CRS Critical Romani Studies

Racialized Slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia: Legacies and Silences

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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 The Journal considers only unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research.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 – Racialized Slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia: Legacies and Silences

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Margareta Matache writes here on behalf of fellow members of the Thematic Issue editorial team: Maria Dumitru, Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, Delia Grigore, and Solvor Mjøberg Lauritzen.

Roma have been integral to the European local, national, and regional realities and histories for centuries. However, the archives and narratives that shape our collective understanding have been overwhelmingly constructed by *gadjikane*[1] (non-Roma) regimes of truth – systems of power and knowledge that dictate what is recognised as truth. [2] Consequently, the stories and lived realities of Romani people, especially accounts of oppression, exclusion, and resistance, have frequently been distorted, marginalised, or completely erased, from neighbourhood chronicles to broader continental histories.

These patterns are distinctly apparent in the historical and historiographical records of enslavement inflicted on Romani people in the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. For five centuries, beginning in the 1300s or earlier, this institutionalized system of racialized slavery (hereinafter, slavery) deprived Roma of their culture, labour, lives, and skills, while generating wealth for the aristocracy, monasteries, and voivodeship. Far from being a peripheral phenomenon, slavery was a force that both shaped and was shaped by the very birth of the Romanian principalities.[3] It also influenced major historical events, including the 1848 Revolutions, the unification of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859, and the subsequent formation of the Romanian state. However, a deep hegemonic hypocrisy persists although the history of slavery is embedded in the past and present economic, political, and societal fabric of the state, it has been pushed to the margins of Romanian history and public consciousness, not only through neglect and silence but also through both subtle and overt misrepresentations.

These displays of hegemony have left deep, lasting scars and effects, not only influencing historical awareness but also reinforcing current structural inequities and, broadly, anti-Roma racism. Against this backdrop – and in tandem with other forms of resistance – academic resistance, ranging from the trailblazing and path-setting works of Ian Hancock (linguist) to Critical Romani Studies, has emerged as a vital intervention. This Thematic Issue, titled *Racialized Slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia: Legacies and Silences*, is a contribution to past and present waves of scholarly resistance, hosted within a journal that both bears the name and embodies the ethos of Critical Romani Studies.

This Thematic Issue pursues a dual aim: to advance new research and to examine the existing historiography on slavery from anti-racist, critical, and feminist perspectives. Contributors like Bogdan Chiriac (historian) and Maria Dumitru (feminist social scientist) provide new analyses of the political debates during abolition and the gendered dimensions of slavery, respectively. In addition, Adrian-

1 An adjective in the Romani language denoting the internal articulation of an external social and broad category – based on cultural, symbolic, and social markers – of people and processes outside of Romani culture.

2 In *Truth and Power*, a June 1976 interview, Michel Foucault analyses the relationship between truth and power, particularly in the history of the West: "'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induce and extend it — a 'regime' of truth." Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power", in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, 1st American edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 201–208.

3 Margareta Matache, *The Permanence of Anti-Roma Racism. (Un)uttered Sentences* (London: Routledge, 2025).

Nicolae Furtună (sociologist), Delia Grigore (ethnologist), Solver Mjøberg Lauritzen (social scientist) and Alexandru Zamfir (philologist), Maria Luiza Medeleanu (cultural scientist), Petre Petcuț (historian), and Oana Rusu (actress) interrogate persistent absences, distortions, and silences in arts, education, historiography, and public memory.

From the outset, the MEMOROBIA project,[4] of which this Thematic Issue is a part, has aimed to contribute research on the history, legacies, and memory of slavery through critical, anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial theoretical frameworks while co-centring and honouring Romani specificities and scholarship. In doing so, we seek to move knowledge production and scholarly alliances forward.

The Thematic Issue contains materials that may be distressing and triggering. It explores painful histories and incorporates accounts of rape and other forms of sexual violence. These were stark realities faced by enslaved Romani women that must be acknowledged and included in scholarly analysis and processes of memorialization to comprehensively understand the scope of this system of exploitation and oppression. Our editorial vision and theoretical frameworks take inspiration from Romani-American linguist Ian Hancock's and Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot's call to interrogate the archives, imagery, narratives, and sources that define our understanding of the past.[5] The articles are organized around three central themes, as follows:

1. Revisiting History and Historiography on Slavery

As we approach the 170TH anniversary of abolition in February 2026, this Thematic Issue reflects on previously overlooked perspectives and spearheads new research on slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia. This Thematic Issue showcases a foundational work in Romanian Romani slavery studies: a recently translated article by sociologist and distinguished Romani activist *Nicolae Gheorghe*, originally published in Romanian in 2006 in a jubilee brochure by Amare Rromentza, which marked the 150TH anniversary of abolition. Gheorghe's groundbreaking work offers a crucial analysis of the origins, institutional development, and civil discourse surrounding slavery in the Romanian Principalities, while also examining the role of abolition within the broader international context of the mid-1800s "European integration" of the principalities. Building on this foundation, many contributions in these Thematic Issues further examine and expand upon topics and questions posed in Gheorghe's seminal work.

Historian *Bogdan Chiriac* unpacks the abolitionist rationales and debates of the nineteenth century in Moldavia. His article pioneers an examination of an extensive correspondence between Mihail Kogălniceanu, a liberal reformer advocating immediate abolition, and Petrache Roset-Bălănescu, a

4 MEMOROBIA: Memorialisation of Romani enslavement in territories of contemporary Romania, was funded by the Research Council of Norway. See: https://mf.no/memorobia.

5 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past Power and the Production of History*, 20th-anniversary and Kindle edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press).

wealthy conservative aristocrat who favoured a gradual approach to emancipation. Chiriac shows that, despite doctrinal differences, both supported an elitist approach to social reforms, favouring controlled change and economic transformation, without actively involving Roma in debates or decision-making.

Social scientist *Maria Dumitru*, a doctoral candidate whose doctoral research was part of the MEMOROBIA project, offers an examination of the history of sexual violence under slavery through a critical feminist and anti-racist lens. Dumitru's research breaks new ground by focusing on the intersections between gendered labour and sexual violence against those enslaved. Dumitru concludes that enslaved women were "subjected to different forms of rape, euphemistically called *jus primae noctis*, *sex tourism, sexual initiators, and "foot rubbing"*, and ultimately they were forced into sexual slavery – "***țiitoare***".

Historian *Petre Petcuț* concludes this analysis of history and historiography with a broad exposé of how this system of slavery has been framed in Romanian historiography, from early chronicles to contemporary scholarship. He identifies four key periods: (a) foundational (1837–1918); (b) interwar (1919–1944); (c) state-socialist (1945–1989); and (d) post-1989 professionalisation. Petcuț's work aims "not only to recount a history of facts but also to chart a history of forgetting and institutionalized silence around a crucial episode for understanding majority–minority relations within the Romanian space".

The historical silences and absences that these scholars bring to light mirror some of the ways in which white scholars have traditionally dominated and shaped narratives about the Transatlantic slaver trade. Moreover, similar to other histories of oppression, along with other factors, these silences have been sustained by an expertise hierarchy – one rooted in racism and Western ideas of scholarly rigor and objectivity. Despite significant contributions and an expansion of scholarship, Romani researchers are, at times, still dismissed as biased, labelled as merely activist-driven, and deemed inferior. These persistent dynamics of power urge for greater critical inquiry diversity, and reflexivity into whose notions of objectivity prevail and who shapes the academic canon.

Critically, the fact that pathbreaking social scientists like Ian Hancock and Nicolae Gheorghe, and contemporary historians such as Chiriac and Petcuț, along with social scientists like Dumitru, Furtună, Grigore, Medeleanu, Rusu, and Zamfir, are leading some of the scholarship on slavery signifies a notable breakthrough. These voices, in addition to others, have precipitated a significant shift against the prevailing scholarly hegemony.

2. Teaching and Remembering Slavery

The scholars contributing works on this topic argue that the silences and distortions of slavery's history extend into Romanian schools, curricula, and public culture. At the same time, the authors argue that Romani-led activism, arts, and research offer sites of resistance to historical amnesia and misrepresentation. *Maria Luiza Medeleanu* uses critical discourse analysis frameworks to examine if and how Romanian textbooks and curricula have reproduced silences around this history. Specifically, she investigates Romanian history textbooks for years 4, 8, and 12, which were approved by the Ministry of National Education for the 2023–2024 school year. She concludes that the history of slavery is presented in "the

Romanian history textbook from a dominant perspective, without questioning the 'ideology of the master', which turns the history book into an oppressive tool for Romani and Romanian students, which reproduces cultural and behavioural racism."

Solvor Lauritzen and *Alexandru Zamfir* examine not only challenges but also opportunities for teaching about enslavement and its institutionalisation. This article is more programmatic in nature, rather than empirical. It proposes four key pedagogical steps for effective teaching: centring perspectives, stories, and narratives of the enslaved; highlighting acts of resistance and agency; connecting past injustices to present-day racism; and foregrounding examples of allyship between Roma and non-Roma, particularly those kept in a system of servitude, to provide solidarity as an anti-racist tool.

Delia Grigore turns to the role of cultural production, unpacking the tensions between historical amnesia in local communities and the arts and the rebuilding efforts of remembrance through Romani activism, arts, and research. She discusses and critiques a typical form of distortion, which claims that institutionalised slavery was "beneficial" to Romani people, which serves to suppress or sanitise both the history of structural and direct violence and the resistance of enslaved Roma. Grigore also shows that contemporary remembrance of Romani slavery exists between social amnesia and a rebuilding of memory through activism, cultural work, and scholarship.

Ultimately, distortions and silences in textbooks and public culture surrounding this system of racialized slavery both conceal the deep suffering it caused and support racialized forms of Romanian nationalism and patriotism.

3. Contemporary Sites of Memorialisation

The analysis of memorisation expands Delia Grigore's arguments about activism, cultural works, and scholarship as forms of resistance, adding physical spaces – villages and theatres – as sites of memory and resistance. *Adrian-Nicolae Furtună* examines the *Dezrobiți* (freed people) village in Vâlcea County, as a living site of slavery memory, illustrating how reclaiming physical places can foster collective remembrance, memory, and resistance to historical amnesia. As Furtună concludes, such mnemonics serve as "continuous testimony for an unreconciled past", reflecting persistent power relations and cultural trauma.

Oana Rusu, actress and PhD candidate, offers an experiential analysis of *The Great Shame*, an award-winning play written and directed by Alina Șerban. In this production, Rusu portrays a central character – Ms Oprea – a teacher who serves as thesis supervisor for Magda, the main character, a Romani master's student studying Romani slavery. As Rusu concludes, "*The Great Shame* brings to the fore the experiences of those who have been historically oppressed, excluded, and underrepresented. Therefore, the role of cultural productions, of Romani artists, regardless of the field, is not only to inform, but also to provoke emotions and critical reflections among the public."

Finally, the Thematic Issue features a book review of *Particularitățile Misiunii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în Comunitățile Romilor Căldărari* (The particularities of the Romanian Orthodox Church's mission in Căldărar

Romani communities) by Marius Căldăraru. Political scientist *Cristina Dragomir* offers a critical analysis of the work, arguing that while the book provides valuable insights into the historical dynamics of enslavement and the role of the Orthodox Church, its heavy reliance on descriptive narratives and theological perspectives hinders a more profound examination of the systemic oppression faced by enslaved Roma.

In sum, *Racialized Slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia: Legacies and Silences* not only brings new knowledge and anti-racist, critical, and feminist perspectives to the scholarship on slavery but also challenges and disrupts Western-centric and *gadjikane* knowledge and lexicons. We hope this Thematic Issue sparks transformations in social sciences, history, and historiography – fields that need openness to new voices, methodologies, theories, and co-creation of knowledge.

We thank Maria Bogdan, Angéla Kóczé, and Márton Rövid, editors of *Critical Romani Studies*, for their support and patience, as well as the Norwegian Research Council for funding the MEMOROBIA project, which made this Thematic Issue possible. In particular, our editorial team is grateful to Maria Bogdan, whose expertise and commitment were instrumental in the completion of this Thematic Issue.

We are thrilled to feature *Emanuel Barica's* digital artwork, *The Abolition of Slavery*, on the cover of this Thematic Issue. This piece reinterprets Theodor Aman's renowned painting *The Emancipation of the G*psies*, presenting a Romani-centred and feminist perspective, inviting us to imagine that historic moment from the standpoint of those who experienced enslavement. Barica created this piece as part of the MEMOROBIA project's exhibition.

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The Debate between Mihail Kogălniceanu and Petrache Roset-Bălănescu Concerning the Future of Emancipated Roma in Moldavia (1855–1856)

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Abstract

This article explores a decisive moment in public debates that surrounded the emancipation of enslaved Roma in the Principality of Moldavia. In December 1855, Mihail Kogălniceanu, a prominent leader of the local "forty-eighter" liberals and proponent of immediate abolition, engaged in a lengthy epistolary exchange with Petrache Roset-Bălănescu, a wealthy conservative nobleman favouring a more gradualist approach to the emancipation of enslaved Roma. This exchange, published shortly afterwards in the pages of the Moldavian newspaper *Steaua Dunării*, touched upon some key economic and social aspects of the process and so helped steer the public debate from a short-termed legalist and administrative perspective towards a more long-term social one, and in the process, problematized the scope and ramifications of the emancipation program in Moldavia. In so doing, both debaters endeavored to provide practical answers to the complex questions associated with Roma's transition from enslavement to freedom and from coerced to indentured labor.

Keywords

- Abolitionism
- Enslaved Roma
- Moldavia
- Mihail Kogălniceanu
- Petrache Roset-Bălănescu

Introduction

After the Revolution of 1848, elites in the Principality of Moldavia showed a renewed interest in debates concerning the future of the local institution of enslavement as the main point of contention shifted from the gradual dissolution of this form of bondage without upsetting the existing social order to its expedient abolition to facilitate the integration of enslaved Roma into mainstream society. These debates took center stage in local political life during the autumn of 1855, as Prince Grigore A. Ghica, the ruler of Moldavia, announced his intention to abolish enslavement and therefore encouraged local elites to voice their opinions about the best course of action to bring about this long-awaited reform. However, Prince Ghica's initial expectations, limited to more immediate legal and administrative concerns arising from Roma's transition from enslaved to free, tax-paying status, were soon surpassed by bold proposals put forward by a few local liberal statesmen. They problematized the social aspects of abolition linked with the transformation of enslaved Roma, an ethnically diverse and impoverished group kept for centuries in bondage, into "contributive members" of society (Achim 2010, 24). How should this transition from enslavement to freedom occur, and what would the new social status of freed Roma be?

Such complex questions did not remain unanswered for long and were addressed during the public debate between Petrache Roset-Bălănescu and Mihail Kogălniceanu, two leading statesmen who supported the same abolitionist cause while favoring different tactics and solutions. Certain that their practical knowledge of enslavement granted them license to articulate pragmatic solutions, both defended their views in a series of public letters they exchanged during late 1855 (which were published afterwards), reflecting some of the core ideas and general tone of the latter-stage abolitionist debates in Moldavia. While initially agreeing on the short-term legal measures, they soon found themselves at odds over the direction of reforms, as their exchange clearly revealed a fragmentation of local elites into different groups, each with its own approach. Whereas conservative landowners such as Roset-Bălănescu supported a "progressive" or "gradual" emancipation that would ultimately turn enslaved Roma into *corvée* peasants in the new scheme of labor, Kogălniceanu and his fellow liberals argued for full and "immediate" emancipation and securing emancipated Roma against new forms of bondage. What this letter exchange made even more evident was that a sound abolitionist program had to involve deeper engagement with broader questions concerning the redefinition of labor relations and civic equality in the country.

The aim of this paper is to examine the content of this correspondence in its historical context and discuss how it helped steer the public debate concerning abolition from a short-term, legalist perspective towards a more longer-term, social, and economic one. More specifically, it sets out to explore the question of how the debaters problematized the scope and ramifications of the abolitionist program. After briefly reviewing the scholarly literature on this topic, analysis will focus on four sections. The first one situates this debate in its historical context; the second compares the debaters' intellectual backgrounds, political careers, and motivations; the third analyses their opposing views on emancipation, as expressed in their letters; and the fourth and final section explores the influence of their political views over their choice of what aspects to include, minimize, or exclude altogether from this exchange concerning the future of emancipated Roma.

1. Literature Review

Abolitionist debates are traditionally situated at the intersection of Romani history and nineteenth-century political reformism, two areas of research that have been receiving more attention in Romanian historiography recently. Apart from becoming better integrated into the grand narrative of the history of Roma in the Romanian Principalities (Achim 2004; Petcuț 2015) or Romania's complex path to modernization (Iordachi 2019, 127–164), antislavery ideas and abolitionism have recently become the topic of a few specialized studies focusing on the role of local progressive statesmen and the liberal press in the emancipation of enslaved Roma. Achim (2010), for instance, explored the public debates surrounding the envisaged integration of emancipated Roma into the local economic structures and/or their ethnic assimilation into the mass of Romanian peasants, while Tomi (2010) looked at how said debates found their way into the militant literature and press of the 1840s and 1850s, and influenced the development of antislavery public sentiment. By tracing the contributions of leading abolitionists proponents, such as Mihail Kogălniceanu, both studies led to a deeper understanding of the efforts of the young generation of "forty-eighters" to put the emancipation issue on the public agenda and to pressure local rulers to enact social reforms.

However, these studies only mentioned in passing the 1855 debate between Kogălniceanu and Roset-Bălănescu and devoted little attention to explaining their respective intentions or proposals (*Ibid,* 66). In addition, the two debaters received very unequal treatment. Whereas Kogălniceanu's antislavery ideas and activities have been well researched in their own right (Achim 2006), Roset-Bălănescu's hardly received any notice (Cojocaru 2014). This paper aims to fill this lacuna by examining both opponents' contribution to this lively exchange of ideas and situating it in the larger context of political debates surrounding the enactment of the emancipation law of 1855.

2. Historical Context

Kogălniceanu and Roset-Bălănescu were men of their time whose ideas need to be understood in relation to the passions and contradictions that shaped nineteenth-century Moldavian political life. Situated at the crossroads of three rival empires, the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia were autonomous states under Ottoman suzerainty and a Tsarist protectorate during the early 1850s. The outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853 served as a catalyst for change since the defeat of Russian troops brought the Tsarist protectorate over the Romanian Principalities to an abrupt end. The victorious powers (France, in particular) offered to support the Moldavian elites' claim for greater autonomy, provided that domestic reforms were adopted (Berindei 2003, 430–435). This favorable international context offered Grigore A. Ghica, the ruling prince of Moldavia, the chance to put into practice his program of adopting Western-inspired measures to reform the outdated *ancien regime* structures, such as the *corv*ée system and enslavement, and to advance abolitionism as a modernizing step required to remove the stigma of "backwardness" still linked to his country (Boicu 1973, 103). Yet, the task ahead was complicated by the deep-rooted nature of Roma enslavement, the pervasive influence of local slaveholders and dilemmas facing the ruling princes when it came to enacting social reforms likely to undermine the local nobility's and Orthodox clergy's century-old privileges (Iordache 1998, 2: 280).

Enslavement was a complex institution that had been intricately woven into the fabric of Moldavian society and economy for at least four centuries. It was still a socially acceptable institution during the early nineteenth century, as the ruling princes, a small number of privileged nobles ("*boieri*" in Romanian), and the Orthodox monasteries continued to exert dominion over the lives, labor, and families of their enslaved Roma (Achim 2004, 27). Statistical data is sparse, but by some conservative estimates, there were at least 60,990 enslaved Roma in Moldavia around 1849 (Achim 2005, 117). Servile treatment varied with each household, but what this ownership meant in legal terms, according to the then valid civil code (Rădulescu et al. 1958, 72–75), was that the enslaved were reduced to a type of "movable property" that could be donated, sold, or mortgaged at will by their Moldavian masters who were free to exert discretionary powers when exploiting the former's labor, severing their family ties, or meting out corporal punishment.

Attempts to modify this form of bondage had been typically met with disapproval by local nobles, as most were slaveholders and so had a vested interest in protecting their privileges and sources of income (Georgescu 1971, 125). However, it was from the same Moldavian nobility, albeit of a more progressive orientation, that the ideas for reform first emerged during the 1820s, just as Western-inspired liberal ideals, a market-oriented type of economy and other factors linked to the process of modernization began to exert their influence over both Principalities. The abolitionist writings of some French, English, or German writers and diplomats who criticized the continued existence of enslavement, largely extinct in Western Europe but still alive and well when they visited Iași or Bucharest, raised awareness among the educated nobles of the degrading effects of enslavement (Tomi 2010, 63). The spread of this new awareness among Moldavian elites, coupled with a few discrete changes of an economic and social nature, probably favored the gradual emergence of a critical attitude towards enslavement among certain local nobles who, in a gesture of magnanimity, began to free the enslaved Roma living on their estates (Kogălniceanu 1908, 43).

At least this is Kogălniceanu's interpretation of how antislavery ideas took root in Moldova, pointing to the gradual shift in the sensibilities and value system of the local nobility under the beneficial influence of Western liberal influence. Yet the complex road from social critique and antislavery sentiment to abolitionist agitations and actual anti-slavery proposals was not so clearly mapped out and much remains to be investigated by contemporary researchers. The available data suggests that, despite the growing opposition to enslavement based on similar humanitarian, cultural, and social grounds, there was a diversity of opinions among local elites concerning the direction of reforms during the 1840s and 1850s (Achim 2010). Such diversity probably reflected individual motivations, the influence of the emerging liberal and conservative doctrines that came to structure local bi-partisan political life and the more distant gradualist or immediatist trends that agitated Western abolitionist movements. During their uneven evolution in Moldavia, antislavery ideas were being advanced by actors of various stripes, driven by an eclectic mixture of reformist ideals and pragmatic motivations and increasingly concerned that the perpetuation of enslavement was hindering the country's path to rapid modernization (Iordachi 2019, 131–132). During the 1850s, the most visible division was between supporters of "gradual" abolition, intent on securing first the enslaved Roma's economic self-sufficiency by progressive measures, and those of "immediatism," arguing for direct abolition to put an end to slaveholders' abuses and ensure some type of civic equality as understood in those times (Sion 2014, 27).

Apart from this divergence of opinions, the slow maturation of antislavery ideas into abolitionist agitation was also due to the reluctance of the conservative political establishment to accept any reformist proposals coming from outside the traditional circles of power. As Ion Ghica, a member of the young generation of liberals known as "the forty-eighters," argued, any such abolitionist proposals that sporadically found their way into the local progressive press, such as *Propășirea*, caused outrage from ruling princes during the 1840s. The latter were willing to go to great lengths to silence its proponents because they feared that any unsanctioned attempt to mobilize public sentiment in the service of the abolitionist cause represented not only a direct critique of the social status quo but also an oblique challenge to their authoritarian rule (Ghica 1914, 3: 90).

This control of the press via censorship cast some light on the dilemmas facing the authoritarian regime in power when it came to enacting social reforms. Whereas enslavement benefited large sections of the nobiliary and clerical elites, its continued existence still depended on the support of the local political authorities. Mihail Sturza (1834–1849) and Grigore A. Ghica (1849–1853; 1854–1856), the two princes who ruled Moldavia during this period of transition, were not impervious to antislavery ideas. Fully aware that reforming the *ancien regime* structures was required to meet the challenges of a modernizing state aspiring for inclusion in European politics, they probably saw the benefits of integrating abolitionism into their political discourse, as the emancipation of Roma would both win them popularity abroad as enlightened reformers and consolidate their finances by increasing the number of taxpayers in Moldavia. Still, their hesitant initiative to coax local slaveholders into parting with their "moving property" was curbed by apprehension about the conservative opposition of nobiliary landowners, who stirred up the specter of political instability as soon as their feudal privileges came under threat, and the pressure exerted by liberal groups such as "the forty-eighters," whose vocal demands for rapid change threatened the existing order and might have invited Tsarist military intervention (Boicu 1973, 14–15).

Prince Sturza sought to balance these opposing trends when he introduced the first emancipatory laws in January and February 1844, which freed Crown-owned and monastery-owned Roma and established a special fund for the gradual redemption of Roma put on sale by nobles. Behind the official discourse praising his philanthropy was the prince's aim to adopt orderly social change – intended both to "steal the thunder" from the forty-eighters who were pressing for swift reforms and to appease conservative groups' qualms by unofficially stating that these limited measures were prompted by the growing needs of the state treasury. In fact, the inclusion of former enslaved Roma into the free population did increase by default the number of taxpayers (Ciurea 2012, 103).

It fell to his successor and nephew, Prince Ghica, to enact the emancipation of the last category of enslaved Roma owned by local nobiliary families. At first, the new prince's support for liberal modernizing discourse was matched by his willingness to rely upon Kogălniceanu and other forty-eighters to counterbalance the influence of conservative nobiliary groups. By relaxing the rigors of censorship to allow the printing of liberal, pro-abolitionist journals such as *Steaua Dunării*, he announced his intention to follow the "path of reforms," but at the same time did not actually stray from the path of autocratic modernization pursued by his predecessor (Boicu 1973, 109). Despite all his liberal-inspired rhetoric, he pushed his reformist agenda by playing one political group against another and biding his time until a favorable international context presented itself (*Ibid,* 103). The Crimean War enabled his government to finally overcome conservative opposition in the legislative

council (Divanul Obștesc al Moldovei) and pass the much-awaited emancipation bill on 22 December 1855, which proclaimed that "slavery shall forever be abolished in the Principality of Moldova and from this day forward, all those who set foot onto Moldavian soil shall be considered as free persons. All Gypsies, particularly those previously deemed as someone's private property, shall henceforth be emancipated and none shall be permitted to sell, buy, or own slaves" (Kogălniceanu 1855c, 137).

3. Parallel Biographies

No sooner had Prince Ghica announced his intention to abolish enslavement than the issue of the role of the nobiliary elites in this process resurfaced more markedly, as the latter were not simply called to voice their opinions but to part with their enslaved Roma. The new law focused primarily on the legal, fiscal, and administrative facets of emancipation, leaving many of the practical aspects concerning the economic transition away from enslavement in the hands of local landowners. The question of how local nobles should support this abolitionist measure, which entailed both sacrificing their own material interests and providing some form of economic assistance to their former enslaved Roma, caused a stir, prompting Roset-Bălănescu and Kogălniceanu to publicly voice their opinions about what they thought the best course of action would be. Since both relied on their intellectual, personal, and political engagement with antislavery to give more weight to their opinions, a closer look at their biographies is warranted to ascertain the breadth and depth of their commitment to the abolitionist cause. As there is no space to give a full biographical study, I will limit myself to a brief exploration of the debaters' social origins, education, and careers in an attempt to compare how their perception of enslavement had been filtered through their individual experience with Roma and shaped by their breadth of vision.

Enslavement was hardly an abstraction for the debaters, as both had first-hand knowledge of it due to their family backgrounds. Both were born into the privileged group of the Moldavian nobility, whose hereditary privileges, social prestige, and accrued wealth reinforced their lead roles in what was largely an agrarian-based economy still relying on *corvée* and enslaved labor (Crăciun 1996, 118–134). There were several nobiliary sub-groups, differentiated by their ancestry, wealth (large estates), and influence they wielded on account of the political and administrative offices they held: the high nobility, to which the Roset (also spelled Rosetti) family belonged, veered towards imposing a virtual monopoly on the highest offices, so limiting the access to power of the lower nobility, from which Kogălniceanu's family hailed (Ghibănescu 1933, 25: 192–200).

For most nobiliary families owning large estates in the Moldavian countryside, enslavement was a socially accepted practice, and the Roset and Kogălniceanu families made no exception. Roset-Bălănescu's family owned such an estate in Cârligi (Neamț County) and Kogălniceanu's in Râpile (Fălciu County), where enslaved Roma lived and toiled as domestic servants, craftsmen, or day laborers. Kogălniceanu's father, Ilie, owned several families (or "*sălașe*" in Romanian) of enslaved Roma (*Ibid,* 232), possibly the same as the ones mentioned by his son in 1837 as "seven or eight families of Gypsies working the land [of Râpile village]" (Kogălniceanu 1837, 24). Sadly, the scant data concerning the Cârligi estate does not offer a precise image of the size of the local servile labor. Although both hailed from noble families who owned enslaved Roma, neither debater was a slaveholder at the time their debate took place. In Kogălniceanu's

case, it was his father, Ilie, who owned the Râpile estate together with said enslaved Roma, whereas the son, Mihail, had already secured the latter's legal emancipation well before December 1855 (Achim 2006, 472). Roset-Bălănescu was indeed the owner of the Cârligi estate, but he had already freed his enslaved Roma sometime around 1844, a fact that he stressed in his letters to publicly distance himself from the "retrograde" local nobles (Kogălniceanu 1855b, 126).

A second element that they had in common was their solid education, as both of them studied law abroad: Roset-Bălănescu in the Tsarist Empire during the early nineteenth century, influenced by Russian culture (Cojocaru 2014, 321), while Kogălniceanu in Prussia from 1835 to 1838, a period which left a deep imprint on his intellectual development. Whereas the former spoke little of the time he spent in the Tsarist Empire, Kogălniceanu described in detail how the lectures delivered by Eduard Gans and other eminent law professors at the Friedrich-Wilhelms University of Berlin introduced him to liberal doctrine, while observing in practice the outcomes of the abolition of serfdom in Prussia convinced him of the benefits of individual freedom (Zub 1974, 87).

On returning home, both men occasionally practiced law while overseeing the running of the family estates. But whereas Roset-Bălănescu busied himself with exploiting his inherited estate in the Moldavian countryside, Kogălniceanu diversified his range of activities upon his return to Iași in 1838. In turn, he practiced liberal professions alongside his fellow forty-eighters, including teaching and journalism, edited liberal newspapers such as *Propășirea* and *Steaua Dunării,* which openly supported abolitionism, and invested in pioneering business ventures, employing freed Romani blacksmiths in the felt factory that he opened near Neamț around 1852 (Chiriță 1964, 7).

As was typical for gentlemen of noble birth, education, and means in those times, both secured positions in the state administration and had distinguished careers which familiarized them with the intricacies of local politics, including the state's efforts to enact social and economic reforms. The more senior Roset-Bălănescu started his career around 1816, steadily climbing the political ladder during each successive regime that ruled the country and holding various positions in the state administration, government, and legislative assemblies until the late 1860s (Cojocaru 2014, 322). During his entire career, he remained true to the conservative principles enshrined in the Organic Statute of Moldavia of 1832, which he had helped draft. Such principles essentially included an eclectic mixture of modernizing initiatives and traditionalist views, which strove to reorganize the state bureaucracy and to redistribute political power according to constitutional principles (by creating a legislative assembly composed of nobles to counterbalance the prince's authority) while avoiding any attempt to restructure agrarian relations that would pose a threat to the nobility's fiscal privileges, wealth, or land ownership (Georgescu 1971, 106). He defended these self-serving principles 25 years later, in 1857, when he was elected in the local special advisory assembly (Adunarea ad-hoc a Moldovei) and championed the cause of the landed nobility. His proposals supported gradual and organic agrarian reforms that intended to foster "social harmony and economic stability" (first and foremost for the benefit of the local nobility) and prevent social unrest or so-called "unchecked peasant mobility" (Filitti 1936, 18).

Kogălniceanu had a more agitated political career between 1838 and 1856, which typified the forty-eighters' complex relations with authoritarian regimes and revolutionary change. His political activity alternated between an initial, short-lived period of collaboration with Prince Sturza, bitter years of exile

between 1845 and 1848 triggered by the latter's irritation at young Kogălniceanu's proposals for liberal reforms, fervent participation in the short-lived revolutionary agitations in Iași in 1848, then once again cooperation with Prince Ghica, who recalled Kogălniceanu and appointed him in several high-ranking government positions after 1849 (Pop 1979, 149–151). Although his relationship with Prince Ghica soured by 1853, as he quit his office to devote himself to activities in support of the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia, Kogălniceanu offered his support to the throne in 1855. He probably was involved in drafting the emancipation law in the same year, a task he claimed to be the climax of his long struggle for turning antislavery into a topic of public debate and pushing abolitionism on the political agenda (Kogălniceanu 1908, 47), a topic that I have discussed elsewhere (Chiriac 2019, 28–32).

The apparent similarities between the two men's social origins, education, and careers can hardly obscure the deep cleavages in political orientation that set them apart. Whether this was due to the age gap (Kogălniceanu was 25 years younger than Roset-Bălănescu) or the different periods and academic environments in which the two intellectually matured remains a matter for debate. Each embraced a different political creed, in tune with their vision of social progress. Roset-Bălănescu strikes a pose as a pragmatic conservative defending a vision of gradual social change, allegedly in harmony with the organic needs of society but, in fact, more concerned with linking the state's welfare with the preservation of the large nobiliary estates and the hierarchical social structures. In turn, Kogălniceanu defended a liberal ideal of social reform, typical of the generation of forty-eighters, that criticized the privileged nobility's near monopoly on wealth and political power and proposed, as early as 1835, that merit should supersede birth as the main determinant of social standing: "*[c]'est le mérite qui est la vrai distinction. La naissance n'est rien*" (Merit is true distinction. Birth means nothing) (Haneș 1913, 148). Both as an idealist forty-eighter revolutionary and a more pragmatic reformer counseling princes, he shared a strong belief in the common people's innate capacity to ameliorate their stance in life and a strong commitment to free individuals from the constraining institutions and rigid hierarchies of the *ancien regime* via social reform and public education (Turliuc 2020, 104).

Unsurprisingly, these differences left a deep mark on their individual engagement with abolition. The details of how Roset-Bălănescu, yesterday's slaveholder turned now into a supporter of Roma emancipation, are unclear. Maybe his experience with running a large estate helped him develop a pragmatic notion of emancipation hinging upon the paternalistic belief that (former) slaveholders had to assume personal responsibility for their (former) enslaved Roma by guiding them in their path to freedom and providing them with, if not material support, at least economic models to emulate. His decision to free his enslaved Roma seems less like a clear rejection of his entitlement (he held the nobiliary title of "*mare logofăt*" or high chancellor) and more like an exercise of his will to impose his vision of how the transition to freedom should take place (Kogălniceanu 1855b, 126). Kogălniceanu's involvement was more personal and far-reaching, bearing the signs of a self-imposed moral mission to denounce all types of bondage and forms of nobiliary ranks, including his own of "*mare vornic*" or court official in charge of justice and internal affairs (Kogălniceanu 1855a: 102). His autobiographical writings tell us how witnessing abuse inflicted upon Roma sparked moral outrage and fueled his opposition to enslavement, while his studies abroad convinced him how incompatible enslavement was to his generation's ideals of social progress:

> Even on the streets of Iași, during my youth, I saw human beings wearing chains on their arms and legs, some with iron horns around their foreheads fastened around their necks with metal

> collars. Suffering cruel beatings, starvation and hanging over smoking fires, confinement in their masters' private prisons, and being thrown naked into the snow or freezing rivers: such was the fate of the wretched Gypsies. Then there was the contempt for the sacred institution of the family. Women were wrested from their husbands, and daughters from their parents, children from the breast of their parents, separated one from another and sold like cattle to different buyers from the four corners of Romania. Neither humanity, religion nor the civil law offered any protection to these wretched beings; it was a terrible sight, which cried out to Heaven. For these reasons, several old and younger noblemen, inspired by the spirit of the time and by the laws of humanity, took the initiative of redeeming the fatherland from the stigma of slavery (Kogălniceanu 1908, 42).[1]

Witnessing the cruel facets of this form of bondage in practice served as a catalyst that propelled young Kogălniceanu into antislavery activities, during which he denounced servile mistreatment as common practice and slaveholder abuse as the unwritten and inhumane rule (*Ibid,* 4–42) He upheld the same convictions, although more moderate in tone, in his later historical writings, denouncing enslavement "as a dark stain in the social history of all nations" and its dehumanizing effects on both the enslaved Roma and their Moldavian enslavers (Kogălniceanu 1976, 483–485).

4. Text Analysis

Having briefly discussed the historical context and the two authors' biographies, I will now turn to the content of their correspondence. As a category of writing, these texts belong to the epistolary genre and follow mid-nineteenth-century conventions of composing open letters intended for a wider audience and touching upon the burning issues of the moment. This exchange encompasses four pieces: two lengthy letters to the editor penned by Roset-Bălănescu and two equally lengthy responses written by Kogălniceanu, accompanied by several editorial notes. It was started by the former on 2 December 1855, came to an end on 5 January 1856, and later was published in the columns of the *Steaua Dunării* in the form of two editorials signed by Kogălniceanu.

On a more general note, this exchange clearly was intended from the beginning for publication, and so both debaters employed rhetorical strategies to argue their cases. Roset-Bălănescu, the one who initiated it, wanted to pose as a well-intentioned and open-minded man of state, but showed himself more as a calculated and pragmatic defender of the local nobility. He extended Kogălniceanu every courtesy, wanting to convince readers of his affability, but at times one notices a scattering of criticism and misgivings about the emancipation agenda, barely concealing his nobiliary prejudice. Kogălniceanu, in turn, was a skilled journalist, a brilliant intellectual, and a gifted historian who could match and surpass his opponent in many ways. As editor-in-chief of *Steaua Dunării*, he displayed the rhetoric of a seasoned debater and managed to steer the course of the dispute via a strategy of alternating praise for his opponent's abolitionist commitment with gentle irony and skillful rebuke of his arguments. I intend to examine the arguments

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translation from Romanian into English are my own work.

advanced by the discussants, focusing mainly on the points related to emancipation and grouping them into three categories: general approach, reservations, and practical aspects.

In the opening part containing Kogălniceanu's first round of editorial comments, Roset-Bălănescu was commended for his decision to voice his opinions about emancipation. This could not have come at a better time, he argued, since it followed the recent adoption of the emancipation law of 22 December 1855 and so allowed readers to hear the opinions of a prominent member of the nobility on this topic. Such an efflorescent display of courtesy and praise was not only intended to win Roset-Bălănescu's good graces but also imply that the latter was a spokesperson of the broad-minded section of the Moldavian nobility (labeled "the moderate conservatives" by Kogălniceanu) ready to endorse the abolitionist cause publicly and willing to make a personal contribution to the emancipation program. As the debate unfolded, Kogălniceanu's intention to present Roset-Bălănescu as a model to be emulated (in certain respects) by his peers became clear:

> […] The esteemed great logothete Petru Roset-Bălănescu sent us the following letter on 2 December, but it came into our possession only two days ago due to our absence from Iași. This letter, which expresses Mister Roset's sympathy for all Christian and generous hearts for the eternal principle of freedom, is to be published with overwhelming joy in the columns of *Steaua Dunării*. This is the first time a leading member of our nobility has stepped into the arena of journalism to express his views on this matter. In this alone, we see a clear sign of progress in our social life (Kogălniceanu 1855b, 125).

After dispensing with the mutual praise, quite typical in mid-nineteenth-century letter exchanges, Roset-Bălănescu and Kogălniceanu outlined their approach to the concepts of personal freedom and rights. Both debaters generally agreed with the idea that enslavement, though contrary to natural law, had only existed in Moldavia until recently by virtue of ancestral customs and positive law and fully endorsed Prince Ghica's salutary decision to abolish this outdated social institution. In fact, they spent little time on debating the actual content of the recent emancipation law, since it had already been approved and promulgated, and chose to focus on how the emancipated Roma should understand and exercise their newfound freedom to secure their livelihood.

The debaters' views on the legal reasoning underpinning this princiary decision were divergent, as each adhered to different schools of legal thought. Although he came at things with a minimum of theoretical apparatus, Roset-Bălănescu's judgments bore the mark of a natural law approach, according to which legal norms and morality were connected organically, and laws should have a foundation in natural developments rather than the mere will of the sovereign (Firoiu and Marcu 1984, 358–363). From what we can glean from his letters, he believed that freedom could not simply be enacted by a legislative measure because people who had been enslaved for centuries required a period of transition to learn to enjoy its lasting benefits by becoming self-sufficient. Conversely, Kogălniceanu appears to adopt a view influenced by early nineteenth-century positive law theory, arguing that existing laws were human constructs largely enforced by the sovereign and, therefore, should be subject to change not only when they failed to meet the abstract ideals of justice but also when "the spirit of the times" demanded it. He retorted that Roma reduced to bondage hardly could learn much about freedom if they were kept in

servitude and had to work for their former masters in a largely unchanged economic and social setting, and it was the duty of the state to enact reforms that sought to correct social injustice:

> […] Here lies the difference between us. Mister Roset consents to reforms, for they are "allowed" by the existing laws. We support reforms because the principle of justice, the spirit of the times, and the situation of our country demand them. Laws are often in opposition to justice, and there comes a time when the times, the situation, and so on demand that law yields to justice (Kogălniceanu 1856a, 6).

Before getting to the vital point of how the state institution should address this form of injustice, first Kogălniceanu had to address his opponent's reservations concerning the risks of an ill-prepared emancipation process. Roset-Bălănescu's rather long and complex argument can be summarized as follows: In keeping with his conservative tendency for safeguarding public order against social unrest (and preserving the status quo), he warned against the dangers of radical propaganda spread by some liberal newspapers aimed at inciting other disenfranchised groups, such as the Moldavian indentured peasants, to seize freedom and land ownership by all means and the insidious threat that such "socialist agitation" among the rural masses posed for the entire society, as the sparks of disobedience could well engulf the Moldavian countryside in flames.

Kogălniceanu undoubtedly understood what his opponent was implying, namely that the abolition of enslavement could pave the way for other radical social and economic reforms, including the abolition of *corvée*, and made efforts to allay these concerns by explaining them away as mere embellishments of the press. In his efforts to convince Roset-Bălănescu of the peaceful and law-abiding nature of the rural population, Kogălniceanu claimed that local peasants were largely immune to such radical messages due to the limited circulation of the liberal press in the Moldavian countryside. He ended his argument with a rhetorical flourish, prophesizing (although history would prove him wrong) that "[…] the Romanian people are the least inclined to illusory dreams, to ideology or, to fully spell it out, to socialism" (*Ibid.*).

Roset-Bălănescu's mind was still not put at ease by his opponent's reassurances, as the memory of the revolutionary events of 1848 was still fresh in the memory of the local nobility. He warned of the threat posed by "unemployed and destitute" Romani freedmen to themselves and mainstream society. In his opinion, such "naked and hungry" Roma, socially uprooted and lacking the means to "earn an honest living," would either seek the protection of new landlords and so, enter again into bondage, or revert to a nomadic lifestyle and risk falling into a life of petty criminality. Despite the tendency to overgeneralize, Roset-Bălănescu's arguments are not entirely baseless, as the Moldavian state archives dating from the late 1850s contain several complaints issued by local landowners and reports from the local authorities detailing the "erratic movement" and "defiance" of recently emancipated Roma moving around the countryside in search of better employment or plots of land to work as *corvée* peasants (Crăciun 1996, 54, 140). Kogălniceanu did not address this argument head-on and equivocated by claiming that "the freemen who had formerly belonged to the Crown and the monasteries as slaves had been settled even before the emancipation laws of 1844" and "only the Layash Roma still led such a [nomadic] lifestyle" (Kogălniceanu 1856a, 6).

This preliminary discussion paves the way towards the debate on the central issue of the epistolary exchange, namely the best course to enact abolitionist measures. The divergence between the two opponents now fully came to light as Roset-Bălănescu, staying true to his conservative principles, argued for a progressive, step-by-step emancipation. This measure, he claims, needs to be preceded by a transition period intended to prepare enslaved Roma "to acquire the habits of free folk," such as stability (sedentarization), industry (economic self-sufficiency) and the practice of useful trades (professional reconversion). To give more weight to his arguments, he presented his personal experience of freeing enslaved Roma living on his Cârligi estate around 1844. To "protect" the latter from reverting to a life of nomadism or entering another form of bondage on a neighboring estate, Roset-Bălănescu precipitated a series of major lifestyle alterations among his former enslaved Roma. He settled those who had previously led a nomadic lifestyle and converted most into ploughmen, while providing a few of them with a modicum of education oriented towards acquiring some practical skills (apprenticeship). Roset-Bălănescu gave no clear indication of whether the beneficiaries of such measures had been consulted about these radical lifestyle alterations. He believed these new Romani freedmen were likely to look forward to building a better future for their families as soon as their daily needs had at least been satisfied. Also, he wanted to persuade readers that what was feasible on a small scale on his estate in Cârligi could be scaled up and done wholesale across Moldavia:

> [...] Since 1844, I, the undersigned, decided to put into practice my belief in this great, commendable, and sacred principle [of emancipation] by freeing my own few slaves. But seeing the fate of the slaves released in accordance with the law voted by the Parliament and that many of them are running to new masters to place themselves anew into bondage or some others, naked and hungry, have taken to the roads and the forests, I thought it wise to prepare my own [slaves] to make good use of their freedom, by securing them a stable future; and since that moment and by every possible means, I strived to accustom them to working in the fields, those whom I could not train at my own expense for the typical occupations customarily among them […] (*Ibid.,* 126).

Kogălniceanu was too astute an observer not to discern the implied self-serving nature of the new arrangement proposed by his opponent. Roset-Bălănescu did release his enslaved Roma from personal bondage, but at the cost of severely restricting their freedom to move and coercing them into a new asymmetrical scheme of labor as *corvée* peasants, that is, tenant farmers who lived and worked on a landlord's estate and had to offer in exchange unpaid labor, dues, and other services. Although he admittedly renounced the arbitrary powers he had as a slaveholder over the labor and family of the enslaved, he still retained a position of authority as the "patron" of the new Romani freedmen and rightful owner of the estates on which the latter still lived and toiled, two factors which left the way open to new forms of labor exploitation with no explicit legal sanction.

Kogălniceanu was not opposed to gradual amelioration, both moral and material, but wanted to reverse the process of first preparing and then liberating Roma, as gradualist abolitionists argued. He favored immediate emancipation, arguing for complete and direct abolition to put an end to slaveholders' abuses and do away with the innate cruelty of this institution. He insisted that enslaved Roma should be first liberated and subsequently educated, since no genuine social emancipation could be achieved as long as Roma were still held in bondage. To further his argument, he relied less on personal experience and more

on his broad historical knowledge, which he repeatedly drew into the conversation. He referred to several social and economic reforms adopted in the course of Moldavian history, particularly the abolition of serfdom of 1746–1749 under the reign of Prince Constantin Mavrocordat, to illustrate "the inexorable march of history" towards increased personal freedom and justice for all people:

> […] To prove our point, we will raise the following question: had serfdom not been lawful until 1749? Despite that, it had to fall before justice. Was it not true that some of the ancestral nobiliary privileges had been lawful until 1830, when they were abolished by Articles 70 and 71 of the Organic Statues? And it is so hard to believe that today or tomorrow, no other privileges will be abolished, as the voice of justice and the needs of the times rightfully demand? (Kogălniceanu1856a, 6).

In a subtle display of diplomacy, the editor-in-chief of *Steaua Dunării* avoided directly rebuking Roset-Bălănescu's paternalistic proposals, attempting instead to appease him by finding some common ground on the practical aspects of the abolitionist program. Kogălniceanu believed the nobility's role in this process was crucial, since many former enslaved Roma, now free but destitute taxpayers, were hardly able to leave their former sites of enslavement. In the absence of direct state support, they had little choice but to turn to former slaveholders to secure work, housing, or even their daily food. Therefore, he agreed with Roset-Bălănescu that the noblemen's country estates were a primary vehicle for the gradual sedentarization and incorporation of Romani freedmen into the mass of the local peasantry as "new Rumanians." Depending on the context, this expression could assume either a social-economic meaning, namely the transition from performing coerced, unpaid labor as enslaved people to a form of contractual, indentured labor as *corvée* peasants, or an ethnic one, that is, newly-assimilated Romanians. Although they would enjoy a different, improved legal status, the new indentured laborers would still be subject to a strong form of social control while their agreement with the nobles on whose land they settled was in force, as the choices available to them in terms of which lands to settle on and what terms of service to accept would be sharply limited (Achim 2010, 27).

Kogălniceanu was aware that such measures would benefit first and foremost the state and the landowners, since they involved both assimilating nomadic Roma into the mass of sedentary, tax-paying peasants and reducing them to the status of indentured agrarian laborers. Whereas Roset-Bălănescu was content to stop the abolitionist program at this point, Kogălniceanu's vision was broader. He believed that indentured labor represented only a transitory stage for emancipated Roma and that all *corvée* peasants, regardless of their ethnicity, would be sooner or later liberated from indenture and transformed into free, small landholders. Yet he was tactful enough not to flaunt in his opponent's face that "the forty-eighters" would never simply go along with such self-serving proposals to control freedmen's labor in the interest of the landed nobility. He voiced his opposition against the proposal to turn freedmen into indentured laborers in February 1856, when he had more scope to criticize the similar abolitionist law adopted in Wallachia in 1856:

> […] we regret the adoption of the provisions included in Article 7 [of the law concerning the emancipation of privately-owned enslaved Roma in Wallachia], which ties freedmen to the land for a shorter or longer period, and only serves to perpetuate their bondage for the following years. The freedom that ties an individual to the land, just like a tree rooted into the soil, cannot be called such. Nomadism served as a pretext for this provision which tarnishes

> the elegance of the law and the nobility of the fact; it could have been controlled by a more appropriate measure, in line with the lawmaker's intention, rather than by producing serfs tied to the land […] (Kogălniceanu 1856b, 74).

It was also probably prudence that prevented him from tackling other contentious issues likely to antagonize his opponent and further alienate the local conservative nobility. He refrained from discussing the issue of financial compensation awarded by the state to slaveholders for the "loss of their moveable properties," since Roset-Bălănescu already had forfeited such claims. Also, *Steaua Dunării* was making efforts to persuade other slaveholders to follow the latter's example and relieve the state treasury of the burdensome obligation of paying compensation (Chiriac 2022, 72). Such a reluctance to speak out might seem as overly pragmatic to contemporary readers regarding the ethics of a decision compensating slaveholders and not the enslaved. Still, Kogălniceanu and some other nineteenth-century statesmen seeking a pragmatic compromise probably saw this concession as the bitter but unavoidable "price of freedom" exacted by slaveholders in return for their support. Roma were now finally free from their legal bondage, yet the choices available to them in terms of stable employment were sharply restricted.

Conclusions

Seen from a larger perspective, this exchange between Kogălniceanu and Roset-Bălănescu added new layers of complexity to ongoing abolitionist debates in mid-nineteenth-century Moldavia. Not only did their letters contain, in a condensed form, many of the arguments around which abolitionist debates were framed at this latter stage, but their adversarial nature compelled discussants to refine further said arguments and provide supporting evidence drawn from their personal experience, while politely but firmly refuting each other's opinions. Apart from offering some rare glimpses into their personal involvement with enslavement and degree of commitment to the abolitionist cause, this exchange presented both the chance to defend their views on the best course to enact the abolitionist program and situate it amid larger social and economic debates.

Reading their letters side by side illuminates the extent to which the two men, nominally united in their support of emancipation, were divided over the means of putting it into practice. Roset-Bălănescu saw abolitionism as part of a limited, process of gradual reform and, staying true to his conservative views, was more concerned with securing stable employment for what he saw as an impoverished and mobile rural proletariat, even if that meant a transition to a new form of dependency. In doing so, one might argue that he went beyond defending his social group's economic interests and reinforced the old trope of a large estate owner who acted as a "benevolent protector" for local Roma – seen as "lacking capacity" to efficiently govern themselves on account of their "loose morals" and poverty (more probably due to their long enslavement) and so in need of being "ushered into" their new life as free people. Former enslavers were encouraged to continue to provide for and steer the lives of their former enslaved Roma in exchange for their loyalty and industry, an arrangement seen as "fitting" for ensuring not only the nobility's interests but also the well-being of Roma and even that of society at large.

Conversely, Kogălniceanu championed a more progressive view of emancipation in line with his liberal ideals of a merit-based social order. He believed that the freed Roma should be provided both with immediate employment and some form of economic self-sufficiency by associating legal enfranchisement with a subsequent major redistribution of land. But despite their doctrinal differences, both men favored an elitist approach to social reforms, concerned more with enacting controlled social change and economic transformation rather than involving (intended) Roma beneficiaries in the debate, let alone in the actual political decision-making process in Moldova.

In the end, both men were willing to reach a compromise that would advance the ultimate goal of turning emancipated Roma into "contributive members of society." Roset-Bălănescu possibly initiated this epistolary exchange to persuade his high-born peers that his small-scale initiative on the Cârligi estate was viable and could be scaled up countrywide. He also insinuated that there was little sense in opposing Prince Ghica's recent measure; by assuming an active part in the abolition process, the nobility could retain some degree of control over its implementation and, in the process, secure more favorable terms for itself. Kogălniceanu skillfully took up the challenges raised by Roset-Bălănescu and addressed the latter's misgivings about abolition. He was probably also eager to show that Moldavian men of state of various stripes could overcome their political differences and negotiate pragmatic solutions to secure some degree of assistance for Roma in their transition to freedom. In other words, former slaveholders were encouraged to renounce their claims to financial compensation, as well as continue extending their patronage over their former enslaved Roma to facilitate the latter's social integration and/or assimilation. The paternalistic tone and elitist approach of this entire exchange raises the difficult question of representativeness, that is, how widespread were these attitudes and ideas among the average Moldavian slaveholders of nobiliary extraction? The available sources are simply insufficient to allow a critical examination of the latter's position on this matter. Sadly, the same silence in the sources prevents us from examining the view from the ground, namely the intended Romani beneficiaries' aspirations and misgivings during their transition from enslavement to freedom. Future research will hopefully present readers with a detailed image of how local Roma understood the meaning of freedom, reacted to the various opportunities and challenges presented by the emancipation program, and engaged with their former masters and state authorities in making their newfound freedom a concrete reality.

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Knowledge Hegemony: Silencing Sexual Violence during Romani Slavery

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Abstract

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

Keywords

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

Introduction

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

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

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

1. Intertwined Gendered Labour and Sexual Violence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 'Țiitoare' or Concubines

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Academic Writings – Sexual Abuse and Exploitation during Slavery

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Women have the most depraved character [...] G*psy[6] women have no shame and are totally devoid of morals. Their debauchery reaches a maximum point and is not considered as something bad, extraordinary. The G*psy in the prime of her life driven by a perverse lust and like young girls trained and encouraged by their mothers indulge in the greatest shamelessness. They do not regularly practice the status of a public prostitute, but at the same time, they do not know what it means to refuse favours when the smallest monetary offering is made to them (Potra 1939, 99).
>
> […] Who did not stop at the sight of the smoked tents [...] and the beautiful G*psies with a flower between their teeth or in their ear. […] The string of white pearls like milk foam in contrast with the bronze of the face and the wrists of the hands and feet ready to be broken at any fine movement that they were (*Ibid*., 127).

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

5 Read more about Kogălniceanu in Chirac (2019).

6 Pejorative word for Romani people.

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

> After learning about the miraculous massage offered by the enslaved person to his great wife, the Boyer Paşcanu also wanted to find out about Maria's talent. After a few sessions, he was convinced that the girl practised the massage with great skill: but with a difference: instead of falling asleep like his wife did, he lets himself into the most charming dreams; his eyes instead of closing, fixed on the breasts and the beautiful forms of the girl's body; his mouth, instead of looking to quench his thirst with a glass of water, sniffed at the peonies that shone on Maria's cheeks. This girl was a right and diabolical temptation; she was not a child anymore because four or five years had passed since she had become a courtesan,[7] and she was beautiful as if she was broken from the sun (*Ibid.,* 20).
> [...]
> He also could not sit sensitively next to such a perfect creature, which according to the law was his property and which he had the right to enjoy in any way, anytime, and in any case. Poor Maria, in addition to the feeling of duty that she knew was imposed on her by her condition as an enslaved person, slowly felt another feeling emerging in her heart [..] because this was the first man who had approached her and told her that he loves her.[8] […] So the boyar in his hours of amusement drank from the cup of pleasure without any care or rage: and his slave in her juvenile exaltation only thought how to please him better (*Ibid.*, 20–21).[9]

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

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

8 The authors make a clear reference to sexual intercourse.

9 Clerics as well as boyers sexually exploited Romani women. See Oișteanu (2018, 611–613) and Petcuț (2015, 74).

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

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

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

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

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

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11 See Matache (2016, 2023, 2025).

12 Kogălniceanu, *Schiță Despre Ț*gani* 1837; Sion, *Suvenire Contimpurane* 1915; Potra, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul Ț*ganilor din Romania* 1939; Achim, *Ț*ganii în istoria României*, 1998.

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

14 Read more in Matache (2023; 2025).

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

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

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

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Romani Slavery in Romanian Historiography (1837–2023): Terminology, Perspectives, and External Influences

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Abstract

This article traces how Romani slavery has been written into – and more often written out of – Romanian historiography from the earliest scholarly treatment by Mihail Kogălniceanu (1837) to the most recent documentary syntheses (2022). Working with a deliberately selective corpus of key monographs, archival editions, and journal articles, the study maps four historiographical moments:

1. Foundational (1837–1918) – romantic–philological texts that name the phenomenon yet normalise it through the terms *țigani* and *robie*.
2. Interwar (1919–1944) – the first large-scale empirical syntheses (Potra, Chelcea) and competing Roma-led associations, documented in police files reproduced by Năstasă and Varga.
3. State-socialist (1945–1989) – a period of partial amnesia, in which slavery is marginalised within grand national narratives but resurfaces in micro-studies (Cicanci, Grigoraș).
4. Post-1989 professionalisation – critical re-examinations spearheaded by Achim, Petcuț, and others, accompanied by substantial archival editions that foreground Romani voices.

Across these stages the article analyses (a) terminological slippages that veil slavery (*robie* vs *sclavie*, *țigan* vs *Rom*), (b) the impact of foreign observers – from Pierre Lescallopier to Elias Regnault – in framing Romanian slavery as a late European anomaly, and (c) the interplay between nationalist myth-making and external scholarly pressure.

I argue that Romani slavery functioned as a fiscal-productive regime integral to Wallachian and Moldavian state formation; its later erasure reflects both elite discomfort with an "un-European" past and the enduring power of racialized language. Integrating this history into university curricula and public memory is therefore essential for a more honest, inclusive understanding of Romanian modernity.

Keywords

- Abolition
- Nationalism and collective memory
- Romani slavery
- Romanian historiography
- Wallachia and Moldavia

Introduction

The subject of Romani slavery in Romania's territories remains – despite its historical and social significance – a marginal chapter in Romanian historiography. Over the centuries, this topic has been systematically ignored, superficially addressed, or distorted through ideological, nationalist, or racist lenses. Although Romani slavery endured for over five centuries – and its effects continue to be felt today in the economic and social marginalisation of the Romani community – scholarly literature on the topic remains fragmented and often contradictory.

Debates concerning the origins of Romani slavery are central to understanding its historical framework. Two opposing hypotheses have been advanced regarding both the geographical origin of the institution (Tatar territories – supported by historians such as Iorga and Giurescu – or the Byzantine Empire – as argued by Panaitescu, Achim, and also considered by Petcuț) and the initial juridical status of Roma (as either slaves or free people). Viorel Achim (1998) argues that Roma were already slaves in the Byzantine Empire and, upon migrating north of the Danube, merely changed masters while retaining their enslaved status. In this view, slavery was a transferred and continued institution. In contrast, Panaitescu and Petcuț (2015) contend that slavery was a locally constructed system, gradually established by Wallachian and Moldavian elites in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to serve purposes of fiscal control and forced labour. The enslaved status was not inherited from Byzantium but rather formulated progressively through legal acts, donations, and princely regulations.

This article does not aim to provide an exhaustive inventory of all scholarship on Romani history. I discuss only those monographs and documentary collections that – by their breadth and methodological influence – have decisively shaped the field (for example, critical editions edited by Năstasă and Varga or syntheses by Achim and Petcuț). Numerous other studies and regional monographs – valuable yet of limited circulation – remain outside the present analysis. This choice reflects both space constraints and the intention to foreground the works that have most visibly re-shaped paradigms on Romani slavery and post-emancipation in Romania's history. It tracks: (1) the evolution of terminology, (2) scholars' stances toward the institution of slavery, (3) external intellectual currents that periodically re-ignited interest in the topic, and (4) the ways in which cultural prejudices have shaped representations of Roma.

To stress the exceptional persistence of this bondage within Christian Europe, the essay also weaves in a series of Western testimonies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Pierre Lescallopier, Paul of Aleppo, William Wilkinson, Félix Colson, Elias Regnault, among others). Read comparatively, these outside voices reveal how Wallachia and Moldavia maintained a slave system after most European states had long abandoned such forms of human exploitation.

Accordingly, the study offers more than a critique of national historiography; it probes the specifically Romanian "anomaly" within the wider European history of slavery.

The article also highlights the disjunction between historical discourse and the social and legal realities of slavery, emphasising how official narratives have contributed to the erasure of slavery from national

memory. This study thus seeks not only to recover a history of facts but also to investigate the history of forgetting and institutionalised silence surrounding a central episode in understanding majority–minority relations within Romanian society.

1. Denying Romani Slavery: Language, Memory, and the Construction of Romanian Historiography

The institution of slavery, as it existed in the Romanian Principalities, has long been subjected to processes of linguistic minimisation and historiographical marginalisation. The persistent use of terms such as *robie* (servitude) instead of *sclavie* (slavery), and *țigani* (Gypsies) instead of *romi* (Roma), reflects not only a reluctance to confront the systemic exploitation of an entire population but also broader dynamics of nation-building and the management of collective memory.

1.1 Denying Slavery through Language: Terminological Ambiguities and the Rejection of an Uncomfortable Memory

Addressing the subject of slavery places the historian in the midst of complex dilemmas regarding the selection of terminology that both reflects the past and holds meaning in the present. The most problematic terms remain *"țigani"*/Roma and *robie*/slavery, along with their respective semantic fields. The use of one term or another today often reflects the author's level of interpretation and theoretical abstraction. Leaving aside recent scholarship, Romanian historiography has been remarkably consistent in employing the terminology inherited from the medieval period: *"țigan(i)"* (Gypsies) and *rob(ie)* (servitude). While this lexical choice has often been championed by nationalist circles, it has not generated sustained academic interest, either historically or today, because it touches upon the sensitive issue of nationhood – particularly in the context of a Romanian national identity constructed in opposition to Hungarians, Jews, and Roma.

Historians following Mihail Kogălniceanu did not write about "țigani" because they were supposed to assimilate; since 1990, Romanian scholars have largely avoided using "Roma" due to the widespread but mistaken belief that the term usurps the ethnonym of the Romanian majority.

"Robia țiganilor" (Gypsies' servitude) remains the preferred conceptual framework used in nearly all historical and literary writings. Alongside the use of the terms *robie* and *țigani* in period documents, one also finds a systematic minimisation of their negative connotations. As a result, the dependent condition of Roma has often been painted in romanticised hues – as a kind of servitude lighter than that of the enserfed peasantry. Among historians, one often encounters remarks such as "servitude protected the Gypsies from the fiscal burdens imposed on peasants", or "relations between the enslaved and the majority population were generally good". Such statements imply that Romani slaves were not truly exploited but rather represented an economic burden for their owners rather than a source of profit.

Nevertheless, archival documents – both official and private – as well as the accounts of foreign travellers, provide concrete evidence that *robie* and *sclavie* were functionally synonymous in the Wallachian and Moldavian social systems.

1.2 What Does 'Slave Society' Mean in a Romanian Context?

The concept of a "slave society" is central to global slavery historiography, yet its application to the Romanian context remains controversial and insufficiently explored. Although the institution of slavery existed in the Romanian Principalities for over five centuries, Romanian historians have generally avoided categorising it as such. Instead, they have favoured the terms *rob* and *robie*, which evoke a milder or intermediate form of servitude, thereby sidestepping the harsh, universally acknowledged connotations of *slavery* and *slave*.

This terminological choice is far from neutral; it reveals a deliberate avoidance of both theoretical positioning and moral accountability. To speak explicitly of slavery would entail drawing direct comparisons with other historical contexts – such as the Greco-Roman world, the Islamic East, or the Atlantic slave systems – where human exploitation was a structural cornerstone of social and economic organisation. Instead, Romanian historical writings have emphasised the "particularities" of local *robie*, often with a justificatory tone: that slaves were not conscripted into the army, that their masters were obligated to feed and clothe them, or that, in certain legal contexts, they could be manumitted or even adopted.

Another argument often invoked to deny the slave character of Romanian society is the relatively low percentage of slaves in the total population – around seven per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this quantitative perspective is misleading.

Even if Roma represented a numerical minority, the social and economic scale of slavery was far broader. Hundreds of thousands of individuals – boyars, clerics, officials, merchants – interacted directly or indirectly with the institution of slavery: from slave owners and administrators to ordinary participants in auctions or market transactions. Slavery was omnipresent in economic life, in religion (monasteries being major slaveholders), and in the social imaginary.

Moreover, the existence of a clear and continuous legislative framework confirming the exclusive slave status of the Romani population attests to the institutionalised and systemic character of slavery. This was not an occasional or marginal practice but a juridical and social norm, transmitted from generation to generation and validated by the state, the Church, and the boyar elite.

Therefore, even in the absence of a plantation-style slave economy, as in the Americas, the Romanian Principalities meet several fundamental criteria to be considered slave societies – and, in some respects, even slave-based societies. The lack of acknowledgment in traditional historiography reflects not historical reality but the difficulty of accepting an uncomfortable and persistently ignored past.

1.3 European Testimonies about Roma and Slavery between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Foreign travellers perceived and understood the social and legal realities of the Romanian lands differently. Their travel notes and reports penetrate more deeply into the everyday life of Roma, allowing us today to reconstruct events, relationships, and mentalities from different periods and regions. Deconstructing biased ideas and assumptions is just as important in historical restitution and becomes possible by integrating Western historiography into the corpus of sources used when discussing Roma in Romanian territories.

In this sense, the notes of Walerand de Wavrin, commander of a Burgundian fleet fighting the Turks on the Danube in the spring of 1445, raise at least two points about Roma in the Balkans: Christianity and legal status (Holban 1968, 112–113). The Burgundian knight acknowledges that he "heard" what he writes and was not an eyewitness. He reports the transfer of some Christian Bulgarians who resembled, according to observers, "Gypsies". It is not specified whether this resemblance was based on Roma from the Balkans or those in Western Europe. Most likely, the author was unable to distinguish between Bulgarians and Roma, as he was unfamiliar with either group. He had first encountered the ethnic melting pot of the Balkans in the fall of 1444, and Roma had only arrived in Western Europe around 1419.

The text is notable for its reference to the south–north migration of a demographically significant group in the fifteenth century, their Christian faith, and the resemblance or confusion between Bulgarians and Roma. Christianity appears as a deeply rooted identity marker, strong enough to generate a definitive displacement, with the central element in the text being a flight from Islamic pressure into a new, Christian homeland. The term "Christian" is used five times in reference to this group of 12,000 individuals, emphasising the main feature that spiritually connects them with the Wallachians and justifies their request to settle in Wallachia. The Christianity of the Bulgarians stands at the heart of an explicit contrast with Ottoman Turkish Islam.

Period sources are diverse and visibly reflect the societies in which their authors were formed and active. The main distinction between foreign and local observers lies in the novelty or familiarity of their gaze upon Romani slavery. Depending on this, they are either struck by previously unseen realities or express considerations shaped by centuries of interaction between masters and slaves. What was unimaginable for a foreigner was mere normality for a local.

The earliest European testimonies on the slavery of Roma in the Romanian space date from the sixteenth century, when travellers and diplomats documented the existence of a subordinated population, often labelled as "țigani". In 1574, the Frenchman Pierre Lescalopier noted that "țiganii sunt robi ai domnului și ai boierilor" (Gypsies are the slaves of the ruler and of the boyars) in Moldova, thus providing one of the earliest explicit Western references to Romani slavery (Lescalopier 1888, 42).

In the seventeenth century, Paul of Aleppo, a Syrian traveller accompanying Patriarch Macarios of Antioch, documented in his travel journal the harsh living conditions of Roma in the Romanian Principalities, referring to them as a clearly marginalised social category deprived of freedom (Paul de Alep 1900, 168–169).

Dimitrie Cantemir, although a Romanian author, wrote *Descriptio Moldaviae* in Latin for a Western European audience, and the work had a significant impact on shaping the external perception of the Romanian space. He clearly acknowledged the existence of "țigani" slaves and described their economic and social roles (Cantemir 1957, 178–179).

The eighteenth century brings a series of German and Central European works investigating the origin and social status of Roma. Samuel Augustini ab Hortis published in Vienna one of the first ethnographic monographs on Roma (Hortis 1775), and Heinrich Grellmann affirmed their Indian origin while also referring to their servile status in Eastern Europe (Grellmann 1787, xvii).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British consul in the Romanian Principalities, William Wilkinson, provided a detailed account of Romani slavery, noting that Roma could be sold, inherited, or exchanged as private property. He was the first English author to extensively address the subject (Wilkinson 1820).

During the same period, the Austrian historian Johann Christian von Engel published in Vienna a historical synthesis of Romanian lands, in which he acknowledged the existence of a well-established system of slavery for the Romani population (Engel 1804, chapters 4–6).

Félix Colson, the French consul in Bucharest during the period preceding emancipation, authored a critical work on Romanian society in which he analysed the slavery of Roma and condemned it as a barbaric remnant incompatible with modern European values (Colson 1839, X).

In the mid-nineteenth century, historian Élias Regnault published a political and social history of the Danubian Principalities, which also addressed the issue of Romani emancipation and emphasised the ruling class's lack of genuine will to redress the historical injustice (Regnault 1855, 329–346, 341–342).

In Victorian England, Mary Adelaide Walker travelled through the Balkans and published a work in which she denounced the conditions under which Roma had been held in slavery and the psychological trauma that this experience inflicted on the community (Walker 1880, 136–139).

Other Western sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, such as those by Antonio Possevino or Michel Quiclet, made tangential references to the servile status of Roma in Romanian Principalities, offering a comparative background for interpreting the European understanding of slavery (Possevino 1586, 133; Quiclet 1676, 219–221).

1.4 Cantemir's Discourse on Roma: Between Documentation and Stereotype

In *Descriptio Moldaviae*, Dimitrie Cantemir notes that:

> […] țiganii are scattered here and there throughout all of Moldavia, and there is no boyar who does not have under his control a few of their encampments. From where and when

> this people came to Moldavia – they themselves do not know, and nothing is found about them in our chronicles. All the țigani, from all counties, speak the same language, which is mixed with many Greek and, it seems, Persian words. They have no occupation other than blacksmithing and goldsmithing. They share the same appearance and habits as țigani from other countries; their most notable traits and what sets them apart from others are idleness and thievery (Cantemir 1957, 178–179).

Although brief, this passage is significant as one of the first written descriptions of the Romani population in Moldavia, composed by an elite intellectual of the time. Cantemir poses essential questions regarding the origin, language, occupations, and geographical distribution of this population, offering valuable factual observations. He notes the dominance exercised over the Roma, without questioning it, and also comments on their language, crafts, and spatial distribution – all useful information for an overview, even if filtered through the lenses of his era.

However, the neutrality of tone disappears in the final part of the fragment, where the prince resorts to value judgments: Roma are "lazy" and "thieving" – labels that reflect the social prejudices of the time more than any objective analysis. It is precisely at this point that the text loses its documentary value and becomes an expression of a dominant mentality that, directly or indirectly, justified the maintenance of slavery.

If we take this assertion seriously – that Roma are inherently "lazy and thieving" – then we must ask how such a supposed moral incapacity could have served as the foundation of a complex economic system, one that enabled the accumulation of hundreds or thousands of slaves by great boyars, monasteries, and even the state. Paradoxically, the "ideal thief" and "ideal idler" were sold "like hotcakes", according to Cantemir, regardless of era or region – a fact that ultimately undermines the logic of such clichés.

Negative labels were not reserved exclusively for Roma. Peasants too were often described by the elites as "lazy", "irresponsible", or "uncivilised" – characterisations meant to justify their exploitation and lack of rights. In reality, in a preindustrial society where survival depended on physical labour, it was not possible to sustain large inactive social classes. Communities could not afford to tolerate a significant share of non-working members, apart from the clergy and the ruling elite.

When theft did occur, it was more often a form of symbolic resistance to the condition of slavery and to the structural poverty imposed on Roma. In the case of sedentary Roma living on a boyar's estate or court, the notion of "theft" is distorted – these individuals lived in a state of absolute dependency, and small acts of appropriation cannot be considered criminality in the proper sense. For nomadic Roma, who interacted with communities beyond the control of their masters, theft can be interpreted as a survival strategy under conditions of extreme material insecurity.

Even the legislation of the time recognised and sought to mitigate this reality: "If a Gypsy man, woman, or child steals once, or twice, or even three times – a chicken, a goose, or some other small thing – they shall be forgiven" (Hamagiu 1932, 254). The legal system was thus not completely blind to the social context, and such judicial clemency can be read as an implicit acknowledgment of the profoundly unequal nature of society.

2. Premises and Silences: Classical Historiography (Nineteenth Century to Early Twentieth Century)

In the Romanian intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery was generally viewed positively, seen as both a moral and national imperative. Unlike the contemporary period – when the slave-owning past is often ignored or minimised – the topic at that time generated a wide array of documentary and literary productions. The first significant contribution by a Romanian intellectual to the study of the Romani population belongs to Mihail Kogălniceanu, through his *Esquisse sur l'histoire, les mœurs et la langue des Cigains*, published in Berlin in 1837 and translated into Romanian in 1900. This study combines historical, linguistic, and ethnographic data, including a Romani–Romanian glossary of 806 words and personal observations made in the Romanian Principalities. Its value lies in the relevant insights into the life and customs of Roma in Moldavia, in the context of the impending abolition of slavery.

In 1857, Jean-Alexandre Vaillant, a professor at Bucharest's Sfântul Sava College, published *Les Romes. Histoire vraie des vrais Bohémiens*, one of the earliest extended monographs on Roma. Blending his firsthand observations from the Romanian Principalities with the scholarship of the day, Vaillant reaffirmed the then-dominant theory of an Indian origin – drawing on linguistic parallels – and offered detailed portraits of Romani traditions, nomadic life, and crafts. Groundbreaking and widely cited, the study nonetheless bears the romanticism and stereotypes typical of nineteenth-century ethnography.

An essential source for understanding the emancipation process is the documentary corpus related to Prince Gheorghe Bibescu (1804–1873), one of the supporters of the liberation of monastic and state-owned slaves in Wallachia. His work, *Règne de Bibesco*, published in two volumes (*Correspondance et documents 1843–1856*, 1893; and *Lois et décrets 1843–1848*, 1894), offers a detailed perspective on the legislative process and the social implications of emancipation.

Alongside these studies, memoir literature, short fiction, and drama reflected – to a limited extent – the presence and condition of Roma in Romanian society. Some of these writings were compiled by Vasile Ionescu in the *Restituiri* collection, a broader initiative aimed at recovering and valuing literary heritage regarding Roma.

By the end of the nineteenth century, academic concern in Romania with the Romani population manifested in a small number of studies. The works of Michail T. Stătescu (*Încercări asupra originei Ţiganilor*, 1884) and Dimitrie Dan (*Ţiganii din Bucovina*, 1892), although modest in length (each under 12 pages), nevertheless provide notable contributions. Stătescu's study attests to the use of the ethnonym *rom* within Romani communities themselves, at a time when official documents continued to use terms such as *emancipat*, *român emancipat*, or *țigan*.

3. The Interwar Period: Selective Syntheses and New Beginnings

Starting in 1920, Ion Peretz, professor of history of Romanian legal traditions at the University of Bucharest, addressed the issue of slavery in Romanian legislation in a course that would form the basis for two doctoral dissertations.

One of these works belongs to Boris Th. Scurtulescu who, in his study *Situația juridico-economică a țiganilor în Principatele Române*, examines the legal status of Romani slaves, while also offering a brief historical overview. The author argues that "fortresses, churches, monasteries, boyar courts, and other public works were built by the hands of these slaves" (Iași 1937, 2), thus underlining the contribution of Roma labour to the premodern infrastructure of the Romanian Principalities.

Another important contribution is a doctoral thesis by Adalbert Gebora, *Situația juridică a țiganilor din Ardeal* (1932). It adopts a chronological approach, analysing the evolution of the legal status of Roma in Transylvania over several centuries. The study addresses the colonisation policies of the eighteenth century, the relationships between Roma and the state or urban authorities, and the ways in which Roma were represented in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature.

The first confirmed historian to mention Roma is Nicolae Iorga. He approaches the subject incidentally, as part of his broader studies on the formation of medieval Romanian states. In his monumental *Istoria Românilor*, Iorga suggests that the arrival of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was linked to Mongol domination in the region. According to his hypothesis, adopted by few contemporary historians, the Mongols brought Roma as craftsmen and musicians, and the term *țigan* has etymological connections to the black-coated *țigaie* sheep. Iorga also claims that Roma adopted this ethnonym in a Greek cultural environment and arrived in Romanian lands either from Russia or the Balkans – "always, however, through Tatar mediation". In this context, he interprets the actions of Voivode Bogdan and his son Lațcu as part of an effort to expel the Tatars, during which Roma were captured and turned into slaves (Iorga 1993, 179).

Eugène Pittard was among the first to initiate systematic anthropological studies on Romani populations, conducting extensive research on the diversity of Romani groups in Dobruja and the Old Kingdom during seven field expeditions across the Balkan Peninsula. Throughout these investigations, Pittard collaborated with local figures interested in Romani issues. These included Prince Gheorghe Bibescu, with whom he carried out research in Comarnic and Sinaia, as well as Professor Istrati, then Minister of Public Instruction, with whom he documented Romani communities in Câmpina (1899). In Dobruja, Pittard also met Lieutenant Gheorghe-Ioan Cantacuzino, commander of the Second Hunters Battalion, a unit that included numerous soldiers of Romani origin. The results of these investigations were published in his seminal work *Les Tziganes ou Bohémiens. Recherches anthropologiques dans la Péninsule des Balkans*, released in Geneva in 1932 under the auspices of the Société Générale d'Imprimerie.

Among the significant contributions from the interwar period is also *Les Tsiganes. Histoire, ethnographie, linguistique, grammaire, dictionnaire* (1930), authored by C. J. Popp-Serboianu – a prominent leader of the Romani associative movement in Romania and a vocal opponent of Gheorghe Niculescu, president of the General Union of Roma in Romania. The volume presents a comprehensive synthesis of Roma in both Romanian and European contexts, blending historical, ethnographic, and linguistic dimensions.

The first major historical synthesis concerning Roma in the Romanian space appeared in the late 1930s and was authored by Dr George Potra. His work *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România* (1939), published under the aegis of the King Carol I Foundation, remains a foundational reference in Romani studies. Its 378 pages offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of Romani history, including 82 document abstracts and 156 full documents pertaining to the lives of Romani slaves in the Romanian Principalities. Particularly noteworthy for researchers is Potra's analysis of Romani toponyms and the reconstruction of a Romani–Romanian vocabulary based on the sources available at the time. The volume stands out for its wealth of information on the customs, occupations, and traditions of Romani communities, while also offering a glimpse into their situation during the interwar period.

In his sole study on Roma, published in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (1941), Petre N. Panaitescu advances an explicitly economic explanation for the rise of bondage, rejecting the long-standing thesis that Romani slaves were "imported" alongside Tatar incursions. Starting from the premise that Roma first arrived as autonomous craft-workers, he argues that their conversion from tributary subjects to "moveable property" was driven by acute fiscal crises and local demand for specialised labour.

Within this framework, monasteries emerge as full-fledged estates: they purchased large numbers of Roma to expand agricultural output, hence the predominance of monastic slavery in Wallachia, whereas in Moldavia royal ("domnească") dependency remained pre-eminent until the seventeenth century. As viticulture and the salt trade expanded, slave prices rose and were calibrated by age, gender, and skill (blacksmiths, *rudari* woodworkers, carters). Nomadic *lăieși* were tolerated only as long as they generated transit taxes; once mobility undercut fiscal returns, princely authorities issued travel restrictions.

Pre-1855 manumissions, Panaitescu contends, were strictly cost-benefit decisions: owners freed enslaved Roma when upkeep exceeded profit or when state tax incentives made emancipation advantageous. Ultimately, Romani slavery is portrayed as an incremental fiscal-productive mechanism woven into the formation of regional labour markets and the consolidation of princely power – not as an isolated legal anomaly. This interpretation offers a critical counterpoint to narratives that foreground external causation, embedding the institution within the broader economic evolution of medieval Romanian principalities.

Ion Chelcea's *Țiganii din România. Monografie etnografică* (1944) occupies an ambivalent but indispensable place in the scholarship on Roma. Written under a wartime nationalist regime, the text openly reproduces contemporary hierarchies – asserting, for instance, that "the tolerance of the Romanian people toward ethnically foreign elements… even the Gypsies have taken advantage of our kindness" (Chelcea 1944, 20). Yet, precisely because Chelcea combined this normative stance with meticulous fieldwork, the monograph remains one of the richest ethnographic portraits of interwar Romani life. Drawing on surveys conducted in the 1930s, he catalogues settlement patterns, kinship structures, craft specialisations, and regional

dialects, and proposes a controversial tripartite typology ("village Roma", *băieşi/rudari*, and nomads). Subsequent researchers have mined his tables, maps, and photographs for comparative data, while simultaneously critiquing the racialized framework and assimilationist prescriptions woven through the narrative. In short, Chelcea's study exemplifies the double-edged character of much interwar social science: an empirically indispensable record that simultaneously naturalises the very power relations it purports to describe.

4. Communism: Between Censorship and Exceptions

In the historical syntheses produced under communist ideological influence, the issue of Romani slavery is addressed sporadically, often with visible reticence and in a marginal fashion. A telling example is the monumental *Istoria Românilor* (in three volumes) authored by Constantin C. Giurescu. While remarkable in its scope concerning the development of Romanian institutions and society, the work distances itself from a thorough examination of Romani slavery, limiting itself to brief mentions and fragmented treatments, without critically engaging with the social and historical implications of the phenomenon.

In the second volume, Giurescu correctly identifies the earliest documentary attestations of Romani presence in Romanian territories. However, in line with earlier interpretations advanced by Nicolae Iorga, the author reiterates the hypothesis that the Roma were "brought by the Tatars" during invasions and subsequently enslaved by local rulers, being distributed to boyars and monasteries as servile labour. This narrative, common in traditional historiography, avoids an internal analysis of the mechanisms that generated and perpetuated slavery, transferring the original responsibility to an external factor and thereby reinforcing an exonerating vision of local elites.

In the third volume of *Istoria Românilor*, Giurescu addresses the issue of slavery explicitly, but exclusively in relation to the Romani population – earlier references to the Tatars as initiators of bondage disappear entirely. In this section, the author inventories several key legal acts that marked the evolution of the enslaved status of Roma in the Romanian space.

Although the system of slavery endured until the nineteenth century and remained deeply repressive, a few legislative initiatives can be identified in the second half of the eighteenth century, suggesting a timid reconfiguration of the relationship between masters and slaves. These measures, far from challenging the legitimacy of slavery itself, may be read as expressions of a shifting social and moral sensitivity toward Roma:

> The *Anafora* of 1766 (Moldavia) forbids the separation of Romani families, invoking moral and religious reasons. For the first time, an official document asserts the shared humanity of Roma and non-Roma: "They too are made by God like all other men, and it is a great sin to be divided like animals." This wording implicitly introduces the value of family unity as a legal principle, in opposition to the absolute logic of slave ownership.

> The *Hrisov* of 1785, issued by Alexandru Mavrocordat, enshrines the prohibition of enslavement through marriage – a practice commonly used to extend the system of slavery to free individuals who married persons of Romani ethnicity. The document clearly delineates the space of freedom from that of bondage and sets a first legal boundary against the expansion of slavery.
>
> The *Așezământ domnesc* of 1793, issued by Mihai Șuțu, prohibits the donation of state-owned Roma – especially from itinerant categories such as *ursari* and *lingurari* – to monasteries or boyars. This restriction reflects both the ruling authority's desire to maintain control over a mobile population difficult to integrate into traditional systems of exploitation, and an attempt to limit the arbitrary exercise of power over enslaved persons.

This series of legal regulations did not undermine the system of slavery but rather signalled the beginning of a conceptual transformation: from the perception of Roma as transmissible property toward a gradual recognition of minimal rights, especially in familial and juridical spheres. The idea of freedom, though still diffuse, began to enter normative discourse, even within a legislative framework designed to uphold the slave order.

The only micro-historical study explicitly dedicated to Romani slavery produced under the communist regime remains Olga Cicanci's *Aspecte din viața robilor de la mănăstirea Secul în veacurile XVII–XVIII*, published in volume X of *Studii și articole de istorie* (1967). Based on archival materials from the Secul Monastery – a corpus overwhelmingly centred on Romani slaves – the author rigorously reconstructs several aspects of their legal, economic, and daily lives.

One notable detail analysed is the emergence of the formula "șerbi țigani de-ai mănăstirii" (Gypsy serfs belonging to the monastery), suggesting an attempt to articulate an intermediate legal status between slavery and serfdom. Additionally, the study documents a limited form of legal capacity attributed to enslaved Roma: they could enter into contracts with abbots, committing to labour, non-escape, and obedience. The contracts were signed by fingerprint, signalling – despite the clearly asymmetric relationship – a minimal recognition of will and legal responsibility.

Cicanci also examines forms of resistance enacted by the enslaved: from concealment to avoid forced labour, to escape from estates, to direct confrontations with stewards or abbots. Labour regimes – uncodified by the feudal state, which provided no legal framework for enslaved labour – were entirely dictated by monastic authority. Although certain documents mention a one-week work rotation for every three, the implementation was inconsistent, leaving room for frequent abuse.

Through this approach, Cicanci offers a rare, detailed picture in Romanian historiography of institutional practices and the everyday life of Romani slavery within a monastic context. While her interpretive framework remains influenced by the ideological constraints of the communist era, the study constitutes a crucial contribution to the understanding of slavery's concrete manifestations in premodern Romania. Soon after Cicanci's study, N. Grigoraș published *Robia în Moldova. De la întemeierea statului până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea* (1968), a broader investigation of slavery in Moldavia. Though not aiming

for a comprehensive analysis up to the moment of abolition, Grigoraș addresses the main dimensions of the institution, drawing on a wide array of documentary and historiographic sources. His work is notable for its attempt to systematise the juridical and institutional evolution of slavery in a coherent chronological framework.

Both Grigoraș's contribution and George Potra's earlier synthesis, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România*, directly influenced the work of Viorel Achim – particularly the monograph *Țiganii din România* (1998) which critically re-evaluates these earlier sources in reconstructing the history of Romani slavery. As such, Grigoraș's study stands as a foundational reference for defining the postwar historiographic framework concerning Romani enslavement in Romania.

5. After 1989: Professionalisation and Epistemic Pitfalls

The study of Romani slavery in post-communist Romanian historiography reveals a dual trend: a continued reproduction of simplified or ideologically biased narratives inherited from earlier historiographical frameworks, and a gradual maturation of the field, supported by increased access to archives, improved methodological tools, and a growing ethical awareness among researchers. Following the fall of communism, the Romanian publishing landscape opened to a diversity of perspectives – some rigorous and scholarly, others marred by prejudice or epistemic negligence. This section critically assesses key works addressing the history of Romani slavery, grouped by their scientific value and their contribution to deepening the understanding of this phenomenon.

To underscore the heterogeneity of historiographical production, the works are classified into two categories: those that represent substantial scholarly contributions and those that perpetuate methodological or conceptual limitations without advancing the field in meaningful ways.

5.1 Works of Scholarly Value and Significance

Among the most notable post-1989 contributions is an edited volume, *Robia țiganilor în Țările Române. Moldova* (2000), coordinated by Vasile Ionescu. This collection brings together historical articles and period legal texts, providing a crucial documentary foundation for understanding the legal architecture of Romani slavery. Fundamental laws such as *Carte românească de învățătură*, *Pravila de la Govora*, *Îndreptarea legii*, and *Codul Callimachi* are accompanied by scholarly contributions from Ion Radu Mircea, N. Grigoraș, Alexandru I. Gonța, Olga Cicanci, and Mihail Kogălniceanu.

The thematic scope ranges from the legal status of the enslaved and everyday conditions to resistance strategies and power dynamics between enslavers and the enslaved. Through its rich documentary base and accessible discourse, the volume offers a multifaceted perspective on slavery in medieval and early modern Moldavia. Importantly, it supports both the professionalisation of historical research and the democratisation of historical knowledge, facilitating Romani communities' access to their own silenced past.

A similar documentary and historiographic effort is represented by *Robia rromilor în Țara Românească* (2001), which complements classical texts – notably those of George Potra and Boris Th. Scurtulescu – with a comprehensive body of legal and administrative documents from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These sources are instrumental in understanding the mechanisms of slavery in Wallachia and recovering an often-neglected segment of Romanian historical memory.

Within this compilation, studies by Gheorghe T Ionescu, Aurora Ilieș, Constantin Șerban, Mihail Grigore Poslușnicu, and Nicolae Iorga contribute to a more nuanced mapping of slavery's legal and economic evolution. They bring to light the diversity of exploitation practices, the complex relationship between enslavers and the enslaved, and the legal ambiguities surrounding Romani status. In this regard, the volume stands as a crucial act of historiographical restitution – a necessary intervention in the collective memory of slavery in Romania.

Another example of solid empirical research is Corneliu Tamaș's *Istoria țiganilor din Țara Românească 1241–1856* (2001), which offers a detailed, event-based historical reconstruction grounded in archival sources, particularly from the Vâlcea region. The book is notable for its fidelity to primary sources and chronological precision, drawing stylistically and methodologically from the tradition established by George Potra.

Although Tamaș does not adopt a novel conceptual framework or critical theoretical lens, the work is valuable for its documentary density and factual rigor. Its contribution lies more in the exhaustive compilation and dissemination of archival material than in offering new paradigms for interpreting Romani slavery. As such, the volume occupies an intermediary position between positivist historiography and the critical turn – bridging archival recovery and the need for renewed conceptual engagement with the legacy of Romani enslavement.

5.2 Continuities and Ruptures in Post-Communist Historiography: Between Narrative Humanisation and Academic Professionalisation

At the intersection of memoir literature and historical inquiry, Neagu Djuvara's *Între Orient și Occident* (1995) offers a sensitive, albeit analytically limited, portrayal of the experience of Romani slavery, filtered through the lens of the Romanian aristocracy's memories. Episodes such as the "little Gypsy girl in the boudoir" or the servant Grigore who kills his master reconstruct emotionally charged micro-narratives. However, they are presented in a romanticised register, devoid of socio-historical contextualisation. The book's merit lies in its ability to bring a marginalised theme into public discourse, using storytelling strategies that humanise the enslaved yet without challenging the dominant boyar-centric perspective.
In contrast, Viorel Achim provides a rigorous methodological framework in his landmark volume *Țiganii în istoria României* (1998), a foundational synthesis for Romani studies in the Romanian context. Grounded in a wide and diverse documentary base, the author offers a coherent periodisation of the history of Romani slavery and emancipation, situating these phenomena within both domestic socio-political dynamics and European trends. While certain influences of interwar historiography remain visible – in stylistic choices and the continued use of the term "Gypsies" – the work marks a professionalising turn, shifting from mere chronology to structural analysis.

This evolution is evident in Achim's later works, such as *Munca forțată în Transnistria* (2015) and *Despre locurile de deportare din Transnistria: lagărul de țigani din Golta* (2016), where he adopts a more nuanced and ethically attuned language, aligning with new standards of historical ethics and terminological sensitivity.

A similar academic depth is reflected in the research of Venera Achim, synthesised in her doctoral thesis *Țiganii din Principatele Române în epoca dezrobirii (1830–1860): Aspecte economice și statistice* (2005). Her work takes an interdisciplinary perspective, analysing the economic and legal impact of emancipation on the Romani population. It highlights a terminological and conceptual transition from "Gypsy" to "Roma", mirroring the evolution of scholarly language and a growing awareness of the political stakes of vocabulary in historiography.

A first-rate documentary landmark – one that merits particular emphasis – is a volume edited by Lucian Năstasă and Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țiganii din România, 1919–1944* (2001). Although chronologically removed from the period of bondage, this monumental reader tracks the *descendants* of the enslaved into the interwar and wartime decades, revealing how the social grammar of slavery continued to shape majoritarian–minoritarian relations. The editors reproduce **365 archival items** – police dossiers, ministerial circulars, Siguranța surveillance reports, party minutes, census tables, petitions, and the full bureaucratic chain that led to the Transnistrian deportations of 1942–44. Two substantial essays map the institutional ecosystem behind each document cluster, showing, for example, how the same categories once used to register slave caravans (*țigani nomazi*, *lăieși*) are redeployed in 1938 "ethnic files", or how the label "socially dangerous" echoes nineteenth-century slave codes that criminalised mobility. Because every item is presented *in extenso*, dated to the day, and annotated with archival shelf-marks, researchers can reconstruct:

- rival Romani political movements of the 1920s–30s (Lăzărescu-Lăzurică, Popp-Șerboianu, Gheorghe Niculescu);
- an oscillation between integrationist projects (schooling, military service) and punitive sweeps modelled on earlier vagrant-slave ordinances;
- path-dependency by which a "Gypsy question" of public order morphed into a racial-biological problem culminating in mass deportation.

In short, the volume turns the interwar archive into a *laboratory of post-slavery continuities*, documenting how former slaves' descendants negotiated citizenship – and how the state, transposing pre-abolition stereotypes into modern administrative idioms, produced new forms of exclusion.

Documente de arhivă privind robia țiganilor. Epoca dezrobirii is the first critical source-reader devoted entirely to the emancipation cycle of 1831–1864. Edited by Venera Achim and Raluca Tomi (with Florina M. Constantin), the volume opens with a 75-page scholarly introduction, then presents 216 archival items – princely decrees, Divan rulings, parish censuses, tax tables, manumission petitions, and court files – transcribed authentically and framed by provenance notes, a glossary, and comprehensive name/place indexes. Covering both Wallachia and Moldavia, the documents trace every legislative step from the Organic Regulations to the 1856 manumission laws, while also recovering enslaved Roma's own petitions

for freedom. By assembling dispersed materials into an annotated corpus, the book equips historians to reassess how state, church, and landowners negotiated abolition and how Romani actors articulated claims to personhood, thus filling a long-standing gap in Romanian slavery historiography.

By re-aggregating a dispersed paper trail, the volume supplies the *missing middle layer* between medieval slavery and modern racism, demonstrating that abolition was neither instantaneous nor egalitarian, but a staggered bargain struck among state, church, and landowners – in dialogue, and often in conflict, with the enslaved themselves.

An equally essential contribution comes from the author of this article, Petre Petcuț, whose work has been central to consolidating the documentary and analytical foundations of Romani history in the Romanian lands. *Rromii din România. Documente (1370–1580)* fills a crucial gap by bringing together 356 chancery acts concerning Romani slavery in Wallachia. Through chronological organisation and onomastic indices, the corpus allows researchers to reconstruct master-slave networks and the commercial routes of enslaved Roma. The documents demonstrate the institutionalised character of slavery, countering the still-circulating myth of a "mild dependency". The collection supplies invaluable price data for quantitative analyses (values, quantities, transaction types) and lays the groundwork for future digital databases. By highlighting Romani personal names, the volume recovers the subjectivity of the enslaved, moving beyond a solely noble-ecclesiastical perspective. Its Wallachia-only focus leaves parallel challenges open for Moldavia and Transylvania, pointing to the need for a complete series. Overall, the work marks a transition from writing "about" Roma to writing "with" Roma, providing the documentary bedrock for any serious discussion of slavery in the Romanian space.

But why do these three volumes matter together? Read in sequence, the corpora chart the full arc of the Romanian slavery regime:

1. 1370–1580: institutional codification and market circulation of enslaved Roma (Petcuț).
2. 1831–1864: legislative dismantling and self-emancipation, with its contested promises (Achim and Tomi).
3. 1919–1944: after-lives of bondage – how former slaves' descendants were reinscribed in new racial and administrative grids (Năstasă and Varga).

Each layer speaks to the next: price lists anticipate compensation debates; master–slave networks reappear as patronage chains in petitions; police "Gypsy registers" replicate categories coined in fifteenth-century charters. Together, the three volumes provide a documentary scaffolding on which any nuanced account of Romani slavery – and its stubborn, modern repercussions – must rest.

This documentary dimension is paired again by Petcuț with an interpretive analysis in *Rromii. Sclavie și libertate* (2015), where the author offers a coherent reading of the historical trauma of slavery and the marginalisation mechanisms that persisted after emancipation. He explores the continuities of institutional racism and structural discrimination, weaving the historical dimension into a broader reflection on social inequality and collective memory. Consistently, Petcuț uses the term "Roma". avoiding the pejorative

"țigan", in line with contemporary ethical and linguistic standards in scholarship.[1] This terminological choice signals a critical stance toward stigmatising discourses and aligns with current trends that recognise and respect Romani identity in public and academic spheres. The book arguably provides the most coherent longue-durée narrative of Romani slavery in the Romanian lands and its aftermath up to 1914. Its major achievement is shifting the focus from the mere chronology of emancipation to the post-emancipation social effects – mobility, surveillance, institutional marginalisation – making the volume a touchstone for both Romani-studies researchers and scholars interested in state-building and the genealogy of ethnic inequalities in Romania.

Completing this historiographic landscape, Marius Căldăraru brings an original contribution through *Particularitățile misiunii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în comunitățile romilor căldărari* (2022), in which he explores the complex relationship between religion, social status, and Romani living conditions. He also addresses the traumatic dimension of the Transnistria deportations, offering an interdisciplinary analysis of how ethnic identity, historical memory, and religious discourse intersect in the identity formation of Romani communities.

By carefully examining the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in relation to marginalised Romani populations, Căldăraru opens new avenues of reflection on the responsibility of religious institutions in perpetuating – or mitigating – social inequalities, while offering a valuable perspective on the dynamics of trauma, faith, and communal survival.

Rotaru and Gaunt recast the *Rudari* not as a timeless "Gypsy tribe" but as a labour category forged by monastic gold extraction and voivodal taxation. For example, a 1388 grant of "300 Gypsy households" to the Cozia monastery marks the moment free gold panners became hereditary slaves, anchoring a racial-capitalist frontier in Wallachia. Even after the Russian census of 1838, 86 per cent of the 800 enumerated Rudari families remained in state or ecclesiastical bondage, despite nominal reforms. As river deposits dwindled, a third of the group pivoted to woodworking (*lingurari*), showing that occupational change did not end fiscal coercion. Linguistic analysis confirms their speech is archaic Daco-Romanian, exposing earlier claims of "lost Romani" as products of "gitanisation". The study thus demonstrates how Rudari identity crystallised through shifting regimes of extraction, slavery, and state surveillance – offering a model for de-essentialising Romani histories.

5.3 Works of Limited Value and Problematic Approaches

In contrast to the previously mentioned contributions, several post-communist publications stand out due to their simplistic or even tendentious approaches. Lucian Cherata's *Istoria țiganilor* (1994) reiterates

1 An analysis of the usage of the terms "Roma" and "țigani" (Gypsies) in the aforementioned works reflects a significant transition in both academic and public discourse concerning this ethnic group. The shift moves from the traditional and often pejorative term *țigani* toward the more recent and politically correct *Roma*. In most of the historical sources cited, the term *țigani* is employed due to the period in which they were written and the historical context of their production. However, in more recent publications and in contemporary academic language, the term *Roma* has been widely adopted. This transition aligns with international trends toward more respectful and inclusive language regarding ethnic minorities, and with growing awareness of their diversity and rights.

Nicolae Iorga's hypothesis regarding the arrival of Roma via the Tatars and adopts Mihail Kogălniceanu's proposed date of 1417 as the first documentary attestation of Roma in Moldova, without providing direct evidence. The work relies predominantly on outdated sources (such as Dimitrie Dan, George Potra, Nicolae Iorga) and fails to integrate recent research, which diminishes its relevance and prevents a contextualised and critical analysis of the subject. These shortcomings reveal a lack of methodological rigor and an outdated perspective, rendering the work as a rather amateurish synthesis.

Tudor Amza, in his volumes, *Țiganii. O lume a contrastelor* (1994) and *Țiganii, necunoscuții de lângă noi* (1996), advances hypotheses that lack methodological foundation, often relying on questionable sources and employing a journalistic tone rather than a scientific one. The author proposes precise data regarding the migration of Roma from India and suggests a "rewriting of history", without supporting these claims with the necessary critical apparatus.

Even more problematic is Marius Băcanu's *Țiganii – minoritate națională sau majoritate infracțională* (1996), which provides an imbalanced and unscientific approach, rooted in ethnic prejudice and stereotyping. The complete absence of academic references raises serious concerns regarding the scholarly integrity and validity of the interpretations presented.

Niculae Crișan's *Țiganii. Mit și realitate* (1999) continues to reflect similar conceptual and methodological limitations, offering little new insight into the subject. While addressing a relevant topic, the book contributes neither theoretical nor substantial methodological advancements, remaining entrenched in a conventional, descriptive register.

Finally, *Rromii (țiganii) din România* (2011), authored by Costache Silviu and Daniel Dieaconu, presents a general overview with informative potential but remains at a superficial, introductory level. Although useful for orientation, the study does not engage with the historical complexity of the phenomenon, and its promised interdisciplinary perspective remains underdeveloped.

The post-communist historiographic panorama of Romani slavery in the Romanian context reveals a notable evolution: from early works marred by stereotypes and methodological negligence, toward rigorous studies grounded in primary sources and attuned to the social and ethnic realities of Roma. While the 1990s were dominated by simplistic and often biased accounts, the early 2000s saw the consolidation of scholarly research, visible in the efforts of specialised institutions and authors with solid archival and methodological experience. From relevant documentary collections to economic, legal, and social analyses, recent scholarship contributes to the reconstruction of Romani slavery's historical memory and its integration into the broader history of Romanian society.

Nevertheless, a number of contributions continue to perpetuate oversimplified or inadequate perspectives, failing to meet contemporary academic standards. Therefore, the study of Romani slavery must proceed with an ongoing commitment to depth, contextualisation, and ethical responsibility, in order to meaningfully contribute to the recovery of a historical memory too long eluded.

6. Silence as Strategy: An Absence of Romani Slavery in Romanian Historiography

As previously shown, the literature and historiography regarding slavery and the enslaved in Romania are both late-emerging and limited in scope, reflecting the generally low level of interest in Roma as historical subjects – a concern which only gained traction following contact with Central and Western European intellectuals.

Why has this topic been so persistently avoided that it remained almost entirely ignored in both academia and society? Are the *țigani* themselves to blame, due to their long-standing placement on the social margins, a position they allegedly refuse to abandon? One might argue that slavery is merely a segment of economic history, in which slaves had a market value like land, draft animals, and other commodities. Romanian historiography is perhaps not yet sufficiently developed to include in-depth studies on all these topics – even though their absence raises serious questions about the robustness of economic history as a whole in the Romanian context. The same could be said about social history: slavery is seen as marginal and therefore unworthy of sustained attention, despite its increasingly recognised societal relevance in recent decades.

There is also the possibility that Roma were merely collateral victims of a broader, intentional silence around slavery in Romanian lands. It is telling that the study of slavery has been reduced to a form of local dependency, disconnected from other temporal or geographic forms of slavery. This isolation enables a paternalistic approach, limiting itself to a chronology of legal provisions and social realities – much like the historiographical treatment of the peasantry – culminating in the integration of the emancipated into the Romanian nation by the mid-nineteenth century. Such a framework is assimilationist, in that it disregards the memory of slavery and its profound consequences on family relations, society, economy, education, health, and the delayed cultural and political aggregation of Romani communities.

The mid-nineteenth century, marked by widespread abolitionist movements across Europe, brought a surge of interest in the Romani population, primarily driven by external pressures to eliminate the institution of slavery – seen outside the two principalities as a source of shame and backwardness. The abolition of slavery, with its emphasis on dismantling the institution rather than ensuring socio-economic emancipation for the former slaves, left assimilation as the sole available path to integration into the national body. This took place behind the historical stage, in silence: Romanian society absorbed the most "advanced" elements of the Romani minority and rebranded them as Romanians. Thus, the memory of slavery and the contemporary experience of economic and social marginalisation remained with the weak, uneducated, ignorant, those without the esteem of society – citizens without papers, second-class human beings.

With few exceptions, Romanian intellectuals have not considered it important to descend so low as to capture this eternally uncivilised *alterity* in their writings. And when they did, the resulting narratives – expositions or historical descriptions – almost always ended with moral judgments, whether pertinent or not, applied indiscriminately to the entire Romani population.

Assimilation has disfigured the Romani minority by depriving it of vital human resources and cultural values. Under these conditions, reconstructing the historical image of Roma can only be achieved in a fragmented way, primarily through chancellery documents that are sparse in detail and overwhelmingly focused on the legal nature of princely, boyar, or monastic acts. Some documents even omit the names of the individuals they concern, revealing a commercial rather than human value assigned to the enslaved.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the issue of Romani emancipation became a central topic in intellectual and political debates. Slavery was seen as a "shame" that tarnished the image of the Romanian nation. In line with the spirit of the time, the 1848 revolutionaries proclaimed the freedom of the Roma on 11 June 1848, without, however, establishing concrete measures for their social integration. The proclamation emphasised the moral imperative of abolition, stating: "The Romanian people cast off the inhumanity and shame of holding slaves and declare the freedom of privately-owned Gypsies. Those who have until now borne the shame of the sin of owning slaves are forgiven by the Romanian people" (Documente 1960, 80).

Documents of the era offer a more nuanced perspective on the 1848 Revolution, revealing the opposition of most slaveholders to the abolitionist current. Although there exists a considerable documentary basis for the efforts of emancipation and the struggles of the Roma for freedom, these aspects were largely ignored by both communist and post-communist historiography. This deliberate omission – motivated either by ideological concerns or a form of systemic racism – has led to a significant gap in the public understanding of this historical episode.

After the abolition of slavery, interest in the Roma population in both public and academic discourse diminished. Subsequent documents focused more on social issues associated with nomadism and the poor economic conditions of sedentary Roma. Archives include numerous records of Roma migration toward urban areas and of their attempts to cross borders – phenomena that elicited ambivalent responses from authorities, torn between recognising Roma as part of the Romanian nation or regarding them as foreign elements. The press of the time provides additional detail, particularly regarding the activities of Romani musicians abroad. Nonetheless, a systematic scholarly approach to these phenomena has been conspicuously absent, reflecting Romania's lag behind academic developments in Central and Western Europe.

In modern and contemporary Romania, historiography – dominated by the imperatives of national identity-building – has reserved minimal space for Romani-related issues. Where they do appear, the information is often superficial and marginal. Yet interwar studies, articles, and doctoral theses attest to the existence of a significant documentary base on Romani history. The archives contain abundant references to slavery and emancipation, but their exploration remained limited – until the end of the communist period – to a small number of researchers. None of the major historians of the time dedicated themselves systematically to the subject, likely due to the prevailing nationalism, regardless of the political regime.

Under the communist regime, research on Romani slavery was extremely limited, and historical syntheses had no chance of passing censorship, making the publication of such works impossible. After 1989, the post-communist period saw greater editorial output on the topic, but a large number of publications was

not matched by a corresponding increase in scholarly quality. In fact, some of the works that emerged in the 1990s may give the impression of a historiographical revival, but this impression is misleading: many of those texts are, in reality, of questionable academic merit.

Conclusion

Romanian historiography has approached Romani slavery with significant reluctance, oscillating between minimisation, romanticisation, and, in some cases, deliberate erasure. This stance reveals not merely an academic gap but a systematic avoidance of confronting an uncomfortable past – one with profound repercussions on Romania's present social realities.

Romani slavery was not a marginal phenomenon; it was a deeply rooted institution with economic, social, cultural, and psychological consequences, the structural effects of which persist to this day in the form of stigma and exclusion. The fact that historians have preferred softened terms such as "serfdom" (*robie*) and have avoided comparisons with classical or Atlantic slavery signals an unease in the face of historical truth.

The recovery of the memory of Romani slavery must go beyond the mere restitution of documents. It must include a critical reassessment of the national historical narrative. Integrating this theme into the national historiography – with all its painful implications – is a necessary step toward building a society that is more aware, inclusive, and honest about its past. Only through such a reckoning can Romanian historiography become a space for truth and symbolic reparation.

A concrete step in this direction would be the integration of Romani slavery as a topic into university curricula in fields such as history, sociology, journalism, and political science. Higher education programs should include dedicated courses – either mandatory or elective – addressing not only historical facts but also their contemporary socio-political implications: collective memory, post-emancipation marginalisation, reparatory policies, and systemic racism.

Training new generations of historians, journalists, political analysts, and sociologists within a paradigm that recognises Romani slavery as an integral part of Romanian history is essential to overcoming the denial and trivialisation of this past. Moreover, it is imperative to support in-depth academic research on this topic, through funding for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral projects, as well as through partnerships between universities and Romani organisations. Such collaborations would enable a participatory and ethically reflective approach.

Only through these educational and institutional efforts can we build a historiography oriented toward truth, justice, and inclusion.

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

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

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

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

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

1. The Omission of Romani Slavery as a Power Tool

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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7 The English translation is not mine. It is taken from the article "Between Antigypsyism and Human Rights Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representations of the Roma Holocaust in European Textbooks", by Marko Pecak et al. 2021, 111. Here is the original Romanian version from the textbook: "O situatie dificila a avut minoritatea rromă (țiganeasca), avand posibilitati materiale reduse, lipsita de educatie, cu un stil de viata diferit, de cele mai multe ori, de cel al celorlalti locuitori, ei au fost supusi unor masuri coercitive din partea statului roman. In timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial au fost deportati in Transnistria 28, unde un mare numar de rromi au murit in lagarele de concentrare. Dupa razboi, regimul comunist, a supus minoritatea rromă unui program de sedentarizare, care a urmarit in primul rand asimilarea tiganilor. In unele privinte, acesta a avut urmari pozitive: scolarizarea obligatorie, invatarea unor meserii."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. (De)contextualisation of Slavery in Textbook Structures

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Perspective of the 'Master'

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

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

Using the pejorative term G*psy as an oppressive tool

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

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

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

Blaming the victim and justification of racism

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

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

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

16 "Aici au primit, se pare, numele de 'țigani', dintr-un cuvânt grecesc care înseamnă 'de neatins' ('*athinganoi*')."

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

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

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

Minimisation and denial

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

Slavery versus bondage (robie)

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

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

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

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

Slavery in images

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

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

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

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

Lack of narrative about Romani women during slavery

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

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

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

Lack of Romani perspective and agency

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

After abolition and the situation of Roma today

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

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

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

22 Este necesară integrarea socială sau maginalizarea rromilor?

Concluding Remarks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Teaching the History of Romani Slavery: Advancing Justice and Combatting Anti-Roma Racism

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Abstract

This article delves into how the history of the system of slavery in the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia can be taught to advance justice and prevent and combat anti-Roma racism. Although this specific form of racism is prevalent in Europe and beyond, and despite the recognition of history education's role in fighting racism, the history of Roma slavery is notably absent from European curricula and textbooks. This omission often leads to victim-blaming due to a lack of understanding of Roma's oppression and marginalisation. However, teaching a traumatic period of history brings dilemmas. Drawing on American slavery education, we discuss both pitfalls and best practices for the teaching of Roma slavery, if the goal is to prevent anti-Roma racism. We highlight four significant steps to effectively teach Roma slavery: (a) emphasise the perspectives, stories, and narratives of the enslaved, (b) provide a balanced account that highlights acts of resistance, resilience, and the agency of enslaved Roma in the face of slavery's brutality, (c) explicitly connect past injustices to present-day racism, demonstrating the ongoing legacies and impacts of Roma slavery and how the vicious circle can be broken, and finally (d) highlight examples of allyship between Roma and non-Roma, and to provide anti-racist role models for all pupils.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Anti-Roma racism
- Roma slavery
- Slavery education

Introduction

Romani people were enslaved in the territories of contemporary Romania (Wallachia and Moldavia) for over 500 years (1300s–1856), by the crown or voivodeships, boyars, and the Orthodox Church[1] (Achim 2004; Petcuț 2015). It was an ethnic-based chattel slavery: Roma were considered property who could be bought and sold. Approximately 250,000 Roma were freed at abolition (Achim 2004).

But the significance of this history extends beyond Romania's borders. First and foremost, it is an integral part of European history. It is not only the history of a minority group but part of the shared history of all Europeans. Second, it concerns Romani communities across Europe and the Americas, as many Roma escaped before or emigrated after abolition. Descendants of enslaved Roma are now citizens of countries all over Europe, in addition to Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Columbia, and the United States. Third, Romani individuals and families today continue to live with the consequences of this history, through phenomena like transgenerational trauma (Hancock 1987; Furtună 2022). Finally, centuries of enslavement shaped the power dynamics and relations between Romani and non-Romani populations. Anti-Roma racism travels across borders, carrying with it persistent racist attitudes and stereotypes, as well as structures of cultural, economic, and social marginalisation.

Anti-Roma racism remains one of the most persistent forms of racism in Europe. Rostas describes it as operating across four levels: the public imagination, discourse, institutions, and practices (2022, 30). A survey by the Centre for European Policy Studies highlights manifestations such as negative stereotypes, discrimination, institutional ignorance, political mobilisation against Roma, unequal law enforcement, and violence (Carrera, Rostas, and Vosyliūtė 2017). Historically, anti-Roma racism has enabled atrocities such as genocides and slavery. Its persistence today demands critical reflection and proactive interventions, including within the education sector.

Despite this knowledge of the widespread nature of anti-Roma racism both historically and today, a report from 2020 found that the history of Romani slavery is nearly non-existent in European curricula and textbooks (Spielhaus et al. 2020). This is staggering, given that history education is regarded as an important tool to combat intolerance and build a fairer and more just society. The Spielhaus et al. (2020) report specifically addresses the potentially damaging consequences of not explicating the connection between slavery and present-day anti-Roma racism:

> Very few books refer to slavery, maltreatment and discrimination as possible causes for the marginalisation of minorities. When social structures such as institutional and structural racism are not mentioned, the blame can easily be placed on the victims (Spielhaus et al. 2020, 23–24).

1 The syntagma "Orthodox Church" in the context of slaveholders in the medieval period in Romanian territory refers, in particular, to the monasteries and annexed administrative units that held slaves.

In other words, oblivion creates or maintain a thriving ground for racism, where present-day marginalisation and poverty may be explained through victim-blaming. Teaching the history of slavery could, on the contrary, provide a fact-based understanding of how the past continues to shape the present. Thus, this paper aims to discuss how the history of Romani slavery can be taught to promote anti-racism and social justice in European education systems.

1. Current State of Romani Slavery Education in Romania and Europe

Research indicates that the history of Romani slavery is largely absent from both Romanian and European educational curricula (Spielhaus et al. 2020; David 2021). This absence reflects a broader marginalisation. Although the research literature on the history of Roma slavery is slowly growing (see, for example, Achim 1998; Necula 2012; Iordachi 2019; Chiriac 2020; Furtună 2020), it is still not included in the mainstream canon of slavery history. For instance, it not even mentioned in *The Routledge History of Slavery* or *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* (Lauritzen and Selling 2023).

The Romanian Ministry of Education's lack of interest reflects this neglect. There are no official textbooks, auxiliary teaching materials, or compulsory subjects that broadly address Romani slavery or Romani history. Without systemic inclusion, teaching about Romani slavery remains marginal, despite the critical need for it in fostering intercultural understanding and combatting anti-Roma racism.

Yet, in Romania particularly, there are numerous examples of associations and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs)[2] trying to include elements of Romani culture and history, including the history of Romani slavery, either in classroom activities or extracurricular activities. A common feature of these initiatives is that they are initiated, developed, and implemented by private institutions, not public authorities or the state. Furthermore, the state often refuses to do so, or significantly delays adopting these models of good practice and integrating them into the mandatory national curriculum. As a result, they remain isolated, limited to small regions, and last for short periods of time.

An example of auxiliary educational material addressing Romani culture and history is *Caietul de 10* (Workbook of 10), developed by the National Centre for Roma Culture "Romano Kher", coordinated by political scientist Florin Nasture. The workbook is an intercultural guide containing lessons and worksheets especially for students, some of which can also be used with parents. Among the topics included in the workbook are themes such as: Romani personalities, "Why Roma and not G*psy/Ț*gan?", Stereotypes and prejudices, Equal rights vs. discrimination, Who are Roma?, Romani language, Calendar of Romani holidays, Institutions and structures of Romani representative organisations, and so on.

2 Examples of NGOs that have implemented projects with the aim of integrating Romani cultural elements in educational activities are: Amare Rromentza Rroma Centre, with the project "Stop school dropout – Promote education!", in the community of Boldesti-Scaeni, Prahova County; Roma Education Fund Romania, with the project "Build your own future through education", implemented in Mures County; Centrul comunitar "Împreună", with the project "Together for an inclusive school", implemented in Ilfov County.

The workbook also includes resources and additional materials, "Did you know?" sections, definitions of fundamental terms and concepts related to intercultural education, themes for reflection, and questions for further discussion. The content is also available online on the institution's platform[3] and can be accessed easily by teachers, trainers in intercultural education, or even directly by students or parents.

Another example of an initiative that sought to bridge the gap is the project "Segregation on the minus, Diversity on the plus", which integrated Romani culture, language, history, and literature into the educational curriculum through a transdisciplinary approach. The project's aim was to include elements of interculturality in everyday lessons, even though the national curriculum did not include this. The curriculum developed through the project had the potential to serve as a model of good practice at a national level, particularly because of the positive results and impacts[4] observed in pilot schools. At the conclusion of the project, in late 2024, an official document with a series of concrete recommendations was submitted to the Ministry of Education. These recommendations were based on public consultations involving key educational actors. They sought to initiate broader discussions and to propose the integration of these practices into the national curriculum. The proposals were issued at the end of 2024 and were monitored the following year.[5]

In addition to methodological developments like "Segregation on the minus, diversity on the plus", NGOs and civil society have focused extensively on training teachers. They offer professional development in intercultural pedagogical methods, highlighting the diversity and specificity of Romani culture and history. Through these trainings, many teachers encounter the topics of Romani slavery and the Roma Holocaust for the first time – highlighting the absence of these subjects in their university-level teacher education.

Moreover, NGOs and civil society have made continuous and strategic efforts to influence public policies. A significant moment came in 2023, when the National Education Law underwent reform. NGOs[6] presented detailed and precise recommendations, arguing for the inclusion of Romani culture,

3 See: https://ikultura.ro/biblioteca/caietul-de-10.

4 At the end of the project a measurable evaluation was conducted to observe how the introduction of Romani cultural elements (Romani history, Romani language, art, and culture, and so on) in different subjects (Romanian language and literature, English language, French language, Civic culture, History, Mathematics, and so on) had a positive impact on the evolution of pupils in the educational process in terms of performance, school results, and effectiveness.

5 The official document appeared because of the activity: *A7. Develop and submit to the Ministry of Education a set of recommendations for the application of the Methodology for the prevention and elimination of school segregation of Roma children*, in the framework of the project: "Segregare pe minus, Diversitate pe plus – Educatie de la egal la egal pentru comunitatile roma si non roma", implemented by Teach for Romania and Roma Education Fund Romania, in the period March 2021 – February 2024.

6 A relevant example, that has circulated since the period of public consultations, initiated by the Ministry of Education, is the document signed by the Community Development Agency "Together" and Amare Rromentza Rroma Centre entitled, Submission Letter – Proposed amendments to the Draft Law on Pre-university Education, aiming at the inclusion of Roma pupils. It sought to attract other associations and members of civil society to join this endeavour to include Romani cultural elements such as Romani language and history, as part of the national obligatory curriculum in the new education law. A concrete recommendation in this regard is the one in Article 45: "In schools with at least 20 per cent of pupils belonging to a national minority, the language of the respective national minority and the history and culture of the respective national minority will be compulsory subjects, which will be part of the common core curriculum."

history, and language into the national curriculum. Among these recommendations was a strong and explicit demand, made on behalf of Romani civil society organisations, for the inclusion of a substantial chapter on the slavery of Roma in the Romanian territories. However, these recommendations, were almost completely ignored, and a substantial chapter on Romani slavery – or Romani history as a distinct comprehensive school subject – will probably have to wait until any future fundamental change of the National Education Law in Romania is made.

Attempts also have been made to provide educational resources that address Romani slavery more thoroughly. One notable example is the auxiliary textbook *Istoria și Tradițiile Romilor*, authored by Petre Petcuț, Delia Grigore, and Mariana Sandu. This textbook covers Romani slavery from multiple perspectives, including Romani groups and traditional occupations, the settlement of Roma in various Romanian Principalities, their socio-economic and political status, the legal frameworks that codified their status as property, the practices of buying and selling slaves, and the long process toward emancipation in modern Europe.

However, *Istoria și Tradițiile Romilor* was published in 2003 as an auxiliary textbook intended mainly for sixth and seventh-year students (and occasionally for high school students) who chose to study Romani history and traditions as an optional subject. Furthermore, the book was published with support from UNICEF and printed in only 1,000 copies, distributed free of charge in selected schools – primarily in schools with high Romani student populations. This case underlines two important points: first, the initiative was again driven by an NGO, and the Ministry of Education was only co-opted as a partner; second, the book's reach was limited and only appeared in schools with predominantly Romani students. Most Romanian students were not exposed to its content. Yet the need for education about Romani slavery is not only for Romani students, but for all students across the Romanian educational system.

In short, NGOs and civil society in Romania have developed and piloted promising methodologies for teaching Romani slavery, trained teachers in Romani history and pedagogy, and made substantial efforts to influence state policies. However, the Ministry of Education has yet to fully utilise or integrate these models. The persistent lag in adopting these initiatives into the national curriculum reveals a systemic issue: While private and civil society actors work actively to fill the gaps, the responsibility for mainstream, compulsory education on Romani history remains neglected by the state.

In this article, we will discuss how Romani slavery can be taught in a way that contributes to anti-racism and social justice in a European context. Spielhaus et al. (2020) conclude their report by stating that there is a "necessity for European nations that aim to promote inclusion and antidiscrimination to address both the lack of representation of Roma and their misrepresentation in European curricula and textbooks". The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers reached a similar conclusion for the first time in 2020, when they adopted a recommendation calling on its 47 member states to include the history of Roma and Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials (Council of Europe 2020).

At the same time, research has consistently highlighted the complexities and potential pitfalls inherent in teaching history and controversial issues. This paper therefore poses the following question: How can the history of Romani slavery be taught in ways that contribute to advancing social justice and preventing and combatting anti-Roma racism? Our discussion draws on both historical scholarship on Romani slavery and

pedagogical research concerning the teaching of Romani history and slavery more broadly. This paper is conceptual and programmatic in nature, rather than empirical, aiming to articulate and critically examine some challenges that effective education about Romani slavery may face in contemporary classrooms. Our objective is to propose pedagogical approaches suited for mixed classrooms – comprising Roma, non-Roma, and other racialized students – across diverse age groups and educational contexts.

2. Approaches to Teaching Romani Slavery

2.1 Terminology: Centre the Stories of Enslaved People through Language

Scholars in slavery studies have highlighted that language matters. In a community-sourced writing guide, senior slavery scholars proposed principles for writing about slavery that "complicates the assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized" (Foreman et al. 2023). The most important principle they propose, regarding language to consider and language to avoid, is a shift in perspective from the enslaver-perspective to the perspective of the enslaved. In the following we will discuss what such a shift may imply when teaching Romani slavery.

Slave vs. enslaved: The term "slave" is dehumanising and implies a slaveowner point of view. In the words of Browning-Mullis (2020), "The noun slave implies that she was, at her core, a slave. The adjective enslaved reveals that though in bondage, bondage was not her core existence." The term "slave" is in other words ripping people of humanity by reducing enslaved Romani people to belongings. Using the term "enslaved" on the other hand, highlights that slavery was something that was done to people. As Matache (2021) puts it: "the term enslaved (forced to become a slave) also calls attention to the act and culpability of forcing someone into slavery, not only to the status of slave". Romani people were not "born slaves" but born with either "free" or "slave" status.

Slaveholder vs. enslaver: According to Matache (2021), "In Romania, the *enslavers* (those who forced people into slavery and held them there) are still timidly called 'boyars', the nobility." "Slave owner" or "slave masters" are also frequently used terms. These terms are better replaced by "enslaver", which emphasises their active participation in creating and upholding the institution of slavery rather than taking their status for granted.

Runaway slave vs. fugitive from slavery: Similarly, people escaping from slavery are often referred to as "runaway slave", which again is from the enslaver's perspective, who saw escaping as wrong. Alternative ways to describe this would be "fugitives from slavery", "self-liberated", or "self-emancipated" individuals.

Roma people vs. racial slur: A range of derogatory terms are used to describe Romani people in Europe, including variations of t*gan/z*geuner and G*psy.[7] The term "t*gan" developed from the Greek word

7 The right to self-definition should always be respected. For example, in the UK, "Gypsy" is commonly used as a self-definition. But in most contexts, it is considered derogatory and should be avoided. Therefore, here, to minimise the reproduction of racial slurs, we replace the letters y and i within such terms with an asterisk.

"atinganos", which meant "untouchable, impure" (Grigore 2001, 36).[8] The origin of the term is thus in itself derogatory, which is strengthened by its entanglement with Romani slavery in Romania. The term ţ*gan appears for the first time in writing in the Romanian territories in 1385, together with the first mention of enslaved Roma, when the ruler of Wallachia Dan I gives the Tismana monastery 40 "aţigani" (DRH 1972–76, 75). From this first appearance onwards, the term continues to appear repeatedly with each that follows, throughout the medieval documents. At the same time a particularly important aspect of the status of Roma in that period is shown; the fact that they were enslaved. During almost 500 years of slavery, through the indivisible use of the two terms "rob" (meaning slave) and "ţ*gan", the two became synonymous. For example, in documents from the fourteenth century from Wallachia, in a total of seven documents, Roma are mentioned as follows: a. 1385 "ţ*gani, 40 settlements"; a. 1387 "40 ţ*gani settlements"; a. 1388 "300 ţ*gani settlements"; a. 1390 "17 tent ţ*gani"; a. 1391–1392 "40 settlements of ţ*gani"; a. 1392 "ţ*gani, 40 settlements"; a. 1392 "ţ*gani, 300 settlements" (DRH 1972–76, 19–45). In the following centuries, when Roma start to be identified with anthroponyms, with personal names, in many cases, forms of overidentification even appear, although the enumeration of the ethnic category mentioned by anthroponyms is specified at the beginning, their names are accompanied by the exonym "ţ*ganul", as in the examples from Wallachia: a. 1470 "Andrea ţ*ganul", a. 1558 "Oprea ţ*ganul", a. 1582 "Răducul ţ*ganul", a. 1582 "Rova ţiganul", a. 1599 "Buda ţ*ganul". So, although the ethnic category mentioned is specified by formulas such as "and the ţ*ganii" at the beginning, their names are accompanied by the exonym "ţ*ganul", and this type of notation is used without exception, with excessive rigour, most likely for the purposes of clear identification and better management of the situation of enslaved Roma in the two regions of Moldavia and Wallachia.

The historical use of the term "t*gan" in Romanian territories is evidenced by official documents from the medieval period to the Second World War, including significant events like the abolition of Romani slavery[9] and the deportation of Roma during the Holocaust.[10] These official records, along with the widespread use of derived words and anthroponyms in the Romanian language, have deeply entrenched the term at both administrative and societal levels. Despite its widespread use across Europe since the fourteenth century,[11] it is important to note that the term "t*gan/G**psy" does not originate from the Romani language, where "Rrom" or "Rom" signifies a man of Roma ethnicity and "Rromni" or "Romni"

8 Greek etymology is also supported by the initial form of the term "atigan", with particular privative initial "a", which refers directly to the Greek term "atinganoi", where the morpheme "a" has the same role, its meaning being "ne". Later, this initial "a" disappeared, and "Tsigan" remained – a term that has been preserved until today.

9 "The Legion for the emancipation of all Gypsies from the Romanian Principality. Art. 1. Slavery is abolished. Any Gypsy who is in this category today should be released and immediately registered among the guardians of the State" (Petcuţ, Grigore, and Sandu 2003, 61).

10 Citing from a report of the gendarmerie inspectorate: "Situation Regarding the Evacuation of Nomadic and Non-nomadic Gypsies in Transnistria" (Ionescu 2000, 58).

11 Here is a list of locations and dates in sequential order: "Serbia – 1348; Bulgaria – 1378; Wallachia – 1385; Slovenia – 1387; Czechia – 1399; Transylvania, the Land of Făgăraş – 1390–1406; Germany – 1407; Moldavia – 1414; Switzerland – 1414; France – 1418; Belgium – 1419; Holland – 1420; Italy – 1422; Spain – 1425; Denmark – 1433; Poland – 1501; Russia – 1501; Scotland – 1505; England – 1522; Portugal – 1526; Norway – 1540; Finland – 1559; and Wales – 1579" (Sărau 1998, 56).

a woman, highlighting a clear distinction in self-identification among Romani people. This historical and linguistic context underscores the complexity and longevity of the term's usage in Romania and beyond.

2.2 Teaching What Really Happened

In their proposed reparations agenda for Roma, Matache and Bhabha (2021) start with the category of "truth telling", which implies both "systematic collection of accurate historical information" (263) and "information diffusion" (264). Including Romani slavery in curricula, textbooks, and teachings is a powerful tool for information diffusion.

When doing so, however, it is crucial that the content speaks truth about what really happened. There has been a tendency to relativise Romani slavery, also in the language used to describe it. In the Romanian language, it is commonly referred to as "robie" ("bondage"), for example, in Romanian textbooks (David 2021). The tendency to relativise and minimise the importance of Romani slavery in Romanian history is also present in school textbooks. For example: in a year-12 textbook, published in 2007 by the publishing house Gimnasium, the chapter entitled "Modern Romania. Majority and Minorities" describes the situation of Romani slavery as follows: "Ever since their settlement here, Roma have been considered, due to their backward standard of living and physical appearance, an inferior population. Therefore, from the very beginning, they were marginalised and isolated." This statement shows, on the one hand, that the problem of slavery is not the responsibility of the administration and enslavers, it was not a factor determined and controlled by them, and on the other, it insinuates the idea that Roma themselves are to blame[12] for the situation they found themselves in due to some of the characteristics attributed to them. But, added to the importance of truthful teaching around what happened during the period of slavery, it is important to remember the effect this tutoring might have on different students. Recent years have revealed the minority stress that racialized students experience, including in education. The topic of slavery often elicits strong emotional reactions from students, due to the horrific acts of violence, cruelty, and dehumanisation carried out during slavery (The Historical Association 2007). The lingering impacts of this historical event continue to affect many, and students may respond with anger, apathy, blame, guilt, or racism (The Historical Association 2007).

Ward (2023) identifies three broad categories of minority stress: (1) fear of being dominated by a more powerful figure, (2) fears of being rejected and abandoned, and (3) fears of not being understood by, or being able to understand, the world (Ward 2023, 98). If translating this to slavery education, slavery is a history of white domination over racialized people, such as Roma. If slavery is taught from a White perspective, the teaching might continue this domination. The importance of including the racialized perspective in slavery education is also emphasised by the second and third point: A white perspective on slavery might be experienced as rejection and abandonment, and indeed cause experiences of not being able to understand or be understood by the world.

12 An idea also emphasised by David, Cezara (2021) în *Teaching of Roma History is Distorted and Racist*.

Matache (2021) argues, that the very silencing of Romani slavery is a racist mechanism: Racism caused the enslaved and their descendants to interpret the oppression as personal weakness and a cause of shame, which in turn served the cause of the oppressor who benefit from the story being silenced. Or as Costache (2021) notes, "this suppression of history serves a very specific purpose; to superimpose a false sense of racial harmony on the world". This leads us to our next topic, that slavery education with an anti-racist ambition should explicate present-day racism as a consequence of slavery.

2.3 Interpret Present-day Racism as a Consequence of Slavery

Loewen (2009, 190) argues that slavery in the United States has a twin legacy: cultural racism, and social and economic inferiority. In the following, we will use these categories to discuss aspects of teaching about Romani enslavement.

Cultural racism

During the Covid-19 pandemic, anti-Roma racism peaked in Europe. In seeking to understand this peak of anti-Roma prejudice, researchers have unpacked how specific stereotypes and prejudices were not invented during the Covid-pandemic, but that they were rather a continuation of already-existing prejudices, some of which date back to slavery (Dumitru 2021; Matache, Leaning, and Bhabha 2021). Matache, Leaning, and Bhabha (2021) show how epidemics often have led to the scapegoating of marginalised communities historically. This includes the portrayal of Roma as carriers of diseases. One specific example was that enslaved nomadic Roma often were forbidden from entering cities at the first signs of an epidemic outbreak and were expelled from Bucharest for a whole month during a plague outbreak in 1793, as they were seen as carriers (Matache, Leaning, and Bhabha 2021, 96). The anti-Roma rhetoric and practices against Roma during the Covid pandemic bear striking similarities to these historical abuses. As Matache, Leaning, and Bhabha (2021) note:

> From Brazil to Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, local or state authorities have enacted disproportionate or militarized measures in Romani neighborhoods or towns. Many justify the racist narrative portraying Roma as carriers of disease and as a collective health and safety threat (102).

Another example of a continuation of cultural racism, is the portrayal of Romani women. In a case study of the portrayal of Romani women in abolitionist literature, Maria Luiza Medeleanu found that the authors portray Romani women as sexualised and passive victims; "promiscuity mixed with a kind of primitivism" (Medeleanu 2022, 6). Despite counter-histories of Romani women fighting for their freedom (2022, 7–8), Medeleanu shows through examples from arts, literature and the media that the exotified image of Romani women created during slavery continues to the present-day.

More research is needed to trace the genealogy of anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypes, and its connection to Romani slavery. In the meantime, teachers may use the above-described examples, or examples from other contexts, to illustrate how slavery gives rise to specific racist prejudices and to discuss similarities with the racism faced by other previously enslaved peoples and Roma in Romania.

More than anything, the teachers and students could reflect on how slavery may have contributed to normalising a racial hierarchy in Romania, which brings us to the second part of slavery's legacy: social and economic inferiority.

Social and economic inferiority

Social and economic inferiority, or inequity, can be understood as a materialised form of racism. Racism promotes a hierarchy, where racialized people are placed below those considered white or superior. This logic of oppression is intersectional, and race intersects with social class and sex (Loewen 2010, 188). In his book from 2009, Loewen writes that in the United States, a median white family had 12 times as much wealth as a median black family (189). Loewen argues that this significant wealth gap exists due to the accumulation of wealth during slavery in white families, which has been passed on through generations, and the lack of opportunity for African-Americans to do the same. There is a huge research gap when it comes to the specific link between Romani slavery in and its consequences in Romania and beyond, and similar figures do not exist for Roma and white Romanians. But survey data from 2021 show that 78 per cent of Roma are at risk of poverty and 53 per cent of Roma experience severe material deprivation.

As Matache (2020) notes, "it is self-evident that the history of 500 years of economic exploitation stripped Roma people of any prospect of accumulating intergenerational wealth". To illustrate this point, Necula (2012) makes a rough calculation of the unpaid salaries from the period of enslavement. He argues that for an approximate number of 266,335 enslaved Roma, who were enslaved for 471 years, with € 5.4 as an average salary per day, the total would be € 247,249,700,235. While the figure itself cannot be regarded as a precise economic estimate, given the absence of rigorous methodology and the simplifications made, it nonetheless highlights the scale of the wealth extracted from enslaved populations. It serves as a reminder that the effects of enslavement extended beyond the immediate deprivation of freedom: enslaved Roma were systematically denied the right to benefit from the economic value of their labour, while simultaneously contributing to the accumulation of wealth among enslavers and the broader society. As such, even imperfect estimates like Necula's can function as important pedagogical tools. They invite critical engagement with the historical economic dimensions of slavery and offer a point of departure for discussions on the enduring socio-economic disparities faced by Romani communities in Romania today. By situating such figures within broader historical and structural analyses, educators and students alike can better understand how historical injustices continue to reverberate across generations.

If the goal, then, is to advance social justice and prevent anti-Roma racism – including the structural racism that unequal distribution of privilege is – the history of slavery must be unpacked, and narratives of earned and justified privileges challenged. The South African academic Jonathan Jansen has introduced the concept of "disrupting received knowledge" through post-conflict pedagogy. He emphasises that education can play a crucial role in challenging inherited narratives which contribute to racial tensions, for example, by fostering critical dialogue among students of different racial backgrounds. Jansen argues that even though the children in the classrooms have not experienced the history in question directly, they have inherited memories from their communities, parents, and grandparents. Disrupting indirect knowledge is important to challenge the taken-for-granted positions of groups in society. As Loewen puts it:

> If members of the elite come to think that their privilege was historically justified and earned, it will be hard to persuade them to yield opportunity to others. If members of deprived groups come to think that their deprivation is their own fault, then there will be no need to use force or violence to keep them in their places (Loewen 2018, 304).

Even without specific figures comparing Roma and white Romanians, the poverty experienced by Roma in Romania could be used as a starting point to explore racialized poverty as a consequence of slavery. Students could be challenged to reconstruct how wealth may have been passed on from slaveowners to their descendants.

2.4 Avoid a 'Curriculum of Tragedy': Romani Agency and Resistance

The most important argument for including agency and resistance in the teaching of slavery, is that these aspects need to be included if the history is to be taught as correctly as possible: Omitting enslaved people's agency and resistance would be a kind of falsification of history. That slavery history concerns historical trauma of marginalised communities such as the Roma, adds to the importance of transcending a solely tragedy-focused curriculum. While it is essential to acknowledge the harsh realities and injustices faced by enslaved Roma, it's equally important to illuminate their agency, resilience, and acts of resistance to avoid reducing their history to a mere "curriculum of tragedy" (Berry and Stovall, 2013). Brazelton (2021) highlights a problematic trend where educational content disproportionately focuses on suffering, which he claims is disrespectful to historical victims of slavery, might normalise "Black suffering" (57), and might potentially re-traumatise "students living in slavery's afterlife" (59).

To avoid this pitfall, it is important to include stories of resistance and resilience among enslaved Roma, countering the notion of passivity. A first step towards moving beyond enslaved Roma as an anonymous and passive mass of people is to name enslaved individuals where possible, acknowledging individuals' personhood and individual stories (Foreman et al. 2023). Although in its very beginning, research unveils stories of resistance and resilience among Roma. Examples include fugitives from slavery (Hancock 1987), and how enslaved Roma used "formal requests for legal emancipation" in courts and the role this played in the struggle for resisting enslavement (Furtună 2020, 201). Such narratives underscore the active efforts by Romani individuals to challenge and resist their oppressive circumstances.

In teaching about Romani resistance, teachers might find it useful to use the impactful work of Alina Serban, a Romani actor, playwright, and director, and her film *Letter of Forgiveness*. The film, based on a true story, portrays the enslaved Roma mother Maria in 1855 Romania, and her fight to secure freedom for her son Dincă. Their acts of bravery contributed to the historical movement towards the abolition of slavery (Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma 2021).

Another important story of resistance is that of Ioana Tinculeasa Rudăreasa. Rudăreasa fought over a decade (from 1843 to 1856) for liberation from slavery for herself and her family. What was extraordinary in her case is that all her initiatives were enacted in a Wallachian court at the time, which was truly

remarkable for an enslaved Roma. At the same time, this story is taken from official documents and confirms that the boyars were against the abolition of slavery and by all means tried to stop it, or at least to prolong it. But the resistance of enslaved Roma, and furthermore their resilience, was manifested even at the legislative level in a court of law through the remarkable efforts of Ioana Rudăreasa. ERIAC has developed a book, teaching materials, and a didactic game about Romani resistance, which also includes the story of Ioana Rudăreasa and her fight for freedom from slavery (ERIAC 2020). Another Romani cultural institution that has integrated the incredible story of Ioana Rudăreasa in an artistic act is the National Centre for Culture "Romano Kher" through the theatrical project "Roma Voices from the Slavery Period" (Romano Kher, n.d.).

In addition, we believe that literature also plays an important role. Mateo Maximoff's book *The Price of Freedom*, portrays a movement of Romani slaves as warriors, fighters against the oppressive system and the enslavers. Therefore, even if the story is slightly nuanced and idealised and does not refer to specific moments in history, it describes the general framework of slavery and sheds light on the revolt. Although the book is a work of fiction, revolt and resistance were part of the history of Romani slavery, and such literary examples can be seen as metaphors for the true resistance of those people during slavery. Literature can reconstruct moments and communicate this history to students in a different way to textbooks.

But examples of resistance and resilience can also be found today, where Romani individuals continue to resist the aftermath of slavery. Notable examples include the Romani musician and politician Damian Draghici, who had a memorial plaque installed at the Tismana monastery, marking a historical reference point to Romani slaves (Matache and Bhabha 2016), or academics such as Margareta Matache, who has played a crucial role in highlighting the link between Romani slavery and contemporary anti-Roma racism, emphasising the importance of acknowledging past injustices to address current inequalities and discrimination effectively (Matache and Bhabha 2021).

Incorporating such narratives in slavery education is particularly important if the goal is to prevent and combat anti-Roma racism, as this approach moves beyond stereotypes, challenges prejudices, and gives examples of historical justice and reparations.

2.5 Highlight Examples of Allyship between Roma and non-Roma

> *When all are guilty, no one is; confessions of collective guilt are the best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits, and the very magnitude of the crime the best excuse for doing nothing.*
> – Hannah Arendt

In Wallachia and Moldovia, people were born with a status as either free or enslaved. The agency of each individual within this established system was therefore limited. But as Hannah Arendt describes above, "confessions of collective guilt are the best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits". In other words, portraying all people born with a free status as guilty might lead to us collectively cleansing them of guilt. It is important to uphold that, even within this system of slavery, it was possible for those born

free to see slavery as wrong, and to resist it. This will not purge the collective of enslavers of guilt but rather confirm that their contribution to enslavement was an active choice.

A similar point is highlighted by The Historical Association (2007), who point out that the downplay of the role of white abolitionists in favour of economic factors and Black resistance can alienate white working-class pupils, and that a focus solely on technological inferiority and brutality can lead students to dismiss the past and its people as inferior. Such forms of alienation might also lead to an alienation from present-day anti-racism.

Loewen (2009, 192) uses the term "racial nationalism" to describe the tendency to identify with people of our own race – either through feeling pride for their achievements or shame for their brutality. Although breaking patterns of racial nationalism is a goal in anti-racist education, it is also important to be aware of its existence. And because of this, it is also important to provide white students who "still harbor some racial nationalism within their minds" with white, anti-racist role models (Loewen 2010, 202).

In educational settings, this could mean including stories of non-Romani people who in different ways fought against slavery. According to Achim, liberal intellectuals played a crucial role in putting emancipation from slavery on the agenda in the 1840s and 1850s (Achim 2010, 24). Two examples to mention here could be the Wallachian Prince Alexandru II Ghica who in 1836 freed 4,000 enslaved Roma. The act was important in itself but also had a great ripple effect as it initiated a policy where the state purchased Roma who had been enslaved by private enslavers and gave them their freedom. Another example could be Mihail Kogălniceanu, who wrote several academic works in order to contribute to the abolitionist movement.[13]

The historical examples of non-Romani allies could be used as a starting point for discussing how non-Romani pupils and students can be allies in the ongoing mobilisation against anti-Roma racism and for historical justice. From this perspective, it might also be worth providing examples of present-day allies. However, if teaching about Romani slavery is to advance social justice and prevent anti-Roma racism, it must centre on Romani perspectives, both in regard to history and to the consequences of slavery today. The topic of non-Romani allyship should be just that, allyship, not the central narrative.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

In concluding, it is essential to acknowledge the state's responsibility in the educational narrative, particularly in integrating the histories and contributions of marginalised communities. Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in Romania have addressed the need for inclusion of Romani slavery in curricula, developed materials and piloted training of teachers. But their efforts must be supported and adopted into official policies by the Romanian state to achieve broader and more impactful change. Furthermore,

13 See Chiriac (2019) for a description of different works by Kogălniceanu, including Kogălniceanu's *Esquisse sur l'histoire, les mœurs et la langue des cigains, connus en France sous le nom de Bohémiens, suivie d'un recueil de sept cents mots cigains* from 1837.

the history of Romani slavery also concerns Romani and non-Romani communities outside Romania's borders and should be taught all over Europe and beyond.

At present the teaching of Romani history resembles history teaching in the United States, where Loewen (2018) among others have highlighted a significant bias towards «white» narratives. As we pointed out in our introduction, Spielhaus et al. (2020) found that the history of Romani slavery is close to non-existent in European curricula and textbooks. Where it is included, it is a largely biased and distorted narrative. Such bias is likely to have consequences at many levels. In the United States, the educational gap between white and Black students is larger in social studies than in any other subject (Loewen 2018, 343). This suggests a resistance from minority students against learning a history that appears to assimilate and exclude their own narratives. Knowing that there are significant disparities in education between Romani and non-Romani students in Europe, educational reform seems urgent. In waiting for the states to take responsibility, educators might resist the exclusion of Romani history from their teaching and shift the focus from blaming the victim to addressing institutional and structural racism (Spielhaus et al. 2020, 23–24).

This paper has made a few suggestions regarding how slavery education could be taught:

- Emphasise the perspectives and narratives of the enslaved, ensuring their stories are told in language, visuals, and accounts that reflect their experiences.
- Provide a balanced account that includes both oppression and resilience, showcasing acts of resistance and the agency of Romani individuals alongside stories of suffering, including literature.
- Explicitly connect past injustices to present-day racism, demonstrating the ongoing impacts of Romani slavery and how the vicious circle can be broken.
- Highlight examples of allyship between Roma and non-Roma, illustrating how support for reparations and anti-racism efforts can be enacted today.

Although we see these guiding principles as important, we recognise that this is a contribution to a discussion that is just starting out. For example, the Afro-American educational theorist LaGarrett J. King has proposed a framework he calls "Black Historical Consciousness Principles". King's core argument is that American schools often have taught *about* Black history and not *through* Black history. Black history, he argues, has been reduced and used to tell the white narrative. Part of this process has been to portray Black history as a one-dimensional phenomenon – *history* rather than *histories* – which has been defined by "the oppression and liberation paradigm", where history has been seen from the perspective of the powerful (2020, 336). The "Black Historical Consciousness Principles" are proposed as a tool to recentre Black narratives, present nuanced histories, and portray the full humanity of Black people. The themes he proposes are: Power and Oppression; Black Agency, Resistance, and Perseverance; Africa and the African Diaspora; Black Joy; Black Identity; and Black Historical Contention (2020, 339).

The Recommendations from the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (2020) share a similar concern. They use the teaching of the Roma Holocaust as a starting point but highlight the importance of complementing teaching of the Holocaust with "historical episodes when Roma and/or Travellers were not victims", mentioning "positive narratives about Roma and/or Travellers' history, such as their

contribution to the local, national and European cultural heritage (...), to national economies, such as trade, metalwork and other handicrafts, as well as animal husbandry, (...) [and] various aspects of Roma and/or Travellers' history and culture, such as storytelling, literature, religion, music and traditions".

King's critique of "the oppression and liberation paradigm" and the additions to Roma Holocaust education proposed by CoE serve as important correctives to this article, where we, in our discussion of the teaching of Roma slavery, have primarily focused on topics resembling "Power and Oppression" and "Black Agency, Resistance, and Perseverance" from King's framework.

This paper therefore also raises a whole set of new questions, for example, related to the relevance of the four remaining Black Historical Consciousness Principles: Africa and the African Diaspora; Black Joy; Black Identities; and Black Historical Contention. The key concepts for teaching about slavery proposed by "Teaching for justice" build up progressively from slavery practiced by Europeans before they invaded the Americas, to the use of sources in current education. Inspired by this, we see a need for discussing whether and how the following questions should be addressed in Romani slavery education: What were the practices of slavery in the Principalities (and related areas) before Roma were enslaved? What were the lives of Roma like before enslavement? How has Romani slavery impacted Romani communities outside of Romania? Should teaching of Romani slavery be linked up with topics such as Romani cultures, intersectionality, present-day resistance movements, and contentious narratives?

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A Critical Review of Remembrance: Romani Slavery in Romani Activism, Arts, and Research

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Abstract

This article examines how the memory of Romani slavery persists in the contemporary collective consciousness of both Roma and non-Roma in Romania. It explores the tension between social amnesia and efforts to rebuild remembrance through activism, arts, and research as a way to understand the past and facilitate truth-telling and reconciliation.

The article examines how – more than 170 years after the final act of abolition of Romani slavery in 1856 during an era of induced oblivion of the memory of Romani slavery – remembrance is beginning, step by step, to be rebuilt through Romani activism, arts, and research contemporary Romania after 1990, when Roma were recognised as a national minority.

It analyses the memory of Romani slavery in Romania through the lens of "social amnesia", a concept coined by historian Russell Jacoby and defined as society's repression of remembrance – the Romanian state rejects its negative past not to be placed in a bad light, as oppressor.

Keywords

- Memory
- Roma
- Self-esteem
- Slavery
- Social amnesia

Introduction – Approaches

Romani slavery in the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (hereinafter, Romanian Principalities) lasted over 500 years – its earliest written attestation was documented in 1385 (Petcuț 2015, 39) and its final act of legal abolition occurred in 1856 (Petcuț 2015, 157). Enslaved Roma were considered property, subjected to extreme exploitation, violence, and abuse (Petcuț 2015, 81–86). Unlike serfs, slaves had no rights, and their families were torn apart at the will of their masters (Petcuț 2015, 78–88).

The abolition process, driven by Romania's modernisation efforts and European pressure, faced strong resistance, particularly from the Orthodox Church and landowners (Petcuț 2015, 135–154). However, only enslavers received compensation (Petcuț 2015, 157–164), and post-abolition policies failed to integrate Roma into society (Petcuț 2015, 171–175), leaving them economically and socially marginalised long after their legal emancipation (Petcuț 2015, 214–221).

The article examines whether members of the Romani minority and broader Romanian society have experienced a chronic lack of collective memory about Romani slavery. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that after 1990, some efforts to remember slavery's history have emerged in Romani activism, arts, and research.

To investigate whether the collective social amnesia concerning Romani slavery in Romania exhibits a comparable pattern, I am using the concept of "social amnesia". Russell Jacoby defines "social amnesia" as society's willing repression of remembrance – the rejection of its own inconvenient past that puts a group or, in the Romanian case, the state itself, in a negative light, as oppressor. Russell Jacoby describes two forms of social amnesia (*Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology,* 1975). First, Jacoby frames amnesia as a forgetting of the past and a pseudo-historical consciousness, arguing that "society has lost its memory, and with it, its mind". Second, he argues that the inability or refusal to think back takes its toll on the inability to think: "[…] exactly because the past is forgotten, it rules unchallenged; to be transcended it must first be remembered. Social amnesia is society's repression of remembrance – society's own past. It is a psychic commodity of the commodity society" (Russell 1975, 3–5).

In addition, I analyse Romani slavery by foregrounding my own positionality as a Romani activist, community worker, scholar, and woman. As an author, I switch between the third person and the first person to openly assume my positionality in my research. I argue that acknowledging cultural background and lived experience does not diminish but strengthens the validity of research, especially when addressing histories of injustice and their ongoing legacies and effects.

Building on scholarship on subjectivity and positionality (Stanley and Wise 1993; Bhabha 1994; Letherby, Scott, and Williams 2013), I highlight the importance of researcher accountability and insist on centring lived experience and empathy rather than detached objectivity. I stress the ethical responsibility of research to avoid reproducing stereotypes, to respect participants, and to approach Romani history with humility and care, developing a methodology in close dialogue with those

interviewed.[1] Additionally, I argue that scientific literature written by Romani researchers is a more reliable source because it is more empathic with the topic, and it is free of anti-Roma racist biases.

To test my hypothesis, I combined field research (interviews) and a review of literature and artworks that I identified as relevant to and representative of the topic.

The historical foundation of this article is built on a literature review of the scholarship lead by Romani historians, such as Petre Petcuț and Ioan Valentin Negoi, as well as the sociological work of Ian Hancock, Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, and others.[2]

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1 The driving force for my research on Romani slavery is the injustice and internalised stigma within ourselves – members of the Romanian Romani community. I believe that acknowledging one's cultural background and personal involvement in the research topic enhances rather than diminishes the validity of the study, as true understanding arises from embracing subjectivity with honesty and self-awareness (Upadhya 1999). I am a Roma woman, so there are pain and trauma involved in this research. In research, objectivity refers to a viewpoint that is free from personal biases, emotions, or opinions, while subjectivity is influenced by personal perspectives, feelings, or preferences. Objectivity relies on verifiable facts and evidence, whereas subjectivity involves interpretations based on individual experiences and opinions. While striving for objectivity is crucial in research, it's also important to acknowledge and address potential subjectivity, especially in qualitative research in human sciences. In this matter there are important works to consider: *Objectivity and Subjectivity in Social Research* (Letherby, Scott, and Williams 2013), provides a detailed exploration of objectivity and subjectivity, moving beyond the traditional view of them as opposing forces and examining the philosophical underpinnings of objectivity and relativity; *Breaking Out Again. Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (Stanley and Wise 1993), highlights the importance of accountability in research and the researcher's personal and political standpoints; and *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha 1994) offers a postcolonial perspective on subjectivity and identity, exploring how culture shapes our understanding of the world and how the colonial past of a country influences the thinking embedded in the local research. I emphasise the ethical responsibility of research to acknowledge its subjectivity based on previous knowledge and on both conscious and unconscious internalization of some general views circulated in society and developed into norms of thought, particularly when studying human subjects, to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes or policies, as has happened in history, especially concerning Romani people (Schmidt 2025). In my research, I focus on ensuring respect for people, humility, integrity, no harm to participants, and empathy over condescension and pity. I stress that research must come from a place of deep reflection rather than an authoritative stance. That is why the methodological approach of this research was developed in close consultation with the interviewed persons, sometimes skipping, adding, and changing questions on the way, in direct dialogue with them.

2 To build the historical research basis for this article, I relied on scientific literature primarily written by Romani researchers. I focused mainly on Romani slavery studies elaborated and published by two Romani historians: Petre Petcuț, PhD in history, author of *Roma – Slavery and Freedom: Establishment and Emancipation of a New Ethnic and Social Category at the North of the Danube 1370 – 1914* (2015), editor of *Roma from Romania. Documents. Vol. I (1370–1580)* (2009), co-author of *Textbook of Romani History and Traditions* (2005) and *Romani History and Traditions* (2003); and Ioan Valentin Negoi, PhD in history, history teacher and researcher, creator of Romstoria – explanatory videos aiming to popularise the history of Roma – and of teaching materials, including about Romani slavery in the Romanian countries. I also explore the work of prolific sociologists like Adrian Nicolae Furtună, PhD student, also published in this volume and coordinator of research by National Centre for Roma Culture "Romano Kher" on Romani slavery, founder of the "Romane Rodimata" Cultural and Social Research Centre, coordinator of the booklet "Romani Slavery in Wallachia" (2019), author of "A history of shame. Ideologising discourse between 'tzigans' robia in Moldova and Wallachia" and "Romani slavery in the Romanian space" (2019), co-author of "Romani Slavery in Wallachia: Pieces of social history: Sales and donations of children, marriages, requests for emancipation from slavery" (2020), co-author of "Sclavia romilor și locurile memoriei-album de istorie socială: Romani slavery and the places of memory – Album of social history" (2021), and author of "Les Lieux de Memoire and the Legacies of Romani Slavery in the Collective Memory. Case Study in Tismana, Gorj County, Romania" (2022), co-author of the article "Three Documents from the Archive of Roma Enslavement" (2024). I also relied on the findings of "Rromii… în căutarea stimei de sine" [Roma… in search for their self-esteem], the first exploratory study on this topic in the world, carried out by the research team of Amare Rromentza Rroma Centre (2007). Co-funded by UNICEF Romania, the study examined the consequences of slavery upon the self-image of Roma whereby most Roma still face negative self-image and low self-esteem, leading to ethnic self-stigma.

I also reviewed the National Centre for Roma Culture's archive research work on Romani slavery, a collection which began building a digital database of archive documents, research done by Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, scientific researcher at the same institution. This digital archive also includes research on Ioana Tinculeasa Rudăreasa, a Romani woman enslaved by voivode Gheorghe Bibescu. She was freed from slavery in 1843 through the crown slaves' abolition law in Wallachia and fought in court for 10 years to gain her children's freedom. The documentation is accompanied by a short film about her true story. (Furtună 2019).

The article also draws on the landmark 2007 UNICEF-supported study by Amare Rromentza on the impact of slavery on Romani self-esteem, linking centuries of slavery with contemporary stigma and internalised racism. My research hypothesis draws from this exploratory qualitative study, which examined the connection between Romani self-esteem and history, including 500 years of slavery, and their lasting impact on negative stereotypes and internalised stigma that Romani people still face today.

Following the publication of the 2007 study, my field research has persisted through observations and discussions with the beneficiaries of various projects undertaken by the Amare Rromentza Association, particularly in areas such as anti-racism initiatives, culture, education, and employment. Over the past 15 years, I have empirically conducted qualitative research through participatory observation. However, I did not document it as scientific results. Instead, I have used it mainly as a basis for other projects, working directly from within the open wound, with a heavy heart or, better said, tucked away in a corner of the mind. This approach, in terms of understanding, uncovers the nightmare of what must be noticed in contemporary society: the consequences of slavery. Thus, in this article, I draw some arguments and conclusions based on this ongoing research because contemporary Romani discourse about their ethnic belonging indirectly links the consequences of slavery to their low self-esteem.

In addition, I conducted individual and collective semi-structured interviews about the memory of Romani slavery with different members of local communities with Romani inhabitants, communities mainly located in areas historically known to be in the vicinity of former major slave owners, such as monasteries and/or former boyars' mansions. Even if most Romani participants in the interviews, with the exception of the activists and teachers, had no idea about slavery and its context and consequences, their self-esteem and social status have been influenced by their former slave positions in Romanian society and these are noticeable in dialogue and direct participatory observation.

Specifically, I conducted 44 interviews in Alexeni, Bărbulești, Broșteni, Fetești, Manasia, and Slobozia (all in Ialomița County) and in Brăila (Brăila County), in February and July 2024. I used semi-structured interviews, with a guideline of questions discussed and decided within the Memorobia project, in the framework of which I conducted the field research.[3]

3 *MEMOROBIA or Memorialisation of Romani Enslavement in Territories of Contemporary Romania* is a research and development project implemented, between 2022–2025, by MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion, and Society, under the coordination of Solvor Mjøberg Lauritzen, Associate Professor, MF, in partnership with FXB Center or Health and Human Rights of Harvard University and Amare Rromentza Rroma Centre, with the financial support of the Research Council of Norway (RCN).

The participants included Romani and Romanian community members, Romani and Romanian teachers, especially history teachers, local public authorities, Romani local councillors/experts/public servants, Romani local nongovernmental activists, and Romani and non-Romani priests, included because the Orthodox Church was the largest Romani slave owner (Petcuț 2015, 72). The participants/interviewees/informants were recruited during the fieldwork, but beforehand local networks of Romani organisations, activists, teachers, and local experts/councillors, local public authorities, and schools were contacted to guide and advise me in my fieldwork. I collected the informed consent of the participants in each case. I made the content analysis of the interviews, using them as case studies, with no sociological sampling method, so my research was qualitative at its core.

Complemented by this recent fieldwork, including interviews and participatory research in historically significant communities, this study situates contemporary Romani identity within the legacies of slavery. In doing so, it contributes both to historical scholarship and to current debates about memory, identity, and the ethics of research with marginalised communities.

1. What Is Social Amnesia in the Romanian–Romani Slavery Context?

1.1 Self-esteem and Internalised Racism

In this section, I focus primarily on sociohistorical and cultural and psychological models conveyed by and to Romani individuals from one generation to the next to identify less obvious consequences of slavery on Romani thinking frameworks and patterns.

The slavery system of exploitation has had indelible, visible consequences. After the abolishment of slavery, alongside a complete lack of repair and healing mechanisms, an immediate consequence was that many former Romani slaves, especially individuals who had belonged to boyars and monasteries, were forced to return to their former 'masters' and continue to work for them, compensated only with food and shelter, in a state of semi-slavery (Petcuț 2015). This transition to a social status similar to their previous status unfolded in a context of powerlessness and neglect of Romani people in public policies and reforms. Over time, marginalisation, cheap labour, and exclusion of formerly enslaved Roma have triggered significant long-term socio-economic inequities, stigmatisation based on their ethnic belonging, and a cultural power gap between the majority population and Romani communities (Furtună, Neacșu, and Grigore 2007).

Besides inequities and racism, there are other, less apparent remnants and legacies of this system, especially a widespread mental framework of Otherness, that still influence us today. In most interviews with Romani participants, a pattern of stigmatised self-identification, low self-esteem, or a negative self-image, manifested in at least two oppositional yet related and multifaceted forms: (a) the inferiority of members of stigmatised and oppressed ethnic group of belonging / origin – feeling "less than"; and (b) at times, an apparent ethnic

superiority complex – a form or a mask of the disguised inferiority complex, necessary for survival in a hostile world – posturing "more than". These expressions of negative self-images are relational to external and internalised racism, as well as a manifest expression of a superiority complex by the reference group majority. In all its forms, stigmatisations lead to psychosocial harms (Lamont et al. 2016), meaning low self-esteem, fewer expectations in life, with such beliefs and traumas being transmitted from one generation to another.

Across the globe, in social and cultural processes of Otherness, in-power groups are framed as reference groups, while historically oppressed groups are essentialised as inferior. Because of their social exclusion, historically oppressed groups are not seen as prestigious. They lack positive social capital, which translates into lower social and economic status, and they also lack well-established symbolic capital, like ethnic institutions or cultural recognition. Therefore, Otherness does not offer an individual a high status in society and a state of security. Consequently, group members look for escape channels to self-realisation in other groups, especially in the majority dominant group, seen as superior; however, to be accepted there, they must copy the Otherness models as authentically as possible.

In the Romani case, as Romanian-American political scientist Delia Popescu argues, "The Roma community in Romania, and in Europe generally, occupies a specific and long-standing outgroup position that can be categorized as the quintessential 'Other'" (2023). Relationally and additionally to the external labelling, Roma's acceptance of harmful labels, and more broadly, of the mental model of Otherness, which is almost like accepting a state of unawareness about the history of slavery, occurs in the words, sentences, narratives, or descriptions that Romani individuals share about themselves.

Most of Romani individuals who I interviewed have absorbed and assumed societal messages related to their inferior role in society, often, at times, at a subconscious level – an understanding that cannot be easily changed or measured. Such a position of implacable inferiority was also apparent in the interviews I conducted for 2007's research on Roma's self-esteem.

Reflections of feeling "less than" frequently appeared in the expressions used by Romani individuals who I interviewed in 2024, as: "What do you want, I'm a Gypsy, I will never be the boss!"; "I have four classes: more than enough for a Gypsy! I'm just not going to be a priest! Where the hell have you seen a Gypsy priest?"; "I don't need school, I'm just a Gypsy! What to do with too much school? That I'm just not going to become a doctor! Where the hell have you seen a Gypsy doctor?"; "Us, the Gypsies, you know, more with trade than with school!"; "That's how us, the Gypsies, are: backward!"; "He's a Gypsy, but he's smart!"; "A Gypsy is still a Gypsy: until he steals a little from you, he doesn't give up!"; "The truth is that us this is how us, the Gypsies, are, we don't really like the work!"; "Black and ugly, really a Gypsy!"; "The Gypsy is a great thief!". In the context of a stigmatised ethnic consciousness, the Roma can only see themselves as less smart, that's why the use of the adversative "but" is required when it comes to a smart Roma: "He's a Gypsy, but he's smart!" "Gypsies" can neither be doctors nor priests nor leaders, and their aspiration level is quite low: more trade, less school.[4]

4 Being a qualitative research, Roma of different ages, genders, and levels of studies were interviewed, without a representative sampling or data disaggregated by axes of inequity, so these forms of internalised Otherness cannot be generalised, and the findings cannot be broken down further.

Similarly, Romani interviewees from the 2007 study also have internalised external labels and stereotypes, which were crafted and amplified during the history of slavery. Expressions like "What to do, that's why I don't know much, I'm a Gypsy," or "We're just Gypsies, what should we do?" were used by some of my interviewees from 2007's research, a pattern that reflects deep traces of exclusion in paradigms of self-stigma.

Romani individuals know that markers of Roma-ness are stigmatising, while markers of Romanian-ness grant a superior status. Interviewees used expressions like: "She's so white and beautiful, you don't even say she's a Gypsy!"; "She's so white and beautiful, you say she's Romanian!"; "A Romanian is a Romanian: he is two steps higher than us, the Gypsies!"; "Let's clean the house at our best, because the Romanians come to us and we don't want them to say – look at these Gypsies, a Gypsy is still a Gypsy!"; "A Romanian took you as his wife, defiled his baptism, take care to cherish this thing! It's a big deal!"; "He took a Romanian woman, white, beautiful: good for him, the Gypsy!"; "He has a beautiful daughter-in-law, you say she's Romanian!"; "Look what a beautiful and blond boy I have, blond and with blue eyes! When he grows up, he won't need a Gypsy, he'll get a Romanian girl!"; "Look, if they are Romanian, they send their children to school!" Thus, in such contexts, access to a social status higher than their inferior internalised status is obtained either by masking or concealing their own ethnic belonging, possible in the case of white Roma, or by hypergamous intra-community marriages.

Distinct gendered labels, with deep-rooted origins, also continue to influence society today. Reflecting on the image of Romani women as slaves as depicted in the abolitionist literature and analysing the way modern and contemporary literature and visual arts present Romani women, we can affirm that the present-day social representation of the Romani woman has also been impacted by practices of sexual violence during slavery. To the enslavers, the "Gypsy woman" was useful only to the extent that she increased the number of slaves. Moreover, as reflected in the abolitionist literature (Rosetti 1839), young Romani women, especially unmarried girls – "*chaia baria*" (virgin girls) were used as objects of pleasure both for their masters, boyars or monks, and for their guests. An effect of sexual abuse and rape was the stereotype of "beautiful and hot Gypsy women", which, at times, Roma internalise in the form of the apparently positive stereotype of beautiful and passionate Romani women. Thus, consequently, the internalisation of the exotic and beautiful "Gypsy woman" can be explored as a reflection of low self-esteem, especially when seen as the greatest, if not only, qualities of a Romani woman. As an interviewee from the 2007 research on Romani self-esteem noted, "You should know that we have beautiful and hot women! That's what they say, that's what the Romanians say, but also the Gypsies say, and I think that's how it is!"

Even without being confirmed through scientific knowledge, the state of slavery persists in the ancestral collective memory of many Romani individuals and families, with all its psychosocial consequences. This complex of inferiority, sometimes disguised in a complex of superiority, can be observed in most interviews I conducted with Romani individuals.

Negative self-esteem is deeply interconnected with external and internalised racism. While most of the scientific literature has focused more on the nexus between external racism and self-esteem, little has been written about the tie between internalised racism and anti-Roma racism itself (Hancock 2010).

In fact, Romani slavery has received little attention in general historiography, and the dimension of a possible "post-traumatic slave syndrome" has received almost no attention at all.

Hancock acknowledges that Romani slavery was a popular research topic in nineteenth-century Gypsylorist literature from racist and romanticised perspectives, which paralleled a genre in fictional literature of the time. He also states that this literature commonly had what we might call an apologetic bias, such that "Roma slavery was not that harmful," and "the Roma preferred slavery to freedom" (Hancock 2010). Hancock's conclusions lead us to consider the process of vindication, as a necessary means for recognising Roma as the agents or subjects of their own history. Still, Ian Hancock has gradually and, at times, implicitly addressed it in the past few decades. He addressed it in *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (1987) and *We Are the Romani People* (2002). More recently, Hancock references a study by Joy De Gruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (2005), as a potential theoretical model.[5]

De Gruy's theory could potentially be used, yet modified and enhanced, when analysing Romani slavery. The legacies of slavery, which, for more than five hundred years, denied Roma in the Wallachian and Moldavian Principalities (now modern-day Romania) not only their dignity and autonomy but also their human nature, treating them as chattel, with all consequences coming from this status. And the effects still resonate in the collective memory today. As Ian Hancock (2013) argued – "What's in a Word" to the Uppsala International Conference on the Discrimination, Marginalization and Persecution of Roma (23–25 October 2013) – "the psychological damage that persecution [of Romani people] has brought with it – not just the fear Roma live with daily in too many places, fear that affects both mental and physical health, but the deeper psychological damage that history has wrought. I don't believe that any attention has been paid to this at all" (Hancock 2013) .

5 In 2005, the African-American researcher Joy DeGruy published, in the United States of America, her fundamental book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, a work that made history in a research specialty through the innovative multidisciplinary perspective on the consequences of slavery through the traumatic legacy imprinted both on the generations that followed the victims and on society in general. DeGruy argues that post-traumatic slavery syndrome is a result of unresolved post-traumatic stress disorder arising from the experience of slavery, transmitted across generations down to the present day, along with the stress of contemporary racial prejudice (for example, via racial microaggressions). Multigenerational trauma combines together with continued oppression and absence of opportunity to access the benefits available in society. This manifests as a psychological, spiritual, emotional, and behavioural syndrome that results in a lack of self-esteem, persistent feelings of anger, and internalised racist beliefs. DeGruy states that post-traumatic slavery syndrome is not a disorder that can simply be treated and remedied clinically but rather requires profound social change in individuals, as well as in institutions, that continue to reify inequality and injustice toward the descendants of enslaved Africans. The enslavement of African-Americans and the subsequent systemic racism and discrimination they have faced throughout history have had long-lasting psychological and emotional effects on individuals and the collective community. The post-traumatic slavery syndrome encompasses the intergenerational trauma experienced by African-Americans as a result of slavery. The trauma includes the physical, emotional, and psychological abuse endured by enslaved individuals and the ongoing oppression and racism that have persisted in American society. This ongoing trauma has been passed down through generations, affecting the mental health, identity, and well-being of African-Americans today. DeGruy argues that healing from the post-traumatic slavery syndrome requires acknowledging and understanding the historical context of slavery, addressing and challenging systemic racism, and promoting individual and community resilience. Healing also involves providing access to resources, promoting education, fostering positive cultural identity, and creating safe spaces for dialogue and support.

My field research also shows, through answers elicited to the relevant questions about ethnic self-image, that the situation of Roma in their relationship with slavery and with the historical and ongoing anti-Roma racism shares both specificities and similarities with the situation of African-Americans, with self-image of the Roma today being one of ethnic self-stigmatisation, self-loathing, and even self-hatred.

1.2 Stereotypes' Roots in Slavery

Observing the contemporary relationship between Roma and non-Roma, we see some of the consequences of slavery that can also be read today in sociohistorical, cultural, and mental processes and models conveyed by the Romanian majority population from one generation to another. Such processes and models push and pull individual consciousness, sometimes blocking access to unbiased knowledge and, thus, an accurate understanding of Romani culture as a valid cultural alterity. The dominant culture often defines its collective imagery and mentality toward Roma through stereotypes, which are predominantly harmful in nature.

This pattern is evident in Romanian folklore, traditional media, and social media, where stereotypes such as collective criminality, inferiority, laziness, and others are reinforced continuously. Among other negative consequences, such stereotypes push and pull the stigmatisation of Romani identity, the internalisation of stigma, and the rejection of Romani individuals and families of their belonging to the Romani ethnicity. The more reality loses to the imaginary, the more Roma are accepted in the paradigms of ignorance that perceive themselves as knowledge. As sociologist Adrian Nicolae Furtună argues,

> Representations about Roma, which are based on prejudices and stereotypes of Otherness, are of prime importance, because they determine attitudes and behaviours. Most of the time, in the context of a negative sociohistorical, cultural, and mental legacies and in the absence of information about the Roma from school curricula and textbooks, thought and language clichés are the only source of knowledge that connects the Roma with the surrounding social environment. The Roma seem to be a reality familiar to everyone: any Romanian asked has an opinion, often categorical and negative, about them (Furtună, Neacșu, and Grigore 2007, 22).

Over the centuries, a whole set of images and labels has been built and developed, crystallising collective stereotypes and creating a reservoir of representations transferred from the collective memory to the individual one. Whether they promote exclusion or assimilation, hatred of exoticism, these representations serve as a backdrop of justifications for discrimination actions. In fact, the Roma are never defined as they are, but rather, they are labelled as in-power groups decide to justify the policies and behaviours of the others towards them.

The dual process of hetero-identification and enslavement of Roma by non–Roma during slavery – *tiganii* – aims to correspond to the collective horizon of expectation, which is eminently negative; therefore, any deviation towards the positive is felt to be an exception to the rule. Here, we can quote the famous myth of a Roma friend from childhood, the prototype of the good, the exception to

the norm of the bad "Gypsy", evoked by those who start their speech with the stereotype, "I'm not racist, but these Gypsies...", and continue it with another stereotype, "I had a Gypsy friend / a Gypsy neighbour in my childhood / in my youth, a special man, if all Gypsies were like him, how good it would be!" Marked by all the rules of racism, including the *avant la lettre* apology, the evocation of an indeterminate positive past, and the generalisation of negative attributes at the group level, this type of discourse refers to childhood as a golden age of absolute tolerance, a time when there could also be found the good "Gypsy", certainly an exception to the norm of evil, both in Romanian and universal literature.

The myth of the "dangerous" Roma has also persisted since slavery. Nomadic enslaved Romani people were viewed as a health threat during epidemics and were prohibited from entering cities. Broadly, during crises (for example, economic, health, wars), thus, in times of enhanced struggles for resources, human hierarchies and stereotypical concepts add up to a moral crisis of values and beliefs, the aim being for the dominating majority to escape from responsibility by throwing it on the alien – the Romani minority – mainly seen as dangerous. As Matache argues, "Racist scapegoating of the 'Other' in times of epidemic as a carrier or transmitter of disease is a strategy with an ancient pedigree" (Matache et al. 2021, 93). Thus, "COVID-19 is simply the most recent public health, social, and economic crisis to precipitate publicly sanctioned attacks on Romani individuals and communities" (*Ibid.*, 99).

Who else could be held responsible for the situation of the whole society if not the former slaves, the Roma, eternal scapegoats for all the frustrations, failures, and fears of the majority of people? This way, the majority's contempt for Roma is considered natural not only by the majority but, unfortunately, through stigma's internalisation, also by Roma themselves. Analysing the discourses embedded in the interviews, we can almost detect a pattern of thinking where the Rom says: "If he is Romanian, he definitely hates me," and the Romanian says: "If he is Rom, he is definitely inferior to me."

This model of biased thinking is perpetuated in Romanian society, either through an explicit position of rejection or through the systematic destruction of ethnic identity, due to a monocultural, ethnocentric model of existence, in which the attitude of the majority towards Roma is either explicit or implicit exclusion culminating with extermination or ethnic cleansing, understood by physical ethnocide and also by cultural assimilation or cultural ethnocide, the last one asserting that the Roma can be "civilised" only "if they become Romanians" (Furtună, Neacşu, Grigore 2007). In this thinking paradigm, the unique model of reference circumscribes itself autarkically and inflexibly to the values of the majority, rejecting any form of difference that is perceived as deviant and dangerous.

The way Roma were persecuted and systemically destroyed, beginning with their enslavement in Romanian countries, followed by a chronic lack of knowledge of this history that lead to social amnesia could be framed in what Fricker named to be "epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007, 9), a chronic phenomenon that affects the persecuted groups, in our case Roma, through deprivation of knowledge, with its two sides: "testimonial injustice", meaning deprivation of memory (Fricker 2007, 14) and "hermeneutical injustice", meaning deprivation of understanding (*Ibid.*, 147).

1.3 Chronic Social Amnesia

To all these, contemporary research adds another critical aspect: the individual and collective oblivion of the past as a deprivation of memory – chronic social amnesia.

Ordinary non-Roma do not know anything about Romani slavery as they have never learned about this in school, society, family, or elsewhere. Consequently, many of them lack feelings of guilt in their relationship with their ancestors as potential owners and traders of enslaved human beings. Notably, they still think Roma are *a priori* inferior to them.

Without any knowledge about Romani slavery, contemporary non-Romani society lives in oblivion, thinking that the history of Romanians is only positive. The concealment of slavery, or the erasure of the slavery memory from the Romanian collective consciousness, has led to a chronic ignorance of the Roma's and of Romania's history, which freed the way towards anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypical and negative hetero-identification of Roma.

During the individual and collective semi-structured interviews with different members of local communities, I learned that many Romani individuals do not know anything about their ancestors' enslavement either. In fact, most have never learned about this in school, society, family, or elsewhere. Nevertheless, a lack of awareness about slavery or exactly because of this lack, may have led some interviewees to feel like they have a lower status in society as well as low ethnic self-esteem.

The testimonies of the investigated Romani communities' members prove that slavery is not known or realized as a historical phenomenon. Instead, the dehumanisation and the historical persecution are seen as a continuum – Roma kept repeating "*na samas manush, samas rande*" (we were not persons, we were at the boyars) – interrupted only by the time of the socialist regime, but to which they returned at present.

Although there is no explicit memory of slavery in the Romani collective consciousness, at times, slavery is merged and/or confused with the Holocaust – the Deportation to Transnistria (Petcuț 2015, 238), a more recent experience and another institutionalised form of violence and dehumanisation. Thus, there is a memory of a dehumanising status, oppression, and hardship, which started during slavery and continues until today, but that memory is expressed particularly in relation to the experiences of its most horrific recent expression.

During the research, some Roma interviewees underscored the harms and memories of harsh working conditions and exploitation: "*kerasas phari buki saste gesende, butvar ji kana pherasas tele*" (we were working very hard every day the whole day, till we were falling off our feet). Others talked about starvation: "*butvar na hasas khanci, sasas baroges kana denas amenqe iekh plancita*" (many times we did not eat anything, it was a holiday when they gave us a slice of pie). Torture was also mentioned: "but var samas marde" (many times we were beaten). In addition, inferior status and the notion of subhuman were emphasized: "*na samas manush, samas rande*" (we were at the boyars). Consequently, some also mythologised the socialist regime as a "somehow better" time for Roma.

The absence of any slavery memory from the Romani collective mind led to the lack of understanding of causes of Roma's inferior status in majority society, which left with no explanation, seems to be natural and, eventually, caused by the guilt of Roma themselves, and also led to an unconscious and unexplained stigmatised self-identification.

In the field research carried out in 2024, the only individuals knowing about Romani slavery are Romani history teachers, Romani activists, some Romani intellectuals and researchers, some Romani journalists, and some Romani writers and visual artists who were especially interested in this topic, so they personally searched for specific information. The only interviewees who explicitly knew about Romani slavery were Romani activists and scholars, especially Romani historians who have studied Romani history, and a few Romani and non-Romani history teachers who have either attended specialised trainings or teach Romani history themselves. In the current research, we counted around ten such respondents who had information about Romani slavery.

Some notable examples include: Romani history teacher Ion Sandu, a specialised school inspector for national minorities at Ialomița County School Inspectorate, very much involved in research activities and remembrance events; Romani activist and local leader Daniel Ganea, who is also working within the public local authorities in Ialomița County; Roma Party county leader Leonida Mandache, very much involved in remembrance events; Romani priest Nicolae Gangă, director of the Professional School "Professor Ioan Man" from Broșteni Village; Ion Roată Commune, Ialomița County, very much involved in research activities and in remembrance events, who is working on his PhD thesis on the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and Romani slavery.

These cases are noteworthy particularly because of having a very good knowledge and understanding of Romani slavery and a high consciousness about its consequences until contemporary times, about the high importance of researching Romani slavery and keeping alive its memory through remembrance events and through building Romani slavery memorials. In particular, a collaborative example of involvement and cooperation was on 20 February 2024 at an event that honoured 168 years since Romani emancipation from slavery. Under coordination of the Romani priest Nicolae Gangă and officiated by priests from the Coșereni Pastoral Circle from the Urziceni Archdiocese officiated, a memorial service for Roma who died in camps, prisons, and deportations was held in the church of Borănești Parish. Notably, the only priest who also evoked Romani slavery was Romani priest Nicolae Gangă.

Without proposing quantitative research, this field research, strictly qualitative in its nature, also found a few non-Roma informed about Romani slavery, especially a few history teachers and some public local authorities and priests, and all of them had participated in trainings and other remembrance events on the topic of Romani slavery mainly held by Romani organisations or by Romani specialists. Only some young history teachers, mainly in their twenties or thirties, who graduated in the last 10 to 15 years, reported that they learned about Romani slavery in their initial university training but not as an extended separate topic or lesson, but in passing within the framework of the 1848 Revolution that included the abolitionist current of thinking.

2. Critical Vision of Research and Public Space

The history of Romani slavery is overshadowed by official and scholarly amnesia and relativisation. This system of exploitation is still neither adequately recognised and remembered in Romanian education nor in sites of memory, arts, and culture. Moreover, institutions have long ignored their consequences and have not put in place any process of reparation to date. Romani slavery and its consequences have also been relativised in knowledge production and public discourse. The Orthodox Church still does not formally and repeatedly recognise Romani slavery or the fact that it owned Romani slaves. Romani slavery is not taught in schools, its topic is just tangentially touched within the 1848 Revolution's larger subject, if touched upon at all.

Even books authored by some of the most prominent and proficient historians are, at times, marked by prejudices, minimisations, or distortions that diminish the extreme severity of Romani slavery. For instance, some knowledge producers assert that Roma were already slaves when they arrived in the Romanian countries (Giurescu 1943; Achim 1998), hypothesis that were clearly dismantled by well-documented research a long time ago. However, these assertions do not negate the fact that the Romanian Principalities themselves institutionalised this system of racialized slavery (Matache 2025).

Furthermore, historian Viorel Achim, affiliated with the History Institute "Nicolae Iorga" of the Romanian Academy, implies the same level of severity between slavery and other types of dependencies in those times, mainly economic, a relevant example being Romanian peasants who were economically dependent of the boyars or the landowners whom they worked for (Achim 1998). Achim, alongside other historians, tends to focus more on the similarities between Romani slavery and the Romanian peasants' serfdom, equating the two, instead of also unpacking the differences (Achim 1998).

Yet, these two systems of exploitation were totally different, the first one representing the personal dependence on the slave from his/her master who owned him/her as a movable good, and the second one being an economic dependence of the serf on the boyar who owned the land worked by the serf, but did not own the serf as a person, not being able to sell him/her as a good, as he/she can do with his/her slave. As historian Petre Petcuț shows:

> The characteristics of slavery emerge from the legislation regarding slaves and from the acts and documents with legal value. Slavery, as a form of corporal servitude, is not defined, but appeal is usually made to ancient custom, thus generating various interpretations of it, in the sense of proximity or distance from serfdom. Within slavery, there were concrete differences in status between slaves, depending on the sedentary or semi-nomadic lifestyle, their belonging to the kingdom or their possession by the Church and the boyars (Petcuț 2015).

Gadjikano (or outsider) knowledge production on Romani slavery is the fundamental view concerning the very states where Roma were enslaved and had the status of slaves for more than half a millennium. For instance, Viorel Achim names the principalities "countries with slaves" and not institutionalised slavery or slave-owning states. To support his claim, he controversially argues that slavery was not systemic enough

in the case of the slave-owning state for its economy to rely on slave labour, and the number of Romani slaves in the Romanian countries was too insubstantial for the economy to base itself on their work.[6]

Such arguments have led to an avoidance of the fundamental responsibility of the Romanian Principalities and the modern state of Romania regarding the issue of Romani slavery. This is a distortive argument because, on one side, the way documents were stored and archived in those times does not allow us to estimate the exact number of Romani slaves, so we do not know how many Romani slaves were, and, on the other side, a state can be considered as practicing an institutionalised form of slavery and a slave-owning state if it has legislation which regulates slave status, this being the situation of the Romanian countries.

Moreover, both official and research discourse use and/or prefer the language of "*robi*" when naming Romani slaves. While "*robi*" is an actual synonym of the name "*sclavi*", in the Romanian collective memory, "*robi*" had a better situation in comparison to that of slaves, such as those enslaved in the Transatlantic slave trade. This toning down of language creates societal confusion, decreases the responsibility of the Romanian state regarding slavery, and diminishes the severity of Romani slavery.

Fortunately, in the past few decades, Roma-led and critical research has grown, so Roma history, stories, and truth are examined from an anti-hegemonic perspective, in articles and books of Roma historians such as Petre Petcuț, Valentin Negoi, Ion Sandu, and Bogdan Chiriac, and Roma social scientists such as Maria Dumitru, Adrian Nicolae Furtună, Luiza Medeleanu, and Margareta Matache, who critically question and examine the way non-Roma narrated and perceived history about us. This wave of critical scholarship relies both on archival documents and on oral history, without non-Romani research's biases.

Alongside scholars, Romani advocates and leaders in various fields have fought against slavery amnesia in society as a whole. In the following, I will discuss current expressions of slavery amnesia and its counterpart, resistance and remembrance, in Romania.

2.1 Legislation, Celebration, Messages – Small and Superficial Steps towards Romani Slavery's Recognition

A first yet very small and superficial step towards the official recognition of Romani slavery in Romania was the adoption of Law No. 28/2011 by the Romanian Parliament. This law, which commemorates the emancipation of the Roma in Romania, took effect on 18 March 2011:

> Article 1 – The emancipation of the Roma from Romania is commemorated on February 20th of each year.

6 Achim's assertion in the working group of the National Agency for Roma, in December 2022, resulted in a National Agency for Roma's internal document about the concept of a Romani history and culture museum, document submitted to the Romanian Government to serve as the basis for the establishment of this museum.

> Article 2 – The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, central and local public administration authorities can materially and financially support the organisation of public events and social-cultural actions dedicated to the commemoration of this day.

This is the only law referring to Romani slavery, and there are some issues of superficiality with it. First, instead of speaking about the *celebration* of Romani emancipation, it speaks about the *commemoration* of Romani emancipation, as if it was not a happy but a sad event. Actually, one cannot celebrate the Abolishment of Slavery without previous knowledge, understanding, recognition and acknowledgement of Romani slavery itself, which is why the actual legislation is superficial. The justification is that the day is also dedicated to a commemoration of the victims of Roma's status before emancipation, but the extremely short text of the law does not allow for nuance and specificities. Second, the law does not recognise the harms of slavery but focuses solely on the emancipation, without specifying emancipation from what. Emancipation is presented as if it were not preceded by wrongs. The wording rather suggests that Roma were freed by Romanians and the Romanian state from a status they were given by somebody else. In other words, the law makes Romania invisible as an institution of enslavement and only visible as a liberator. Third, regarding the support of the central and local public authorities in Art. 2, the law only speaks about the *possibility* for these authorities to commemorate, without making it mandatory.

It is mainly Romani-led state agencies such as central public authorities specialised in Romani issues (National Agency for Roma, National Centre for Roma Culture "Romano Kher") and local public authorities (Prefectures' County Offices for Roma, schools from localities with significant Romani communities), nongovernmental organizations in collaboration with such national or local public authorities, which yearly, on February 20th, celebrate the Abolishment of Slavery and commemorate the victims of Romani slavery. For example, the National Centre for Roma Culture, a state agency, organises remembrance events including concerts, debates, conferences, book publishing and launches, exhibitions of archive documents, and production of docu-dramas or short films. High-level government representatives, namely the prime minister, the general secretariat, national ministries for education, domestic or international affairs, the Department for Interethnic Relations, parliament, or the presidency, very rarely attend in person. Notably, some do send messages to be read at public reunions by a superior councillor or a spokesperson.

We actually face a blank space of social amnesia, that includes state amnesia, because the Romanian state has never apologised for slavery and because the only existing law itself conveys only a celebration of the abolition of Romani slavery as a possibility, without any mandatory provision, to be supported by the public authorities, with no reference to the tragedy of a half millennium of Romani slavery. As a positive exception, the 2024 official meeting holds relevance. For the first time in the history of Romania, on 20 February 2024, on the occasion of Romani Liberation Day in Romania, the National Agency for Roma, in collaboration with the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History and the Romanian Academy, organised a colloquium on "Romani Liberation and its Significance for the Romani Minority and Romanian Society". In this context the president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, sent an appropriate message which was presented at the event by Sergiu Nistor, presidential advisor in the Department of Culture, Religion, and National Minorities. The introduction of the speech read as follows:

> The emancipation of the Roma from Slavery represents a significant historical moment in modern Romania, February 20th marking 168 years since the acquisition of freedom for this ethnic group, a complex process that still has reverberations in our current society. The marking – by law – of the Day of Roma's Emancipation from Slavery demonstrates the joint commitment of politicians and citizens to make possible a real political, economic and social-educational inclusion of the Roma and to support the members of their communities to reach their potential, as active participants in the nation's life. By marking this day, the Romanian state recognises the centuries-long sufferings of the Roma and pays tribute to the victims of discrimination, all the more so since the legal Roma's Emancipation from Slavery of the mid-19th century could not eliminate the remaining gaps that, over time, have led to the stigmatisation of the Roma. Although liberated, the Roma continued to suffer through pauperisation, marginalisation and the attempt to cancel their identity, a dramatic moment being represented by the deportations during the Second World War. Only by overcoming this legacy can we talk about a modern, European, and resilient Romania[7] (Iohannis 2025, author's own translation).

This message was important because it came from the highest public authority in the Romanian state, the presidency. As many other official messages, it spoke well about the dramatic history of Roma and its consequences until today. It also addressed the responsibility of the Romanian state and society, and of the need for education and remembrance for the new generations to know and understand history and to fight discrimination and hate speech. Unfortunately, it lacked realism and still did not assume any responsibility for slavery by way of an apology or by planning concrete measures, and almost none of this is put into practice. The only specific good step forward, is the inclusion of the optional subject "History, Slavery and Deportation of Roma" in the school curriculum from 2025, according to the new Pre-University Education Law. As of April 2025, this has not yet been implemented.

2.2 Orthodox Church's Position towards Romani Slavery

Despite the historical evidence of its position as owner and trader of slaves for almost five centuries, one of the most, if not the most problematic current official positions towards Romani slavery is that of the

7 The remainder of the text follows:

> Today's day, dedicated to the emancipation of the Roma, allows us to evaluate Romanian society's progress in terms of Roma's inclusion, but, above all, to make us aware of the responsibilities we still have. I welcome the efforts carried out to fulfil the objectives assumed in the Government of Romania's Strategy for the inclusion of Roma 2022-2027, through which Romania continues to mobilize its energies in building a society of equal opportunities for all. Coming to terms with the past remains one of the most important challenges of the present. Without understanding the history and the causes that led to terrible suffering, extremism will continue to threaten both Europe and the whole world. According to the new Pre-University Education Law, the inclusion of the optional subject "History, Slavery, and Deportation of the Roma" in the school curriculum from 2025 represents more than a simple adjustment of study programs. Secondary school and high school students will be able to study the centuries-old traditions of the Roma, but also the fact that their slavery and deportation were dramatic realities of our common history. These painful aspects of the past must be known to new generations in order to combat discrimination and hate speech through education, tolerance and mutual respect. Let the remembrance of history inspire us in our common effort to make Romania a space of equal opportunities for all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity!

Orthodox Church. It is even worse because, as the most important spiritual institution in Romania, one would have expected acceptance of guilt, regret, and repentance, if not reparations or remedial measures. Unfortunately, none of these have happened.

Analysing the discourses of the Romanian Orthodox Church's representatives on the topic of Romani slavery, we can see clearly that the Church assumes no responsibility in relation to Romani slavery. It does not even recognise that Orthodox monasteries owned Romani slaves. Instead, the leadership of the Church claims that the Orthodox Church did its best, in the social context of the times, to help Roma by offering them shelter and food in exchange for their work and that Romani slavery was totally different from the other types of slavery, obfuscating further that slavery was much broader in scope than in the Romanian kingdoms and that Romanians were also slaves (Patriarch Daniel 2016). There was never a word uttered by the representatives of the Orthodox Church about the very clear and proven historical fact that Orthodox monasteries owned the highest number of Romani slaves, and that the Church opposed the emancipation of the Roma from slavery (Petcuț 2015, 72).

In its public discourse, the Orthodox Church frames Romani slavery as a different and easier form of slavery, with more rights for Roma, than "the slavery practiced in the Atlantic countries or in the colonies of some Western empires". For instance, Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, delivered the following message on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of Roma's emancipation from slavery in the Romanian countries[8]:

> It must also be said that the phenomenon of the slavery of the Gypsies in the Romanian Countries presents differences of understanding compared to the slavery practiced in the Atlantic countries or in the colonies of some Western empires, where the slaves did not have as many rights as the Roma ethnic slaves in the Romanian Countries. [...] Many Romanian Orthodox priests had a humanitarian attitude towards the Roma, both during the dark period of deportations in Transnistria, between 1941–1943, and later, up to the present day. [...] Today, the Romanian Orthodox Church contributes to the efforts to integrate and help the Roma (Patriarch Daniel 2016).

The Patriarch's statement disregarded the topic of those Orthodox monasteries that owned Romani slaves and what this meant for slaves from the point of view of cruel exploitation, abuse, family members' separation, the sale of human beings, and a lack of minimum human rights. All these are extensively described in the abolitionist literature and journals. In fact, my advocacy experience shows that the representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church misrepresented the so-called humanitarian attitude towards Roma during the Holocaust, when history tells us that the Orthodox Church was on the side of the Nazi government of the dictator Antonescu and supported the extermination both of Jews and Roma (Popa 2017, 238). It is well-known that the Legion of Michael the Archangel, established by and activating under the Orthodox Church, played an important role in the extreme-right political and

8 An event organized by the Department for Social Inclusion and Human Rights within the Government of Romania on 19 February 2016.

ideological movement against Jews and Roma, including support for their deportation for extermination in Transnistria. The statement claims that the Orthodox Church has supported integration and aided Romani communities. However, the first necessary steps for the Church are to acknowledge that Orthodox monasteries were involved in the ownership of slaves because reconciliation cannot take place without recognising and assuming this historical reality. This recognition should be accompanied by expressions of regret and apologies for such practices. The Church has to take remedial measures, such as allowing access to and supporting research about Romani slavery in the monasteries' archives, establishing slavery memorials, or taking other reparatory measures. Instead, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church solely emphasised a claim by historian Viorel Achim (1998), who argues that "the monastery Gypsies fared better than the rest of the Gypsies" (Patriarch Daniel 2016).

In most of their discourses on the occasion of 20 February, including in 2024, in the official meeting organised by the National Agency for Roma held at the Romanian Academy's library, representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church insisted exclusively on highlighting a few enlightened clerics who held abolitionist or progressist views (Popa Radu Șapcă, Iosafat Snagoveanu, Eufrosin Poteca, Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu). These were in fact exceptions. In their own time, they were, for their modern ideas, seen as radical, and were not only persecuted within the Orthodox Church but also excommunicated from the Church. They were therefore dissidents of the Church, eventually expelled from it, so, by no means, its representatives (Totorcea 2024).

In his message sent, through his representative, Patriarch Daniel spoke about the "Three Orthodox archimandrites from Wallachia fighting for the emancipation of the Roma": Eufrosin Poteca, Iosafat Snagoveanu, and Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu, the last two being seen as Roma who, as a sign of appreciation, were conferred, by the Romanian Orthodox Church, with the highest rank for the monastic clergy - the rank of archimandrite". Asserting this, the message is actually trying to convince that the Orthodox Church fought "for the freedom and for the dignity of her Roma sons" (Totorcea 2024).

What the message avoided saying was that all the three archimandrites were persecuted and excluded from the Church exactly because they campaigned for the emancipation of Roma from slavery (Totorcea 2024). Moreover, the message reflects a total and meaningful amnesia or a clearly wilful oblivion about the Orthodox Church as the most important owner of Romani slaves and about the fact that the Orthodox Church as an institution, with a very few priests being exceptions, actually had a fundamental contribution to the enslavement of Roma, legitimised Romani slavery, and fought against the abolishment of Romani slavery, doing all it could to stop it or at least postpone it, because the Church was afraid to lose its most important and only free labour force – Romani slaves. Furthermore, and still hiding this tragic part of its history, not only Roma's history, the Church contributes to the social amnesia linked to Romani slavery. And this social amnesia prevents both Roma and non-Roma from knowing and understanding why the relations between them are marked by chronic mistrust, prejudice, and negative stereotypes.

Over the past 50 years, most Western Christian churches apologised for the times they owned slaves. As a relevant example, on 21 May 2001, the French Parliament passed Law 434, named after its main initiator and fighter Christiane Taubira, making slavery a crime against humanity:

> *Article 1: La République française reconnaît que la traite négrière transatlantique ainsi que la traite dans l'océan Indien d'une part, et l'esclavage d'autre part, perpétrés à partir du xve siècle, aux Amériques et aux Caraïbes, dans l'océan Indien et en Europe contre les populations africaines, amérindiennes, malgaches et indiennes constituent un crime contre l'humanité.*
>
> Article 1: The French Republic recognises that the Transatlantic slave trade and the slave trade in the Indian Ocean on the one hand, and slavery on the other, perpetrated from the fifteenth century onwards, in the Americas and the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean and in Europe against the African, Amerindian, Malagasy, and Indian populations constitute a crime against humanity.

In fact, even in the specific case of Romanian Roma, in 2019, at the meeting in Blaj with Roma, Pope Francis told them that he was asking for forgiveness "for the moments when, in the course of history, I discriminated against you, mistreated you, or looked at you in a wrong way", adding that "through indifference we feed prejudice and incite hatred" and that when "one is left behind, the human family stops moving forward" (2019).

The Romanian Orthodox Church never made such a moral gesture of repentance and apology, nor has it ever asked for forgiveness. This indicates that the Church does not feel sorry about its past as an enslaver and sees slavery as a normal phenomenon in that historical context. Instead of asking for forgiveness, the Church is constantly looking for excuses, ignoring reality. If the Romani slavery is not recognized, nor seen as the mistake or sin of the Church, there is nothing to regret or for which to ask for forgiveness. Insisting on the idea that we cannot judge the past with the moral tools we use today, the Romanian Orthodox Church does not regret anything. When no repentance is involved, asking for forgiveness makes no sense. This symbolic gesture would have been the most important step towards reconciliation and peace, and towards a moral reparation which includes at least supporting, by the Church, archival research in the monasteries, establishing slavery memorials, and contributing to the establishment of a Romani history and culture museum.

3. Critical Vision of Activism and Arts

3.1 Rebuilding Remembrance through Romani Activism, Arts, and Research

As I have previously shown, as a way of resistance, breaking away from amnesia, and rebuilding memory, Romani activists and organisations were the first to celebrate the commemoration of the victims of slavery on 20 February. I have also touched upon how Romani researchers have challenged established research about Romani slavery as incorrect. In this section, I will therefore focus on two further areas for remembrance initiatives, namely journalism and arts.

A notable mainstream initiative that offered spaced to Romani scholars and artists to discuss slavery was the "The Custom of the Land" project, a multimedia journalistic project about Romani slavery

run by the independent magazine *Doar o Revistă* (*DoR* – Just a Magazine) in 2022. The project was led by reporter Ana Maria Ciobanu, and a Special Issue was curated by Margareta Matache (*DoR* 2022). The articles and podcasts produced dealt with both the history of slavery and its memory in present-day Romania. The podcast series has six episodes: (1) *Social Amnesia,* about the chronic and systemic oblivion of Romani slavery's history and about a total lack of reparative policies; (2) *500 Years*, about Romani slavery's history and the dehumanised status of the slave; (3) *Places of Memory*, underlining the chronic shortage of recognised slavery memory sites; (4) *The Bridge*, about activism through theatre arts or *artivism*, taking the model of the Romani actress, director, and playwright Alina Şerban, who wrote, directed, and performed the first play about Romani slavery, *The Great Shame* in 2016; (5) *Racism is convenient* addresses the deep and sometimes unconscious anti-Roma racism as one of the consequences of slavery; and (6) *Debts,* which underlines the need of reparation to build the reconciliation and enable a better living together in a better society.

This conversation has been continued in mainstream media in 2025. In an article from the magazine *Scena9*, journalist Andrei Popoviciu explores what Romania can learn from truth and reconciliation processes in countries like Rwanda and Gambia, to confront its own past with slavery. For this, there is to be evoked the concepts of reparatory justice, historical justice, and transitional justice, which go beyond legal provisions towards the decolonisation of the mind through regaining the memory of historical injustices (Bhabha, Matache, and Elkinks 2021; Selling 2021; Popescu and Stan 2025).

Besides mainstream journalism, Romani artists and their arts have been important voices, tapping their sources and means to speak about history, inform knowledge and empathy with the past, create heroes, and build and rebuild memory. To include Romani artists' perspectives in this article, I used past interviews and discussions with different Romani artists who have approached the topic of Romani slavery in their artistic creation.[9]

Let me cite some relevant examples of Romani artists who approached Romani slavery in their bodies of work. In 2016, Alina Şerban wrote and directed the first play about the history of Romani slavery with a cast of professional Romani and non-Romani actors. In *The Great Shame*, Şerban played the main role, and most actors were Roma, namely Doinița Oancea, Oana Rusu, Elena Duminică, and Sorin Sandu.

At least four films have been produced about Romani slavery. Alina Şerban wrote a screenplay and directed the first short film about Romani slavery, *Ticket of Forgiveness*. The term "forgiveness" was used during Romani slavery and meant the release of an enslaved individual from slavery, so the enslaved was "forgiven" from slavery. The film is based on a true story from the 1800s that describes the tragic fate of a Romani slave who committed suicide because his master did not accept to free him and let him marry the woman he loved. The short film was released in 2020.

9 Romani artists addressing Romani slavery include Alina Şerban (actress, director of theatre and film, screenwriter and playwright), Marian Petre (sculptor), Emil Iulian Sude (poet) and Marian Ghiță (poet), Eugen Raportoru (painter), Viorel Curt (painter and graphics artist), George Vasilescu (painter and sculptor), Mihaela Cîmpeanu (sculptor), Viorel Gongu (writer), Mihaela Drăgan (actress and playwright), Zita Moldovan (actress), Sorin Sandu (actor and poet).

Romanian filmmaking offers one exception in the field. In 2015, the only feature-length artistic film addressing Romani slavery was launched. Its title *Aferim!* is the Romanian version of the Turkish word *aferin,* which means *bravo.* The film is a Romanian-Bulgarian-French-Czech co-production directed by Radu Jude. It is a historical drama with features of a road movie. It is based on archive documents and follows a story from the nineteenth century, centred around a Romanian father and son, who arranged to return a Romani individual who escaped slavery to a Boyar enslaver. Awarded with the Silver Bear for the best director at Berlin Film Festival and winner of the most categories at the 2016 Gopo Film Gala, *Aferim!* actually represents an exception in Romanian film production, and it remains an exception as a unique feature-length artistic film that approaches the subject of Romani slavery.

The National Centre for Roma Culture "Romano Kher" has further produced two films about Romani Slavery: *Roma Slavery – The Long Road to Freedom* (2018), a docu-drama, and *Ioana's Truths. 10 Years of Fight against Slavery* (2022), a short biopic based on the life of the Romani heroine Ioana Rudăreasa who fought in court for more than a decade to free herself and her children from slavery.

Another example comes from sculpture: a theme of Romani slavery runs through, like a red thread, the works of the leading Romani sculptor Marian Petre.[10] One of his sculptures, *Himerotronic*, reflects a terrible image of a Romani slave wearing a torture instrument known as the slave's horns, meant to punish a slave to a dreadful death by fracturing his/her spine in the cervical area. The enslaved is a human being made of wood in Petre's sculpture, because the wood is warm and alive like a tree, representing emotion, empathy, and compassion, but it is considered as non-human by the enslaver, so he is incarcerated in iron in Petre's sculpture, because the iron is frozen and harsh like a knife, representing hatred, torture, and horror.

Figure 1. *Himerotronic,* by Marian Petre, 2022. "Simeza" Gallery of the Visual Artists' Union of Romania. Photo © Delia Grigore.

10 More about Marian Petre's portofolio: https://vatra-mcp.ro/artisti-si-patrimoniu/sculptori-romani/olt/marian-petre-sculptor.

As for Romani literature, two well-known and valuable poets who approached the theme of Romani slavery include the contemporaries Emil-Iulian Sude and Marian Ghiță. In Emil-Iulian Sude's poem *Emptiness in the Chest*, the slave's status is depicted as absolute non-existence, a total sense of void, through which even birth and death do not belong to the one who is not perceived as human, so slavery is felt as the absolute dehumanisation of person and of society.

Marian Ghiță's poem *Origins* is a manifesto against a past seen as a perpetual present: slavery seen as the absolute murder of the body and soul by the master of slaves whose God "is coming from the monkey". The lack of any human feeling makes a slave the best slave and all the dead slaves are buried in today's Roma, as a tragic continuity of spiritual slavery.

In Marian Ghiță's poem *Half*, no redemption seems to be possible because the souls of the ghost slaves were totally destroyed, everybody – mothers, fathers, and children – died, fate disappeared "the flesh became wound / and the blood became water", so the only way is the uprising, the physical and spiritual fight: "Give me a rock / I am yelling / to break the head / of the dragon / at least one / to free / our souls / at least one / to free / our minds."

In his poem *Traum*, Marian Ghiță's poetic ego directly yells out the pain of slavery "The boyars called them / slaves / Tziganes / and stole from their chests / their freedom / and from the eyes the light," which symbolises the killing of the very roots of Roma, the traumatised and desacralised Indian origins.

In summary, while Romani slavery remains largely absent from public memory and mainstream historical consciousness, activists, artists, journalists, and researchers are playing a critical role in reclaiming and reconstructing this history. Through journalism and artistic expression such as theatre, film, literature, or visual arts, Romani voices are not only preserving the memory of slavery but also challenging collective amnesia.

Conclusion: New Approaches

Different from the recognition of other systems of racialized slavery, particularly the Transatlantic slave trade (Bhabha, Matache, and Elkins 2021), Romani slavery was neither comprehensively recognised nor assumed by Romanian society, historiography, its school system, the Romanian Academy, the Orthodox Church, or Romania's highest political powers. This pattern of amnesia has extremely serious consequences both on Romani collective consciousness (amnesia about what concerns Romani slavery and inexplicable stigmatised self-identification), and on the Romanian collective consciousness (ignorance about Romani slavery and a stereotypical and deeply prejudiced hetero identification of Roma). Because all these occur in the subtle realm of the subconscious, the spiritual liberation of Roma from slavery requires, if not as many centuries as slavery itself, then at least political will at least as strong as anti-Roma impulses from the time of slavery.

Social amnesia linked to Romani slavery has two faces, both hideous: forgetting the past by killing memory and building a pseudo-historical consciousness based on false images, stereotypes, and prejudice.

Romani scholars, artists, and nongovernmental activists and their allies are actually the only people who are trying, with very limited means, to break this social amnesia and to rebuild Romani slavery's memory.

Stigma and racism are both distinct and subtle when it comes to Romanian Roma. To this day, many *gadje* do not understand the background of Romani people and often make them feel as though their struggles are their own fault, rather than a result of historical injustices. This misunderstanding further exacerbates feelings of self-hatred among Romani individuals. In fact, stigma and racism are based on a subhuman status assigned to Roma during slavery and still perceived as such until today.

> Most likely a marking of the attestation of the G*psies at Tismana (1385) or at Cozia (1388) would create an uncomfortable precedent, because what follows naturally would be the creation of a Slavery monument […], where the Roma could gather, honour the memory of their ancestors, recall history and, last but not least, aware of ethnic and group specificity (Petre Petcuț 2015, 41).

Erasing the memory of slavery is a manifestation of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). The paradox of buried, unexpressed traumas are the social psychological consequences of slavery which are experienced, despite the cultural amnesia regarding slavery. For healing, the trauma must be remembered and expressed, and the pain mourned.

No law can simply abolish slavery's amnesia: that becomes a new type of slavery, a spiritual slavery, without the firm and concerted contribution of all actors in society, from public authorities to opinion leaders. Here comes, for public policies, the role of transitional justice and remedial/reparatory measures rooted in the right to rectification. Here comes, for society as a whole, the ethics of guilt, that should be taught in school, beginning with very early stages of education.

> But there is still much to do. We could start by acknowledging this past at the highest level by having a commission to look into slavery and recognise the effects on the present. The Orthodox Church should publicly condemn the 500 years of slavery, symbolically asking for forgiveness. The Romanian state should, among other things, prioritise and support research projects about slavery and rename cities, buildings, streets after Roma and non-Roma who fought against slavery. The school could be more inclusive – textbooks, celebrations and symbols about Roma should be used in a dignified way that does not reinforce stereotypes (*DoR* 2022).

The Romanian state needs to move beyond mere discussions and occasional ceremonies and take substantial action. This includes the implementation of slavery memorial plaques, the establishment of slavery monuments and memorials, and a national program for archival research on slavery that is supported by a comprehensive database. Additionally, there should be a Romani slavery museum and mandatory teaching of Romani slavery in schools at all educational levels, rather than just as an elective. Furthermore, the creation of documentaries and feature-length films about slavery, along with various other reparative policies, is essential.

The solutions must focus on two key areas. First, majority society and state institutions need to foster recognition and acceptance of history. And second, there is a need for institutional support to help regain ethnic dignity and reconstruct Romani identity. The aim is to ensure that Romani people no longer feel like inferior human beings, and that Romanians are freed from their own fantasies and prejudices about Romani people. The only way towards reconciliation in Romanian society is the institutionalisation of Romani slavery's recognition through public policies measures such as: extensive and mandatory teaching about Romani slavery in schools, at all pertinent levels in step with wider actions like establishing a Romani history museum with extended sections dedicated to Romani slavery, establishing a national research program on Romani slavery and a national institute of Romani history research with a section dedicated to Romani slavery, building a Romani slavery memorial/monument and placing other memorial plaques at slavery memory sites such as monasteries.

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Slavery, Cultural Trauma, and Romani Identity

Between Reconciliation with the Past and Internal Coloniality

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Abstract

This article develops and tests a methodological approach for studying the memory of Romani slavery that transcends oral history and archival research sources, treating local mnemonics – such as oikonyms, spatial morphology, and institutionalised sources – as carriers of memory. By grounding and applying this methodology to the case of Dezrobiți village, I show how the cultural trauma of slavery reveals itself even where silence, denial, or fragmentation obscure direct narratives, collective memory, and symbols.

Keywords

- Collective memory
- Cultural trauma
- Mnemonics
- Roma identity
- Slavery

Introduction

In the interwar period, disputes over the right of Roma to commemorate slavery became strikingly evident. In 1934, *Ilustrațiunea Română*, a monthly magazine, published an article entitled *"80 Ani Dela Desrobirea Țiganilor"* (80 years since the liberation of the Gypsies), which ironised and dismissed Romani initiatives to commemorate their emancipation (Rex 1934). In the same year, in turn, *Glasul Romilor* (*The voice of Roma*), a Roma-led newspaper, proclaimed the need for historical recognition and social change: "In 1854, the great statesmen of the time thought about improving the fate of Roma…. Since then, however, no one has thought about our fate" (Lenghescu-Cley 1934). These contrasting discourses reveal how Romanian elites marginalised the memory and remembrance of slavery while Romani intellectuals and activists sought to articulate it.

Furthermore, while a Romani elite advocated for recovering historical memory, segments of the Romanian intellectual elite started to develop and promote eugenic and racial theories that classified Roma as "dysgenic" and inferior. This culminated in the deportation of more than 25,000 Roma to Transnistria during the Holocaust, nearly half of whom perished (Turda and Furtună 2022). During communism, Romani intellectuals, as sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, unsuccessfully advocated for the recognition of Roma as a "cohabiting nationality" (Achim 2010). Gheorghe nonetheless laid the foundations for the post-communist Romani civic movement, emphasising the importance of slavery in shaping identity. At a global level, Ian Hancock's book, *The Pariah Syndrome* (1987), brought attention to Romani enslavement, urging Roma themselves to reclaim and tell their history.

Following the official recognition of Roma in Romania as an ethnic minority in 1990, the recovery of slavery's memory intensified. Vasile Ionescu published landmark volumes on the history of enslavement (2000; 2001), while activists and researchers such as Nicolae Gheorghe and Delia Grigore linked historical memory to identity politics. These efforts translated into memory policies: the creation of the National Centre for Roma Culture (2003), the adoption of February 20 as the official commemoration day (2011), and the adoption of a law establishing a National Museum of Roma History and Culture (2023).

Building on these efforts, this article develops and tests a methodology to analyse the collective memory of Romani slavery by focusing on local mnemonics – such as oikonyms, spatial arrangements, and sites of memory – and their role in bearing memory and shaping ethnic identity through the lens of cultural trauma. The case study of Dezrobiți village in Vâlcea County, rooted in the former dwellings of enslaved Roma from Dintr-un Lemn Monastery, provides an empirical setting to explore these issues. The village name itself – *Dezrobiți* (the Freed) – illustrates how memory is inscribed in space, at once symbolising emancipation and reinforcing hierarchies of power.

Using this case study, the article examines how remembrance of slavery remains embedded in local history and community identity. It highlights the ambivalent role of mnemonics: on one hand, facilitating reconciliation with a traumatic past; on the other, reproducing legacies of internal coloniality – inequities and marginalisation. The broader objective is twofold: to contribute a methodological framework for studying cultural trauma through local memory practices and to demonstrate how the legacies of slavery

continue to shape Romani identity, both in tension with and in resistance to dominant national narratives. By situating this analysis within memory studies, cultural trauma theory, and Critical Romani Studies, the article underscores that the memory of slavery is not a static remnant of the past but an active, contested force in the present, shaping both identity and politics.

1. A Methodological Approach for the Study of the Memory of Romani Enslavement

When I worked alongside Delia Grigore in the 2000s, I first heard her mention that there is a locality called "Dezrobiți" ("the Freed") in Romania. That remark stayed with me, and I often wondered whether the memory of slavery might still survive there, while in my own family and in most Romani families in Romania it had largely disappeared.

The first concrete step toward developing the methodology presented in this article was a 2017 research fellowship with the Community Development Agency "Împreună," where Delia Grigore was assigned as my supervisor. In this role, she was among the first to encounter and engage with my intention to study the collective memory of Romani enslavement. I understood how important my approach to the study of the collective memory of Romani slavery was when this was applied in the MEMOROBIA project in 2022–2025.[1]

Frances Amelia Yates (1899–1981), a historian of the Renaissance, published in 1966 her influential book *The Art of Memory*, exploring the role of memory before the invention of Gutenberg's printing press (1455). The title was inspired by the ancient Greek poet Simonides, who developed a mnemonic technique based on associating each place in a given space with an idea, image, phrase, or word. According to legend, while reciting a poem at a nobleman's banquet, Simonides was called outside by two young men. In his absence, the roof collapsed, killing and disfiguring all the guests inside. By recalling where each person had been seated, Simonides enabled their families to identify the bodies. Yates demonstrated how such mnemonic practices, developed in Antiquity and refined in the Renaissance, shaped European intellectual culture and memory. Her work revealed that memory was not merely a tool for learning but a fundamental cultural and intellectual practice influencing art, philosophy, religion, and science.

Starting from this framework, I began to ask what connections exist among people, the places they occupy, and the names given to them. Could there also be an "art of memory" in the spatial and symbolic positions of Roma and Romanians – figuratively at the same table? Viewed in this light, oikonyms (oikonims) become more than names: they are carriers of memory.

I rely on Maurice Halbwachs's distinction between historical and collective memory, and his emphasis on the relation between social groups and spatial environments, to develop and test a methodology that

1 See more detail about the project here: https://mf.no/en/memorobia.

reads oikonyms, monasteries, and demographic continuities as mnemonic markers. For Halbwachs, historical memory refers to the reconstruction of the past through external, written, or institutionalised sources – such as the name of the locality, the official website of the commune, the spatial morphology, or the archives – whereas collective memory is a living and dynamic process, embedded with meaning in the social frameworks and transmitted within groups (Halbwachs 2007, 95–140).

Building on and also moving beyond Halbwachs's concept of spatial frameworks of memory, this article shifts attention from how space supports collective memory to how it reveals the absence or distortion of memory within histories. In the case of Romani slavery, archival documentation is not lacking, yet these materials are rarely translated into living, community-based remembrance. The discontinuity lies not in the evidence but in its cultural transmission.

By reading oikonyms, land ownership patterns, and the proximity between former princely palaces, boyars' mansions or monasteries, and present Romani settlements as mnemonic structures, I propose and test a methodology for identifying where memory has been displaced from consciousness into the morphology of space and the endurance of everyday social relations.

The methodology rests on three interrelated dimensions:

a. Chronological – examining Romani neighborhoods and villages through the stages of their residential sedentarisation;
b. Spatial – analysing localities situated near monasteries, boyar estates, and princely courts that owned enslaved Roma.
c. Mnemonic – interpreting oikonims, parish names, land allocations, and institutional records as elements that preserve memory of enslavement.

To operationalise this framework, I conducted a case study in Dezrobiți, Vâlcea County, a village whose name itself ("the Freed") marks slavery and emancipation. Data collection combined structured individual and group interviews, and informal conversations with people currently working for the monastery; three waves of direct observation; and the analysis of archival and documentary sources, including the monastery's own monograph. Content analysis of the interviews, social documents, and my own field notes enabled me to identify the main categories of representation concerning the memory of slavery and to explore how these categories inform collective identity and cultural trauma in the present.

2. 'Țigănia' as a Place of Memory of Enslavement and Cultural Trauma

I approach mnemonics primarily through oikonyms. Place names are not merely labels but carriers of memory that point to the continuity of communities through history. This is particularly relevant for Romani communities, where the traces of slavery have often been silenced or erased from official history but remain embedded in local spaces and oral traditions.

The term "țigănie" illustrates this dynamic. In Romanian folk usage, "țigănie" refers to a neighbourhood where Romani people live. It derives from the exonym "țigan", which was first imposed in the Byzantine Empire. Most "țigănii", especially in rural areas, originated in dwellings attached to the estates of boyars, monasteries, or princely courts, where Roma were enslaved. As such, they represent a direct link to the institutions of enslavement. To be understood as a place of memory of slavery, a "țigănie" must maintain this link to its origins, preserving spatial and temporal continuity with the structures of domination that produced it.

Here, Maurice Halbwachs provides a useful framework. He argues that collective memory is anchored in spatial morphology: "When a human group lives for a long time in an environment adapted to its habits, not only are its movements regulated according to the succession of material images that represent external objects, but its thoughts are too" (Halbwachs 2007, 200). In other words, memory is not abstract, but organised spatially, creating a symbolic map in which each place occupies a position within a hierarchy dictated by the past. When the morphology of space changes, the memory hierarchy is disrupted. From this perspective, "țigănia" is not only a social or ethnic label but also a mnemonic landscape. Through continuity of settlement, it preserves the memory of slavery, even when explicit narratives are absent, and transmits it across generations. This is why memory often survives more in spatial arrangements and community practices than in words – a form of "memory in bodies", inscribed through descent.

The case of Dezrobiți village in Vâlcea County is a prime example of this process. The proximity of the Romani community to Dintr-un Lemn Monastery in its spatial morphology reflects the historical relationship of enslavement. Beyond morphology, public markers such as the village's name itself reinforce the mnemonic significance of slavery. These elements are discussed further in the following section and demonstrate how slavery is inscribed in both space and collective consciousness.

At the same time, however, "țigănia" must also be understood as a site of cultural trauma. Jeffrey C. Alexander defines this as a social process whereby members of a group interpret a horrific event as leaving an indelible mark on their collective consciousness and fundamentally shaping their future identity (Alexander 2004, 11). In Dezrobiți, the memory of slavery and the meanings attached to it can be analysed through this lens, as collective interpretations that shape identity across generations, rather than static recollections.

Ron Eyerman, writing on slavery and the formation of African-American identity, emphasises the link between trauma, collective identity, and the social construction of memory (2004, 60). Although his framework was developed in a different context, it provides a useful comparative model: slavery as a foundational trauma that shapes identity even when remembered indirectly.

For Romani communities, however, the trajectory is more fragmented. Many Romani people have lost explicit memory of slavery due to assimilation, urbanisation, and political silences. A term that can be put in relation to "țigănie" is "mahala". Derived from Turkish, the word often was used to name Romani neighbourhoods, as is the case of Roma in Tismana, where the term, due to its sense of naming more a social category of people rather than an ethnic one: "mahalagiu" = a person who lives in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of a city; through extension the term was invested with the sense of "with vulgar, coarse

tendencies, who argue and gossip" (Dexonline 2004–2025). Compared with "țigănie", the term "mahala" functions as a softened designation, one that conceals Roma's ethnic identity beneath a neutral, spatial label. It reflects a tacit agreement – shared by both Roma and non-Roma – that allows the community to be referred to simply as "the people from the Mahala," avoiding the stigma historically attached to the word "țigan."(Furtună 2022, 168–196).

Yet the continuity of Romani settlement carries within it a quiet, enduring memory. Even when the villages were moved or reshaped, Roma remained bound to these places through the lives of their ancestors. They are the children and grandchildren of those once enslaved, and their presence itself becomes a form of remembrance. Even when words and stories have been lost, the memory of slavery endures – unspoken but alive in gestures, landscapes, and the very fact of their remaining (Rice and Kardux 2012, 245–272). Thus, "țigănia" operate on two levels: as a mnemonic space tied to the spatial legacy of slavery, and as a site of cultural trauma where that legacy continues to shape collective identity. It represents both continuity and rupture, and both survival and stigma – simultaneously preserving memory and reproducing the hierarchies born of enslavement.

3. The Mnemonic Ensemble That Preserved the Memory of Romani Enslavement and the Structure of Power Relations

Dezrobiți (the Freed) – The power of a name

Dictionaries from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are crucial for this research, as they show that several villages and hamlets across Romania bore the name "Desrobiți" and were populated largely by former enslaved Roma (Alessandrescu 1893, 126, 349, 362, 366; Gheorghiu 1895, 233; Racoviță 1895, 260, 370, 567). For example, the old *Geographical Dictionary of Vâlcea County* presents two entries for the oykonym "Desrobiți": 1. "Desrobiți, part of the village of Romani, Horezu plain"; 2. "Desrobiți, village, part of the rural commune of Monastireni, Oltu-de-Sus. It has a population of 462 inhabitants (201 men, 261 women), and a school population of 46 children" (Alessandrescu 1893, 124).

Vâlcea's village of Dezrobiți was originally named *Mănăstireni* ("Those who belong to the monastery"), which directly indicated Roma's status as property of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. After the Agrarian Reform of 1864, initiated by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the name was changed to *Dezrobiți* ["Disenslaved" or "Freed"]. The new oikonym symbolised the transition from enslavement to emancipation, intended both to remind Romanian society of its past and to signal the lifting of stigma from the descendants of enslaved Roma. Romanian abolitionists of 1848 had played a major role in this process, describing slavery as a "shame" upon the nation, to be erased through emancipation (Kogălniceanu 1908, 46).

Other localities that received the name "Dezrobiți" later abandoned it, but the Vâlcea village preserved its use. The reason lies in the reform itself: many former slaves were granted half a hectare of land,

integrating them into the peasant class (*clăcași*) and bringing them closer to the social status of Romanian peasants. In practice, however, only part of the Roma benefited. Many were excluded from the land reform, remaining without property or secure livelihoods.

In the 1860s, Dezrobiți served as a symbolic monument to emancipation for the Romanian state. For Roma themselves, however, it evoked mixed feelings: the promise of freedom alongside the memory of slavery.

Ana Lucia Araujo observed in the context of southern Benin that commemorations of slavery can be perceived as an external imposition, recalling a past that many descendants would prefer to forget (Araujo 2010, 18). This tension persists today. The official website of Frances̨ti Commune, which administers Dezrobiți, states:

> The village of Dezrobiți was first documented in 1634 as a village of Gypsy slaves who worked the lands of the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. From 1864, the name Dezrobiți was adopted instead of Mănăstireni (Frances̨ti City Hall 2024).

By reproducing this narrative, the commune simultaneously acknowledges slavery and reinscribes the village's identity through it. However, the mnemonic ensemble extends beyond names and archives. Today, 90 per cent of Dezrobiți's inhabitants are Roma, most of whom are direct descendants of those enslaved by the monastery.

The community itself embodies continuity with slavery, preserving memory through descent and settlement. The Romani population is not only the subject of memory but also an integral mnemonic element; their presence in the village serves as a living reminder of the historical structures that shaped the lives of their ancestors.

Thus, the name Dezrobiți functions as an invitation to reconcile with history, but also as a sign of the ongoing reproduction of power relations. It is a symbol of emancipation and a marker of past domination, preserving the ambiguity of freedom won under unequal conditions.

Dintr-un Lemn Monastery – An eternal open gate between past and present

From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, monasteries were central institutions of economic, cultural, and political power in Wallachia and Moldavia. Rulers demonstrated their piety by founding monasteries and endowing them with vast tracts of land, mills, vineyards, and, crucially, enslaved Roma. These donations meant that monasteries were among the largest slaveholders in Romanian history.

Like other villages formed near monasteries, Dezrobiți has the monastery as its monumental point of reference, continuously recalling enslavement. The collective memory of slavery here is inextricably linked to the presence of the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. Even after the secularisation of monastic wealth in 1864, the monastery's religious life remained uninterrupted, unlike that of many others. As Mother

Abbesses Emanuela Oprea and Tecla Fuioagă observed, this continuity was considered miraculous (Oprea and Fuioagă 2014, 13). The monastery's monograph confirms this connection, with archival documents concerning enslaved Roma appearing alongside inventories of material heritage in its annexes (Fuioagă and Barac 2009, 176–207). Recognition of slavery thus comes from both secular sources (the commune website) and clerical authorities.

Today, the relationship between the monastery and the Romani community is more than just historical. Some villagers still work as day-labourers for the monastery, which reinforces the sense of continuity between the past and the present. For them, the monastery remains part of their collective identity: once their owner, now their employer, it represents both exploitation and belonging. This ambiguous bond "humanises" them, as some community members have expressed, setting them apart from Roma who are considered outsiders (for example, Romani-speaking or nomadic groups).

The Archdiocese of Râmnic further preserves this link by continuing to use the old parish name, Mănăstireni, even though the village has officially been called Dezrobiți for 160 years. On its website, the Archdiocese of Râmnic describes the parish church of Saint Paraschiva as being located "very close to the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery in the middle of Dezrobiți village" (Archdiocese of Râmnic 2024). By sustaining the old oikonym, the Church reinforces the memory of the connection between the monastery and enslaved Roma, thereby embedding slavery in the region's symbolic and spiritual geography.

4. The Local Collective Memory of Enslavement and its Reflection in the Ethnic Identity of the Freed

In this section, I examine how local mnemonics of slavery are reflected in the collective memory of Dezrobiți's inhabitants. My aim is to trace the relationship between these signs – as continuous forms of communication between past and present – and the identity of the villagers. At the same time, I question the position of the *dezrobiți* (the freed) in relation to the values and self-representations associated with modern Romani ethnic identity.

'The Freed' as poor – Rejecting Romani identity and constructing an identity of poverty

A feature of the collective memory of Dezrobiți is that poverty, rather than ethnicity, has become the dominant marker of identity. Roma in Dezrobiți, as well as those in other communities such as Tismana, tend to identify as "disadvantaged people". This designation emphasises social condition while excluding ethnicity, reflecting a distancing from the Roma label and a reconfiguration of identity through socio-economic vulnerability, a policy concept developed by state institutions.

This form of identity construction is reflected in public representations of the village. For example, a local newspaper article from 22 December 2016 entitled "The village of Dezrobiți in Vâlcea is one of the poorest in the country" describes Santa Claus's arrival at the local school:

> There are 60 pupils altogether. None of them has dropped out of school, even though their parents struggle to make ends meet. Recently, the children have started receiving a hot meal every day because the school has joined a government programme through which the local authorities receive funding for very poor communities. However, before eating, the little ones wash their hands and say a prayer. Of course, Santa could not resist such well-behaved children.

What is striking here is the complete absence of any reference to the children's Romani identity. Poverty becomes the defining feature of the village, while ethnicity remains unspoken.

This narrative also emerged in my field research. A Romani representative from Frances̨ti City Hall, himself a member of the Rudari community, described the reluctance of Dezrobiți's school mediator to facilitate interviews: "He says he is not a G***y, that his people are not… that he was not put in charge of G***ies, but of disadvantaged people." This statement reflects a broader pattern: identity framed through social exclusion rather than ethnicity. Poverty becomes a transgenerational attribute, linking present conditions to an imagined past. As one elderly woman (73 years old, Dezrobiți) explained when asked about the meaning of the village name: "Why is this village called Dezrobiți? Because the people were poor here, mother, the people here are poor!"

Here, the etymology of Dezrobiți, rooted in emancipation from slavery, is reinterpreted in terms of persistent poverty rather than historical slavery and freedom. Poverty replaces ethnicity as the dominant narrative, reframing the legacy of slavery not as shared ethnic trauma but as continuous socio-economic deprivation.

This phenomenon becomes clearer when viewed within the wider commune of Frances̨ti. While most of those who declared themselves as Roma in official statistics were not from Dezrobiți, they were from the Rudari community. However, the Rudari have a long-standing tradition of distancing themselves from Roma identity, instead cultivating the idea of descent from the ancient Dacians (Calotă). In contrast, the inhabitants of Dezrobiți – descendants of enslaved Roma – often avoid the Roma label altogether, preferring the more neutral category of "disadvantaged people".

This rejection of Romani identity has significant consequences. As sociologist Iulius Rostaș (2012, 199–230; 2020, 1–46) argues, the failure of many social policies directed at Romani communities lies precisely in their lack of ethnic relevance. When communities internalise categories such as "poor" rather than claiming Romani identity, they reinforce their own exclusion. In Dezrobiți, this tendency reflects both stigma and survival: distancing oneself from Romani identity avoids external discrimination but simultaneously erases the ethnic dimension of slavery's legacy.

The case of Dezrobiți therefore illustrates how the local collective memory of enslavement is filtered through present-day poverty. Rather than emphasising Romani identity as a framework for remembering slavery, the villagers reinterpret their past through a narrative of disadvantage. Poverty becomes both an explanation and an identity, connecting the present marginalised state with that of their ancestors. In this sense, the cultural trauma of slavery is refracted less through ethnic belonging than through social exclusion, producing what might be termed an "identity of poverty".

Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza as liberator from the shame of being țigan: Land ownership as a symbol of local belonging

For the formerly enslaved Roma of the Dintr-un Lemn monastery, the 1864 Agrarian Reform represented much more than the redistribution of land. Receiving half a hectare was seen as an entry into the social world of the village and a symbol of dignity, pride, and local identity. One man, aged over 70, explained: "My mother had it from her father. From his parents. He gave her the dowry, and it was the dowry that made us; we ruled the land." When asked if land ownership placed them on an equal footing with Romanians, he replied: "Yes, because we had land." Another villager added, "Well, that's why they get upset when you call them 'Gypsies', that's why."

Here, land is not only an economic resource, but also a symbolic marker of freedom and recognition – a means of escaping the stigma of being a țigan. This echoes W.E.B. Du Bois's thoughts on the emancipation of African-Americans, in which he identified the formation of a Black peasantry as a vital part of social change. In both cases, it was not only the legal decree of emancipation that elevated the freed from the status of slaves to that of recognised villagers but also land ownership. Field, garden, and house became symbols of dignity, hard work, and pride – values embedded in the identity of the Romanian peasant.

Yet, in Romanian cultural discourse, the phrase "Gypsy peasant" (țăran țigan) has always seemed contradictory. The "Romanian peasant" embodies the dignity of village life, tied to the land and hard labour in the sun. In contrast, a popular stereotype of Roma portrays them as nomadic and detached from the land – lovers of freedom rather than farming. For this reason, they were long denied a peasant identity. However, the Agrarian Reform of 1864 challenged this stereotype. By granting land, the reform enabled former enslaved Roma to break free from their identity as *monăstireni* – property of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery – and become *dezrobiți* or the freed. This was not only a legal and material change but also a symbolic and moral emancipation that uprooted them from the subhuman status that had been imposed on them for centuries. Local memory confirms this interpretation.

For Dezrobiți's elderly population today, the figure of the liberator is not Barbu Ştirbey, the Wallachian ruler who signed the 1843 law emancipating monastery slaves, but Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. For them, emancipation is not associated with the abstract concept of legal abolition but with the tangible gift of "a place for a house and a garden". Cuza's reform thus occupies a central place in their memory because it offered a tangible sign of belonging: land. As one villager put it, emancipation became a reality when they were given land "like the Romanians".

Owning land meant sharing in the dignity of peasant life, joining the symbolic community of the village, and distancing oneself from the shame of slavery. For the inhabitants of Dezrobiți, Cuza is remembered not only as the liberator from slavery but also from the stigma of being a țigan. The land itself became a mnemonic bridge connecting the trauma of slavery with the pride of local belonging.

The monastery as 'Good Mother'

In Dezrobiți's collective imagination, the monastery is represented as a "good mother", a benevolent figure who has ensured the survival of the poor across generations. This symbolic representation is not only local, but also appears in official religious discourse. On 19 February 2016, to mark 160 years since the abolition of Romani slavery, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church declared:

> The emancipation, however, found the Roma slaves unprepared. Although they were legally freed from slavery, most Roma people remained near the monasteries where they had once been enslaved. They formed entire Roma villages in the immediate vicinity of these monasteries and former boyar mansions, and these villages still exist today. They helped the landowners with agricultural work in exchange for money or food, and over time some became the owners of the land on which they lived (Patriarch Daniel 2016).

What is notable about this statement is the positive connotation that the highest clerical authority gives to slavery. By portraying monasteries as protectors and Roma as "unprepared" for freedom, the Patriarch reimagines centuries of forced labour as a narrative of benevolent care.

This representation is tied to persistent socio-economic conditions. After abolition, most Roma remained poor. Even Cuza's Agrarian Reform of 1864, which granted some families half-hectare plots, could not ensure subsistence. Poor agricultural development in the Francești region, both before and after communism, reinforced dependence on the monastery. During fieldwork, many interviewees emphasised that they did not condemn the monastery but instead expressed a willingness to forgive – a disposition shaped by their continued reliance on the occasional work provided by the monastery, even to this day.

Religion reinforces this image. Unlike in other Romani communities in Vâlcea County, where Pentecostal churches have gained ground, the villagers of Dezrobiți have remained overwhelmingly Orthodox. This affiliation strengthens their symbolic attachment to the monastery, which they see less as a former enslaver and more as part of their spiritual and communal identity. In interviews, villagers rarely used the language of slavery or freedom. Instead, they spoke of protection and subsistence. The monastery is remembered not as an oppressor but as a provider. This perspective reflects historical continuity: the land granted in 1864 was insufficient to make families economically independent, so labour relations with the monastery endured. This structural dependence thus transformed into a perceived relationship of care, sustaining the image of the monastery as a "good mother".

However, this forgiving memory contrasts sharply with the lack of institutional accountability. The Romanian Orthodox Church has never apologised for exploiting enslaved Romani labour for nearly five centuries.

This silence is particularly notable when compared with the Catholic Church. During a visit to a Romani community in Blaj in 2019, Pope Francis stated:

> I have, however, a weight on my heart. It is the weight of the discrimination, segregation, and mistreatment that your communities have suffered. History tells us that neither Christians nor Catholics were strangers to this great evil. For this, I would like to ask for your forgiveness... for the moments throughout history when we have discriminated against you, mistreated you or judged you incorrectly, viewing you with the gaze of Cain rather than Abel (Pope Francis 2019).

By comparing these two perspectives, we can see how memory politics can differ. In Romania, the monastery is still seen as a nurturing mother, even by the descendants of those who were once enslaved there. A forgiving memory, shaped by dependence and Orthodoxy, obscures responsibility while maintaining the Church's moral authority.

5. Ethnic Identity as Cultural Trauma

At first glance, one might be tempted to describe Dezrobiți as an assimilated Romani community. Its inhabitants no longer speak Romani, do not preserve traditions or customs associated with "traditional" Romani groups, and rarely identify as Roma in official contexts.

Such communities have long attracted the attention of ethnographers and sociologists. During and after the Second World War, however, scholars framed assimilation through a lens deeply marked by racial prejudice. The ethnographer Ion Chelcea, for example, described mixed marriages between Roma and Romanians as a "lifting from the race" (*ridicare din neam*), an expression that openly suggested the racial inferiority of Roma (Chelcea 1944, 89). Similarly, Sabin Manuilă and D. C. Georgescu, who were known for their racist writings, noted in their report on the 1930 census that many Roma avoided declaring their ethnic identity because being identified as 'Gypsy' was considered socially degrading (Chelcea 1944, 74; Turda and Furtună 2022; Turda 2024).

The reluctance to self-identify as Roma is therefore not a new phenomenon. It is a practice rooted in the stigma historically associated with slavery and perpetuated by scholars, particularly Romanian eugenicists, the state, and present-day prejudices of the majority population.

Communities such as Dezrobiți and Tismana are located in regions that are emblematic of traditional Romanian ethnographic culture and have been greatly influenced by the presence of monasteries. Not only were these monasteries religious centres; they were also guardians of Romanian cultural traditions, pilgrimage sites, and economic hubs. They preserved local Romanian folklore and communal bonds well into the communist era, when other regions were reshaped by urbanisation.

Within such environments, Romani communities were exposed to intense pressures of assimilation. As guardian of national faith and culture, the Orthodox Church left little space for alternative ethnic representation. Romani identity was erased or repressed and associated with negative stereotypes such as danger, laziness, and nomadism. As Elena Trancă Buzneri notes in her monograph on Tismana, a tacit agreement seemed to govern relations: "Romanians know in their hearts that we are Gypsies, and we know

in our hearts" (Buzneri 2011, 21). Like the unspoken silence surrounding a shameful family secret, this tacit understanding ensured that the trauma of slavery remained unspoken. Silence became a way of managing stigma: if one does not speak of it, it is as if it does not exist.

In such a power relationship, the meaning of the word "G***y" was defined by the dominant culture. As long as the Roma descendants of the Dezrobiţi conformed – singing Romanian folklore, working as day-labourers for the monastery, and avoiding public claims to ethnic difference – the social order was maintained. To openly claim Romani ethnicity would have disrupted this order and broken tacit rules established over centuries.

The "dream" of the freed people was to become Romanians, equal members of the national community. Indeed, the Romani people of Dezrobiți have actively contributed to Romanian cultural life. Many were musicians, performing in ensembles in nearby towns. During the communist era, Dezrobiți became particularly renowned for its emblematic Romanian folk dance, Călușarii. Villagers still recall with pride that they performed this dance mainly themselves, rather than ethnic Romanians. Through music and dance, they preserved and promoted Romanian folk traditions, even when their Romani identity was being denied or suppressed.

Yet the stigma of slavery remained. The descendants of monastery slaves often insisted that their status made them superior to the nomadic Roma, who were seen as dangerous and untrustworthy. Locally, the loss of Romani language is not viewed as a loss but as a point of pride. Romani is associated with crime and violence; it is seen as foreign and undesirable. For Dezrobiți, learning Romani today would not mean reconnecting with their roots but falling into a "black hole", since collective memory insists that they never knew the language. Thus, this stance illustrates how deeply internalised prejudice shapes identity: the rejection of Romani language and culture is framed as protection, when in fact it perpetuates self-hatred.

What characterises the inhabitants of Dezrobiți is a distinct kind of self-hatred: an identity built on the rejection of one's own ethnic roots and shaped by centuries of racial subordination. Vasile Ionescu, one of the founders of the post-communist Romani cultural movement, asked: "First, why do we tell the *Gadje*, like a personal story, and yet we do not discuss the warping disaster of racism amongst ourselves as a collective story?" (Ionescu 2018, 135). This "warping disaster" is precisely what sustains the Dezrobiți identity: slavery as a trauma that cannot be spoken of directly, but effects of which remain embedded in attitudes of denial, hatred, and silence towards one's own ethnicity.

Du Bois's "colour line" remains relevant here. In Dezrobiţi, there may appear to be no visible racial boundary since the community has assimilated into Romanian culture. However, the rejection of Romani identity actually highlights the existence of that line. The word "țigan" operates as a racialized label, marking a distinction between free Romanians and enslaved Roma for centuries. The people of Dezrobiți exist within this division, even as they attempt to eradicate it. This is why assimilation is not an adequate description of their identity. Instead, what has developed is a specific form of identity based on rejection: a denial of Romani culture, a refusal of public policies aimed at Romani people, and a desire to be recognised as Romanians. This is not assimilation in the sense of gradual integration but rather a colonised identity centred on self-negation.

Roma who lived near monasteries for centuries developed differently from nomadic Roma. They reject Romani identity most strongly, as they wish to distinguish themselves from nomads and groups stereotypically associated with "long skirts" and deportations to Transnistria during the Holocaust. When they insist that they are not "tsiganes", they are primarily emphasising that they are not like these other groups. Their identity is relational, defined not by what they are, but by what they refuse to be.

At a family level, memory takes on complex forms. Marianne Hirsch coined the term "postmemory" to describe the transmission of traumatic knowledge from one generation to the next (Hirsch 2008, 103–128). This concept shapes Dezrobiți's interpretation of its past. Slavery is remembered not in terms of oppression, but of work, dignity, and poverty. By attributing a positive meaning to their history – "We were hard-working, we were poor, but we belonged" – they create a narrative that enhances their local image and facilitates their integration into Romanian society. Thus, slavery becomes a paradoxical source of pride: an element of an identity internally colonised through capture and enslavement that seeks recognition by reframing trauma as virtue.

A salient feature of Dezrobiți's memory is its isolation. Villagers believe that their community was the only one enslaved because of their village's name. They do not perceive themselves as part of an imagined Romani community in the sense of Benedict Anderson (1991). Instead, they imagine their community alongside Romanians: school classmates, fellow villagers, and fellow Orthodox believers. Their historical memory is shaped by Romania's national curriculum, which omits any reference to slavery.

So, how will Dezrobiți come to terms with its past? How can its inhabitants reconcile the shame of being Roma with the impossibility of fully passing as Romanian? Ron Eyerman's analysis of African-American identity provides a revealing contrast. For African-Americans, the memory of slavery became central to identity formation through collective memory and the persistence of segregation rather than through direct experience (Eyerman in Alexander et al. 2004). In Romania, by contrast, the memory of slavery was largely erased after abolition. Political regimes promoted integration, aiming to "transform Roma into Romanians", except during the Holocaust period. It is only with the recent emergence of Romani political representation in the last few decades that slavery has begun to resurface as a component of ethnic identity. For the people of Dezrobiți, however, slavery remains a muted trauma, reinterpreted through poverty, silence, and self-rejection. Their identity is not based on the memory of slavery as a shared cultural wound but on the erasure of that memory and the desire to belong to the Romanian nation. It is precisely this erasure, this refusal to remember, that constitutes their cultural trauma.

Conclusions

Methodologically, the article developed and tested an approach capable of uncovering the traces of Romani slavery that persist beyond explicit narratives – within local spaces, institutional continuities, and everyday social relations. This aim was achieved by combining ethnographic sensitivity with cultural-sociological interpretation, reading oikonyms, spatial morphology, and lived experience as mnemonic markers of historical trauma.

Through this integrative methodological framework, this article demonstrates that the memory of slavery does not reside solely in what people recall verbally but also in the material, symbolic, and relational structures that shape their worlds. In this sense, the research fulfils its methodological goal of extending the study of collective memory beyond oral history and written archives, toward a more holistic understanding of how trauma and identity are inscribed in space and transmitted through silence, continuity, and belonging.

"Dezrobiți" has two meanings: on the one hand, it suggests reconciliation with the past, but on the other, it symbolises the colonial past, reminding us of the enslaved Roma of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery and their descendants. As slavery was never acknowledged or accepted publicly by subsequent political regimes following its abolition, the potential for reconciliation inherent in the oikonym was never realised. Instead, over the course of more than a century and a half, its colonial legacy has grown to become a potent symbol of entrenched social hierarchy.

This hierarchy is reproduced through spatial morphology. A series of elements that were once part of nineteenth-century public memory were never fully "translated" into the present, yet they continue to shape local identity. These include the oikonym Dezrobiți; the inclusion of slavery in the official presentation of the commune on the Francești City Hall website; the Archdiocese of Râmnic's continued use of the old parish name, Mănăstireni; the monastery's monograph listing Romani slaves as part of its patrimony; the half-hectare land allotments granted in 1864; uninterrupted monastic life at Dintr-un Lemn; and ongoing labour relations linking Romani villagers to the monastery.

My fieldwork shows that trauma is hidden in local culture and reconfigured as a strategy of coexistence between Roma and Romanians, structured by a durable principle of hierarchy. The discourse of recovering the memory of slavery is not confined to contemporary Romani activism. Even in the interwar period, Romani elites attempted to establish this kind of identity discourse. However, this effort remains distant from communities such as Dezrobiți, whose identity has been shaped by mnemonics that testify to an inferior, racialized status rather than collective resistance.

At the local level, terms such as "rob" (slave) and "țigan" are not perceived as symbols of historical oppression but as indicators of poverty. Identity is defined more by social factors than cultural ones. The Romani language is rejected and associated with crime, a stigma reinforced by memories of the deportation of Roma to Transnistria.

These mnemonics serve as ongoing reminders of an unreconciled past. They sustain relations of dependency, reinforce self-hatred, and perpetuate cultural trauma within the racialized boundary that separates the Romani community from the Romanian majority.

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Foreword to Nicolae Gheorghe's Article: *The Romani People: From Enslaved People to Citizens*

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Nicoleta Bițu is a pioneering voice in Romani feminism and Roma rights, with over 35 years of activism in Europe. She has shaped Romani feminist discourse by linking gender, ethnicity, and social justice. She co-founded Romani CRISS, a Roma-led organisation that was the leader in defending Roma rights for 30 years. She served as an expert and consultant for the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Open Society Foundations. She was a key figure in establishing ERIAC, where she later served on the board. Additionally, she was chair and academic adviser for RomArchive.

Nicoleta Bițu's constant actions, like a silver lining, have been mentoring new generations of Romani activists, both women and men, as well as maintaining a lasting connection with the realities of her people from local Romani communities. Nicoleta Bitu was Nicolae Gheorghe's life partner and supported him in his intellectual work and activism from 1991 until his passing in 2013.

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The text by Nico (Nicolae Gheorghe) predates the year it was published. I first read it in the 1990s as a typewritten manuscript before we transcribed it to a computer. At the time, I knew little about the enslavement of Roma, so this text provided not only information but also a unique perspective – one that was difficult to find elsewhere. Even now, rereading, I discover new layers I did not grasp the first time.

Nico was deeply preoccupied with the fate of Romani people and was one of a few intellectuals who connected the realities of Romani life with our history. One of the key aspects of his work was deconstructing the myth that we, Roma, were already "slaves" upon arriving in Moldavia and that we remained enslaved because we were incapable of living freely. This text serves as proof of that deconstruction. Those of us who had the privilege of working with him understood this deeply.

For Nico, the history of slavery was essential to understanding not only the collective mindset of Roma but also the historical evolution of relationships between Roma and non-Roma in what is now Romania.

At one point in the text, he highlights how enslaved Romani people resisted oppression – primarily through escape. This theme recurs in his work, challenging the idea that Roma were passive victims who simply accepted their fate. Instead, he presents a history of the resilience of a people who opposed and fought against their oppression.

He also draws a clear connection between the term *țigan* and the legal status of enslaved Roma, an argument he later reiterated in 1997 when we had to fight for the recognition of the name *Roma* as the Romanian government issued an internal decision on the matter.

For Nico, achieving full and equal citizenship for Roma was a lifelong mission, and this text is one of the earliest pieces that clearly reflects his dedication to that cause. Although it is a study on Romani slavery, it also reveals – between the lines – the motivations behind his choices in the Romani movement.

Ultimately, the history of slavery in Romanian territories is not just about Roma; it is also about reconciliation within the Romanian nation. Unfortunately, recovering and honouring the histories of our ancestors has not been a priority for the Romani movement. We have had to focus on daily struggles and, in the early 1990s, on a series of violent attacks. However, reclaiming our history is crucial to ensure that the world does not forget the injustices of the past.

From my perspective, the abolition of Romani slavery was not driven by love or compassion for Roma. Perhaps some Romanian intellectuals, having studied in Paris, were more humanistic than others. But in reality, the abolition primarily was motivated by a desire to advance Romanian society and align with the direction that Western European countries were heading.

One piece of evidence lies in historical records that show compensation was paid to the *boieri* (noble landowners) for the loss of Romani people they kept as slaves.

The true celebration of emancipation will come when the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Presidency, the Romanian Government, and the Romanian people commemorate this history alongside us. It should

be a shared Romanian–Romani celebration, not just a Romani one. Until that day, each year, I remind myself and others that, despite our limited resources – material, energy, and time – we have achieved much and will continue to do so.

Moreover, in today's political climate, this historical act should serve as an example for current politicians. As in so many areas of Romani mobilisation, we owe the beginning of this critical discourse to Nico – and the path he paved for us to follow.

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The Romani People: From Enslaved People to Citizens

Nicolae Gheorghe

Sociologist

Nicolae Gheorghe was a foundational figure of modern Romani activism and a leading intellectual in the field of Roma rights. A sociologist by training, he founded Romani CRISS and shaped key national and European Romani mobilisations and policies. He advanced critical frameworks on ethnicity, citizenship, and minority rights, and played a central role in building pan-European Romani networks and engaging institutions such as the United Nations, Council of Europe or Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – where he served as Senior Advisor.

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Abstract

This is an edited excerpt of an earlier published text: Nicolae Gheorghe. 2006. *Roma People: From Enslaved People to Citizens.* Bucharest: Amare Rromentza Rroma Centre. Translated from Romanian to English by Noémi Fazakas.

An essay on the beginnings of civic discourse regarding Romani people in Romanian Principalities and on the significance of abolishing Romani enslavement in the international context of the "European integration" of Romanian Principalities in the mid-nineteenth century.

Keywords

- Abolition
- Citizenship
- Reforms
- Revolution
- Slavery

1. The Institution of Slavery of Romani People

In December 1855 and February 1856, the administrative authorities of Moldavia and Wallachia, commonly called the Romanian Principalities, proclaimed the total abolition of Romani slavery in these countries. The historical significance of these events is not limited to Romani people living in Romania but also to Romani speakers of the so-called "Vlah" dialect of Romanian residing in Central and Western Europe, as well as in the Americas, whose ancestors emigrated from the territory of present-day Romania after the abolition of slavery. That is why, for example, in March 1982, the International Romani Centre in Paris, or now, in February 2006, the Romani associations of France have and will organise celebrations to mark the emancipation of Roma from enslavement.

The abolition of Romani enslavement was long and challenging. One of the first moments of this struggle was marked by the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia (*Ţara Românească*). Among the reforms initiated by the revolution was a proclamation on the liberation of Roma owned by private individuals, the boyars (*boier*): so-called "*ţigani boiereşti*" (boyar-owned Gypsies, boyar Gypsies). When the revolution in Wallachia failed, emancipated Roma returned to their former masters. Nonetheless, their courageous fight to defend their freedom from slavery influenced later political events: in the end, slavery was abolished, and Roma were given full rights as citizens. The massive participation of Roma in the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia was one of their most notable political manifestations in European countries. Any commemoration of the European revolutions of 1848 must also remember the mass uprising of Romani people against their subordinate status during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia.

All of these commemorations are a call for today's Roma to draw public attention to the events of Romani enslavement and their history in general. We must see this as part of our duty to "collect for ourselves" fragments of our history from all the larger and smaller communities of a Romani nation scattered around the world.

This essay is an attempt to address the controversial and still unexplored issue of the origins and causes of Romani enslavement in the Romanian Principalities.

I must begin by clarifying that in this text, the term "Romanian State" refers to a political entity formed by the union of historical and geographical provinces that, for a very long time, had been autonomous political entities, namely Wallachia (Ţara Românească), historical Moldavia, including Bessarabia and Bucovina, Transylvania, and Dobrogea.

The presence of Roma was registered early in all of these provinces: in 1385 in Wallachia, in 1402 in Moldavia, and in 1417 in Transylvania. However, Roma had different statuses and destinies as political and economic circumstances differed in these regions. In Transylvania, Roma were "free people" from a legal point of view. But Romani people who came to Wallachia and Moldavia fell into a form of economic and legal dependence that gradually hardened into a socio-legal institution of slavery that only ended in the mid-nineteenth century. What was the cause of slavery in these regions?

A Summary of the Migration of Roma Who Were Enslaved by the Romanian Principalities

The mere juxtaposition of the words "slavery" and "Roma" may seem paradoxical, if not impossible, given that slavery denotes the worst form of dependency between two people and the binding of someone to a given place. Romani people and their way of life are perceived as powerful symbols of nomadic life and freedom, and also as symbols of a people who are bound only by freely accepted rules and who follow the customs of their community. One peculiar historical characteristic of Romani communities settled within the borders of the Romanian Principalities is their experience of more than three hundred years of *slavery*, a legal and social condition equivalent to modern forms of *slavery* in other parts of the world.

The enslavement of Roma within the Romanian Principalities was a unique experience in the overall history of Romani people. Although Roma held low social positions in many other countries, only the Romanian Principalities assigned them collectively and hereditarily to a caste-like social category called slavery. Legally, this status was interpreted as a particular form of personal dependence on an owner who was formally vested with full rights (apart from the right to kill them without being punished) over the persons, families, and property of their Romani slaves or "*țigani*" (Gypsies).

If this type of slavery was unique to the history of Romani people, we need to explore the origins of this institution: why did the Romani people fall into slavery, and why did this happen only in the Romanian Principalities?

The answers can be found in the concrete historical circumstances of Romani migration to Romanian territories as well as in the cultural, economic, and political characteristics of these territories and their subsequent development. Nevertheless, different authors have approached these issues in many ways based on the information available on the history of Roma and according to their ideological attitudes and positions towards Romani people and their culture.

Some theories argue that the Romanian Principalities, especially Moldavia, were "gateways" for Roma to enter Europe, as Roma allegedly arrived on the heels of Tatar armies that invaded Eastern Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is believed that Tatars already had enslaved the ancestors of Roma. Once defeated, Tatar leaders may have left their slaves/bondmen on the battlefield, especially on Moldavian territory, which was closer to Tatar camps in the Crimea. Following this thread, it is assumed that enslaved Roma were transferred from their former masters to their new ones, landowners or *boyars*, who were therefore "authorised" to enslave Roma, as they were considered "spoils of war".

Various variants of this theory are common to Romanian historiography as an explanation of certain historical realities, such as:

- the early presence of Romani people on Romanian territory, which began at the end of the thirteenth century,

- their large number in these lands,
- their supposed slave/bondman status in the earliest recorded accounts about them, and
- the fact that in Moldavia, both Roma and "tătari" (Tatars) are mentioned as "bondmen" in some historical documents.

A few historians have added new arguments to the above theory, arguing that Roma always have been slaves. According to this theory, even in medieval Indian languages, Roma were referred to as members of lower castes and *pariahs* and, therefore, not respected by their contemporaries. Therefore, "Roma were born into slavery", and their status as bondmen/slaves in Romanian society was to their "benefit", as they were accepted as such by their masters and others and had a recognised economic and social value. Such an argument is not only historically incorrect but also racially and ethnically biased because it attempts to explain the practical institution of Romani enslavement in feudal Romanian society as the result of a timeless, ahistorical social inferiority. The explanation of a historical and cultural fact within particular circumstances is made through a presumed inability of Roma to be free, an "innate" and inherited inability of the Romani population.

Recent research on the origins of Roma and their migration from India helps us to critically evaluate and reject such arguments based on prejudice and preconceptions. There are strong arguments that identify Roma as descendants of *all* Indian castes and sub-castes from the time of their historical migration to Central Asia and then to Europe, including merchant and warrior caste populations of India in the ninth and tenth centuries. These facts also shed new light on the controversial issue of Romani servitude in the Romanian Principalities.

In my opinion, the ancestors of Roma were free people. They were part of a complex and socially sophisticated organisation and a culture whose legitimate presence lies in the richness and unity of Romani language and the diversity of their customs, combined with a strong sense of belonging to the same people, despite the time and space that now separate Romani communities scattered throughout the world. It also is consistently argued that the ancestors of Roma emigrated from their Indian homeland precisely to avoid their humiliating status as "prisoners of war and slaves" after Mahmud Ghaznavi's repeated invasions of northern India. It is now accepted that most Romani migration followed a route through Central Asia to Byzantium and then to the Balkan territories. From there, they fanned out in successive waves, starting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to eastern, central, and western Europe in search of economic opportunities and better administrative treatment.

The Romanian Principalities were among the first areas where groups of migrating Roma settled. Therefore, they have been present and recorded on Romanian territory since the twelfth century, as presumed. As the first wave of Roma crossing the Danube to the Romanian Principalities continued, their numbers in the region increased significantly. Another wave later followed this initial spontaneous migration: during numerous wars in territories south of the Danube, Romanian princes or *voivods* often captured large numbers of Roma from the Balkans and brought them to the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. According to one document, 11,000 to 12,000 people were taken forcibly from Bulgaria to Wallachia without baggage or animals, and they looked like "Egyptians": it is assumed that these people were Roma.

Another document records that Moldavian prince Stephen the Great, after emerging victorious from a war with his neighbours in Wallachia (1471), transported more than 17,000 Roma or "ţigani" (Gypsies) to Moldavia to use their labour. These figures may be exaggerated, but they show the high economic value associated with "Gypsies".

Thus, while it is possible that some Roma in Moldavia arrived as a result of a Crimean branch of Romani migration, possibly following trade routes opened up by Tatar armies, historical evidence suggests that the vast majority of Roma migrated to Romanian territories from regions south of the Danube, as did other groups of Roma who migrated to central and western Europe. Like their relatives who travelled to various European countries, Roma, who arrived in the Romanian Principalities in the second half of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, were free people and remained free for a long time before being enslaved. One piece of evidence supporting this claim is the fact that there was a small but constant number of free Roma throughout the medieval history of the Romanian Principalities, reminding both their enslaved counterparts and today's impartial experts of the original free status of Roma who became enslaved much later. Assuming that Roma came to Europe following the Tatars (whose slaves they already would have been), one wonders why they were not slaves/bondmen in the other Eastern and Central European countries, which were also invaded by Tatars and also had the habit of treating "prisoners of war" as slaves. However, if Roma came to the Romanian Principalities as free people, why did they become slaves? Why are "ţiganii" (Gypsies) recorded as slaves in the first documents mentioning their presence in the Romanian Principalities?

Romani Enslavement – Integral to the Romanian Principalities in the Medieval Period

In my opinion, the root cause of the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities neither lies in the dangers of their migration to Romanian territories nor lies in their "inferior" ethnic characteristics, as mentioned and argued in theories based on prejudice.

On the contrary, the dependent and later enslaved status of Roma in these lands is linked to the power structure and class formation processes in medieval Romanian society, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to present the whole process in its entirety. As a general theoretical framework, I can mention the theory of social historians (mainly Henri H. Stahl) who studied the controversies surrounding landless peasants and those "fallen" into serfdom at the beginning of modernity in the Romanian Principalities. According to this theory, "landed" peasants originally lived as free men with collective ownership (*devălmășie*) of the land of their villages. Growing fiscal exploitation by a group of *boyars*, collectively represented by a local prince, gradually led to them being "tied to the land" as serfs, being dispossessed of their land, and placed in an increasing economic and legal dependence on the owner, who thus became rich through abuse.

Over time, local voivodes, especially in Wallachia, gave particular landlords and monasteries the right to collect tax from villages. The boyars and the monasteries fought to gradually transform

this right into a right over land and, later, over people who were initially free. As a result, a class of landless and dependent peasants emerged in the Romanian Principalities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This local process was part of a wider movement throughout Eastern Europe where peasantry underwent what has been called a "second serfdom", culminating in the severe exploitation of peasant labour through a system of forced labour and later drudgery, both of which were a form of semi-slavery (economist and sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein called this type of exploitation "coerced cash-crop labour").

Land rights were not only the basic condition of social and legal freedom but also the basis of "citizenship" as the source and guarantee of rights in relation to the political entities that existed at the time. In the Romanian Principalities, being "*pământean*" (landed) or "native" meant owning a piece of land. The newcomers to Romanian territories, so-called "*venetici*" (foreigners or aliens), were denied access to the right to own land so that, like "aliens", they became legally dependent on a local prince, a relationship that materialised in the payment of special taxes to him. These taxes paid by aliens corresponded to the collective tribute paid by villages as an expression of their "landed" status. The voivode was considered the rightful owner of the entire territory of the Romanian Principalities. Similarly, the same prince was considered the nominal "owner" of the aliens settled in his country, who were then treated as part of the prince's "property".

Without diving into a complete social history of the Romanian Principalities, it must be added that the exploitation of the peasantry and the specific forms that the "second serfdom" took in these countries were much harsher than in other regions of Eastern Europe. These facts were related to the unique social organisation of the Romanian Principalities and their external dependence on the Ottoman Empire and, later (in the first half of the nineteenth century), on the "protector" Tsarist Empire.

All these general characteristics of the Romanian Principalities had specific consequences for the social circumstances and administrative treatment of Romani immigrants in Romanian territories. We can now see that Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities was part of the general class structure of Romanian feudal society. Their status as bondmen was added to that of Romanian serfs, and together they formed the lowest stratum of a feudal social hierarchy. There were differences between the serfdom of Romanian peasantry and the servitude or "țigania" (Gypsydom) of Roma. Still, essentially both social categories were part of the same system of a "second serfdom". The intensity of their exploitation and their administrative treatment were similar to the extent that certain Romani groups (who were formally, legally, and fiscally bondmen) had better working and living conditions than certain groups of Romanian serfs and were somewhat "freer" in terms of a possibility for residential mobility.

During the campaign for the abolition of Romani servitude in the mid-nineteenth century, a famous Romanian poet and publicist evoked "[...] the feeling of brotherhood that moved the descendants of the Indian Shudras and those of the Roman Emperor Trajan's colonists: they supported each other, and together they bore the hardships of this land, and together they carried on their shoulders the burden of boyar feudalism". But if Romani slavery was only a variant of the generalised servitude relations in the Romanian Principalities, why were *only* Roma in the position of bondmen, and why

was being a "Gypsy" equivalent to the legal status of a bondman? What role did their ethnicity play in their enslavement?

A 'Scenario' of the Fall of Roma into Slavery in the Romanian Principalities

The subjugation of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was not an isolated, formal event on record as a "historical document". Instead, it was a process that ran parallel to the transformation of Romanian peasants, the "landed" ones, from free men to serfs tied to the land. Considering the above details about Romani migration to Europe and the social structure in medieval Romania, we can now "reconstruct" the main directions of the process of Romani servitude in the Romanian Principalities.

Driven by westward migration from the Balkans to regions north of the Danube and Central Europe, groups of Romani migrants arrived in the territories of Wallachia and later Moldavia and Transylvania. They were attracted by flourishing thirteenth- to sixteenth-century economies of the political entities that were emerging in the territories of present-day Romania. During this period, strong trade linked these areas with the Mediterranean (to the west) and the Near and Far East. Nomadic Romani groups enjoyed good conditions for practicing crafts such as metalworking, woodworking, and so on, or for trading in livestock (as the first records about Roma in Moldavia show). These economic opportunities explain why many Roma preferred to limit their nomadism to Romanian territories and why other spontaneous migrations to these territories continued between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In addition to such good economic conditions, Romani migrants were treated well from an administrative point of view, as their skills were needed, and the laws were favourable during this early period of Romanian feudalism. Like all other aliens settling on Romanian soil, Romani migrants had to pay an annual tribute (taxes) to local princes and accept the protection offered by the princes and boyars, mainly a military class at that time. As a result, nomadic Romani groups became fiscally dependent on the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, who represented the public authority of the time. But this was a limited form of dependence in return for a clear set of taxes: money, gold, labour, and goods. Romani groups had a considerable degree of freedom per the customs and norms (customary law) of the time. They were free to keep their trades and to move around the country to practice them. They also maintained their customs and traditions, their community life, and their leaders. This worked as a loose "contract" between Romanian princes and Romani leaders, a mutually beneficial agreement. This situation is historically documented by the treatment of so-called "*țigani domnești*" (craftsmen and commercial dealers); Roma, who were the property of the prince and later (in the eighteenth century) of the state, were the most numerous and kept their rights and privileges until the mid-nineteenth century, when the legal institution of servitude was abolished. Roma belonging to these groups remained nomads until after the Second World War, when they settled under the pressure of administrative measures initiated by the postwar Romanian state. To this day, they preserve the customs and rules of social organisation that are very different from those of the majority, reminding us of the specific way of life of the Romani groups from past centuries that arrived on Romanian territory.

Their customs, and in particular the Romani language they speak, are similar to those of Romani groups settled in other countries where slavery did not exist as an extreme form of dependency.

The situation referred to as "slavery" in the case of groups of Roma belonging to a prince was, I repeat, represented only by an administrative and fiscal dependency; it involved little (if any) of the humiliating personal dependency evoked and documented as "slavery".

Moreover, the daily life of Roma was in some respects better than that of Romanian peasants living in the same area because the latter were tied to the land and heavily exploited. At the same time, nomadic Roma were free to move around the country and were well paid for their crafts. It was Roma who belonged to two other categories of landowners – boyars and monasteries – who really lived in "slavery".

As I have already mentioned, it was a rule and custom in these countries for the voivode to bequeath goods, land, and livestock, among others, to Orthodox monasteries and nobles and to exercise his right to collect taxes from villages of free peasants (who later also fell into "serfdom" and were tied to the land). As part of the prince's property (because they were aliens in the Romanian Principalities), Romani families and groups (referred to as "*șatre*" and "*sălașe*" in documents of the era) also were given to monasteries and nobility as slaves to provide labour and craftsmanship needed in the agricultural economy. Thus, the first records about Roma in the Romanian Principalities appear in such deeds, the legal content and purpose of which underlined the subordinate and dependent position of Romani groups. But in the case of Roma (as in the case of villages donated with all their peasants), what the princes gave to the monasteries and landlords was not the right to ownership (in the modern sense of the word) of the people but the right of monasteries or landlords to collect taxes (in labour, money, and produce), which Roma were obliged to pay to the voivodeship. What was transferred from the voivode to private owners was **the relationship of dependence**, which was limited and included elements of freedom as well as certain rights.

In my opinion, the earliest records about Roma in the Romanian Principalities tell us that in the fourteenth century Roma were in a position of dependence (seemingly "normal" in the social organisation of that period) but not necessarily in a position of "slavery" (in the sense of modern slavery), as some of the theories mentioned in the first chapter of this essay claim.

Things changed considerably in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when nobility (boyars) and monasteries attempted to convert their rights over donated goods and privileges into personal property rights. This process took place when the technological development of domestic agriculture was low, and the demand for labour constantly was threatened by demographic fluctuations due to numerous wars waged by the Romanian Principalities and the individual attempts of local peasants to escape from various landowners. In this context, Romani groups offered the emerging feudal landlords the prospect of a steady, cheap, and skilled labour force. Romani people were numerous, and they were among the few skilled in metalworking and woodworking in villages and feudal domains.

The monasteries and boyars obtained from the voivode the right to transform the right to collect taxes from Roma, which guaranteed their freedom, into the right to restrict their freedom through these

taxes. Monasteries and landlords paid the taxes for Roma who settled on their estates. In return, they demanded increasingly more work and services from them. Over time, an initially limited and contractual dependence on feudal landlords was transformed into an unlimited and hereditary dependence; they also managed to subordinate some of the initially free peasant "*devălmaş*" villages (with collective ownership) in a similar way. As Roma were given to these owners along with property, including land, animals, and so forth, Romani individuals began to be seen as economic assets and legally treated as "objects" rather than persons. Since Roma were considered the "personal property" of boyars, the latter felt entitled to use them to the point of abuse, to exercise almost total control over their persons and property, apart from a formal right to kill them with impunity (although such cases were recorded). Mostly treated as objects, Roma were bought, sold, and passed on as inheritance and dowry. In some cases, the owners exchanged Roma for other goods, such as horses and cattle, houses and gardens, household tools, and so on. As the power and rights of the owners over their Romani servants increased, their situation worsened, almost reaching the status and treatment of what we now call servitude, that is, slavery, as a legal concept and as a social institution.

The process of enslaving Roma began in the sixteenth century and reached its peak in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time, the terms "*rob*" (slave) and "*ţigan*" (Gypsy) became synonymous, and they were used to refer to Roma and their subordinate social status. This was the period when the Romanian Principalities entered the European capitalist grain and cattle markets, a period when large landowners were concerned with providing a large labour force necessary for an agricultural sector that was no longer geared to subsistence but to incipient forms of modern market economy. During this period, indigenous peasants who were in relationships of "*şerbie*" (serfdom) experienced a deterioration in their status, becoming increasingly dependent on the landowners, to the point of being treated as "slaves" in some cases. Villages of dependent Romanian peasants also were subject to exchange, purchase, and sale. Peasants were collectively or jointly bound to **the land of their "estate"** (that is, their inheritance, handed down genealogically), and it was therefore impossible for an owner to separate peasants and their families from the land they worked. In contrast, Romani groups (individuals and families) were tied to the **person** who owned the property. This is another fact that explains why the bondage that Romani groups were subjected to was much more severe and gradually came very close to slavery.

However, different categories or occupational groups of Roma were affected by this process of gradual enslavement to varying degrees. For example, "*ţigani domneşti*", that is, Roma listed in the tax register of princes, were much freer than the "*ţiganii mănăstireşti*" (monastery Gypsies) or the "*ţiganii boiereşti*" (boyar Gypsies). The "monastery Gypsies" were also treated worse and exploited more than the "*boyar Gypsies*" because the monasteries had fewer local peasants to work their fields. Among the "*boyar Gypsies*" who worked in agriculture, the so-called "*ţiganii de câmp*" (field Gypsies) had a more challenging life than the "*ţiganii de curte*" (court Gypsies or Gypsies of the ruler), those Roma who carried out various tasks related to the households and daily lives of landlords. The latter category included a large number of craftsmen, who generally were treated more favourably. Many Roma lived in urban areas and, therefore, had easier access to urban resources than those living in rural areas. Many Romani groups were forced to settle, although most of them retained their nomadic lifestyle, especially "*ţiganii domneşti*" (Gypsies of the prince). All these differences significantly impacted the

social and cultural dynamics of different Romani groups. What is unusual about the history of Roma in the Romanian Principalities is that, despite such harsh living conditions, they managed to preserve, reproduce, and enrich their cultural heritage and distinct identity. As a result, many Roma in Romania today, descendants of former bondmen, have distinct cultural customs, community lives, and a strong sense of Romani identity. Of course, there are differences between groups regarding distinct cultural practices and the degree to which they identify as Roma, and some differences may be attributed to their ancestors' experiences as Roma.

Let us pause to summarise some of the conclusions of the arguments presented so far. Contrary to particular theories about the origins of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities, I believe that Romani groups arrived early in the history of the Romanian Principalities through spontaneous migration as itinerant craftsmen and traders. When they arrived in these lands, they were free people, and they kept their status as free people, or a status of limited dependence, for almost two centuries. Their "fall into slavery" was a gradual process of slow transformation of an initially limited fiscal dependence of Roma on Romanian princes into unlimited personal dependence on large landowners, monasteries, and boyars. Formally speaking, the whole process of enslaving the Roma was **abuse** on the part of landowners, without any legal basis or authorisation; a repeated practice, a constantly reinforced abuse, which slowly became a "*de facto*" situation, a kind of "custom of the land". Much later, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, this custom was "written" and transcribed in the "*Codul Robiei*" (Code of Slavery), represented in legal codes issued by Phanariot rulers, in particular Mavrocordatos, Caradja, Callimachi, and partially reproduced in the Organic Regulations (*Regulamentele organice*), the interpretation of which depended on the owners' interests.

The causes of the enslavement of Roma lie in their position as an alien, "venetic" group entering an agrarian society based on the right of free ownership of land, exercised by the "*pământeni*" (landed or landowners), the economic basis of what later became "citizenship" in the modern Romanian state. Mediated access to land ownership through the (actual or fictitious) genealogical community of the collective village ("*satul devălmaş*") prevented Roma, like other aliens, from owning their own land, a condition for freedom and the right to full "citizenship" and civil rights in both incipient or mature forms of statehood of the Romanian Principalities.

These facts, specific to the social organisation of the Romanian territories, were combined with resources generated by the specific skills and occupations of Roma – metalworking, woodworking, gold panning, physical labour – resources that were highly valuable in a society with an underdeveloped agriculture sector. A solution to preserving Romani people's skills and labour, increasingly needed as Romania's agrarian economy moved towards a market economy, was to keep Roma in personal dependencies that gradually developed into servitude. In Romanian society of the Middle Ages, a social division of labour interfered with an ethnic division of labour, status, and privileges. In such a society, the cultural and ethnic characteristics of Roma became the sources of their economic role and, later, of their socio-legal status of subordination. Their derogatory ethnic name *ţigan* – borrowed from the areas south of the Danube in the form of "aţ*ngani" – acquired the social meaning of slave, a subordinate category lower in the social hierarchy. Something similar

was true of the local serfs, whose ethnic name "*rumân*" in Wallachia referred to dependent, landless peasants, while the landowning class, belonging to the same ethnic group, identified with a foreign political elite, Turks, or their cosmopolitan officials, Greeks. Later, "*rumân*" was transformed into the ethnic-national appellative "român" (Romanian), with its derivatives.

Following the flow of the above arguments, it is easier to understand that the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was a rather exceptional phenomenon, considering the history of Roma in other countries, but it was more or less "normal" given the cultural, economic, and political circumstances of the Romanian Principalities, where various forms of personal and social dependence based on existing social categories were the rule. Moreover, the political dependence of the Romanian Principalities on the Ottoman Empire, and later the Empire of Tsarist Russia, explains, among other things, the maintenance of feudal social structures in these countries – including the enslavement of Roma – until the mid-nineteenth century.

Apart from these particular and unique circumstances, the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities seems to be only one chapter in a long history of suffering and discrimination against Romani people throughout their history in modern Europe. Romani groups in other European countries were not bought and sold like their relatives in the Romanian Principalities but were subjected to ethnic prejudice and discrimination, harassment, expulsion, cruel punishment, and even collective extermination. The "pillars" of medieval Europe – the Catholic Church, guilds, and feudal aristocracy – feared and despised Roma and pursued a permanent policy of isolation and marginalisation in various countries. The "enlightenment" programs for the forced "civilisation" of Roma, conceived and implemented by the likes of Maria Theresa or Joseph II, by Charles V or Catherine the Great, had the same effects as forced sedentarisation with the enslavement of massive groups of Roma in the Romanian Principalities.

As we have pointed out, while Roma were enslaved because their skills and labour were needed in the economically and technologically underdeveloped Romanian Principalities, other Romani groups were marginalised and stigmatised as "vagabonds", "nomads", and "parasites" in Western European countries precisely because their skills and labour were not required in the more technologically advanced and already capitalist-oriented Western societies and economies.

In a broader comparative context, however, the institution of slavery was not unique to the Romanian Principalities. Slavery flourished in the late Byzantine Empire until the end of the thirteenth century. The Ottomans had a thriving slave trade until the end of the nineteenth century. A similar slave trade on the Black Sea and Mediterranean was carried out by Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish cities with slaves from Eastern Europe, preserving a living European "tradition" that later exploded in the form of the transoceanic trade of African slaves to the Americas. Moreover, Russia's peasantry faced a situation similar to slavery until about 1865.

Given all these facts, it is not surprising that Romani migrants became subordinates in the Romanian Principalities, which inherited many of the institutions of Byzantine and neighbouring countries. Far from "inheriting" the bondage of their past Indian history, Romani migrants in Eastern Europe,

between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, fell into a pattern of "pure" European extraction, of labour recruitment through forced enslavement (let us not forget that there were also forms of voluntary enslavement, by contract, as Adalbert Gebora shows in his work "Robia in Transilvania"), and through cultural discrimination, pre-existing institutions such as social practices and legal institutions, in relation to the economic migration of Roma.

The enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and their subordinate status in other Eastern European countries were only variants of a generalised system of "forced cash labour" and "second serfdom" specific to these and other regions of the world that were incorporated as "peripheral" economies and societies into the expanding "capitalist world system" (Immanuel Wallerstein).

Seen as such, Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities appears as another chapter in a lengthy history of oppression and enslavement, from a "classical" era to a "modern slavery" as practiced in the Americas and West Indies. The emancipation of Roma from slavery in the nineteenth century is also seen as part of a broader international movement for the abolition of slavery. This movement changed the lives and history of millions of people worldwide and paved the way for their future struggles for ethnic affirmation and civil rights.

Such comparative analyses are beneficial in order to discover and expose the similarities between the history of Roma and other peoples in a world that has also changed from various statuses of personal dependence embedded in hierarchies specific to a feudal world or to American capitalism – including different forms of servitude/slavery – to the status of citizenship and equal access to rights specific to the modern world, in particular to today's world (at least in the sphere of ideology).

Today's Romanian Roma have developed a particular kind of social mobility while retaining their distinctive cultural elements and ethnic consciousness. A lesson learned from their enslaved ancestors was one of constant resistance to any form of abuse, discrimination, or subordination. Descendants of former slaves have now joined the international Romani movement to affirm their own culture, Romani language, and equal access to civil rights in a world that continues to reproduce elements of social subordination and cultural discrimination inherited from multiple local social histories based on group dependencies and hierarchies.

2. 'Abolitionist' Ideas of the 1848 Generation

The enslavement of Roma, which lasted for almost five centuries as a legal and social relationship, deeply penetrated the feudal social order of the two principalities, their economic relations and their administrative and legal structures, daily life, and the mentality of slave owners, Roma themselves (as "ţigani"), and other social categories.

Closely linked to more general problems of feudal society and the privileges of the owners of land, serfs, and "ţigani" (Gypsies), the slavery of Roma was hard to eradicate all at once. For this reason, the abolition of servitude took on the character of an arduous political process consisting of a series of events and

actions directly or indirectly related to slavery. This process unfolded gradually, sinuously, over more than three decades, in line with the political turmoil, social contradictions, and general changes to Romanian society in the Romanian Principalities during this period.

In February 1856, General Divan of Wallachia passed a law declaring that "slavery is abolished" throughout the Principality, after a similar law in Moldavia in December 1855 proclaimed in its preamble that: "Slavery is abolished forever in the Principality of Moldavia, all who tread Moldavian soil are free men."

This sanctioned the legal conclusion of a lengthy process, the critical moments of which include:

- Legal regulation of slavery through late eighteenth-century legislation and the Caragea (1817) and Calimah (1818) Codes;
- Liberation of private bondmen by some liberal landlords: Costache Conachi in Moldavia in 1826[1]; Ion Câmpineanu in Wallachia in 1834; Emanoil Bălăceanu in Wallachia, within the framework of the "Scăieni Phalanstery", organised between 1835–1836 and inspired by Theodor Diamand;
- Measures taken in Wallachia between 1833 and 1840 by the sovereign and the state administration based on provisions of the Organic Ordinance for the "colonisation" of state slaves on boyar estates as agricultural labourers and their liberation in Wallachia in 1847;
- Creation of budgetary funds in both Principalities for "redemption" and released by the State of private slaves ("boyar's Gypsies") when they were sold;
- Abolition of the institution of boyar (private owner) slaves in Wallachia during the revolution of 1848, which was reintroduced after the removal of the provisional revolutionary government by the intervention of a foreign army;
- Liberation of privately owned slaves, with compensation to their owners, by the laws of 1855 and 1856 in Moldavia and Wallachia.

Every moment of this challenging process of emancipation made it easier to define the political program of the generation that carried out the revolution of 1848, the unification of the two principalities, and the achievement of Romanian independence in 1877/78. The abolition of Romani slavery thus became part of a vast program to transform society, democratise its institutions, and modernise the mentalities and public spirit of the two principalities.

The clash of interests and the public debates surrounding the abolition of slavery provided the "progressives" with a convenient opportunity, sometimes even a simple pretext, to address more complex contemporary problems of Romanian society and to promote ideas that could not otherwise pass the strict censorship of the press, which was then carefully monitored by the "sovereign" or "protector" powers of the principalities, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia. As one voice of the time said, the abolition of the institution of slavery "[...] means that another step is taken on the path of progress, which means that the step taken will be followed by a series of similar steps towards the improvement of the social condition of our country".

1 Costache Conachi, *Istoria României*, Bucharest, Vol II, p. 307.

The idea of Romani emancipation was both an outcome, a "beneficiary" of the broader social reform agenda, and a carrier of it, sometimes pre-empting deeper reforms because it more easily achieved the public consensus, otherwise so divided by group interests.

This is why the measures to abolish the institution of slavery, whether partial, as in 1844 and 1847, or complete, as in 1855–1856, were greeted with great enthusiasm by progressive members of the political class, "reformers", and protagonists of the "transition" of the political institutions of the time. For their part, rulers of the "regulatory period", unable to act to improve the situation of the peasants bound to the land, left to the discretion of landlords by the Organic Regulations, disputed the priority of initiating one or the other of these measures. The emancipation of slaves owned by clergy and state in 1844 was considered one of the most significant acts of the era. In 1847, the ruler Gheorghe Bibescu justified the vote for a similar measure as "the opportunity to acquire one of the greatest rights of humanity and the gratitude of posterity".

The day of 28 November 1855, when the ruler of Moldavia, Grigore Ghica initiated a draft law on the liberation of private slaves, was considered "[...] a day of celebration for the homeland [...] signifying the most beautiful page in the progress of the Romanian nation", and "a day of freedom springing from the beautiful sky of Moldavia". The abolition of slavery was "[...] a proud achievement of the contemporary history of the Romanian people, which can thus glimpse its great future because it is a proud and great step towards it", and "a triumph won by the weapons of civilisation over one of the enemies of society".

The law on the abolition of slavery in Wallachia stipulated that "[...] a day of public solemnity shall be determined, on which this act of the abolition of slavery in the Principality shall be celebrated forever".

Later, by a decision of the Administrative Council of Wallachia, this day was set to 20 February because on this day, in 1856, the ruler Barbu Știrbei had passed the law for the abolition of slavery, thus giving it a definitive form.

In 1855, Mihail Kogălniceanu described the act of abolishing slavery as "[...] conviction of the heart, of logic, the most vivid desire of my existence". Later, recalling the political achievements of his generation, Kogălniceanu considered the emancipation of the slaves as one of the "three great dates in the contemporary history of Romania", together with the emancipation of the peasants, the abolition of boyar privileges, and the proclamation of political and civil freedom for all children in Romania.

This complex significance of the emancipation of Romani slaves meant that every critical moment in the process was accompanied by a broad public discussion on more general measures to be taken to change attitudes towards emancipated Roma, for their civic integration, in their new condition as free people, as citizens with equal rights with other inhabitants, with "landed" people.

The public debate was more intense in Moldavia, where it took the form of a real "press campaign" in 1855, but it was also present in Wallachia and in some Transylvanian newspapers, such as *Telegraful* and *Gazeta de Transilvania*.

The public debate on the abolition of slavery led to an expression of attitudes and dissemination of historical and economic information that, when read today, reveal a coherent vision, a "*Romanian abolitionist thought*", as an integral part of Romanian social and political idea in the first half of the nineteenth century and an important but insufficiently analysed component of the ideology of the generation of 1848.

Without following any pre-established systematic plan – but benefiting from the cumulative effect of writings by influential personalities and systematic research by renowned historians such as Mihail Kogălniceanu or Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah – social and public thought, prompted by the abolition of slavery, examined a broad range of issues related to the historical origins of the legal institution of servitude, its place and relations with other social categories within the social division of labour, and the feudal system.

The analysis of this particular institution of Romanian social and political history was part of an overall political program generated by the engagement of progressive thinkers in debates about the reform of society in the Romanian Principalities, democratisation and modernisation of its institutions, and for the affirmation and acquisition of the political autonomy of the Romanian state.

In this text, we propose to identify and analyse some of the basic motifs (ideas) behind the "public discourse" on the abolition of Romani slavery, with the following aims:

a. to help complete the picture of how Romanian ideology evolved between 1840 and 1860;
b. to illustrate a way of thinking and a particular way of "talking" about Roma;
c. to place the "discourse" in a political context that was essential for the formation of the modern Romanian state: reform of social institutions and public affirmation of the liberation of the Romanian Principalities from the domination of two great political powers, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia, and by seeking the support of other great powers, like Western European states, the support of which was sought by the animators of a projected sovereign Romanian state.

3. Romania's Public Discourse on Abolition

The idea of abolishing slavery and freeing Gypsy slaves was affirmed, defended, and argued in a polemic against the mentality and opinions of the great slave owners (the ruler as representative of the state, the monasteries, the boyars), who tried to justify the maintenance of slavery or at least the postponement of its abolition.

In this polemic, which was part of the broader struggle to reform Romanian society, intellectuals and the progressive press of the mid-nineteenth century denounced the historical, temporary nature of the institution of slavery, which until then had been considered "natural" and ever-present, because it was believed that "Gypsies were born to be slaves".

In his 1837 work on Roma/Gypsies, Mihail Kogălniceanu was still concerned with exploring the history of Roma as a people to convince European public opinion of the need to abolish slavery. In the preface to his work, he mocks the Europeans who set up philanthropic societies to abolish slavery, forgetting that "[...] in the bosom of their own continent, in Europe, there are 400,000 Gypsies who are slaves", whose customs and social situation arouse a passing curiosity, without "anyone taking the trouble to civilise this people".

Although published abroad, Kogălniceanu's work did not go unnoticed by progressive scholars and politicians in the country. In his memoirs, Costache Negruzzi, then a deputy in the Moldavian General Assembly, notes the interest that reading Kogălniceanu's book arose in the situation of Gypsy slaves, to the point of writing a speech in favour of their liberation from slavery. Information on the history of Roma in the Principalities and the historical origin of their enslavement frequently appeared in the Moldavian press in the run-up to the vote on the law for the emancipation of the Gypsies; we will reproduce some of them in the following.

3.1 Views on the Origins of the Institution of Enslavement of Roma and their Construction as 'Țigani' (Gypsies) in the Social History of the Two Principalities

A commentary in the *Gazeta de Moldova* to the *Ofisul princiar* (prince's decree) of 28 November 1855, concerning the abolition of Gypsy slavery, mentions the Indian origin of Roma and their migration around the world.

Their social situation in Moldavia as slaves is compared to the legal serfdom of local peasants, and both legal institutions, servitude and serfdom, are denounced as abuses. In Moldavia, the Roma "[...] sought shelter, security, and hospitality [...] where for this benefit they gave [sacrificed] their serfdom", a custom that "[…] deviated from decency and the Gypsies, like the Helots of the Lacedaemonians, were treated here not as people but as things".

This social condition deprived them of "the right to individual liberty and deprived them of the benefits of the teachings of religion and morality, and diverted their natural talents and abilities to acts by which they became the scorn of humanity and a public burden, even to the detriment of the owners".

The Organic Regulations of the two Principalities – with their aristocratic outlook aimed at justifying the interests of landowning and slave-owning boyars – considered slaves to be "a burden and a curse for the other inhabitants of the land". According to the authors of the regulations, the cause of the "evils" committed by the enslaved Roma, the "*țigani*" (Gypsies), was to be found in the "way of life" of some of them, the nomads, in their "fickleness" and, above all, "[...] in the fact that the departure of the Gypsies from the dogmas of our holy religion is one of the causes of their savagery and godlessness". The property relations within which the bondage of the Gypsies was possible were unquestioned, and on the contrary, they were strengthened: the Regulations recorded the obligation of the "*țigani*" slaves to be "[...] at the service of their masters", the slaves being private property.

Contrary to paternalistic-conservative solutions advocated by the Organic Regulations for the "improvement" of the fate of the Gypsies enslaved by the state, the article (quoted above) in *Gazeta de Moldova*, a newspaper representing the views of the proponents of modernisation, sought the cause of the socially disordered behaviour of the bondmen in their legal status as people who were treated as "objects", as slaves, by abusive owners. The solutions of the Organic Regulations are criticised directly: "[...] The Organic Regulations governing the fate of the Gypsies and the emancipation of these from the state and the monasteries had introduced an anomaly in their rights so that the name 'ţigan' was still synonymous with 'slave'."

It argued for the need to abolish slavery and to free privately owned Romani slaves who were the most numerous and whose emancipation raised the general problem of feudal property relations and the privileges of the nobility.

Referring to the history of Roma and their enslavement in the Romanian Principalities, historian and publicist Theodor Codreanu, editor of the newspaper *Zimbrul*, notes in a published article on the "*oriental origin*" of Roma: "[...] a people who, on arriving in Europe, found nowhere a more hospitable asylum than in the Romanian countries", but who "suddenly found themselves under the yoke of slavery, under the yoke of boyar feudalism"; for this reason, they "suffered the most avaricious persecutions". Underlining the relationship between the enslavement of Roma as "*ţigani*" and feudal social organisation, Theodor Codreanu stated: "As long as the Gypsies were serfs [that is, slaves], so long did the Romanian feudalism last in the principalities." Similarly, other articles from the same period denounced the enslavement of Gypsies as an "abusive practice" and "a sign of centuries of violence and feudal tyranny".

3.2 The Value of the Work and Economic Contribution of Romani Slaves

Presentation of the historical origin of the enslavement of their Roma – as an "abuse" on the part of the boyars, as a "deviation" from the customs and "decency" of the Romanian people – was accompanied by an emphasis on the economic contribution of the work of Roma, of "ţigani" as slaves over time in the mid-nineteenth-century press.

Roma made a significant contribution to the social history and economy of the Romanian Principalities, with variations reflecting the overall profile and development of the Principalities' economies over time. Clarifying this economic contribution was the basic argument for demanding their emancipation by the actors of political modernisation. The right of Roma to be freed from slavery was justified by the tradition of their work, which had made them "related to the Moldo-Romanians". The argument over the disenfranchisement of the "*ţigani*" (Gypsies) was also valid for the abolition of Romania's dependent peasantry, a reform that *Gazeta oficială* could only allude to, criticising feudal property relations that made Romanian peasants bondmen just as slaves "[…] condemned to serfdom, which deprived them of the freedom to choose another master of their choice".

The economic value of Gypsy slaves as cheap labour began to decline as a result of changes in agricultural practice on boyar estates, intensive use of peasant-dependent labour, and the spread of industrial activity in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This new type of agricultural exploitation was more consolidated in Moldavia than in Wallachia, a situation that influenced, among other things, owners' attitudes towards the work of Gypsy slaves and the maintenance of slavery in general. In addition, Moldavian landowners were more receptive to the idea of the abolishment of private slavery and more generous when renouncing the compensation offered by the state in the law adopted on 10 December 1855.

In this overall economic and socio-cultural context, as the value of slave labour declined – also reflected in the decline in their price in those few slave transactions that still took place – it seemed to many, especially conservative landlords, that the economic usefulness of slave labour had always been diminishing, that Gypsy slaves were being "kept" with food and clothing at the expense of landlords, causing them more harm than good. Slavery was thus presented and defended as beneficial to the "*țigani*", and there was no shortage of opinions according to which slavery was preferable for Roma compared to the "freedom" of bondmen peasants.

Arguing with such views, proponents for economic and social modernisation of the Principalities emphasised the economic usefulness of the labour that slaves provided to their masters over the centuries; through their skills as craftsmen or agricultural labourers, Roma enslaved as "*țigani*" made a significant economic contribution alongside peasants made "*rumân*" or serfs, with variations reflecting the overall profile and development of the Principalities' economies over time.

Highlighting this economic contribution was the basic argument for demanding their emancipation by the political reformist class of the time.

A commentary in *Gazeta de Moldova* in 1855 stated that slaves had earned their right to liberation "[...] by carrying the yoke for four centuries", and George Sion, in his article "Cauza sclavilor" (The cause of the slaves), published in the same year i, urged owners to renounce the compensation offered by the state for the liberation of their slaves, because "[...] through a long slavery they have redeemed ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred times their price (if the soul of a human being can still be valued)!" Similarly, Nicolae Rucăreanu, who had been involved in the emancipation of slaves in Wallachia since 1844, asked somewhat rhetorically, on behalf of the owners, "[...] how will we ever be able to do without these significant benefits" brought by the work and taxes of the "*țigan*" slaves, and he proposed some economic measures to accompany the political act of emancipation, such as:

> [...] not only should the emancipated not abandon their crafts in iron, brass, bone, etc., but even more, the owner should urge his fellows to learn from them what they do not know, to increase and improve their tools, so that when we ourselves shall be freer, I mean when we shall have power, means and money enough (for what is our power? slavery; what is our powerlessness? submission), and shall bring industry into our country, these people will be better prepared and more ready to put their progress into practice.

Slave owners were fully aware of the economic value of Romani slaves. However, the contribution of their labour varied from one owner to another, depending not only on the number of slaves but also on the master's ability to exploit their labour. For many, especially for the great boyars, "*țigan*" slaves were part of their "label" (*etichetă*): their **number** was supposed to indicate their rank or, for example, the "dowry" they gave to their sons and daughters when they married. For other landowners, especially smaller ones, the cost of keeping slaves was more significant than the **benefit** of their cheap labour; when they gave up the compensation offered by the state, they gave up a small number of slaves but admitted, as one such small boyar said, that "all his wealth consists only of these slaves". Large landowners only agreed to "halve their wealth".

A certain Nicolae Băleanu from Dâmbovița County, however, managed to make better use of the labour of Romani slaves: in 1848, when the provisional revolutionary government of Wallachia had proclaimed the liberation of slaves, Băleanu resisted the departure of a considerable number of Roma whom he had employed to work in a cloth factory in this district. They had protested against the owner, who, according to the document, "[...] now demands them to work for a wage and in no way wants to receive compensation on the pretext that they are suffering from the mistreatment they suffered in bondage."

The liberation of Romani slaves by the Moldavian state in 1844 allowed Nicolae Istrati to write "Disertație în privința țiganilor" (A dissertation on the Gypsies), published in *Gazeta de Transilvania*. The author, who was well acquainted with relations between landowners and peasants, also proved to be an expert on the customs and occupations of various Romani peoples, arguing in favour of their qualities as agricultural workers or craftsmen. He criticised the opinion of those who "[..] think that, if they touched the establishment of Gypsies of the state, any attempt would be futile" because "Gypsies" are "unaccustomed to the work of the field, [...] fickle and without inclination to work. [...] But these opinions are very wrong." To support his argument, he analyses the specific situation of the two categories of "*țigani*" formerly owned by the State: spoon-makers (*lingurari*) and bear-trainers (*ursari*). In the case of the former (spoon-maker slaves, 2,925 families with 10,051 individuals), "[...] they have been domesticated [meaning sedentary] and settled in villages for ages, they are today no different from the serfs, and therefore the Commission [for the settlement of emancipated Gypsies] will have nothing to do for them; as for the monastery Gypsies, it will only have to give them places to grow food after they have settled down, as in the case of other inhabitants, and to abolish haggling with owners, which in some places is very burdensome and oppressive."

As for the bear-training (*ursar*) Roma, their nomadic way of life is not due to their stubbornness or their unwillingness to work in the fields, since according to Nicolae Istrati, they "[...] would have settled down more easily if the bitter state of the peasants today had not disgusted and frightened them; and on the other hand, if the representatives of the districts and other state officials, looking after their own interests [taxes paid by 'Gypsies of the state'] had not made them believe that the disenfranchisement was a mask and that they would remain the slaves of the private owners where they would settle." In the case of these Roma as well, Nicolae Istrati shows that "[...] there are some hard-working and industrious ones. Some have considerable wealth ('goods', 'possessions')". The author goes on to illustrate a specific case: besides working in the fields, "each of them has two or three other crafts, which is why they have been called craftsmen since the time when our Romanian ancestors had to deal

only with weapons in order to defend their dwellings against the invasion of the barbarian tribes and to preserve a homeland for their future descendants (as an inheritance)." In view of their qualities as agricultural workers and craftsmen, Nicolae Istrati suggests that the bear-leaders should be settled by "giving them, at a reasonable price, one of those many estates of the monasteries which are said to be consecrated, where they can all settle, paying in due time the amount of money that the estate will cost", since they are "able to pay such a sum of money". The author presents a detailed economic calculation of such an undertaking, left to the administration of the freed Gypsies, and shows how feasible it would be, were it not for "[...] the obstacle that some would pretend to encounter in the settlement of these Gypsies". Such obstacles were invented by "[...] those unsatisfied spirits discontented within themselves" who "were and are enemies of every reform and declared opponents of every step that is made in civilisation and culture because they were and are guided in all their movements by the system [by the new state, by the Organic Regulations that protect their interests] and not by principle." At this point in his dissertation, the author vehemently polemicised with those "rusty spirits" who had slandered the gesture of the young Moldavians who, led by Mihail Kogălniceanu, had praised the act of the ruler Mihail Sturdza and the General Assembly of Moldavia, which had adopted a law on the emancipation of monastery Gypsies and then of those of the state; those "*rusty spirits*" had accused the young modernisers of flattery and material interests. The article concludes with a clear delineation of group and class positions in the context of political struggles in which, as we have shown, the emancipation of Romani slaves was only one part of an extensive political program. To those who had criticised the young liberals, enthusiastic about the emancipation of monastery Gypsies, to the ones who, in the clear opinion of the article's author, belonged to "a privileged class who own land, animals, and people without any conditions", Nicolae Istrati addressed a blunt formulation of the divisions and conflicts that characterised the Romanian political class at that time: "[...] you are sons of another age, of another time, of another spirit as well as of another class".

Once again, the problem of emancipating and settling nomadic Roma was not seen by reformers as a problem of correcting the "way of life" of the "ţigani ", but as a problem of criticising and changing social relations, especially those of the large boyar estates.

I have presented and quoted Nicolae Istrati's "dissertation" at length because this text shows how a reforming public consciousness of the mid-nineteenth century was concerned with the problem of the emancipation of Roma from slavery, from "Gypsydom" and with what we would now call their "social integration", in accordance with general social relations specific to the period and based on a good knowledge of the customs and occupations of each group or "*neam*" (people) of Roma and the differences among them.

Moreover, the analysis of this text reveals the nature of the "public discourse" on the place of Roma in the economy and society of the period, and how various motifs and objectives, thoughts and actions of a political group that aimed to reform Romanian society according to a liberal program were interwoven. Nicolae Istrati's study deals directly with the specific issue of the emancipation of Roma ("*ţigani*") from slavery. Still, during its argumentation, the study raises several major social concerns and reveals the intellectual repertoire of advocates for the reform of economic and social institutions and, more generally, the public spirit. These concerns included:

- bonded peasants' difficult situation ("the poor state of the peasants");
- their burdensome labour debts to the state, the "dreadful *salahorie*" (day labour) of bonded peasantry (from which emancipated Roma were to be exempt in the first years of their settlement in the villages);
- status of monasteries "dedicated" to Mount Athos and the leasehold of their lands;
- abuse of state administration officials: district representatives, and state officials who advised nomadic Roma, recently released former "*țigani domnești*" (Gypsies belonging to the state), not to settle down (sedentarise) in order not to lose their income;
- conflict between youth and "*rusty souls*", the criticism of class privileges, and the militancy of the former for civilisation and culture;
- the glorification of the struggle of our forebears to defend the homeland, alongside the criticism of those contemporaries who not only failed to *"love their country as they should"* but also "endangered" and "sacrificed" it through their intrigues and servility toward dominant foreign powers – the "protectors" of the rights of great landowners and maintainers of the system of exploitation against dependent peasants and enslaved Roma.

Thus, the "*Disertația în privința țiganilor*" (Dissertation on the Gypsies) defined a whole political program, an attitude, a state of mind that gradually would change the existing feudal institutions and prepare for the birth of the modern Romanian state.

Nicolae Istrati's and his generation's discourse argued polemically and convincingly for a place that Roma emancipated from slavery were to have in a new society, free in their work and in their person, alongside serf peasants from whom, at least for some Roma, they no longer had any cultural differences. The integration of Romani slaves, "*țigani*" into Romania's economy and society, and their contribution to its development, was the basis for the acquisition of political freedom for their "landed" status (the term used at the time, "împământenire", denoted the status of "citizenship") and of "brotherhood" with the Romanian people, in whose name the provisional government of 1848 proclaimed: "The times of slavery are over and the *ypsies of today are our brothers."

3.3 Vectors of Social Reform: Ending Gypsy ('Tigan') Slavery and Abolition of Peasant Serfdom

The serfdom of Romanian peasants and the enslavement of Roma as "*țigani*" were components of economic, legal, and spiritual relations created by the great feudal property owners represented by rulers, nobility (boyars), and monasteries of the Orthodox Church. Each measure to reform one of these components of feudal property paved the way for the reform of the others within a general context of changes imposed by the emergence and consolidation of modern relations of production based on individual bourgeois property and the integration of the economy of the Principalities into a European capitalist market.

The abolition of "*rumânie*" and "*vecinie*" (serfdom) in the mid-eighteenth century also marked the beginning of the gradual abolition of slavery, an idea emphasised by Mihail Kogălniceanu, who sought

to situate the act of emancipating "*țigani*" slaves within the political struggle for social reform and modernisation of the Romanian state.

In January 1844, the newspaper *Propasirea*, edited by Mihail Kogălniceanu, paid homage to the act of liberating the slaves of the clergy and the state with a special issue printed on green paper, the colour of hope, proposing 6 April 1849 as the date marking the complete abolition of slavery, on the centenary of liberation from serfdom ("*abolirea robiei*", the abolition of slavery, in the author's words) of the peasants or "serfs" of Moldavia, in 1749.

The historian Theodor Codrescu described the same "historical series" as a moment of breaking the chains of "ugly slavery in the whole of Moldavia".
On the other hand, the emancipation of Gypsies in the mid-nineteenth century was described by Alecu Russo in an article published in *Steaua Dunării*, also led by Kogălniceanu, as "an emancipation that will lead us to emancipations from other bad habits of ours that have other names". These "other names" were bluntly defined in an editorial or *hronica*, published in *România Literară* a few days after Russo's article: "[...] today, [B]lack slavery falls and is abolished tomorrow, white slavery should fall and be abolished [...], for how else can we begin to be a society" founded on "principles of justice and humanity", as the paragraph immediately preceding the article states.

The challenge to the great boyar estates was so direct that this prophecy, skilfully inserted into an article praising a wise measure of the government of the time, did not escape the attention of censors, which led to suppression of the publication of Alecsandri's magazine,[2] *România Literară,* and proposal for a genuine political program for achieving national unity in a modern state.

3.4 Towards Full Social Citizenship: Equal Work Opportunities for Roma Freed from Slavery

The completion of the individual freedom of Roma, emancipated from slavery, with a radical reform of the property regime was part of the "Gordian knot" that had to be cut. In Kogălniceanu's words: feudal property did not make it possible "to establish free arms and free property in Romania",[3] the economic and political goal of the Romanian bourgeoisie – in full affirmation, an ideal from the perspective of which "[...] the interest of the owner and of a wise state economy is to increase the number of free workers, but not the number of beggars and slaves", as an article in *Zimbrul*, entitled "Chestia robilor" (The question of slaves), points out.[4] The article's author also was concerned with the adoption of public education measures to train the emancipated as disciplined workers, fit for a new type of capitalist economy, who would understand "[...] that through work their skill and material improvement will increase".

2 See: C. Zane: *Nicolae Bălcescu*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1979.

3 *Gazeta de Moldavia*, XXVII, 1855, p. 384.

4 Idem.

The abolition of slavery not only created the opportunity for the education of free and work-oriented workers but also for the education of a new bourgeois economic rationality or mentality in the former owners. Alecu Russo, in the article quoted above, tried to convince them that slaves, as an economic asset, represented a "capital that is difficult to convert", whereas "[...] converting slavery into money (through compensation to be paid by the State) is a more sensible use than slavery". The payment of compensation was to be made through a system of public credit, the beginning of a modern financial system that would thus prepare "[...] the means for all the great improvements that await us".[5]

4. The Abolition of Romani Slavery

4.1 Roma and the Collective Imaginary of Nineteenth-century Romania: Projects of Social Organisation in Light of Roma Emancipation

A concern to reform Romania's economy and society on a new basis is also present in the Memorandum (*Memoriu*) addressed by Theodor Diamand to the Moldavian government in 1841, which at that time was concerned with the implementation of the provisions of the Organic Regulations on the settlement of nomadic "ţigani", former slaves of the state. In this reform, which in Moldavia, unlike in Wallachia, began later and without many results, Theodor Diamand found the pretext to formulate one of his most consistent social utopias, inspired by the theories of Charles Fourier, regarding the organisation of Romanian society on a "societal" basis.

Diamand proposed organising Gypsies, along with "*many other poor families*", into *"agricultural-industrial colonies"* organised on principles similar to the "Scăieni Phalanstery" that had failed in Wallachia in the 1830s. The economic advantages and administrative details were now better argued and explained to convince the authorities and gain their cooperation in a project that had the stated aim of "improving the moral and material condition of the Gypsies" and the "morale of the lower classes" in general. These "colonies", which were to start modestly (in the form of what we would now call "social assistance" and "social integration of the marginalised"), were intended, in Diamand's words, to develop Romanian industry, "to save time, labour and fuel, to exploit domestic natural resources, to modernise agricultural techniques, to improve domestic and foreign trade and the balance of payments", in short, "to double the income from the property in less than five years".

These radical reforms were presented in the typical manner of utopian socialism, as a project to improve the way of life of nomadic Roma, a specific problem for the administration. We do not know the reaction of the Moldavian government to Diamand's memorandum, but we do know that, whether in connection with it or not, administrative efforts to settle nomads intensified from the following year, 1842.

5 Mihail Kogălniceanu, "Dezrobirea Ţiganilor," *Propasirea* I (1), 1844, supplement to No 5, pp. 1–2.

Writing from a socialist position but with a romantic nature and a more pronounced character of social criticism, Cezar Bolliac, in his political, journalistic, and literary activity, also showed a constant interest in the problems of liberating Romani slaves and improving their lives, as part of the process of overthrowing the feudal system of labour exploitation and replacing it with a modern economy and society. In his poem "*Țiganul și clăcașul / au fost gândirea mea*" (The Gypsy and the serf / were my thought), he formulated a poetic confession that summed up the social credo of an entire generation of fighters for the reform of feudal society.

Following this credo, in 1835 and 1836, Bolliac addressed *Memorii* (memoirs) to political personalities in Wallachia and Moldavia to abolish slavery; he protested the various miseries suffered by Gypsy slaves in poems such as "Fata de boier și fata de țigan" (The boyar's daughter and the Gypsy's daughter') or "Țiganul vândut" (The sold Gypsy) (1843). He was also a member of the Commission for the Liberation of the Slaves during the provisional revolutionary government in Wallachia in 1848. He sang of the joy of those freed from slavery in the poem "O Țigancă cu pruncul său la statuia libertății în București" (A Gypsy woman with her child at the Statue of Liberty in Bucharest), after encouraging political agitation among the slaves in the run-up to the revolution.

We can see that, from different political and ideological positions (general-liberal, socialist-utopian, socialist-romantic), the slavery of Roma, of "*țigani*", as well as the serfdom or forced labour of Romanian peasants, were criticised as defining elements of a feudal system of labour and social organisation which had to be replaced by a new, vaguely outlined bourgeois-capitalist or socialist economy and society.

4.2 Arguments for Legal and Constitutional Reform of the Romanian State

The criticism of the feudal economic and social system, through the criticism of "țigani" slavery and the demand for its abolition, was continued by a **criticism of the political and legal institutions** that reinforced and legitimised the system of inequalities and privileges of which slavery was a part. Emancipating the slaves became part of the liberal program, which sought to achieve political equality before the law for all the country's inhabitants. Slaves were also part of that "social mosaic" (Cezar Bolliac) represented by various social and fiscal categories established by the Organic Regulations, categories that signified the social, political, and legal inequalities characteristic of a feudal society in transition to a new institutional order.

Just as slave owners, mostly boyars, were "above" the general laws of the state as privileged people, and their slaves, "boyar's Gypsies", were "below" the same laws (for example, both social categories did not pay taxes to the state) as persons with incomplete legal capacity, having the status of "economic property" owned by someone else. The fight against slavery implicitly meant a fight against a whole system of feudal political inequalities: first of all, against the privileges of the boyars, whose significance and "*etichetă*" (label, etiquette) included a number of enslaved Roma. Let us remember that "here it is considered as a label that completes the dignity of a person to do his service through slavery [domestic work]."

From the perspective of the formation of a modern, democratic state, slavery appeared to the revolutionaries of 1848 and the authors of the political union of the Principalities as "a black stain on our social order", "a monstrous anomaly", "a degrading state of humanity which keeps this interesting race [the Gypsies] in subservience", and "the ultimate sign of barbarism".

The Proclamation of Islaz (*Proclamația de la Islaz*) of 1848 declared, among other things, that, "The Romanian people renounce the inhumanity and shame of keeping slaves and declare the freedom of private slaves," and Mihail Kogălniceanu, in *Dorințele partidei naționale în Moldova* (Desires of the National Party in Moldavia), declared that "a constitutional state with slaves would be a monstrosity".

The enslavement of Roma had, at a certain point, become a symbol of the untouched preservation of property of the nobility and a social order established by the Organic Regulations. We can understand why a decree by an occupying power (which had suppressed the revolution of 1848) and the Caimacam, which it set up, gave way to the interests of the landowners, who owned both land and slaves, and returned the "țigani" to slavery as "part of the property of private individuals", since their emancipation "necessarily affects the prosperity of the country".

In 1855, when he freed his family's slaves without compensation, thus anticipating by a few months the law abolishing private slavery, Vasile Alecsandri showed, in addition to his well-known poetic sensibility, a clear political intuition that defined his entire generation. Alecsandri accompanied his gesture with a public declaration that would resonate with the consciences of the most diverse political and ideological orientations: "In the face of the stable future of happiness and dignity that opens before us, [...] when the Romanian nation is called to take its place among the other nations that enjoy the joys of a wise freedom, [...] slavery is the ugliest stain that still dishonours our homeland in this age of prosperity."

The modernisers of the Principalities, who had reached maturity in their political program and were anxious to achieve state autonomy, no longer accepted any restrictions on civil rights, individual freedom, and equality before the law. Slavery was the final stage in denying these rights, "the negative conscience" of the principles on which they were based.

An essential part of the critique of the socio-political foundations of slavery was to question its **legitimacy** as a principle of law, a critique based on theoretical and legal arguments drawn from the arsenal of rationalism and the Enlightenment, from theories of natural law and the rights of peoples. The only legal basis for slavery was the legacy of the past, the "custom of the land", customary law, transcribed and enshrined in various laws and codes of law, which, in principle, represented the interests of the nobility. The "modern" codes of Caragea and Calimah preserved these "customs" relating to the enslavement of "țigani", attempting a vague correlation with rational legal principles. According to the Calimah Code, which was in force until the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was "against the natural rights of mankind", but it was accepted because of the customs of the land.

For a coherent modern mind, such as that of Eufrosin Poteca, educated in the school of French rationalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "[...] whoever understands the freedom of mankind can no

longer suffer to be a slave, nor hold others in bondage": not only on religious grounds "but also politically, because slavery is considered very harmful and barbaric". In the middle of the century, the legitimacy of the customary law of slavery was utterly and radically questioned as an "abusive practice", a law "so filthy and inhuman" (George Sion), "a custom of great damage to our souls, left by our ancestors as a curse on our heads" (Mihail Kogălniceanu).

The legal argument was also based on a more general concept of a human being and humanity as a whole. For Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah, freedom is part of the natural condition of human beings and of people, of their very definition. To be a slave, to subject someone to bondage is to deprive him of his essential nature, to treat him as an object, to make him not human. Slavery appeared as a "logical impossibility", and therefore, "[...] the words slave and right are totally contradictory, they cancel each other".

The right to own slaves was contested, as was the body of law in which it appeared. The principle of the relativity of the rules and the need to modify them when the public interest so requires was accepted (Papadopol-Calimah). More radically, Cezar Bolliac demanded that "the *Arhondologia* (Almanac of the nobility), the Organic Regulations, Caragea's *Pravila* (Caragea's Code), the Criminal Register of 1851", the main legal instruments of the feudal social order, be burned because, among other things, they stipulated the right to sell and buy people like cattle, to split families by sale and inheritance.

Abolition of the servitude of "boyar's Gypsies" and liberation of slaves owned by private individuals raised a difficult question concerning the relationship between public and private law since it was one of the first interventions by the state in the sphere of private property, the fundamental principle of the feudal order as well as the new bourgeois order. The compensation paid by the state was a way of preserving intact the principle of private property. But this right of the owners to compensation was also contested, both on moral grounds, because it was a "trading of human souls" and on historical-economic grounds: as we have seen, the owners were urged to be satisfied with the work done by the "țigan" slaves during four centuries of slavery.

The interest of these ideas, arguments, and attitudes in relation to the institution of Romani slavery and its abolition as a legal institution goes beyond its strict framework. It is relevant to the general political thinking of the time, particularly to a broader and more heated discussion on the abolition of serfdom and peasants' allotments.

In the case of the complicated "peasant question", the arguments followed a similar structure: researching the historical origins of land ownership among different categories of owners; denouncing boyar ownership as abuse and challenging its legal legitimacy; and asserting the peasants' right to the abolition of serfdom and allotment without compensation.

Once again, it seems that the issue of the abolition of Romani slavery was incorporated into a general strategy of action and way of thinking that corresponded to essential problems of the time. A discussion of specific issues related to the abolition of slavery contributed to clarification and better elaboration of some details and nuances of this general strategy of action and thought, helpful in approaching and solving fundamental political problems. An intense discussion of abolition thus became a civic exercise

that contributed to the articulation of political thought and development of a coherent program of action to reform Romanian society.

4.3 A Spiritual Revolution of Romanians in the Early Nineteenth Century and the 'Discovery of Roma': Roma – Part of a Political, Multicultural Nation of a Modern Romanian State

So far, we have attempted to trace the contours of "Romanian abolitionist thought" as articulated in the debate on the abolition of Romani slavery. The general direction of ideas, concepts, and consciences between the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth century also can be traced and "measured" through a sensitive "barometer" of attitudes towards "*țigani*" slaves.

As a form of absolute personal dependency, social and psychological relations involved in the slavery of Roma provoked consciences with a contradiction generated by the dual position and status of a slave:

a. an "economic asset" similar to other "things/objects" in someone else's possession;
b. a "human person" who is anthropologically and culturally similar to free human beings, including his or her owner.

The emphasis on one or the other of these aspects, a perception of a slave as an individual and as a member of a larger group, in the consciousness of others and one's own consciousness, reflected and was related to cultural institutions and motifs embedded in a social practice in which both slaves and slave owners and other social categories of people were a part, in varying degrees of freedom and dependence on each other. Without delving into such a study, we would like to mention here some lines of analysis relating to the changes and evolution of the public spirit of mentalities expressed by concepts such as "humanity", "human", "people", "homeland", and "nation".

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as throughout the feudal period, the existence and the contemplation of Romani slavery did not cause any "disturbances of conscience" (Dimitrie Bolintineanu) as it was considered natural and just. Romani slaves, as "*țigani*", were perceived more as things, as objects (although, through derision, their number and price were related to their "souls"), and the "*țigani*", as a social group with certain cultural and moral characteristics, were perceived more in their state of "*animality*" and "*savagery*".

Similarly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a result of the influence of the Enlightenment that had begun a century earlier, the concept of a "Christian brotherhood" between slaves and free men was established, which made the relationship of bondage between master and slave difficult but by no means impossible.

Christian religion has always had an ambivalent attitude towards slavery, tolerating and justifying it in the sense that we are all "servants of God" but also criticising it based on the equality of all human beings before the Creator.

The spread of rationalist and Enlightenment concepts, if a secular orientation, allowed a broadening of the perception of man and humanity up to the identification of the slave as a human being, fully entitled to and capable of freedom, granted based on the civil and political equality of all citizens of a state before its laws.

This moment of "mutation" in Romanian public mentality, which occurred towards the middle of the nineteenth century, made it legally possible to free Roma from slavery and led to the beginning of their perception as human persons and citizens in the Romanian state (a perception that is still being clarified today, at the start of the twenty-first century).

This new perception projected both on individuals, former slaves, and Roma as a specific historical and cultural group, made it possible to "discover" their qualities: their skills useful in economic production, their artistic sensitivity, and their very humanity.

The history of this group (see the writings of Kogălniceanu and Papadopol-Calimah), the characteristics and cultural differences of various Romani subgroups, which are rooted in their specific, differentiated history within the history of the social institutions and mores of Romanian society, were sought with interest.

There was an interest in knowing the ethnic characteristics of this people, as in Jean Alexandre Vaillant's and, to a lesser extent, Mihail Kogălniceanu's studies of the language, and in representing them through art, as in Gheorghe Asachi's *Idilul* or *Ţiganii*. Questions were raised about the political status of these people in the social structure of Romanian society, by Nicolae Rucăreanu, a contemporary poet, writer, and politician, and within the framework of the nascent Romanian nation, then conceived a political nation and not, as in the twentieth century, as an ethnic one; at that time nationality or "landed" status was interpreted as **citizenship** derived from the right to the land, *ius soli*, and not from some supposed right of blood – see the press during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia.

If in Mitiță Filipescu's movement of 1848, the boyars and their subjects were not included in the concept of "*popor*" because some were considered privileged and others unfit for political activity; subsequent "constitutions", which stipulated the liberation of "*țigani*" slaves, also granted them the status of citizens. Roma thus were considered to be part of the Romanian state, which was conceived politically as a modern state in which freedom and equal rights were guaranteed to individuals, who were thought of as individuals and not as members of "legal states" – see again Bolliac's description of a "social mosaic".

The integration of Roma into modern Romanian society, the acceptance of their humanity, was achieved through a renewal of the individual soul and through political notions that reflect how the public spirit sought clarification and connection with the modernising spirit of the time, that of the nineteenth century. There is now talk of a "brotherhood" and "union" of Romani slaves with the native inhabitants, with the "landed" who, less than a hundred years earlier, in the time of Mavrocordat, insisted that their "*rumânie*" or "*vecinie*" (serfdom) should not be confused with the "*țigănia*" of Romani slaves. The "brotherhood through work" of Romanian peasants and Romani slaves was invoked in support of the latter's emancipation. For example, a *hronică* (commentary) published in *România Literară*, a magazine

edited by Vasile Alecsandri, spoke of "that feeling of human brotherhood which animates the great-grandchildren of the Shudras of India, fellow citizens with the great-grandchildren of Trajan's colonists", who "embraced each other in a brotherly union, and together bore the hardships of their land, and together bore boyar feudalism on their shoulders, until today, when the dawn of the days of freedom and justice destined for the Romanian people is breaking."

The term *brotherhood* had complex social and political meanings in the mid-nineteenth century, representing one of the many influences received and assimilated by the ideology of the generation of 1848 from the ideas of the Revolution and French socialism and providing one of the arguments for the economic basis of social solidarity. At that time, "*ţigani*" (Gypsies) still constituted the lowest social status category, formally and legally separated from the rest of society by the legal settlements of the late eighteenth century and the codes of Caragea and Calimah, still in force in the 1850s.

The right of Roma to be considered an integral part of society as citizens was also argued by attempting to present the "positive" consequences of slavery. The official newspaper *Gazeta de Moldova* stated that:

> […] the emancipation of the Gypsies has become an important issue in our country because of their number and the relationship they have with the Moldo-Romanians. Elsewhere, these groups of people live in isolation from society and support themselves more by unpardoned trickery [illicit occupations – from French text] than through the work of the hand or toil. Here, however, most of the Gypsies, who were part of the domestic economy, satisfy their material interests by labour, for which their masters see to it that they are fed and clothed so that this expenditure is equivalent to, though it does not exceed, a regular wage.

From the perspective of this reform of the civic spirit (briefly outlined above), we can understand the almost universal enthusiasm of public opinion in the mid-nineteenth century, which saw in the abolition of slavery not only the direct benefit of approximately 200,000 Roma living in the Principality at the time but also the economic, political, and moral benefit of society as a whole. As Theodor Codrescu noted on the eve of the emancipation of Moldavian slaves, "the name ţigan had come to mean, in the Romanian language, *the person subjected to the degradation of serfdom*" (emphasis in original).

The liberation of Roma from the institution of Gypsy slavery meant not only the restoration of their dignity as human beings but also the restoration of the integrity of the concept of man and humanity in the Romanian political and moral consciousness. Public opinion, therefore, saw the abolition of slavery as an opportunity to "congratulate society on the moral reform it had achieved". "For if the Gypsies were thus saved from the yoke of slavery, society was no less saved from the yoke of immoral salvation" that slavery produced, through the behaviour of people who were not "*naturally evil*", but who, "without any kind of learning", despised and scorned by their owners, took revenge by "poisoning" their "domestic relations" with their owners and their sons, whose education was almost exclusively the responsibility of the slaves. The abolition of slavery was to be accompanied by wider measures to educate new free citizens, with the article urging the government to "endeavour to open the doors of educational institutions to the Gypsy youth of both sexes", so that "through the benevolent influence of both government and society, the Gypsies may emancipate themselves from their vices".

The abolition of slavery, by freeing the slaves from their "domestic relations" with their owners, also brought about *a reform of daily life*, of the habits of everyday life inherited from Turkish domination, especially during the reign of the Phanariotes. With sarcasm, George Sion describes the effect of the news of the emancipation of slaves, which "fell like a bomb on hundreds of houses", who "wondered how they were going to live without the Gypsies", because, as the article goes on to say, "how can one be a boyar without Gypsies, buffaloes, and a shingled house?" The former owners had to "give up the housework that was done by the Gypsies and do it themselves, by the sweat of their brow".

Slavery, with the benefits and social relations it generated, had penetrated deeply into the social order of the Principalities, into the habits of daily life, and into the character and tastes of the privileged class and its imitators. These habits and cultural tastes were even more resistant to the idea of manumission than the economic interests associated with property.

In campaigning for the abolition of slavery, the reformers and progressives of the period were engaged in a complex and comprehensive effort to change and modernise the repertoire of sentiments, ideological and cultural motifs in the public mind, moral consciousness, and inertia of everyday life. These efforts aimed to remove Romanian society from the circle of Oriental influences and to place it in the European political orbit.

Then, as now, Europe was less of a geographical reality "frozen" within contours drawn by artificial political borders. Political and spiritual frontiers were then, as now, relative and mobile, approaching the Carpathians and the Danube, offering hope and a chance that a new political order of a modern type, a bourgeois state, rule of law, with all the political freedoms that this entailed, a new conception of humankind and humanity, a new sensibility and culture of everyday life could be realised.

The maintenance of Romani slavery was a sign of distance from this Europe, a symbol of the subordination of the Principalities to foreign powers that defended the old social order, of which slavery was an integral part. "Would you rather be among the ennobled boors of Russia than join the *hora* [dance] of the civilised nations?" Sion asks the slave owners. The question annoyed and offended the slave owners, as the chronicler of the time, the newspaper editor in which Sion's article had appeared, noted: "The great boyars were alarmed and, through five landowners, showed their dissatisfaction with *Zimbru's* mocking remarks." Therefore, "to reassure the deputation of the boyars", the ruler Grigore Ghica instructed the secretary of state to protest against the newspaper's editorial board support for the article, which contained "such horrors as to provoke hatred against one of the classes of society".

Abolition of slavery was not achieved solely by the enthusiastic applause of public opinion influencers, the writers of newspaper articles at the time. Its slow, gradual unfolding reflects a fierce clash of interests, the opposition of slave owners and their external protectors, the resistance of some institutions, and the habits that the passage of time seemed to make irreplaceable. For this reason, a confrontation over the issue of Romani manumission has been an area for a general political conflict between "social classes", giving rise to affirmations and demarcations of positions, affinities of ideas and groups, and proof of the consistency of messages and political programs.

Let us recall the invective of Nicolae Istrati in his *Dissertation on the Gypsies* of 1848 (when the monastic and state slaves in Moldavia were liberated), those "rusty spirits", "unsatisfied spirits [...] and enemies of any reform [...] that is made in civilisation": "You are sons of another age, of another time, of another spirit as well as of another class."

5. Romani Manumission and 'European Integration'

Like other social reforms of the time, the abolitionist movement was part of efforts by the political elites of the Principalities to create a unified, autonomous state "emancipated from foreign domination and influence". The generation that brought about the political union of the Romanian Principalities believed in the unity of political freedoms, equality, and international political sovereignty.

In 1834, Ion Câmpineanu expropriated the peasants on his estate, freed the enslaved people, and renounced the privileges of his boyar rank as a sign of protest against the social order established by the Organic Regulations under the protectorate of Tsarist Russia. Furthermore, the vote on the law for the emancipation of enslaved Roma people of the "land" and "dedicated" monasteries in Moldavia in January 1844 was perceived in the public consciousness as a political challenge to the pro-Russian consul Dascof, who had come to Iaşi to influence the election of a pro-Russian metropolitan or bishop favourable to the idea of uniting the Moldavian Church with Moscow.

The enthusiasm of liberal youth of the time was also motivated by the political significance of the law adopted by the country's General Assembly. The occasion was used to urge a union of minds and a realisation of a common cause, "the liberation of an entire people", illustrated by the manumission of enslaved Romani people.

A few years later, in 1855–1856, the international context following the Crimean War was used by the political elite of the Principalities to put an end to the Russian protectorate and the regulatory period. Decisions to free privately owned slaves were linked explicitly to national political interests, clearly formulated by a political class interested in maintaining the sovereignty of the Romanian Principalities, through a clever use of the argument for the abolition of "Gypsy slavery" in the geopolitical context of the time.

By passing laws for a complete abolition of Romani slavery, the General Divans of the two Principalities asserted and exercised their right to legislate, previously forbidden by the humiliating Convention of Balta Liman, thus marking a *de facto* exit from under the Russian protectorate, before the subsequent international conferences enshrined this political reality.

Shortly after the vote on the Moldavian law, the priest Josafat Snagovineanul, a former member of the Commission for the Liberation of Slaves set up by the provisional government of the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia, delivered a moving speech in Paris to an audience gathered to celebrate the "double blessing": "the abolition of the Russian protectorate and the emancipation of our Gypsy slaves". The speaker stated: "I make no distinction between the idea of the liberation of the Gypsies

and that of our own liberation, for the same iron hand is pressing down on them as on us. [...] Slavery no longer has a protector."

The international public was thus informed of one of the causes of the long perpetuation of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities until the mid-nineteenth century: external political subordination did not allow for an internal implementation of an innovative and humanistic social reform. Slavery as a legal institution existed in various forms both in Tsarist Russia (where the serfdom of Russian peasants, considered a real form of slavery, was not abolished until 1865) and in the Ottoman Empire, where a public slave trade continued, legally or illegally, until the end of the nineteenth century.

For the political elite of the time, social freedom, including liberation of Romani slaves, could not be achieved without the political sovereignty of the Principalities.

Shortly after the liberation of private slaves, in January 1856, the Law on the Abolition of Censorship was also passed in Moldavia, marking a further step towards the affirmation of the legislative autonomy of the state.

By passing these laws amid debates between the great political and military powers of the time, which were concerned, among other things, with the political future of the Principalities, they demonstrated their political ability to use an international context to achieve modernising social reforms. By abolishing slavery and censorship, the Principalities wanted to show international public opinion their determination to use the instrument of the sovereign state to promote liberal social-political freedoms at home.

"A people that maintains slavery deserves to be placed among the damned peoples": the famous words of the French historian de Maistre, also taken up by Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah, also offered a solution for the opposite situation: a people that abolishes the institution of slavery from its internal legal order legitimises its right to be counted among free peoples. This idea was formulated by Mihail Kogălniceanu in his 1848 work "*Dorințele partidei naționale în Moldova*" (Desires of the National Party in Moldavia), in which he called for the abolition of slavery and asked: "Could we, who will be a free nation, still bear the stain of having slaves?" In 1855, it was Kogălniceau again who renewed the argument for the abolition of Romani slavery: "The best way to ascertain our right to autonomy before Europe is to use it to establish in the country a social and political state that will put us in the same league as the great families of the civilised world, that is to say, by introducing freedom, justice and equality in Europe."

For the Romanian citizen today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the abolition of Romani slavery may be perceived as a minor social reform, perhaps important at the time but not essential. However, in the geopolitical context of the mid-nineteenth century, the abolition of Romani slavery was of particular public importance, at least for intellectual and political elites involved in the formation of the modern and independent Romanian state. For the "people of progress" at the time, the achievement of this reform went beyond the scope of the social categories directly affected by it (slaves and their owners) and became a moment and a symbol of a will and a political ideal that aimed at the realisation of the

liberal program in its entirety: democratisation of political institutions and the achievement of unity and autonomy of the Romanian state. The political significance of abolishing Romani slavery is recorded in the documents of the state administration dating from this period.

In the *Ofisul domnesc* (decree) of the ruler Grigore Ghica of 28 November 1855, as in that of 5 December 1855, the maintenance of slavery in the Principalities was considered to be "in contradiction", not only with Christian dogmas and the principles of humanity but also with "the vital interest of the state". The abolition of slavery was therefore a "humanitarian question of the first order", the solution to which "in the present circumstances is dictated by the wisdom of the state", "and concerns above all the dignity of the country". Therefore, "among the reforms that have been initiated and those that the future demands, we consider that this matter is one of those that must come before any other".

The Administrative Council of Wallachia also recognised, in its Journal (*Jurnal*) of 1855, that the maintenance of slavery was a "social anomaly" that had to be eliminated. The "vital" importance of the abolition of slavery was reinforced in the international context and by the specific position of the Principalities in the "Eastern Question" being discussed at the time. "[…] when Europe is showing such a lively interest in the Principalities and meditates the regulation of their destiny, it is the duty of our motherland to take a step forward of its own accord."

The initiative of the Principalities in the act of emancipating slaves and the implementation of this democratic and humanitarian reform was part of a political calculation in pursuit of the national interest, as well as of the "lesson learned" by the political class in the previous decades: after the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, the two Romanian Principalities had to accept the interference of Tsarist Russia, which legitimised its "protection" through modernisations promoted by the Organic Regulations. "It is better to do something, even if it costs us such great sacrifices, which comes from our own good will, by which we will raise the opinion of foreigners of our political maturity, than to wait for the minute when a foreign interference will feel entitled to take over our internal organisation," read an article in *Zimbrul* newspaper.

The "sacrifice" invoked was primarily financial, represented by sums that the state paid slave owners in order not to violate their principle of private property. Although some owners, particularly those in Moldavia, waived their right to compensation, sums paid out by the state were high, justifying Cezar Bolliac's criticism that "the treasury will feel the pain of the wound" by paying the sums to those "entitled" to compensation.

The political gain from the decision to free Romani slaves far outweighed the financial losses. What was important was that: "Moldavia, which aspired to the honour of joining the circle of European families, to which its position and common interest entitled it, had shaken off the last traces of barbarism." Hence George Sion's call to slave owners: "Not the rulers, but all of us, boyars and owners of țigani, representatives of civilisation and of the rebirth of our homeland, are obliged to take this step to show the world that we deserve a national life, a political existence, a future of progress, respect among peoples." This political message was taken up by the international press and public opinion, which was favourable to the Principalities. The newspaper *La Presse d'Orient* praised

the measure taken to abolish slavery with the following words on 3 January 1856: "The important act of emancipating the slaves of Moldavia is likely to attract not only the eyes but also the sympathy of the whole of Europe to this Principality."

The Principalities' abolishment of slavery was later popularised in many works on the history of the Principalities or other general information, published abroad, especially in France, by steadfast friends of the political cause of the Romanians, many of whom were both direct participants in the political turmoil and revolutionary movements in the two Principalities and authors of works on the history, language, and customs of Roma, such as Jean Alexandre Vaillant, Félix Colson, Jean-Henri-Abdolonyme Ubicini, and Paul Battailard.

Informing international public opinion about the abolition of slavery in the Principalities, as part of the extensive propaganda in its favour, was also intended to fulfil an objective focused on "image", as we would say today, by making foreigners "stop at once and as soon as possible from confronting us and saying that we are not doing our best to join the great family of civilised nations of Europe". The aim was therefore both to obtain a "seal of approval" from the great powers of the time and to demonstrate the will and ability of the local political elite to modernise the socio-political institutions of the planned sovereign state by their own means, even at a financial cost. Among the administrative reforms to be carried out, the abolition of Romani slavery was "one of those that must come before any other".

Let us remember that, in the decades of the mid-nineteenth century, England, France, and later elites in the northern United States were deeply involved politically and diplomatically in restricting and banning the global slave trade; this was the main objective of a nascent human rights movement, pursued by means of state diplomacy.

The use of the term "slavery" in press articles and even in the text of the laws on the abolition of Romani servitude opened the way for the penetration of liberal European ideas and the criticism of all forms of personal dependency in the Principality, explicitly the slavery of "*țigani*" but also "peasant servitude". This also marked the Principalities' own contribution to an international human rights campaign dictated by the political interests of the time: in the short term, the withdrawal of the Principalities from the sphere of dominance and influence of Tsarist Russia, and in the medium term, the achievement of independence and international recognition of the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Romania. The abolition of the institution of Romani slavery was therefore a contribution that the two Romanian Principalities made on their own initiative, with some sacrifices, and which placed them together and on an equal footing with civilised countries of the era. This idea, which was part of the consciousness of the political class, was formulated clearly by Alexandru Papadopol-Calimah at the end of his historical and political article on the manumission of slaves: "Through manumission, the Romanian people will today stand proud and equal before Europe, and if equality does not consist only in material equality, how much more in equality of feelings!"

The idea of the political unification of the two Romanian Principalities and the abolition of Romani slavery, seemingly so far apart, were explicitly linked by those who were the "champions of progress"

for the modernisation of society and a nascent Romanian state. The newspaper *Steaua Dunării*, led by Mihail Kogălniceanu, which brought together the most active and radical forces in favour of the political unification of the two Principalities, had also included the cause of Romani emancipation in its program. When Kogălnicenu published in his newspaper *The Journal* (Jurnalul) the Decision of the Administrative Council of the Romanian Country on the abolition of slavery, he found the occasion for an extensive historical commentary on "this law imposed on the principalities since their foundation [...], the law of their common historical destiny, for better or for worse, the law of their union. How could slavery, which had been abolished in Moldavia, continue to be part of the social order in Wallachia, given the tendency to assimilate, to unite in everything, as partners for better or for worse?"

For Kogălniceanu, the succession of measures for gradual emancipation of slaves, in which each principality was either the initiator or the imitator of the other, was proof of an eternal emulation that had been established between the two countries throughout their history, a cultural and social emulation that was waiting to be completed by political union.

For a moment in history, at least for a few public figures, the right of Roma to individual freedom and the interest of the Romanians to form their own state by uniting fragments of their territory under different rulers and spheres of interest coincided and took the form of effective political action.

6. Enslaved Romani Participants

Roma were beneficiaries of civil reform and of political confrontations between different segments of a political class in the Romanian Principalities that led to the abolition of slavery. Still, they were also actors and active participants in contemporary political movements, including the events that led to the unification of the two Principalities. The emancipated former slaves, now free citizens, declared in the *Jurnal al Brezlei dezrobiților* (Journal of the body of the emancipated) from Iași, on 4 September 1857, that "[...] Together with our staroste [chief] we will participate in the town elections to be elected to the ad hoc Divan."

In the context of political and civil reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, various forms of protest and struggle of Roma throughout the historical period of their enslavement found fulfilment and historical significance. Romani slaves were not just an amorphous, inert commodity, resigned to a life of misery. Subjected to "cruel exploitation", "often treated like animals", the slaves' resistance, their escape from their owners, was the main form of limiting labour obligations imposed by feudal lords.

Flight was not the only form of protest. Despite the views of the time that "*țigan*" slaves were "born to be slaves", "unfit for freedom", or "content with their state of servitude", Roma did not cease to seek their freedom through escape, through association with free people, through individual efforts to "forgive bondage" through ransom, or through their participation as a group in political actions to abolish slavery as an institution.

In the mid-nineteenth century, this protest became more diversified and more widespread. The documents of the time speak of Roma "complaining" to officials about the abuses of landlords or landowners; joining outlaw bands; and supporting and deliberately participating in the revolutionary actions of 1848. In 1830, according to Vaillant, Romani slaves tried to persuade Kiseleff to restore their freedom in an original way, offering him "as much gold as a horse can carry". Only the opposition of the boyars, who had already lost the right to have squires, prevented the Russian general from freeing this "rank of men".

Their demand for a better life seems to have been echoed in the Organic Regulations by the inclusion of measures for the sedentarisation and colonisation of nomadic Gypsies belonging to villages on boyar estates, a measure probably influenced by Kiseleff's information on state policy towards Roma in the Habsburg Empire during the time of Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the eighteenth century.

However, all the boyars benefited from this measure, as French historian Félix Colsson, a participant and direct observer of political life in the Principalities, noted. Unwilling to serve the interests of the boyars, many nomadic Roma, especially those of the *lăieți*, also known as *netoti* (wandering Gypsies), resisted colonisation, preferring to join the powerful groups of "*clăcași*" peasants who had also fled boyar exploitation and who, especially in the Moldavian Carpathians, waged a veritable "guerrilla war" against the armed forces of the rulers. A literary echo of these historical realities can be found in the book *Prețul Libertății* (The price of freedom), written by Mateo Maximoff, an educated Kalderash Roma and member of a famous group of Roma who, after manumission, went to Bessarabia and then, fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, settled in a suburb of Paris, in Romainville, where they continued to speak a Romani language full of words from the Kalderash dialect.

Slaves settled on boyar estates in Wallachia soon felt the burden of the leaseholders' greed, and the complaints of many of these serfs to the *Vornicia temnițelor* (which administered the sedentarisation of the nomads until 1843) forced this state body to ask the owners of the estates to "curb the greed of the leaseholders".

On the eve of the liberation of monastic and state slaves, in 1844 and 1847, and encouraged by reform fighters, including Mihail Kogălniceanu and Cezar Boliac, the unrest of slaves against the oppression of boyars increased in the two Principalities. There were local rebellions and violent protests against landlords or tenants.

In the context of social and political unrest in Moldavia in 1846, a "radical" Constantin Negruzzi considered attacking the city of Iași with the help of "[...] young people and 400 armed Gypsies". Local rebellions of Romani slaves became a real "social movement" for liberation from slavery during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia. Documents from the 1848 Revolution tell of the enthusiasm with which thousands of Roma flocked to Bucharest to obtain their "certificates of liberation" from slavery, offered by the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

General Gheorghe Magheru, as is known, had gathered his own army and was waiting, on the outskirts of Craiova, for the decision of the Provisional Government of the Revolution on whether to resist the intervention of the Imperial troops, which, this time, were allied. In the ranks of this army were many

Roma emancipated from slavery. They were apparently under the command of an ad hoc leader who was impressive in his enormous stature. But General Magheru had to abandon his military plans, yielding to the pressure of the other leaders of the revolution, perhaps wiser, aware of the inequality of forces, or perhaps simply more willing to compromise, aware of the internal weaknesses of a fragile political class still tied to the status quo of the social order that guaranteed their property and their "label" (*etichetă*), which included a number of enslaved Roma.

The briefly liberated Roma returned to their former legal status and masters, many of whom paid dearly in beatings and other forms of oppression for the audacity to seek the freedom promised and granted to them by revolutionary youth of the time.

After a few years, however, in 1855 and 1856, the servitude of Roma, who were privately owned by the boyars, was to be abolished by decisions taken separately but successively by the legislative bodies and rulers of the two Principalities, on the dates now commemorated.

7. 150 Years after Emancipation

Since 1990, with the recognition of Roma as a national minority in post-communist Romania, Romani associations have initiated the celebration of the anniversary of Roma's "exit from slavery" in February each year.

The political act of abolishing slavery as a legal institution in the Romanian Principalities, promulgated between December 1855 and February 1856, is part of our collective memory, of the history of our people, Roma, in Romania, in Europe and all over the world – see, for example, Ian Hancock's book, *The Land of Pain.*

Many Roma freed from slavery migrated to Western Europe and then to the "New World", forming communities that still retain elements of "Vlah" language and culture, or even a complete dialect of the Romanian language – the case of the Boyash or "Rudari" who spread throughout the Balkans, Hungary, and United States.

The above text uses information mainly from newspapers that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century; the text, written in 1980, is *NOT* a work on the history of Romani manumission.

A systematic work by Viorel Achim is now available to Romanian readers: *Istoria ţiganilor din România* (History of the Gypsies in Romania), which includes a chapter on the abolition of Romani slavery. Achim's study also highlights the limits of the actions of the 1848 generation with regard to enslaved Roma: the abolition of slavery was not accompanied by measures to appropriate the enslaved, so that the "marginalisation" of Roma in Romanian society has been reproduced to this day.

We also have shown that a "language gap" exists among Romani activists in how they think and "talk" about Roma today. In this way, we can explore the "dark side" of Romania's public spirit today, an area of

individual and collective subconscious where prejudices, negative stereotypes, and intolerance towards cultural differences, often translated into xenophobia or even racism, take root.

Between the European revolutions of 1848 and the present-day, at the beginning of a new century and millennium, there have been nationalist ideologies, two world wars, the tragedy of the Holocaust, a division of the world during the Cold War, the suppression of individual freedoms in the name of a collective good promoted by totalitarian communism, and the costs of transition in Eastern Europe.

Roma in Romania and Roma around the world have also experienced these tragedies, together with others and separately, in their own way. Today's human rights movement is concerned with combating a resurgence of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, antisemitism, and aggressive nationalism. We believe that, in the context of a transition full of confusion, reading articles written from the mid-nineteenth century could contribute to re-establishing, in the public mentality, a link between the "Roma problem" and a political process of moral and civic reform of a Romania facing the hopes and failures of a new "integration into Europe".

Perhaps the prestige enjoyed by the generation of 1848 in the Romanian consciousness could inspire those of us who write (civic activists, journalists, politicians) to affirm now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ethnic identities of Romanians and Roma, in a civic political process of building a common public space that is democratic, non-discriminatory, tolerant, and open to cultural, religious, and political diversity. Reading the lines that we have reproduced in our text may also help us, descendants of Roma who were freed 150 years ago, to measure the impact of world events on our souls and on others around us.
The manumission of Romani slaves was part of a process of modernisation of Romania's society in the mid-nineteenth century and the establishment of an autonomous and later sovereign and independent Romanian state. The political class of the time explicitly presented the decision to abolish the slavery of Romani people in the Romanian Principalities as a contribution to an international movement against the slave trade and the institution of slavery, in the spirit of the ideals of European and American revolutions for the affirmation of human and civil rights.

The reconstruction of the "abolitionist discourse" for the abolition of the slavery of Romani people in the Romanian Principalities can now, in 2006, be a contribution to the European campaign against racism, intolerance, xenophobia, and antisemitism. Reading public discourse from the press of the mid-nineteenth century has given the author (and perhaps others as well) a feeling of *déjà vu*, *déjà connu.* It is as if, in these years, we, Roma and non-Roma alike, have again felt the need for a "coming out of slavery", a more confused slavery, not related to legal segregations explicitly formulated in legal codes. We seem to be living a "slavery" of the mind caused by *intolerance* towards the other, an intolerance deeply rooted in mentalities, in stereotypes of thought, speech, and feeling, an intolerance that is expressed, among other things, in the way we feel and talk about today's "Gypsies". Again, there seems to be a desire for a change in mentality, including a change in the way Roma are written and spoken about in contemporary Romanian society.

Such a renewed revolution of the soul would be part of a social and political reform of the "transition", which for today's Romania is once again "integration into Europe", an integration into a Europe that is also experiencing moments similar to those of the revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century.

At the beginning of this new millennium, we are all taking part in a new political revolution: that of building a *united* Europe through democratic values and institutions; a *complete* Europe, embracing all geopolitical entities, all peoples and cultures that have formed nation-states, but also national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities; a *non-racist* Europe. A Europe concerned with recovering multiculturalism and tolerance towards others, after having reacted with excessive violence to "foreigners" invented by aggressive nationalism, is now trying to give a chance to Roma, a people living in diasporas across the world, who are the epitome of multiculturalism, of the ability to adapt to different political and cultural environments.

Some of us, who are descendants of traders who came from the India of our ancestors, believe that Europe has become a second motherland for us. In such a Europe, as a political alternative to the "classical" national minorities, some Romani associations have proposed becoming *a European minority*. The Council of Europe and the European Parliament have received and recognised this message, with some documents referring to Roma as "a truly European people", a transnational minority.

After December 1990, the Romanian state faced the challenge of integrating into the structures of the European Union and strengthening its position in the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

In this political process of profound reform of the country's values, political institutions, and economy, the current situation of Roma in Romania is often perceived as an obstacle. Agenda 2000, the European Commission's document on the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, explicitly states in its chapter on the assessment of the political situation in these countries: the human rights of Roma are not respected equally before the laws of the country in the same way as those of other citizens, either belonging to the majority or to other national minorities in Romania. In the case of Roma, the circumstances created by economic transition have led to a deterioration in their daily living conditions, health, their children's education, their access to work, and social protection. Cases of violence against Roma find justifications in the discourse of local authorities and the press that, over time, recall the words used by the defenders of Romani slavery to justify the institution.

The Romanian government's initiatives on Roma-specific issues, including legislative proposals, are not as clear, firm, and effective as those of other neighbouring Central European countries. It is as if Roma, "Gypsies", are once again "a shameful stain", an obstacle, a "ballast" for a Romania that needs the "seal of approval" from the Europe from which it has been cut off, and that once again sees itself as a kind of "poor relative" of Europe, from which it expects recognition and solidarity. It is as if we are once again facing a political and moral challenge similar to that experienced by the intellectual and political elite 150 years ago.

I have transcribed some excerpts of this discourse, so as not to copy it simply, out of ignorance; perhaps we, Romanians and Roma, can succeed in renewing and advancing the reform of the soul that precedes and accompanies political events and legislative acts. The words spoken and written 150 years ago seem to urge today's Romanian political class to be as bold and innovative in their initiatives to reform the socio-

political situation of Roma as their predecessors were in the mid-nineteenth century. They, intellectuals and politicians of the time, were faced with the problem of creating and gaining international recognition for an independent Romanian state: the sympathy and political support of Europe at the time was won, among other reforms, by the abolition of Romani slavery and the granting of full citizenship to Roma of Wallachia and Moldavia.

The challenge to the political class in Romania today is to repeat such a courageous moral and political gesture. Do we now have the imagination and the courage to take up this challenge?

I believe that we could consider of the anniversary of the abolition of Romani slavery in the Romanian Principalities as the beginning of the campaign to combat current forms of racism, intolerance, discrimination, and social exclusion of Roma, as recommended by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its report and resolution on Romania's compliance with its political commitments to respect human rights. A campaign aimed at "escaping the bondage" in which we live, perhaps without being aware of it, due to racial prejudices, and at the common integration of Romania and Roma in Romania into a European political space.

But what if we had the same desire to be part of a "great story" as the hearts of the youth of 1848?
From slaves... to Romanian citizens and through Romania... to European citizenship.

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Legacies of Enslavement: Theatre Review of *The Great Shame*

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Abstract

In this article, I review *The Great Shame*, a play by Alina Șerban, a Romanian Romani playwright and actor. My analysis focuses on the central theme of the play, namely the enslavement of Romani people in the historical Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. While telling a contemporary story about academic engagement with the theme of enslavement, the play sheds light on reminiscences of the past in society, particularly institutionalised and interpersonal racist behaviour, censorship, and the perpetuation of stereotypes.

The Great Shame goes beyond the mere exposition of a painful historical theme, becoming a deep meditation on the continuing impact of the system of slavery on contemporary artistic identity and expressiveness. Therefore, I also discuss the interpretation of the actors of Romani ethnicity in the show – including myself. I address several questions: how does a past of enslavement for hundreds of years affect a contemporary Romani actor? Is an actor's connection to their ancestors visible in their expressiveness. (For example, the character Oprea says, "Our cells carry memories, memories of experiences that our parents and our parents' parents went through.") Does the actors' expressiveness evolve as they better understand and accept their past?

The choice of cast is by no means accidental. Interpreting Romani roles on Romanian stages is a form of restorative justice (Matache 2021) currently conceived and applied in Romania by Romani public figures. In this play, the performances of Romani actors not only evoke a collective memory but bring to the surface the complexity of transgenerational experiences, emphasising the power of art as a form of restorative justice and self-affirmation.

The Great Shame asserts itself as an essential artistic and political act, which provokes both social and personal conscience, offering a mirror through which the past and the present enter a dialogue to build a more conscious and empathetic future.

Keywords

- Ancestors
- Expressiveness
- Slavery
- Theatre

Once Upon a Time…

> Actor Alina Şerban created a show-lesson, *The Great Shame*, in which she makes a documented foray into the history of Roma and a scan of the racist mentality of today. The artistic investigation follows both the public discourse and the self-limitations within the ethnic group, because, under the discriminatory pressure of the majority, the minority censors itself. Thus, the show has two episodes: the questioning of the present through a story that illuminates the character of contemporary Romanian society with regard to Roma and the "lesson" of history itself, with performed documents (Stoica 2017).

To fully understand *The Great Shame* and its profound impact, it is essential to know the historical context of the liberation of Romani people from enslavement, which involves linked political, economic, and social factors that influenced decisions regarding the status of Roma.

Romani people in the historical Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were enslaved by the Crown, boyars (feudal landowners who formed the dominant noble class, exercising both economic and political authority), and the Orthodox Church during the Middle Ages. The beginnings of this system of slavery arguably can be traced back to the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242 (Achim 1998, 28). It may have begun as a practice of enslaving prisoners of war in Eastern Europe, initially applied to Tatars but which evolved to target solely Romani people. During the Byzantine Empire, from whence Roma came to the Romanian Principalities, they were enslaved by the Crown and registered in a special tax register. We can assume *that the two Romanian Principalities took over Romani people as enslaved already,* as here the institution of slavery was older, dating to the time of the battles with Tatars (Livadă-Cadeschi 2015).

Enslaved Roma were divided into different categories, such as princely G*psies, boyar G*psies, and monastic G*psies, each with different obligations and living conditions, but all lacked personal freedom and faced labour exploitation. The economies of the principalities were based primarily on subsistence farming and the forced labour of enslaved Roma and Romanian serfs and peasants.

Enlightenment ideas and emancipation movements that were spreading in Europe impacted the elites of the Romanian Principalities. Ideas about freedom, equality and human rights began to take root in this space as well. Mihail Kogălniceanu, a renowned abolitionist, historian, and politician, recounted the strong impression that enslaved Romani people, dragging their chains through the streets of Iași, made on him in his youth (1892, 266). It seems likely that Enlightenment ideas fuelled a growing dissatisfaction with systems of slavery and other local forms of social inequality in his young mind (Chiriac 2020).

International pressure, especially from Europe, as well as the example of other countries that had abolished slavery, played a role in changing local mentalities and policies. In 1837, Alexandru Ghica, ruler of Wallachia, issued a series of laws aimed at improving the living conditions of enslaved people.

The first law abolishing the enslavement of one category of Roma was adopted in Wallachia, on 22 March 1843. A few years later, on 11 February 1847, at the proposal of the ruler Gheorghe Bibescu, a law was

voted on by which all Roma of the metropolis were released from enslavement by bishoprics, monasteries, and any public establishments (Petcuț 2001).

In 1843, Mihail Sturdza, the ruler of Moldavia, initiated reforms aimed at the progressive emancipation of enslaved Roma. Between 1843 and 1856, several laws were enacted in both principalities aimed at the gradual emancipation of the enslaved. In 1856, the ruler Barbu Știrbei issued the decree for the final release of enslaved Roma from Wallachia, and in 1855, Grigore Alexandru Ghica released enslaved Romani people from Moldavia. Emancipation was not a smooth and uniform process, encountering resistance from boyars and other enslavers, who feared the loss of free labour and their control over it.

Even after liberation, Romani people continued to be marginalised and discriminated against, without access to land or economic resources that would enable them to recover from transgenerational economic, wealth, health, social prestige, and cultural losses and to prosper in society.

After liberation, Roma did not benefit from economic and social support measures. They were not provided with land or other means to support themselves, leaving them in a state of extreme poverty and vulnerability. Without a legal and economic framework to facilitate their integration, many Roma continued to live on the margins of society, becoming victims of discrimination and institutionalised racism. Liberation was an essential step towards the recognition of Roma rights but did not immediately lead to significant change in their social and economic status. The legacies of slavery have continued to influence perceptions and attitudes towards Roma, perpetuating negative stereotypes and social exclusion.

Who Is History Told by?

Various differences and relational elements between the system of slavery and the system of serfdom have been conceptualised and nuanced in certain historical and social contexts. In the specific case of Romania, the terminology preferred, or imposed, to describe the experiences of over 500 years of Romani enslavement is critical. Historians and other scholars have often used the power of cannons and terminology to advance the term "*rob*" (serf) as opposed to "*sclav*" (enslaved) and, consequently, downplay the brutality and impacts of the system of slavery in the Romanian Principalities.

Yet, slavery, in the strict sense, involves a complete deprivation of a person's freedom and fundamental rights, reducing enslaved Roma to the status of someone else's property. In contrast, serfdom had more varied connotations and was less dehumanising, as it did not reduce Romanian serfs to a status of property but was still an oppressive form of servitude.

As Becky Taylor said in her work *Another Darkness, Another Dawn: A History of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers,* the history of Romani people remains at least for now, a history told by non-Roma.

"Who is history told by?" asks Magda in *The Great Shame* when the teacher's oppression cannot be countered through dialogue. However, the performative revolt of the student does not have the expected effect/echo and the singularity of her voice tends to be found only in the turmoil of the teacher Oprea.

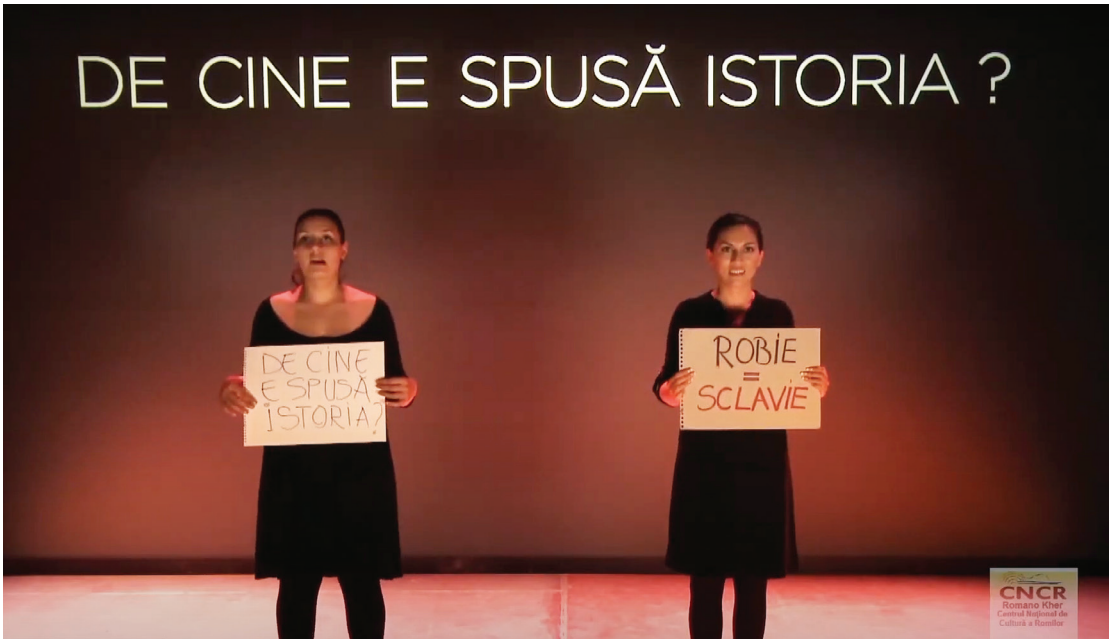

Figure 1. Still from *The Great Shame*

Magda (right) and Elena (left, daughter of Professor Oprea) join the protest organised by the young master's student. The placards of the two girls read: Magda: Serfdom = Slavery; Elena: Who is history told by? The photo is a screenshot from a recording of *The Great Shame* at 50'34". A link to the recording can be found in the references.

In *The Great Shame*, Magda tries to highlight the gravity and injustice of slavery. However, the intervention of the coordinating teacher, who censures Magda by refusing her use of the term "slave", reflects an actual scholarly and societal trend to minimise historical trauma and diminish collective responsibility for such atrocities. This academic and interpretive censorship not only undermines the real experiences of Roma but also perpetuates a form of denial of the past often found in hegemonic discourses.

From the point of view of interpretative theatre analysis, this scene can be seen as a critique of how society and academic institutions have the power to manage, distort, and interpret Romani history. In a theatrical setting, this conflict between Magda and her coordinating teacher becomes a symbolic representation of the struggle for truth-telling, recognition, and justice. Fortunately for us, theatre as an art form has the potential to expose and challenge these tensions, providing a space for marginalised voices to be heard and audiences to be confronted with uncomfortable realities and untold stories.

This censorship dynamic in *The Great Shame* can be analysed through a prism of postcolonial theory, which examines how dominant discourses perpetuate inequalities and control historical narratives. Edward Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), argues that the West has systematically distorted representations of non-Western cultures to justify colonial rule. Said describes how these representations not only alter the perception of the Orient, but also serve to maintain colonial power through the construction of subordinating and exoticising narratives. The response of the

coordinating professor reveals how the academic authority can rewrite and diminish the historical experience of Roma:

> I gave you the opportunity for a Roma master's student to prove that she can be as good as any master's student. And what are you doing? We have a problem: I suggested replacing the expression Roma slavery with Roma serfdom... How to use the subtitle 500 years of Roma slavery in Romania, that is an inadmissible ideological error.

Applying and adjusting postcolonial theory to *The Great Shame*, the teacher's intervention to censor the use of the term "slave" can be seen as an act of domestic orientalism, where Romanian dominant narratives avoid fully acknowledging the atrocities committed against Roma in order to maintain a clean and unproblematic national image.

> I have no reason to feel ashamed... did I have slaves? If I don't feel ashamed, does that mean I'm a racist?

This statement is voiced by the same professor, who positions himself as detached and morally unaffected revealing how the refusal to acknowledge historical responsibility becomes a strategy for preserving dominant comfort.

Gayatri Spivak, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), explores the difficulty of the marginalised to express their voices in a context dominated by hegemonic discourses. Spivak points out that the subaltern (those on the fringes of society) often lack the means and structures to articulate their experiences and suffering in a way that is heard and understood by those in power. In *The Great Shame*, the censoring of the term "slave" by the coordinating teacher is a clear example of an attempt to silence a subaltern voice, in this case, the voice of Roma who are trying to claim and tell their own history.

Through these theoretical lenses, the teacher's intervention is not just a simple act of academic censorship but a manifestation of power that controls and limits historical narratives to protect existing power structures. This censorship reflects a tension between the hegemonic collective memory and the efforts of historically marginalised groups to acknowledge and affirm their traumatic past. In the context of the theatre, the scene in which Magda is censored thus becomes a focal point for the critique of power and for highlighting the need to allow spaces for free and authentic expression for all voices, especially marginalised ones.

Relations

Magda Vernescu's story explores the complex and tense relationships with those around her, and each relationship contributes to shaping her personal and professional path.

Magda's love affair with a *gadjo* (a term used to denote a non-Romani person) is one that often causes cultural and family conflicts. The *gadjo*, a fellow university student, is open and eager to understand

Romani culture but often encounters resistance from members of the community. He is also played by a *gadjo* actor – Radu Ciobănașu. This relationship could be seen as a representation of Magda's desire to join majority society but also the difficulties encountered in maintaining her cultural identity. The university professor, who is of Romanian origin, represents academic authority and, in a certain sense, the voice of the dominant discourse. He is the one who censures Magda, refusing to allow her to use the term "slave" to describe the historical experiences of Roma. This conflict reveals the tension between the official narrative of history and the lived truth of Romani people. Magda sees him as a major obstacle to the correct recognition of a Romani past.

Mrs. Oprea, a Romani teacher, becomes Magda's mentor and unconditional supporter. I, a Romani actor – Oana Rusu – play the teacher character. Elena Duminică, another Romani actor, plays the role of my daughter in the show. Mrs. Oprea is a mother figure who dreamed of writing a book about Romani slavery but gave up for various personal and professional reasons. In Magda, Mrs. Oprea sees a reflection of her own aspirations and the desire to bring unspoken truths to light. This relationship is one of female empowerment and solidarity, giving Magda the emotional and intellectual support she needs to continue her fight. The fact that the professional relationship between the two women continues in the writing of a book about Romani slavery leaves us a ray of light and hope that the stories of our ancestors will not remain untold.

For me, the interpretation of this role overlapped the novelty of the information I was learning with indignation and revolt. I recalled my grandmother, telling me about her childhood and re-interpreting all her stories, feeling that I finally understood their subtext. Each rehearsal consumed me more than any other because I was in a process of re-identification.

This new development and fluidity in my identity made me think of Jacques Lacan's theory that our identity is not fixed but is continuously formed and reconfigured through our relationship with our image and with others (Lacan 1978, 76). In the context of theatre, this idea becomes extremely relevant because actors, through the repetition of roles, are challenged to reconnect and constantly reinterpret their own identity through the lens of the character they are playing. Even more so when the play you are acting in has to do with your nation's historical past. An actor may begin to assimilate the traits or emotions of the character they're playing, leading to a dissonance between their personal and professional selves. This fragmentation of the self can be psychologically draining, especially when the character is going through intense or emotional moments, as in *The Great Shame*. Therefore, rehearsals become not only an exercise in memorisation and performance but also one of self-reflection and identity negotiation.

Magda's brother, the priest Vernescu, played by Romani actor Sorin Sandu, works for the Church, an institution that has a controversial history regarding the enslavement of Romani people. The relationship between Magda and her brother is deep and complex, marked by different visions of the past and the present. Vernescu sees the Church as a force of morality and salvation, while Magda looks at it critically from the historical perspective of oppression and disinterest in regret, repair, and healing. The scene of the interview between Magda and Vernescu is illustrative of these differences of vision. Magda challenges her brother to recognise the Church's role in perpetuating the system of slavery, while Vernescu tries to explain to her the complexity and changes of the institution over time. The relationship with her priest

brother, in particular, deepens Magda's internal conflict between loyalty to family and the desire for truth and justice. Vernescu represents tradition and an attempt to find meaning and hope in a complicated institution, while Magda symbolises a new generation that demands transparency and recognition of the past. This complex relationship provides rich material for reflection and discussion, inviting the audience to contemplate their own views of history, religion, and identity.

Thus, in this context, as Matache argues, "Ignoring reparative mechanisms – apologies, compensations, memorialisation and historical truth processes – is not casual negligence. It is the product of memory wipe" (Matache 2021).

This story is a study of interpersonal, institutional, and social tensions, offering insight into a young Romani woman's struggle to assert her identity and break free from historical power and cultural constraints. Each relationship in Magda's life adds a new dimension to her understanding and the complexity of her condition. Theatre is a powerful medium to expose these conflicts, using dialogue and stage interactions to bring themes of identity, justice, and reconciliation to the fore.

Through its relationships with those around it, the show manages to raise essential themes of identity, power and historical truth, providing a platform for often silenced voices.

Legacies…

The interpretive and aesthetic direction of cultural productions plays a vital role in how the public perceives and appreciates them. It is not enough to make performances with and about Roma: we need to look deeply into how they are produced and presented. In this regard, performances are not just a form of entertainment but a medium through which complex cultural stories and themes are explored and transmitted to the public.

A significant example in this sense is the approach of the director Alina Șerban, who creates an apparent separation of plans between the present and the past in this show. She emphasises the need to understand the past in order to live in the present and to let go of prejudices and stereotypes. The lessons of the past should not be presented as an argument or a slap, but in a way that is firm but not harsh, compressed but not reduced. Only in this way is the message received and understood.

In the first part of the show, the story is fluently presented, and the characters are interpreted realistically, we could say according to the "Stanislavski method". This method emphasises the importance of authenticity and lived experience in the actors' interpretation. In the second part of the show, the characters are sketched discreetly, with irony – boyars who feel wronged that they must free the people they enslaved – in some places with humour but also drama – in the case of Coana Profirita who has to free her "slave" whom she raised as her own child. In this particular context, a relevant theorist is Bertolt Brecht, who introduced the concept of "distancing" or the "alienation effect". Brecht argued that the audience should not be completely absorbed by the illusion of theatre, but rather be aware of the fictional nature of performance in order to reflect critically on the themes presented (Brecht 1977, 31). This is pertinent

to the historical part of Alina Șerban's show, where the separation of plans between present and past can serve as a Brechtian mechanism to provoke reflection and introspection.

A major challenge in artistic representation is creating an authentic connection between present and past. This requires not only a deep understanding of history but also an ability to present these stories in a relevant and expressive way. That is why the actors' play combines irony and drama to render the complexity of human experiences. This dual approach allows viewers to see beyond stereotypes and explore the complex motivations of the characters, thus creating a connection between the historical narrative and contemporary reality.

Set design and visual expression are key elements in creating the atmosphere of a show and directing the audience's attention. The stage is not unnecessarily loaded with props, but a minimalist design is used to emphasise the message of the show. The separation of space is achieved through the use of lights and projections of character names in the background, ensuring that the audience remains focused on the core of the story's essence and the characters' interactions.

According to Edward Gordon Craig's scenic design theory, minimalism in set design can amplify a performance's emotional and intellectual impact by allowing audience members to use their imagination to fill in missing details. Here, light and shadow become powerful tools for visual storytelling, creating contrasts that emphasise the moral tensions and dilemmas of the characters. *Design elements must function as symbols and communicate deeper meanings, rather than simply reflecting the real world* (Lucarelli 2014). In any cultural representation, there is a complex dynamic between stories that are privileged and those that are marginalised. This aspect is essential in exploring representations of the Other, often influenced by social, political, and historical factors. *The Great Shame* brings to the fore the experiences of those who have been historically oppressed, excluded, and underrepresented. Therefore, the role of cultural productions, of Romani artists, regardless of the field, is not only to inform but also to provoke emotions and critical reflections among the public.

The emotional impact of a play often depends on its ability to address universal themes and foster empathy through the characters and stories presented. According to Aristotle's theory of catharsis, theatre has the power to purify the audience's emotions through empathy and introspection. ...*evoking pity and fear, (tragedy) carries out the purification characteristic of such emotions* (author's translation from the Romanian edition) (Aristotle 1957). The audience is always invited to live alongside the characters and explore the moral dilemmas and challenges together,accomplishing a form of collective catharsis. In the spring of this year, Alina Șerban – director and author of the play – stated small details of great significance in an interview:

> I wanted to show solidarity between us. I really care about lifting each other up. Before the premiere, I took the actor Oana Rusu by the hand, I looked into her eyes and my tears were already flowing. Because we were together not just physically. We were two Roma women on stage. As we, the actors, sat in the booth before the show, we were very emotional – we felt that it wasn't just any play. Because others have not been on stage as Roma to tell their story. Their story and that of their ancestors. And we were trembling with fear. That we want to do

> good, that we are limited, that we are tired. That... all our human failings. I told them: We are together. No one is alone. This song is supported by all of us. Today, on 20 February (Day of Liberation), we have the honour of feeling many souls behind us. For them we must find the strength to tell this story. When I looked up, it was incredible. The physical space seems to no longer exist.

Cast

Premiere: 20 February 2018
Magda Vernescu – Alina Șerban/Ana Maria Carablais/Doinița Oancea
The professor – Radu Ciobanașu
Daniel, the *gadjo* boyfriend –Radu Ciobănașu
Teacher Oprea – Oana Rusu
Elana Oprea – Elena Duminică
Priest Vernescu – Ninel Petrache/Alexandru Fifea/Sorin Sandu
Directed by: Alina Șerban
Assistant director: Ștefan Pătrașcu/Radu Pocovnicu
Lights: Costi Baciu
Sound: Cristian Constantin
Video design: Tania Cucoreanu
Set designer: Maria Crețu
Production: CNCR-RK National Centre for Roma Culture "Romano Kher"

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Book review by

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The book *Particularitățile Misiunii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în Comunitățile Romilor Căldărari* explores the historical, theological, and sociological dimensions of the Orthodox Church's role in the enslavement of Romani people, specifically the Căldărari sub-group. The author aims to present the community's ethos and examine the impact of the Romanian Church on their evangelization.

Written with an academic rigor that resembles a doctoral dissertation, the book provides valuable and broad insights into the history of Romani people. The book starts with an introduction that explains the scope, aims, and methodology. It then surveys a large historical narrative of Roma in Chapter 1. Further, in Chapter 2, Căldăraru uses original sources and existing literature to analyse the status and conditions of Romani people in the institution of slavery. Chapter 3 discusses the role of the Orthodox Church in the centuries-long enslavement of Romani people within the Romanian principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, and Transylvania. Next, he focuses Chapter 4 on the Căldărari community's interactions with the Orthodox Church. Chapter 5 examines the influences of other Christian traditions within Romani communities and critically assesses the impact of Neoprotestant religions. In the last chapter, Chapter 6, the author reflects on the ethos and pastoral mission of the Church in the life of Roma. The book concludes by offering an overview of Romani history, focusing on Romania, detailing their enslavement, persecution during the Holocaust, and ongoing oppression. And while presenting the enduring social, economic, and political challenges the community faces, the author expresses hope that their ultimate freedom lies in God.

The book starts by providing an analytical overview of Romani people's origins, community development, and their economic, social, and geographical transitions. This is never an easy task, especially considering the lack of reliable data and historical sources. For centuries, Romani people did not have access to writing their own history – and, until recently, the insights we have come from the "hegemony," that is, the majority community who has been recording history. Since one's history and origins are assumed to be "given," being the very basis of one's identity, and belonging narratives are paramount in today's world, not having them "other"-izes and marginalizes communities. This leaves Romani people needing to produce and reproduce discourses of history and power. And because Romani history is neither widely known nor uniformly accepted, many studies on Romani topics must reiterate a definition of the community, explaining yet again who Roma are, how diverse and unique they are, how their names came into being, and how all this needs to be used today.

The originality of the book lies in the examination of the Orthodox Church's historical role in the lives of the Roma people – balancing between spiritual salvation and complicity in their subjugation. An important and precious asset of this book rests on the author's access to monastic writings and documents – a privilege not awarded to many. These references are well-cited, and the research is comprehensive. The critical analysis and breadth of perspective, however, fall short, especially regarding the complex institution of Romani slavery in Romania.

More specifically, one of the book's most compelling sections delves into the historical roots of Romani slavery in Romania, beginning with the first attestation of Romani presence in 1385. To support his argument, the author highlights a critical document referencing enslaved Roma being donated to the Tismana Monastery, which underscores the early institutionalization of slavery. By examining the historical details of the monastery's documents, the author effectively illustrates how such systems of oppression were embedded into societal structures by the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

His approach aims to situate the Orthodox Church within the customs and practices of its time, and to create a synchronic perspective on its historical entanglements.

However, the argument he is trying to make is undermined by the fragile rigor of the writing style and analysis. Căldăraru attempts to show that, compared with other institutions such as the state or the boyars (that is, a high-ranking aristocratic class in medieval and early modern Eastern Europe), the Church acted in good faith, treated enslaved Roma better, and was preoccupied with saving their souls. While the author emphasizes the Church's role in the eventual emancipation of Romani people, his evidence actually reveals how slavery was accepted, perpetuated, and supported by the Church.

Căldăraru sharply outlines how Roma were enslaved in monasteries throughout the three Romanian principates. This practice is mainly presented as a form of gift-giving from state officials or boyars to monasteries. For example, in 1578, "Boyar Detco gifted Mărgineni Monastery some 'țigani,' given for the peace of his dead brother" (Căldăraru 2022, 99). The author enumerates multiple instances of Romani families being 'gifted,' and fully acknowledging how this system reinforced human enslavement would reveal how inequities have been systematically justified and supported. However, once in the Church's possession, Roma are objectified, as there is no reference to their lives or conditions. This framing seems to absolve the Church of actively participating in the slave trade and ownership, instead portraying it as a passive recipient of such "gifts." Yet, the Church had to play an active role once human beings officially became its property. In this regard, Căldăraru falls short of analyzing how the Church perceived and treated Romani people.

Nevertheless, the book allows the reader to take it upon themselves to examine critically the unique role that the Church played in all Romanian principalities and see how the practice of Roma enslavement brought together many types of enslavers, including boyars, monasteries, and the voivodeship/state. Căldăraru's minute presentation clearly distinguishes between the roles of different systems of governance across the Romanian principalities: Wallachia, Moldova, and Transylvania, and their impact on Romani enslavement procedures (for example, in Transylvania – part of the Austro-Habsburg empire – slavery was not institutionalized). He argues how the pathways into slavery were equally diverse, ranging from traveller donations and enlistment in slavery to escape poverty, to landlords becoming monks and bringing enslaved Roma into religious domains. Yet, the perpetual nature of this institutionalized system ensured that children born into slavery were also enslaved, with the cycle further reinforced by practices such as buying and selling enslaved individuals. Furthering this reflection on the social, economic, and cultural consequences of these interactions between Romani people and those in power, especially the Romanian Church, could create a strong analysis of slavery as an institutional power.

In spite of these shortcomings, Căldăraru's access to resources, as well as his careful inspection and documentation are a significant strength of the book. Its reliance on primary sources to describe the dynamics between Roma and Romanians, and references to specific documents – such as Mavrocordat's *Hrisov Domnesc de Învățătură* (1785) – provide valuable first-hand insights into these relationships. The book is descriptive, and by being so, misses an opportunity to analyze the institutionalization of human ownership critically. A more thorough interrogation into how and why such systems were justified, particularly through religious and societal norms, could empower research into the underpinnings of systemic injustice perpetuated on historically oppressed communities.

As this work aims to bring to light how the particular characteristics of the Romanian Orthodox Church's Mission impacted the Căldărar Romani people, the author highlights the spiritual journey some Roma undertook. Căldăraru argues that the encounter of Roma with the Church in Romania led to interactions and often conversion to Christianity. This could be seen as an emancipation within a spiritual journey, which is honorable. However, we also need to recognize that this encounter of Roma with the Church in the Romanian space also led to nearly 500 years of slavery. Furthermore, this brings us to the elephant-in-the-room questions: "Why did it take the Church so long – that is, centuries – to advocate for emancipation?" and "Why did the Church oppose the progressive intellectuals' and state's efforts to abolish slavery in the 1800s?" Yes, the Church operates within society and historical time, but as Căldăraru himself outlines, it also has a special role in referencing "the transcendent Truth." If that logic applies, why did not the Church propose alternatives to enslavement or voice ideas of human freedom for all within its own quarters? These questions remain unanswered in the current version of the work, leaving the reader to speculate. Perhaps the Orthodox Church – at least in its social functions – was simply a product of its time and acted accordingly. Maybe they tried but were unable to move the abolitionist agenda/acts forward. Or maybe its delay in advocating for emancipation, and at times its opposition to abolitionist efforts, resulted from a combination of complicity, institutional self-interest, theological conservatism, and a reluctance to challenge the societal norms it had helped shape and from which it also benefited. While these possibilities are implied in Căldăraru's work, the absence of a clear authorial stance makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions or move the discussion forward.

Additionally, while the author touches on the intersection of slavery and the exploitation of Romani women, the analysis is limited. The complex gendered underpinnings of the financial, economic, social, political, and ethical dimensions of enslavement of women are only briefly mentioned, with the focus primarily on the eventual emancipation of those who suffered enslavement. A more focused lens would provide a comprehensive understanding of how slavery shaped practices in Romani families, their gendered dynamics, and their place in Romanian society.

Overall, the book offers valuable insights into the historical dynamics of Romani enslavement and the role of the Orthodox Church. It is a trove of data drawn directly from original monastic sources, many of which have rarely been accessible. However, the author's reliance on descriptive narratives and theological framing limits a deeper exploration of the systemic oppression endured by Roma. In so doing, it leaves many critical questions unanswered, extending an implicit invitation to researchers to engage with this data and develop a more profound analysis of power dynamics and the subjugation of diverse Romani communities within the broader context of social justice. Nevertheless, the earnestness of the research and the commitment to uncovering the complex historical experiences of Romani people resonate throughout every page of this meticulously crafted book, making Căldăraru's scholarship an important step in understanding and addressing the historical oppression of Romani people.

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