Critical Romani Studies

Roma LGBTI, Feminist Movement and Scholarship

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

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 The Journal considers only previously unpublished manuscripts which present original, high-quality research.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

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

Foreword

Roma LGBTI, Feminist Movement and Scholarship

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In 2022, Romani women are still objectified, sexualized, and forcibly sterilized; Romani transgender people are raped, abused, and excommunicated; Romani people who live with disability(ies) are dehumanized and marginalized; Romani LGBTI[1] people are victims of LGBTI-phobic motivated hate crimes and discourse in racist heteronormative non-Romani society and within Romani and LGBTI movements, respectively. Romani LGBTI people face and resist intersectional oppression, internalization, normalized public shaming, and scapegoating. They are violated and excluded intersectionally because of their identities and/or characteristics, as people with disability(ies), social class status, intragroup differences, gender identities, sexuality, age characteristics, or any other intersections of these (Bitu 2009; Brooks 2009; Jovanovic 2009; Matache 2009; Kutic 2013; Baker 2015; Mate 2015; Tiser 2015; Carmen 2016; Fremlova 2017; Corradi 2018; Mate 2020; Fremlova 2021).

When we critically reflect on the development over the past fifty years (1971–2021) of the international Romani movement, we note that Romani LGBTI people and feminist visibility were rarely addressed. However, this does not mean that Romani LGBTI people and feminists were not part of the mainstream Romani movement. Romani LGBTI people consistently have been influential members of the movement for Romani human and political rights emancipation; they had a decisive role in the Romani movement. As the first generation of Romani activists, they resisted together for the first cultural and identity representation of Roma from the 1940s until the 1970s, promoting visibility, equality, and dignity for all. They fought for the autonomy and freedom of Romani arts and culture in particular, as well as for overall Romani emancipation, and leadership (Kallai 2000; Marsh 2007; Junghaus 2014). From 1971, Romani cultural identity politics, with a second generation of Romani intellectuals and resistance as its engine, transformed into an institutional political movement which, by the 1990s, led to the emergence of Romani civil rights activism (Mate 2020; Marton 2021). In the 2000s, a third generation of Romani activists and scholars focused on analysing and resisting antigypsyism, anti-Romani racism,[2] and LGBTI-phobia, with knowledge production, cultural representation, human rights recommendations, and protections (Mirga–Kruszelnicka 2018; Fejzula 2019; Rostas 2019; Rovid 2021).

Until the 2010s, due to socially normalized antigypsyism, LGBTI-phobia, and structural social, institutional, and academic oppression, Romani LGBTI people as well as feminist activists and intellectuals lacked voice, visibility, and representations in mainstream (white, middle-class, majoritarian) movements and scholarship. In the early 2000s there was a turning point in Romani history, as physical resistance (demonstrations, hunger strikes, and so on) shifted to intellectual resistance in the field of knowledge production (Bogdan, Ryder, and Taba 2015; Costache 2018).

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1 LGBTI refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Tansgender, Intersex; Queer, Asexual, and Pansexual identities.

2 The terms *antigypsyism* and *anti-Romani racism* both refer to special forms of racism against Romani people. However, they are not interchangeable. Some scholars argue that the root of *antigypsyism* (Gypsy) is a racial slur and insult, therefore they prefer the terms *anti-Romani racism* or *Romaphobia.* Others argue that *antigypsyism* denotes more than anti-Romani racism. It goes beyond the scope of this footnote to summarize this debate.

The intellectual resistance is based on "*talking back*", i.e., confronting systemic normalized antigypsyism, anti-Romani racism, and LGBTI-phobia (Mate 2020). In the 2010s, Romani LGBTI and feminist voices were increasingly recognized in academic and activist discourse. Romani LGBTI and feminist movements and scholarship tackle issues of personal freedom and collective emancipation (Kocze 2009; Daroczi and Jovanovic 2015; Heljic 2017; Mate 2017). They contribute to social sciences, policymaking, and community services. Their present recognition is the result of struggles by pioneering Romani LGBTI activists, scholars, and supportive allies (Corradi 2018).

When, on the 12th of October 2014, Vera Kurtic, David Tiser, Jelena Jovanovic, Joci Marton, and myself met at a workshop[3] in Budapest, I am not sure whether we were aware of our leading position and power in international Romani LGBTI and feminist activism and scholarship. Before this, each of us had worked separately, mostly at the national and grass-roots levels. We realized that our voices and efforts must unite and support each other, no matter the cost. By 2015, at the first International Romani LGBTI Conference in Prague, (we) the representative participants declared that our intersectional identity ought to be celebrated and protected, and we must build reliable and supportive alliances to minimize oppression within and between our communities. Romani LGBTI people are facing intersectional social oppression and violations between and within their own communities (Romani, LGBTI) on a daily basis. It is essential to openly manifest our community's lived experiences and to combat intersectional antigypsyism, anti-Romani racism, racialization, exclusions, intolerant attitudes, and hate crimes together. We, as activists, artists, curators, community and political leaders, and scientists, are responsible not only for our own statements and actions but also for the development of future generations' identity, visibility, and self-esteem.[4] Ever since the mid-2010s, our movement has experienced ups and downs: its members shared sensitive emotions, debates, and disagreements. Some members got hurt, some caused harm; some became more visible, others stepped back. Our community is intersectionally vulnerable.

Based on the last decade's Romani LGBTI- and feminist-lived experience and scholarship, it is appropriate to critically discuss and challenge intersectional antigypsyism and anti-Romani racism across Europe. It is crucial to critically reflect on the controversies of human rights protection, movements, and scholarship. Our present recognition is the result of struggles by pioneering Romani LGBTI activists, scholars, and their supportive allies. To challenge the status quo is a collective aim where Romani, LGBTI people, people of colour, racialized communities, feminists, sex-workers, stigmatized communities with AIDS and HIV, and people with disability(ies), must stand together and demand back - not asking their- our fundamental human rights.

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3 Roma Research and Empowerment Network – Nothing about us without us? Workshop on Coalition building and transforming the Romani movement: Feminism, LGBT rights, trade unions. Roma Research and Empowerment Network (wordpress.com), 12 October 2014.

4 Prague Declaration – First International Roma LGBTIQ Conference (13–14 August 2015), ARA ART, o.s. Prague Declaration final (araart.cz)

Resilience and Resistance

Being a founding member of the current international Romani LGBTI movement and scholarship is challenging both mentally and physically. The cost of all our work, efforts, and actions is paid in our health, personal security, and relationships. We are targeted, labelled, dehumanized, stigmatized, and exiled on a daily basis. Is it really worth it? I can categorically state that an increasing number of Romani LGBTI people and supportive alliances continue to join our movement with pride and dignity mean, so yes, it's worth it!

We are vulnerable but resistant and resilient. This period is a critical landmark in Romani her/they/hi(s) story due to physical resistance that has transformed into intellectual resilience.

Before continuing, let's circle back because resilience and resistance are popular but frequently misused terms. The notion of *resilience* appeared in the early 1970s in ecological terms; it was then adopted in a socio-ecological context. In the 1990s it was observed and noted in social-psychology, education, and development studies. In 1991, Hispanic children who lived in the United States were observed, despite their low socio-economic status and a discriminatory institutional environment, to achieve outstanding results at school when mentored by a supportive educator. These students were known as invulnerable (Alva and Padilla 1991). In the European context, Edith H. Grotberg came to similar conclusions when she was examining trauma in early childhood lived experiences. Grotberg's research results and observations verified resilience as well. Students examined by her went on to achieve outstanding performance in their careers, and the assumed motivation was their compliance and conformity to the majority. She named these children resilients (Grotberg 1995).

Resistance not only denotes social action by people but silence, too, as well as various forms of arts, cultural, and knowledge production, representations, and symbols. It correlates with the material environment, through which people are able to physically challenge the status quo in different places and spaces such as walls, buildings, streets, squares, institutions, or even an entire country. An act of resistance transforms and strengthens identity politics. To sustain resistance and disempower social structures, the actions must be constantly repeated, evaluated, and re-considered.

Resilience refers to inner balance, maintained despite the forces of oppression. It is a flexible adaptation which is able to regain its previous solid state when facing unexpected psychological or physical shocks and/or violations. Resilient people are part of the resistance movement. Resistance is mostly associated with visible places, whereas resilience is an inner flexible ability, therefore resilient people are the foundations of movements. Resistance and resilience complement one another: one cannot exist without the other (Mate 2020; Selling 2021).

The Politics of (Mis)Representations and Alliances

The ideology of antigypsyism and heteronormativity was generated by external non-Romani, cisgender, heterosexual, privileged discourse, which often presents a racialized, classist, sexist, and objectified conceptualization of intersectional LGBTI people. These dehumanizing stigmatizations excluded our own narratives and representations, limited our access to knowledge and its production; i.e., the needs, visibility, representations, and lived experiences of intersectional LGBTI people. Romani and LGBTI persons, people of colour, sex-workers, and people with disability(ies) face similar structures of oppression, unspoken violations, and harassment. Repeated struggles form lines around those who now enjoy absolute rights and freedoms in today's movement, politics, and alliance. Having our allies' engaged support is more important than ever. The theory of collective action states that cooperation, ideally, promotes common good for all. It could generate a solid commonwealth via group cooperation and reliability (Mancur 1965). Only through open cooperation can dominant groups and the subaltern enjoy the results of collective action (Spivak 1995).

Taking pride as a Romani LGBTI person, but recognizing my privileges as a cisgender man, I was delighted to find that there are coalitions in the cross-movements which preserve a safe space and place, even though we share similar forms of social exclusion, oppression, and violation. Although there are tensions between academic and activist positionalities in the Romani, and more specifically in the Romani LGBTI movement, our joint aim is to promote social change. However, ethnic (Romani vs. non-Romani) and gender identities, sexuality, social class status, and life experiences shape the movement's drives, expectations, and results. We have to appreciate and respect each other's identities, characteristics, and boundaries, not to hurt, shame, or violate one another, nor reinforce the structures of social oppression.

In order to critically analyse the Romani LGBTI movement's leadership, representation, and visualization, it is essential to acknowledge Romani LGBTI members' academic, cultural, and life experiences. The embodied position of allies – even with supportive intentions – risk to (re)colonize the representation of the Romani LGBTI and Romani feminist movements. Non-Romani LGBTI voices and knowledge can undermine our visibility and the movement. The politics of recognition and epistemic justice requires the privileged *not* to direct the representations and knowledge production of the vulnerable, for the simple reason they have never experienced the reality of Romani LGBTI people or Romani women.

Alliances must recognize when they suppress community members' representation and leadership, and try not to create more harm and inequality than reliability and support. If a single person is hurt by such an alliance in the movement, then the whole community falls victim to epistemic violation. On the other hand, personal and social privileges must be mobilized to promote and strengthen our communities for the collective good. Common or shared identities are not sufficient to assume leadership in any movement, especially in the Romani LGBTI movement. Self-centred power practice damages those who are invisible, vulnerable, and powerless. Egocentric competition creates oppression and misrepresentation for hidden members of the movement. The position of the oppressed via such "puppet" power can easily shift to the oppressor, with no acknowledgment or acceptance of subconscious self-colonization. Acting in solidarity requires an understanding of whom the individual is acting in solidarity with, and why. Alliance building faces two challenges: first, the role of allies in the conceptualization and deliberation of

the values of emancipation. Second, the position and power of allies within the movement, concerning issues of visibility and representation.

Academic and activist discourse – even with good intentions – often reproduce "othering" images of Roma. Narratives of "underclass", "ethnic minority", "disadvantaged group", and "catching up" play this role. Critical self-narratives are necessary to analyse the social and historical embeddedness of such categories and distinctions as "Roma/Gadjo" and "Gypsy/Peasant". In cases where scientific "discourse" is about the underclass, the poor, the minority, the disadvantaged, catching up, or ethnicity, everyone clearly knows that the subject is "the Gypsy". These positions are currently still at odds with what practitioners of privileged science call "suffering discourse". However, in order that forward-looking social change and mobility take place, scientific self-narrative and objective reflection are necessary.

Romani LGBTI people are not simply "commentators" or "members of activism". Vanishing our knowledge, representation, and visibility, is epistemic violation.

WE ARE THE MOVEMENT!

The Present Thematic Issue

This special issue arose from the "Romani LGBTQ Movement and Gender Politics" panel which was part of at the Critical Approaches to Romani Studies conference held at the Central European University on 15–17 May 2019. By organizing the panel my initial intention was to bring public attention to how Romani LGBTI and feminist narratives and academic knowledge is part and parcel of society's day-to-day reality. The panel included three papers. Vera Kurtic from Serbia presented her academic narrative on the Romani Lesbian Movement and Existence. David Tiser gave a political-activist speech on the Roma LGBTIQA Movement and the Role of ARA ART, the pioneering organization he founded in the Czech Republic. I gave a paper on Romani LGBTQ Intersectional Marginalization and Social Distances.

The thematic issue begins with Laura Corradi`s new-wave paper discussing social (mis)representations and identity politics of the "Gypsy Queer" versus self-representations emerging from activists' experiences. Following Corradi`s article, Arman Heljic provides a critical intersectional analysis of the theatre play *Roma Armee*. Heljic addresses the preconceptions and representations of Romani queer and feminist identities by examining individual narratives and the self-envisioning of queer and feminist Romani entertainers.

Justyna Matkowska offers an excellent overview of Romani woman representations in contemporary Polish and Romani literary texts. Her research demonstrates how the perception of Romani women influenced artistic imagination and literary discourses. Ahmad Al-Kurdi`s article gives a precise analysis of intersectional inequalities faced by queer Roma women**,** where economic and symbolic inequalities are similarly intertwined. The last academic paper is David Szoke`s essay which examines the violations of the Pro Juventute organisation against the Yenish minority community. In his essay, Szoke analyses how state power intended to "stop vagrancy" and, from 1926 to 1970, purify Swiss society from the "genetically degenerate". During this period almost 2,000 children were forced from their families and

placed in psychiatric institutions, prisons, or given to foster families, where they were exposed to mental and physical abuse.

The thematic issue includes two book reviews. Silvia Cittadini offers a profound overview of the autobiography of Mikey Walsh's *Gypsy Boy. My Life in the Secret World of the Romany Gypsies*. Erika Bernacchi undertakes a deep and much needed review of Laura Corradi`s *Gypsy Feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism*. Both books and their reviews provide insight into a world of intersectional oppression**.**

In the Arts and Culture section Daniel Baker presents the narrative and background of the *"Altered States: LGBTQ-R"* flag, which became the symbol of the international Romani LGBTI movement and scholarship. The cover of the current special issue is elevated by Baker's artwork and generous contribution. In terms of narrative record and cultural memory, the journal includes the speech David Tiser delivered at Central European University in 2019. Tiser is the executive director of ARA ART, a Czech association which focuses on artistic creation and organizes national and international cultural events, amongst other cultural and social activities. A unique mission of ARA ART is to support Romani LGBTI people, raise awareness, and offer advocacy and identity development.

Isaac Blake is the executive director of the Welsh Romani Cultural & Arts Company (RCAC) and previously studied and worked as a choreographer and professional dancer. In his work with the RCAC, Isaac has developed arts and performance programmes with communities living on Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites, in housing and in accommodation, working with children, young people and adults. Blake`s arts and culture narrative, offers a unique overview of Romani arts, dance, and advocacy in action.

The thematic issue is the result of more than two years of intensive work. I believe its academic results and narratives will contribute to future Romani LGBTI generation's pride and critical knowledge production.

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to journal contributors, to all the anonymous double-blind peer reviewer scholars, journalists, and arts and cultural professionals.

Keep on being resilient and resistant!

Acknowledgments

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Affective Politics and Alliances in 'Queering the Gypsy' and Facing Antigypsyism in the LGBT Milieu

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Abstract

This essay engages with issues of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Romani/Gypsy/Traveller (RGT) communities. A lack of acceptance, marginalization, and at times expulsion of Queer people from RGT communities is a source of suffering for individuals and their families – with political consequences in terms of solidarity and alliances. Sexual minorities within marginalized ethnic and non-ethnic RGT minorities, when excluded, can be regarded as a threat to the social cohesion of the group and to internal social ties based on common struggles for economic and cultural justice. Acceptance for Queer people in RGT communities may also improve relations with social movements' alliances, a sensible and necessary step – primarily in the anti-racist and feminist arenas, movements for social rights, i.e., jobs and housing.

The paper discusses social (mis)representations of the 'Gypsy Queer' vs. self-representations emerging from activists' experiences. In light of 'affective politics' – s conceptualized by Sara Ahmed – experiences of Homo-Lesbo-Bi-Trans-phobia in the RGT communities and 'soft' anti-gypsyism in Queer communities are addressed. In conclusion, affective politics are viewed in the frame suggested by Judith Okely around Roma-Gypsy-Traveller cultural identity "constructed through opposition, not isolation"; through the mirror of Jasbir Puar's theory of identity created in the constant and aware, individual and collective, *assemblage* of parts of self; and as an element of 'travelling activism' – practice of "mobilizing hybrid forms of expertise and knowledge across space and difference" contesting both territorialization and ethnicization, as in Van Baar.

Introduction

This work can be considered a position paper advocating in favour of alliances contrasting antigypsyism in society and in the academic world (Corradi 2018; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018), and to strengthen Roma/Gypsy/Traveller (RGT) communities, by offering a better understanding of affective politics and positive attitudes toward LGBTIA-Queer people. In the following pages I mostly use the umbrella term 'Queer' coined by Teresa De Lauretis (1991), unless indicated otherwise by the authors I am referring to; and explain the meaning of this word as proposed by Halprein (1997). I will engage with issues surrounding the existence of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities. A lack of acceptance, marginalization, and at times expulsion of Queer people from RGT communities is a source of suffering for individuals and their families – with political consequences in terms of solidarity and alliances. The exclusion of sexual minorities within marginalized ethnic or non-ethnic minorities can be regarded as a threat to the social cohesion of the group, since it weakens internal social ties and the common struggle for economic and cultural justice. The lack of acceptance of Queer people also undermines relations and possible alliances between RGT activists and social movements such as broad feminist and anti-racist arenas; urban movements for social rights, health, and environment; and local mobilizations for land occupations and squats in houses (Maestri 2019).

As Dezső Máté pointed out, there is a plenty of literature about Roma and even more about non-heterosexual people – but very little on the intersecting social group of both identities. In fact, the RGT Queer is "surrounded by a lack of awareness and taboo – and is therefore invisible" (Máté 2017). Being part of two ostracized communities, Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Trans and Gypsy-Roma-Traveller people still happen to be considered deviant and dangerous – symbolically or materially – and get easily stigmatized and 'inferiorized' in media, science, and institutions. Dezső Máté underlines how the phenomenon of Roma Queer have *multiple dimensions* (still to be fully investigated) none of which has being taken seriously in the mainstream media or social media, but mostly oriented to spectacularized RGT people, as we will see in the next section.

As an introduction I want to reveal my positionality in respect to the topic, and a feminist intersectional standpoint[1] which I have adopted over the last three decades. Positionality is a methodology requesting researchers question themselves on their own privileges and reveal their viewpoints. "Academic rigor" is often mistaken as impartial and nonaligned research or theories, yet no knowledge is neutral: all production of data, facts, or experience is always "located" in terms of gender, sex, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, culture, language, status, age, and geopolitical background. In other words, the researcher's awareness and work is always affected by his/her/their standpoint (Harding 2004). So is mine: I identify

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1 The intersectional approach teaches how systems of inequalities are characterized by multiple hierarchies; in order to overcome sexual and racial subjugation (of women, men and all those who do not recognize themselves in the binary opposition male/female), other traits also need to be taken into account: class, status/cast, colour, culture, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, disabilities, and geopolitical background. All these 'interlocking categories of oppression' have to be addressed *simultaneously* (Davis 1981; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hurtado 1989; Hill Collins 1990; Yuval- Davis 2006, 2012; Lykke, 2010; Hancock 2007; Walby 2007; Bitu, Vincze 2012; Jovanović, Kóczé, Balogh 2015; Collins, Bilge 2016; Corradi 2018).

as a Mediterranean Indo-European cis-woman Traveller, working-class academic, Queer eco-feminist – deeply influenced by the politics of indigeneity and nomadic thinking, active in decolonizing social movements. From this *located knowledge* (Haraway 1988), which is relevant for the topic, I am going to offer a non-Romani Gypsy perspective, being self-reflective of the social and political privilege I enjoy as a fair-skinned person, and aware of the debate around critical whiteness (Fremlova 2018). I will proceed on a reasoning path, from surface to depth, from margin to center (hooks 1984). The methodology of this work is qualitative and intuitive, based on different state of the art sources of scholarly work; in other words, I try to combine personal perceptions, sociological imagination, and insightful readings: a non-dichotomous (*advaita* in Sanskrit) viewpoint.

Section one looks at social representation of the Gypsy Queer through a simple search on Google; section two deals with discrimination based on literature regarding sexual orientation within the RGT community and the social invisibility of the Gypsy Queer in everyday life; section three addresses antigypsyism in the Queer community both in terms of soft-racism and the lack of political attention around this relevant type of racism, the only one still admitted in Europe; section four introduces the reader to the concept of 'affective politics', emotions around sexuality and ethnicity, and possible alliances between Gypsy and Queer people; and with other indigenous 'stateless collectives'. Alliances are also discussed in the conclusion as a process deeply combined with critical identity construction and the decolonization of western internalized assumptions.

1. Social Representations of the 'Gypsy Queer' on the Web

Social representations of reality are culturally and historically determined; they are based on bodies of ideas and practices that are socially constructed (Durkheim 1912; Moscovici 1961; Berger and Luckman 1966; Goffman 1979) and can be seen as a barometer of the unequal distribution of power, both mirroring and reinforcing social hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity/colour, gender, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation (Corradi 2012). In this section I will first describe and analyze three examples of social misrepresentations of the Queer Gypsy, corresponding to main stereotypes. One proposes a sexualized form of a conventional gay male; another makes fun of Gypsy traditional culture around marriage, and the last is a case of plain cultural appropriation. Second, I will turn to good practices of autonomously produced social representation.

Ten years ago, while surfing the Internet for the keywords 'Queer' and 'Gypsy', nothing could be found. Today, the search offers a variety of soft 'Gypsy porn' attributed to 'Gay Gypsies'; websites such as Top Gay Gypsy Boys show a number of pictures among which are fake sunglass ads, 'metrosexual' young men in sexy poses, and stereotypical bodily displays of expensive status symbols. Unsurprisingly, this website on supposed Gay Gypsy Boys published in 2010 did not become popular; it only received one 'like', by the same author of the video, who signed himself off as 'Gypsy Fag Report'.[2]

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2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwEU1BANwYI.

The notorious six-season series 'My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding' did not forgo its own 'Queer Gypsy' title to attract new viewers. The video description has: "A [G]ypsy bride-to-be [who] finds herself caught in a love triangle with two potential suitors – and a bridesmaid from hell". Since the series is known for reinforcing heteronormativity and gender roles, one would wonder about which type of 'queerness' is going to be offered – in this case an unreal spicy 'triangle'. The video clearly displays its intention of deriding the Traveller lifestyle and the traditional importance of marriage. Its implausible narrative is based on the groom's scorn. Far from being credible, it is merely a series of dialogues in which a husband-to-be acts out a jealous scene concerning a supposed 'cell-phone relationship'. Both characters, bride and groom, are infantilized and seem ridiculous in order to make fun of this fake tragic event and add contempt as a stereotypically dramatic way of expressing discomfort.

Another video I want to analyze is 'Gypsy Queen' by Chris Norman. Although the title recalls Drag Queens, it does not deal with Trans-life in RGT communities – despite what one would expect. Instead, it displays an all-white women's group line-dancing in a gym – to the song 'Gypsy Queen' as its soundtrack – again raising the problem of cultural appropriation of Gypsy music, clothes, jewelry and stories in the entertainment industry, as well as in fashion and handicraft markets (Corradi 2018). In a neoliberal world, where even plants and seeds are patented, indigenous populations are constantly robbed of their resources, lands, cultural products, and freedom; this process also effects RGT, often considered 'the last indigenous peoples of Europe'. This type of dispossession continues because of endemic antigypsyism, the inferiorization of the Gypsy body, and a lack of recognition that has been highlighted by Roma activists, of which the group 'Gallery 8' posits:

> The social assignment of Roma Bodies to an underclass is an historical construct that has multiple origins, rooted in the institutions of both slavery and mass media. It theorizes how race is enacted in the moment of the gaze, and how this spectatorial surveillance complicates social relations because of how it is historically and inextricably woven into the European collective consciousness and the European cultural ethos via popular media (2015).

The reappropriation of ethnic signs and the struggle against the trade of bodies and cultural products in the all-pervasive market are political struggles of indigenous and nomadic people all over the world. This is particularly true of Aboriginals, Adivasi, First Nation, and other Native populations, among which it is important to mention the Maori of New Zealand/Aotearoa, who have been remarkably successful in asserting their own reality as *Kaupapa* (knowledge) over which they own natural rights. However, RGT epistemologies, realities, and emotions still go largely unrecognized and are subjected to looting by the fashion world, mass-media, and the advertising industry.

In the context of ethnocide and dispossession, the bodies and sexuality of indigenous people has also been colonized for centuries, during which "a narrow view of sexual relationships was imposed on indigenous societies, a process that was facilitated by the dominant influence of Christian missionaries" (Hutchings 2007, 17). For indigenous and marginalized people, the "understanding of our sexuality today is heavily influenced by the historical understandings passed down to us by our ancestors. Gradually, as we uncover the truth about what our ancestors believed and peel back the veneer of colonization, it becomes clear that the sexuality of indigenous people is vastly different from the dominant Western paradigm that has been applied around the world" (*ibid*).

At this point I would like to offer two positive counterexamples of online social representations. Both do not arise in virtually manufactured settings but in real political circumstances. In the first, a traditional Romani leader expresses solidarity with LGBTQ people, while the second regards the participation of Travellers in an historical Gay Parade. These can be seen as cases of enacting *voice* (Hirshman 1970) and political agency toward the reappropriation of the Gypsy body image. They also serve as grounds for alliances, representing the outcome of the activities by two different groups of Gypsy Queer activists. A self-representation of the Gypsy Queer milieu is offered by QRTV Europa, featuring pictures of a public demonstration called 'Gypsy Queer Happy',[3] a public event held in Hungary since 2015. The introduction to the website refers to the Prague Declaration:

> LGBTQI Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers across Europe face multiple marginalization and discrimination at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and/or sexual orientation. It is an issue that has not been recognized and/or addressed yet by the international human/Roma/ LGBTQI rights community (Prague Declaration, ARA ART, 2015).

In the video reporting the first edition of the event, the main organizer of the Pride floats, László Farkas (whose DJ name is Gypsyrobot) spoke about social problems and international movements among Roma LGBTQI people. In his speech, he addresses Roma LGBTQI people who are still struggling with their own identities:

> LGBTQI-Roma in Europe face multiple discrimination due to multiple identities such as ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. It is an issue that has not received sufficient attention in the society and media. Our goals with the Roma-LGBTQI float are to support Roma people, who are struggling with their identity of being 'different'. As a Roma, it can be harder to reach self-acceptance because of the fear of the unknown (lack of information about homosexuality) and the prejudices they already face.[4]

The float is meant to find political cohesion and alliances – with a warm "welcome to join the float, independent of racial, sexual and other background!" – and to outline a programme of action with the following goals: to empower Roma LGBTQI people to accept their identity and eventually "come out of the closet"; to raise awareness of "Roma and non-Roma communities of the importance of acceptance vis-à-vis the LGBTQI community"; to show that "Roma and non-Roma can work together on issues like equality" and to commemorate Milán Rózsa, the LGBTQI and human rights activist whose work in Hungary was crucial for the movement. The clarity of political aims, by using an intersectional approach, is effective in inviting horizontal alliances; while the analysis of the problems, in terms of multiple discrimination, should interpellate and question those European institutions which addressed the issue (par. 14, Dir 2000/43/CE) with little success twenty years ago.

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3 https://qrtv.eu/en/qrtv-baxtaroam-2018-gypsy-queer-happy/#

4 Also the activist Jenő Setét – talks about gay rights as a Roma man https://qrtv.eu/en/as-roma-we-must-speak-out-also-for-the-rights-of-gay-people-interview-with-jeno-setet

Other recent initiatives have similar political features. On 7 July 2018, the 'Gypsy Queer Happy' group took to the streets and participated in the 23rd Budapest Pride march under the banner "Roma-LGBTQI people, heterosexuals and non-Roma marched together for equality, diversity and freedom." The leader of the *Idetartozunk* [We belong here] Association made a declaration about the situation of LGBTQI people in Hungarian Roma communities. An activist (also known as Brada) confirmed the solidarity of his association toward LGBTQI people and said: "I don't believe in a country where anyone can be humiliated or beaten up, just because they belong to a group. And I don't believe either that I don't have anything to do with it, even if it's not directly about my group. *Te is a nemzet resze vagy* (You are also part of the nation)."[5]

In the UK, the Travellers LGBT+ mobilized in June 2019. The participation of a delegation of Queer Gypsies at London Pride was very successful. Activists taking part in Traveller Pride included Showmen, Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Roma, and Bargee/Boaters. For the first time ever, Roma Gypsies and Travellers took a public stand in the main LGBT+ event in the UK and were recognized as part of the larger community. The physical presence was marked with a 'Traveller Pride' banner; a good number of Queer Gypsies wearing red 'Traveller Pride' t-shirts; the Romani flag as well as our voices and smiles, together with awareness of being part of an historical moment. Thousands of stickers distributed in the million-people annual march were not a drop in the ocean; they were the missing salt in the Pride event: from now on our voice can make a difference in this social movement. As Travellers' Pride organizer Tyler Hatwell commented, it took 47 years, but we are here to stay; the press welcomed the event: "Travellers are making history."[6]

Media representations (particularly around identities in social movements) are a sensitive indicator of change and resistance to change. They play a pivotal role in two contrasting ways: first, by reinforcing the colonial gaze of white supremacy and heteronormativity, legitimizing prejudice towards sexual and cultural minorities; and second by proposing and spreading new ideas, behaviours, experiences, and politics oriented toward liberation. Alliances that mobilize resources in communication can have a strategic impact in combatting antigypsyism, enabling unforeseen possibilities of action, amplifying social influence, and strengthening solidarity ties across communities and borders.

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5 There are two different meanings for this word, as used in queer nation or gypsy nation – without reference to a specific land to conquer or defend, no state, no army. More on Idetartozunk Association and the Budapest Roma Pride Day in https://idetartozunk. eu; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j95C1e4wvqs; with subtitles on Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/312383267

6 Indira Warnes, "The Travellers making history at the Pride", https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/07/travellers-making-history-pride; Mike Doherty, 'Travellers make history in the London Pride Parade' July 11th, 2019 'https://www.travellerstimes.org. uk/news/travellers--london-pride-parade. Photographs by Joseph Mitchell (www.josephmitchell.org). Traveller's pre-pride event at King's College https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/traveller-pride-event-celebrating-gypsy-feminism-tickets-63420786279. See also the report of the RGT Lgbtqi Conference held in Wales, august 2019 https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/news/2019/08/historic-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-lgbtqi-conference-wales-downloadable-full-report

2. Fighting Homo-Lesbo-Bi-Trans-phobia in Gypsy Communities

In this section I will discuss literature by scholar/activists about discrimination based on gender and sexual identities. Fiore Manzo, Romani student, poet, and activist, wrote a final paper about the status of sexual minorities in his Romani community, after interviewing a small number of people and finding evidence of exclusionary practices and painful discrimination. As reported, at times the 'diverse' person had to leave the place and go elsewhere. The very fact of talking with a 'faggot' – as someone who does not conform to homosocial rules – made people subject to marginalization and mockery. Over the last decade this topic became part of theoretical and empirical research by several authors who pointed out the existence of homophobia, lesbophobia, bi-phobia, and transphobia in Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities, and how the problem should be addressed (Horvath 2010; Okely 2010; Fremlova and Georgescu 2014; Baker 2015; Dunajeva, Kóczé, and Cemlyn 2015; Máté 2015).

Dezso Máté (2015) recognizes that Queer people are also afflicted by homophobic attitudes in the Romani community and writes in the context of five different types of oppression suggested by Marion Young (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural dominance, and violence) played out on those who have non-heterosexual orientations or express gender identities socially perceived as gender 'non-conforming' because of the binary dominant paradigm. The 'identity-development stages' reported by Dezso Máté indicate the different phases individuals go through: shame/shock, anger/denial, proof, reconciliation, and pride. Such steps are comparatively analysed as they manifest among the Roma and in the Queer milieu:

> The starting points for both communities are the same. Both communities are faced with harm (false portrayals, harassment and discrimination) and try to ward off the negative impacts of this. This is an independent and defensive emotional mechanism in their personal development. After recognising their own vulnerability, the individual experiences wrath, anger and self-hatred (Máté 2015, 96).

The main differences between Romani identity and Romani LGBTQ identity, concludes Dezso Máté, are based on approaches to the level of the 'pride' related to the extent of self-acceptance and community support. In his qualitative research, significant parts of the interviews are discussed; I found it quite surprising that Romani LGBTQ individuals' partners are (in 12 cases out of 15) foreigners who belong to the majority society – which is probably an indicator of the absence of a Romani Queer community where members can regularly meet, nationwide and across borders, and develop political ties, friendships, and relationships.

Such needs for a safe space are expressed by Vera Kurtic, in her book *D ž u v l j a r k e,* where she discusses the situation of Romani lesbians in Serbia, who "suffer from multiple forms of marginalization, forced to live an invisible existence, and as such remain vulnerable to all possible forms of discrimination and violence." Kurtic's work wants "to ensure that when lesbian existence is discussed, the conversation opens a path leading to the empowerment of these women, who are, at the moment nameless and invisible and

remain objects of shame and victims of multiple forms of violence and discrimination." Similarities in the exclusion of Queer and Romani people are mentioned in her study.

> The *community of those who do not belong* represents a new political voice whose historical position is in total opposition to the position of patriarchal dominance, capitalism and colonialism and who, from such a position, can construct an identity of their own, comprised of respect for the other and our diversity. The Roma community can be a part of this, as it shares the experience of not belonging to the majority, the same as the LGBTIQ communities (Kurtic 2012, 92, *author's emphasis*).

Kurtic's narrative is very useful to social sciences for at least three good reasons: first, it enables an understanding of the nuances of cultural/ethnic Romani activism as fashioned in relation to women – whose traditional values as mothers are still predominant in these communities.

> There are a number of examples where Roma activists, or those who identify themselves as such, attempted to address, or raise awareness about 'Romani women's issues,' however, these attempts usually centered on organizing folklore events, which were aimed at preserving and promoting 'tradition.' Other efforts actually perpetuated gender roles, by focusing solely on reproductive health issues among Roma populations.

The second reason relates to her decision to disclose her experience of patriarchal resistance to change among male activists.

> In fact, there has been strong resistance coming from the mainstream, male-dominated Roma Rights movement to solely discuss Romani women. I myself have received instructions from some Roma activists that I am only 'allowed' to speak publicly about Romani women's oppression within the context of forced sterilizations perpetrated by state institutions in the region, and I have also been warned that I should never mention the arranged marriages or bride sales which occur in my own Roma community.

The third reason I found her work helpful is that it confirms problems – already mentioned by Ethel Brooks (2012) – in alliances with *gadje* women: Kurtic pins down different ways in which mainstream feminism pays so little attention to Romani women – which, in so doing, makes negotiation toward shared ground in the gender struggles agenda harder.

> When it comes to the mainstream, majority society women's movement and women's civil society groups generally, Romani women's rights have been and remain an area of little interest, and for most feminist organizations there is neither time nor space on their political agendas to think or act either on behalf of or together with Romani women.

An important distinction made by Vera Kurtic is between Romani lesbians and Romani feminists, often assimilated in the public discourse; in fact, "not all lesbians are feminists or activists". At the same time, she makes a distinction between women's groups and feminist groupsm for "not all Romani women

activists are automatically feminists". Kurtic denounces inferiorizing discursive practices around how non-Romani (Gadje) women complain about being *fed up with Romani women and their demands* – an irritation with a racist and classist undertone. "As a lesbian," Kurtic states, "I can say that a similar dialogue takes place regarding sexual orientation. The experiences of Romani lesbians living in Serbia are a clear example, illustrating the intersecting burdens of gender, race, nationality, class and minority sexual existence" (2012, 4).

The social invisibility of people bearing both stigmas as Queer and Gypsy results in a relational absence: if nobody knows about Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans and Intersexuals in the Romani, Gypsy, and Traveller communities, they *do not exist*. And simultaneously they undergo processes of 'phantomization' which take place where socially undesired qualities are attached to the unknown, transforming the marginals, the poor, the 'diverse' into shadows; 'imaginary' subjects and are found guilty and thrown to the last level of social exclusion (Corradi 2018). In a study edited by Lucia Fremlova and Mara Georgescu, we find some examples of caste-based exclusion which emerges as specific feature in the hetero-normative Romani community, adding issues of purity differentials to the known types of discrimination; according to Czech Roma LGBT activist David Tiser,[7] Romani LGBT people are the most vulnerable group who face triple discrimination: as Roma, as LGBT people, and as LGBT people in the Romani community.

> In the case of young Roma LGBT living in ghettos, there is a fourth ground for discrimination: exclusion. (…) Some traditional Roma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia still maintain the concept of caste reflected in the Roma tradition of ritual purity, according to which some people in the Roma communities cannot take part in the preparation of food. Similarly, in some families, LGBT people are still perceived as unclean. If they touch a plate or other items, everything has to be thrown away after they have left because it is unclean, or they have their separate plates and cutlery (Fremlova and Georgescu 2014, 22–23).

While discriminatory practices are still common, there are cases about how loving families and intra-communal solidarity can facilitate social processes of recognition and approval, and where subjects can rely on one another, shaping situations where young Queer Roma are not excluded. A couple of women living together in a camp in Serbia achieved recognition as a family during the relocation process and were assigned a house together (Fremlova and Georgescu 2014).

There are good practices where Queer Gypsies are accepted in the peer groups and in the clan, sometimes even when they are in positions of leadership. To do this, taking public stands in favour of the acceptance of sexual diversity, 'coming out' sessions, and debates are happening. As reported in *The Travellers' Times*, Isaac Blake, the Romani director and founder of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company attended the 23rd international LGBT conference promoted by ILGA-Europe in Prague, Czech Republic (23–26 October 2019) to celebrate 50 years of Stonewall, considered the starting point of the contemporary

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7 David Tišer is the Director of the non-profit organisation ARA ART, and author of the first comprehensive study on Roma LGBTQ in the Czech Republic entitled 'Homosexuality in the Romani Community'. He holds a degree in Romani Studies from Charles University, Prague.

LGBTI movement. Jeremy Miles, a Welsh Assembly Member, underlined the importance of allocating resources to allow Isaac Blake's participation in the Conference: "The movement towards greater LGBT equality over the past 50 years cannot be taken for granted as we look ahead. Isaac's scholarship to attend the conference on behalf of the LGBT Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community enable him to make an important contribution to the discussions about how we take forward the journey for LGBT equality in all our communities, in all parts of the world."[8]

3. Addressing Antigypsyism in Queer Communities

In this section I will address discrimination in the Queer community both in terms of soft-racism, and in the deficiency of political attention to a relevant type of racism: antigypsyism, which is still socially tolerated in contemporary Europe. Once nomadic cultures, all Gypsies in the past were perceived as 'queer' types of people, mirroring both the fantasies and anxieties of sedentary people and estate proprietors. Through bans, slavery, persecutions, and genocides, Gypsies have come to embody all forms of otherness and difference. Among the many conceptual interpretations of what is 'queer', I found the one proposed by David Halperin politically useful, for in his words,

> Queer is, by definition, whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing, in particular, to which it necessarily refers (Halperin 1997, 62).

As Lucie Fremlova pointed out, critical whiteness is 'queer' by virtue of being counter/normative in relation to whiteness – not to be understood just as a *colour* but as a social norm: white-normativity. "The use of self-reflective queer, feminist, and critical whiteness methodologies means that reflective and reflexive researchers conducting research 'with,' 'for,' and 'on' Roma do not 'have to be' Romani in order to participate in knowledge production on Romani communities" (Fremlova 2018). We can also apply her concept to sexualities: a critical self-reflective researcher may be queer, and by challenging heteronormativity is enabled by his/her/their methodology to carry out research 'with,' 'for,' and 'on' Queer people.

By demarcating a positionality that avoids fixed roles and rules, the activity of 'queering' identities and spaces opens up to freedom and invention: the subversion of the normative happens simultaneously at different levels, not just around sexualities and gender identities. If the Queer movement does not intertwine with feminist intersectional methodologies and the decolonial approach (Smith 1999), there is a risk of being domesticized and subsumed and becoming just another fashionable commodity around sex and sexuality. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and Gurminder Bhambra (2007) pointed out, the cooptation of feminism and Queer theory/practice within the paradigm of western representative democracy is an ongoing de-powering process.

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8 https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/news/2019/07/romani-arts-company-director-go-international-lgbt-conference

There is a lack of research evidence and specific literature on the topic of antigypsyism in the transnational Queer community. A brief exploration, in which I engaged through informal dialogues with activists in Italy, made me aware of the lack of reflection and participation in mobilization around the topic of RGT human rights, which are routinely violated. While some Queer activists are concerned about the association between Homo-Les-Bi-Trans-phobia and antigypsyism in the dominant right-wing discourse, they do not seem yet ready to plan any collaborative political praxis or alliances with Romani people to jointly contrast anti-Gay and anti-Gypsy neo-fascist and xenophobic rhetoric in some political parties and media. The Queer milieu may have Gypsy-friendly attitudes, compared to the rest of society; at the same time the struggle against Roma-phobia and antigypsyism are not given due importance in Queer spaces, which lack political interest and initiative on the topic. Some activists and groups are politically present in the solidarity pro-migrant movements, but the main focus of these groups' activism is to grant a status of 'refugee' to those who are escaping from authoritarian regimes known to persecute sexual minorities. Antigypsyism usually is not on the anti-racist agenda despite the fact Islamophobia – another far-right flag – has undergone critical debate and public protests. Antigypsyism (at times referred to as Romaphobia or antigypsyism) and islamophobia have several features in common; the first still considered as "the last acceptable form of racism in Europe" (McGarry 2017) , the second a rising type of "respectable racism" (Wolfreys 2018). Hopefully the anti-racist movement will start to link these kinds of discriminations – and them with others.

Training about the intersectional approach in the Queer community and in general among groups of activists for social change are useful in order to sensitize social movements about the reality of dealing with often unrecognized multiple discriminations. Jokes or gags with antigypsy undertones usually are seen as a teasing way to convey acceptance. RGT social lives and traditions are perceived as funny; romanticization and exotification are underestimated instead of being deconstructed as a form of 'soft racism' and represent an easy way out for gadje's embarrassment over their privilege.

An intersection between Gypsiness and Queerness is narrated by Kata Horvath through the story of Rebeka, who is frustrated in trying to conceal both her poverty, as a cave dweller, and her ethnicity as a Roma. She finds in self-exotification a strategy for being accepted, in a context of white[9]-dominated societies, where fair skin is a synonym for beauty and femininity. Rebeka is dark, and in the peer group, her skin colour equates to ugliness. But during Gay Parade in Budapest she tells a story about being originally from Cuba – and suddenly the negative visibility she suffers because of being 'black' becomes a positive hyper-visibility. Her skin colour gets eroticized: in 'the carnival-like representation of sexuality', concludes Horvath 'for a few hours the blackness of Rebeka could become the performance of femininity' (Horvath 2010, 130). The "passing" strategy enacted by Rebeka is different from the usual one (i.e., trying to look white) since she chooses to expose her 'negritude' as an identity camouflage. Rebeka masks as a black Cuban *to hide the stigma of being a Roma.* The enactment of her *passing* strategy is evidence confirming how, as a Gypsy, you are never safe, not even in Queer spaces. During a Gay Parade you still cannot be fully proud of what you are and feel at ease with your identities.

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9 See on whiteness Vajda Violeta (2015).

In general, *passing* strategies are double-sided social practices, equally enabling and constraining. "Both Gays and Gypsies have historically been well placed to employ strategic 'passing' with self-protection or ease of passage determining when and where to pass as straight or non-Gypsy" (Baker 2015, 88). Passing "can offer safety from attack" on one hand, while on the other "passing not only hurts ourselves but also the communities in which we live, which don't reap the benefits of our authentic participation," states Baker. The price to pay, to live openly as Gay, is that of losing ties with the ethnic community and family. To keep life running without choosing self-exile, one has to pass as non-Gay in the Gypsy community, and as a non-RGT person in the Queer community: a sort of identity dislocation that implies life-long concealment.

> To maintain full integration into Gypsy communities one has to sacrifice the open expression of sexual identity, and conversely in order to explore an openly Gay identity one's integration within the Gypsy community is compromised to a significant degree (Baker 2015, 91).

While the Queer Gypsy is trapped between two identities perceived as mutually exclusive, both associated with internalized inferiority and self-hatred, the mostly white Queer Community must be willing to go out of its ghetto-like comfort zone, cross invisible boundaries to reach out and welcome the challenge represented by the presence of Gypsies in its ranks. The struggle against antigypsyism needs to be addressed in all political environments, while attitudes of classism, white supremacy, and soft racism should be recognized in our relationships. The emotional and political safety of Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers in Queer spaces is crucial – and not just a matter of 'inclusion', which is a top-down type of perspective (Maldonaldo-Torres 2016; Corradi 2018). Making space for Queer Gypsies calls for much needed decolonization of Feminist and Queer theories and praxis.

4. Affective Politics and Alliances

Overcoming homophobia and Gypsy-phobia means political action and will not happen without dedicated and competent efforts. These feelings of disgust and hatred toward Queer and Gypsy persons are centuries-old. All emotions have an 'affective' power; while seeming to be spontaneous or 'induced', they are always a social construct, and historically and culturally determined. Our emotions embody relationships of power, based on gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, status, and geopolitical privilege. Emotions deeply influence our lifestyle, ideas, and politics and when fueled by hate speech, can instigate racist, sexist, homophobic, and violent antigypsy practices. Emotions situated between ourselves and what we perceive as the material 'external' world (Ahmed 2004). The social channeling of emotions at election time is a key factor leading us to mobilize and vote for a certain party. In the construction of social and political identities, emotions can be largely hetero-directed; whereas the power system manipulates sentiments through its institutions and media and can even manufacture popular feelings (Basso 2010; Corradi 2012). Feelings can also be self-directed, for example, by social movements through acts of change or resistance, in collective politics and alliances. The quantum of agency is indicated by the amount of freedom and self-determination expressed in the choice of emotional expressions.

The repetition (*Japa* in Sanskrit) of words, concepts, and signs, produces and reinforces emotional responses with an oil splash effect – as in the case of slogans during a rally; verses by rappers; group mottos; and the diffusion of wall graffiti via cultural contamination. Words generate meaning and can be re-signified by social movements – as in the case of terms like Gypsy and Queer, once derogatory, then successfully reappropriated. Words, as all signs, are tools to change reality. They can be used for *détournement* – to divert an offensive attack – or to resist with semiotic guerrilla actions (Corradi 2018): *no one can insult us without our permission*. A close analysis of the political implication of emotions, as proposed by Sara Ahmed (2004) may help us build alliances based on self-reflective solidarity; as Jekatyerina Dunajeva, Angéla Kóczé, and Sarah Cemlyn wrote (2015) "Lgbtqia often share the same emotions as we [Roma] do, and thus they could be *natural allies*" (*author's emphasis*).

For such an alliance to become real, several steps need to be taken. The first may be related to the recognition of differences and privileges among us – often avoided and perceived at times as a taboo topic. Romani feminist Alexandra Oprea powerfully explains it as:

> It is only through recognizing our privilege, whether it be white privilege, male privilege, class privilege, light skinned privilege, or heterosexual privilege, that we can challenge hierarchical relationships. It is essential (…) male activists acknowledge their male privilege as a first step to challenging patriarchy (Oprea 2004, 39).

Emotions are always public issues, the public is 'emotive' – we know how empathy can be controlled/maneuvered by mass media, and how consent gets manufactured. Ahmed analyzes negative emotions such as pain, hate, fear, disgust, and shame; she also looks at positive feelings around love in the context of queer theory and feminism.

Distaste and hate related to racial/ethnic belonging, cultural lifestyle, gender orientation or sexual preferences, are socially constructed emotions and are to do with power and hierarchy. As Indian activist and writer Arundhati Roy pointed out, religious and ethnic minorities ranging from Armenian (and Kurdish) people in Turkey to resisting peasants in India are made objects of entomological metaphors to mark difference from an ethnic majority, a dominant religion, the middle class and 'them.' Expressions such as 'clean-up' or 'disinfestations' of their places; and 'eradication' of their presence, with annihilating or suppressive representations are common (Roy 2008). Feelings of disgust are related to emotions of shame; in Sara Ahmed's elaboration they are deeply combined:

> Shame in exposing that which has been covered, demands us to re-cover, such a re-covering would be a recovery from shame. Shame consumes the subject and burns on the surface of bodies that are presented to others, a burning that exposes the exposure, and which may be visible in the form of a blush, depending on the skin of the subject, which might or might not show shame through this 'colouring' (Ahmed 2004, 104).

Ahmed's statement on shame recalls an early essay by Ervin Goffman (1956), on *embarrassment*: These are normative types of feelings, functional to the reproduction of dominant values and cultures. Ahmed looks at social processes of "othering" – which hit both the RGT communities and Queer people, having much

in common in terms of exclusion and creation of categories of bodies allowed to different levels of *access to space*. As Jasbir Puar pointed out, some bodies are socially perceived as 'trespassers' or 'space invaders' (Puar 2004). Both Gypsies and Queer people are immediately identified as such: bizarre, uninvited, out-of-place; improper and ill-behaved; unfitting, indecent, unbecoming; causing everybody discomfort in the space they own, inhabit, or have colonized. The feeling of being unwelcomed is intersubjective and related to the shape of the social structure itself, as a sedentary, gadje, (hetero)normative classist world that despises the poverty it creates.

> One feels better by the warmth of being faced by a world one has already taken in. One does not notice this *as a world* when one has been shaped by that world, and even acquired its shape. […] Queer subjects, when faced by the 'comforts' of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable (the body does not 'sink into' a space that has already taken its shape) (Ahmed 148).

Even though sexuality and ethnicity apparently differ as concepts and categories, both underwent the same type of scrutiny. As pointed out by Daniel Baker in 'The Queer Gypsy', there are several lines of comparison between the two identities: 'Ethnicity and sexuality mirror each other within cycles of concealment and revelation' (Baker 2015, 88). In the past, ethnicity and sexual orientation were perceived as 'natural', while they are the product of negotiations, influences, redefinitions, and survival strategies: both Gays and Gypsies were targeted by the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. This persecution resulted in medicalization and inferiorization processes in European sciences and societies over the following centuries, especially in the colonial era. Baker's interviews with four Gypsy gay males pinpoint emotional and physical detachment from their families and communities as a common experience. One of the issues raised by Daniel Baker, based on his research findings, regards the similarities between Gay invisibility and Gypsy invisibility.

> Even though all seem essentially proud of their Gypsy roots, all make it clear that their detachment occurred mainly through a difficulty in combining Gayness and Gypsiness (Baker 2015, 89).

State political emotions tend to manipulate social feeling to oppose solidarity and functionally create "others" – in this case a shameful double otherness of Gayness and Gypsiness. By lining up some bodies and granting them the privilege of being society's insiders, others are singled out and pushed to the margins (a well-demonstrated and useful practice as a preliminary to scapegoating). As regards movements, a new identity politics is necessary to build alliances; it should be able to reclaim words loaded with shame and to use them as weapons (Corradi 2018); it should be able to challenge the rigidity of race and 'ethnic' belonging, as a source of exclusionary behaviours.

> The intercultural terms Gypsy and Queer are both used to describe globally linked collectivities of identity rather than fixed identity positions. This 'un-fixity' relates not only to the range of possibilities within each identity position but also to the persistence of community and cultural values independent of geographical territory (Baker 2015, 88–89).

As 'stateless collectives', both Gypsies and Queers have no fixed boundaries, no country, and no army. Gypsy flags, as well as Queer flags, deeply represent places of the soul (Corradi 2018). Political theories about *overcoming the state* as an historical obsolete form have gained ground, in favour of federations of different ethnic and religious communities, such as those which recently emerged during the struggle by Kurdish people in the liberation of Rojava in Syria (Öcalan 2016). Such ideas, combined with a practice of direct democracy and self-government developed by Kurdish (historically nomadic) societies, surfaced during dramatic resistance in the north and east of Syria against the attacks of the Islamic State (of Iraq and the Levantine – Isil) supported by the Turkish government's genocidal politics to eliminate Kurdish cultures and grab their land. International interest in the Democratic Federalism in Rojava can be explained by its emphasis on interculturality, interreligiosity, and a commitment to overcome race, class, and gender inequalities, by a constitution. In fact, the 'Rojava Social Contract', signed by all ethnic groups in north and east Syria, calls for cooperation, women's rights, ecology, and the valorization of diversities; it may become an inspirational model for all nomadic, indigenous, and GRT stateless communities – toward the development of self-government and transversal alliances (Corradi 2016; Öcalan 2016).

It is interesting at this point to comparatively look at how 'othered' bodies, persecuted groups, and marginalized societies are dealing with such issues; for instance, the solutions that are blossoming from the 'margins' in war zones and refugee camps, seem practicable for all. In the last three decades of research and activism I found deep connections in the dispossession and oppression faced today by Gypsy, Native Americans, Palestinians, Kurdish, Maori and Aboriginals – who have in the past been subjected to ethnocidal and/or genocidal politics (Connell and Corradi 2014; Corradi 2018).

An open dialogue on common political solutions is, in a globalized world, strategic to face old challenges – aggravated by ecological and health emergencies – and new ones, such as the pressure of cultural assimilation and cooptation, with pernicious forms of political/academic 'domestication'. Such processes are not unavoidable disasters; they can be deactivated through critical attention, decolonization practices, and the valorization of subaltern epistemologies together with collective and transversal processes of knowledge construction, elaboration, and social action (Smith 1999, Smith Hingangaroa 2012).

Conclusion

'Political-correctness' is concerned with surface, i.e., it acts on appearances, lacking the substance of the problems of sexism, racism, and the roots of the inferiorization of Gypsy and Queer communities. In our communities we should not allow behaviours that indulge in derogatory contents, such as sexist stereotypical assumptions; homo/lesbo/bi/trans-phobic jokes; soft-racist comments; anti-gypsy or exotifying *boutades*; or body-shaming and gags based on self-hatred. It is not a matter of banning some words as 'bad'; offensive terms and images should not go unnoticed or be feared: they need to be made socially impracticable – or *uninhabitable* as Roma feminist Maria Bogdan proposed. She creatively applies deconstruction as a process 'going inside the image (the stereotypical image) and exposing it from inside'. Such a practice results in opening up stereotypes and 'making them uninhabitable'

(Bogdan 2015). The negative work of decoding and exposing the underlying sexism, racism, queer-phobia, antigypsyism of images and concepts should be combined with the creation of positive representations – an ongoing process today's young people are engaging with, by using social media, affective politics, and visual arts (Corradi 2018).

Insulting epithets cannot be banned, they should be resignified and reappropriated, used in semiotic warfare aimed at liberating our bodies from white supremacy, internalized gadje-ness, hetero-patriarchy, and other forms of normativity. At stake is the reduction of the power that stigmatizing concepts still retain, and the decoding of some emotions still functioning against ourselves and so reinforcing the dominant discourse. Acting upon social feelings is a relevant issue that re-dignifies our political agency and enhances possibilities of alliances (Corradi 2018). The elaboration of different and more dynamic concepts of our individual and collective identities, with the renegotiation of our egos and cultural traditions, are current concerns for the GRT Queer community. The diaspora weakens the idea of identity as essential or absolute; and disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity: "[diaspora] stages the dynamic processes of identity formation in a specific manner, accentuating the power that people enjoy to create themselves and their distinctive cultures where this cannot be openly acknowledged" (Baker 2015, 89).

Identity construction is a collective endogenous process, which happens through resistance to assimilation and a conscious selection of inputs coming from the outside. As Judith Okely suggests, "Gypsy cultural identity is constructed through opposition, not isolation" (Okely 2010, 53). Collective self-reflection and social and political agency are all ingredients of such a change. Identity is also created in the constant *assemblage* (Puar 2007) of parts of self, in the making of a Queer Theory able to be propositive around affective politics. Awareness of the power we have in choosing, and building our identity is vital to understand alliances among diverse subjectivities and communities. 'Travelling activism' may be one of the elements of such a process.

> My examination of travelling activism explains how activist expertise travels through disjunctive circuits, and how the diverse forms of coalition building that arise from these activities can serve as a productive source for developing new kinds of policy in domains such as education, anti-discrimination, and de-segregation. (…) *Travelling activism in the Romani movement is related to mobilizing hybrid forms of expertise and knowledge across space and difference and thus aims at contesting the territorialization and ethnicization* (van Baar 2013, *author's emphasis*).

Travelling activism may be opening unprecedented spaces of dialogue and direct democracy.

> Importantly, they do not simply enter existing public debates, but try to contribute to establishing the problems the Roma face and the rights they have as public issues and collective responsibilities. Through the claiming of rights, including the right to participate in public and policy debates as subjects with their own voices, those involved in travelling activism contribute to the enactment of citizenship as participation (*ibid*).

As a conclusion to my reflections around affective politics, identity construction, and alliance in the Gypsy and Queer milieu, I quote the following from Vera Kurtic's work, where she challenges the fixity of identity politics and addresses the issue of otherness in a self-reflective way.

> We are now faced with the challenge to publicly come out as 'different' in a society where it is, to say the least, not very popular to be different. We are threatened with rejection, ridicule, blame and harassment over the phone or online, as well as with physical violence and intimidation. In addition to perpetuating our isolation, normative heterosexuality and forms of patriarchy have an impact on how we set standards for engaging in any other relationships. The negation of women's lives as well as the negation of lesbian lives within Romani communities is a manifestation of deeply rooted misogyny, homophobia and racism (Kurtic 2013, 90).

As Kurtic states, the "omnipresent homophobia and heterosexism in majority and Romani communities" make life particularly difficult for lesbians; she wonders how many of our grandmothers, aunts, and female neighbours "have lived without men?" and denounces the lies and the effort to ignore lesbian existence and make their lives invisible.

> Being subversive is a reflection of our ability to strengthen ourselves by accepting the fact that throughout our entire lives, we have perceived ourselves through the eyes of others; others who have told us what is beautiful, normal, acceptable and desirable (…). The necessity of deconstructing concepts of identities and subjectivity that originated within the western science tradition and policy, racist capitalism governed by male dominance, progress and adopting nature as the resource for culture production (Kurtic 2013, 91).

Both in the gadje society and in Romani communities there are some categories of people considered to be 'different' – which always implies the existence of a majority that is not 'different' and holds the superior status of 'normal'. We look at our bodies, our feelings, relations and emotions through the mirror of what is considered socially acceptable, as if hierarchies, behaviours, and conventions were 'natural' and our conflicts around them unchangeable. The identities we feel so attached to – be they gender or sexual identities, ethnic or cultural identities – should be seen as the product of Western dychotomical constructions, born within and against hetero-patriarchal, colonial, and capitalistic relations, which, of necessity, must be deeply decoded, decolonized, and subverted. Those who strive for alliances need to walk this path together.

Acknowledgements

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Staging the Romani Queer Revolution: New Approaches to the Study of Romani Queerness

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CRS **Critical** Romani Studies

Abstract

In this paper, I provide an intersectional analysis of *Roma Armee,* a theatre play staged at Berlin's Maxim Gorki theatre. I wish to challenge preconceptions and representations of Romani queer and feminist identities by investigating the personal narratives and self-envisioning of queer and feminist Romani performers. While there are notions that Romani queers live only as victims, perpetrators of violence, or unwitting exoticized objects of desire for mainstream queer consumption, I favour a more complex image, showing how some Romani queers articulate their own sexuality, race, class, and agency. I look at how these articulations are met in some Romani communities, and by majoritarian audiences in Berlin and Stockholm, in order to problematize the complex nature of being a minority within a minority. I end with remarks on the revolutionary potential of the play, by arguing that the play creates spaces for healing and can be seen as a significant contribution to an epistemic and ontological shift when it comes to Romani queer and feminist knowledge production.

Introduction

In this article I aim to deconstruct the ways in which notions of Romani queer subjectivities have been articulated and represented in mainstream LGBTIQ+ and feminist social movements, academic knowledge production, and cultural production in Europe. My focus is the play *Roma Armee (Roma Army)*, a production by the Maxim Gorki theatre in Berlin. In addition, I include ethnographic field notes, combining them with a textual analysis of the script adapted by the playwright Iryna Szodruch (2017). This play has been performed in five countries: Germany, Sweden, Italy, Romania and Austria. The cast represents Roma from different parts of Europe as well as their Turko-German and Israeli allies. The play is devised as a dialogue between sisters Sandra and Simonida Selimovic, it is directed by Yael Ronen, with costume designers Delaine le Bas and Maria Abreu, and the late scenographer Damian le Bas. It is based on the performers' personal testimonies, shifting from experiences of oppression, based on migration status, forced sterilizations, menstruation shame, class injustice, same-sex love, and the ongoing persecution of Roma, to name but a few. These are performed as rap, cabaret songs, and Romani soul, in English, German, and Romanes.

The play is an ideal case study because it brings to light challenges and seeks to transcend preconceived notions of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class relations within Romani communities. The play also highlights the tensions between the general conditions of oppression that Romani communities face, and the singular oppression of LGBTQ+ and feminist Romani community members. These tensions form a significant part of the intersectional analysis I later make. The accumulation of data and visual/narrative analysis methods reflect my interdisciplinary approach. I used George Markus's (1995) multi-sited ethnography and Kimberlé Cranshaw's (1991) intersectionality perspective to create a map of counter-narratives. By referring to Muñoz (2011), I contextualize knowledge production on Roma within a system of power relations that pushes Romani subjectivities into counter-public spheres. Dominant discursive representation politics frame Roma as passive victims of violence and racism. I deconstruct this victimhood image by incorporating hooks (1994, 2009) and reflections on representation politics and the gaze, while creating a deeper, intersectional, understanding of Romani subjectivities. This self-envisioned and self-forged subjectivity is articulated through creative artistic practices, relying on complex decolonial labour and drawing strength and power from cruel pasts and presents, in order to create a different present and future. My ambition is to contribute to the ongoing epistemic and ontological shift in the understanding of Romani queer lives by not solidifying subjectivities into vulnerability and precarity, but rather by opening up cognizance to multiplicity and complexity. The play and its analysis stress the importance of solidarity between Black and Brown queer and radical feminist thinkers, and their struggles, with all their similarities and differences. I build on the accumulated insights of scholars who have contributed to a transformative understanding of Romani experiences and positionalities in mainstream research, such as Vera Kurtic (2013), Daniel Baker (2015), Jekatarina Dunaeva, Angéla Kóczé and Sarah Cemlyn (2015), Dezső Máté (2017), Katarzyna Pabijanek (2018), Ethel Brooks (2019), and many others who are creating this paradigm shift. The analysis focuses on anger as a driving force of revolutionary change. By drawing on the work of Audrey Lorde (1984), Sara Ahmed (2010) and José Esteban Muñoz (2011), explore how anger is used in healing the wounds of the past, as well as becoming a trigger for creative processes in which a new type of Romani queerness emerges. I also explore how the

creativity and vision in the play transforms shame by releasing anger and generating a new calmness and communitarian kinship. This healing potential opens a door to a process of self-creation, through love, joy and self-respect and adds a positively charged value that was missing from analyses of Romani queer lives in both academia and cultural production.

1. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

I used George Marcus's *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography* in order to collect the data and create a map of emerging narratives. The decision to approach this topic from an interdisciplinary perspective reflects the complexity of the movements of people, artefacts, ideas, and politics across national borders. Marcus (1995, 109) states that: "There are stories or narratives told in the frame of single-sited fieldwork that might themselves serve as a heuristic for the fieldworker constructing multi-sited ethnographic research." *Roma Armee's* significance could be analysed in the context of its original performance at the Maxim Gorki theatre in Berlin; however, that would be at odds with the transnational character that is at its core. The play makes visible narratives that existed within Romani queer communities but remained at the margins of dominant histories. Marcus's (1995) methodological approach allows us to see how narratives travel and work in a broader system of oppression and resistance. I read counter-racist narratives against and within a context of a complex network of a seemingly common *Antiziganist* core that the performers highlight in a time of far-right mobilization across the continent. In addition, Marcus's (1995, 108) multi-sited ethnographic approach enables me to respect nuance and avoid generalizations, while mapping stereotypes and investigating their social impact. The figurations of *Antiziganism* I saw in the play are: the dirty, uneducated, uncultured, victimized, poor, and oversexualized "Gypsy."

In order to deepen the understanding of methodological choices, I resort to feminist and queer research on self-reflexivity and situated knowledge production. Donna Haraway in *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, emphasizes the importance of situated knowledge that is at the core of feminist knowledge production. Rather than producing transcending universal knowledge claims, that cannot be traced back and are projected to levels of generalizations, which is both dangerous and damaging, Haraway (1988, 583–89) argues for knowledge claims that are rooted in epistemologies of location. Self-positioning and embodied situating, with all its complexities and contradictions, are important in feminist knowledge production. One should keep in mind that identity itself does not produce knowledge (1988, 586). Hence, the standpoint I occupy, as a Romani gay man from Bosnia and Herzegovina, informs the ways in which I have collected the data and the vision from which knowledge has sprung, but ultimately does not determine it. The knowledge in this article is developed from the margins of academic knowledge production, activist interventions, and cultural production. It belongs to a sphere that is marginal, but also a counter-public domain. Muñoz (2011, 31) defines counter-public domains as complex domains in which minoritarian subjects have limited capacity for self-representation. This space is re-negotiated via the concept of disidentification, which is a process of recycling and rethinking encoded meanings. Disidentification helps rearticulate the figurations in a way that exposes the universalization and exclusionary power structures that push minoritarian subjects into the counter-public sphere, while empowering minoritarian identities. Roma

queer and feminist actors, in *Roma Armee*, deconstruct the multiple layers of oppression while creating a space for self-envisioning and reclaiming history, embodiment, and agency. However, one must keep in mind that positionalities with intersecting identities that shape constant negotiation and articulation are not innocent ones. Although Haraway (1988, 584) calls it a "subjugated standpoint," I believe it chimes well with the minoritarian positionality and expands on Muñoz's concept in a way that deepens the understanding of how disidentifications can be used against minoritarian subjects or appropriated by the mainstream. Subjugated standpoints are the preferred positionalities, as they are least likely to allow a denial of the critical core of knowledge. This positionality is one which, at its core, understands how power operates in relation to repression, forgetting, denial, and so on. This is useful to the oppressor, so is often used against minoritarian subjects. Additionally, I have concerns about claiming knowledge from a subjugated position which manifests in two ways: when knowledge is produced, minoritarian subjects face the ambiguity of either self-exoticization or appropriation. This ambiguity is also addressed in the play, where centuries of oppression have left the wound of being psychologically frozen by the inability to overcome yet, at the same time, when the experience is shared it can lead to misinterpretations, claiming the victimhood position; however, I believe its articulation and naming is an act of resistance rather than victimization. When we add Brooks to this debate, we see what the consequences are from Romani subjectivities. Ethel Brooks (2019), a North American Romani Scholar states:

> Passed down through generations within communities, the work of Roma has often gone unrecognized, while the people themselves have been equally disregarded. Yet, as artists, intellectuals and activists, we Roma have generated extensive knowledge and created a vast array of cultural and artistic practices as part of a global legacy that has been co-opted and colonized by others – from individuals to nation-states to entire continents.

To summarize, producing knowledge from the counter-public domain standpoint has benefits and dangers. Temporarily accumulated privileges enable critical standpoints that challenge structures of racism, but, simultaneously, the very critique ties me to counter-public spheres, limiting access to majoritarian debates and the discomfort such confrontation would entail. The interdisciplinary approach of this paper helps dehomogenise perceptions of existing representational frameworks for queer Romani persons. Consequently, the methodological approach diversifies understandings of Romani sexualities and ethnicity, in comparison to scholarly work that looks at individual national contexts. Intersectionality and precarity, together with a debate on representation and self-envisioning in the following paragraphs, help comprehend some of the diversity that exist in Romani queer and feminist movements.

Intersectionality as a methodology has been widely debated over the last 20 years. It has been introduced by the legal scholar Kimberlé Cranshaw in her work *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, in which she proposes intersectionality as a way of framing and analysing social, economic, and political inequalities and injustices, based on interactions between multiple categories that impact the lives of people of colour generally and women of colour specifically. Intersectionality will be used in this article as an addition to multi-sited ethnography to analyse the ethnographic data (i.e., narratives and visual data). Specifically, I am interested in the values that are attached to Romani subjectivities in various European contexts, and the ways in which different dominant social structures render certain people within Romani populations less or more valuable,

depending on a complex interaction of categories such as gender expression and sexuality. However, we need to understand that categories interact in specific contexts and historical trajectories, so it is important to reflect on Yuval-Davis's work on intersectionality. In *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics,* Nira Yuval-Davis (2013) points to the various uses of intersectionality in policymaking at the UN and in academia; however, she notes that there is no clear agreement on what intersectionality constitutes as a methodology outside of Crenshaw's field. I have seen intersectionality being used in litigation and policymaking by the EU, as well as by academic research on Romani communities, and I observed that the use of intersectionality can often be decontextualized and become a traveling concept (Lewis 2013; Salem 2016) that disregards complex histories of power structures and resistance against oppression. Some disregard negotiations of positionalities and hierarchies within Romani communities, while others see intersectionality as a quick fix in transnational approaches to social justice and mitigation of the same, which can cause more harm than good. That is why I believe Yuval-Davis's (2013, 195) contribution to the intersectionality debate is an acknowledgement that each social division (race, class, gender, sexuality) has a different ontological basis that is grounded in differentiated historical processes of hegemonisation, which need to be taken into account, when approaching analyses of oppression. The importance of this differentiation warns researchers to look at every intersection and its historical development in a very specific context rather than borrowing the concept and making it travel across different contexts (Yuval Davis 2013, 199). Rather than taking an oppositional standpoint, Yuval-Davis (2013, 195) acknowledges that intersectionality can do both, look at differences and similarities: "… being oppressed, for example, as 'a Black person' is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography, etc.)."

The multi-sited ethnography, intersectional methodological approach, and theoretical design for this paper were chosen to reflect on the complexity of narratives in a context of rising far-right nationalist movements and *Antiziganism*,[1] as well as *Antiziganist* homo/lesbo/bi/transphobia. *Roma Armee* offers a space to deconstruct and rearticulate the lived experiences of Romani queer subjectivities in a struggle to create an awareness of the diversity of Romani populations as well as the specificities of the struggles that European queer Roma face in the contemporary socio-political setting. I believe that by using intersectionality and multi-sited ethnography, as well as auto-ethnographic notes, one can decentralize genealogies and canons of knowledge production essential to struggles that are not only queer and feminist but also Roma. This decision, to voice these genealogies and ontologies alongside the concerns mentioned above, is not an exotic attempt to fetishize myself or the people who helped me understand myself better, but rather to share a process that occurs in spaces that are not traditionally considered of value for academic knowledge production or real theatrical or artistic engagement.

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1 I use Soraya Post's definition on antiziganism, articulated in an interview for the European Roma Rights Center. For more see: http://www.errc.org/blog/in-conversation-with-soraya-post/21.

2. *Roma Armee*: The Revolution Is Here and Queer

The Angry Feminist Club

Anger is one of the central affective roles in the play. Anger, as an affect in social movements and performances, has been widely discussed in feminist studies and Black feminism, but the potential for anger in Romani Studies has yet to be explored. In this segment I look at the occurrences of anger in the play and offer a manifold intersectional analysis. Mihaela, a Romanian Romni queer/lesbian feminist actress, takes central stage with a homage to Audre Lorde. In act 2, scene 8, *Anger* (Szodruch 2017, 35), Mihaela talks about the revolutionary potential of anger:

> I'm an angry Roma woman. I have lived with that anger trying to ignore it, but I've learnt to use it before it laid my visions to waste. Once I used it in silence, afraid of its power. My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of my anger will teach you nothing, as well. Growing up in Romania where Roma people were slaves for 500 years, but nobody speaks about this, not even in school. […] Nothing in museums, no references and no memorials.

In paying homage to Audre Lorde and her 1984 essay "Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," the music intensifies, transforming into a rhythmic chainsaw type sound, followed by actors and actresses performing martial arts moves and getting ready for the battle. The stage is red, reflecting on the audience's faces that turn from happy and jolly into terrified expressions as they observe the militaristic moves and listen to the speech she delivers. As she speaks, Mihaela points at the audience, her face communicates her accumulated anger. I see the pointing as a performative identification of guilt, in regard to the *Antiziganism* she faced. In response I read guilt, shame, and also fear, on the faces of the Berlin audience. After the play ended, I asked several audience members how they felt, and they responded saying they felt heavy and scared but also felt it is unjust that every white person is put in the same basket. A sense of wanting to be taken care of is in the air. In Stockholm on the other hand, her Audre Lorde reference received ovations. Some audience members were reciting along, remembering each line of the original quote. I could sense that there was an atmosphere of solidarity. It took me by surprise, as I was told that Stockholm audiences are quite reserved, especially as it was performed at Dramaten, the Royal Dramatic Theatre. On my tram ride back, after I saw the play for the first time in Berlin, I was writing some notes and overheard a conversation among three women. They articulated a feeling of extreme discomfort (*Ungem*ütlich in German), adding that they cannot see how another woman could be responsible or held accountable for racist crimes against Romani women, when they themselves are victims of a system of oppression. Their discomfort echoed Sara Ahmed's figuration on feminists as killjoys in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). Ahmed states that feminists are often identified as the source of bad feelings and killers of good atmosphere in spaces of solidarity (2010, 65). However, she sees these figures next to the angry Black woman referring to Lorde (1984) and hooks (2000), where women of colour do not only kill joy in general, but feminist joy by "pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics." (2010, 67). The rest of the conversation continued by listing all the reasons why they themselves are victims. I turned around to catch sight of them, all three were white-passing women in their mid or late twenties. I felt sad that such a powerful play was viewed as an attack rather than an invitation to act in solidarity.

Anger is an emotion that has been historically devalued in minoritarian movements. It has its history, its heritage, linked to sexuality and gender; it has a context and creates a complex set of consequences for a woman of colour, specifically for a lesbian Romni to express. Heteronormative majoritarian societies and their allies across the world have tried to suppress the creative potential of anger in Black movements and the feminist and gay liberation movements because of the potential for change they ignite. Mihaela realized that anger, with its long decolonial affective trajectory, disrupts the denial of a colonial history of Romani slavery. Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984, 150) states that anger is to be seen as a response to systematic racism, exclusion, unquestioned privilege, silencing, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, and co-optation. Rather than responding to it with defensiveness and guilt, she suggests using it to grow and learn. I believe that Mihaela's creative use and subversive force of anger is rooted in the oppressive past which she, as a Romni lesbian experienced and witnessed, and a forward driving force that, as Lorde states, has a potential for growth. However, it is washed away by the feelings of guilt and shame embedded in some majoritarian subjectivities that react repulsively and defensively towards her performative action. Lorde (1984, 152–3) recognizes that anger is rooted in oppression, both personal and institutional. Instead of containing and suppressing the anger, she suggests focusing on it and using it as a powerful source of energy that drives radical change in the minoritarian subject's life and can be used to prompt a futuristic vision that is liberating and clarifying. Therefore, I see Mihaela's action as a step forward, compared to previous generations, our parents', confronting the white majority with complicity in oppression, creating a generational shift and breaking the silence. I believe that the remark on complicity is a safe generalization, with few exceptions, when it comes to our parents' generation in regard to diverse sexualities.

The release of anger brings to the fore the complexity of the dynamics within the field where Mihaela's experiences are rooted. Mihaela (Szodruch 2017, 37) calls for internal unity as a core value of the revolution, and surpasses the victimhood position, in a historical moment reclaiming spaces and power:

> But we have to know: There can be no Roma-Gadje unity until there is first some Roma unity. [...] Because it's not only the society that is our enemy, when you were oppressed long enough you begin to do it to yourself. We divided our communities, denounced and abandoned each other and created our own imaginary hierarchies and adopted the idea of exclusion against each other.

Mihaela's articulation of anger brings forth internalized forms of *Antiziganism*, developed as a result of centuries of oppression. Her monologue speaks to Romani thinkers conceptualizing the "Roma Spring." In their paper entitled *The Roma Spring: Knowledge Production and the Search for a New Humanity*, Maria Bogdan et al. (2015, 34) define the "Roma Spring" as a significant moment of critical consciousness in which a process of decolonization is triggered with a new sense of militancy and assertiveness. While such shifts are commendable, they are simultaneously met with exclusionary practices as a result of challenging hegemonies. I believe that as a queer Romani identified academic and activist, I have often been told not to bring sexuality to the forefront of my activism as it disturbs a sense of unity, or more conservative members, the same way as addressing racial issues in majoritarian communities does. What Mihaela touches on, as well as everyone else in this play, are topics that are avoided or suppressed by a large number of heteronormative movement leaders. Each movement, whether feminist or mainstream,

national or transnational, has strategies that reflect on the local and European Romani movements' agendas. What *Roma Armee* articulates is a backlash against the feminist and queer agenda for liberation and emancipation of Romani members of such communities. This liberation is often not part of the so called "Roma Agenda." Alliance building, therefore, is very important for the process of liberation. Jekatarina Dunajeva, Angéla Kocze, and Sarah Cemlyn (2015, 75) note in their work entitled "LGBTQIA, Feminist and Romani Studies": "Alliance building was one contentious issue: while some saw a clear opportunity in LGBTQIA, feminist and Roma communities joining forces in their struggle for equality, others were wary that the very idea of premature alliance would dilute the Roma cause." Many other minoritarian movements across the globe saw similar dynamics when queer liberation began taking place. The reason for this might be manifold. Some of it is rooted in homo/bi/lesbo/trans/intersex-phobia, as no community is immune to it. Others might be distribution of funding, slow pace of adaptation, lack of understanding and willingness to hear out the needs of LGBTQIA community members, shame, and so on. Therefore, I believe that the play and Mihaela's articulation of a critique towards the Romani establishment represents a critical point of recognition that the oppressor is not only the white man, but heteronormative patriarchy within our communities as well.

Sandra's Malcom X inspired anger speech adds to this debate. Sandra (Szodruch 2017, 39), in act 2, scene 8, *Sandra Malcom X,* defines the Romani revolution in a militant and assertive manner:

> You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true. How are you going to be nonviolent when your own people were murdered, enslaved, sterilized and are still set on fire and being deported, oppressed and discriminated? But we don't fight for them. We don't bleed.

Sandra performs her anger in order to expose the willingness of some Roma to fight for the white oppressors, to perpetuate the *Antiziganist* cause, and to participate in oppressing their own community members, not only in regard to enslavement and forced sterilizations, access to education or jobs, running water or electricity but also exclusion based on sexuality, class, or gender expression, something which will become more evident later in the analysis. This indicates the complex nature of the perpetuation of racism, and the fact that its internalization is imminent.

In *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, bell hooks (2009, 49–50) states that contemporary African-Americans need to remember the ways in which life was sustained and nurtured by generations during and after slavery, rather than surrender agency and embrace the victimhood position. Consequentially, this is what Mihaela's and Sandra's monologues do for the queer and feminist Romani movements. I believe that bringing anger to the stage enables multiple levels of social transformation. It has an educational character, in terms of exposing those unfamiliar with Romani histories to centuries of oppression, while simultaneously opening discussions that are necessary for inner transformations, within our communities, to create what hooks refers to as life-sustaining values.

The Romani Sexual Revolution

As discussed above releasing anger summons the multiplicity of oppression that shapes the existence of Romani queers and feminists alike. In this segment I focus on transformative anger situated in feminist performance practices (Schneider 1997). I then try to connect those practices to the process of envisioning by following the roadmap set out by Lorde (1984, 153–4) to analyse where that anger takes Romani movements. The play acknowledges its impact yet deconstructs the victimhood narrative. The actors engage in a process of dismantling hundreds of years of intergenerational trauma. This deconstructive practice furthers what Rebecca Schneider (1997), a theatre and performance studies scholar, calls feminist performative practices that are rooted in the radical feminist movements of the 1960s. I draw parallels between the play and Schneider's concept of explicit body in performance (1997). The play, at the point of the body, can be seen as a space for elucidating social relations and structural inabilities (Schneider 1997, 2, 38). Performances produce a transgressive shock and are considered the feminist avant-garde (Schneider 1997, 38–41). In *Roma Armee*, the performance of anger through an intersectional contextualization of the Romni's body via reflections on menstruation, vagina love, and sexuality, position the play within a genealogy of feminist performative art, while addressing structural injustices that Romni feminist artists encounter in society. In addition, I believe that the play dialogues with Eve Ensler's (2001) *The Vagina Monologues*, as the monologues on menstruation and vagina love deepen understandings of structural injustices and discrimination based on gender. The odes to vagina love and menstruation in *Roma Armee*, evoke a formation of the Romani feminist avant-garde. This play brings forth what Chambers-Letson (2018, 4–5) defined as "More Life" and freedom at the point of the body. Chambers-Letson, like Muñoz, acknowledges that minoritarian subjects have limited capacity to make the impossible possible and to improvise with what is around them to create freedom. The play is a testimony to Romani queers and feminists carving out and claiming spaces for self-envisioning, healing, surviving, and being in this world, together.

It is never either one identity or the other that shapes a life, but as bell hooks (1992, 1–2) notes in *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* being part of the counter-public sphere also means that Blackness and Brownness exist surrounded by white supremacy. hooks (*ibid.*) argues the necessity of acknowledging the diversity of Black and Brown communities, followed by the development of analytic tools to articulate both the beauty and the pain that Black and Brown communities in USA face. She (*ibid.*) sees misrepresentation as a tool for maintaining institutional oppression and reifying exploitation of Black and Brown bodies via the mass media and dominant culture, something that Baker and Hvalajova (2013, 8) acknowledge as a general problem for Romani cultural representation. Although, since 1992, there has been a significant qualitative shift in terms of representation of Blackness in the USA, I believe that some similarities could be drawn with where the Romani movement is right now. hooks' (1994, 4) intervention calls for setting imaginations free, a mode which allows a vision outside of the oppositional and responsive framework. By breaking out of oppositionality, one creates space for transgressions, rebellious visions, and transformations. Self-envisioning is grounded in this call for transgression and non-oppositionality, performativity and subversives. However, it escapes the representational narrative in a way that focuses and serves a healing process that is oriented inward. When performed it leaves space for identifications but does not intend to be representative. Minoritarian subjects, such as us, queer

Romani individuals, have been fed imagery, been ashamed by it, and tried to escape such damaging and hurtful representations. We rarely dared to self-envision, look at our past, and be grounded in the present while reaching out and creating a future. Self-envisioning allows us to sit with the pain that injustice, misrepresentation, and othering has inflicted; it is a healing moment, in which there is calm and clarity. It is the moment after anger settles down, burns out, and creative vision takes over: a moment that many of us never had, or never will have the privilege of enjoying, but which we still have despite the odds. It is the moment when we ask ourselves who we want to be, who we are, and what we project on our environment. What our talents are, what/who our loves are, what our hopes are? This, in itself, is an act of rebellion. Sometimes, being queer and Roma means not having time, as we are continually beset by destructive forces. Self-envisioning in such an oppressive system allows us to reclaim agency as a revolutionary practice. Mihaela and Sandra craft visions of themselves in which they are Roma, queer and feminists. As their testimonies show, these interlocking identities make them fighters on multiple fronts. As Sandra (Szodruch 2017, 26) says: "I am a lesbian. I know some of you don't understand why I have to mention it on stage, why it should come as a topic in a show that is supposed to deal with Roma issues. But this is a show about us, and I bring my entire identity into the show, I'm Roma and I'm queer, and I do not apologize for either." This statement urges recognition of interlocking identities. Those that assume that she should be apologetic for bringing up her identity as a queer or lesbian, as if it is a burden on both Roma and *Gadje*. For one, it is a burden of shame for having to occupy an identity that might, for some Roma, be not true to our ways, while for some *Gadje*, she becomes either a helpless victim in the eyes of the saviour to be saved from her own kind, or an exotic Brown lesbian, essentialized for her appearance and her otherness.

The power of art in social movements of change is described by bell hooks (2009, 126–7) in *Belonging: A Culture of Place* where she identifies art as a tool of liberation and inspiration for resistance. However, she also warns against essentializing Blackness and creating art that serves nationalist agendas. This raises the question: can Romani queer art hold ground by being collective yet committed to countering heteronormative cultural production? While on the one hand, heteronormative cultural production within Romani communities exists already in the counter-public sphere, on the other hand Romani queer art and the experiences Sandra articulates depict the complexity of the processes determining the position of Romani queers in society. This means that as a lesbian, an artist and a Romani woman, it is hard to carve a place within the current discursive regimes. I would argue that by critiquing and creating a vision of herself as a proud Romni, speaking and rapping in German, English, and Romani, appearing as a butch lesbian on the stage, she does not counter or create a dichotomy between the us and them, but rather her articulation invites us to consider the political implications of her coming-out statement. Her self-envisioning transgresses the normative understanding of what a Romni should be, while creating spaces for more Romni lesbians to identify and give a sense of belonging during her performance and the spaces she goes to once the performance is done. Sandra's political vision is inclusive of closeted Romani queers; she invites them to join the journey. However, she does not pretend that the process is easy but rather acknowledges the complexity and rejections that happen in the process. Mihaela (Szodruch 2017, 26) speaks to this as well: "They all beg me not to talk about my love for my vagina and especially not about my love for other vaginas and in general to avoid any queer issues because … well, since homosexuality is an invention of you, *Gadje*! And we, Roma people, are not gay." It might seem that Mihaela is essentializing and othering homosexuality and vagina love as an "imported" concept. However, I believe that her utterance

is a counter-strategy, countering heteronormative Romani intellectuals and leaders, who perpetuate this narrative in order to enforce homo/lesbo/bi/trans/intersex-phobia towards queer Roma. I see Mihaela's exclamation of love as a form of resistance that exists in a context of heteronormative patriarchy within which Roma queer subjects also live. Heteronormative patriarchy, as a social structure, overlaps and is enforced equally in minoritarian and majoritarian societies. Mihaela's vagina love monologue is an act of resistance that is set in a context of several narratives of forced sterilization being brought up on stage.[2] This statement is revolutionary because love for one's vagina, in this case, is an act of solidarity from one Romani queer person to all Romani women identified persons or persons identifying as having and loving vaginas. It is an unapologetic act of resistance that overcomes shame, the only emotional response to both forced sterilizations and vagina love.

The mutual construction of gender, race, and class becomes clear in the aforementioned scene when Mihaela and Simonida talk about period shame, specifically through the lens of poverty. Mihaela starts by stating that she was ashamed and terrified by her first period, as it was like a "massacre," yet poverty informed her experience as well: "… we were so poor that we couldn't afford pads. They were too expensive. I had to use cotton balls and put it in my underwear. It was so uncomfortable, I had to walk like this." She then jokingly imitates a walk with her legs half spread to simulate the discomfort of having to use cotton balls. Simonida on the other hand could not even afford cotton balls: "I also made my own pads out of toilet paper. One day it fell out of my panties in the middle of sports class. I was so embarrassed." Class and race intersect in a way that informs their experiences of being women, one of whom was growing up in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the other one as a Yugoslav refugee child in Austria. Their ethnicity and the fact that there was a lack of access to resources prevented them from having sanitary pads or tampons. It is not because they come from a culture that does not understand what tampons are, but because their parents were pushed to the margins of the society, making a threadbare living, unemployed or denied access to employment. Simonida had to work part-time to contribute to the household. She says, "I was ashamed that we had to work as children. All the other kids could play after school, but we had to go help our parents. They were the caretakers of three buildings." While child labour is unimaginable and was so when Simonida and Sandra were growing up in Austria, they had to work instead of play like majoritarian children did. It is important to state that neither of the actresses said that their parents forced them to work, but that their working-class background and ethnicity meant they had to contribute to the household if they were to survive. This traumatic experience of shame (Simonida) and fear (Mihaela) becomes an immense power in this play, as references to menstruation, in a feminist tradition, is used to inform the strength of the flow of the revolution, just as it informed the *écriture féminine* or women's writing as defined by French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976).

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2 While forced sterilizations of Romani women and men are not the focus of the paper, acknowledging this historic trauma is important. The context of sterilization and history are specific to each country. Further research can be obtained on the website of the European Roma Rights Centre (www.errc.org) and on the Swedish government website for the Swedish context: https://www.government.se/contentassets/eab06c1ac82b476586f928931cfc8238/the-dark-unknown-history---white-paper-on-abuses-and-rights-violations-against-roma-in-the-20th-century-ds-20148.

Before I shift towards the gay experience, I would like to reflect on an important standpoint as a writer, academic, and activist. This analysis is grounded in the acknowledgment of the differences in experience that lesbian and gay Romani men have, and in the privileges that come with my positionality as a cis-gender, white-passing gay Romani man. This play, together with years of being in queer communities in different national contexts, confirms that Romni lesbians and trans* persons survive more discrimination and deprivation than gay Romani men. This is because men benefit from patriarchy. Women-identified persons suffer a more complex struggle and have more at stake politically and personally when claiming spaces publicly, hence they have a greater responsibility and a harder burden on their shoulders.[3] While, as we will see in the paragraphs ahead, Lindy is negotiating spaces for the articulation of his struggle, women-identified actors share testimonies about being responsible for the internal struggle within Romani movements. Women-identified persons are held accountable for the success of the political struggle and supporting the well-being of communities that they are in. For example, Mihaela refers to the fact that she was asked by her aunt and family members not to talk about her love for vaginas or other vaginas and her menstruation. I believe this request was made in order to preserve the well-being of the communities and to not bring shame and break taboos, not to muddy the waters, and keep the focus on the race struggle. At the same time, she is expected to participate in the race struggle, address the issues of violence against women, forced sterilizations and early marriages, which seem more acceptable. These forms of violence against Romni across Europe play a role in heteronormative familial relations from which majoritarian heterosexual Romani communities benefit. My intention is not to undermine the importance of addressing violence against women, early marriages, or forced sterilization but rather argue that violence against sexual minorities should be treated as equally acute. The positionality of a Romni today reveals that they are, to some extent, expected to be the keeper of family values. There seems to still be an expectation to preserve the symbolism of the female body as a pure entity. That is why the preservation of its innocence is still a battlefield. However, most of these expectations are deconstructed, broken, and rearticulated in such a way that, even if the actress decides to take on the role, will be self-defined. I argue that when viewing these narratives, we take a critical perspective, from a point of subversion, rather than a point of reproduction.

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3 This term (women-identified persons) is used for inclusion purposes and to avoid gender binaries. My understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality are embedded in queer and trans studies. For more, see Judith Butler (2004) and Susan Stryker (1994).

What *Roma Armee* makes clear is that shame is not a source of weakness. Lindy, a Swedish traveller, who identifies as gay, Roma, and vegetarian also works through shame. He (Szodruch 2017, 11) starts with:

> I am Lindy.
> I'm a Man
> I'm Swedish
> and I'm gay.
> I'm gay because
> I like men.
> I like to fuck them.
> It's a sexual thing.
> I'm a practicing gay.
> Very much a practicing gay.
> I'm proud to be gay,
> but it's complicated.
> To be gay,
> I'm openly gay but not always.
> I don't show my boyfriend love openly
> although I consider myself to be totally open
> I don't want to be a statement all the time.
> I don't enjoy coming out all the time
> but if I don't tell people I'm gay
> like the first thing I do,
> It becomes strange
> because when it comes out,
> they have the feeling I have betrayed them.

Through his self-identification process in the opening scene, the multiple positionalities and their negotiation become apparent. For him, it is never only about being either Roma or a gay man. It is having to live with the fear of rejection, being safe, and also about how *Gadje* society in Sweden impacted his life and shaped his fears and strengths. Daniel Baker, a curator, practicing artist, and scholar of Romani Gypsy origins, addresses the ambiguities of (non)belonging in his thesis *The Queer Gypsy.* Baker (2015, 89–90) states that those Romani men who were out as gay experienced detachment or exclusion from families and communities, while those who were not were deprived of the benefits that being openly gay brings. The research was conducted in 2002, but despite the time difference it still reflects lives of some Romani gay men today. Baker (2015, 90) also identifies a lack of visibility which as a result: "… suggests that the reported lack of mirroring throughout life has led to a fragmented sense of self – a lack of internal vocabulary with which to construct an inclusive self that enables one to see oneself reflected in others." Lindy (Szodruch 2017, 11), creates a vocabulary for himself by claiming pride, yet feels discomfort doing so: "To be gay is filled with a lot of self-hatred. I'm openly gay but not always…." He (*ibid.*) further states that: "I'm not openly gay because I am afraid to be rejected, I want to be loved and accepted, I want to belong. And sometimes I am not openly gay because I am afraid of my own security." Being a Romani-identified gay person means not only being

Roma and having to live in a world of preconceptions by majoritarian cultures but also living in fear of familial and societal rejection.

This produces a feeling of not belonging anywhere. Lindy's monologue reflects a strategic coming out that negotiates the preservation of belonging, safety, and security rather than a lack of visibility out of shame or cultural difference. Lindy's fear of a double ostracization represents a fear many Romani gays live with. Lots of Romani gay men are rejected by the majoritarian white heteronormative and queer society and fear rejection within their own communities. In my own experience, during a lot of interactions, both online on apps like Grindr or on live dates, I have experienced various forms of rejection based on ethnicity, religion, sexual expression, or migration status. In Sweden particularly, I have received hate messages from Swedish gay neighbours on Grindr, been called a "Passport Slut," and told that I should stop abusing the Swedish social benefit system even though I am employed and not exploiting anything. In a live encounter with a Chinese gay man whose migration status is the same as mine, I was told that "Gypsies are thieves and don't want to work, why do you study their culture when they don't have any?" These experiences, in dialogue with Baker and Lindy, confirm the complexity of the nuances that some gay Romani men have to live with on a regular basis. This experience makes some gay Romani men still choose the places and times when we proudly come out and claim our right to the spaces we occupy. Drawing on Baker's conceptual articulation of passing, I argue that Lindy deepens the understanding of negotiating practices in expressing the authentic self, not only within the Romani communities to whom he belongs, but also to the majoritarian society that claims to be liberated, open, free, and accepting.

A Romani gay man often occupies two positionalities in the white gay male's imagination. First, he is a victim of the naturalized and essentialized homophobic violence of Romani culture. I do not claim that homophobia is not part of Romani communities, I claim that homophobia is part of every culture, since heteronormative patriarchy is still the norm. What is nuanced is its articulation. I argue that a misconceptualised and essentialized homophobic representation in pop culture, sexual cultures, and academic texts in connection with Romani communities does not hold ground. What this play shows is that gay Romani men are exposed to both majoritarian and the Romani community's homophobic violence, while struggling with racism. To think that all gay Romani men lie and live multiple lives, having sex with men in secret because it is a reflection of a culture in general and sexual culture specifically, is both *Antiziganist* and homophobic. This means that strategies of passing need to be viewed in a different light than previously conceptualized and discussed. The process of forming a self and of articulating queerness is a long process of negotiation contextualized over time rather than a singular moment in it.

The second common depiction is the oversexualized Romani macho. In my master's thesis entitled *Articulations and Negotiations of Roma Masculinities: An Intersectional Analysis of Ethnicity, Sexuality, Gender and Class at the Roma Access Programs* (Heljic 2016), one of the interviewees, Hugo, a gay Romani man, addressed connections between oversexualization and estrangement: "Sometimes I feel different in the Roma community, and sometimes I feel different in the gay community. ... I felt like an exotic animal or a toy." (2016, 46). Hugo supported this claim by showing me a picture that was taken of him posing next to a large piece of meat in a freezer, in a butcher's shop. This feeling of being a piece of meat is a result of the interaction between some majoritarian and minoritarian gay subjects. The metaphor of meat

reflects the space that gay Romanies have in some white gay men's imaginations. The gay Romani man lives a "straight life," is hypermasculine (beefy), and serves as a sex toy to fulfil white gay men's desires. This projected image constructs a generalization that gay Romani men are only useful for the production of pleasure. I say production, as the gay Romani man here is objectified as a consumable good rather than being seen as a subject who constructs his own identity or subjectivity. Lindy shows us that he is aware of all these discourses when choosing to self-envision. His resistance strategy is a disidentification that Muñoz (1999, 4) sees as a strategy to negotiate phobic majoritarian formations of subjectivities that are built on a fantasy of normative citizenship. Puar (2007) takes a step further defining normative citizenship as being constructed in regard to whiteness, and in recent decades also appropriating white homonormativity. Lindy is aware of his positionality in the social hierarchy. Ye, he articulates the affective consequence that these choices bring each time they are made.

In conclusion, I would argue that the contribution of Lindy's performance to knowledge production and queer studies is a clear articulation of resistance narratives and strategies against misrepresentation. His performance also teaches that the process of self-envisioning is a process of healing. Although wounded by dominant histories, he dances and sings, so healing the paralysing positions that he has learned to occupy, while shattering the moulds that were created for him. I see every dance move as an unlearning of predispositions and imposed representations at the level of the body, while reclaiming a space to exist and love just as we are. Each verse of his song is an undoing of the mind and thought structures that taught us that we and our bodies can only exist to entertain and please the white (gay) male subject or, on the contrary, be the boundary from which he will distance himself and rise up in all his mighty subjectivity.

3. Theatre of Healing

Even when I felt therapy was not helping, I did not lose my conviction that there was health to be found, that healing could come from understanding the past and connecting it to the present.
– bell hooks (2009, 17)

Articulating a queer and feminist Romani revolution is an emotionally and physically challenging task. Multiple forms of violence and limited access to psychological support, healthcare, housing, a living wage, and community support exhaust its revolutionaries. Fighting for equity and dignity leaves traces on the bodies and minds of each revolutionary. What *Roma Armee* revolutionaries do, however, is create a space of belonging that enables dialogue and healing. Therefore, I believe that the play has the potential to be an important contribution to multi-generational, multi-sited, cross-temporal healing. I argue that *Roma Armee* initiates a healing process through artistic practices.

Art spaces and the theatre, specifically, have a potential to articulate new decolonial strategies. These strategies are shared in conversations among queer Romanies after the curtain falls. The healing potential, as bell hooks (2009) states, lies in returning to core values and the belief that learning from history and connecting it to futurity forge different spaces of belonging. *Roma Armee* reflects on history from a decolonial perspective, rearticulating narratives of injustices that Roma need to hear and have mirrored. I argue that the play represents a subversive journey that reworks vulnerability, heals self-victimization, and

opens up a different space of becoming and belonging, by reworking accumulated historic anger, shame, and pride. Every act is a new stage in the process of healing. It is a self-empowering process of reclaiming language and inner voice. Intergenerational wounds are healed by accepting the consequences of injustice and rewriting histories in a way that Roma themselves find fitting. *Roma Armee* teaches us power and the lesson of being one's own saviour and accepting every part of the journey towards that. Every character gives birth to a reworked meaning and a self-envisioning, one that has been self-ascribed and taken pride in. This theatrical performative practice, I believe, is healing because it triggers a complex set of effects, both in actor and audience, whether one is Roma or not. It is healing because it was silenced and taboo, and opening the stage to this process of forging one's own subjectivity is, and was, an important political issue for Romani queers. It is healing because it does not claim to be universal, yet it is a roadmap to a different future, one that shows how glorious the revolution can be when we decide to blur the lines imposed to separate us, and produce tools that unite us.

I would like to close this analysis with an invitation to see the play in the light of a tradition of a theatre of revolution. The above acts of resistances are part of a tradition that was defined by African-American playwright and poet Amiri Baraka in a public speech in 1965, later published under the title "The Revolutionary Theater." In his speech (1965, 1–2) he addresses the importance of letting the anger out and the importance of anger as a decolonizing strategy in theatre. He defines the revolutionary theatre as one that must expose; it must attack and accuse everything that can be attacked and accused. It is both shaped by the world that surrounds it and shapes the world around it; it is enmeshed in the social and gives the victims of normalized quotidian violence a confirmation of their precarity, while guiding them to a place of strength. *Roma Armee* is a play that does not skip any stages. In my analysis I argue that it starts from anger, it acknowledges the internalization of the majoritarian gaze, it works through the pain and the suffering, it brings to the fore prior unspoken or unthinkable topics, and dares to envision a future and a self that has not been dreamt of before. It carves spaces of pride in one's sexuality, class background, race, age, gender expression, and affective baggage, and creates spaces for belonging in a time when hate is increasingly becoming the norm.

Conclusion

In this article I discuss the revolutionary potential of *Roma Armee* and the epistemic and ontological shifts that this play contributes to when it comes to writing Romani queer subjectivities. In this collective endeavour, academics, activists, and artists join a struggle for liberation, through a set of artistic practices that include decolonial narrative strategies, visual decolonization via scenography and costume design, and performance. I analyse anger and its articulations. I conclude that anger is a decolonial strategy that clarifies the visions of Romani revolutionaries in the play, helping carve futurities in which different self-envisioning is presented. The self-envisioned representations challenge hegemonic *Antiziganist* moulds of subjectivity and open spaces for imagining different articulations of Roma-ness and queerness. By reflecting on the play, through an intersectional lens while analysing the script and conducting a multi-sited ethnography, I argue that *Roma Armee* shifts the decolonial process of knowledge production towards solidarity and community building. This is achieved by reflecting and situating oppression against Romani populations into the canon of anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist genealogy. The narrated,

lived experiences performed through personal stories indicate the existence of a history of contextual differences of oppression in European Union member states and also underline similarities in structural approaches to the oppression of Roma across Europe. The queer and feminist practices reflected in the play paint a complex picture of multiple positionalities with which many Romani queers can identify. In addition, I argue that an intersectional critique of the movements, both majoritarian feminist and queer ones, as well as Romani movements across Europe, is a way to deepen understandings of oppression. Romani queer and feminist art and cultural production has the unique potential to create new bonds and spaces of belonging, in solidarity with global minoritarian subjectivities. It is a play that has a healing impact on Romani queers at a time when violence is normalized, and lives rendered unliveable.

Acknowledgments

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Representations of Romani Women in Contemporary Polish and Romani Literature

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CRS **Critical** Romani Studies

Abstract

This paper summarizes and discusses the key findings of my research on representations of Romani woman in contemporary Polish and Romani literary texts. The first part of this paper discusses Romani women's roles and positions in the Romani community. While the subsequent part describes Romani literature in Poland, the main focus of this article discusses images of Romani women in Polish and Romani literature. The article aims to reveal the process of shaping their description in Romani and Polish literature. The research result shows how the perception of Romani women influenced the artistic imagination of Poles and Roma (female and male) and their literary discourses. The study also indicates the degree of durability or variability of the compared images. The research is significant because of its intent to deepen the understanding of Romani imagology, as well as promoting the discourse of Romani Literature Studies.

Introduction

The social and cultural image of Roma,[1] including Romani women, formed in Europe in the sixteenth century consolidates and strengthens over the following centuries.[2] The current situation of Roma in majority communities, including Poland, is as it was centuries ago. Roma are affected by marginalization, hostility, stigmatization, and discrimination.[3] Non-Roma often perceive Roma through a prism of negative, harmful, false stereotypes, and little knowledge of them.

For centuries, the stereotypical image of Roma (including Romani women) was perpetuated in art and literature.[4] Up until now, only external and passive observers of Romani culture (and not its active participants) created Romani characters in opera, art, film and literary works. The narrative of these works was usually incompatible with how Roma perceive themselves. Art has become a tool to promote and consolidate an image of the Romani community dominated by forceful stereotypes.

Michel Foucault defined representation as knowledge production and meaning throughout discourse. According to Foucault, the production of knowledge is connected with body and power (Foucault 1980). Stuart Hall describes representation as the "production of meaning through language" (Hall 1997, 16). There are three approaches to explain this process of representation production: reflective, intentional, and constructivist (also called constructionist). The reflective approach indicates that language shows the existing meaning "in the object, person, idea or event." The intentional approach says that speaker (or author) dictates meaning by language. Finally, in the constructivists' approach – which acknowledges the public and social nature of language – people "use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Hall 1997, 24–25). In conclusion, meanings can impact the representation of a particular group in society (including Roma), as well as influence their identity.

Roma – among the other non-white communities – were impacted by power relations as well as the coloniality of gender, which emphasized the concept of intersectionality, and exclusion and struggles of women of colour (Lugones 2008). For centuries Romani women function in a patriarchal system, which performs differently in various cultures and nations, including that of Roma. Patriarchy refers to male domination over women in the family and in society, as well as to the power relations, by which men dominate women (Lerner 1986, 239).

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1 In this paper, I use the term *Roma* to refer to the community which is the topic of my research. The negatively connotative terms *Gypsy* and *Gypsies* occur in the text only when quoting historical documents and statements.

2 In this paper, in referring to the literature created by Roma, I use the term *Romani literature.*

3 The aim of the research is not to reinforce and strengthen the stereotypes of Romani culture, including Romani women.

4 See Jodie Matthews. 2018. *The Gypsy Woman: Representations in Literature and Visual Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris; Valentina Glajar and Dominica Radulescu, eds. 2008. *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, eds. 2016. *Roma Culture: Myths and Realities*. Munich: Lincom Academic Publisher.

The visual and cultural representation of Romani women, together with women of colour, has been stereotyped, exoticized, and sexualized; consequently, Romani women are misrepresented or often underrepresented in the areas of arts, media, and culture. Ian Hancock states that this process will continue, and it will take some time before the Romani representations perpetuated in societies change the real and true image of Roma. He also explains that society has started to recognize that the literary image of "Gypsies," and the myth about them, have nothing in common with real Roma (Hancock, 2007, 188–190).

Other issues of visual representations of Romani women are related to the politics of representation. Moreover, the image of Roma dominated by (unconscious and unaware, or aware) antigypsyism has been problematized. Roma are seen as "other," as criminals, thieves, nomads, and dirty people. According to Huub van Baar the process of the problematization of Roma increases due to the diversity of Romani identities and mobilities. Baar states that representation of the Roma in Europe "ambiguously transformed" and Roma "are now seen as a 'European problem' rather than a 'European minority'" (van Baar 2011, 204).

In Poland, Romani artists and writers were admitted to the cultural mainstream in the second half of the twentieth century. The emergence of a written Roma narrative created the possibility to express culture and present the Romani perspective. It allows Roma to build the right self-image, consistent with their sense of identity. Today, Roma are gradually taking control over their image in the arts, politics, society, and the media.

This article brings new ideas to the debate on Romani Literature Studies by deepening research of Romani literature in Poland. The study contributes to Romani studies on Romani imagology, particularly Romani women imagology, through comparative studies of the images of Romani women in Romani and Polish Literature. Romani literature fights antigypsyism, negative stereotypes, prejudices, and stigma. Via the arts, Romani authors raise their voices and make an impact on their image in the arts and in a wide range of fields by telling their own stories and presenting their perspectives. Romani artists use art as a platform to discuss antigypsyism and to tell stories about the persecution of Roma during the Second World War. In addition, Romani literature creates an idealized image of Roma as a community (including women), which aims at improving the Romani image.

The theme of Romani literature and the image of Romani in literature is particularly important for me. I am the only literature researcher in Poland of Romani origin, and one of only a few in Europe and the United States. Romani literature and imagery research became an extraordinarily personal opportunity to voice, create and write about our (Roma) perspective and approach in academia. I hope that my impact will allow for change and, more importantly, improve the discourse of Romani literature in Europe.

1. The Role and Position of Women in the Romani Community

Roma who live in Poland are divided primarily into two culturally diverse groups: the Carpathian Roma, who long ago converted to a settled lifestyle, and Romani communities with long migratory traditions: Polska Roma, Lowarzy and Kalderasze (Bartosz 2004, 94–97). Over time, the lives of Polish Romani communities underwent changes caused by civic, political, social, and cultural transformations, which also included the Genocide. After the Second World War, there were radical lifestyle changes in the Communist system. The government forced Roma, who had been nomads, to settle permanently and swap their caravans for apartments. It banned the migration of Roma and traditional professions. In turn, some of the Carpathian Roma, including those leading a semi-sedentary lifestyle, moved to larger cities, including those in the "Regained Territories." The Communist system gradually tried to assimilate Romani groups. The government did not aim to integrate them with Polish society, while respecting their cultural and moral identity. This situation led to more deep-rooted exclusion of Roma from society, as well as their stigmatization.[5]

The woman, called in Romanes *Romni* (woman, wife) or *Romni* (Romani woman), handles the family's daily existence and survival, the household, and raises children.[6] She must pass on to the next generation knowledge of how Romani Women should behave as daughters, girls, wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law. For centuries (regardless of origin, social, and property status), the cultural role of women has not changed, and Romani women have a crucial impact on upholding Romani principles and values.

There is a clear distinction between men's and women's social roles among the Roma. Women play a crucial role in maintaining cultural content and cultivating tradition, and protect the customs, and family, at the same time shaping the awareness of the younger generation. The honour and survival of the group depend on women, because they embody Romani selfhood with their behaviour, appearance, and dress. The basis of Romani women's actions is an observance of *romanipen*. Most of its principles regulate women's daily lives and behaviour.

The social expectations of Roma towards women concern being a good wife, mother, and hostess. From a community perspective, this is only attainable by the woman's allegiance to her husband and the elders. The woman should be modest, devoted, submissive, and faithful. All her attention should be directed at the family. Especially important is a woman's good reputation: both before and after marriage. Women

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5 See Hristo Kyuchukov and Omar Rawashdeh, eds. 2013. *Roma Identity and Antigypsyism in Europe*, Lincom; Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé, 2020. *The Roma and their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books.

6 An important study of Romani women's identity in Poland is the book Życie w dwóch światach. Tożsamość współczesnych Romów [Life in two worlds. Identity of modern Roma]. The paper is based on research conducted among the Polska Roma, Lowary and Carpathian Romani groups. See Marta Godlewska-Goska and Justyna Kopańska. 2011. Życie w dwóch światach. Tożsamość współczesnych Romów, Warsaw: DiG Press.

must control their behaviour and be careful of their opinions for the sake of the environment. In the case of a scandal, all families would be exposed to exclusion from the community. Appropriate behaviour (according to the rules adopted by the group) is socially supervised.

In most Polish Roma groups, the patriarchy still applies. The position of women – both societal and private – Is still secondary to men. As mentioned above, Romani women struggle not only with patriarchy but also with the deeply rooted stereotypes and prejudices associated with them, as well as the structural racism against Roma. Antigypsyism is, in this case, an element of the system of domination of Roma female images. Marcus End defines antigypsyism as a component of two elements:

> First, there is resentment against 'the Gypsies,' which involves a majority society sharing images and beliefs and projecting them onto specific social groups, among them mainly those which identify themselves as Roma, Sinti, Kalderashi, Irish Travellers, etc. The second element of antigypsyism consists of discriminatory and often violent social structures and actions with which Roma or other people stigmatized as 'Gypsies' are confronted. (End 2012, 7).

In the case of literary representation of Romani women, it is crucial to mention levels of antigypsyism characterized by End such as social practice, historical and social framework, images and stereotypes, the structure of meanings, social norms, and values that involved the majority. All of them seem to be related to literary studies about Roma. End also stated that it is important to change the current approach and begin to study antigypsyism as deeply rooted in majority societies, not in Roma. (End 2021, 7–14).

The author pointed out that antigypsyism is based on stereotypes and false visual and cultural representations of Roma. End explained that antigypsyism is a "cultural tradition, an image, and a form of communication that is reproduced independent of the real-life of the people stigmatized as 'Gypsies' – construction in the minds and the cultural products of the majority society that does not require any relationship to real experience" (End 2021, 14). In that sense, the visual and cultural images of Roma presented among others in film, press, literature, created by non-Roma have been politicized, romanticized, and demonized. This image defines the majority societies rather than Roma.[7]

The meaning of gender in the case of anti-Romani racism and the importance of gender for the Roma movement are issues of debate among Romani women activists and human rights activists (Kóczé 2009, 19). Romani women are in a particularly difficult situation because they belong to a group exposed to repeated discrimination. At the same time, Romani women are stifled and stigmatized as women, and Roma, as well as disadvantaged people, who often function on the margins of social life. On the one hand, women are subject to restrictions within their own community due to gender. People see them negatively as "Gypsies." Sławomir Kapralski notes that "the overlapping of both dimensions of discrimination is an added value, which means that the result of intersectional discrimination is not a

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7 See Mihail Surdu. 2016. *Expert Frames. Scientific and Policy Practices of Roma Classification*. Budapest: CEU Press.

simple sum of its components but is often a total negation of the humanity of the discriminated person" (Kapralski 2014, 71). This situation affects limited access to employment, education, healthcare, or full participation in civic life. Romani women also experience discrimination in a majority society, in the context of xenophobic atmospheres. Besides, their situation negatively affects domestic violence, limited opportunities to decide their own fate, early marriage and motherhood, and total subordination to men. According to Angéla Kóczé, Romani, female activists are confronted with two major dilemmas when studying the intersections of sexism and racism: intra-differentiation and intra-group hierarchies (Kóczé 2009, 19–21). Kóczé also states that "the compound effects of racism, sexism, and poverty that comprise the social environment of many Romani women discourage them from taking a stance against internal gender oppression, lest they should suffer personally and stigmatize their families and communities even further" (Kóczé 2009, 23).

2. Romani Literature in Poland

The development of Romani literature in Poland may be divided into three periods.[8] The first concerns anonymous folklore literature. The second is the time of the most outstanding Romani poet in Poland – Bronisława Wajs. The last period, which is applies today, is the time for conscious Romani authors who have been creating and publishing since the 1990s. (Bartosz 2011, 52). The first known Romani writer in Poland was Bronisława Wajs, called in Romanes "Papusza" (born 17 August 1908 in Sitaniec, died 8 February 1987 in Inowrocław), belongs to a group of outstanding figures of Romani origin. Papusza learned how to read and write by herself. First, she started by asking children about letters. Afterward, she learned from a Jewish woman. In exchange for lessons, Papusza stole hens for her (Ficowski 2013, 336).

Papusza's literary talent was discovered by Jerzy Ficowski,[9] who was hiding from Communist government persecution in her family caravans between the summers of 1949 and 1950 (Dębicki 2012, 54–58). He sent the first translations of her poems to Julian Tuwim,[10] which led to their publication. Papusza's works (four poems) first appeared in the literary press in 1950, in the monthly journal called *Problemy* (No. 10/50). However, her official debut was in 1951, when her poem was printed in the journal *Nowa Kultura* (Kajan 1992, 107).

Bronisława Wajs is the author of three volumes of poetry: *Pieśni Papuszy. Papušakre Gila* (1956), *Pieśni mówione* (1973), and *Lesie, ojcze mój* (1990). She was the first Roma, and simultaneously, the first Romani woman, admitted to the Polish Writers' Union. Her works have been translated into many languages.

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8 Adam Bartosz, as the initial researcher, proposed the periodization of Romani literature in Poland in his paper "Literatura tvořena Romy v Polsku" [English literature created by Roma in Poland] published in 2011 in *Romano Džaniben*. (Nr 1. s. 51–62).

9 Jerzy Ficowski (1924–2006) – Polish poet of Jewish origin, writer and translator.

10 Julian Tuwim (1894–1953) – Polish poet of Jewish descent, writer, author of vaudevilles, sketches, operetta librettos, and song lyrics; one of the most popular poets of the interwar period in Poland.

She became an authority and inspiration for a young generation of Polish Roma[11] and for the authors of movies, plays, and literature,[12] as well as scholars.[13]

Thanks to Papusza, Romani literature entered Polish literary circulation. However, apart from discussions of her work, and above all, her tragic fate, it is difficult to find information in Polish studies about other Roma authors and Romani literature. Yet, Teresa Mirga (Carpathian Roma), Izolda Kwiek (Kalderash), Karol Parno Gierliński (Sinti), Stanisław Stahiro Stankiewicz (Polska Roma), Jan Mirga (Carpathian Roma), Don Wasyl Szmidt (Polska Roma), Tadeusz Kamiński (Kalderash), Edward Dębicki (Polska Roma), Edward Grafo Głowacki (Lovari), and Miklosz Deki Czureja (Carpathian Roma) all belong to the group of Romani literary authors living in Poland and writing in Romanes and Polish. Most of them are part of the last generation of Roma, who had a nomadic lifestyle, were born in caravans and, at the same time, the first, which took up a sedentary lifestyle.

Poetry and other short literary forms were for years printed in the first Romani journal in Poland, *Rrom p-o Drom* (in the Romani poetry section), which has been published since 1990. The periodical published works by the poets mentioned above, and by people who had not published books, their output consisting of one or more poems. This group includes Adam Andrasz, Sylwester Masio Kwiek, Dariusz Mirga, Bohun Moradziński, and Andrzej Wiśniewski.

The contemporary development of Romani literature, and with it, Romani Literature Studies, is closely related to the political situation. In Poland, it is not by chance that most volumes of Romani prose and poetry published so far have been issued by the Tarnów Regional Museum, as part of the "Romani Library" series, co-financed by the governmental Programme for the Roma Minority in Poland. Roma expert, Adam Bartosz, who directed the Museum for many years, contributed to the popularization of poetic work by Roma in our country.

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11 In 1995, the Association of Artists and Friends of the Romani Culture, named after Bronisława Wajs Papusza, was registered in Gorzów Wielkopolski,. Streets in Gorzów Wielkopolski and Inowrocław are also named after Papusza. There is a monument to Papusza in the Spring of Nations park in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

12 See the novel *Zoli* by Collum McCann and documentary films: *Papusza* (1974) directed by Maja and Ryszard Wójcik, *Gypsy Songs of Papusza* (1984) by Grzegorz Dubowski with music by Edward Dębicki, *The Gypsy Story* (1991) directed by Greg Kowalski, *Papusza* (2013) directed by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze, the symphonic poem *Papusza's Harps* by Jan Kante Pawluśkiewicz, and the musical *Papusza* by Edward Dębicki, produced by the Gypsy Music Theatre "Terno."

13 See *Papusza, czyli wielka tajemnica* by Krystyna Kamińska (Wielkopolski, Gorzów 1992); *Papusza, czyli wolność tajemna* by Leszek Bończuk (Wielkopolski, Gorzów 1996); *Bronisława Wajs – Papusza: między biografią a legendą* by Magdalena Machowska (Kraków 2011); *Bronisława Wajs – Papusza (1908–1987): biografia i dziedzictwo*, edited by A. Dariusz Rymar, (Wielkopolski, Gorzów 2017); *Papusza. Granice przynależności* by Adrian Zawadzki (2017); *Papusza* by Angelika Kuźniak (Wołowiec 2013).

3. Representations of Romani Women in Polish and Romani Literature

Romani women became an inspiration for many contemporary Polish and Romani authors. Poetic and prose portraits of Romani woman characters brought a touch of exoticism and mystery to Polish literature. Polish writers, by raising Romani issues in their works gradually became conscious recipients of Romani culture. Polish authors often touch on issues of Romani traditions and customs, or try to identify cultural elements. Their awareness of Romani culture is due to knowledge of Roma and Romani literature, as well as contacts, and even personal acquaintances, with Roma. However, Romani literature does not draw on the richness of Polish literature at all. The only known Romani writer who made reference to Polish literature was Sinto – Karol Parno Gierliński.

The Polish authors who created Romani protagonists in their literary works are Maria Ziółkowska, Jan Ziółkowski, Zdzisław Olszewskiego, Magdalena Kozłowska, and Wojciech Chmielarz. This includes various genres novel, including crime fiction, as well as stories. Romani characters appear in many volumes of poetry by authors that include Jerzy Ficowski, Emilia Zimnicka, Dariusz Cezary Maleszyński, and Jan Zych. Roma also feature in literary reportage by Lidia Ostałowska and travel writing by Andrzej Stasiuk.

The subjects of the Polish and Romani texts analysed are set in the period of the Second World War, postwar caravan travels, and the present-day. Romani and Polish texts show two diverse cultural contexts. Comparative transcultural studies allowed for an in-depth analysis of literary endeavour by Romani women. The collected material was divergent in terms of imagology. Examples of images of Romani women in Polish and Romani literature were assigned to six key semantic fields, within which more detailed images were pointed out. The confrontation of diverse cultural contexts and perspectives on perceptions of the same phenomenon is an interesting collision of the two ways of thinking (Romani and Polish) about Romani women.

In Romani and Polish literary texts, we find images of Romani women as devoted wives, mothers, and caretakers of the family, mothers of the victims of Romani extermination during the Second World War, and figures of Our Lady of the Gypsies. Motifs include the chicken thief, the fortune teller, and the faith healer. Romani women as the objects of love and delight, as well as artists – dancers, singers, poets, appear in both types. There are also many references to Bronisława Wajs – Papusza. Despite the revolutionary change in the lives of Roma in the twentieth century, motifs of caravan dwelling, including images of traditional nomadic Roma, are invariably present in contemporary Polish and Romani literary texts. The few exceptions, present exclusively in Romani literature, include the personification of Mother Nature and the "Gypsy" traveller.

Mother Nature
The key image in Romani literary discourse is Mother Nature as a protectress of Roma. Such an image does not occur in contemporary Polish literature. Polish authors, when using the Mother Nature motif

refer to a tradition of Slavic beliefs, or Mediterranean culture, whilst Roma look to their cultural beliefs. Romani authors strongly emphasize the attachment and inseparable emotional bond, connecting Romani community with the surrounding nature. Mother Nature is a mighty, omniscient mother goddess, as well as an extraordinary parent, host, guardian, trustee, friend, and confidant, loving and devoted to her forest protégés and sheltering them. Poets use personification, anthropomorphism, animation, idealization, and the mythicizing of the image of Mother Nature. The texts hold sentimental and nostalgic memories full of respect for centuries-old traveling and caravan dwelling in nature, and dependence on its gifts. Roma, as a community living for centuries on the border between nature and civilization, saw themselves as an integral part of nature and considered themselves children of deities and the elements. The literary approach to Mother Nature, and especially the forest, is a great longing for the past as a lost paradise. Roma have also creatively adopted the stereotype of happy, free travellers in European culture. Roma authors, who refer to the image of Mother Nature, were born and raised at a time when Roma led a nomadic lifestyle.

Wife and mother
Another great literary image of a Romani woman is the wife and mother. Over the years, the woman's position has evolved and changed, influenced by cultural, political, and religious factors. The functions performed by women, however, have always had a significant bond with nature, consisting of building marital, maternal, and intergenerational relationships. On the other hand, women were subject to constant social control imposed by the family and group system. The woman's attitude, behaviour, skills, scope of work, and responsibilities, are continuously assessed by her husband, mother, mother-in-law, or other relatives. A Romani woman's fundamental and unquestioned mission is to be an obedient daughter, then a devoted wife and caring mother. The images of women performing such roles are timeless and present in all cultures. In both works of literature, there are images of women as fully devoted and loving wives and parents and guardians of the home. These images are enriched with references to the Romani cult of Our Lady of the Gypsies and the threads of the suffering of Romani mothers whose children died during the Second World War.

This image of the devoted Romani wife in Polish and Romani literature corresponds to the traditional role of women in culture. In both literatures, the features of a woman's character are depicted and shaped by Roma: purity, faithfulness, loyalty, patience, eternal love, constant affection, and boundless devotion to her husband, enduring all suffering in the name of love and Roma principles, and often also renouncing their own happiness in the name of tradition, duty and respect for elders. So, in both literatures, there is a manifestation of the reinforcement of a cultural pattern, often idealized, as well as the positive stereotype of Romani women as devoted wives. This idealization is particularly visible in Romani literature. Polish writers also try to emulate this pattern. Only in Izolda Kwiek's poetry do non-idealized images of women appear, who renounce happiness in the name of duty and respect for the family. This sacrifice is based on a fear of breaking *romanipen* rules.

The universal and timeless perspective of motherhood, also typical of Polish poetry, is present in Romani literature. Literature strengthens the positive stereotype and idealizes cultural ideas about the mission of the Romani wife and mother. Romani literature presents a woman as a mother and caregiver of the family from a universal and timeless cultural perspective based on family values and the traditional role of Romani women

(taking care of the daily existence of the family). The analogous image in Polish literature – with the exception of non-fiction – is the result of established literary patterns, and even clichés, embedded in the stereotype of the "Gypsy woman." Authors from both types of literature present mothers and homemakers in an idealistic way, as women capable of any sacrifice, caring, and supporting their children, surrounding them with boundless and unconditional love, hardworking, trying to provide for children every day, to create a dignified life and, above all, a better future. Nonetheless, this idealization hides Romani woman's full subordination to men and their exploitation, which she experiences for herself and the whole community in areas such as work, education, decision-making, and personal life, body and sexuality, early marriage and motherhood.

Images of Romani woman as a mother of the victims of the Romani Holocaust during the Second World War, suffering from the death of her children, appear in both Romani and Polish literature. Authors recalled tragic and very realistic scenes of the pain, suffering, and despair of Romani mothers, whose children became defenceless victims of the war. Only in Romani literature, apart from the Nazi Holocaust, are threads of the murders of Roma carried out in Volhynia. Polish literature touches on the issues of harm and cultural taboo, and more specifically – the painful detachment of Romani women from tradition, dignity, respect, and identity in the extermination camps, which is absent in Romani literature. Romani writers limit themselves only to a description of internal pain and despair that haunt mothers who were direct witnesses to the death of their loved ones and children. Romani authors adopt the domestic and community perspective of the representatives of minorities. According to the traditional Romani approach, Roma do not violate the cultural taboo of Romani women's traumatic camp experiences of. A woman's real (not idealized) experience in Romani culture has a lower status and priority than a good and a positive image of the Romani community.

Roma define the Mother of God as *de Dewleskeri* or *Dewlikani Daj*. Roma believe in her intercession and protection. Images of Our Lady of the Gypsies in Romani literature correspond to the cult that Roma have for their guardian and confidant. In Polish literature, we do not find many references to the image of the Our Lady of the Gypsies. The examples show the figure of the Madonna as a unique character embodying a Romani woman and, at the same time, standing out from other images of the Mother of God.

The Gypsy
The extensive section on literary images of Romani women focuses on the portrait of the "Gypsy woman." In Polish and Romani literature, there are images of Roma fortune tellers, chicken thieves, and faith healers. However, only in Romani literature do references to the figure of the caravan's "Gypsy women" appear. Presumably, the reason for Polish authors' failure to specify the discrete image of the traveller is the close connection between the portrait and the association of Romani Women in Polish culture with fortune-telling, chicken theft, and faith healing. The literary images of caravan women mostly harmonize with the traditional social role of Romani women leading nomadic lifestyles. Women, often under challenging conditions, had to show much strength, perseverance, patience, obedience, and dedication, whilst caring for the family.

The image of a traveller Romani woman, as a resourceful, devoted family member, brave, loyal to the rules in force, trying to ensure the family's existence, appears only in Romani literature. This image corresponds to the traditional social role of women. There is also a picture of a Romani woman expressing longing for

caravan existence and freedom, as well as a life full of joy and music. Romani literature creates the myth of a free traveller devoted to Romani traditions. Unfortunately, the reality of Romani women was not always so ideal. Taboo and social position radically limited their freedom. So, the myth creates the migrating reality of the traveller as full of meaning and values as professed by the, which strengthen their identity. It is reflected in literature in the form of parables, metaphors, and cultural symbols. The myth is for Roma themselves, as a means by which the community keep its identity and collective memory.

One of the most stereotypical images of Roma is the chicken thief. In groups that led a nomadic lifestyle, the ability to obtain food was a critical factor in choosing a wife. Thanks to this skill, Romani women were able to fulfil their obligations to support their families. The motif of the Romani chicken thief appears in the memories of Roma and older inhabitants of Polish villages. A typical image of a Romani woman who "near the forest [...] cooks a stolen hen" (Gierliński 2001, 31) appears, amongst others in Gierliński's poem "Ta scena bez kurtyny..." or "Zagubiony w lesie" a short story by Kamiński. However, it was not always possible to obtain food in the ways described above, especially in the realities of war. In the Papusza poem "Ratwałe jaswa – so pał Sasendyr pszegijam apre Wołyń '43 i '44 bersza" a picture of desperate women is painted: "Gypsy women are crying, begging God / they are going to steal at night / rarely they bring something" (Wajs 2015, 67).

Despite the change in the locum and lifestyle of the Romani community, the literary image of a Romani woman as a chicken thief occurs in both Romani and Polish literature. Here, we can find descriptions of women preparing meals using stolen hens. Also, in Polish literature, there are scenes of the unjust accusation of Roma for poultry theft, excused theft, descriptions of the shame accompanying the robbery, as well as village inhabitants and farm owners' fears of chicken theft by Romani women. For traveling women, chicken theft was an everyday occurrence, by which they could guarantee the existence of the family and feed hungry children. Nonetheless, this manifests as simple theft and, from a religious perspective, a sin according to Polish community and Polish literary principles.

The motif of the Romani fortune teller appears extensively in European prose and poetry, including Polish and Romani works. Polish literature presents images of Romani women from the perspective of those who used their services. Romani literature focuses on moments of future prediction and the laying out of cards. Fortune tellers appear in texts as manifestations of intelligence, sharpness, perceptiveness, wisdom, confidence, the logic of thinking, mystery, insight, and extraordinary intuition. The protagonists of the texts believe in its truthfulness and divination fulfilment. However, only Polish literature presents scenes fearful of "Gypsy" spells and even folkloric means to counteract them. In both cultural views on representatives of the Romani community, the theme of magic is an integral element, shaping the overall image of the figure of the Romani fortune teller. Moreover, these ideas are primarily consistent with the traditional cultural perception of Romani women. In addition to portraits that convey the belief in the extraordinary talent of Romani women, it also appears in mythicized images in which fairies assign magical powers. The presence of Romani women in the literature stems from the stereotype of the "Gypsy," deeply rooted in the consciousness and culture of both Poles and Roma.

Literary images of faith healers and herbalists appear in Polish and Romani literary works. In both, we see the mythization of the image of a Romani healer by enriching it with supernatural elements: spells and healing magic. One of the Romani poems, "Zielarka" written by Karol Parno Gierlński, draws a sentimental picture lamenting the disappearance of this profession among Romani women. There is also, rarely, a more realistic, quasi-ethnographic image of the Romani faith healer (e.g., "Złoty kolczyk"). The gradual decline of herbalism as a traditional occupation is also true of other cultures and communities.

The object of love and delight

In the eighteenth century a discourse on the eroticization and sexualization of foreign women – non-European – began to spread in Europe. Visual representations of Romani women have been exoticized and sexualized in Western Europe[14] (e.g., Carmen and Esmeralda). For centuries people accused Romani women of practicing spells and attributed them with magical powers to make men fall in love. The literary image of Romani women is certainly dominated by the discourse of *La Femme Orientale*. In addition to beauty, authors attributed to Roma women such features as wildness, sensuality, demonism, and freedom.[15]

Romani woman, as the object of love and delight, appear in the works of Polish and Romani writers. These are idealized creations of woman as perfect and gorgeous women with specific features: beautiful eyes, unusual looks, long black hair. In both literatures, there are threads of relationships between Romani women and non-Romani men and love scenes, often filled with suffering, disappointment, and longing for a life with another man. For cultural reasons, only common threads of infatuation and admiration for woman's beauty appear in Romani poetry. In Polish literature, we find completely different images. There is objectification, stereotypization, erotization, and mythization of the Romani woman, as having natural abilities and magical powers to make men fall in love. Behind the above-mentioned images of Roma women, dominated by orientalizing clichés and marked by attributes of sexuality (mainly in Polish literature), there is a view which devalues her spiritual, moral, or intellectual values and internal features. A Romani woman is principally portrayed as an erotic object, with emotional strength, and even a *femme fatale* that can lead a man to his death. This demonic and erotic image does not correspond to the traditional perception of women in Roma culture.

Artists

The sexualized image of Romani women as talented artists – dancers, singers, and poets with extraordinary musical abilities – is one of the most colorful depictions found in Polish and Romani literature. Literature strengthens and idealizes the image of Romani women as talented artists. The authors emphasize a

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14 Ian Hancock. 2008. "'The Gypsy'. Stereotype and sexualization of Romani Women." In *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*, edited by Valentina Glajar, Dominica Radulescu, 181. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

15 See Geoffrey Edwards and Ryan Edwards. 1993. "Carmen's Transfiguration from Mérimée to Bizet: Beyond the Image of the femme fatale." In *Nottingham French Studies* 32 (2): 48–54; Joseba Gabilondo. 2008. "On the Inception of Western Sex as Orientalist Theme Park: Tourism and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Spain (On Carmen and Don Juan as Femme Fatale and Latin Lover)." In *Spain Is (Still) Different: Tourism and Discourse in Spanish Identity*, edited by Eugenia Afinoguénova, Jaume Marti-Olivella, 19–61. New York: Lexington Books; Ian Hancock, 2008. "The Gypsy". Stereotype and sexualization of Romani Women." In *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*, edited by Valentina Glajar, Dominica Radulescu, 181–191. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Romani woman's innate talent and unique musical ability. The most common is the literary image of a Romani dancer. Motifs of lively Romani dances, the feline movements of the dancers, and accompanying emotions appear in both Polish and Romani artists' work. In Polish literature, the image of Romani dancers is objectified and dominated by their sexuality and sensuality, which directly touches on cultural taboo and perpetuates a stereotypical image of women as talented artists. In the Polish cultural circle, the image of the Romani artist is dominated by erotic and sexual overtones, which objectifies Romani women. However, for example, the theme of Romani songs sung by Romani women only appears in Romani poetry. Ethnic Romani songs mainly addressed existential issues: poverty, hunger, love, death, and traveling.

Papusza

The name of Bronisława Wajs – Papusza is permanently inscribed in the collective memory of Poles and Roma. Papusza is portrayed as an extraordinary, subtle, delicate, pleasant, talented, and inspired woman, as well as loving and respecting all creatures and gifts of nature. Both Polish and Romani writers express undisguised admiration and respect for the Romani poet and emphasize her intellectual independence and artistic individuality. Both literary canons present the legend of a stigmatized Romani woman, preserve the memories of Papusza, threads of rejection, alienation, her underestimation, as well as the tragedy of an unjustly accused, tried, and lonely woman. There is also the myth of Papusza as the first Romani poet in Poland and, at the same time, the first Roma *poète maudit* in Poland, who betrayed the secrets of the Romani community, which she paid for with defilement and poor health. Many works contain descriptions of pain, suffering and injustice towards the poet, and a lack of understanding and recognition in the eyes of Roma.

The Romani poet – Papusza is present in many works by Romani authors such as Izolda Kwiek, Jan Mirga and Karol Parno Gierliński. Dębicki, who is a relative of Papusza, recalls in "Ptak umarłych" the story of her kidnapping by Dyźko Wajs (Tricked Papusza). Papusza's other relatives such as Don Wasyl Szmidt portrayed her as a dedicated auntie – a series entitled "Papusza" in his poetry volume *Pasażerowie niebieskiego taboru*, in which he expresses respect and admiration for the poet and her work. A collection of poems by Polish authors dedicated to Bronisław Wajs appears in the book *Papusza czyli Wielka tajemnica*, titled *Poeci – Papuszy*.[16] The image in these works looks at the poet's character and sensitivity. She appears in them as a compassionate being, talented, inspired, and loving all creatures.

Papusza is the greatest Romani poet in Poland. Papusza's exceptional talent manifests in touching, authentic poetry filled with simple images, but also with a surprising metaphor, far from literary norms and conventions. The poet's texts captivate us with truthfulness, honesty, freshness, and simplicity. Her work raised topics and problems significant from the perspective of this community, including the Romani Holocaust, the forced postwar settlement of Roma, and the need for education. Bronisława Wajs was a modest person. As she used to say, "I am a poet, and I do not know what this poetic means, I just don't know. I know it's a big advertisement and a small business" (Ochwat 2020). From a branded

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16 A collection of poems dedicated to Papusza contained the lyrics of Janusz Koniusz, Zdzisław Morawski, Bronisław Suzanowicz, Romuald Szura, Henryk Szylkin, Czesław Kuriata, and Czesław Sobkowiak.

artist, she became a protagonist. The image of Bronisława Wajs in Polish and Romani literature adheres to her original form and corresponds to the poet's character and sensitivity. Artists who dedicate their poems to Papusza express respect and admiration for her person and work. Authors emphasize the originality and uniqueness of her poetry and indicate the great importance of Papusza's achievements for the Romani community. Poets also raise the issue of lack of understanding and recognition in the eyes of her Romani contemporaries, for whom Wajs has long been synonymous with betrayal and apostasy. In both literatures' threads of rejection, alienation, and misunderstanding appear, as well as the tragedy of a lonely and stigmatized woman. In this way, literature presents a realistic image of Papusza, although, at the same time, it mythicizes her as *poète maudit*.

Conclusions

The cultural ideal of a woman in the Romani community is different from the stereotypical image of the "Gypsy woman." Literature strengthens but also disrupts stereotypes of Roma – including Romani women. Judith Okely described this as: "The Gypsy women especially have been the objects of the dominant society's exotic and erotic projections and disorders. Their image has been associated with non-Gypsies with sexual attributes beyond the bounds of Gorgio 'culture' and with certain animals. In Gypsy-Gorgio relations, the men of each group project the image of uncontrolled female sexuality onto the women of the opposing group" (Okely 1983, 202).

Comparative analyses of the images of Romani women in Polish and Romani literature between 1956 and 2016 showed similarities and differences in the functioning of Romani women's ideas in Romani and Polish writing. Both present descriptions of feelings and reactions that Romani women provoked among Poles and Roma themselves. Both textual canons reference the phenomena of mythization, idealization, and stereotypization of the images of Romani women and the consolidation of their cultural pattern as devoted wives and mothers. Realistic representations of Romani women are present in both kinds of literature, in line with their traditional role in culture and the family and the rhythm of the caravan existence. Visual representations of Romani women – contrary to those of white women – have not changed over time.

The differences in the literary depiction of Romani women are evident in approaches to tradition and Romani cultural taboos. In Polish literature, there is objectification, showing the sexuality and sensuality of Romani women and a description of harm and painful detachment from tradition, dignity, respect, and identity in the extermination camps of the Second World War. These threads directly infringe upon cultural taboos. Authors, who are also representatives of the Romani community, are subject to intra-group and community *romanipen* rules. Their perspective on cultural perception is Romani, and therefore internal, resulting in a total omission of banned topics and non-violation of taboo issues in the literature. Romani literature is characterized by captivating, often lyrical, comparisons and poetic formulations and emotional simplicity, as well as colorful imaging and originality. The difference between Romani female and male authors' perspectives is found in Romani women's duties and roles. Romani women authors touch on loyalty, renounce real emotions, and give up true love in the name of family obedience.

Romani literature focuses on self-presentation, issues of identity structure, and the cultural memory of the Roma. Both prose and poetry reflect Roma's reality and create idealized images that are directed at Polish audiences. It is a conscious process of the mythicization of specific threads to show other nationalities the culture and existence of Roma as beautiful, colorful, and idyllic. Thus, Romani literature becomes a weapon with which to fight negative stereotypes and prejudices, but at the same time create myths targeting Roma themselves as a community. Primarily, it is a vision of an idealized caravan reality and a longing for a nomadic lifestyle. This existence takes on characteristic features for the Romani community. Since the cessation of Romani migration and the change in lifestyle of Romani groups, the disappearance of centuries-old everyday Romani experiences, as well as of traditions and customs, a myth that preserves them in the collective memory to maintain an identity for future generations, has been maintained.

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Familial Frictions: Intersectional Inequalities Faced by Romani Queer Women

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Critical Romani Studies

Abstract

This article reviews the growing but still scarce scholarly work on queer Romani women in Eastern and Central Europe to highlight how economic and symbolic inequalities are inseparably intertwined and mutually strengthen each other in the case of this group. The review finds that cultural and symbolic injustices dominate the analysis of the situation of queer Romani women; economic deprivation is often mentioned when providing an overview of the situation of Romani people but is hardly ever brought up when the specific experiences of queer Romani people are discussed. The article zooms in on one area where the interplay between economic and symbolic inequality is pronounced: the central role of familism in the lives of Romani communities, and the detrimental impact it has on the situation of queer Romani women. The article also proposes a set of other mechanisms undermining the equality and well-being of queer Romani women where economic and symbolic inequalities are similarly intertwined.

Keywords

Introduction

In the last two decades the attention of academics and policymakers dealing with social inequalities have turned to individuals and communities that belong to several disadvantaged social groups at the same time, or in other words whose social position is defined by the intersection of two or more axes of inequality (Crenshaw 1991; Verloo 2006). Such an intersectional approach questions the mono-categorical bias of law, policy, and social movements that make invisible the experiences of and thus cannot address the specific forms of oppression suffered by these groups.

Queer[1] Romani women form such a multiply disadvantaged social group in Eastern and Central Europe, lying at the intersections of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. What is interesting about this intersection is that the various axes of inequality constituting it are traditionally approached in very different terms. Fraser (1995) makes a difference between two understandings of injustice: socio-economic and cultural or symbolic injustice. While the social position of Romani people is more often than not described in socio-economic terms,[2] that of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT or queer) people is accounted for in cultural terms. Gender has both economic and cultural components (in Fraser's terminology, it is a bivalent collectivity), and different forms of feminism/academic approaches to gender tend to prioritize one over the other.

While Fraser's analytic separation between the economic and symbolic have often been subject to criticism (Butler 1997; Young 1997; Honneth 2003; Swanson 2005), it is particularly difficult to maintain if one approaches inequalities with an intersectional approach (Yuval-Davis 2011). The aim of my paper is to analyze the growing but still scarce scholarly work on queer Romani women in Eastern and Central Europe to highlight how economic and symbolic inequalities are inseparably intertwined and mutually strengthen each other in the case of this group.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section will be devoted to supporting the claim that "Roma-ness" is mapped to economic, sexuality to symbolic, and gender to both economic and symbolic inequalities. Key policy documents on the European level will be analyzed to support these claims. The second section reviews published (semi)academic work on queer Romani women[3] exploring whether the authors emphasize the economic or cultural aspects of inequalities, or some form of an interplay between the two. The third and final section will zoom in on one explanatory factor often cited in the

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1 Throughout this paper I use the term "queer" in the broad sense to refer to persons marked by same-sex sexual and emotional attraction, including people with homosexual or bisexual sexual orientations, as well as those with more fluid sexual identities and/or practices. While queer has a more specific use referring to fluid, non-identitatarian conceptions of sexuality, it is increasingly used in both popular and academic literature as an umbrella term to grasp sexual non-normativity in times of ever-proliferating sexual identity categories. For an overview of different uses, see Somerville 2014.

2 Fraser's article considers "race" as a bivalent collective as well, but I will argue that unlike "race" in the American context, being Roma is predominantly grasped in socio-economic terms.

3 Some of the works analyzed talk more broadly about queer Romani people; in those cases I will highlight those findings that clearly apply to women as well or apply to them particularly.

literature for the specific vulnerability of queer Romani women – the importance of family values in Romani communities – to show the interaction between economic and symbolic inequalities shaping the social position of queer Romani women.

1. Roma-ness, Gender and Sexuality, and the Economic/ Symbolic Divide

To better understand the complexity of the multifaceted inequalities faced by queer Romani women, I turn to Nancy Fraser's highly influential distinction between socio-economic and cultural or symbolic forms of injustice (Fraser 1995). By socio-economic injustice, Fraser means injustices rooted in the "economic structure [...] of society" (75), the purest form of such injustice being social class. Cultural or symbolic injustice, on the other hand, is "rooted in the reigning social patterns of interpretation and evaluation" (76), for which she gives homosexuality as an ideal-typical example. Fraser sees the distinction as the two endpoints of a "conceptual spectrum" and acknowledges that most collectivities lie somewhere in-between. Fraser uses this distinction to criticize contemporary social movements and progressive political projects that focus solely on cultural or symbolic injustices and prioritize recognition as the main solution for overcoming injustices. Instead, she suggests that adequate attention should be paid to socio-economic injustices as well, which necessitates another form of intervention: the redistribution of material resources.

In Fraser's classification, the injustices Romani people face fall predominantly in the socio-economic category. While Csepeli and Simon (2004) describe that there has been no consensus in Eastern and Central Europe among experts and politicians about how to best conceptualize Roma (some consider them an ethnic or cultural group, others a social class or stratum (136)), policy documents at the EU and national level, however, tend to focus on the socio-economic aspect of the situation of Roma. The *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, for example, departs from the statement that Romani people "are marginalized and live in very poor socio-economic conditions". The document then proceeds to tell a narrative proceeding from the educational disadvantage suffered by Roma people, which results in mass unemployment, and leading to economic deprivation, geographical segregation and a lack of access to health and vital services. The subsequent document, the *EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020–2030* has a more complex understanding, and among the seven objectives the first is fighting and preventing antigypsyism, which is understood as originating in "how the majority views and treats those considered '[G]ypsies'", and the processes of "othering" and "stereotyping". Nevertheless, the six other objectives still focus on socio-economic aspects such as reducing poverty and social exclusion, increasing access to mainstream education, employment, healthcare, and social services, as well as housing and essential services.

In line with Fraser's classification, sexual and gender minorities are mapped nearly exclusively to the symbolic. The European Commission's *List of Actions by the Commission to Advance LGBTI* departs from the statement that the "figures on the lack of social acceptance of this group are alarming", and proceeds to propose measures to enhance the legal recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity,

highlighting the importance of reaching citizens, fostering diversity and non-discrimination. The report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights *Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe* also starts from an overview of negative social attitudes linking it to religion and traditional values. The report explains how these social attitudes promote a sense of shame and internalized homophobia. The report then proceeds to discuss a lack of legal recognition for sexual orientation and gender identity. Problems concerning education and employment are relegated to the last chapter, and even in these chapters the focus is predominantly on the heteronormative content of curricula and harassment at the workplace. Educational disadvantage, unemployment, poverty, or homelessness are not thematized. The European Commission's recently adopted *Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025*, the EU's first ever officially adopted strategic document on sexual and gender minorities, begin by covering widespread stigmatization and the sharply different levels of social acceptance among EU countries; it then briefly thematizes poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion, and the proposed actions focus on strengthening legal recognition and promoting the values of diversity and inclusion.

Similarly to Fraser's assessment that gender is a "bivalent" category incorporating both socio-economic and symbolic aspects, policy documents tend to emphasize both aspects. The European Commission's newest gender equality strategy (*A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025*), for example, covers topics such as labor market participation, pay gap, the glass ceiling, care work and work-life balance, sexist hate speech, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes.

With this brief analysis, my aim is not to argue that these policy documents are mistaken when they prioritize different aspects of inequality for the different groups. Indeed, the social realities of Roma, women, and sexual and gender minorities differ immensely, which require different approaches. My aim is to highlight that when one focuses on the groups lying at the intersection of these axes of inequality, socio-economic and cultural-symbolic aspects of inequality are likely to overlap.

2. Mapping the Literature

Recent academic publications cite Daniel Baker's Master's thesis (2002) as the first scientific treatment of Roma/LGBT intersection. Baker summarizes the findings of his research based on interviews with four gay Romani men in the UK in the 2015 issue of *Roma Rights* as follows (Baker 2015): identities are not fixed but rather contextual, subject to constant contestation and reconstitution. An openly gay sexual identity and Gypsy ethnic identity are irreconcilable, so Gay Gypsies either stay in the closet or detach from their ethnic communities. The skill of passing as non-Gypsy that they learn from their early childhood helps them hide their ethnic and/or sexual identity. This, however, renders them completely invisible not only in their gay and Gypsy communities, but also towards each other, which makes community building and the construction of a shared Gay Gypsy identity impossible.

A study commissioned by the UK's equality body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, in 2009 notes that "no research on the subject of sexual orientation within Gypsy and Traveler communities appears to have been carried out in the UK or Ireland" (Cemlyn 2009). The study's findings are based

on consultation with Roma and LGBT civil society organizations, and it study ascertains that sexuality is a taboo in the Romani community and that there is a very strong expectation to find a (opposite sex) spouse and have children, especially for women. Many Romani LGBT people do marry and have children; men often have parallel lives in which they establish sexual relations with other men, while women lack this possibility due to their limited freedom outside the household. Women are forced to stay in their heterosexual relationships in fear of losing their children if they come out. LGBT Roma who do come out risk isolation from their community and/or violence from relatives and other community members. Those that do not come out experience immense psychological pressure leading to depression, substance abuse, and suicide.

The first studies on Roma/LGBT intersections in Eastern and Central Europe were carried out in the early 2010s. Vera Kurtic (2013) interviewed 15 Romani lesbian women and 10 non-LGBT Roma in several cities of Serbia. While most non-LGBT respondents claimed that both gay men and lesbian women are treated the same in the Romani community, they only knew gay or bisexual men and transgender people in the community; Romani lesbian women were completely invisible. Kurtic explains this invisibility by the patriarchal control of women's sexuality in the Romani community, which is maintained by religion and traditional values, economic dependence, and physical violence targeted at women who do not conform to these ideals. Kurtic notes that older women are also complicit in maintaining the patriarchal order; mothers are often at the forefront of sanctioning non-normative sexual behavior. Some Romani lesbians face arranged marriages, but even if they marry voluntarily, they do so under immense communal pressure. Kurtic also stresses that the isolation of Romani women (in the ghetto, as a result of societal racism, and in their home, as a result of patriarchal values) isolate lesbian women from one another, leaving them without any form of communal support. Romani lesbians are unlikely to rely on the police to solve violence: if they were to report an incident, they would likely hide the sexual orientation aspect of the attack. Similarly to Cemlyn, Kurtic also notes that isolation from the community is the ultimate social sanction, which might lead to the loss of contact with children, and – due to the lack of education or experience with gainful employment – a loss of livelihood.

In parallel, David Tišer (2015) carried out a similar project in the Czech Republic, with the participation of 15 Romani LGBT people (two of them women). Tišer's approach is focused on identifying the deep cultural roots of anti-LGBT sentiments in the Romani community. He claims that Roma culture still revolves around the notion of ritual purity, and homosexuality is considered "impure" or *degeše,* requiring that objects used by a gay or lesbian person be thrown away after use or kept for use solely by that person. Homosexuality is also considered shameful (*ladž*). Both uncleanliness and shamefulness can result in excommunication (either by *kris,* an internal conflict resolution mechanism of Romani communities or simply by communal practice), and they also carry over to the whole family: if a family does not discipline their gay or lesbian family member, they also risk excommunication. Tišer, however, notes that that is more a fear than actual practice, as only one person from his sample recounted such an experience. If not excommunicated, openly gay or lesbian members of the community still risk mockery and verbal abuse, as well as physical abuse from their family members.

Tišer argues that while all but one of his interviewees reported their family to be religious, religious arguments were never used to argue against homosexuality; it was rather the failure to have a family that was most often mentioned. Tišer, however, underlines that the centrality of family values is not simply a remnant of the past, but a coping strategy that many Roma use to deal with the hostility of the external world. Family is the guarantee of emotional and economic security; being open about one's sexual orientation means letting go of this security. Tišer closes his study by showing that even if Romani LGBT people face common rejection and discrimination from their family members, they are still more likely to consider their Romani ethnicity as the greater source of injustice that permeates all aspects of their life. A short section is also devoted to prostitution, arguing that oftentimes it is the only source of income for gay Romani youth excommunicated by their communities.

In the same year, in 2015, Dezső Máté also published the first results of his interview-based study with 15 Romani LGBT persons in Hungary (Máté 2015). At the center of Máté's article is a set of contradicting expectations that Romani LGBT people face during their identity development, from majority society, from Roma themselves and from the LGBT community. Máté argues that both Romani and LGBT people go through similar stages of identity development (shame/shock, anger/denial, proof, reconciliation, pride), but that this takes place at different times in the individual's life, and results in the development of a number of defense mechanisms. Similarly to Cemlyn and Kurtic, Máté also asserts that all of his interviewees had long-term relationships with heterosexual partners before they were able to establish same-sex relations. Máté notes that both the awareness of and later practice of same-sex desires often occurred together with a spatial move (to high school, university or abroad). In his later works Máté discusses the development of Romani LGBT activism (Máté 2017) and explores why intersectionality did not form part of the intellectual horizon of earlier generations of Romani activists and intellectuals (Máté 2018).

The fourth author with several published works on the Roma LGBT people in Eastern and Central is Lucie Fremlova. She was one of the editors of the Council of Europe's educational resource *Barabaripen* (Fremlova and Georgescu 2014) that featured life histories of young Roma facing multiple discrimination (among them two gay and one lesbian youth), complemented by a conceptual introduction to multiple discrimination and a summary of common features found in the interviews. The introduction differentiates between serial, additive, and intersectional discrimination; the summary highlights that Romani LGBT people "feel torn" due to the cultural clash between their sexual orientation, Romani traditions and gender roles. Besides discrimination from majority society and the LGBT and Romani communities, the summary also mentions exclusion as a fourth aspect limiting access to services such as police and healthcare. The summary reiterates Tišer's claims about purity and shame. The authors also assert that coming out in the Romani community is structured differently: families and communities are more close-knit, meaning that selective coming out common in other segments of the LGBT population are difficult to maintain. The text also stresses that some Romani communities are accepting of LGBT people, especially if they play an important role in the community.

Fremlova continued to study the Romani/LGBT intersection, which became the focus of her doctoral dissertation (Fremlova 2017). Fremlova's main aim is to provide an alternative to a fixed, essentializing, ethnic model of Romani identities, emphasizing instead hybridity, super-diversity, and intersectionality;

or as she called it "queer assemblage". Fremlova's research was built on participant observation at international Romani LGBT gatherings, 14 in-depth interviews and two focus groups with Romani LGBT people from Central Europe and the Balkans. Her main finding is that antigypsyism takes a pre-eminent place in the lived experience of Romani LGBT people, often overshadowing other forms of oppression. The family and community responses to non-normative sexuality and gender identity is much more diverse than in other accounts; Fremlova claims that social rejection and ridiculing is largely limited to lesbian women and effeminate, passive gay men. She talks at great length about the ambivalent role family and community play in the life of Romani LGBT people both as a social safety net and the source of heteronormative and patriarchal oppression. As her most recent article summarizing the main findings of her research claims "both nuclear and extended family relationships play a crucial role in terms of material and economic security [...] LGBTIQ Roma may choose to 'stay in the closet' fully or partially in order not to sever vital social bonds and relationships" (Fremlova 2020, 11).

This short review of the existing literature on Roma LGBT provides ample evidence that queer Romani women face a variety of forms of oppression. According to Young's (1990) terminology, the faces of oppression most often mentioned in the literature fall under the categories of cultural imperialism (invisibility, internalized homophobia and racism, identity conflicts, shame, impurity) and violence (by family and community members), although marginalization also appears in some texts contributing to isolation and lack of access to services.

Linked to the above, cultural and symbolic injustices dominate the analysis of the situation of Romani LGBT people. Unemployment, educational disadvantage, and housing conditions are often highlighted, but only in introductory chapters describing the general conditions of Romani people, and hardly ever when the specific experience of Romani LGBT people are discussed. In fact, several researchers highlight that Romani LGBT people interviewed have a significantly higher level of education and better economic position than the average Romani population (Tišer 2015; Fremlova 2020). This, of course, might be largely attributed to sampling bias, but two alternative hypothesis have also been put forward in the literature to explain this phenomenon: (1) Romani LGBT people value education higher than other members of the Romani community as they see it as the only way to escape their sexually repressive communities (Tišer 2015); (2) education provides Romani LGBT people with a cultural vocabulary and financial independence so that they can be out about their sexuality or gender identity (Kurtic 2013, 64).

The topic where economic inequalities become most pronounced is the ambivalent role that families of origin play in the lives of Romani LGBT people, in particular queer Romani women. The literature analyzed above offers a rudimentary analysis of the detrimental impact that an interplay between the economic and normative aspects of family relations have in the lives of queer Romani women.

3. Familism beyond the Economic/Symbolic Binary

The central role of family ties and family values in the lives of Romani people is well documented. As Angus Fraser, in his by now classic anthropological study on Roma notes, "family values are the important cement in much of Gypsy life" (1995, 306). Similarly, Liégeois observes that "[e]very aspect of

Gypsies' and Travelers' lives gravitate around the family" (1995, 83). Familism offers a strong normative framework in which having a family is an indispensable part of a good life, and having feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity towards members of the immediate and extended family is expected under all circumstances (Peterson and Bush 2013, 383). This latter aspect constitutes family ties as an important economic safety net that family members can rely on for their survival. It is this latter, economic function of family ties that has prompted scholars to see familism not simply as a remnant of traditional values, but an adaptive coping strategy for social groups facing economic hardship or hostile social environments (Zinn 1982). While familism offers normative guidance for both men and women, it restricts the lives of women in a more fundamental way in societies with a gendered division of labor, as reproduction, child-rearing, and maintaining family ties is perceived to be a woman's job.

There have been numerous studies on the impact of familism on the lives of queer women and men in diverse social contexts. Familism and the subscription to traditional family values has been used in both theoretical (Adam 1998) and empirical (Callahan and Herek 1988; Vescio and Biernat 2003; Vescio 2011) studies to explain anti-queer prejudice. Comparative studies that aim at explaining different levels of legal protections and social acceptance afforded to sexual minorities have also relied on the varying centrality of familism in different cultures as an explanatory factor (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015; Wakefield et al. 2016). Finally, studies among ethnic minority queers in Western social contexts (especially of Asian and Latinx descent) also show the specific challenges they face due to higher levels of familism in their ethnic communities (Diaz 1998; McKeown et al. 2010; Patel 2019; Patrón 2021). Muñoz-Laboy (2008), however, warns against treating familism as intrinsically negative for sexual minorities: an overriding loyalty to family members might pierce the walls of prejudices and prove to be a factor facilitating acceptance rather than rejection.

While the literature on Romani LGBT persons in Eastern and Central Europe analyzed above touch upon the negative impacts that familism have on the lives of these social groups, the exact mechanisms through which familism contributes to the oppression of queer Romani women remains to be properly analyzed. A number of hypothesis on how familism and its interaction with the gendered division of labor, institutionalized homophobia, and the social exclusion of Romani people might contribute to the vulnerable position of queer Romani women.

Both the normative and the economic aspects of familism contribute to such vulnerability. Women living in same-sex partnerships cannot have biological children without the involvement of others, so they cannot fulfil the main moral and cultural obligation of familism to have a family of their own. While adoption and modern reproductive technologies would enable queer Romani women to become mothers, restrictive legislation on adoption and assisted reproduction, limited access to health services, and class biases in adoption procedures makes this nearly impossible for queer Romani women. Many of these women thus "voluntarily" enter into heterosexual relationships to have children. Exiting such relationships is impeded by several factors. Leaving their children behind would mean failing as a mother and thus not living up to the expectation of familism. In case they decide to remain with their children, they face significant disadvantages during the (legal) dispute concerning the custody of their children. A lack of trust in public institutions, lower level of education, and the lack of financial resources makes it very difficult for these women to take such a case to court. Even if they do, prejudiced social attitudes

and discriminatory legislation concerning same-sex parenting severely limit their chances, which are further weakened by the fact that the father will likely be supported (socially and financially) by the whole community, while she will be left alone. Even if the courts act in a non-discriminatory way, the stronger financial position (and community support) of the father will likely tip the balance towards him.

The close-knit, family-based structure of Romani communities makes it very difficult for queer Romani women to develop and maintain same-sex partnerships in secrecy: the gendered division of labor relegate many of them to the domestic sphere, and their mobility and social contacts are more restricted than for gay or bisexual men. If a queer Romani woman wants to develop a same-sex partnership, her sexuality becomes public to all members of her community. Declaring one's sexual orientation, however, carries the risk of social isolation and excommunication, that is, being cut off from the economic safety net of family ties. This can be particularly difficult for Romani women, who have a lower level of education compared to Romani men and are less likely to be employed.

While recent studies on the social networks of Roma show that family ties as a support structure or economic safety net are significantly less widespread than commonly expected (Messing and Molnár 2011), the belief that without the support of their families they would not be able to survive still holds strong among queer Romani women guiding their life choices as evidenced by the interviews in the studies presented here.

Focusing on the role of familism in understanding the complex, multi-faceted form of inequality faced by queer Roma woman showcases a truly intersectional form of discrimination where ethnicity, gender, and sexuality operate not as separate axes of inequality, the impacts of which are added up in case of queer Romani women, but are mutually constitutive (Yuval-Davis 2006): the intersectional experience of queer Romani woman is greater than the sum of racism and sexism (and homophobia) (cf. Crenshaw 1989, 140). Without social exclusion of Romani people, neither the normative nor the economic aspect of familism would be so decisive; without a gendered division of labor, women's economic dependence would not force them to choose the maintenance of family ties over exploring their sexual orientation; and finally, without institutionalized homophobia, these women would not be forced to enter into and remain in heterosexual relationships if they wish to have children.

Familism is, of course, not the only aspect of the lives of queer Romani women where racism, sexism, and homophobia interact. Access to employment, education, healthcare, housing, support services and community infrastructure, as well as levels of self-acceptance, assertiveness, relationship quality, and well-being are also impacted. A proper analysis of such mechanisms, however, would go beyond the confines of the current article.

Conclusion

In this paper I provided an overview of the growing but still scarce scholarly work on the Romani/LGBT intersection in Eastern and Central Europe, focusing in particular on the situation of queer Romani women. The article argues that the existing scholarship focuses primarily on the cultural or symbolic

inequality faced by Romani LGBT people, but highlighted one factor present in the literature, the familism of Romani communities, where economic and symbolic inequalities are inseparably intertwined and mutually strengthen one another. Existing research on the social determinants of prejudices (Carvacho et al. 2013), the relationship between social exclusion and religiosity (Aydin et al. 2010), and isolation and internalized homophobia (Detrie and Lease 2007) might provide further mechanisms to better understand the interplay between economic and symbolic inequalities contributing to the intersectional discrimination suffered by queer Romani women. This would require systematic research into the attitudes of Romani people towards sexual and gender minorities (preferably using standardized quantitative measures, such as social distance (Bogardus 1926), the Modern Homophobia Scale (Raja and Stoker 1998) or the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison and Morrison 2008)), as well as further qualitative studies with Romani LGBT people focusing on less privileged members of the community.

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The Cultural Genocide of the Children of the Country Road Programme and its Memorialisation in Mariella Mehr's *Stone Age* and Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life*

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Critical Romani Studies

Abstract

The present paper aims to discuss the memorialisation of crimes committed by the Children of the Country Road programme in Mariella Mehr's novel *Stone Age* and its monodrama-adaptation, Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life.* The paper will examine actions taken by the Pro Juventute organisation against the Yenish minority community from 1926 to 1970, to 'stop vagrancy' and purify Swiss society from the 'genetically degenerate', during which almost 2,000 children were taken away from their families, put into psychiatric institutions, homes, prisons, or given to foster families, exposing them to mental and physical abuse. This work identifies Mehr's novel as a pivotal work, one of the first to reveal the crimes of Pro Juventute by a survivor, and as such, an important part of European memory culture. In her novel, Mehr deconstructs the language of stigmatisation used by Swiss authorities in the files on Yenish children, raising questions about power, racial identity, uprootedness and survival. In *Speak, My Life*, Dijana Pavlović reassesses Mehr's life and work as a 'heroic narrative', which has allowed room for the Yenish community to represent itself and restore a positive self-image. The paper will discuss the following questions: How can both novel and drama explore the crimes of Pro Juventute in the context of a collective European memory culture? What challenges must this memorialisation face?

Introduction

Stone Age, Mariella Mehr's debut novel, is the first book to reveal the crimes committed against the writer and her Yenish community in Switzerland by the child and youth welfare organisation Pro Juvenute under their project Children of the Country Road *(Kinder der Landstrasse)*. Published in 1981, the book marked the beginning of a historical turning point for the Yenish minority group, a mid-point from their stigmatisation and systematic assimilation to their ultimate recognition as a national minority in 1999.

In reality, from 1926 to 1973, the focus of the Children of the Country Road programme was to assimilate traveller families, most notably from the Yenish community, by systematically taking children away from their parents. Their goal was, as Alfred Siegfried, its founder, says to 'fight against vagrancy', i.e. to bring up useful members of the Swiss majority society by eradicating inherited asocial behaviour from this 'genetically degenerate' people (Galle and Meier 2009, 7; Pavlović 2009, 108). According to official records, 586 children were stolen from their families. Each of these children was sent to foster families, educational and correctional institutions, made to do forced labour, or subjected to psychiatric treatment. A large number received no formal education, serving in households, or hired to help on construction sites or in factories, and many of them faced mental and physical abuse from their guardians or foster parents.

Mariella Mehr was one of the victims of the Children of the Country Road programme. Separated from her mother as an infant, in 1947, she was put into a hospital for mentally handicapped infants in Zurich. Much of Mehr's life was spent in mental institutions, reform schools, and foster families. She received her first electroshock treatment in 1952 in a psychiatric institution in Lucerne, after her mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Mehr's youth was overshadowed by institutional control, serial sexual abuse by her foster family or employers, escape attempts, and insulin and electroshock treatments. When she became pregnant in 1965, desperately hoping that she would be released from state guardianship if she married the father of her child, she was committed to 'administrative care' for 19 months at the Hindelbank women's prison and lost custody of her son, Christian, to the Children of the Country Road programme. After release from prison, she married a friend and was granted guardianship over her son. Over the following years, Mehr suffered severe bouts of depression, attempted suicide many times, and was sent back to psychiatric care. In 1975, Mehr founded, along with other members of the Yenish community, a self-help organisation for Yenish and Romani travellers, the Wheel Collective of the Country Road *(Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse),* to publicly protest the actions of the Children of the Country Road programme. In 1986, along with other Yenish people, Mehr interrupted a Pro Juvenute press conference, asking for a public apology and the disclosure of documents to its victims.

In *Stone Age*, Mehr records her traumatic experiences, blending fact with fiction, history, and artistic imagination. Written between 1979 and 1980, the novel is based on journal entries she made during her therapy sessions (Pletscher 1988, 187). For her, writing is a tool for survival, making sense of her trauma, and demanding justice for Pro Juvenute actions. As Mehr said in an interview with Marianne Pletscher: 'With literature, one always comes to terms with the past. There are no other forms of

writing. It is the only reason for writing, literally' (Pletscher 2007). In her novel, Mehr's identity is split into three parts: silvio, silvia and silvana. This fragmentation is notable for several reasons: It can be seen as a therapy as the author looks back and finds her own identity in the fragments; on a collective level, it allows her to testify to the shattered identity of her Yenish community, their physical and spiritual uprootedness over decades of persecution. As a writer from a minority group, she uses language to deconstruct the rhetoric of the bureaucracy of a system that stigmatised, criminalised, and dehumanised her people. Furthermore, I will argue, writing is an act of commemoration for Mehr, raising awareness of the past to prevent it from happening again. In this respect, I recognise *Stone Age* as an important and marginally explored work of European cultural memory that deserves its place among postwar and post-Communist European victim narratives.

Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life* is a stage adaptation of Mehr's novel. Performed at the International Roma Storytelling Festival in Budapest in 2017 and 2018, the play introduced Mehr's life and work to a Hungarian audience. In 2019, the play was published in *Roma Heroes: Five European Monodramas*, the first volume of monodramas to be written by Romani authors. What makes the performance and publication of Pavlović's monodrama remarkable is that it portrays Mehr as a role model for her Yenish community, one who uses her survival as a way of speaking up for her people and demanding justice and equal rights from the Swiss authorities. Pavlović effectively reassesses Mehr's story as a heroic narrative, which also offers the Yenish community a means of regaining a positive identity.

In this essay, I will discuss the cultural genocide of the Yenish community by Pro Juventute, as well as the way Mehr and Pavlović memorialise this in their work. In the first part I will discuss the actions of the Children of the Country Road programme with a special emphasis on individual cases, their use of language for stigmatising and criminalising children under their care, and the trauma this has led to. Then, I will explain in detail the way Mehr struggles to make sense of the past, the problem of uprootedness and her use of language to deconstruct the rhetoric that was used against her. Finally, I will turn my attention to Pavlović's monodrama, discussing why Mehr's story should be seen as a story of heroism and commemoration. I believe that such works of collective memory are particularly vital for Romani and Yenish minority groups in constructing, and maintaining, a positive identity.

1. Stigmatising through Documents: The Action of the Children of the Country Road

Alfred Siegfried and the Children of the Country Road

Although the term 'traveller' combines Roma and Yenish communities, there are some notable differences between them in origin and language. Romani tribes originate from India, came to Europe in the late Middle Ages, and have been influenced by European societies and cultures. In contrast, it is believed that Yenish communities emerged from poor and vagrant classes in the native population in the early

nineteenth century (Meier and Galle 2009, 30). Yenish people live mostly in Austria, France, Germany, and Switzerland. The term '*jenisch*' dates to the late eighteenth century and refers to *rotwelsch*, a secret language used by marginalised groups in Germany and Switzerland. As a traveller group, Yenish people tend to separate themselves from the settled population and preserve their own language with many borrowings from the national language, Romani, Yiddish, and rotwelsch (Dreher 2018; Günther 2019). They have their own family names, their own territories and work mostly as blacksmiths, basket weavers, scissor sharpeners, peddlers, or merchants. Although there are no reliable sources about the number of the Yenish, around 30,000–35,000 Yenish people live in Switzerland, of which 500–2,000 have a nomadic lifestyle (Meier and Galle 2009, 31). For more than five hundred years, the Yenish and Romani communities were subject to countless pogroms by the Swiss authorities, all of which were undeniably capped by the Pro Juventute organisation.

Pro Juventute was the largest and most prestigious child and youth welfare organisation in Switzerland. Founded in 1912 by the Swiss Non-Profit Society, it existed until a restructuring in 2004. Although the original concept of the organisation was the treatment of child tuberculosis, it dabbled in many other areas relating to child and youth welfare, such as giving parenting advice, arranging holidays and spa stays for Swiss children, supporting children living in the mountains and children traumatised by war, awarding scholarships, as well as founding and running leisure workshops (Meier and Galle 2009, 13). Many well-known people in politics, business, and the military, as well as in health, education, and welfare had a seat on its committee. The chair was held by an incumbent or former officeholder from the Federal Council. Due to its sales of charity postage stamps and greetings cards, Pro Juventute was popular with the public.

Its central pillar was child protection, i.e. legal intervention by authorities in domestic matters if it was felt that a child's well-being was at risk. In 1927, a year after the foundation of the Children of the Country Road programme, its target group became the Yenish minority. In the eyes of the Swiss authorities, Roma, Sinti, and Yenish minorities were not merely a problem for, but a danger to, society. At the time Heinrich Häberlin, a Thurgau lawyer and Bern justice minister, representative of the Federal Council at Pro Juventute, thought of the Yenish as 'vagabond families', whose members were 'a dark spot in our Swiss country that is so proud of its cultural order,' revealing the racist ideology behind the Children of the Country Road actions (Huonker 2009, 161). Alfred Siegfried, a former high school teacher in Zurich, convicted by Basel Criminal Court of committing indecent acts with a student in 1924, was appointed to work at the central secretariat of Pro Juventute and founded the Children of the Country Road programme to wipe away his dark spot: Yenish families. His responsibilities included reports about domestic conditions and applications to the authorities for parental custody to be withdrawn and the appointment of a guardian for the children if he concluded that parents were not carrying out their duties properly. Under Siegfried's guidance, close surveillance of families took place with the assistance of church leaders, teachers, neighbours, relatives, police officers, or Pro Juventute employees under the Aid Organisation for the Children of the Country Road ('Das Hilfwerk für die Kinder der Landstrasse').

There were two objectives that Siegfried hoped to accomplish to stop vagrancy. One was the total alienation of children from their parents and family members, so all Yenish social reproduction could be prevented. The other was the turning these children into 'useful' and 'settled', i.e. 'socially acceptable' citizens through the dissolution of their racial identity (Meier 2008, 106). As Thomas Meier argues, '[a]s the parents were considered debauched and unfit to educate their children, their right to custody of their own children was removed with the help of the authorities, according to the relevant sections of the Civil Code' (Meier 2008, 106). By tightening its policy, the 'Relief Organisation' was entitled to systematically remove all children from their families, putting them under guardianship and placing them in homes and institutions, or with foster families (Meier 2008, 106). By this means, the purpose of the action was obviously not the welfare of the children but to purify society of the 'filth' of the Yenish community (Meier 2008, 106; Huonker 2009, 168). According to Thomas Huonker, from the beginning of the twentieth century, several measures were taken by the Swiss authorities to keep Switzerland 'practically "[G]ypsy-free"', including an entry ban on travellers, and the removal of Yenish children from their parents, and the sterilisation and castration of a great number of the Yenish people (Huonker 2003; 2006, 9).

Switzerland's entry and exit rules during National Socialist rule caused many controversies and affected not only Jewish refugees from Germany but also the Romani, Sinti, and Yenish population. Only a few were able to gain asylum in Switzerland during the war without the risk of being recognised as 'unwanted "[G]ypsies"' (Huonker and Ludi 200, 68). Switzerland's collaboration with the Gestapo and the SS took place not only at the level of consulate and border protection forces but also with the higher police forces (Huonker 2006, 11). As Huonker explains, '[t]he Interpol files, including an international gypsy register it had built up since 1936, were also transported to Berlin and were of murderous use to the SS when it came to accessing the Roma and Sinti in their domain' (Huonker 2006, 11). The Children of the Country Road programme, a campaign that ostensibly aimed at Yenish children's welfare was actually a systematic 'cultural genocide' similar to the administrative procedure carried out by Nazi officials against Jewish people during the Holocaust, founded around the time of the end of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler in Germany, which can be seen as more than mere coincidence (Schallié 2010, 143).

The Language of Stigmatisation

In this section, I will discuss the language of stigmatisation that is present in and behind the files on and about Yenish children; the files are similar in at least two ways to the Nazi administration of Jewish people, highlighting Yenish minorities as harmful and impure members of society, and also in representing a forbidding bureaucracy that renders human beings into documented case numbers.

For some critics of modern society, these two tendencies have been integral to pre- and postwar twentieth century and our twenty-first century civilisation. Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), that racism is a social practice that has certain aspects of architecture, gardening, and medical treatment, all of which are 'in the service of the construction of an artificial social order' (Bauman 2008, 65). In Bauman's view, a core concept of Nazi antisemitic ideology was to look at

'racially impure' elements of society as contagious diseases. Therefore, as Nazi ideology suggests, the restoration of social health requires the separation of the healthy and useful parts of the social organism from the infectious and harmful ones (Bauman 2008, 70–71). The language of stigmatisation is a double-edged sword, since it not only permits and legalises verbal and physical expressions of hatred toward minorities, but, as Richard Delgado and Stefan Jevancic claim, it makes stigmatised individuals 'feel ambivalent about their self-worth and identity,' basing their awareness of themselves on the way 'others perceive them as falling short of societal standards, ones that even the individual may have internalized' (Delgado and Jevancic 2018, 8). So, the language of stigmatisation involves both general animosity toward a minority and the internal negative identity that a minority might have, both of which seem to justify violent behaviour towards that minority.

Robert Ritter, a psychiatrist and race theorist, whose career took a meteoric rise during the Third Reich for his eugenics policies, wrote about Yenish communities as 'asocial' beings, who are also 'incorrigible', suffering from 'a partial or disguised congenital idiocy' (Mehr 1990, 79). Such reports meant that the Roma and Yenish communities posed a threat to the pure German race, leading to their extermination in concentration camps and special death clinics (Mehr 1990, 76). Such rhetoric shows striking similarities to the administration and rhetoric of the Children of the Country Road programme. A strong admirer of Ritter's racial theories, Siegfried and his partners in crime never lost a chance to emphasise in almost all educational reports the 'hereditary nature' of negative personality traits. These negative qualifications range from the children's physical appearance ('fat', 'dwarf') and their mental health ('feeble-minded', 'debilitating', 'imbecile', 'psychopath'), to their sexuality ('endangered', 'guy-addicted', 'sexually unstable', 'sexually rotten'), social behaviour ('obscure', 'insincere', 'devious', 'mean', 'unstable', 'infantile', 'sucker', 'mischievous', 'antisocial') (Galle and Meier 2009, 129–132). Such documents include a report of an institution in Alstätten, a small city in Switzerland, on an 18-year-old girl, who is described as 'not entirely sincere and honest and lies a lot', and who's particular failure is that she is 'sensual' and 'has a strong urge to wander' (Galle and Meier 2009, 131). In one of Mehr's reports, a strikingly prominent argument is that her mother 'comes from Mehr's heavily burdened vagrant tribe, in which there are frequent cases of heavy drunkenness, depraved, sexually impulsive unstable lifestyles, criminality and mental deficiency', suggesting not only that there is a link between vagrancy, crime, and mental instability but that insanity is something that is inherited matrilineally, raising questions about patriarchal notions of femininity and reproduction in the Pro Juventute organisation (Mehr 1987, 65).

In 1989, the files were finally opened, and those who had been affected previously could learn about what had been written about them. This was a symbolic moment, since it was the first time that these files were made visible to both the victims and the public. The growing number of scholarly and literary works, including several studies by Thomas Huonker and Thomas Meier, an MA-thesis by Mariella Widauer, as well as novels by Robert Domes, Thomas Sautner, and Mariella Mehr, have at least four essential tasks to accomplish: help the public learn about the past, restore the dignity of those affected, tell their stories of heroism, and create a positive identity. In the following chapters, I will discuss these traits in Mehr's *Stone Age* and its Hungarian adaptation, explaining how these works can contribute to collective European memory culture.

2. 'Only the Living Must Remember': Coming to Terms with the Past in Mariella Mehr's *Stone Age* and Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life*

Making Sense of Trauma in Mariella Mehr's *Stone Age*

Stone Age is Mariella Mehr's first novel about her time as a child and a young woman under the care of the Children of the Country Road. The novel bears a striking resemblance to Mehr's biography, telling the story of silvana, a writer, striving to look back at her past, to piece a fragmented memory together, and give meaning to what happened to her as a child, a young woman, and a mother. Based on Mehr's journals kept during psychotherapy sessions after a suicide attempt, the text is at once journal sketches and survivor testimonies. Mehr's narrative voice struggles on the verge of pure anger and desperation. As a narrator, Silvana is aware of the danger that such a plunge into her past might involve. Like Orpheus, she descends into the past, while battling against its absorbing power.

Memorialising the past is both a personal and a collective matter. Although neither names, institutions, nor an exact period are mentioned in the book, the sight of white walls, the pain of a mother torn from her child, the cloaks of doctors and nuns, and the wailing of a soul tortured by electroshock therapy, all emerging from the fragments of the narrative, serve as a testimony for both Mehr and her Yenish community. As the first lines of the novel suggest: 'This book is dedicated to all unloved babies, all home children, all schoolchildren, all those who have been driven crazy by our society, all those who have become dumb, and all those who know that only love saves our future' (Mehr 1988, 5). The last lines in *RückBlitze*, a 1990 collection of Mehr's essays and poems is: 'Only the living must remember' (Mehr 1990, 280). Writing for Mehr therefore is and has been a means to break the silence by speaking as a survivor about herself and those mothers and children who have been mentally and physically broken and silenced.

The central question the narrator Silvana must face, and the question for Mehr, as well as those other unloved babies, schoolchildren, and people driven crazy and rendered speechless, is a question for society and the entire Yenish community: how to restore identities that have been disturbed and traumatised by the actions of the Children of the Country Road programme? How to come to terms with the past, if the past has a haunting presence in our everyday existence? In my mind, these questions link the book to postwar trauma narratives of the twentieth century, whose torchbearers are trauma narratives by Holocaust survivors and Jewish refugees. What such works share with Mehr's novel is that they evoke the experience of a minority being oppressed by a bureaucratic power, shedding light on the complex dynamics between the individual, a minority group, and the institutionalised forms of power that make every imaginable effort to enslave and exterminate this minority (Adler 2017).

Like many Holocaust writers, what is at stake in Mariella Mehr's works is the brokenness and the re(dis)covery of identity. The questions central to all Mehr's novels are: how can identity be restored after it has been charged, demonised, and almost fatally wounded by society? How can the feeling of homelessness be eliminated and trauma be healed at the same time? How can one be given a proper name, a proper identity to which one belongs? In her trilogy – *Daskind* (1997), *Brandzauber* (1998), and *Angeklagt* (2002) – the fight for an identity presumes its very absence, the absolute denial of the self and its human existence. It is a difficult quest for all of Mehr's heroes since the traumas of the past are always passing through a veil of remembrance.

In *Stone Age*, Mehr splits the identity of her heroine into three parts: silvia, silvio, and silvana. In doing so, the narrative gives a clear picture of the shattered identity of the Yenish community, while, as Emma Patchett argues, it also 'mimics the perverse colonising trauma inflicted upon [the heroine's] body' (Patchett 2017, 6). In some places, these identities are separated from one another: 'for thirty-one years i have done nothing more than survived. the price was high. silvana – at earlier times silvia or also silvio – is an alcoholic, dependent on medication, incapable of social integration, depressive, scared, angry, destructive. silvana is scream' (Mehr 1988, 9). In other places, they flow into one another like subjects of the heroine's stream of consciousness – 'think, maybe this time, silvia/silvio/silvana, you can finally step away from everything, to cross that boundary, to go in the direction where the pain should no longer be felt, where nothing should exist but boundless indifference' (Mehr 1988, 144). Sometimes the narrative 'I' cries out with anger, with an 'ICH' that wants to survive, the 'ICH' that goes through corridors, over monster-like doctors and nurses, the 'ICH' that is displaced and that should be found among the fragments (Mehr 1988, 103–104). It is this 'I' that refuses to live as a victim and that aims to defy the system that victimises it by finding its way of survival. Yet, in many other places, there is a gap between two worlds, the world of screaming that Silvia as Silvana's baby alter ego inhabits, which is the world of foster homes, psychiatric institutions, juvenile halls, and prisons, and the world of writing inhabited by Silvana that requires her to plunge into the dark territories of memory (Russi).

Home in *Stone Age* appears as a place which Sigmund Freud conceptualises as the 'uncanny', i.e., the sphere of the domestic, the familiar, which is also a strange and frightening place, whereby 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (Freud 1985, 340). Zero, the city where Silvana grew up, is the place of departure to painful and terrifying memories, where behind the familiar, the domestic, there is always an unsettling sense of being displaced and belonging nowhere. This uncanny feeling towards home appears in the novel as follows: 'after all, zero gave me twelve years to think about silvia-silvio-silvana, about her involuntary stays in children's homes, educational institutions, psychiatric institutions, about her involuntary failure as an adult, about her fear' (Mehr 1988, 7). At one point, the baby Silvia cries with fury out at her mother, saying:

> in reality, I felt a sea of disgust, cold and homelessness. my mother's hatred and despair spat me out into a landscape full of horror. she let me be petrified, even before i was allowed to live. the despairing scream of my mother was my lullaby, and the white of the house in which my birth took place, became the colour of terror (Mehr 1988, 21).

As Roger Russi explains, what Silvana comes to learn is that her accusation of and rage towards her mother is misdirected, since both the mother and the child are caught in a system that aims to destroy their family and their larger community (Russi). As she grows into adulthood, Silvana realises that home is a place of the 'aching body, it is as if the inside is turned outside', a place of torture where 'hands have their own language', and a place, which 'only needs you as a working machine, as a functioning working machine' (Mehr 1988, 95, 113). Therefore, home is also a place of dislocation and displacement, a world of control and oppression that constructs the vulnerable body (Patchett 2017, 9).

What brings Mehr's lived experiences and her novel much closer to the scopes and aims of Romani feminism is the fact that she went through, and subsequently wrote about, torture and abuse as a *woman*. At one point Silvana describes when she was seven years old, she was sexually abused by her foster father, an experience that has striking resemblances to Mehr's life. Silvana's description is both poignant and horrid: in a rather matter-of-fact voice, she reveals that her foster mother wanted her to sleep without her panties, shirts, and petticoat, and sent her foster father, who was groping her body parts under her nightgown (Mehr 1988, 87). She says that 'I had to stand up on the bed so that he could comfortably reach under the shirt. if I wasn't completely undressed, I had to do it before him. he watched. I was terribly ashamed' (Mehr 1988, 87). This nightmarish occurrence traumatised Silvana so deeply that it made her physical relationships with other men almost impossible. She explains that 'as the father of my son slept with me for the first time, I had to think of that ritual in neuendorf. he undressed me and the room was light green like the beating room in our house' (Mehr 1988, 87). By recording these events from the point of view of a victim and a survivor, Mehr's narrative provides a shocking revelation about the emotional, physical, and sexual abuses that took place behind the closed doors of homes, institutions, and female prisons, as well as their traumatic impact.

What is also disturbing, yet utterly apparent is how conventionally patriarchal the world of institutionalised power is, which is recorded in the book, with its typical patriarchal ideas about such concepts as family, reproduction, and gender differences. One of the ideas that entail to a certain degree all these concepts is the genealogy of madness as naturally feminine and hereditary, a sign of which is deviance against what is socially accepted as 'normal'. Whilst the novel describes the painful and shocking ordeal that the heroine silvana/silvio/silvia goes through during, and after, electroshock therapy:

> doctor anatov to silvia: 'we know you have inherited the illness of your mother. you are young, we will be able to heal your hysteria.' they pretend to heal silvia with the big black one, with the cannulas and blowpipes. they know nothing about silvia's images during the coma, nothing about her mortal fear. they only want to be right, that is all (Mehr 1988, 87).

Shocking as it is, the depiction above perfectly reconstructs the patriarchal reasoning that does its best to justify its actions by referring to psychiatric constructions of the matriarchal genealogy of madness that is in sharp contrast with a 'normal' society based on racial purity, gendered conventions, and the unity of the family. What is intriguing in Doctor Anatov's argument that hysteria was an illness that the heroine inherited from her mother, and that it could be healed by the institution of psychiatry is that it categorically reproduces patriarchal ideas about motherhood, femininity, and madness. In Luce Irigaray's words: 'What of that woman outside her social and material role as reproducer of children, as nurse, as

reproducer of labour power?' (Irigaray 1991, 35). It is this logic that permeated Nazi eugenics policies that saw women as reproducers of healthy and Aryan generations, in which Robert Ritter said that 'their [the Yenishes'] constant intermingling and reproduction contributes to the formation of new criminal clans and a characteristic rag proletariat' (Mehr 1990, 78). Ritter's racist reasoning was taken up by Alfred Siegfried, arguing that '[i]t must be said that sometimes the wood was rotten and that a lot has already been accomplished if these people do not start a family, do not reproduce unrestrainedly and give birth to new generations of depraved and abnormal children' (Mehr 1990, 13-14). What makes Mehr's writing an act of triumph is that by representing the gender-specific rhetoric of this ideology, she reveals its cruel and dehumanising workings as well as the devastating impact it had on her and many other women and men.

Consequently, *Stone Age*, along with Mehr's other novels, essays, and poems, is an essential yet somewhat neglected part of European memory culture in the twenty-first century for many reasons. Like many survivors of the Nazi and the Communist regimes, Mehr takes writing as a vehicle to unveil the mechanisms of a socio-political regime that bore a striking resemblance to Nazi leadership in Germany. In so doing, Mehr uses her own voice as a survivor to speak for those mothers and children who were tortured and silenced as antisocial, filthy, and depraved, and who, as a result, forever lost their sense of a positive racial identity. In this respect, writing is a constant struggle to come to terms with the past and restore one's identity that has endured many extermination attempts. In the next section, we will see how the stage adaptation of *Stone Age*, Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life*, approaches Mehr's story as a heroic journey, which offers the Yenish community a positive identity and a place in European memory culture.

Heroic Narrative in Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life*

Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life* was performed at the International Roma Storytelling Festival in Budapest in 2017 and 2018 and published in 2019 in the monodrama collection *Roma Heroes: Five European Monodramas*, the first volume of monodramas written by Romani authors. Both the festival and the book publication were arranged and organised by Independent Theatre Hungary. According to Rodrigo Balogh, the artistic leader of Independent Theatre Hungary and the editor of the volume, the publication of the collection hopes to create new artistic initiatives that raise awareness of complex social phenomena, make people from Romani and non-Romani communities sensitive to the problems of minority groups, and provide adequate intellectual foundations for Romani youth. As Balogh argues:

> When I was a drama student, I was looking for Gypsy plays and works in which my identity was valued and had positive connotations. I did not find any plays by Roma writers at all. And what I found in mainstream drama literature and theatres about us was not too impressive either. If theatres put on plays with Gypsy characters in them at all, my colleagues usually portrayed ungrateful children, fathers impregnating their daughters, soulless mothers, blokes who humiliate themselves for a few cigarettes, characters who talk like 'Gypsies' and loiter around. When I saw this, I felt both ashamed and as if I did not exist. As if the values and heroes that were important in my life were invisible (Balogh-Kondi-Merényi 2019, 7).

Balogh takes note of the absence of Romani writers and artists in the theatre who could have offered truthful accounts on intersectional problems that Romani communities face, including social stigmatisation, prostitution, early school dropout, the lives of Romani women within the patriarchal tradition of their families, as well as extreme atrocities by contemporary societies and throughout history affecting Romani communities. Therefore, there were two main principles contributing to the publication: to allow Romani writers to speak for their own communities on stage and to present a heroic narrative to a (non-)Romani audience. Such heroic narratives have proven essential, since there are two main portrayals of Romani people, both of which represent them exclusively within a victim narrative (Illés et al. 2020). One narrative depicts the Romani people as a threat to society, who are altogether vulgar, uncooperative, work-shy, and lazy. Such depictions are particularly present in Hungarian and European mainstream media (Illés et al. 2020) The other narrative focuses on the differences between Romani and non-Romani communities, with particular emphasis on the inability of Romani communities to bring about change in their own lives and their relationships with the majority population (Illés et al. 2020). In contrast, a narrative that interprets stories as 'heroic journeys' depicts heroes whose downfall is caused by negative influences from majority society, while being able to stand up, move forward, and make crucial changes in their lives and their communities. Such initiatives are not alien to monodramas: Through the direct, almost intimate, connection between performer and audience, the audience can easily identify with the hero and the issues he/she must cope with (Szirtes 2020, 8). Thereby, (self)representations in monodramas have two tasks to fulfil: to confront and encourage self-examination and to pave the way for positive (self-)identification.

Pavlović's drama opens with a general introduction to the atrocities against the Yenish community by Pro Juventute. It is followed by two video recordings – one about Mehr's interruption of the Pro Juventute press conference in 1986 and another Mehr's honorary doctorate from the University of Basel in 1998. To my mind, such a narrative technique serves two purposes. First, the play's audio-visual effects enliven our perception, creating 'a liminal zone between history and memory – that is, between the past as an object of dispassionate study and the past as an affective part of personal and collective consciousness' and, as Susan Sontag put it, 'builds our sense of the present and immediate past' (Sontag 2003, 85; Prividori 2008, 80). Through the recordings, the audience become observers, voyeurs of, and personally affected by, history. Second, as Kinga Júlia Király, the play's Hungarian translator notes, the portrayal of Mehr as an activist with an honorary doctorate recalling her past, in which Mehr 'in some places [tears up] the spiritual and physical wounds in a confessional, blood-freezing and poetic manner, yet in other places reveals with documentarian stubbornness the destruction that only the most determined, and with much luck, have survived' (Király 2019, 87). Pavlović's vision picks Mehr's story from a plethora of victim narratives, turning the heroic story of survival into a fight against inhumanity.

What heroic narrative does Pavlović's play follow? How can such a narrative be applied to Mehr's story? To understand this, we should first take note of the classic explanation of the concept of the 'hero's journey'. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell identifies the hero's path as a triple path: inspired by various external forces, the hero embarks on a journey, descends into the unknown, where he triumphs over various crisis situations, and, finally, is spiritually transformed (Campbell 2008). From Campbell's theory comes the narratological pattern of the 'hero's journey', a concept which can be described in the following way. The hero sets off from the safety of his world to the unknown. His call to go out stems from a crisis in the unknown. In his journey, the hero is provided with the equipment,

usually a mentor, necessary for survival by supernatural forces (Illés et al. 2020, 54). Crossing the threshold of the unknown world, the hero must face the fact that his experiences and abilities are not enough to overcome danger, and that to win, he must learn the laws of the new world (Illés et al. 2020, 54). He faces various challenges, and since he usually has little strength to face these challenges alone and withstand the temptations of evil forces, he needs an ally, a weapon bearer (Illés et al. 2020, 54). After he descends into the underworld, at the bottom of the abyss, the hero experiences the death of his old self (Illés et al. 2020, 54). Shadows hold a mirror to the hero, showing him the man who he can become if he allows evil to triumph over him (Illés et al. 2020, 54). To conquer, the hero realises that he must break with his old self. The hero is reborn and transformed by this realisation. He understands that he has learned something new through the challenges, stands the test, fulfills his duty, and finally returns home a completely different person (Illés et al. 2020, 54).

In her play, Pavlović applies the concept of the 'hero's journey' in the following way. As the heroine, Mehr leaves the protective world of her mother's womb and enters the underworld of institutions and foster homes. While descending into the deepest forms of inhumanity and the closeness of spiritual and physical death, she learns that to be human means 'freedom and pride, searching, and for that matter defending yourself, love songs, romantic gardens for princes, princesses, but also brutality, pain, disgust, punches and whippings' (Pavlović 2019, 86). Along the way to the abyss of the underworld, Mehr is accompanied by such wordings as '[t]he love of a Yenish mother is as primitive as a wild animal' which 'had to be refined,' the logic of which led to the sterilisation of mothers after their second child (Pavlović 2019, 89). A shadow holding up a reflection to Mehr, the heroine, is her brother, 'who hanged himself when he was twelve, in an institution for the mentally ill because he could no longer bear life in that freezing cold. He wasn't sick enough to be able to rebel in some other way' (Pavlović 2019, 89). The moment of becoming a hero comes when Mehr, confronted with her mother's document, chooses to take off the burdens of victimhood, the burdens of suffering that her mother also had to carry. She uses memory to speak and stand up for those silenced by a larger political power (Király 2019, 87). The play's ending perfectly recalls the last lines of Mehr's *RückBlitze*:

> Now I must celebrate a birthday, mother of mine, your sixtieth birthday, which you were never able to celebrate. *Lacio drom*, dear mother, *Bachtalo drom*, my brave mother. I wish you a safe journey and happiness, I wish you peace and a long, calm death. Only the living shall remember (Pavlović 2019, 91).

As Pavlović's play implies, to come to terms with the past, Mehr needs to kill the dirty little girl in herself who the Swiss authorities rendered her to be. Mehr needs to use her anger and her hatred as constructive tools for her resistance, her power to survive and to stand up against injustice. In this way, Mehr – and Pavlović – deconstruct the rhetoric of stigmatisation used by Alfred Siegfried and his company to unveil the racism and inhumanity behind their words, as well as the tragic consequences such words meant for thousands of Yenish mothers and children. By speaking, Mehr and Pavlović not only confront the audience with contemporary racism; they also suggest that in order to fight effectively against racism, one must form a positive identity, i.e., a self-image that resists the negative connotations of being Roma in contemporary and historical European discourse. Such a self-image, triggered by what Aleida Assmann calls a 'heroic memory' and based on 'self-respect, free will, spiritual options, future, positive values and

a rhetoric of salvation', is indispensable for Romani and Yenish communities, since it allows them to find their heroes, recover their collective identity and reflect on themselves as people who can stand up together and make important changes in society (Assmann 1998, 147). Therefore, the role of heroic narrative is to reconstruct a collective identity, providing a new terrain for European cultural memory.

Conclusion

The present article has attempted to examine the cultural genocide of the Children of the Country Road programme, its effect on the Yenish community, and its memorialisation in Mariella Mehr's *Stone Age* and its monodrama-adaptation, Dijana Pavlović's *Speak, My Life*. Although there is increasing interest by contemporary scholarship in the atrocities of the Pro Juventute organisation and its legacy in Mehr's work, there is much to investigate in terms of what challenges the Yenish minority have faced in their fight to be recognised in writings by many contemporary Yenish authors, including Robert Domes, Thomas Sautner, or Romenius Mungenast (Widauer 2020, 28). Although the Yenish community has been recognised as a national minority since 1999, the number of stopping places where these communities can continue their traveller lifestyle has rapidly decreased (Vuilleumier 2019). Works by Yenish authors are therefore not only important but indispensable, since they pave the way for Yenish communities to represent themselves in a collective European discourse and raise awareness of the socio-political challenges they face.

The present article has aimed to discuss two important aspects in Mehr's novel and Pavlović's play. First, it has argued that making sense of the past is the basis for Mehr to deconstruct the rhetoric of stigmatisation of Pro Juventute, to regain her own identity, and to speak for the silenced. Second, it has identified Mehr's life and work through Pavlović's play in the context of a 'heroic narrative', whereby such narratives make self-representation for Romani communities possible, while dismantling the stereotypical representations of Roma, and making room for Romani people to find their heroes and, through them, a positive self-image. Consequently, both works are vital for a collective European discourse on minorities: while revealing the cultural genocide of the Children of the Country Road programme and its survivors, these works speak for humanity and recognition, and claim a place in collective European memory culture.

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Critical
Romani Studies

Gypsy Boy is the autobiographical story of Mikey Walsh, a Romani boy belonging to the Gypsy community[1] in the UK, who had to abandon his family because of his LGBTIQ identity. Throughout the book, the author describes his childhood in a Romani family, residing in caravans, moving to different campsites, earning a living via various formal and informal activities, segregated from the rest of society. Mikey's childhood is marked from the beginning by a violent relationship with his father who, unsuccessfully, tries to make him a bare-knuckle fighter, and the difficulties of blending into the patriarchal environment in which he finds himself. Here, sex is taboo, preventing him from speaking openly about his sexuality. Gender roles are sharply defined: men are expected to fight other men, experience sex at an early age with *gadjo* (non-Roma) and marry a Gypsy woman a few years later, spend nights drinking in pubs talking about fights and money, and prove their virility both inside and outside their community. As a result, all forms of sexuality which fall outside this model must be hidden and rejected, with no opportunity to face them. Mikey pays the tragic price for this when he falls victim to sexual violence committed by his uncle, which his father, even when told of it, refuses to acknowledge. Only at the end of the novel does the author have the strength to escape this circle of violence and find someone willing to accept and support him.

Seemingly, gender roles, physical and social distance, illegal activities, violence, and the tradition of bare-knuckle fighting depict a typical representation of "the life of Gypsies" in the UK. This group, like other Romani groups in Europe, has long been the object of external representations that, by taking some visible aspects of their lives and traditions, have constructed an orientalised and stereotypical image of "the Gypsy" (McGarry and Drake 2013; Matache 2016). *Gypsy Boy* offers a different perspective, from the inside, which provides a more complex depiction of the everyday life of a boy growing up in a Romani family. One example is the bare-knuckle fights which are traditionally associated with "Gypsies" and have attracted the attention of non-Romani artists and moviemakers eager to represent this "mysterious" and "underground" world. These representations, on the one hand, make the Gypsies out as bare-knuckle fighters, ignorant and attached to the family, and, on the other, as emotionless and bloodthirsty fighters. They are mere stereotypical sketches of a certain non-Romani idea of "the Gypsy", whilst failing to properly acknowledge their agency and humanity. In *Gypsy Boy*, the complexity behind the stereotype of Gypsy bare-knuckle fighters emerges, highlighting the suffering and pride connected to it and its relationship to violence suffered within non-Romani contexts. It is no coincidence that Mikey's fight training becomes even more violent after his father returns from prison.

The exclusion, prejudice, and violence suffered by the Romani community are key to Mikey's experience and grief growing up as a LGBTIQ Roma. Beyond reinforcing a circle of deprivation and violence, the exclusion of the Romani community from society and the stereotypes associated with them have contributed to the invisibility of the Romani LGBTIQ community. Few literary and scholarly works have so far dealt with the oppression suffered by this group, and this invisibility has prevented LGBITQ Romani persons from emerging to support each other and fight prejudice within their own Romani communities (Baker 2015; Maté 2015). For this reason, Walsh's testimony represents an important contribution to the

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1 The term "Gypsy" is here used to refer to a specific Romani group that lives in the UK and self-identifies with this term, in no pejorative sense.

struggle against the invisibility of LGBTIQ Roma and is located within the emerging production in this field (e.g. Jovanovic 2009; Maté 2015; Tišer 2015; Fremlova 2017). Apart from presenting an internal depiction of the life of Gypsies in the UK and their relationship with the external world, Walsh's book effectively describes the challenges faced by LGBTIQ Roma. The similarities between his experience and of other Romani LGBTIQ authors are numerous, such as the pain caused by the experience of "passing" or hiding his identity. As other authors have highlighted (Jovanovic 2009; Baker 2015), this reinforces the loneliness suffered by LGBTIQ Roma and aggravates it with a constant fear of "being discovered".

Another aspect that appears in Walsh's account is the intersectional discrimination that Roma LGBTIQ people suffer. He is rejected by his Romani peers because, although he hides his true sexuality, he disappoints his father's hopes to make of him a true "Gypsy man". On the other hand, he experiences the daily discrimination Roma face, leaving a school where teachers barely paid him any attention at all. All relationships with the outside world are marked by prejudice and violence – in school, in prison – and this prevents Mikey from finding understanding and comfort outside his family. He remains an outsider, both within his own Romani community and in non-Romani society. A touching passage that, for me, eloquently reveals the deep suffering caused by deprivation and rejection is the one where Walsh describes his short friendship with a dosser:[2]

> "I was a messed-up boy, and he was a dosser; both of us outcasts. But Kenny treated me like a human being, he cared what I thought and spoke about things other than fighting and money. He made me feel as if, just for a moment, I mattered, and for that I loved him."

Lack of recognition from others and the impossibility of finding emotional support even pushed young Mikey to consider suicide, more so than the physical violence suffered at the hands of his father.

Another aspect that I appreciated in Walsh's book was his use of irony in describing his family, his everyday life, the relationship between his people and their behaviour, and the external picture of the "Gypsy". In this description, he disrupts some of the most common stereotypes associated with his group: "Contrary to popular belief, they don't believe in magic, and the Gypsy 'curse' is no more than an age-old way of scaring non-Gypsies into buying something." In the same way, he does not victimise his people, breaking another stereotype usually associated with Roma: poverty – "we certainly weren't poor. Contrary to popular belief, not many Gypsies are. Our clothes were clean and well-made, and we had all that we needed and plenty to eat." At the same time, irony is used to engage with non-Romani readers and their prejudice: by referring to some of the most common stereotypes associated with this group – robbery, bad health-related habits, weird and kitsch looking – Walsh seems to ask us, non-Romani readers, to face our own prejudice and its subsequent painful consequences.

By the end of the book Mikey manages to escape his poor situation and to find a space within the non-Romani LGBTIQ community. Yet, Walsh never rejects his Romani identity and, until the end, expresses pride and love for his roots and family. This is evident when the book takes a romanticised turn by

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2 The term dosser is used to identify a non-Romani person, usually homeless.

finding reconciliation between his LGBTIQ identity and his family – his mother, sister, and brother go to Mikey's marriage to a non-Romani man. His claiming of his Romani LGBTIQ identity can be read as a process of empowerment. He could have hidden his ethnic identity to non-Romani peers, but this would have represented a new denial and denigration of his true self, another manifestation of the violence of antigypsyism. As Fremlova and McGarry (2018) highlight, LGBTIQ Romani identity, from a source of discrimination and pain, can become an empowering and inspiring site in the fight against the prejudice affecting the whole Romani community. Furthermore, it is with this idea that Roma LGBTIQ activists started emerging recently across Europe, becoming active both within Romani and LGBTIQ movements. This new wave has the potential to fight prejudice towards LGBTIQ Roma both within and outside their own communities and *Gypsy Boy* is surely an important step towards this goal.

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Book review by

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Critical Romani Studies

Gypsy Feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism by Laura Corradi makes a fundamental and innovative contribution to Romani studies, gender and feminist studies, as well as to critical race studies in Europe. The book provides an analysis of several feminist projects and trajectories within different Gypsy groups by asking for a decolonization of knowledge through a critical reflection on race, power, and privilege. The author adopts a feminist, intersectional, and decolonial approach, based on the relevance of "situated knowledge", founded on acknowledgment of one's own positionality in terms of the intersection of the main social categories, such as gender, race, class, and so on.

The text includes an analysis of a variety of forms of feminist, gender, and queer activism within different Roma, Sinti, Travellers, and other groups for whom the author uses the umbrella term "Gypsy". In the terminological note, Corradi retraces the history of the term and explains why she opted in favor of it. She notes how the term has been reclaimed among researchers and activists both acknowledging internal differences and recognizing the common oppression among different groups labelled as "Gypsy."[1] Most importantly, the author emphasizes how such a term – that has been utilized in a derogatory way – can be reappropriated to indicate its subversive potential, as experienced with the term "queer." "The faculty of re-appropriating terms, even insults, enables discursive practices of re-signification – a crucial terrain of agency and symbolic warfare – meant to reduce the normative power of stereotypes. By deconstructing and disassembling despotic signifiers, oppressive and offensive words and images, the subalterns give birth to a process of neutralizing external domination and control over the language" (xviii).

The book examines the experiences of gender activism through a type of intersectional feminist research that aims to examine how social categories intersect, giving rise to forms of social inequalities, with a particular focus on the intersection between sexism and racism. Corradi's text also examines the ways in which Gypsy feminists and gender activists have to simultaneously address issues related to the discrimination and marginalization of their communities: Similarly to other marginalized groups, the discrimination and racism that Gypsy people suffer make it more difficult to address questions of discrimination and violence against women. Indeed, denouncing forms of discrimination and violence against women could foster racism against Gypsy people while not addressing issues that could reinforce sexism suffered by Gypsy women and girls.

Another relevant characteristic of Corradi's book is that it provides a number of interesting parallels with other women's and social movements such as indigenous women's groups in India and Australia and the Rojava Democratic Federation in Syria. It also highlights the potential for coalition and alliances of Gypsy feminist and gender activists from different geopolitical locations, moving to overcoming the present form of the nation-state.

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1 "The term has been re-claimed among researchers and activists in different ethnic and non-ethnic groups, combining the understanding and valorisation of internal differences with the awareness of living under the same type of oppression. In fact, Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Kalé, Yanish, Gitans, Camminanti, Gens du Voyage, and Travellers have all been called Gypsies; all have dealt with anti-Gypsyism and persecution throughout history. And in the present, all face common difficulties as inferiorized minorities. This is one of the reasons why I elected to use the term Gypsy in this work."(Corradi 2018, xv)

The analysis is preceded by a historical note explaining how being Gypsies in Western societies constitutes a radical Otherness and clarifies the historical and social reasons why Gypsy women in Europe today are at the intersection of racism, sexism, and often extreme poverty. Corradi retraces the most important stages in the history of the Gypsy population, from the first law against the Gypsy community – passed in 1538 by the state of Moravia as part of the Czech Kingdom – although some authors argue that laws targeting Roma can be dated to as far back as 1499 in Spain, for example – up to the Nazi *Barò Porrajmos* when half a million Gypsies were exterminated. Corradi also notes that Romani people, consisting of 12 million individuals, constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe and have to confront increasing Romaphobia and antigypsyism, as acknowledged by a number of international organizations.

The **first chapter** emphasizes the importance of feminist intersectional research. Intersectionality allows us to better understand how different axes of inequality are mutually constitutive. An intersectional approach is fundamental to addressing inequalities faced by Gypsy women, in order to avoid rigid identity politics which only considers ethnicity as relevant for Gypsy people. Intersectionality also involves overcoming the contrast between various identities, such as being a Gypsy and being a woman. Indeed, it is important to recognize that Gypsy women have only recently emerged from the invisibility to which they have been confined. Until relatively recently, for example, they have largely remained silent about domestic violence in order to protect their communities from discrimination. The author stresses that there are both advantages and disadvantages in the ethnicization and de-ethnicization of gender-based violence. The first leads to the old stereotype of Gypsy men as violent, whilst the second carries the risk of being unable to carry out a specific analysis of the situation. Corradi also emphasizes how international organizations have not been able to adopt an intersectional approach, leading to the invisibility of Gypsy women in their documents and reports.

The **second and third chapters** address the issue of Gypsy feminism and gender activism, starting from the question posed by Trinidad Muñoz, "Can we discover a way to live our 'Gypsyhood' as feminists?" The author analyzes the blossoming of a number of associations and networks of Gypsy women in different European countries, especially in Eastern Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia) and Spain. Corradi emphasizes the complexity of Gypsy gender activists, simultaneously fighting discrimination and racism in their communities and maintaining a feminist commitment. She investigates how they have had to confront the conflict between being loyal to their group and their aspiration for greater gender equality. Because of the Western tendency to disrespect and sensationalize those cultures that have been othered, it is not easy to address gender equality and gender-based violence within Gypsy groups. In relation to this, Corradi also analyses the contribution by Lidia Balogh, Angéla Kóczé, and Natasha Lamoreux who have addressed these themes in their work *Liberal Multiculturalism and Roma Feminism, Building Bridges between Roma and Non-Roma Feminists*. Corradi points out that white feminist theories and practices rarely take into account the experience of Gypsy feminism and poses the question of who has the power to legitimize knowledge, experience, and theories. This is a central point in decolonial studies that unveil how colonization was not only pursued via economic and military means but also via knowledge operation. This aimed at othering colonized populations, and those mechanisms are still active today.

Chapter 4 focuses on the necessity to decolonize feminist theory and practice, by also referring to scholars researching indigenous knowledge, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith. She unveils how the production of academic knowledge is still largely influenced by European values and priorities that originated during the Enlightenment. Such an approach and world-view privilege rationality to the detriment of experience and intuition. As explained by Anibal Quijano, the coloniality of power survives colonialism. Against this background, Corradi calls for an individual and collective disconnection from dominant academic theories and methodologies. Such an operation includes the recovery of forms of traditional teaching and the valorization of non-dichotomous approaches which are present in indigenous and aboriginal cultures. The author stresses that decolonized and intersectional knowledge is important, not only in the field of research but also for social workers and policymakers. This would help understand how phenomena, which are attributed to the cultural specificity of Gypsy people, are better explained through an intersectional analysis where, for instance, material and economic conditions are given due relevance. On the contrary, poverty is often ethnicized, and victims considered responsible for their condition.

Chapter 5 addresses the subject of the queer Gypsy, a topic which is seldom investigated, both through academic literature – such as the journal *LGBTQIA Feminism and Romani Studies* – and through personal stories. Corradi emphasizes the invisibility in the condition of the queer Gypsy, an identity which is twice obscured. This condition leads to the difficulty of perceiving oneself as a Gypsy in the non-Gypsy world and as gay in the Gypsy community. Corradi's text also has the merit of transmitting the immediacy of the situation experienced by young gay Gypsy people via narratives from *Barabaripen: Young Roma Speak About Multiple Discrimination*. These stories not only describe the harshness and discrimination suffered by these young people but also speak of their ability to fight for their rights and the recognition of their identity. Corradi concludes that what is at stake is both the growth of awareness of LGBT issues within the Gypsy population, as well as the necessity to address cultural diversity within queer groups.

Chapter 6 focuses on *academic invisibility, Gypsy epistemology, and the importance of "Halfies."* First of all, Corradi acknowledges the necessity to criticize traditional academic studies on Roma people because, for all indigenous people, being the object of research has led to their inferiorization and social oppression. The author declares the importance of involving Romani people in research from the outset, including in research design and the conceptualization of the methodology. She also emphasizes the relevance of participatory action research. At the same time, she calls for research to be carried out on whiteness to investigate the racism and xenophobia of white people.

By quoting Ethel Brooks, the author focuses on the role of "Halfies," namely those people whose national or cultural identity is mixed for various reasons. Interestingly, Romani scholars are defined as "halfies" *par excellence* because they move between the Romani and gadjo worlds through migration, education, and kinship processes. Brooks concludes that as feminists, as "halfies," and as committed scholars, they are able to produce studies which are both critical towards oneself and towards the Western kind of dominant knowledge. This is certainly one aspect which makes the literature produced by scholars with Romani and Gypsy origins particularly significant, both in the field of social studies and in feminist studies.

A further theme addressed by the book in **chapter 7,** is that of body politics and media activism. Here the author highlights both the pervasiveness of an Orientalist Western view in the prevailing media representations of Gypsy groups, and the opportunities for self-representation that the new media can provide Gypsy women. In the final **chapter 8,** the importance of Gypsy Springs is emphasized. The growth of a Gypsy feminism emerges as a particularly significant phenomenon both in relation to the increase in antigypsyism, and to counter forms of gender discrimination within Gypsy communities, as well as towards overcoming white cultural hegemony and its hetero-patriarchal heritage. Corradi also notes the relevance of Gypsy activism in terms of coalition building, given the transnationalism of Romani, Sinti, and Traveller women. She underlines how Gypsy feminism has the potential to transcend borders and challenge Eurocentric assumptions.

Corradi's work is based on analysis of a wealth of sources – including academic Romani literature, conference proceedings, projects reports, as well as media and blogs – all of which make her text particularly accurate and rich.

Finally, *Gypsy feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism* represents a "must read" for all those who are interested in intersectional, queer, and decolonial feminism as well as in critical race studies, while also providing a precious resource for activists, social workers, and policymakers.

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Altered States: LGBTQ-R

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CRS Critical
Romani Studies

During the completion of my MA dissertation 'The Queer Gypsy' in 2001, which examined the experience of Gay Romanies in the United Kingdom, I had in my imagination an image which represented the aim of my research – the examination and reconciliation of the two experiential phenomena which underpinned my life to date – the gay experience and the Gypsy experience. The picture in my head resituated the red wheel from the Romani flag to the multicoloured rainbow flag, to produce a hybrid image symbolising the unification of two seemingly disparate identity positions. In bringing together Gay, Romany, and Traveller (GRT) and queer subjectivities for debate, my research process felt like a healing, if traumatic, journey. Making sense of my own experience, in relation to that of gay GRT community members who I interviewed, proved both daunting yet cathartic.

Having trained as a visual artist from an early age, my default mode of enquiry is to approach things from a visual perspective. It is no surprise then that I seek to produce a visual embodiment of the intersectionality uncovered by my research to symbolise the forging of a queer GRT subjectivity. The aim was a unifying image that, in an instant, could convey the many complex ideas within my research and represent two important aspects of my own life. But, even with the best of intentions, the pressure to complete my final paper by the deadline, and the technical skill required to produce a convincing image seamlessly embodying my intentions, meant that I was unable to realise this hybrid flag in a satisfactory manner before submission. Even as the final spell check and bibliographical reference were signed off, the image of a queer GRT flag was clear in my mind – another idea for a new artwork to be filed away for future development. Creating the hybrid flag I had in mind did not happen until some years later.

The existing flag designs that I intended to use had both been developed in the 1970s. The Romani flag in 1971, at the first World Romani Congress, held in Orpington (where I was born ten years before) and the rainbow flag in 1978, by the artist Gilbert Baker for the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. The Romani flag consists of a blue background representing the sky, and a green one, representing the earth. It has a 16-spoke red chakra, or cartwheel, at its centre. The latter stands for the itinerant tradition of the Romani people and acts as an homage to the flag of India, where our diaspora is said to have set out from. The rainbow flag, as used as a symbol of LGBTQ+ pride, has undergone several revisions since its original eight-colour design, with many variations intending to denote wider affiliations and inclusions. The traditional, and still most common variant, consists of six stripes: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet with the red stripe on top, as in a natural rainbow. It is this version that I used in my design.

It was not until 2014, when I was invited by the Director of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company, Isaac Blake, to produce an exhibition of new works, as part of their Arts Council of Wales funded Gypsy Maker programme, that seeds began to flower from the idea sown during my MA. As part of an exhibition entitled 'MakeShifting: Structures of Mobility',[1] I produced a series of hybrid flags entitled 'Altered States'. The series comprised a number of new flag designs which combined the red wheel of the Romani flag with the existing flags of Wales, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. These new flags acted simultaneously as icons of integration and symbols of resistance. The harmonious design expressed an

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1 See online: http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/daniel-bakers-makeshifting-structures-of-mobility.

optimistic scenario of coexistence but, at the same time, denoted that Romani communities have existed within these nations and territories for hundreds of years.

The MakeShifting exhibition project was concerned with themes of physical, social, economic, and aesthetic mobility and the structures that enhance and/or inhibit these freedoms. Objects such as ladders, wheels, ropes, and flags were employed as signifiers of both mobility and fixity. The resulting artworks exemplified contradictory qualities, such as attraction and diversion, display, and concealment, functionality, and obsolescence. The hybrid flags that formed the Altered States series looked at the possibilities of adaptability and inclusion within more abstract structures of nationhood. The show aimed to rethink identities, with particular emphasis on relationships between the marginal and the mainstream in society.

In 2016 I was invited to exhibit at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow as part of the GLITCH[2] Queer People of Colour Film fFestival in 2017. Digital Desperadoes, the organisers of the festival, had decided to include an art exhibition as part of the film programme and thought my work would sit well within the context of the event. Along with the many existing works I had in mind for the show I realised that now was the time to make real the flag that had first developed over fifteen years earlier. And so 'Altered States: LGBTQ-R' finally materialised as a large-scale flag for exhibition and parading, as well as small-scale postcards for wider distribution and to draw attention to Queer Romani issues.

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2 See online: http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/daniel-bakers-makeshifting-structures-of-mobility.

The Romani LGBTIAQ Movement and the Role of ARA ART

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David Tišer studied the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. He is the first LGBT Romani activist in the Czech Republic. In the past he was a member of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs. He is currently on the Committee for the Rights of Sexual Minorities, part of the Government Council for Human Rights. He is also a founder of the Romani NGO ARA ART, an organization dealing with creatives and organizing cultural events. ARA ART is for the Romani LGBT+ minority and looks at issues of intersectional discrimination.

Critical Romani Studies

I'm very glad that I was invited to this conference and would like to thank the organizers for holding this panel.[1] My speech looks at the role of ARA ART in setting up the LGBT movement. In 2009, I, along with my fellow student Rozálie Kohoutová, shot a semi-fictional documentary *Roma Boys* based on my partner's story. The film deals with the intersectional discrimination against the Romani LGBT minority. The documentary points out the major discrimination against the LGBT community in Romani families. It was a great success, not only in the Czech Republic but in other countries as well.

Since then I have been approached by many Roma who underwent similar experiences. At the time I started to look at other such stories, meeting people and trying to help them. In the summer of 2012 I organized a Romani LGBT evening for Prague Pride. We turned to well-known Romani celebrities from various fields and organized an evening with a fashion show by the famous Romani designer Pavel Berky, a concert by the well-known singer Jan Bendig, an exhibition of photographs by Lukáš Houdek, and a screening of the documentary *Roma Boys* – a love story. During the evening, we also set up the first email counselling centre for the Romani LGBT minority. It attracted enormous interest, the event was well attended, and more than 400 people came. I introduced the first online counselling for Romani LGBT which, during its first month of existence, received more than 300 emails. I realized that I could not implement this alone over the long term, so I started to negotiate with individual Romani organizations so that they focus on Romani LGBT issues as part of their work as nonprofits.

Although they were very liberal nonprofit organizations, they didn't want to deal with this issue for fear of damaging their reputations. That is why, in the autumn of 2012, I decided to set up my own organization, ARA ART, and started working on this issue consistently. In traditional Romani society, sexuality and its related themes, including different sexual orientation, are huge taboos.

People with different sexual orientations are exposed to great pressures in their communities and can often be excluded from them. The Romani LGBT community is therefore subjected to intersectional discrimination: excluded by the majority society on the basis of ethnic origin, excluded by their own Romani society due to sexual orientation, so they become a minority within a minority. This intersectional discrimination is very stressful and may lead to suicide. The aim of our project is to break this taboo and to work on bolstering the confidence of Romani LGBT people.

In 2014, I organized the first-ever Romani national LGBT meeting in Prague. A total of 20 young people from all over the country participated. In fact, interest was much higher, but we could only select a limited number of people due to limited funds. This involved participants learning about the activities of ARA ART, and we held several workshops on identity building, swapped life stories and, afterwards, each of these young people started to help and be supportive of other Romani LGBT. Young people themselves defined what ARA ART should do. And we listened.

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1 Speech delivered at the *Critical Approaches to Romani Studies* conference held at Central European University 15-17 May 2019.

2015 was a crucial year for the Romani LGBT community because of the first international Romani LGBT conference in Prague. This was a key moment for us. It was critical for the Romani LGBT community because it was not about individual activists from different countries but, for the first time in history, people from many countries met and worked on the issue together. We invited 28 Romani LGBT activists from 12 countries to a two-day conference (Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom and USA). On the first day the thematic panels covered: (1) the reality for Romani gays and lesbians across Europe and (2) how national legislation affects the lives of LGBT minorities. The next day focused on the future: participants planned a joint strategy directed at European institutions and subsequent further cooperation. This resulted in setting up an informal International Romani LGBTQ Platform and a joint statement, the so-called Prague Declaration.

In parallel, a national meeting of the Romani LGBT community took place in Prague. Forty young people from all over the country, who had been working with our organization, came to the city. As the part of the programme, these young people performed for conference participants a Theatre of the Oppressed show, looking at a minority in a minority.

In the same year we attended Prague Pride for the first time. We designed a Romani allegorical float, which garnered a lot of attention from the public. For the first time we also staged a cultural programme on the main stage of Prague Pride, performing to more than 30,000 people. The LGBT festival hosted many Romani bands that previously had trouble participating at this event. In short, 2015 was the year that the Romani LGBT community became visible and audible.

In 2016, an international conference was again held in Prague, and in 2017 in Strasbourg. The number of activists and participating countries grows each year. For example, people from Turkey, Finland and other countries came, too. In 2018, a number of smaller meetings took place in various countries. In 2019 the largest LGBT conference, ILGA Europe, was held in Prague and we lobbied for the inclusion of a Romani panel in the main programme.

National gatherings take place several times a year. In 2016, we launched a unique project with Romani LGBT consultants who help disseminate information about various sexual orientations to Romani families directly. A project "I will say it" was set up as a counselling centre for those members of the Romani LGBT community who need support. In addition, this project offers advice from consultants who currently operate in four regions of the Czech Republic. They work in the regions which showed the greatest interest: Prague, Ostrava, Ústí nad Labem and Plzeň. However, our consultants also help in other regions, too. As the part of the project, a parental advisor helps parents who do not know how to manage their child's distinct sexual orientation. The parental advisor is a heterosexual parent who has been through the same experience. On average, about 100 people from the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and United Kingdom turn to the counselling centre every month.

Our consultants were properly trained in 2016 and are undergoing further training.

Now I will outline several cases that are most commonly addressed by our consultants. It must be said that I am outlining the stories of those who seek counselling and therefore cannot be seen as indicative of the whole Romani population living in the Czech Republic. Our consultants most often deal with excommunication from the family – this is the most common punishment. There are differences between different groups of Roma. There are six Romani groups in the Czech Republic – Czech Roma, Moravian Roma, Slovak Roma, Sinti, Vlach Roma-Lovari and Hungarian Roma. The most frequent punishment, excommunication, is meted out in the most conservative groups of Vlach Roma and Sinti. This form of punishment is based on cultural traditions.

Another common problem is bullying. This manifests in several ways – social control. For example, swearing naked to a holy picture or swearing by the grave of his or her relatives, being subject to mockery in the family and community including the disposal of utensils the subject has used, and if a family member, their crockery always must use the same crockery in the home. This is a targeted demonisation. The third most common is fear of coming out, resulting from the above-described actions.

Severe psychological problems require special intervention and the input of mental health professionals. Our organization provides assistance to deal with such crises. We try to provide victims with protected housing. In the meantime, we will negotiate with Prague 3 borough council to provide council flats in such cases. Furthermore, we offer mediation with family and community: putting the excommunicated person into a new environment, helping with job searches, negotiating council assistance, providing professional help, and life coaching. Based on our long experience in working with this target group, our organization has issued Methodological Procedures for Working with the Romani LGBT Community, also available in English.

We are engaged in national activism. ARA ART is on the Committee of the Government Office for Sexual Minorities. One of the goals of the Prague Declaration was to integrate the Romani LGBT issue into the Governmental Strategy for Roma Integration after 2020+. Today, I can proudly say that our long-term negotiation with the Czech Republic is over; we have succeeded by defining the Roma LGBT community in a strategic document.

We are involved in the government project '\"Effective support for the health of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion". We also educate public administration institutions (representatives of ministries, offices, educational institutions) and nonprofit organizations. We hold training for young Romani LGBT activists and set up Romani LGBT self-help groups.

We are engaged in international activism. There is a unique initiative to set up an informal International Romani LGBT platform and coordinate its activities. To inform the general public about the Romani LGBT community through projects. To publish a newsletter on the Romani LGBT community in Europe. To provide expertise via consultations to create programmes focused on Romani LGBT topics – we have helped set up fellowships, a methodology of how to work with the Romani LGBT community, disseminated good practices, provided expert advice and counselling on organizing themed meetings, project activities, research and analyses. We have negotiated with European Institutions in regard to

the setting of grant terms and international research to intercede and prioritize the Roma LGBT community.

As you can see in our seven years of existence, the LGBT Roma community has taken a huge step. It is appropriate to thank Open Society Institute – Human Rights Department and Mariana Berbec for both financial and moral support. The train has already left the station but much more support is needed. We have yet to come up with a grant procedure framework for this forgotten yet numerous minority.

Romani Arts, Dance, and Advocacy Action in Wales: My Life and the Romani Cultural and Arts Company

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Isaac Blake is a proud Gay Romany Gypsy and has worked as a professional dancer and choreographer. He is currently Executive Director of the Romani Cultural & Arts Company in Cardiff, UK, which is supported by a variety of major funders and government departments.

Isaac Blake is a proud, GAY[1] Romany Gypsy and Executive Director of the Romani Cultural & Arts Company (RCAC). He previously studied and worked as a choreographer and professional dancer and currently lives and works in Cardiff, Wales. As recently as 2019, Isaac lead a team of academics and researchers in collecting items and artefacts for the online digital RomArchive,[2] a growing collection of Romania and Traveller art of all types, complemented by historical documents and scholarly texts.

In his work with the RCAC since 2009, Isaac has developed art and performance programmes with communities living on Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites, in housing, and in accommodation. Isaac and the RCAC also work in Welsh schools and colleges, promoting arts and culture as a medium for advocacy, empowerment, and resilience for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. RCAC has engaged widely with non-Romani and Traveller communities to promote understanding between them and improve social cohesion, communal dialogue, and positive debate, contributing its voice to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) advocacy and empowerment in the UK.

Isaac and his team at RCAC have been instrumental in supporting LGBTQI rights for Romani and Traveller people in the UK, Europe, and beyond, while active in the wider movement for human rights. His story is an inspirational and powerful testament.

RCAC is funded by the BBC Children in Need Appeal, Arts Council Wales, the National Lottery Community Fund in Wales, and the Welsh government, among others.

Growing up and Moving up

Born in Bromsgrove, England, I grew up and lived on Gypsy caravan sites until the age of 25. When I was 13, my family left the site at Stourport-on-Severn to move to South Wales. I had an ideal childhood in Stourport, as our site was next to a meadow, by the river. I used to walk along the river to get to school and into town each morning. I look back on that time with such happiness, as there were no barriers and I cannot remember any tension or animosity between the settled community and our site. I felt free and unconstrained as a child, as the site was for both Gypsies and Travellers; everyone existed in apparent harmony as one united community. The weather always seemed nice.

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1 'GAY' is an acronym, not a word itself, unless used in the archaic sense of to be 'happy and joyful', i.e. "The party was rather gay." As explained by Peter Tatchell, MP at Hornsey Town Hall in 1981, the term came from the Stonewall Inn Uprising, Greenwich Village, New York City, in June 1969, and meant 'Good As You'. It was shortened to GAY as a chant in the streets around Stonewall Inn during the ensuing riots at the club and at Christopher's End, also a bar, where the most violent confrontations took place. The clubs were all owned and run by the mafia, especially the Genovese family in New York, who bribed police to ignore them and extorted money from wealthy customers through blackmail. A raid on the inn, and the violent arrest of two Black transgender women on 28 June, sparked six days of rioting and led to the foudation of the Stonewall organization.

2 See online: http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/the-romani-cultural-and-arts-company-proud-romarchive-wins-prestigious-awards

My Aunt Jessie was a great inspiration during my early life; she was a matriarch in our community, someone with tremendous energy and enthusiasm. She may have been small in stature, but she was large in other ways, someone I could always count on for sound advice. I learned from her that is important to have faith and belief in yourself. Growing up in a Romani and Traveller environment, I was encouraged to take on an adult role from an early age, find my path and stand on my own two feet. Sometimes things have happened in my life that knocked my confidence, such as the loss of loved ones, but I have always maintained hope in the power of the human imagination to overcome individual problems. If something in one part of my life is not working, it is probably that it's not right for me at that moment; so I just look for another area to grow and flourish.

The family moved to Wales when I was 13. and I have to say that it was not an easy transition. There was animosity between the settled community and the local Gypsy sites, making the atmosphere quite different to that of Stourport. In Cardiff, Gypsy and Traveller sites are starkly detached from the settled communities and from any interaction with wider society. As a teenager, I had to make a great effort before planning to go anywhere off the site; there wasn't even a bus route nearby to take us into town. At weekends, friends and I would be followed around shops by security staff; if they heard an Irish accent, they would assume that we were all Travellers and that we were there to steal. Prejudice about *all* Travellers shoplifting was very prevalent among shopworkers.

Despite antagonism from the settled community, or *gorgios,* I grew up in a close-knit extended family, both in Stourport and in Cardiff. As my sexuality became clear to me (and apparent to others), there were no issues within my immediate circle of friends and family. People had grown up with me and knew me as an individual, as part of a respected family and community. I always felt included and safe as a Gypsy on the sites, and at no point did I face any animosity. My brother is well respected as a clairvoyant, fortuneteller, and businessman, and it's possible this provided me with some level of additional protection from any prejudice or homophobia. Also my father was a well-known tap dancer within the community, and I admired his skills and the respect he gained as a result, from a very young age. Dance and musicality were part of my upbringing and integral to the community, the culture, and to my image of myself as I grew up.

I was not a confident speaker, and I had a speech impediment as a child. This caused me some difficulty in expressing myself, and dance became an effective way to communicate and a way to explore my own heritage and culture through movement. I knew from a young age that my strength was using my physicality and body to express myself, without relying upon speech, so it seemed an obvious step to embrace dance as my life and that of my people. My family and community have supported my ambitions, and my upbringing added perspectives, cultural references, and experiences that many other dance students simply did not have. Although many people on the Gypsy sites found it difficult to understand, I took up an offer to go to university to train as a contemporary dancer. Despite their puzzlement, I did not face any backlash or negativity from my own community; I never have. On the contrary, people have made me feel proud, celebrating my achievements as a dancer.

I have also never faced any backlash for coming out as a GAY man.

I remember thinking, "If my father could see me now!" while studying at the Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London. The teachers were all established and well known in the world of music, theatre, and dance. Some were from companies such as Adventures in Motion Pictures, DV8, Candoco Dance Company, and the Royal Ballet School. Others were attached to the Martha Graham Dance Company and Merce Cunningham Dance Company. I was working with some of the biggest names in contemporary dance, then going home to live on a Gypsy and Traveller site; the two worlds seemed unimaginably different.

I am a passionate advocate for Romani, Gypsy, and Traveller culture, not just because I am from that background and am proud of where I come from, but because Romani culture is rich in many ways. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people may not sometimes hold to ideas of a traditional education (often because of prejudice and discrimination parents experienced in their own schooling), but learning is part-and-parcel of Romani and Traveller culture all over the world, whether that means learning to mend a car engine and build fences, or dancing and playing musical instruments from a very young age (and many things in-between). "It's not all wagons and horses!" as a well-known Romani leader once said; he went on to become a mayor of a large town in Essex and Chairperson of the Gypsy Council for many years, as well as restoring and selling antiques. "Gypsies are real people, too," is a quote I hold dear.

The Romani Cultural & Arts Company

After some time working in television and on a variety of creative ventures, I needed something more community-focused and humanitarian to provide me with stability and a sense of making a positive impact. With support and seed funding for a rough idea, I set up a project with local Gypsy and Traveller primary school pupils in Wales. The first project was small in scale and short term, centred on taking culturally relevant dance, arts, and crafts onto the Gypsy site where I grew up. It was a resounding success and grew steadily. It was clear that the warm welcome this initiative received signaled an opportunity to do more, so I gathered support to submit further bids for funding that aimed to establish a charity. My vision was based upon the power of the arts to enable community change and facilitate development.

The Romani Cultural and Arts Company (RCAC) was formed in September 2009 as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee (No. 07005660) and is a registered charity (No. 1138150). Working through the arts, the RCAC raises funds to take community development and educational projects onto Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller sites and into non-Gypsy communities across Wales. A recent Arts Council of Wales report cited the significance and high quality of the work that the RCAC carries out with Gypsies and Travellers.[3] In the review, the writers noted, "This review has uncovered nothing but praise for Isaac Blake – his work is universally acknowledged by academics, Gypsies, Travellers, politicians, public bodies

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3 See online: http://romaniarts.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Beyond-the-Stereotypes.pdf

and international organisations. This is a unique, Welsh-based company that should be supported in every possible way."

All the RCAC's projects and programmes build capacity from within the community so that Community Champions can go on to develop initiatives themselves. The arts projects on caravan sites develop children's social skills, raise self-esteem, and encourage participation across the two distinct ethnic groups who live on them: Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Our projects for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller artists provide a structured programme and platform for them to showcase their work and become known in the wider world of arts and culture. Our women-only on-site projects support women to become more resilient in the face of social isolation, more interdependent and confident in standing on their own feet, and in liaising with agencies and public services.

The groundbreaking work of the RCAC is widely documented on the website, which displays a wealth of talent and experience across Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. This includes profiles of many proud LGBT Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers; among them are William Bila, Chris Lee, David Tišer, Daniel Baker, Dezső Máté, Gianni Jovanovic, and László Farkas.[4] The charity is proud of our community and the hard work that many community members carry out, as advocates and champions, ensuring that the colourful and vibrant heritage and culture of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers continues.

RCAC is a Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community development organisation at heart; it is led by Gypsies and Travellers, about Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers, and for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers. We believe that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities can become fully acknowledged and active participants in mainstream society, while still retaining their distinct culture and heritage. Our mission statement is simple: racism is born of ignorance and poverty; the RCAC exists to promote a better understanding of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller culture and history, within and beyond these communities.

Our work, which initially centred on supporting young children through the arts, has developed over 12 years into something far broader in reach and impact. As we are Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller-led, we have a strong bond and trust with our communities, stable and consistent in the support of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers. The drive for greater inclusion, tolerance, and understanding between the mainstream community and the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community is critical to our work. As a result, RCAC sits on a number of national forums such as the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association, the Wales Race Forum, and the Cross Party Group for Gypsies and Travellers of the Welsh National Assembly.

There have been so many thresholds passed and hurdles jumped to reach what has been achieved so far. It cannot be done alone, and the RCAC is proud to have a range of partners and Community Champions from across the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community. Many of these champions are LGTBQI. Chris Lee is an example of one of our LGBTQI Community Champions who has become a strong advocate for both the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities of Wales and the LGBTQI community. She became known

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4 See online: http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/profiles

to the charity through a partner, and due to her Romani heritage she took on a significant volunteering and paid consultancy role, working across many different projects.

Chris Lee is a Lesbian Romani Gypsy woman. In 2015, she represented the RCAC and Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers in Wales at a Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller LGBT conference in Prague. This historic international conference highlighted and explored the many challenges facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Romani and Traveller people in Europe and elsewhere. The programme included presentations and discussions on international and European rights and standards, in relation to discrimination, and how national legislation impacts upon the lives of LGBT Romani people in the Czech Republic, Spain, Slovakia, and UK.

Chris also represented the RCAC and the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community in Wales, at an event with Rainbow Pilgrims, an organisation that focuses on the Rites and Passages of LGBTQI migrants in the Britain.[5] Rainbow Pilgrims was a landmark project that discovered the hidden history of LGBTQI migrants in the UK in the past and present. The project covered the period from the first Jewish *Kindertransports* to Britain (1938–1940) to today. Rainbow Pilgrims explored the narratives around rites and passages, documenting the interconnection among faith, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity, by using oral history, film, and photography. Rainbow Pilgrims culminated in a touring exhibition and pop-up events, a symposium, cutting-edge learning tools, and an archive collection. This collection was the first source of LGBT and migration in a faith context in Britain.

Chris represented the RCAC and GRT communities in Wales, once again at the Second International Roma LGBT Conference in Prague, 11–12 August 2016. Chris also attended the "Prague Pride Parade" on 13 August. The important exchange of information and lively debate among the delegates resulted in the drafting of a *Roma LGBTQI Prague Declaration* by 28 representatives of Romani LGBTQI professional associations, civil society, and academia. Chris then represented the RCAC in Budapest and at a follow-up meeting of the Roma LGBTQI Conference, held in Strasbourg in June 2017. This important event was organised and funded by the Council of Europe. Representatives of several European countries, including the UK, participated in training designed to mobilise communities and further establish networks.

Many Romani LGBTQI people remain invisible and conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important that more confident Gypsies, such as Chris Lee and myself, be visible and proud for the sake of others. The LGBTQI movement itself does not always prove inclusive and responsive enough to the needs of LGBTQI people belonging to minority ethnic groups. The stigma they face has a detrimental impact on their life chances. The cultural clash between sexual orientation and gender identity, on the one hand, and Romani traditions and societal expectations, on the other, place LGBTQI Romani people at the intersection of discrimination.

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5 See online: https://www.rainbowpilgrims.com/rainbow-pilgrims-symposium-photostory

The Romani Cultural & Arts Company was very proud to hold the first Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller LGBTQI International Conference in the UK on 4 July 2019 at the *Senedd* – the National Assembly of Wales. The event featured an international selection of speakers, including activists, academics, artists, and Community Champions focusing on the current and historic experience of GRT LGBTQI people and the future possibilities for improving equality and opportunity across our communities. The Romani Cultural & Arts Company gratefully acknowledged the Welsh government for supporting this important event.

As an organisation, we have a track record of delivering high-quality international conferences on a variety of GRT-related issues and topics. Since 2009, we have organised seven symposiums focused on political and social issues as well as the LGBTQI agenda. We always have excellent attendance, and many sectors, as well as our own community, are well represented and have their say. We are proud to be the voice of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers and to stand up for their rights.

We have achieved so much over the first twelve years of operation, and we have grand plans for the future. We believe we are unique as an organisation and that our potential and that of our community has not yet been reached. It is so important that Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers; particularly LGTBQI, have visibility and use this visibility to be positive role models for others. I am proud to be a Gay Romani Gypsy. I feel excited by what the future may hold and excited by the opportunities being a GAY Romani Gypsy will bring me in the upcoming years.