drawing from Maria Janack, they elaborate that while epistemic authority is related to whose knowledge is perceived as 'objective' and reliable within academic institutions and discourses, epistemic privilege pertains to opportunities related to one's "gender, race, class, sexuality, citizenship, social network, even institutional belonging, and so on" (*Ibid.,* 84). Kóczé argues that the process of claiming epistemic authority can be enhanced by Romani scholars utilising their epistemic privilege within Romani-led institutions to establish new collaborative models between Roma and non-Roma (*Ibid.,* 86).

Similar arguments are proposed by Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, who discusses how post-colonialist and feminist approaches to knowledge production could contribute to developing the discipline of Critical Romani Studies. Mirga-Kruszelnicka argues that while Romani scholars must navigate the paradox of simultaneously being an insider and an outsider both in academia and their local communities, their "outsider within" status can be beneficial to foster cultural sensitivity and might grant them easier access

to first-hand information and an ability to recognise patterns, dynamics, and phenomena which may go unnoticed by non-Romani researchers (Mirga-Kruszelnicka's 2015, 44). To envision new approaches to research which foster Romani knowledge, they suggest drawing from disciplines such as Indigenous scholarship, which has provided alternatives to Western canons of research by centering 'subaltern' perspectives and challenged scholars to "turn inwards, exploring their own ways of knowing" (*Ibid.,* 43).

In their articles, both Kóczé and Mirga-Kruszelnicka advocate for collaboration between Romani and non-Romani researchers through respectful dialogue that aims to resist epistemic hierarchies while acknowledging the value of lived experiences (Kóczé 2015, 86; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 45). Mirga-Kruszelnicka extends the call for collaboration to include relationships between the researcher and the researched, noting that in the lack of meaningful partnerships, "Roma participation in the academic production process becomes tokenistic and symbolic ('rituals of participation') and in the best case, is expressed in paternalism" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 43). However, while the benefits of Romani scholarship and collaboration for Roma-related research have been established, what is less specified is how the proposed epistemological shift should be utilised through research methods. Furthermore, another question remains: which efforts could be taken by non-Romani researchers to avoid producing participatory approaches where the role of Romani participants remains tokenistic, and contribute to elevating Romani counternarratives instead?

Some possible solutions are offered by Violeta Vadja in her 2015 *Roma Rights* article, which calls for a better understanding of "what non-Romani identities mean" in the context of Roma-related research, politics, and development projects (Vadja 2015, 48). Vadja invites non-Romani scholars to engage with critical race theory to "make sense of our racial experience," suggesting drawing from academic discourse on whiteness as a product of racialization (*Ibid.,* 53). Scholars have addressed how hegemonic whiteness operates by rendering white identities as existing outside of race (for example, Lewis 2004), resulting in problematic ideas such as colour-blindness being adopted to avoid discussions on racism (for example, Robertson 2015). Pointing to similar issues, Vadja proposes a framework of philosophical hermeneutics, critical race theory, and critical whiteness pedagogy to be applied in unpacking how historical processes of racialization affect interactions between Roma and non-Roma in the present. They refer to Hans Georg Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*, which underlines the role of one's effective history, being described as "not only our individual personal history, but the history that has brought each of us to where we are now, e.g., our family history, the history of our people, our class or ethnic group or our nation" (*Ibid.,* 49). A so-called 'provocation of the Other,' "a situation or experience that we cannot make sense of within our reality," then becomes an opportunity to expand one's understanding of the world (*Ibid.,* 50). Vajda, therefore, proposes research based on hermeneutic dialogue as a platform to reflect on different experiences of racialization and to "question where that difference originated, how it developed and where it has left each of us" (*Ibid.,* 51).

I agree that hermeneutic dialogue, as proposed by Vadja, can function as an efficient framework for participatory research as it resists the scientist approach where the researcher acts as an objective authority. However, I do think that further methodological considerations must be made to ensure that the research is beneficial to all parties involved. Even if the non-Romani researchers have educated themselves on how structural racism has contributed to the construction of whiteness, participatory

modes of knowledge production can reproduce the power inequalities it aims to resist by applying a damage-centred approach in the research. So, in reference to Tuck's question, "What can research really do to improve this situation?" I suggest that more attention to research planning itself, rather than its execution, is needed (Tuck 2009, 423).

2. From Tokenism to Collaboration: Participatory Research and Desire-based Frameworks

The second goal Tuck has established for resisting damage-centred research is to "*[e]stablish tribal and community human research ethics guidelines*" in order to "protect cultural, intellectual, and sacred knowledges from being stolen, appropriated, or handled in ways that are disrespectful" (Tuck 2009, 423). Tuck notes that the framing of research should also be considered in the process, so that the communities being researched can demand "desire-based inquiries" to replace damage-centred frameworks (*Ibid.*). The second proposition therefore emphasises that agency over research topics and approaches belongs to the communities about which the knowledge is being produced. This challenges the normative processes of research planning, where the person or institutions holding academic authority plan the research and apply the element of participation through interviews conducted within readily established research aims and questions.

A methodological approach which is still less utilised but which I believe holds a lot of potential in Roma-related academic research, is the idea of co-researching. The emerging methodological approach fosters collective knowledge production by acknowledging the participants as equal co-researchers and experts of their own lived realities, rather than positioning the researcher as an authority. The co-researching model resists tokenism by inviting co-researchers to participate in the early stages of research planning, including the framing of research questions and aims (Kulmala et al. 2023, 11). I argue that the co-researching approach could prevent situations where a non-Romani researcher benefits from the epistemological labour of Romani participants while claiming authorship over research outcomes. By fostering critical reflection and dialogue *before,* and not only *during,* research, a methodological frame of co-researching can foster Romani agency in knowledge production by allowing Roma to evaluate which kind of projects would – or would not – be beneficial. An example of co-researching in Roma-related research is the recent and ongoing work of Ioana Ţîştea who, together with Romani women, has researched Roma's experiences with precarious work and migration in the Nordic context. Ţîştea has pointed out that, even in projects that apply co-researching as a method, an issue which persists is that academic language can be inaccessible and alienating to people outside of academia (Ţîştea 2025, 226). In collaboration with Romani co-researchers, Ţîştea has attempted transparency, for example, by translating each section of the final research product for the co-researchers (*Ibid.*). Such considerations form part of the practicalities of developing methodologies which resist tokenism and foster equality.

Tuck's proposition to demand desire-based approaches that resist narratives where communities are only defined through their struggle is also relevant to scholarship on Roma. Without referring to Tuck specifically, Mirga-Kruszelnicka has addressed how narratives of poverty and marginalisation

have dominated Roma-related research, noting that "producing and reproducing such images of a socially-deprived ethnic group rarely works towards diminishing prejudice or raising acceptance on the receiving end – that is, the majority society" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 41). They call for research that focuses on how Roma have contributed to their local and national cultures and participated in national independence struggles – both topics which have later been explored by Critical Romani Studies scholars, including Mirga-Kruszelnicka. Some examples are 2020's *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery,* edited by Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva, and Jan Selling's 2022 *Romani Liberation: A Northern Perspective on Emancipatory Struggles and Progress.* Such publications, by adopting frameworks of bravery and liberation, provide new points of departure to produce counternarratives which position Romani people as active agents in social change rather than passive victims of oppression.

While desire-based research can foster counternarratives to struggle and shed light on Romani resistance, solidarity, and societal contributions across cultural and geographical contexts, it is important to ensure that exploring alternatives to problem-focused research does not become synonymous with overlooking past and current hardships faced by Roma. Especially in the current political climate, where far-right mobilisations and anti-intellectualism are on the rise, it remains crucial to acknowledge and address how structuralised antigypsyism influences the lived realities of Romani individuals and communities. I believe that the practice of co-researching, especially in the early stages of research planning, could also be useful in configuring which research gaps in this context are worth addressing in a way that benefits Roma themselves.

3. Expanding the Archive: Alternative Sites and Modes of Knowledge Production

The third and final goal Tuck calls for is to "*[c]reate mutually beneficial roles for academic researchers in community research*" by reassessing the relationships between academic research and a community's self-knowledge (Tuck 2009, 424). Tuck notes that it should be up to the people being researched to evaluate the necessity of academic inquiries, and that such reflections allow recognition of community self-knowledge as an equally valuable form of knowledge production (*Ibid.*). I suggest that, in the context of Critical Romani Studies, this goal could be a useful framework for discussing questions regarding the archive and alternative modes of knowledge production outside academic discourse.

In her contribution to the 2015 volume of *Roma Rights,* Ethel Brooks discusses the insider/outsider dynamic which marks discourse on Romani subjects, communities, and knowledge production, problematising how previous knowledge production on Roma has imposed an "inexpert status" on Roma and rendered their knowledge invisible (Brooks 2015, 57). Brooks suggests that dismantling the Gypsylorist canon requires new approaches to the archive, drawing from Thomas Acton to argue that the anthropological understanding of culture has led to Romani Studies assuming "an archive that is without individual authors; tradition, folklore or the primitive stand in for the author, the knowledge producer or the cultural agent" (*Ibid.,* 59). They propose that expanding the archive in a way that elevates

Romani authorship is to consider community- and family-based practices of producing culture and knowledge. As an example of knowledge production which operates across generations, kin networks, and communities, Brooks mentions the UK-based Romani family Le Bas, whose extensive arts careers manifest both through individual and collaborative family practices (*Ibid.,* 59). Brooks notes that such family-oriented practices resist tokenism and the concept of "anomaly – the community member who 'escapes' or succeeds despite the community, or against the community" (*Ibid.,* 60). The kind of Critical Romani Studies scholarship that separates itself from hegemonic and dismissive modes of knowledge production should reposition communities as significant loci of knowledge rather than as limitations to individual expression.

An example of scholarship which pushes the limits of the archive is Arman Heljic's 2021 *Critical Romani Studies* article "Staging the Romani Queer Revolution: New Approaches to the Study of Romani Queerness." Heljic's analysis of *Roma Armee,* an ensemble-based theatre production by the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin, applies a methodology which combines (auto)ethnographic field notes with interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from queer-, feminist-, post-colonial, and Critical Romani Studies. The article explores how the production "as a space to deconstruct and rearticulate the lived experiences of Romani queer subjectivities" contributes to understanding the diversity of Romani populations, especially elevating the specific challenges faced by queer Roma (Heljic 2021, 41). Heljic's choice to merge autoethnography with an analysis of the performance renders visible the intersectionality and complexity of Romani queer experiences. Furthermore, by focusing on knowledge production at sites which, in Heljic's words, "are not traditionally considered of value for academic knowledge production or real theatrical or artistic engagement," the article can be seen as an example of scholarship which contributes to reimagining the archive of Romani knowledge (*Ibid.,* 41).

Arguing that Heljic's proposal to redefine what is "of value" for researching is integral for Critical Romani Studies, I propose that alongside community- and family-based practices and non-mainstream arts and culture, more attention should be given to digital spaces, especially the realm of social media. Digital platforms foster new modes of community-building and knowledge production, enabling Romani individuals to (counter)narrate and share experiences beyond their local communities. While social media can foster anti-Romani sentiments in the form of hate speech, it also provides a platform to fight prejudice by allowing non-Romani populations to have access to Romani narratives outside of the often problem-focused and stereotypical Romani representations in mainstream media. I believe these digital interactions are worth consideration for academic inquiry for both Romani and non-Romani scholars, as both positionalities can provide beneficial situated knowledge in exploring how digital discourse and community-building contribute to new forms of knowledge production across cultural and geographical contexts.

Reconfiguring the archive should also extend to how the knowledge produced through research is preserved and presented. I believe that initiatives to make the archive more accessible for people outside of academia would be a beneficial step towards elevating Romani counternarratives. Among examples of archival projects that are easily accessible online is *RomArchive,* a digital archive initiated by Franziska Sauerbrey and Isabel Raabe in collaboration with Romani activists, academics, artists, and curators across Europe. Additionally, while scholars are often limited by copyright and institutional policies, practices such as ensuring interview records are accessible in their original language should be considered when reconfiguring the archive and

envisioning mutually beneficial methodologies. Considering that the Romani diaspora extends across a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts, I believe that both Romani and non-Romani scholars can utilise their local knowledge in ways which do not only contribute to their personal academic merits. Especially in locations where Romani scholarship is still less established, non-Romani scholars might have the benefit of shared language and cultural knowledge to produce research on topics that would otherwise remain unexplored. The focus, then, should be on figuring out the ways in which location-specific knowledge could be utilised to benefit Romani communities in the specific location.

Furthermore, in reference to Tuck's point about recognising knowledge production outside of academia, I propose that in addition to reflecting on what is *worth* researching, even more attention should be given to what is considered *as* research. Brooks and Heljic both have addressed the latter by framing artistic practices as important sites of alternative knowledge production, and more examples can be found in other cultural contexts. Among them is the work of Finnish Romani singer Hilja Grönfors, who since the 1990s has travelled around Finland collecting melodies and lyrics of Finnish Romani songs. By transcribing and performing the songs which historically have only been passed orally from generation to generation, Grönfors has made a significant contribution to preserving Finnish Romani musical heritage. In doing so, they have also challenged traditional gender roles by performing songs which traditionally are only sung by men (Hatinen 2024). In 2024, the University of Arts Helsinki awarded Grönfors with an honorary doctorate. While such symbolic gestures from authoritative academic institutions alone are not enough to recognise the value in Romani-produced knowledge, the acknowledgement of Grönfors' extensive career is one step towards bringing awareness of alternative modes of knowledge production on Roma *by* Roma.

Conclusion

In this article, I have utilised Eve Tuck's notion of desire-based research to revisit and reflect on methodological frameworks which have been proposed as tools to resist the hegemonic modes of knowledge production on Roma. While a short-format discourse analysis cannot capture all the epistemological considerations related to the paradigm shift which the emergence of Critical Romani Studies has fostered, I have aimed to outline some central suggestions which scholars have made over the past decade. The discourse was approached through Tuck's three proposed goals for resisting damage-centred research, which call for researchers and the communities being researched to "*Re-vision our theories of change;*" "*Establish tribal and community human research ethics guidelines;*" and "*Create mutually beneficial roles for academic researchers in community research*" (Tuck 2009, 423–424). The resulting discussion established counterhistories of Roma (Costache 2018), Romani scholarship (Kóczé 2015; Mirga-Kruzlenicka 2015), reconfiguration of the archive (Brooks 2015; Heljic 2021), and reflections on critical whiteness (Vadja 2015) as foundational elements in envisioning new methodologies for Romani-related research.

In dialogue with the abovementioned scholars, I provided examples of how the methodologies they have proposed have later been applied in Romani-related research through publications which centre on emancipatory narratives (Mirga-Kruszlenicka and Dunajeva 2020; Selling 2022) and draw attention to non-mainstream sites of artistic Romani counternarratives (Heljic 2021). While hoping, through

my discussion of the selected texts, to illuminate the significant shift that the field has already made towards more critical and emancipatory knowledge production, I proposed some further methodological considerations which have been less focused on to date.

As I suggested through the discussion on participatory research and the role of non-Romani scholars, I believe that the methodological framework of co-researching could open up new possibilities for envisioning projects "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck 2009, 416). As pointed out by Ioana Ţîştea, applying innovative methodologies such as co-researching sets new challenges, such as reflecting on the accessibility of academic language in knowledge production (Ţîştea 2025, 226). I believe that such challenges should not only be seen as potential pitfalls or obstacles, but as exciting opportunities for new collaborative efforts between Roma and non-Roma to further develop the field. As suggested, such collaborations could be used to study contexts which are still little explored, such as social media and other digital realms.

In the introductory chapter of "Nothing about Us without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production," it states that the sense of idealism and optimism which the publication and the preceding conference fostered are an "invaluable resource, for without a 'pedagogy of hope' the Romani Movement would stagnate" (Bógdan et. al. 2015, 3). It is no exaggeration to declare that now, a decade later, this pedagogy of hope has successfully begun to materialise through a remarkable shift in the academic discourse on Roma. To conclude, then, I believe that concepts such as desire-based research can function as useful frameworks to envision and utilise methodologies to further advance this positive change.

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Romani Epistemic Resistance beyond White Fragility: Decolonial Refusal in a Workshop on Romani Genocide

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Abstract

This article critically engages with racialized epistemic structures that pretend to "include" Romani voices while simultaneously colonise, extract, and discipline them. Based on my lived experience in 2025 as co-trainer in a workshop on Romani genocide, I delve into the attitude of a "White" historian who perpetrated epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) by controlling the narrative, essentialising and Orientalising Romaniness, silencing Romani epistemologies, ignoring first-hand Romani family histories, and ignoring ongoing systemic biopolitical violence against Roma in Europe.

This article has three aims: (1) to show that Romani epistemic sovereignty acts as a refusal to the colonial "neutrality" of academia; (2) to show that so-called institutional "inclusion" is, more often than not, containment through Orientalism, neo-colonial forms of knowledge production (Trehan and Kóczé 2011), and White fragility (DiAngelo 2018); and (3) to show that acts of refusal by Romani people constitute decolonial resistance.

Therefore, intertwining my lived experience with critical theory, I suggest that Romani knowledge is a theory, a method, and a decolonial intervention in and of itself. This is a call for epistemic justice and, at the same time, an assertion that Romani subalterns have spoken.

Keywords

- Critical pedagogy
- Decolonial resistance
- Epistemic violence
- Romani epistemology
- White fragility

Introduction

Romani epistemic sovereignty is studied within the domain of colonial epistemic structures in the field of academia and activism. I illustrate this by referring to a workshop on Romani genocide, in which I was supposed to participate as a co-trainer. Although the event aimed to honour Romani lives and memories, it, unfortunately, honoured the same epistemic hierarchies that have historically rendered Romani knowledge stagnant. A "White" [1] historian took "charge" of defining Romani identity, dismissing contemporary anti-Roma violence, and "controlling" the legitimacy of Romani knowledge. This was not just a case of an unhinged disagreement but a ritualised display of epistemic violence and "White" fragility. The ethical reason for not citing the workshop is to highlight that I do not intend to name actors within colonial structures. I am writing this article to reorient the analysis from individuals to the systems in which they operate, at the same time signalling that the behaviours and practices in this paper are structural and not aberrant or random.

This article has three objectives. First, to discuss the way Romani epistemic sovereignty refutes colonial academia's "neutrality." Second, to show how institutional inclusion can still function as containment through Orientalism, the neo-colonial governance of Romani knowledge (Trehan and Kóczé 2011), and "White" fragility. And third, to demonstrate how Romani refusal, such as reclaiming the anthem *Gelem, Gelem*, prioritising family history, and rejecting essentialism, is performed as decolonial resistance and knowledge production.

The argument is built up in three parts. In the next section, Conceptual Framework, I describe the theoretical tools used to approach the analysis of epistemic violence, scholarly colonialism, and refusal. In the next section, Situated Experience, I explain how the dynamics described in the previous section evolved in the Romani genocide workshop. The Conclusion discusses the implications of Romani epistemic resistance as both a theory and a method. In it, I state that Romani subalterns have spoken and can no longer be confined within colonial epistemic frames.

Theoretical and Conceptual Scope

This article theorises Romani decolonial resistance as an act of epistemic sovereignty – a marginal community's ability to define, legitimise, and disseminate knowledge on its own terms (Simpson 2014). In this case, refusal is not a communication breakdown; it is an intentional intellectual and political act to counter systems that seek to subsume, silence, and exploit Romani epistemologies (Simpson 2017). As Trehan and Kóczé (2011) argue, Romani politics and knowledge production are frequently shaped by neo-colonial relations, where external "expertise" governs what counts as legitimate Romani knowledge

1 In using the term "*White*", I do not refer to corporeal or biological characteristics of a group, but rather to social power relations in which non-Romani people are positioned as superior and the racialized Roma as inferior. This usage draws on the colonial binary frameworks articulated by Edward Said (East–West) and Frantz Fanon (Black–White), as well as the notion of the liminal space between coloniser and colonised developed by Homi K. Bhabha. See also: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

(50–52). Their analysis shows how inclusionary discourse can mask deeper structures of domination. Kóczé (2020) similarly discusses how institutional practices around recognition can reproduce racialized hierarchies even within human-rights frameworks.

For Michel Foucault (1977), the power–knowledge nexus illustrates that knowledge is never neutral. Power structures dictate the vantage points considered and the voices excluded. This dynamic was very visible in the workshop, in the guise of "White" authority's epistemic gatekeeping.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) poses the famous question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She shows how hegemonic systems mediate and neutralise subaltern speech, a process she refers to as epistemic violence. This helps understand how Romani voices "included" under "White" authority, may be simultaneously disqualified and reshaped.

Spivak's work is complemented by Edward Said's (1994) authority to narrate, in which he highlights the imbalance in who is able to tell what story. In the case of Romani, "White" scholars are the authoritative narrators, whilst their voices are pushed to the margins. In his critique of Orientalism, Said (1978) shows "Whiteness" exoticises and decontextualises Romani identity.

Inspired by Sara Ahmed's (2012) work on non-performatives, I discuss institutional non-commitments to diversity or anti-racism as non-performatives. In reality, these symbolic non-commitments absorb critique and neutralise them, leaving structural hierarchies undisturbed.

Equally important are Robin DiAngelo's (2018) recent theoretical contributions on White fragility and how defensive responses to critiques of racism serve to control and "discipline" dissent. These are not simply irrational emotional responses but serve as a means to re-establish "White" control and authority and subvert subaltern resistance.

These authors, in combination, give my argument conceptual tools with which to understand the workshop as a situated experience, where I was exposed to epistemic violence, scholarly colonialism, Orientalism, non-performatives, and White fragility. They also help me contextualise Romani refusal, not just as a form of resistance, but as a theory and method of decolonial intervention (Smith 2012; Santos 2014).

Situated Experience: Workshop on Romani Genocide

The Romani genocide workshop was meant to focus on remembrance and honouring Romani past (and present) struggles. Instead, it turned into a concentrated performance of colonial power. My experience as co-trainer reveals how colonial gaze, epistemic violence, and White fragility worked together to bracket Romani knowledge. Here, I refer to several harms caused by the "White" historian and sustained by the institution: gatekeeping of knowledge through essentialist definitions of Roma, dismissal of ongoing genocidal and biopolitical violence, erasure of family history as theory, reduction of our anthem *Gelem, Gelem*, the colonial gaze, the pedagogy of racist stereotypes, the silencing of structural critique, whilst framing it as personal conflicts and the lack of reflexivity in research.

At the beginning, the "White" historian assumed the right to determine "Who are the Roma?" in reductive, oversimplified, and essentialist ways. This is what Michel Foucault (1977) refers to as the power–knowledge nexus. Gadje[2] dominate the scene, wielding authority over the identity of Roma, while muzzling Romani voices to mere footnotes.

When the "White" historian described Roma as "closed communities", it was a sophisticated means to shift responsibility for marginalisation onto us, while obscuring the structural violence and betrayal of our communities. As Trehan and Kóczé (2011) demonstrate, such externally imposed definitions operate within a neo-colonial regime of knowledge, in which non-Romani actors claim epistemic authority over Romani identity and history (52–55). Kóczé (2020) likewise notes how institutional practices often reproduce racialized hierarchies rather than dismantling them.

When, before the workshop began, I tried to describe and name some of the ongoing genocidal and biopolitical violence to the "White" co-trainer – including forced sterilisations of Romani women, police murder of Romani men, segregation, neglect, and abandonment of Romani lives, and removal of Romani children – the historian dismissed my intervention, stressing particularly that "this is in the past". Acting on a denial of lived realities, the historian performed what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) calls "epistemic violence". This dismissal was not simply a disagreement but a silencing of voices in which removal of urgency adds to the systemic injustices and attempts to erase the historical genocide connection, along with the current control of racial violence. In that instance, the power–knowledge constellation acted as a gatekeeping mechanism, seeing "White" voices as legitimate whilst ignoring Romani accounts of the ongoing violence.

There was a similar dynamic when I integrated my family history into my intervention. The historian interjected: "We are not here to listen to your family!" By devaluing family history, they reiterated what Trehan and Kóczé (2011) identify as the marginalization of Romani experiential knowledge within neo-colonial epistemic frameworks, where Romani narratives are devalued unless filtered through non-Romani authority (55–58). Kóczé (2020) similarly critiques the limits of institutional recognition when it fails to center subaltern epistemologies. However, as Audra Simpson (2014, 2017) notes, "refusal" is not silence, but it is a strategy to live under coloniality. My argument that family history is a theory was intended to reject the colonial edict of detached neutrality. It brought to the fore embodied memory and intergenerational trauma as valid epistemology and countered the "White" academic fantasy that objectivity is the sole valid form of knowledge.

Gelem, Gelem, the Romani anthem, faced the same Orientalist treatment. The co-trainer folklorised and trivialised it, playing an Orientalised version of the anthem without any explanation. This, as a response to a hymn of genocide and resistance, reproduced what Edward Said (1978) termed Orientalism: the rendering of the "Other" as vivid, consumable, and devoid of any political significance. I objected, and the "White" co-trainer "corrected" the error by playing another version. This one, however, only contributed to anti-Roma stereotypes with the lyrics *"Si man Romni chgivel ma te chorav"* (I have a wife who makes me steal). Even "corrected," the Orientalism and criminalisation of Roma continued. I

2 "*Gadje*" refers to the domestic "White" population in the states where Roma live. It generally means non-Roma.

endeavoured to counter it by playing the official version on my phone. Participants stood up and listened in silence as I translated the lyrics and explained their significance, both historical and political. I drew on what Simpson (2017) describes as a decolonial method: reclaiming narrative authority through embodiment.

Harm also emerged in workshop exercises. Anti-Roma stereotypes were mentioned by the "White" co-trainer without any context or critique. When a Romani participant rebutted this, explaining that it made them feel unsafe, the trainer dismissed it as "necessary pedagogy". This dismissal captures what Sara Ahmed (2012) refers to as a non-performative: an institutional gesture that seems to acknowledge racism but actually reproduces it.

Another Romani participant later confided that the "White" co-trainer had "corrected" their family history. Once again, the trainer decided which Romani knowledge counted and which did not, committing another act of epistemic violence (Spivak 1988). This shows how "educational" spaces can reproduce harm without accountability for the violence they re-enact.

The NGO hosting the event only solidified this containment. When I voiced concerns, representatives pointed to "neutrality" and "professionalism" frameworks, recasting my critique as personal. Protecting institutional reputation over epistemic harm reinforces what Robin DiAngelo (2018) terms as White fragility. Defensive manoeuvres – minimisation of my critique, recentring "White" authority, and delegitimising my refusal – functioned as disciplinary control of Romani voices. "For you," I said to the "White" representative of the NGO who organised the workshop, "this might only be a job, but for me this is about the struggles of my people." The difference in their professional detachment and my embodied investment is a critique of how "neutrality" is wielded as a control mechanism rather than an ethical position.

The term "interesting" was often used by the "White" historian when talking about archival findings on Romani displacement, exile, violence, and genocide. My attempt to problematise the usage of this word was answered by the "White" co-trainer with ignorant defensiveness: "I see no problem in using this word. We all have academic interests; therefore, these findings are interesting to me." In this framing, our struggles became "interesting", our pain reduced to unempathetic academic interest. This reduction exemplifies what Spivak (1988) terms epistemic violence: the re-coding of subaltern suffering into objects of "knowledge" that satisfy dominant academic interests while erasing their ethical and political weight.

In the end, it was again the "White" historian who said nothing about their positionality. Responding to the question on why they studied Roma, their answer was simply that "it just happened". This lack of justification for such a fundamental aspect of their work mirrored, in part, the colonial research practices outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012). Given the historically oppressive frameworks in research about Roma, it is not innocent to suggest such decisions "just happen". In the absence of self-reflection, the historian detached themselves from any positionality attributed to their knowledge production without recognising the power dynamics at play. This illustrates the coloniality of knowledge production.

The colonial epistemic structures that the "White" historian reproduced in the workshop seemed to contain a conflict of personalities. The "White" historian placed themselves in the role of epistemic gatekeeper,

practicing, in varying degrees, Orientalism and neo-colonial epistemic governance (Trehan and Kóczé 2011). The "White" representative of the NGO-organiser folded critique into its bureaucratic "neutrality" and non-performatives, constructing the semblance of critique whilst perpetuating White fragility. As a consequence of these dynamics, familiarity with Roma and their epistemologies was contained. Yet I disrupted the colonial choreography. My decolonial refusals asserted Romani epistemic sovereignty as a method and theory (Santos 2014; Simpson 2017).

Conclusion: We Are the Theory You Cannot Contain

As difficult as it was to accept, the issues that came up in the workshop were not due to a clash of personalities but rather a performance of the more intricate facets of colonial encounter. The "White" historian silenced ongoing genocidal violence, dismissed family history as theory, and exoticised our anthem. Racist stereotyping by the trainer in the name of pedagogy, and an NGO reframing structural critique as an issue of interpersonal conflict, were all cases of failing to recognise the "Whiteness" of the authority. The performance of all these acts, unrefuted in that space, illustrated the invisible grip of colonial power, defining and disciplining Romani voices while drawing on complex forms of abusive control, proving the disingenuousness of claims of inclusion.

These practices were still challenged in different ways. Romani refusal turned the workshop into a site of decolonial resistance. I reclaimed the anthem *Gelem, Gelem* as a collective act of memory, insisted on family history as epistemology, and refused essentialist definitions of Romani identity. These refusals exemplify what Simpson (2014, 2017) calls refusal as method. These acts, however small, are in the domain of colonial disruption and reclaiming sovereignty over our knowledge. They also show, as Santos (2014) points out, that for epistemic justice, we need more than symbolic inclusion. Santos's work insists on the need for subaltern epistemologies to be recognised as theory, method, and intervention in their own right.

The workshop demonstrated how easily the claim of "neutrality" crumbles in the face of Romani epistemic sovereignty. Professionalism and talk of "diversity," as Ahmed (2012) reminds us, often function as non-performatives – gestures that mask containment under the guise of inclusion. Yet even in the face of silencing, Romani subalterns spoke. Our interventions shattered the colonial structures embedded in academic and activist spaces.

Romani knowledge is not an additional commentary to "White" frameworks; it is theory incarnate, rooted in our histories, memories, and intergenerational survival. It defies control, discipline, and reduction to secondary material for institutional prestige. Romani voices speak for accountability, not to uphold the colonial edifice but to dismantle it. The Romani subalterns have spoken, and our voice is not marginal but constitutive. It is carried through our anthem, sustained in intergenerational memory, and embodied in survival. The Romani body is a living archive, bearing the weight of genocide, displacement, and resistance, and transforming memory into method. The Romani voice is theory, because it produces concepts from lived experience; it is method, because it refuses colonial neutrality and centres refusal as practice; and it is an archive, because it safeguards histories that dominant epistemologies attempt to erase. This voice cannot be domesticated as "interesting" material. It insists on epistemic justice, challenges the authority of colonial knowledge, and asserts Romani epistemic sovereignty as an intervention into structures that have long sought to contain us. The Romani subalterns have spoken! Opre Roma!

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Reparative Memory and the Visibility of Roma Subjectivity in Otto Mueller's 'Gypsy' Depictions – Anger, Pride, and Shame

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Abstract

This article offers a critical reflection by Romani intellectuals on their joint engagement with the Otto Mueller exhibition at the LWL Museum of Art and Culture in Münster (2024–2025). Moving beyond an art-historical experience, the exhibition prompted a profound confrontation with colonial memories and stereotypical representations of Romani bodies, evoking ambivalent emotions such as anger, hope, pride, and shame Positioned as German and Hungarian Romani scholars, the authors analyse Mueller's work through a transnational and intersectional lens that foregrounds lived experience, collective memory, and epistemic responsibility.

At the same time, it is important to consider Mueller's position and function within German Expressionism – connected to Die Brücke from 1910, later professor at the State Academy in Breslau (1919–1930), and a key author of the "bathers" pictorial formula; the subsequent denunciation and confiscation of works in the Munich "Degenerate Art" exhibition of 1937 (posthumously) further underscores the visibility of his modern visual language in the period's cultural discourse. The authors emphasise the necessity of visibility as subjectivity, shifting from being objectified to asserting agency in knowledge production and cultural representation. They highlight the limitations of counter-narratives within the exhibition and argue for deeper institutional reforms, including active participation of Romani scholars in curatorial practices.

Drawing on feminist epistemologies and critical memory studies, the article articulates reparative memory culture as a transformative practice that challenges hegemonic narratives and centres Romani voices. Dialoguing with artworks by Tamás Péli and Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, it illustrates how Romani art creates reparative spaces of memory and dignity, contesting historical erasures. Ultimately, the article advocates for a decolonial and participatory memory politics that recognises Roma as knowledge producers and co-creators of culture, thus reshaping European art, memory, and scholarship without seeking to destroy them.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Exhibition review
- Expressionism
- Memory
- Otto Mueller
- Reparation

Introduction

In this text, we reflect as Romani intellectuals on our joint visit to the Otto Mueller exhibition at the LWL Museum of Art and Culture in Münster (20 September 2024 – 02 February 2025). For us, this engagement was more than just an art-historical experience – it confronted us with colonial memories of our ancestors, the impact of which we felt both academically and personally. The more than 60 exhibited artworks evoked in us ambivalent emotions, such as pride, shame, anger, and hope. These feelings form the starting point for our analysis, which combines lived experience, memory, and critical reflection. As German and Hungarian Romani scholars, we analyse Mueller's work from a transnational perspective, grounded in our familial histories and shaped by shared by identity experiences.

Our self-positioning is not rhetorically simply a gesture but the expression of an epistemic reflection and claim for reparation as to who speaks and from what position, which is central in memory, political, and postcolonial discourses. Visibility here means no longer positioning oneself as an object, but as a subject of rebuilt memories and unresolved pasts. In an art history in which Roma were objects, denied the chance to speak, we understand our authorship[1] as a counter-narrative to hegemonic images and historical erasures.

Our critical engagement with postcolonial, memory, and critical race theory leads us to challenge the colonial gaze in visual cultures. The depictions of Romani women's bodies shown in Mueller's work, referred to as "Gypsies," as the original,[2] is an antigypsy and orientalist term which is not an abstract and innocent choice by Mueller but a deeply personal and direct choice. We consciously align with the assessment of Tanja Pirsig-Marshall,[3] who rejects a blanket labelling of Mueller as a racist; at the same time, she underscores that Mueller's imagery has historically contributed to the consolidation of certain stereotypes and that such patterns are, at times, uncritically perpetuated in his depictions. Against this backdrop, it is clear to us that a portion of these works participates in a traditional, racially grounded exoticisation that typifies Romani bodies and – particularly in some representations of women – encourages sexualised projections. They embody epistemic violence – erasing Romani dignity and denying Romani possibility to articulate their lived experiences and memories. This phenomenon echoes Spivak's well-known question, "Can the Subaltern speak?" (Spivak 1988).

The exhibition was organised and launched on the occasion of Otto Mueller's 150th birthday sesquicentennial. In addition to an art historical retrospective, it explicitly addressed the debate surrounding the depiction of women's nudity and the reproduction of stereotypical images. A curatorial

1 The spelling "authorship" is deliberately chosen here to include gender-sensitive and non-binary perspectives. It reflects our aspiration to go beyond mere representation and to ensure the visibility of marginalised positions in language

2 The term as the original is a racist connotation, used here exclusively for critical analysis.

3 Tanja Pirsig-Marshall, born in 1973, studied art history, history, and archaeology in Bochum and Bonn. She received her doctorate from the University of Essex in 2004 with a thesis on Otto Mueller. She is Deputy Director of the LWL Museum of Art and Culture in Münster and has been Head of Exhibitions, Collection and Research Department since 2022.

decision was made to partially cross out original titles and include artistic positions from Romani academics and artists, such as Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Luna De Rosa, and Vera Lacková, who offered attempts at critical refractions. These contributions opened up spaces of aesthetic self-empowerment, and further assert themselves in reparatory discourse in the field of arts and culture, knowledge production within museum representation (Pirsig-Marshall 2025).[4]

The counter-narratives were only able to interrupt stereotyping devaluation at certain points. Colonial images resurfaced with full intensity in the first instance of our direct encounter with the works, and then were reenforced when we read labels emblazoned with historical titles: some struck through, marked as "Z**" – our redaction of the German slur "*Zigeuner*", roughly equivalent to "Gypsy" – or replaced entirely. Although the introductory wall text clearly contextualised the racializing terms ("Gypsy", the "N-word"), the visual presence of the historical designations remained powerful. For us, these works remained difficult to accept, because the perspective of the exoticised object continued to dominate reception.

Taking our critical reflections and lived experiences into account, we ask: how can colonial and racializing regimes of looking be deconstructed through counter-images and critical knowledge production, and how can Romani subjectivity be made visible and open to debate in art, culture, and scholarship? In doing so, we deliberately engage with Mueller's visual language – especially the nude and the Brücke context (Brücke-Museum 2025) – as both a point of reference and friction. We call for a critical examination of aesthetic, historical, and political dimensions. The public debate mirrors these tensions: Till Briegleb (2024) criticises a moralising "tribunal" framing, while Tanja Pirsig-Marshall (2025) stresses that the exhibition is not only about Nazis, rejects a blanket labelling of Mueller as racist, and at the same time underscores that Mueller's work has historically contributed to the reproduction of stereotypes – a fact that institutions must address explicitly today.

The disproportionate attention given to the works in which Roma are depicted is especially revealing, considering they represent only a small fraction of his overall oeuvre. The so-called "Zigeunermappe" (1926–1928) had a particularly strong influence on these receptions, which depictions reproduce stereotypical ideas of closeness to nature, nomadism, and wildness. Titles such as *Z girls on the beach* show how colonial attributions are anchored in curatorial practices, regardless of actual identification. These considerations lead us to a central insight: reparative memory for Romani people must be grounded in critical reflection and scholarly analysis.

As the "ancestors" of the depicted Romani bodies by Otto Mueller, we do not write for them but with them, supported by transnational and transgenerational collective memories and lived experiences. We bridge between personal and analytical levels and thus try to offer antigypsy image constructions in the European art world.

4 The exhibition was curated by Tanja Pirsig-Marshall, Flora Tesch, and Ann-Catherine Weise, with the help of external experts, including one of the authors of this text.

1. Epistemic Responsibility – Between Lived Experiences and Knowledge Production

Our paths as Romani intellectuals have crossed several times in the past at different youth meetings since 2009, and later at various national and international roundtables and conferences. Despite these coincidences, we share a common origin from southern Hungary, a region characterised by racialization and social marginalisation as the vein of the social structure. Currently, we do not place ourselves into self-victimisation; simply, we just confront society with its blurred antigypsyist constructions. These experiences form a shared social and identity resonance that continues to shape our starting points, reflections, and critical scholarship frames. Today, we work together in the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft Antiziganism and Ambivalence in Europe Research Unit, an interdisciplinary research unit that is negotiating Romani perspectives in an institutionally legitimised way for the first time in Germany.[5] We see our voice as part of a collective dialogue and as an intervention in an academic field that has long marginalised our position. The decision to write together is a form of reclaiming Romani memories and methodological, which allows us to navigate differences and develop a common voice with more than just the results of individual contributions. Our aim is not only to make marginalised experiences visible but also to bring them into academic discourse as critical knowledge. We understand epistemic responsibility as the obligation not only to decolonise knowledge but also to question the institutions that produce it, as earlier Ethel Brooks in 2017 analysed the interrelations of subjectivity, representation, and exclusion.

Reparative memory culture refers to a form of remembrance that goes beyond mere preservation: it critically examines colonial and racializing narratives and creates new, dignified narratives from the perspective of those affected. This practice is not only aimed at the majority society but also at marginalised groups themselves in order to regain historical continuity, dignity, and agency. Access to knowledge is a social privilege that has historically been secured and maintained by those in hegemonic, advantaged positions. In the social sciences and arts and cultural productions, as soon as we articulate our origins and emotions, we risk being devalued as "biased", "self-victimised", "sensitives", "subjective", or "subjective insiders". This "white fragile" defence fails to recognise and underestimates Romani lived experiences, narratives, memories, and academic knowledge production. What is often framed as our weakness is, in fact, the foundation of situated knowledge, rooted in lived experience and capable of challenging hegemonic narratives.

As bell hooks points out, passionate narratives of marginalised groups often are dismissed as sentimental unless they conform to hegemonic academic norms. Furthermore, she emphasises that emotion is knowledge that makes violence not only analysable but tangible. Looking at racism analytically is necessary. Experiencing racism and reflecting on it scientifically at the same time is a layered burden because it operates through multiple structures, manifesting in personal gestures, perceptions, and institutional practices (bell hooks 1995).

5 DFG Research Unit, "Antiziganism and Ambivalence in Europe (1850–1950)", European University of Flensburg. https://www.uni-flensburg.de/fogr-antiziganismus.

This reflection also mirrors our experience in academic practices, as normalized forms of sets, with countless unspoken experiences, subconscious categorizations that often exclude or exoticise our European heritage. And yet, even if we have the chance to take only a few seats around an imaginary academic table, we do not see ourselves as permanent participants but as temporary guests and visitors, even though the discussion is about us. We are initiating to set up the table, although the critical Romani voices are maintained to be hidden under the tablecloth with ignorance. Therefore, our responsibility lies not only making ourselves heard but in actively reshaping European knowledge landscapes in the societies. One of the manifestos of the early Romani intellectuals' resistance in critical scholarship is based on the memory of Tamás Péli (1948–1994), who addressed the value of self-assertion and dignified cultural memories and representation. Although we have never met him in person, his words from the past speak directly to us, as if someone had grasped our challenges in the present-day. His message, written in 1993 for future generations of Romani intellectuals, is a call for social responsibility, self-esteem, and resistance to forced assimilation:

> You who come after us will no longer be forgiven as special savages [...] When someone tells you to be like me, it doesn't mean to live better, it means not to exist. [...] Don't allow them to demand that you behave differently as a 'gypsy,' because in doing so, they are demanding that you give up your life. And you shouldn't do that (Choli Daróczi 1998, 3–4).

This warning is still valid today, for all of us who are on the threshold of self-denial or emancipation. His metaphor of the *"gardener of culture"* is particularly powerful:

> You will not be the fruit trees of the 'Gypsy' and universal human culture, you will be the gardeners (Choli Daróczi 1998, 3–4).

This metaphor challenges us to cultivate our cultural roots – not nostalgically but as an embodied practice. As Romani intellectuals, we see this as a call for the collective continuation of his work while honouring his legacy. Péli's painting *Születés* (Birth), from 1983, is a particularly important artwork for Romani reparative memory, which we develop below in relation to Mueller's visual language and its reception.

2. Art as a Reparative Practice of Romani Memory

Tamás Péli's political and poetic appeal to future generations finds its visual equivalent in the monumental mural *Születés* (Birth). The 41-square-meter work was created in the dining hall of a children's home in Tiszadob Castle (Hungary) and unfolds a symbolically dense visual language. It shows central figures from European Romani history – embedded in a setting that links origin, resistance, and collective identity. *Születés* creates an alternative history of creation that challenges colonial erasure with a self-determined visual counter-narrative.

Otto Mueller depicted Romani women with a pictorial language that, in the 1920s, was received as artistically legitimate within expressionist aesthetics. In more recent scholarship, however – especially

with regard to the "Gypsy" portraits and certain nudes – his works are discussed as embedded in colonial visual regimes and marked by exoticising effects, without ascribing to Mueller a blanket colonial or racializing intention.

Figure 1. Tamás Péli, *Születés* (Birth), 1983, oil on wooden panels, 41 m², Tiszadob Children's Home, Hungary.
© Photo: courtesy of ERIAC – European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, Berlin.

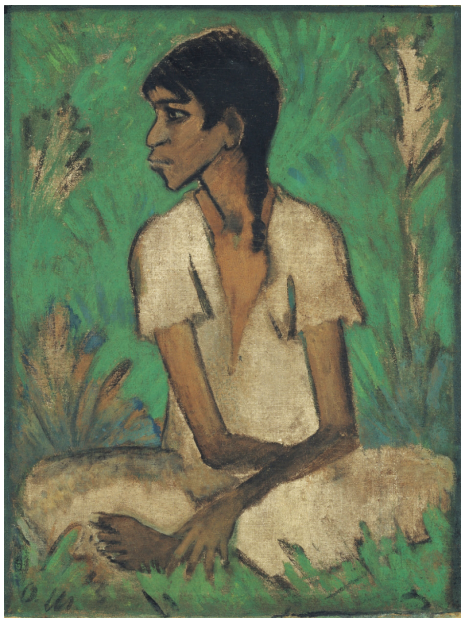

Figure 2. Otto Mueller, *Seated ~~Gypsy~~ Girl* (German original title: *Sitzendes ~~Zigeuner~~mädchen*), 1926, distemper on burlap, 100.5 × 75 cm, Inv.Nr. 958 LM. © Photo: LWL Museum of Art and Culture, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, Hanna Neander.
Note: The original German title contains a racialized term. The LWL Museum preserves the historical title but strikes through the term ~~*Zigeuner*~~ to indicate and critically contextualise its problematic nature within a colonial visual framework.

We, the authors, stress this explicitly. At the same time, today's reception of the so-called "Gypsy" depictions can foster stereotypical habits of seeing and revive colonial regimes of looking. Mueller's motif also stands within a long European pictorial tradition: from Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* (1594/95) and Georges de La Tour's *The Fortune Teller* (c. 1630), through Henri Rousseau's *La Bohémienne endormie* (The Sleeping Gypsy, 1897) and Édouard Manet's *Gypsy with a Cigarette* (c. 1862), to Kees van Dongen's *La Gitane* (1910/11), Amedeo Modigliani's *Gypsy Woman with Baby* (1919), and – in the German context – Max Pechstein's *Junge Zigeunerin (Kopf)* (1928), as well as August Sander's typological photographs (*Gypsies*, c. 1930). Moreover, it should be borne in mind that Mueller was uninterested in a broad spectrum of different role images of Romni but worked with a narrowly defined circle of models/sitters. According to current research, these sat, among other places, in the Hungarian city of Szolnok; some depictions are based on drawings and photographs made on site, which Mueller later developed into paintings and prints in his Breslau studio. What becomes visible, then, is a specific slice – by no means the diversity of the Romani community. The historical work and series titles using the designation "Gypsy" are experienced today by many members of the minority as demeaning and discriminatory; they complicate an open, art-historically informed engagement with Mueller's work. Our aim is to build a bridge here: we acknowledge Mueller's formal achievement and his role in German Expressionism and, at the same time, through reparative contextualisation – visible historicisation of titles, naming and biographical contextualisation of the sitters, and the inclusion of Romani voices in museum interpretation and reception – we enable an empathetic, non-exoticising reading. In this way, critique does not become "cancel culture" but the condition of a shared practice of remembrance.

While Mueller's pictorial world invokes colonial visual regimes, Tamás Péli responds in *Születés* with a reparative grammar of visibility. At the centre is a symbolic birth scene attended by personalities such as Sándor Bari, János Bihari, and other figures from Roma history who gather around a new-born. They embody cultural heritage, resilience, and continuity. The composition does not follow a linear historical narrative but refers to cyclical, mythical structures, a form that makes European history visible anew from a Romani perspective. Later on in 2022, *Születés* was presented also at documenta fifteen in Kassel, in the exhibition "One Day We Shall Celebrate Again: RomaMoMA" at the Fridericianum, organised by OFF-Biennale Budapest. This made it clear that Péli's work must not only be located transnationally in terms of the politics of memory but also in terms of art history.[6] In this context, cultural theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay speaks of the "unlearning of the imperial gaze", that refers to the conscious questioning of the colonial order of the visible, such as: who is allowed to show, who is shown, and how (Azoulay 2019). Reflecting on *Születés,* it breaks with this order and it replaces objectification with self-representation, silence with voice, the image of the other with self-representation. Consequently, in this case reparative memory means unlearning colonial viewing habits and enabling new forms of recognition. Following Azoulay, critical engagement means contextualising and unlearning. The so-called "Gypsy" depictions in European art history should also be read anew against this backdrop. They are not mere testimonies to artistic freedom but part of a colonial image system that exoticised,

6 "One Day We Shall Celebrate Again: RomaMoMA", documenta fifteen, Fridericianum Kassel, 2022. organized by OFF-Biennale Budapest. See https://www.offbiennale.hu.

marginalised and politically disempowered Romani bodies. Thus, Romani women were cast as screens for hegemonic desires; the visual regime operates in a racializing register – even where no explicitly racist intention can be established.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas pursues a related remembrance-political and feminist approach, particularly in her installation *Re-enchanting the World* (Venice Biennale, 2022). In the Polish pavilion, she presented a visual history of Roma that deliberately distances itself from folkloric or exoticising depictions. Her textile imagery combines everyday scenes, personal family stories, and historical references to create a multi-layered self-image. The memory of Zilli Schmidt, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and her own ancestors is particularly moving, as it embodies the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience. Alongside her, important cultural figures such as Papusza (Bronisława Wajs) and János Bihari are symbolically present in the mural, representing the continuity of Romani intellectual and artistic traditions and belongings.[7]

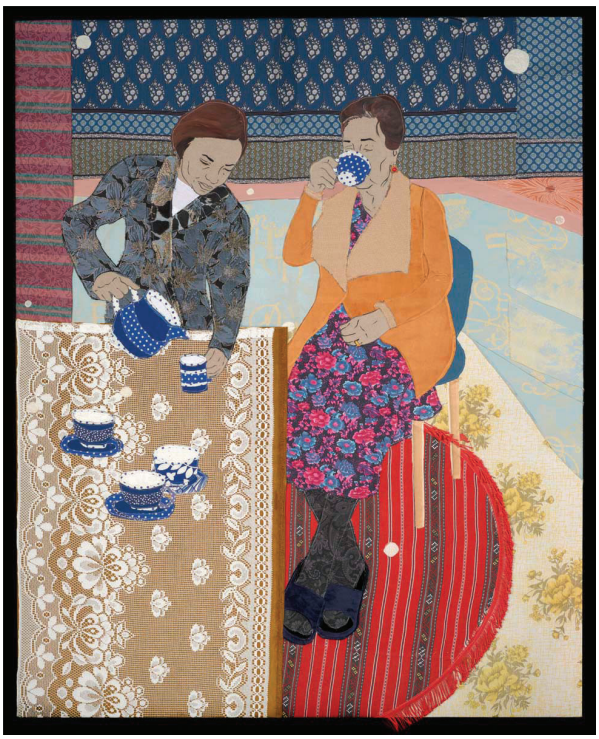

Figure 3. Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Morning Tea*, 2023, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Inv.-Nr. ML 10438
© Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Walz, Sabrina, 22.11.2023, rba_d060371_01.
Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

7 Biennale di Venezia, *Re-enchanting the World,* official exhibition catalog of the Polish pavilion, curated by Wojciech Szymański and Joanna Warsza, with contributions by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas and others, 2022. See https://labiennale.org/en/art/2022/national-participations/poland.

Both works call for a new cultural public sphere in which Roma subjectivity is not only represented but recognised as an active presence. They stand for a growing movement within the Romani community that is committed and that advocates for a reparative practice in arts, culture, and academic knowledge productions. This development marks a break with colonial pictorial orders, and at the same time opens up a framework in which our reception of Mueller's works can be critically situated – without calling into question their artistic quality and canonical significance. In this sense, we understand art not only as a mirror, but as an active agent in the struggle for ethical representation and recognition.

3. Colonial Construction of the 'Gypsy' Image in Mueller's Work

Mueller's images do not give voice to Roma themselves; instead, they articulate a colonially inflected gaze that makes the historical term "Gypsy" appear as a universal image, even though it is a European construct. The Otto Mueller exhibition in Münster confronted us with a multifaceted ambivalence. On the one hand, with the visualised entrance of Romani bodies into European art history; on the other, with their aesthetic fixation in colonial-racializing pictorial traditions, as well as with the incorporation of Mueller's work into canonical mediation practices that at times continue problematic representations without sufficient contextualisation. Although artists such as Tamás Péli or Małgorzata Mirga-Tas are increasingly finding their way into museum spaces, their works rarely are recognised as independent aesthetic-political traditions. Instead, they are often only seen as well-intentioned "counter-positions". This devaluation is also reflected in the reluctance to deal with racializing titles or labels. Many institutions elsewhere leave it at halfway solutions between original title and brief commentary, rather than consistently deconstructing colonial image regimes. This ambivalence triggered a tension of recognition and pain in us, the desire for visibility, but also the experience of continued reduction to stereotypical images. The artistic counter-positions within the exhibition were only able to interrupt the effect of these images at certain points which were insufficient to permanently disrupt the colonial visual order. Following Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, this raises the question of an "imperial unlearning": What must museums do, not only to name colonial viewing habits but also to counteract them institutionally and symbolically. The central prerequisite is the involvement of affected communities, not as retrospective corrections but as active, curatorial co-creators. Museum spaces must face up to their ethical responsibility, set new standards, and integrate critical self-reflection into their practice. Museums therefore have a dual obligation to preserve the heritage of Otto Mueller, for example, and at the same time, as Toni Morrison has called for, to initiate a change of perspective in *Playing in the Dark* (1992). Her analysis of literary representations can be transferred to art: What effects do works like Mueller's have on those who are represented or imagined, and on those who view them? What obligations to act arise from this for curatorial practice and knowledge production? Furthermore, Azoulay also calls for viewers of historical images not to remain passive observers, but to understand the people depicted as "citizens" – as subjects with rights, dignity, and participation (Azoulay 2008).

This fundamentally changes the museum space from a place of aesthetic reception to a place of ethical responsibility. Mueller's depictions of half-naked Romani women in particular demand a new perspective

as they are sexualised and racialized bodies whose family histories, in a further historical course, became linked to persecution, deportation, and extermination. Such a perspective shifts the gaze away from the exoticising distance and towards a recognition based on the politics of memory. Ethics and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive – on the contrary: therefore, a reflective reception of art requires combined both aspects. Mueller's works undoubtedly belong to European modernism. However, their formal quality must always be read in relation to their social impact and political significance. Only in this way can art become a cultural testimony that demands responsibility.

The terms anger, pride, and shame are not merely emotions for us, but figures of speech that structure our engagement with Mueller's work. Pride is not a naïve expectation but a stance of memory, an insistence on visibility despite persistent resistance. It enables a mode of remembrance that remains critical while also progressive. Yet, this pride exists in tension with a sense of powerlessness in art spaces, where Romani people are expected to take pride in depictions as naked, anonymised, and dehumanised savages. Therefore, as long as racializing labels persist and museums fail to take responsibility, this question remains unresolved and painful. Our shame does not result from the nudity itself but from the lack of dignity, from the absence of context, and from the erased names and untold, forgotten stories. Our anger is not directed against art but against a system that places aesthetic form above historical responsibility. It is the experience that our bodies are shown, while the mediation underexposes our voices. Nevertheless, we seek ways of re-appropriation, as we do not want to suppress these images but reinterpret them with us, about us, and from our perspective. Ethel Brooks reminds us that representation also means control over narratives. In *Why It's Time to Reclaim Romani Art History*, she emphasises that visibility alone is not enough, it must be linked to agency and memory, otherwise it remains a subtle form of erasure (Brooks 2019).

Stuart Hall, in turn, emphasises: "Identity is never given, but a construction of experience, exclusion, becoming" (Hall 2022, 247). Mueller's works allow for ambivalent readings but are often received in ways that favour repetition over transformation. As a reparative thought experiment, we propose to bracket the racializing title for a moment and to look at the person: What if we recognized Mueller's Z[] portrait as one of the most beautiful depictions of a Romni – without downplaying the historical violence of the designation? Should archival research substantiate the designation of the "Gypsy portfolio" as secondary (for example, by trade/gallery) and not given by Mueller, then a two-track curatorial solution could be tested: (1) visible historicisation of the transmitted title (explicitly marked as historical)[8] and (2) a reparative parallel designation (focusing on person, relationship, place/time). In this way, acknowledgment (beauty, presence, subjectivity) would be rethought together with critique (the marking of title politics) without reproducing paranoid attributions regarding Mueller's intentions. For Hall, cultural representations are always also places of power struggles for meaning and visibility. His theory of *diasporic identity* (Hall 1990) helps us to understand the ambivalence of such images – and to recognise our own position as part of this conflict. If identity was formed through omission and distortion, then writing, like image criticism, is an act of re-appropriation. Our authorship is part of this struggle for

8 Pending clarification of title provenance, no conclusive evidence shows that Mueller himself assigned these series/work titles; until clarified, we recommend marking them as historical/ascribed designations and offering a parallel person- and place-based labeling.

representation, not as a distanced analysis but as a situated intervention. Hall's understanding of cultural identity as a contested process in particular makes it clear that the museum space is not a neutral place but a zone of hegemonic and resistant production of meaning. A combination of Azoulay, Brooks, and Hall creates an epistemological triangle: representation is never innocent – it oscillates between affirmative and disruptive, hegemonic and resistant effects. The question of who speaks, who is exhibited, and in what narrative framework, is never merely curatorial – it is political.

Conclusions

This article examined the importance of a decolonial and just form of memory reparation from a situated Romani perspective. As Romani authors we critiqued the historical and ongoing marginalisation of Sinti and Roma in European memory culture. Our intervention challenges nationalistic and colonial frameworks that have rendered Roma either invisible or exoticised and calls instead for a memory politics rooted in justice, participation, and shared responsibility.

The article adopts as its engine the view that Roma should not be merely as victims of history but as active agents who have contributed to European culture through craft, intellectual production, music, and resistance. This perspective counters the dominant portrayal of Roma as strangers or outsiders and emphasises their integral role in shaping European societies. Furthermore, we have argued that a just memory must acknowledge the historical continuity of exclusion, such as slavery, the Holocaust, and contemporary antigypsyism, as systemic and not isolated events.

Central to our analysis is the call for reparative epistemic practice and recognition. For too long, Roma have been spoken about without being heard. The demand for recognition of Roma as knowledge producers with authority, particularly in arts and culture and academic knowledge production is crucial, essential, and timely. We view memory reparation not as symbolic but as a structural task that must address access to education, representation, and institutional participation. Connecting Stuart Hall's postcolonial thought, the article examined how emotions like pride, anger, and shame become epistemological tools. These emotions reveal the continued power of colonial representations, such as Otto Mueller's *Zigeunermappe*, and inspire critical reflection and curatorial interventions. Hall's notion of "thinking from the in-between" resonates with our own sense of existing between exclusion and resistance, visibility and erasure.

Artistic voices such as Tamás Péli and Małgorzata Mirga-Tas offer alternative visual languages that centre Romani subjectivity and reclaim representation. Their works shift the gaze from exoticisation to dignity, creating reparative spaces of memory and future-oriented narratives.

The article concludes by emphasising that decolonial memory must be participatory, intersectional, and transformative. Institutions must not merely include Roma as objects of display but must empower them as co-creators of history and culture. A shift from speaking *about* to speaking *with* Roma marks the beginning of shared memory practices that recognise Romani people as central to, and not peripheral to, Europe's past, present, and future.

On this basis, we turn in conclusion to curatorial implementation. Taking our critical considerations and lived experiences into account, we ask how colonial and racializing regimes of looking can be deconstructed through counter-images and critical knowledge production – and how Romani subjectivity can be made visible and negotiable in art, culture, and scholarship. We deliberately take Mueller's visual language (especially the nudes and the Brücke context) as a reference and point of friction, and we call for a critical examination of aesthetic, historical, and political dimensions. We do not intend to label Mueller's depictions as consciously colonial across the board; our critique is directed primarily at contemporary reception and title policies that can reactivate racializing habits of seeing.

The public debate reflects these tensions: Till Briegleb (2024) criticises a moralising "tribunal" framing and recalls that Romani motifs make up only a small part of Mueller's oeuvre; he also emphasises that Mueller worked without a documentary or socially critical intent, painted his models in the same sensual manner regardless of origin, and left the self-description "I can only paint what I love." We take these ambivalences seriously as touchstones, without conflating them with our reparative reading. At the same time, we align with Tanja Pirsig-Marshall's assessment (2025), which rejects a blanket labelling of Mueller as racist while underscoring that his work historically contributed to the reproduction of certain stereotypes – a fact that must be addressed explicitly today.

From this dual perspective, we argue for participatory, reparative mediation: visible historicisation and contextualisation of historical titles; shared authorship with Romani voices (for example, in labels and audio guides); and precise dual labelling (a formal reading and a critical reading). Where provenance research indicates that titles were assigned secondarily – for example, by dealers or editors – and not by Mueller himself, we recommend a two-track solution: (1) display the transmitted historical title clearly marked as historical; (2) offer a reparative parallel designation that foregrounds person, relation, and place/time. Such measures open alternative reading modes – for example, approaching selected works as expressionist female portraiture or studio-based nude studies – while explicitly naming the colonial frame. The aim is not exoneration but accountable looking and shared responsibility.

In this way, Mueller's canonical significance can be thought together with an emancipatory representation of Sinti and Roma – and a decolonial, participatory politics of memory can be fostered that reshapes European art, memory, and scholarship without calling Mueller's artistic quality into question and without damaging these fields.

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Making the Invisible Visible – Roma in the Programme of European Capitals of Culture: From Marseille 2013 to Timișoara 2023

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Abstract

The programme of Timișoara – European Capital of Culture 2023 included a component on "Deconstructing Stereotypes and Overcoming Marginalization of Roma Communities in Timișoara and Europe", initiated and coordinated by the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the key features of this component and its background, with the first initiative of this kind, that was part of Marseille-Provence European Capital of Culture 2013. It argues that the way in which cultural and educational activities, aimed at overcoming stereotypes about Roma, are framed, designed, and implemented can, in terms of outcomes, result in big differences. Approaches used to challenge stereotypes in the programme of Timișoara – European Capital of Culture, counter-stereotype exposure, and eliciting empathy and perspective-taking are discussed here.

Keywords

- Counter-stereotype exposure
- European Capital of Culture
- Perspective-taking
- Racism

Introduction

Since 1985, the European Commission has awarded the annual title "European Capital of Culture" to over 60 cities in the EU and beyond. Overall, the European Capitals of Culture initiative has two general objectives: (1) to protect and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, to highlight common features, to increase the sense of belonging to a common cultural space among citizens, and (2) to stimulate the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities. The title European Capital of Culture is not a recognition of the value of a city's cultural heritage or cultural life but rather supports its commitment to improvements at various levels such as urban regeneration through culture, developing the international profile of the cities, improving the image of the city in the eyes of its own inhabitants, developing cultural provision, or promoting it as a tourist destination. While acknowledged at the EU level, European Capitals of Culture are also endorsed by national ministries of culture. However, local authorities play a key role and are supposed to involve relevant local stakeholders to define specific and operational objectives based on the local context, opportunities and needs, as well as a programme of activities that will contribute to achieving the general objectives mentioned above, defined at European level (Garcia and Cox 2013; European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2014; European Commission 2018).

European Capitals of Culture have, in general, explicit aims related to local and European cultural diversity. Timișoara won the competition to be a European Capital of Culture with a complex proposal which included a component entitled "Invisible/Visible – Deconstructing Stereotypes and Overcoming Marginalization of Roma Communities in Timișoara and Europe", initiated and coordinated by the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara. The title is particularly relevant to the local context. It is aligned with the branding of Timișoara 2023, which used light as a metaphor, with the tagline "Shine your light! Light up your city!" with all its component titles somehow related to the idea of light. It is also relevant locally, as Timișoara is a city that prides itself on cherishing its traditional cultural diversity, while often avoiding recognition of Roma as part of this diversity, alongside significant tensions related, especially, to a small group of Roma, whose criminal activities chimed with the racism and discrimination levelled against Roma in general.

Timișoara is not the first European Capital of Culture to include a focus on Roma in its programme. Kosice, in 2013, and Plovdiv, in 2019, also included activities on this topic, albeit limited, in both cases, to their respective "Roma ghettos" (EC 2015, 2019). Therefore, in both these cases, most of the activities consisted in bringing cultural activities to the largest Roma-majority neighbourhoods. However, Timișoara's approach on this matter is more linked to the case of the European Capital of Culture Marseille-Provence 2013. Indeed, despite the fact that its component on Roma is not mentioned in the review of 30 years of European Capitals of Culture (EC 2020), and the only mentions of Roma refer to Kosice and Plovdiv, Marseille proposed a series of remarkable activities that are similar in many ways to the ones included in the programme in Timișoara.

This analysis relies on the programme documents publicly available for both cities and on the views of the authors of the Timișoara one, but does not include, for practical reasons related to unavailable data, the perspectives of other relevant stakeholders, both Roma and non-Roma, as well as the perceptions of

participants and of the general public, Roma and non-Roma. However, it can provide a useful reference for the kind of reflection that public or non-governmental entities may have when attempting to spotlight aspects concerning intercultural perceptions and relations and anti-Roma racism. It argues that, in order to actually obtain the positive outcomes intended, initiative design is essential. It describes several ways in which the programme in Timișoara and, to some extent, the one in Marseille, took into account two of the most powerful strategies to change individual and collective negative perceptions towards groups that are targets of racism, exposure to counter-stereotypical examples and empathy and perspective-taking (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015; Lai et al. 2016; Paluck et al. 2021).

1. Marseille 2013 – Timișoara 2023: Similarities and Differences

The Intercultural Institute of Timișoara did not design its programme by copying ideas from Marseille. The design was based on two aspects: on the one hand, an analysis of local context, needs, and opportunities, done by and also involving Roma organisations from the region, and, on the other, a set of principles and general aims that the organisation has been promoting for a long time. However, the programme in Timișoara turned out to be quite similar in content to what Marseille had implemented ten years earlier, but with some differences also worth highlighting.

Both programmes included local activities, as well as activities with a European dimension. In the case of Marseille, the European dimension was provided by the connection of regional authorities with the Council of Europe, while in Timișoara, the Intercultural Institute, besides involving some of its European partners engendered for this purpose, with the support of the Council of Europe and cooperation with the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC). Local activities included exhibitions, performances, and community-based activities in both cities. However, most local activities in Marseille targeted non-Romani participants and were aimed at encouraging them to discover the reality, background, and diversity of Roma, while in Timișoara, there was a balance between activities targeting non-Roma and activities dedicated to local Roma, focused on empowerment, removing barriers to accessing cultural provision in the city, and participation in a variety of cultural activities with an intercultural dimension. Both cities had a focus on overcoming stereotypes about Roma. In the case of Marseille, this concern was explicitly outlined in the brochure edited on that occasion by Jean-Pierre Liégeois, a Council of Europe expert who played a leading role in establishing the Roma programme of Marseille 2013 and in engaging the Council of Europe (Liégeois 2013). In the case of Timișoara, the focus on deconstructing stereotypes is found in the title of the Romani-focused component and was a key concern throughout its design which was led by the Intercultural Institute.

The way the programmes of the two European Capitals of Culture addressed Roma stereotypes differed. In Marseille, there was a mixture of events presenting Roma from stereotypical and counter-stereotypical perspectives, while in Timișoara there was more overt and explicit transversal attention to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

2. Can Cultural Activities Challenge Deeply-rooted Stereotypes?

Indeed, one of the starting points in the design of the Roma component of Timișoara 2023 was acknowledgement of the great impact that negative stereotypes about Roma have and the importance of addressing them through cultural activities included in the European Capital of Culture programme; however, this does not mean that positive outcomes are guaranteed. On the contrary, there is evidence that well-intentioned efforts to overcome the negative impact of stereotypes can actually lead to unintended negative consequences, reinforcing stereotypes and worsening intercultural perceptions and relations (Legault et al. 2011; Dover, Kaiser, and Major 2019).

Research also proves that both explicit and implicit stereotypes are malleable, and that certain processes can improve individual ability to moderate and control stereotypic responses (Blair et al. 2001), as well as positive outcomes obtained at the collective level. While evidence provided by social psychology and related fields is still weak and insufficient, revealing that most interventions can change expressed attitudes and behaviours to a certain degree, there are certain approaches that have a stronger positive impact, especially if they are embedded in a broader, multi-faceted programme, such as that provided by a European Capital of Culture, which combines cultural events and activities, public communication, and education (Paluck et al. 2021).

Two of the strategies that proved more effective will be discussed further, as they were key transversal features of the Roma component of Timișoara 2023: counter-stereotype exposure and empathy, linked to perspective-taking. A review of studies on prejudice reduction published between 2007 and 2019, performed by Paluck et al. (2021) reveals that, despite methodological shortcomings, there is valid evidence that these two strategies are some of those with the highest impact. Moreover, these approaches are compatible with interventions connected to cultural activities that are proven to have a good potential for larger-scale impact (Murrar and Brauer 2018).

3. Counter-stereotypical Exposure

Exposure to cases and situations that contradict a stereotype is one of the most effective strategies if measures are taken to avoid perception of the counter-stereotypical example as an exception. The Marseille 2013 programme included both activities that challenge and activities that confirm Roma stereotypes. For example, non-Roma were invited to join a "Roma circus" activity, "accompanied by Gypsy music, bewitching and wild", but there was also "an interdisciplinary theatrical creation, in which five actors and five Romani musicians will intertwine the stories of refugees living in Europe with excerpts from Homer's *Odyssey*" (the quotes are from the agenda of the Marseille events).

The team in Timișoara aimed to enhance the visibility of messages that challenge Roma stereotypes. For example, the performances by the self-declared "Roma feminist" theatre "Giuvlipen" presented a different image of Romani women from the stereotypical ones. By focusing on the future, they also challenged

the common association of Roma with traditions and the past. Santino Spinelli was introduced to the Timișoara public as both a Romani musician, combining tradition with innovation, and as a Romani academic, poet, and activist. Several of the contributions by ERIAC to the process, including a modern art exhibition or a concert by a Romani rock band, also generated perceptions of Roma that challenge common stereotypes, in line with many other ERIAC initiatives.

Another section of the programme that can also be seen as promoting a counter-stereotypical image of Roma was academic. An international conference on "Racism and Romani Studies", organized by ERIAC, in partnership with the Intercultural Institute and West University of Timișoara, brought together Romani scholars from different countries, alongside non-Romani colleagues. In addition, the Intercultural Institute also organized, in cooperation with West University, a national academic workshop, bringing together young Romani and non-Romani scholars from across Romania to exchange interdisciplinary approaches and the common transdisciplinary challenges and ethical principles that guide their current and future research.

In all these cases, as shown in media analysis by the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara, the use of mainstream and social media, as well as of wide-reaching public communication structures created for Timișoara 2023, including a dedicated website, newsletter, and consistent social media presence, allowed for counter-stereotypical examples to reach a much larger audience than those involved directly, or connected in some way with the events or with the institutions where they took place.

4. Empathy and Perspective-taking

Another Timișoara programme worth emphasising is the one on empathy and perspective-taking as a way to overcome stereotypes and prejudices against Roma. These viewpoints, that is the capacity to see things from the perspective of others and understand what they could think or feel (Eisenberg 2003), are proven to significantly foster the capacity to counter automatic tendencies to rely on stereotypes when thinking about a group or when interacting with its members. Experimental studies prove that, by encouraging individuals to experience the thoughts or emotions of another person, perspective-taking leads to more favourable attitudes toward that particular person, that also extend toward members of that person's group (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Paluck et al. 2021).

Stimulating empathy was visible to some extent in the Marseille 2013 programme, especially through photo exhibitions and film presentations, such as a documentary on the story of a Romanian Roma moving back and forth between Romania and France. Such events were also present at Timișoara 2023, but some additional approaches were added.

One was the use of Forum Theatre, in cooperation with two experienced international partners, Théatre de l'opprimé, from Paris, and Kuringa, from Berlin. Forum Theatre sessions were built by mixed groups of Roma and non-Roma young people, presenting scenes of racism, violence and discrimination faced by Roma. They were presented to different audiences, especially to young people, enabling an exploration of intervention alternatives. This is not only consistent with general research evidence, but also with

research revealing that seeing things from the perspective of Roma can provide crucial insights, that avoid evaluations of situations and behaviours based on prejudice, as well as inefficient policies and presumed support measures (Rus and Nestian-Sandu 2014; Rostas 2019).

Another example of this category was an exhibition on the Roma Holocaust, based on consultations with two domestic Romani organizations, Nevo Parudimos and Romane Rodimata, and the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma from Heidelberg, with contributions by two Romani scholars, Adrian-Nicolae Furtuna and Bogdan Chiriac. The exhibition opened and was shown initially at West University of Timişoara, then travelled to several high schools. Therefore, hundreds of high school and university students were able to develop a critical understanding of this tragic historical event and show empathy and perspective-taking by relating to the personal stories of victims, survivors, as well as bystanders and rescuers, demonstrated during the accompanying educational activities. A key feature of the exhibition was that it presented personal stories of Roma, not just as victims, but by emphasising a variety of affiliations, connections, and contexts involved. Selected testimonials of Romani women and men, parents, children, soldiers, members of local communities, and so forth, were shared alongside examples of people who supported Romani deportations, as well as supportive measures from members of the majority who requested that their Romani neighbours be left alone.

Conclusions: What Actually Works to Overcome Stereotypes at a Collective Level?

The activities related to Roma in the European Capital of Culture programme, seem to be implicitly good ones. They would be even better if their declared aim was to deconstruct stereotypes and challenge the dominantly negative perceptions of Roma, rooted in racism. However, as argued above, the way activities, supposed to reach these aims, are designed can make a big difference in terms of outcomes. Taking a colour-blind approach that denies differences or ignores the prevalence of negative stereotypes can lead to superficial, ineffective measures, that risk enforcing apparently positive stereotypes, enhancing covert racism and justifying current power unbalances (Apfelbaum, Norton, and Summer 2012). Conversely, if too much emphasis is put on denouncing and exposing the prevalence of negative stereotypes, significant risks can arise. Increasing awareness of stereotyping in the hope of motivating individuals to resist and challenge it, risks normalising it, paradoxically undermining the desired effect. People that are more aware of the prevalence of negative stereotypes, tend to express them more in their views and behaviours (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015). Moreover, giving explicit messages to people to suppress stereotypes results in stereotype rebound, and when such messages are public, denouncing widespread racism, they risk generating defensive reactions and majority backlash.

Having an intentional strategy to expose the public to carefully selected counter-stereotypical messages and stimulate the manifestation of empathy through a capacity to understand the perspective of members of a group that is target of racism and discrimination, as is the case with Roma, is proven to have a better chance of successfully promoting positive change. The avoidance of how widespread are stereotypes and prejudices reduces the risk of normalising them, and not collectively blaming the majority reduces

the risk of resistance and backlash from them. Stimulating empathy and perspective-taking generated simultaneously a critical understanding of the structural background of inequalities and injustices, and a sense of increased personal responsibility, combined with a commitment to the values of equality, equity, cultural diversity, dignity and human rights. By tackling these through cultural activities, a perception of directive, moralising messaging is side-stepped, stimulating reflection and responsibility instead.

There is solid research evidence that interventions of this kind work better when they are part of a larger framework with high public visibility (Paluck et al. 2021). The European Capitals of Culture offer such an enabling context and should be further used in a similar way as the examples of Marseille 2013 and, especially, Timișoara 2023 show.

A key challenge that these initiatives also have to face concerns visible outcomes. Measuring in a systematic way the actual impact on public perceptions is difficult and unreliable. People may be affected positively but remain unaware of that effect, or the impact can be delayed and manifest sometime after exposure to the trigger of perception change (Lai et al. 2016). Therefore, the most reasonable step is not to allocate resources for extensive statistic studies aimed at measuring the impact of such initiatives but rather to pay close attention to checking ex-ante to what extent intended activities reproduce stereotypes or challenge them in a way that seems more likely to minimise unintended negative consequences and produce actual change.

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Charting New Frontiers in Democracy: A Romani Voice in Parliament

Interview with Ismael Cortés Gómez by Carmen Cañete Quesada

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This interview features insights from Ismael Cortés, a scholar who spoke during the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Summer Abroad Program in Spain, which Carmen Cañete has directed for a decade. In Madrid on 7 July 2022, Cortés delivered a lecture on the portrayal of criminalised Spanish Roma (*Gitanos*) in the "New Spanish Cinema" of the 1960s, focusing on Mario Camus' *Con el viento solano* (1965).[1] The talk sparked discussions on ethnicity, identity, and marginalisation, and the original Spanish version of this exchange was published in *O Tchatchipen*, a journal from the Romani Institute for Social and Cultural Affairs (IRASC). IRASC, founded by Romani activist Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia,[2] has long worked for Romani rights in Spain. Cortés returned on 22 July 2024, to discuss the Gitano subaltern figure in *Cine Quinqui*[3] and further addressed the CEU Romani Studies Program, EU elections, and his ongoing projects, culminating in this bilingual interview.

Cañete

What do Granada and Andalusia mean to you? You also studied in Castelló and later abroad – why not in southern Spain? Was it due to a lack of opportunities, or did you feel the need to leave? Perhaps the influence of your paternal family played a role in your desire to travel?

Cortés

Granada holds a special place in my heart, as it's where my family roots lie. It's a true cultural melting pot, with the rich legacy of Al-Andalus and the vibrant Romani communities in Sacromonte and Albaicín, places where I have many cherished friends. Granada is my Lorquian paradise, where I was fortunate to live for twenty-five years. So why did I leave? Driven by intellectual curiosity, I was drawn to the application of philosophy to social and political conflicts. A master's at Jaume I University, with its UNESCO Chair on Philosophy, Peace, and Conflicts in the Contemporary World, caught my eye.

Cañete

Paradoxically, despite a deep-rooted presence in Andalusia, the Romani community's culture and history are often overshadowed by simplistic representations.

Cortés

Certainly, in Andalusia the images of Romani men and women are often reduced to a folkloric stereotype, stripping away the resilient, resistant, and dynamic aspects of Romani identity. Ironically, despite the

1 Cortés' "Con el viento solano: The Figure of the Criminal 'Gitano' in the New Spanish Cinema," was part of the research project Chachipen, "Paving the Way for Truth and Reconciliation Process to Address Antigypsyism in Europe: Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building". Cortés' essay was published in Radmila Mladenova et al., eds., *Antigypsyism and Film / Antiziganismus und Film*, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2020, pp. 195–202. https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.650.

2 Cañete Quesada, "Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia: Una vida de trabajo social para el pueblo gitano en España." *O Tchatchipen* 111, 2020, pp. 43–59.

3 "Cortés, Gitanos and Subalternity in Cine Quinqui: The (Un)Archived Spanish Transition." In Radmila Mladenova, ed., *Counterstrategies to the Antigypsy Gaze*, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2024, pp. 317–337. https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.1039.c19482.

Romani community being more prominent in Andalusia than anywhere else in Europe or the world, their rich history and identity remain largely unknown. Every town and village in Andalusia, no matter how small, usually has a significant Romani presence. It's time for Andalusia to recognise and appreciate the true essence of Romani identity beyond the stereotypes.

Cañete

Indeed, beyond exoticism. You mentioned the master's you completed, and I'd like to know how your Romani background influenced you in pursuing a path that differs from that of other Spaniards with similar aspirations. What impact do you think your ethnicity has had on your journey, and what were the biggest obstacles you had to overcome?

Cortés

I approach my political trajectory with the clear understanding that Roma should be seen as equal citizens, rather than as victims. I believe that we should be proactive in shaping our own destiny, and to do that it is important to understand the underlying power dynamics and how they affect our lives. Furthermore, for me, being Roma has been intellectually enriching because no other identity is as multifaceted. We are a diaspora living across Europe, from Portugal to Turkey, through Scandinavia, Russia, and the Balkans. In these times of profound shifts in the humanities, where subjectivity is paramount, this has been a powerful catalyst for reflection. It has allowed me to understand the diverse situations of other Roma and study a collective identity from various angles. Our historical Romani memory is a rich mosaic of diverse socio-political contexts and legacies. It forms a peripheral narrative that, in its own way, reconstructs a European history yet to be fully written.

Cañete

What conditions are necessary for the emergence of a Romani elite?

Cortés

This is a project that was outlined by A. Mirga and N. Gheorghe in their 1997 policy paper, *The Roma in the Twenty-first Century*, emphasising the importance of building a political elite capable of navigating both internal community dynamics and external societal structures. To me, the development of a robust Romani elite necessitates access to high-quality education, as well as fair mechanisms for political representation, economic opportunities, and media and cultural visibility. Effective support systems should encompass mentorship, institutional-driven initiatives, and public policies to dismantle systemic obstacles. The project of building a Romani elite represents a significant challenge in terms of shifting social and power dynamics. While efforts to cultivate this elite have emerged over the past 30 years, they have yet to match the influence of national elites in countries such as Spain, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, or the United States. Despite advancements, Romani professionals frequently encounter exclusion from key power structures, particularly within politics, media, and academia, which limits their impact and visibility.

Cañete

Tell me, the first time I reached out to you, we had to delay the conversation because your voice was hoarse after speaking in Congress. What policies were you proposing or defending?

Cortés

Back in May 2022, the Penal Code had just been amended to include antigypsyism as a specific hate crime category in Article 510 and an aggravating factor in Article 22.4. Changing the penal code in Spain is a complex process, requiring an overwhelming majority – 3 out of 5 votes in the Congress of Deputies. This significant change came after years of diligent work, involving extensive dialogue and working sessions with both civil society and political parties to explain what antigypsyism is all about, and why it needs combatting with such a powerful legal tool.

Cañete

Why do this through Podemos/En Comú Podem rather than another political party?

Cortés

Because Podemos/En Comú Podem began as a movement rather than a traditional political party, and it brought a fresh openness to the political arena. This lack of an initial rigid plan allowed for the emergence of Romani issues in political discussions, alongside other previously excluded topics. Today, in Spain many Roma discuss matters they wouldn't have broached five years ago. Conversations now include full political participation, encompassing both the right of Romani communities to elect their representatives and the right of every Roma to be elected democratically. Other significant achievements include the right to the historical memory of the Romani people, now part of the new national law on democratic memory, and the inclusion of Romani history in the compulsory school curriculum, as mandated by the new national education law. These democratic milestones, once unthinkable, have now become reality.

Cañete

In the United States, census data allows us to track the percentage of African-Americans and other minorities who vote Republican or Democrat. But how do we know which party the majority of *Gitanos* in our country support? For reference, I have an estimated figure for the Romani population in Spain: around seven hundred and fifty thousand. Is that roughly accurate?

Cortés

The 750,000 figure dates back to the late 1970s and is still incorrectly referenced by some. However, in 2000, the Council of Europe estimated the Romani population in Spain to be around one and a half million. Despite this, we still lack a legal framework for a comprehensive census. The legacy of the Holocaust and ongoing pogroms across Europe mean proposing a rigorous ethnic census is a highly contentious issue, even today.

Cañete

Why not implement a system similar to that of the United States, allowing voters during elections or on applications to identify their ethnic group or race?

Cortés

The straightforward answer is that the United States didn't experience the Holocaust. If it had, the census mechanism would likely be much more carefully designed and applied today. However, the

United States still faces racial issues linked to visibly diverse groups, driven by a system of racialization based on skin colour. Europe's complexity stems from its history of blatant discrimination against seemingly invisible identities: Jews, Sinti, Roma, religious minorities, homosexuals, and more. This makes it particularly challenging to conduct a census of these vulnerable and victimised groups, which, despite their invisibility, have been once again politically targeted and brutally repressed by both paramilitary groups and state forces.

Cañete

It's complex, as we are dealing with subjectivities and each individual's perception of their own identity. Someone who is ethnically Roma may not wish to identify as such, and vice versa. I think of Helios Gómez, whose Romani origins have never been confirmed, yet he identified himself as a *Gitano*. Still, having demographic data on minorities would facilitate integration and equity policies for the most disadvantaged. For example, if two percent of Spaniards are of Romani ethnicity and the majority are underserved in education, a census could help identify the groups and regions needing focused support.

Cortés

In cities like Madrid, Barcelona, and Sevilla, public administrations are well aware of the high concentration of Romani students in ethnically segregated areas. Despite this, there's a glaring lack of economic investment to ensure Romani children and teenagers have equal opportunities. Existing data on the Romani population could be a powerful tool for crafting and assessing positive public policies. However, the real issue isn't the absence of data but the lack of political will to invest in Romani communities across various policy fields, from education to housing.

Cañete

Returning to the topic of classification and identification, there are Romani Spaniards who could physically pass for *gadje* ("payos"), or non-Gypsies, and there are *gadje* who possess Romani features. What I mean is that we are all mixed. Beyond the ethnic aspect, it's a matter of seeking and embracing one's own identity. Now that we're discussing identities, what is your opinion on the influence of the Philadelphia Church within the Romani community?

Cortés

Beyond my perspective, this is a reality experienced by around 80 percent of the Romani community in Spain, including Catalonia. Evangelism, a dominant Protestant movement within the Romani community, is woven into the daily lives of millions of Roma in Spain and across Europe. From waking up to going to sleep, their days are framed by prayers to God.

Cañete

Perhaps this trend is linked to breaking the hegemony of Catholicism as an institution of power, along with the sense of independence that *Gitanos* gain by being part of a religious community where they are essentially the protagonists. This involvement is not only through dancing and singing but also because the majority of pastors in these churches are Romani as well. Am I correct in this?

Cortés

Exploring the practices within the Roma Evangelist movement reveals a notable area of study still ongoing. Religion serves as a source of spiritual support. In Madrid's neighbourhoods – Orcasitas, Pan Bendito, Vallecas, Carabanchel – the Romani community demonstrates significant engagement in religious activities. They often express the belief that "God restores what society strips away." For many, faith is both a personal and communal experience that strengthens their cultural identity and provides a foundation for future generations. The Roma Evangelist movement illustrates the role of faith in providing hope and dignity to the community. The religious practices of the Roma Evangelists incorporate traditions and customs that reflect their cultural heritage. Music and dance are integral to their worship, creating an atmosphere of joy and celebration that may help alleviate daily hardships. The sense of belonging and identity within the faith community supports many Romani individuals and families as they navigate harsh social and economic problems.

Cañete

How is it possible to reconcile traditional Roma values – which can be quite conservative regarding gender and sexual issues – with a feminist, radical leftist political platform like that of Podemos/En Comú Podem?

Cortés

Being Roma doesn't mean being conservative. My personal and political beliefs centre on tolerance and celebrating diversity. Everyone should live by their own feelings and thoughts. While individuals and communities are interconnected, no one, including myself, needs to agree with every and any group opinion. With a secular view on religion, I strongly believe that tolerance is key to living in harmony. I hold deep respect for religious freedom, which I view as a cornerstone of democracy. Throughout my scholarly career, I've observed that religion plays a vital role in shaping personal and community identities. Therefore, tolerance is the only viable path forward. At the same time, I stand against any form of religious persecution or harassment towards those who, exercising their rights as free citizens, dissent from established dogmas. In essence, a society thrives on respecting individual beliefs while fostering a culture of mutual understanding and acceptance.

Cañete

As a graduate of the CEU Romani Studies Program, I wonder if you might share your thoughts on how this program could contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for Romani communities.

Cortés

Critical Romani Studies delve deep into the social, political, and cultural composition of Romani communities. Through the powerful lens of critical theory, as an emergent epistemic community, we aim to dismantle harmful stereotypes and nurture a profound understanding of Romani identity. By scrutinising policies and intellectual discourses, Critical Romani Studies are pivotal in tackling systemic inequalities. The main goal is to amplify Romani voices and ensure our presence is felt in both academic circles and the wider public sphere.

Cañete

What is your assessment of the last EU elections in June 2024?

Cortés

This unprecedented silencing of a European minority strikes at the heart of European democracy. Since the EU's 2004 enlargement, this is the first time that an estimated six million Roma across the EU are left without a direct voice in the European Parliament. The Roma, Europe's most scapegoated minority, are now more vulnerable than ever. With no parliamentary representation, there's no one to counteract the rising tide of hate speech and defend our rights.

Without Romani voices, critical issues of equality and non-discrimination are at risk of being sidelined in the European Parliament. The largest minority in Europe is being systematically shut out of the democratic process. By excluding Romani voices, the new European Parliament sends a dangerous signal: that diversity is dispensable, and that it's possible and legitimate to shape a space that ostracises Romani people. This undermines the EU's motto of "United in Diversity" and threatens the very foundation of an inclusive Europe.

Now more than ever, we must ensure that the doors of EU democracy remain open for all. We need allies to advocate for Romani representation in the European Parliament and to uphold the true spirit of a united and diverse Europe. Together, we can ensure that every voice is heard, and that the European Parliament truly reflects the diverse fabric of our society. Advocate for inclusion. Stand for unity. Ensure democracy for all.

Cañete

What position do you hold now, and what projects are you currently working on?

Cortés

As a professional advocate and academic dedicated to the Romani cause, I recognise two major challenges facing Romani communities across Europe: the push for democratic and economic inclusion, and the reclamation of our own narratives within intellectual and cultural spaces. These challenges are deeply intertwined, each reinforcing the other in ways that can break or perpetuate the cycles of exclusion.

On the democratic front, Romani communities are routinely sidelined in political processes that directly shape their futures. Local and national policies often exclude Romani voices from critical decisions on housing, education, and labour market, deepening ethnic marginalisation. Without genuine representation, Romani communities remain vulnerable to policies that either ignore their specific needs or, worse, reinforce systemic antigypsyism. Through my work with networks such as the OSCE–ODIHR, the Council of Europe, and various grassroots organisations, I see the urgency of building pathways for authentic Romani participation in decision-making. Supporting the development of Romani leadership within local councils, national parliaments, and European institutions is essential if Romani voices are to be heard and their needs addressed.

Romani communities are tasked with reclaiming their own narratives and addressing longstanding stereotypes on an intellectual level. Historically, the story of the Roma has often been narrated by outsiders, frequently in ways that are biased, distorted, or reductive, failing to represent the diversity, resilience, and vibrancy of Romani life. Academic collaboration can significantly contribute to this effort. Initiatives such as the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), the Central European University's Critical Romani Studies program, and Heidelberg University's Centre for the Study of Antigypsyism are essential in creating platforms for Romani activists, researchers, and scholars. These initiatives enable individuals from within the Romani community to share their experiences and perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensive and accurate representation of Romani life and counteracting harmful stereotypes.

By working across these channels, from policy to academia, we can begin to dismantle the cycles of exclusion and move toward a future where Romani rights and voices are integral to European democratic values.

I'm particularly motivated by the new possibilities that emerge when we create synergies among diverse actors, from academic institutions to advocacy organisations like the Roma Foundation for Europe. This approach isn't just about pushing for policy changes; it's about empowering Roma communities with resources and networks that let us participate on our own terms. Working across these channels, I envision a future where Romani rights aren't just an afterthought, but a central tenet of European societies.

Cañete

Thank you for this comprehensive and honest interview. Your insights shed light on the critical challenges and transformative opportunities facing Romani communities across Europe. Your dedication to amplifying Romani voices in academic, cultural, and political spaces is both inspiring and essential. It is clear that through collective effort, inclusive policies, and the reclamation of Romani narratives, there is hope for true democratic inclusion and the dismantling of stereotypes. I appreciate the depth of your reflections and your commitment to fostering real change. It was a privilege to discuss these important issues with you, and I look forward to seeing your impactful work continue.

This thematic issue builds on the outcomes of the international academic conference ***Racism and Romani Studies***, organized by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) in partnership with the Intercultural Institute of Timişoara and the West University of Timişoara, held on September 14–15, 2023, in Timişoara, Romania. The conference was part of the "Timişoara 2023 – European Capital of Culture" Programme and was funded by the Municipality of Timişoara through the Centre for Projects. We also acknowledge the support of ERIAC's institutional donors – the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, the Alliance for European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) and the German Federal Foreign Office – who made the organization of the conference possible. The print edition of this thematic issue is supported by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany within the framework of the International Cultural Outreach Program 2025 and the Intercultural Institute of Timişoara.

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