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Romani Aesthetic(s) – self- and external representation

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Approaches to a “new” World Literature

Romani Literature(s) as (re-)writing and self-empowerment

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Herausgegeben von
Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf
und Kirsten von Hagen

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Lorely French and Marina Ortrud Hertrampf

Introductory Reflections on Romani Literature(s) as Engaged World Literature

I write
because of the flight of the black birds
which circle around us again and again,
because of the hidden sky,
because of the crying child.

I write to note our lives,
so that we may remember
with a spark of love
the scent of our existence,
so that together we may
describe the desolate places of oblivion.

So that we may revive the days gone by,
the sleeping souls,
so that we may remember
our ancestors.

So that we may rouse from sleep
the forgotten past,
that I carry in my chest.

– That is why I write.

Russo (2022, 30)

Ruždija Russo Sejdović's poem, originally written in Romani, is translated into Serbo-Croatian,[1] German, and English (see the print of all four versions following these introductory words) and shows the importance of translations for the circulation of literary works, as many Romani literary works remain hidden from people in the majority society.[2]

In the context of post-colonialism and globalization, the question of globality has become increasingly important in socio-historical and geo-

[1] The author translated his poem himself into Serbo-Croatian, the majority language of his childhood and youth in Montenegro, which was then part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

[2] On the author, see Zahova (2018).

political debates in recent decades. The idea of world literature, however, is a very old one, which can be traced back at least to Goethe and his famous letter to Eckermann of 31 January 1827. The notion of *Weltliteratur* (world literature), which the German writer conceived from the observation that the same texts circulate throughout the world, raises the question about the scope of history. It is indeed a notion that powerfully challenges the national framework that generally organizes the writing of literary history and that also allows other frameworks of thought, such as those of European literature, to be complexified and enriched.

David Damrosch, in his pioneering work *What is World Literature?* (2003) confronts the established canon of European "masterpieces" implied in Goethe's perception of world literature. Rather than looking at world literature as a canonical body of texts, Damrosch presents world literature as a way of circulation, reading, and reception. Focusing on texts outside the European frame of reference, from the Sumerians to the Aztecs, and across historical and literary periods, from medieval to postmodern, he expands the concept of "masterpieces" to include established classics and new discoveries that move and intersect transculturally and transnationally.

Damrosch, unfortunately, does not include any examples from Roma literatures. And yet, Roma literature is per se transnational and transcultural: the fact that Roma literatures, like the Roma themselves, often refer to one and the same Indian "imaginary homeland" (Rushdie 1991, 10), but live diasporically (Hertrampf 2020), always gives their literature a transnational character. Transgession is thus an identity-forming element of a kind of literature that is multilingual and heterogeneous in every respect.

For Roma, writing is always a political act (Toninato 2014): a rebellion of the subalterns (Spivak 1995) who want to draw attention to the reality of their lives and the painful past of their ethnic group. Sejdović's poem also bears witness to this when he writes of the flight of "the black birds", referring to the oppressive feeling of exclusion, discrimination, and oppression and referring to the intergenerational trauma of the Porjamos, which is perpetuated primarily due to the lack of perception and reappraisal by the majority society, but also due to their own daily experience of discrimination and exclusion and stigmatization.

Roma literature is always socially and politically engaged literature. Its authors see themselves as the voice of their unheard community, ex-

plicitly addressing the majority society, as Anina Ciuciu does in *Je suis tzigane et je le reste* (*I'm a Gypsy and I Remain One*, 2013):

> Ma vie et celle de mes racines furent, sont et resteront un éternel combat contre l'injustice et les préjugés […]. Et si aujourd'hui je vis en France, pays des droits de l'homme, mon combat – mon sacerdoce –, comme celui de mes proches, est quotidien, pour gommer notre soi-disant différence avec les autres et pour que ce texte rédigé en 1789 par les Représentants du Peuple français soit respecté à notre égard. […] Pour eux, pour le peuple rom souvent méconnu, mais tellement décrié, j'ai donc voulu raconter mon histoire pour que tout le monde comprenne que, dans nos yeux, il y a de l'amour et de l'espoir, que nous ne voulons pas être rejetés ou plaints, mais simplement compris. (Ciuciu/Veille 2013, 17–18)[3]

Thus, most works written by Romani authors express the strong ethical need for social responsibility and function as a non-polemic and non-propagandistic articulation of opinion, whether in the mode of consternation or in the mode of *prise de parole* ("speaking up").[4]

The mid-nineteenth century has been considered as the beginning of modern original Roma literature (Zahova 2021, 11). Thus, tracing the history of written Romani literature is still a relatively young field, and Romani literatures are still being defined and consolidated. As of today, in almost all countries where Roma live, authors of Romani background have been producing books and other publications in various languages, including Romany. In the decades since 1989 the number of books that authors of Romani background have published has increased. Likewise, the usage of Romani in books, translations, and periodical publications by and for Roma has also risen. Romani literary pieces share features that go beyond the borders of any one country or region. These circum-

---

[3] "My life and that of my roots was, is and will remain an eternal struggle against injustice and prejudice […]. And if today I live in France, the country of human rights, my fight – my vocation –, like that of my family, is daily, to erase our so-called difference with the others and so that this text written in 1789 by the Representatives of the French People is respected in our regard. […] For them, for the often misunderstood but much maligned Roma people, I wanted to tell my story so that everyone would understand that there is love and hope in our eyes, that we do not want to be rejected or pitied, but simply understood." (Ciuciu/Veille 2013, 17–18)

[4] On the topic of current engaged literature, see for example: Bouju (2005), Chaudet (2016), and Denis (2000).

stances allow us to speak of Romani literature, and even of Romani literatures in the plural form, as a heterogeneous and multifaceted, yet still a collective phenomenon.

One of the special features of this young literature is, on the one hand, that it is a multilingual diasporic world literature that very often could be characterized as engaged literature and tries to deconstruct different old stereotypes of the minority. On the other hand, it is striking that female authors play a prominent role: *Papusza* (Bronisława Wajs), a Romani woman, is generally considered to be the first Romni to make a name for herself as an author.[5]

It is conspicuously often female authors who achieve visibility with their texts on the national book markets. Some authors appear in their texts as committed feminists and/or human rights activists. For other authors, sexuality and gender play a less prominent role in their works. Additionally, women often also play a very central roles in texts by male authors.

Therefore, the aim of our volume is to explore the different facets of Romani Literatures in two interrelated axes. First, their status as transnational world literature will be discussed. Second, the significance of writing as a form of social engagement and self-empowerment will be examined. It will be shown that it is mainly women authors who speak out and stand up for their rights as women and Romnya. And when males do write, gender figures prominently as a topic.

Individually, the essays in the volume represent the wide diversity of topics, languages, countries, and authors that Romani literatures have assumed in the past three decades. The Roma writers and artists analyzed in the essays come from Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, and the United States. The languages of the places where they create and disseminate their works are English, German, French, Finland, Polish, Romany, and Spanish. This breadth proves that Roma are not "country-less," but rather, to borrow a phrase that Virginia Woolf applied to women, their "country is the whole world." (Woolf 1938, 197) While the works of the Roma discussed in this volume often relate to the geographical area from which they originate, they also transcend the local in their focus on topics that will resonate with scholars and laypeople alike worldwide. Those topics range from narratives on autobiographi-

[5] Recent research by Emilia Kledzik, however, has shown that Papusza probably did not write and market her verses herself (Kledzik 2023).

cal experiences, the role of the artist in the community, gender norms, witness testimonies of persecution during the Romani Holocaust/Porajmos/Samudaripen, and the "contact zones" (Pratt 2008) between Roma and non-Roma.

We are particularly honored to have the first essay be a piece of original literature by Oksana Marifioti, author of the bestselling novel *American Gypsy*. Having family roots in several geographical areas, she writes eloquently about the "borderlands" she has crossed into, by, and through and lived inside, outside, and beside. Her second sentence echoes Virginia Woolf's sentiments: "My entire life I belong to every neighborhood I've ever lived in and to no country" (see page 23 in this volume). Marifioti articulately blends theoretical observations by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa and Emma Patchett with honest reflections on writing about her family and Romani heritage. Her self-identification as "an *atlas*, a *patchwork*, a *tapestry*, a *land*" (see page 27 in this volume) offers the perfect segue to the essays that follow.

Ana Belén Martín Sevillano's essay is, indeed, a fitting follow-up to Marifioti's piece, presenting an analysis of *American Gypsy* along with Miky Walsh's *Gypsy Boy* as important writings about the trauma that two young Roma face in their private and public lives, albeit in different geographical and social situations. After providing important definitions of the genres of autobiography and memoir, Sevillano gives an overview of representative Romani autobiographical accounts produced in western Europe by authors born in the first quarter of the 20th century. While the trauma these writers of an older generation suffered under National Socialism often figures prominently in their works, authors of the younger generation (born after 1970) explore "the diverse, flexible, and complex condition of being Roma, contesting mainstream essentializing representations that still reproduce stereotypes and prejudices" (see page 34 in this volume). Surfacing clearly in their works are conflicts related to the "contact zones," a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt, summarized as "a shared space in which conflicting cultures clash but nonetheless, coexist and interact" (2008, 8).

Besides defining themes that occur in Roma literatures, literary scholars have also taken up the task of identifying aesthetic qualities that might characterize Roma literatures. Kirsten von Hagen's essay looks at the way in which Roma writers toy with the stereotypes and prejudices against Roma at the same time that they challenge them. She has developed the particular term of "mythis bricolage" to describe the mixture of genres

that characterizes three works: Sandra Jayat's novel *La longue route d'une zingarina* (*The Long Road of a Zingarina* (1978), Anina's programmatic self-quest *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* (*I am a Gypsy and I remain one*) (2013), and Miguel Haler's autofiction *Les mémoires d'un chat de gouttière* (*Memories of an alley cat*) (2011). Re-writing, re-interpreting, and re-performing in varying genres become tools for dissolving cultural and aesthetic boundaries.

Writing as a political act for Roma comes to the forefront in Martin Shaw's pioneering article on Uriah Burton's *Uriah Burton "Big Just": His Life, His Aims, His Ideals*. The compromises that Uriah Burton had to make when fighting for private caravan site provisions for "Romanies, Gypsies, Travelers, and people of no fixed abode" in the United Kingdom epitomize the ways in which the "contact zones" that affect writers aesthetically and thematically also affect them politically. Shaw's concludes that Uriah Burton did make a difference regarding improved caravan sites, regardless of the personal attacks on his personality and the processes he used to reach his goals.

The biofiction of Núria León de Santiago's *El ángel de Mahler* (*Mahler's Angel*) (2014) as a "paradigmatic example of contemporary world literature" is the subject of Marina Ortrud Hertrampf's essay. Marina Ortrud Hertrampf first cogently defines the hybrid genre of "biofiction," as coined by French critic Alain Buisine, namely as a succinct fitting term for "fictional biographies" or "biographical fictions." The subject of Núria León de Santiago's novel—a famous Jewish-Austrian musician—along with the author's own background as a Romni author epitomize, as Marina Ortrud Hertrampf states, "a world dialogue about overcoming the timeless theme of the powerlessness of minorities" (see page 93 in this volume).

Emilia Kledzik also focusses on Mary Pratt's notion of "contact zone" to interpret the stunning work of Polish artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Most exciting for this volume is the bridge that Emilia Kledzik builds between Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's visual images, the textual images promoted under the aegis of "Gypsy Studies" in the 18th and 19th centuries, and world literatures. Emilia Kledzik shows how Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's visual work *Re-Enchanting the World* reinterprets pejorative visual and textual images created by European ethnologists and historians of "Gypsy Studies". Małgorzata Mirga-Tas reinstates subjectivity, dignity, and agency to Roma affected negatively by such images. Such a constructively critical approach to the historical and artistic heritage of Roma proves

necessary to advance the socio-political engagement that has become a defining feature of other Romani authors and artists.

The second part of the volume, which focus on women's overwhelming presence in the realms of Romani literary and artistic production, begins with Florian Homann's fascinating look at the important roles that women played in the production of flamenco music, not only as singers, but as lyricists. The significant connection that Florian Homann makes between music production, textual creation, and performance adds yet another dimension to identifying Romani literatures as world literature. Florian Homann looks at Romnja performers who have sung about historical atrocities, thereby rewriting official historical documentation.

The multimedial work of Romnja surfaces especially in the extraordinary work of German Sintezza Philomena Franz and Austrian Lovara Ceija Stojka. Paola Toninato provides a clear and cogent exposé of both women's creations as writers and activists. As the two first women to write publicly about their horrific experiences as children in concentration camps under National Socialism, Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka represent the courage, resilience, and boldness necessary in the face of struggles for autonomy and self-expression. Their texts have become classics of world literature that break harmful stereotypes while promulgating images of hopeful social, political, literary, and artistic engagement for Roma communities.

Sidonia Bauer takes a close, unique look at the spaces that frame several texts by Sinti*zze/Manouche authors. In particular, Sidonia Bauer's analyzes the important gendered space that the horse-drawn living wagon assumed for these groups in the early 20th century. After presenting an overview of several texts, she focusses on those by German Sintizza Philomena Franz and the French Manouche Duville family. Although the wagon has in many ways become a stereotypical, overused image of the "wandering Gypsy", Romani perspectives on and descriptions of their wagons have received very little scholarly attention. Sidonia Bauer takes a sociopoetic approach based on theoretical writings of Lefebvre and Massey to analyze rich auto-representational literary texts.

Following Paola Toninato's and Sidonia Bauer's essays, Lorely French's essay analyzes in depth one particularly poignant story in Ceija Stojka's memoirs, namely, that of a "Kinderweihnachten" ("Children's Christmas Party") that occurred in 1944 in Ravensbrück concentration camp. In weaving together a close textual analysis of Ceija Stojka's story with sev-

eral other narratives by other women Ravensbrück inmates from several countries, French demonstrates the qualities of world literature that the stories possess. The piece shows the invaluable contributions that witness accounts by Roma offer and the necessity to listen to the voices of Roma, such as that of Ceija Stojka, and to consider the Romani concept of *baxt* when interpreting Stojka's interpretation of the event. French's article stresses the necessity of scholarship that combines precise historical documentation and close textual analysis.

The very act of writing is empowering, as Marina Ortrud Hertrampf's essay on the novel *Cuando callan las estrellas* (*When the stars are silent*) (2018) by Spanish author Sally Cortés Santiago demonstrates. It is especially gratifying to include the voices of younger generations in the essay collection, and Marina Ortrud Hertrampf's two essays in this volume complement each other in their interpretations of works by Núria León de Santiago and Sally Cortés Santiago. Whereas the subject of Núria León de Santiago's novel is a famous Austrian-Jewish composer, that of Sally Cortés Santiago is a young, strong, self-confident Romni. Sally Cortés Santiago's work thus seems more geared towards a popular readership, but, as Marina Ortrud Hertrampf successfully argues, that should not undermine the critical questioning of stereotypical images of Romani women that Sally Cortés Santiago accomplishes. One should also not ignore the empowerment that Romnja gain through writing works that reach the arena of world literatures.

The final essay by Viola Parente-Čapková on Kiba Lumberg's literary works encapsulates many of the thematic and aesthetic characteristics of Roma literatures that have surfaced in other essays in this volume. Kiba Lumberg has also worked in a multimedial arena as a writer, artist, and activist. Her texts represent a variety of genres and are highly autobiographical as they highlight topics of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and identity politics. Viola Parente-Čapková undertakes a multifaceted, intersectional analysis Kiba Lumberg's latest novel, *Irtiottoxxx* (2018). While the novel presents a highly critical view of the position of the artist, and especially the aging female artist, within cultural institutions and in society in general, it does end in a kind of feminist utopia.

With these descriptions of the individual essays, we want to describe the flow that moves from one to other. We do want to acknowledge, however, that working within the understanding of the disparate, diverse nature of the texts also raises particular editorial difficulties. A main concern that we editors had when preparing the final manuscripts

for publication relates to terminology. First, we use the term "Roma" to refer to the entire ethnic group, which includes many sub-groups, such as Lovara, Manouche, Sinti*zze, etc. In the spirit of diversity, we allow latitude in accepting what the individual scholars and authors wish to use, for example, Rom*nja and Sinti*zze, to show gender inclusivity. As Gadje, we strive to avoid what Margareta Matche identifies as "the use of fixed, racialized, harmful signifiers like *Tsigan* [...] and *Gypsy*, knowing that the Gadje imposed them on false and rigid symbols and markers" (Matche 2017). When such terms are used in historical contexts, we have thus used quotation marks to signify those contexts, as with the use of "Zigeuner" or "Gypsy" under National Socialism. In the cases of specific communities or sub-groups who prefer to employ this terminology, we have treated the terms as such and not, as Matche states "to advance a global *Gypsy* identity that is involuntary, reactive, and imposed" (Matche 2017). Likewise, we allow American and European scholars to conform to their own conventions of spelling and punctuation.

In the end, we want to recognize the fecundity of Romani literatures and accomplishments within the framework of Romani literary and artistic creation as the kind of shift that Matche identifies for Romani scholarly production:

> We are, I would say, facing a stringent need to shift the frameworks of thought and Romani scholarly production from Roma vulnerability to white privileges, from participation and achievement gaps to opportunity gaps, from poverty to perpetual institutionalized racism, and finally from integration of the Roma to the means of liberating non-Roma from long-held racist *doxa* or commonly held beliefs. (Matche 2016)

As editors, we are most proud to present a volume of essays grounded in profound theoretical concepts, close textual analysis, and rigorous historical inquiry. We are thankful to all the authors for their enriching contributions. We also thank Hayden Christensen for assisting in editing the final manuscript, supported by a Summer Undergraduate Research and Creative Inquiry grant from Pacific University. We know and hope, however, that this is not a definitive, comprehensive collection of essays on Romani literatures. If anything, the essays prove that the sky is the limit when exploring the limitless world of Romani literatures.

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Ruždija Russo Sejdović

Me ramosarav

Me ramosarav
sebet o urjape e kale ćiriklěnqo,
so savaxt utrijal amende trujin,
sebet o guravdo devlikanipe
sebet o rovarrdo ćhavorro.

Me ramosarav
amaro trajo te lekhavav,
kolesa te śaj
ciknorre kamipasa
pe sung amare trajimasqo das
amen godi,
te śaj khetanes
E kahrune thana amare
nakhlimasqo Lekhavas.

Te śaj e nakhle divesa pale thaj
pale ʒuvdaras,
E sute vogă,
te šaj das amen godi
Pe amare papura.

Te śaj
andar o sovipe mrtik las
o bistarrdo nakhlipe,
so ando brek ingarav.

– Sebet kova ramosarav me.

Ja pišem

Ja pišem
zbog leta crnih ptica,
što i dalje oko nas kruže,
zbog skritog neba
zbog uplakanog djeteta.

Ja pišem
naš život da zapišem
Da bismo se
sa žiškom ljubavi
mirisa našeg postojanja sjetili,
Da bismo zajedno
neutješna stratišta prošlosti opisali.

Da bismo dane naše prošlosti
opet oživjeli,
uspavane duše,
Da bismo se prisjetili
Naših prađedova.

Da bismo
iz sna otrgli
zaboravljenu prošlost,
Koju u nrdrima teglim

– Zbog toga pišem ja.

Ruždija Russo Sejdović

Ich schreibe …

Ich schreibe
wegen des Flugs der schwarzen
Vögel,
welche immer wieder um uns
kreisen,
wegen des verborgenen Himmels
wegen des weinenden Kindes.

Ich schreibe um unser Leben zu
notieren,
damit wir uns
mit einem Funken Liebe
an den Geruch unseres Daseins
erinnern,
damit wir zusammen
die trostlosen Orte der
Vergessenheit beschreiben.

Damit wir die vergangenen Tage
neu beleben,
die schlafenden Seelen,
damit wir uns erinnern
an unsere Vorfahren.

Damit wir aus dem Schlaf reißen
die vergessene Vergangenheit,
die ich in der Brust trage.

– Darum schreibe ich.

I write …

I write
because of the flight of the black
birds
which circle around us again and
again,
because of the hidden sky,
because of the crying child.

I write to note our lives,
so that we may remember
with a spark of love
the scent of our existence,
so that together we may
describe the desolate places of
oblivion.

So that we may revive the days
gone by,
the sleeping souls,
so that we may remember
our ancestors.

So that we may rouse from sleep
the forgotten past,
that I carry in my chest.

– That is why I write.

I. Transnational Writing As New World Literature

Oksana Marafioti

Borderlands

I am land.

With age, features shift, the soil of me curves and rises and bares new formations. My entire life I belong to every neighborhood I've ever lived in and to no country. I've been called a hybrid, a half-breed, a bastard, a crossbreed—one word echoes with others, and all are true and none are true enough. Writer Gloria Anzaldúa once said, "Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory… where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[1]

I am borderlands.

A patchwork of cultures grows crops inside me, and as most mixed people, I have become a resolute farmer. Most days, when someone asks about my ethnicity, I choose the shrewdest answer; a response that will prompt the other to smile in good humor. I want to read a face that won't punch me in the face or harm or ridicule me for my roots. I want validation, connection. As we are different people occupying a territory of a single body, gauging the safest answer is an artform only we crossbreeds truly know.

If the asker is Azerbaijanian, for example, I'll be cautious not to say I'm Armenian. Our bloody history is just that, history to me, but in self-preservation I'll say I'm Ukrainian, instead—a neutral alternative even if my fear is unfounded, even if the asker is empathy-full. But in the company of a Ukrainian, I can never admit to that tiny spark of Russian blood from Anna, the great-grandmother on my father side. At least not now when another war tears lifelines into scraps. That graceful slender lady who gave me a handful of her genes must hide. With a Russian, it's a crapshoot. If they hear my maiden name, Kopylenko, they'll know immediately that I'm tainted with Ukrainian blood. Never mind that my Ukrainian grandfather and his Romani band entertained Soviet soldiers on the frontline and sometimes carried messages between partisan

[1] Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942–2004) was an author, intellectual and activist who made a name for herself in her autobiographical work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), about social and cultural marginalization as a Chicana.

camps. Never mind that the Nazis broke his nose, his, ribs, his legs, killed his brother. My Ukrainian last name is a dishonorable discharge.

Rurik, the Varangian prince who sailed down from Scandinavia in 862, colonizing the land between the Baltic and the Black Seas, would have something to say about this aversion. When he established Kievan Rus, he didn't discriminate between the Northern or the Southern S/slaves; all were devoured in equal measure. Unfortunately, he's long dead. Left the rest of us parsing out the land even now. Land that will bury us all one day, turn us into weeds.

Who's more authentic, a Russian or a Ukrainian? Sit them down and let them sing the tales of their grandparents' valiant acts during WWII. But just two generations later, they ask—who deserves to live? Whose children should run down fields without detonating explosives? The two factions will have to fight it out, they think, but in my borderlands, the Russian and the Ukrainian have long accepted they are braided into my DNA, drawn into my identity with atoms.

In Russian and Ukrainian company, mixed or not, friends or strangers, I must decide how to present the Armenian in me, if I must, and I often must—they never accept my presence without questions. They squint aslant, body language in inquiry of my ethnic denomination. What's your value in this company, the bodies demand to know. Between their inquiry and my answer, I divine their response based on countless others: 'Ah, those Armenian men,' they might exclaim. 'Always rutting after our women, never working a decent day. Good for little, stupid, those Armenians with their simple women'. At a party a few years back, after learning of my Armenian ancestry, a friend remarked that I must think the crystal champagne glasses fancy since I most probably drink champagne from paper cups. Never mind that Armenia is one of the oldest countries in the world, and at its height stretched between the Caspian, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. History is irrelevant. Dignity conditional. To leverage my worth, I add that I'm Greek-Armenian (see how I place Greek first?). Well, that produces a collective nod of respect. Plato, Socrates, George Michael. Who doesn't love a good Greek?

In the presence of a real Greek, my Greek self is diluted so much that they will comment only on my features and in passing. Language lands a body an identity, and since I don't speak Greek, I am a disembodied Greek at best. I can only ever be one in a sense, by implication. My features are the only place they see a ghost of belonging.

During World War I, survivors of the ongoing Greek genocide flooded the Armenian Highlands. Soon the land was strewn with Greek villages. That's where my own Greek story begins. In 1917, while fleeing a band of Ottoman soldiers with her family, my great-grandmother Angelee made a heartbreaking decision. They'd been traveling South for days, rickety wagons bumping down unfamiliar country roads, when a word reached from those following miles back that the soldiers were gaining. In desperation, Angelee, who'd been breastfeeding her youngest, jumped off the wagon, rushed to a clump of trees and hid the baby—my grandpa Melenti—in the tall grass, praying that at least he would escape impending death. The next day and miles later, a distant relative caught up with Angelee's wagon and handed her the baby. That deed is why I am alive. The family settled in a village they named *Hankavahn*, where generations of Greeks would become known as Greek—Armenians. The Greek in me belongs to that story and to that family of farmers: my great-grandparents, Yakim and Angeli and their eight children—Grigori, Lavrenti, Konstantin, Michail, Olgha, Anna, Tamara, and Melenti.

In her essay "Corpus Cartography", Emma Patchett (2013) defines diasporic identity as "the disjunction between the dis/location of identity and the unstable territories of origins." Neither here nor there and yet in several cultural identities at once, I am constantly adjusting, negotiating how intimate the spaces within me grow. I am sometimes disjointed and at other times fused with the identities I hold. A map of my ancestry is imprinted on my bones. Shapes form in my internal borderlands.

Gloria Anzaldúa says that borderlands produce people she calls *mestiza*—mixed people, suspended between cultures, "fully accepting—and fully accepted by—neither."

Don't I wish that sentence had a kinder resolution.

"Fully accepting and fully accepted by all."

What happens when a mixed person wants to accept the languages she speaks? When identity is a kaleidoscope—full of colored glass contained within a tool? There's something in my blood that maps the languages I walk in search of acceptance. In Russian, I know resilience and good people who saved me from death more than once. I know Gogol and how to not get caught in a blizzard. In Ukrainian, I hear my grandma say to my grandpa, 'I would give anything for a pot of your Borsh right now,' before they step onto the stage, hand in hand. In Armenian, I am a sister to every stranger in need "*khirik djan*" *(dear sister)*, and my bumpy childhood, cradled in the warmth of the Armenian Highlands, is res-

cued. In Romani, my heart is never too far away from my family's music or suffering, and I'm desperate to be understood.

By far, the trickiest part of me to introduce to anyone is that Romani Oksana. Before I outed myself as a mixed Romani woman in my memoir, I seldom revealed that parcel in my borderlands. Every time it felt like getting lost in the woods at night—Chances are you won't make it, chances are the wolves will eat you first. For decades, the Romani in me grew weeds. We all carry secrets inside us like a bag of seeds, picking who's allowed to see one depending on how generous or safe we feel. On occasion, the secret seed buds of its own will. Not everything is in our control, certainly not nature.

Oh, the most conflicted I ever was, when I started writing about my Romani heritage. With my parents' blessing, I wrote about a life I hid for so long that at first it felt alien. Curious things happened in those days. I cried all the time, something I seldom had done before. Once, I was sitting at my desk writing about the death of a Romani boy—my first love—when my body stilled, as if my organs and blood halted like a clock. I turned around and saw myself standing in the doorway. These dissociative episodes ended only after I finished the book. The shell of my Romani identity, protected for years by an outer shell of others, cracked. A delicate stem peeked out. A Romani ghost of me walked the house for a little while after.

Evolution is never easy.

Maybe that's why mine took the form of a book, followed the sentenced landscapes and walked them with a reader.

For the longest time I resented my parents for robbing me of my Roma roots, for refusing to teach me the language, for infusing me with blood shame. There they were, fully clothed in Romani stage costumes, singing and dancing in front of thousands. Here I was, a kid at school packed with peach-skinned Russian kids, fist-fighting my way through the formation of my identity, confused and so angry.

Here I was, in my thirties, writing a memoir, growing new skin of an identity long neglected.

Until then, I didn't understand my family's unwavering belief that admitting to being Romani was a dangerous endeavor. As their stories unfolded under my fingers, I slowly saw the face of terror looming over the life my stage family had to constantly negotiate into being.

In Nazi Germany, the most malevolent and dangerous entity that ever lived was a mixed "Gypsy." At the commencement of WWII, Heinrich

Himmler declared that mixed “Gypsies” were the most likely to have criminal proclivities, and later two Danish sociologists, Gudrun Brun and Eric Bartels, wrote, “The pure gypsies present no great problem, if only we realise that their mentality does not allow of their admittance to the well-ordered general society…the mixed gypsies cause considerably greater difficulty.” (Bartels/Brun 1943, 5)

History shows us that being mixed is a curse. A byproduct of miscegenation, we are a nuisance to those who suckle on the dried teat of purity. By virtue of our birth, we are unlawful and undeserving of acceptance. We are always fighting to establish the one thread in our ancestral tapestry that possesses the truest hew or the desired qualities. We learn early to pick the perfect identity and disregard the rest.

And yet, nature itself wastes nothing. Nature is seeds and genes ordered in infinite combinations to make up every material thing in life’s soil. The things we can’t see, we make up stories about. In that way, even the intangible has use. The very nature of us all in an accurate manner is a hodgepodge, a mixed race, a multi-breed, a fusion. Like nature, the borderlands of me are a host to many selves. I am called many names: a half breed, a hybrid, multiracial, biracial, mixed race as if my races are the only thing that give me value. But I don’t want to be any of those things. I am a*n atlas,* a *patchwork,* a *tapestry, a land.*

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Ana Belén Martín Sevillano

Representing the Romani Self: Trauma in Autobiographical Narratives

Abstract

Romani literature comprises texts produced in different languages, countries, and distinct communities. Recently, it has transitioned from its traditional oral formulation to the written modality. This transition has been connected to an increased participation of Roma in the social sphere and the development of the Romani ethnopolitical agenda. Deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices is one of the tenets of this agenda, and this entails producing new representations of the Romani subject and presenting reasons as to why Roma have been depicting their own experiences and subjectivities in autoreferential texts. Given the history of oppression that Roma have endured, trauma is one of the main themes authors address when considering their own life. This essay explores how trauma was initially represented in autobiographical accounts by a first generation of Romani writers, and continues to be an important subject in contemporary texts. In particular, the analysis will focus on *Gypsy Boy* by Mikey Walsh, and *American Gypsy* by Oksana Marafioti.

1. On Romani Literature and the Process of Self-Representation

As a social process, the making of Romani literature is connected to the expansion of the ethnopolitical movement that has been developed in the last few decades. In this sense, Romani literature could be certainly considered a *resistance literature* (Harlow 1987, xvii), an artistic tool in which Roma review their history of persecution and marginality, as well as their past and present position in the hegemonic order, while looking into their lives and their materiality. Putting forward new and organic depictions of Romani subjectivities and identities is a crucial element in the ethnopolitical agenda, and a prevalent trait in cultural production. In particular, literary practice teems with self-representation through

different literary modalities or genres, such as autobiography/memoirs, testimony and autofiction.[1] This essay focuses on standard autobiography and memoirs; these two genres are very similar, but while the first considers the narrator's life as a whole, the second focuses on a specific period that holds special significance in the narrator's life or in history (Trezise 2013, 25). Testimony is also an autobiographical account, but differs from standard autobiography/memoir due to its writing and compositional process, which will be considered below. In contrast, autofiction is a fictional account with autobiographical components, such as the projection of the author's identity and experiences in the main character. *Goddam Gypsy* (1971) by Ronald Lee (1934–2020) or *Füstös Képek* (1975), translated into English as *The Color of Smoke*, by Menyhért Lakatos (1926–2007), are well known Romani autofictional novels, but analysis of these works exceeds the scope of this work.

This essay opens with an overview of representative Romani autobiographical accounts produced in Western Europe by authors born in the first quarter of the 20th century. These have been considered precursors or fore parents in Romani Literature(s), and their work reveals the transition from oral to written textualities. Subsequently, the analytical second part of this essay will focus on two contemporary autobiographies written by authors born in the last quarter of the 20th century: *Gypsy Boy* (2009) by Mikey Walsh (1980), and *American Gypsy* (2012) by Oksana Marafioti (1974). The selection of these two books adheres to the fact that they offer a new perspective on Romani identity and subjectivity by considering the particular experiences of singular individuals who grew up in the context of the Romani culture. They are not, as previous Romani autobiographical accounts, representations of experiences shared by other members of the community. However, the analysis offered in this essay considers how the narrative of trauma, which is indeed key in Romani literatures, is embedded in these autobiographical accounts.

Autobiographies and memoirs are non-fiction narratives in which the instances of author, narrator, and main character correspond to the same subject. The narrator presents in first person a selection of life experiences organized in a coherent sequence that usually has a departing

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[1] This essay is part of the research project "Depicting the Racialized Self: Autobiographical Narratives in Romani Literature(s)", which explores the different types of autobiographical narratives (mainly autobiography/memoir, testimony, and auto-fiction) that Roma have published to date.

point in the past. From there, the narrative goes into the future, often reaching the present, in which author/narrator is located during the writing process. Following Lejeune (1975), autobiographies imply a tacit pact between author and reader. The label "autobiography" simultaneously conveys an understanding of truth and a given horizon of expectations about the narrative. It implicitly guarantees that all depicted events actually took place, and that the narrator/character experienced them firsthand, unless otherwise specified. The pact extends to the characters, presumed portrays of real people the narrator knew. The reader expects to learn about a series of meaningful events in which the main character had an active role or that had an enduring effect on them. However, as a literary genre, autobiography deploys strategies and devices that modify, interpret, or adapt reality. These devices are internalized by the reader, who assumes them as organic to the narrative. An example of this could be the meticulous description of events, feelings, or objects that belong to the narrator's past (sometimes reaching decades back), and that could not be remembered in such detail. In fact, no reader would expect to find in an autobiographical text a representation of the actual memory process, filled with gaps and uncertainty. Furthermore, this remembrance is a fictional process inasmuch as the narrator recreates these memories in their mind, projecting the image they have now of who they were in the past. This image is necessarily informed by the present and by what happened to the narrator before that. The first step of fictionalization in any autobiographical account happens in the mind's eye of the subject who remembers. This remembering is not random but driven by its textual representation. Autobiographies are aesthetic products; creative writing implies a considerable degree of engineering that points out that any autobiographical account presents a fictional dimension (de Man 1979).

As a literary genre autobiography shifted in the 20th century, when marginalized groups appropriated it and, by telling their lives, questioned the principles of domination and authority implicit in traditional autobiographies. These autobiographies by marginalized groups usually offer what appears to be a seamless recollection of the past: a subject looks back into their life and presents it to the reader as a meaningful process. However, this recollection is not a linear process; events and experiences are not simply recalled but selected following a line of reasoning that the narrator (the subject who recalls) is pursuing. This narrative reason is informed by the present, the location from where the author/narrator decides what should be remembered and what not, and what

can be retold not just in the context of the present, but also considering as well who the reader might be. This collection of memories is therefore to be arranged into a sequence that will be translated into a text, adjusting to an aesthetic editing process. Gergen & Gergen point out how narratives of the self are social constructions in which authors attempt to make themselves intelligible (1988, 17–19); this intelligibility is twofold: for the self (narrator) and for the other. Romani autobiographies are unique in the sense that they depict lives that had rarely been written from a perspective of Roma themselves. Implicitly, they are read against a long tradition of representations and narratives that have reduced, stereotyped, and generally misconstrued Roma and their ways of life. This double dimension is well-defined in the autobiographies studied in this essay: narrators explain themselves as Roma, but also as singular individuals with unique experiences, many of them traumatic.

2. Trauma in Romani Autobiographical Narratives (Testimony and Autobiography)

In the context of their traditional oral culture, Roma have produced a rich oral textuality that reflected, among other topics, on traumatic experiences. Trauma is embedded in the Romani cultural and collective memories. The narrative of trauma has been instrumental in educating the new generations about their past in order to understand their present and prepare for their future. The Romani autobiographical accounts that emerged at the end of the 20th century in Western Europe considered in particular the radical trauma inflicted on Roma by the Nazi Holocaust (Grobbel 2003, 142; Blandfort 2013, 111). These works contained information about domestic or cultural practices that highlight the narrator/characters' ethnic identity, which is the very reason of their persecution. These texts sit in a hybrid zone due to their literary, historical, and political quality, but also because they are often a bridge between oral and written textuality. One of the first Romani Holocaust survivors who wrote a memoir about her experiences in the concentration camps was Philomena Franz (1922–2022), whose work was published in 1985 with the title of *Zwischen Liebe und Haß: Ein Zigeunerleben* [Between Love and Hate: A Gypsy Life]. A number of these autobiographical accounts were not written by the authors themselves, and in terms of literary genre, they are not a standard autobiography, but a testimony. For example, this

would be the case of *Das Brennglas* (1998)—translated into English as *A Gypsy in Auschwitz*—by Otto Rosenberg (1927–2001), and of the series of autobiographical works by Ceija Stojka (1933–2013): *Wir Leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeuner* (1988), *Reisende auf dieser Welt: Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (1992), and *Träume ich, dass ich lebe? Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen* (2005)—respectively translated into English as *We live in Secrecy: Memoirs of a Romni-Gypsy*; *Travelers in This World: From the Life of a Romni-Gypsy*; and *Am I Dreaming I'm Alive? Liberated from Bergen-Belsen*.

As in standard autobiography, in testimony the narrative is related to life experiences, and the pact of truth is still a given, but the triad author/narrator/main character is compromised by the fact that the author/narrator is not the actual person writing. In testimony there is a collaborator that has a major impact in the articulation and edition of the narrative. This impact is more extensive than any editorial work performed on autobiographies. The life narrative is usually not directly produced by the narrator but conducted in response to a number of questions that the collaborator has crafted beforehand and that follow a particular logic. Therefore, the narrative is somehow directed by these questions that, more often than not, are left out of the final manuscript. The oral narrative is affected by the person who asks and listens in order to register it later, and also by the circumstances in which the exchange happens. At the same time, the collaborator inevitably interprets the oral narrative in the context of their own culture and experience, which are embedded in the written representation. Finally, the manuscript will follow the same process that any other literary product does, adjusting to variables and interests (those of the author, the collaborator, and the publishing house).

There is one last fundamental difference between autobiography and testimony. In the first, authors speak for themselves about themselves. In the case of Romani autobiographies, authors usually consider their ethnic identity within the group to which they belong, but they reflect about very specific experiences they encountered as individuals. The very fact of writing an autobiography conveys a position of authority, and usually these authors are writers that have other publications that are not necessarily autobiographical writings. Conversely, testimonial narrative focuses on events that were common to the group to which the narrator belongs and on behalf of which she is speaking. Sometimes this collec-

tive subject is indicated in the titles, as it is the case of some of Ceija Stojka's writings.

Contemporary to Franz, Rosenberg, and Stojka, French author Mateo Maximoff (1917–1999) wrote about his life as a young adult during the German occupation of France in his memoirs, *Routes sans roulottes* [Roads without caravans] (1993). Maximoff's writing employs a number of strategies that belong to oral textuality, such as abundant use of dialogue, colloquial style or a compositional logic that follows the plot, inserting constant digressions and allusions. This literary practice implicitly confronts many of the precepts that have prevailed in the literary field. Maximoff's work, as other Romani productions from the same period, embodies the notion of resistance literature not only because its content confronts ethnic oppression, but also because it simultaneously defies standards of the canonic literary methodology (Harlow 1987, xvi), such as the sequential organization of content, the selection of a given representation strategy, or a specific literary style depending on the targeted audience, etc., which in turn poses an obstacle for its mainstream publication.

3. The Contact Zone in Ethnic Autobiography

These initial autobiographical works opened the path for younger contemporary Romani writers (born after 1970) that entered the literary field at the inception of the 21st century. These younger authors show a clear interest in representing the diverse, flexible, and complex condition of being Roma, contesting mainstream essentializing representations that still reproduce stereotypes and prejudices. Their work develops solid literary characters whose life experiences are depicted in the context of the Romani cultures (practices, values, and beliefs), cleverly crisscrossing trauma and culture as predominant thematic traits.

This essay explores these new representations of the Romani self through a comparative reading of *Gypsy Boy*[2] *by Mikey Walsh, and American Gypsy*[3] by Oksana Marafioti, published in 2009 and 2012 respectively. At that time, the Romani movement had reached some social

[2] Hereafter GB in all references.

[3] Hereafter AG in all references.

visibility that coincided with a popular interest in Roma and their ways of life. A telling example of this interest was the British show My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, a one-off production aired in 2010. Its success had it expanded into two series, a number of spin-offs, and an American version, My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding, premiered in 2012. That same year, the American National Geographic channel aired another reality show, American Gypsies, that depicted the domestic practices and customs of a well-established Romani family in New York (Pusca 2015, 340). The representation and content of these reality shows were controversial as they reinforced racial stereotypes and prejudices (Jensen/ Ringrose 2013).

Established publishing houses, such as those behind the editions of *Gypsy Boy* and *American Gypsy*, joined this mainstream curiosity for Roma and offered literary products that targeted a different audience than that of the reality shows. As the title of these two autobiographies suggest, the author/narrator/main character identifies primary as Rom(ni), conveying the ethnic character of their social identity. While these narratives are driven by the authors' ethnic consciousness and depict the new possibilities of being Rom(ni) they also hold ambiguities and conflicts. The very use of the term "Gypsy", avoided among most European Romani groups due to its pejorative connotation, might actually reveal an editorial marketing choice. Publishers might consider it a more recognizable term to English-speaking readers than the more recent, politically chosen notion of "Rom(ni)". Certainly, despite its exoticized and stereotyped connotation, the English word "Gypsy", as the Spanish "Gitano", is not as derogatory as its equivalent in other Central European languages.

Gypsy Boy and *American Gypsy* are both coming-of-age memoirs that depict the narrators conflictual search for identity within the context of the Romani culture. In both cases, the narrators look back at their formative years, considering the impact that their ethnic milieu had on them at the time. Simultaneously, there is a reflection on the effects that their childhood experiences have had on their current subjectivity and identity. During the writing process the narrators are situated outside their original communities and, in that sense, they are positioned in a liminal space from where they look at their original culture with a certain perspective.

In both autobiographical accounts there is an underlying trauma narrative that the narrators resiliently develop through memory work. Still,

the experiences recounted by Walsh and Marafioti are unique, highlighting the heterogeneous condition of the Romani community, or of any other ethnic group for that matter.

Gypsy Boy is a poignant account of the early years of a Romani British boy whose family tradition of bare-knuckle fighting put extraordinary pressure on him. In the very first pages of the book, the narrator establishes the model of masculinity that has ruled in his family for generations and was, therefore, expected from him (GB, 3). His great-grandfather had started to fight when he arrived in England from "Eastern Europe during the Blitz, poverty stricken and homeless" (GB, 3). As a descendant of survivors, Mikey is supposed to be a fighter, literally and figuratively. However, he struggles to conciliate his gentle temperament with what is expected from him as a Romani male. Mikey's father, unable to see his son for whom he is and disappointed at his lack of fighting aptitudes, exerts horrifying physical violence on him. At 12 years old, Mikey distressfully accepts his homosexuality, knowing it would never be accepted by his father or his community (GB, 200). Throughout the book, the narrator places his traumatic experiences within his family practices, which are explained to the non-Roma readership and often ironically questioned.

In Marafioti's *American Gypsy*, the narrator recounts the "metamorphosis" (AG, 9) that took place when she left behind childhood and motherland—the Soviet Union—in order to settle as a young adult in the United States, a country with a different language and culture. Being "Gypsy" for Marafioti comprises her origins and her family's cultural practices, but also the different ways in which she has been perceived depending on her location. In contrast to Mikey Walsh, the narrator in *American Gypsy* is very cautious about revealing some of her traumatic experiences. While she focuses on the distress that she experienced due to the pervasive racial discrimination in the U.S.S.R., the narrative tiptoes around the trauma that alcoholics and negligent parents necessarily bring to their children.

The authors/narrators of these autobiographies recall and write their life experiences using as a framework the set of values, practices, and beliefs of their ethnic group, making the autobiographic account simultaneously an ethnic one. In this sense there is an autoethnographic dimension implicit in both memoirs that is evident in those passages that address rituals, beliefs, traditions, and behaviours that are meaningful to the narrators and their communities, but widely unknown to the vast

majority. Mary Louise Pratt points out that "[i]f ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) other, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations." (2008, 9) Pratt locates the production of these autoethnographic texts within a "contact zone": a shared space in which conflicting cultures clash but nonetheless, coexist and interact (2008, 8). In this sense, literary practices are digging up a "contact zone" in which Romani authors examine their experiences in societies that have historically oppressed Roma but in which they have actively participated.

In *Gypsy Boy*, the narrator opens up his account by pointing out that his family status within the Romani community depends on fighting; their traditional abilities at it have given them a respect they highly value. The very name that was chosen for him was that of his great-grandfather, who made a life out of fighting (GB, 4). It is relevant that Mikey's mother chose a different name for him, Blake, which remains the private name between them. The mother would be Mikey's shield during his childhood, but in a very limited capacity as she was controlled, and also physically abused, by the father. The day they left the hospital after Mikey's birth, he fell to the floor when the basket that carried him broke due to his big size. Years later, the mother told Mikey how he "did not make a sound" (GB, 6) and his silence persisted for several months (GB, 8). This anecdote advances what would be the narrative reason of the book: the manifestation of what Mikey experienced and felt during his childhood but could not verbalize. Mikey's memoirs are a way of voicing his painful truth, both to himself and to others. Through this process, the narrator intrinsically claims his Romani identity by describing the way he and his family lived, including the rites and celebrations they performed, such as weddings (GB, 24–25), funerals (GB, 57–60; 145–148) or family and community reunions (GB, 33–35;); the traits that are specific to the British Romani community, such as fortune telling and trinket selling (GB, 4; 11) or metal scrapping (GB, 102); the dynamic of life in the caravan and on the different campsites (GB, 18–19); and the specificities of the dialect British Roma speak (GB, 85). These cultural elements appear consistently in all kinds of genres within Romani literature, revealing their distinctive ethnic ethos (Martín Sevillano 2020).

Walsh implicitly questions prejudices and stereotypes that affect Roma in England. He repeats that Roma are not poor (GB, 17; 150), a fact that Marafioti also mentions when she refers to her family's wealthy status

in the Soviet Union (AG, 4). He also addresses the stereotype of the "Gypsy thief" with the character of his aunt Minnie, describing her as a "kleptomaniac" (GB, 25). Shoplifting is therefore presented as an individual behavioral problem, and not as an ethnic trait. However, Walsh's description of the Romani community is not always positive, and there is certainly a tension between the insider he was and the outsider he is at the time when he is writing this autobiography. At one point he refers to the rules that govern the duties of young females (menstruating) in the household as well as the behaviour that is expected from them as a "crazy set of customs." (GB, 191) He considers his own sister "a not traditional Gypsy girl" (GB, 187) due to her not adhering strictly to those practices, the same way he could not behave as expected from a Romani boy.

In *American Gypsy*, the narrator looks decades back into her life and assembles a storyline that alternates between two main times and locations: her childhood in the U.S.S.R, and her young adulthood in the U.S.A. The plot sets off in Moscow in the fall of 1989, when the collapse of the Soviet Union is imminent, and Marafioti's parents are obtaining the legal authorization to migrate to the United States of America. This would be the hinge around which the two storylines gravitate.

The following chart visually conveys the relationship established in the book between time and place, and how the ethnic and national identity of the author varies accordingly:

The narrator's viewpoint is that of an adult who considers herself at the time of writing an American-Romani-Armenian as the title of the book partially indicates. The ethnic character of her account is also conveyed

by the two initial epigraphs: a Romani saying ("We are all wanderers on this earth. Our hearts are full of wonder, and our souls are deep with dreams") and an author's note that firmly sets the ethnic content of the book:

Author's note

> There are well over five million Romani people living in every corner of the world today. We are bound by thousands of years of common history, but our culture is as diverse as our customs and dialects. Although there are many similarities between the clans, the stories in this book are mainly those of my experiences growing up in the Romani community of the former Soviet Union. (s/p)

The insertion of these two texts determines the basis of the narrative—the Romani culture—and place the narrator at the heart of the Romani community (indicated by the first-person plural pronoun used in the note). At the same time, these initial texts establish a direction for the narrative, conveying that it only integrates those events and experiences that match with this Romani viewpoint.

Marafioti's childhood memories revolve around her extended Romani family. Her paternal grandfather, a musician, successfully operated for decades a musical ensemble that was a family enterprise: Marafioti's father was one of its musicians, her paternal grandmother was the leading singer—despite not being Roma—and her own mother, an Armenian, took care of its administration. Music, dance, and performing arts are outstanding elements of Romani culture that explain the stereotype that have reduced Roma to musicians. In particular, for Marafioti these cultural practices are the context of many of her childhood experiences. Additionally, the narrative presents other cultural themes, such as food (AG, 41–44) and traditions (AG, 50–51; 71), that frame the narrator's memories within the Romani culture. Still, the Romani heritage is not the only one that shapes the narrator's subjectivity and identity, as her Armenian heritage is also connected to her childhood memories. Marafioti links both cultures, highlighting their similarities (AG, 92–93), and the fact that they have a common history (AG, 107).

The insertion of these cultural details generates the "contact zone"; this information would not be necessary if the implicit reader belonged to the Romani community. Getting to know the culture from the inside allows the possibility of a new point of view, informed by the knowledge and empathy that derives from the first-person account, which facilitates an identification between the reader and narrator/main character.

4. Trauma, New Subjectivities, and Double Consciousness

Departing from Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" and building on Lev Vygotsky's educational theory, it is possible to read these autobiographies as tools for cultural mediation: "the process through which the social and the individual mutually shape each other" (Vygotsky, in: Daniels 2015, 34). Vygotsky considers literature a mediator of human experience; being literary texts makes them symbolic tools that enable learning and cognitive development (Vygotsky, in: Kozulin 1998, 132; and in: Wertsch 2007, 178). Romani autobiographies display this mediational component through the abundant description of rites, beliefs, material culture, and domestic practices, which implicitly address a non-Romani reader. This instructive dimension fits well within autobiography, a literary genre that entails some exemplary quality.

After Vygotsky, Kozulin points out that "cognition is affected by the possibilities inherent in literary form" (1998, 138). While the content of a literary work has an obvious impact on the reader, there is also an array of embedded devices that have a crucial effect on the reception of the text. The construction of the self the author/narrator displays in the autobiographical account involves a complex psychological process of selection and organization. This intellectual capability is embodied in the narrator's voice, whose effect on the reader is more subtle than the narrative the plot presents. Romani autobiographies present narratives that challenge discrimination and prejudices while reflecting on social and private experiences, and by doing so they implicitly disclose mature, perceptive, and coherent Romani subjectivities and identities. By writing about how their minds and lives have been shaped by certain events and by their ethnic identity, Romani authors claim agency and new social positions. The main characters in these works are Roma with meaningful experiences and a life purpose that stems from their ethnic heritage. Furthermore, as authors/narrators they speak from a position of authority, one that has not been usually occupied by Roma, and certainly not in the literary field, as they were presumed to be inherently illiterate. Writing about themselves, Romani authors face not only the intrinsic challenges that self-representation entails, but also those derived from how Roma characters have been previously depicted.

From a very early age, the main character in *Gypsy Boy* is physically abused by his father, and sexually abused by one of his paternal uncles.

The horror of the facts depicted makes the reader wonder how Mikey came to survive all this and live to tell it. Mikey's mother registers him in a school as a way of keeping him away from the father (GB, 140), but there Mikey has to face a different kind of violence, that of racial discrimination: Roma "[…] were taught separately during the morning […]" at the request of the other children's parents (GB, 82), and they did not mingle "[…] because more often than not our contact with the Gorgia kids ended in an exchange of taunts, insults and scraps." (GB, 117) The narrator reflects from his present position about how Mikey "[…] hated violence […] but could never seem to escape it" (GB, 118).

In *American Gypsy*, Marafioti considers how discrimination pervaded her social life during her childhood and had a long-lasting effect on her subjectivity. While she did not experience this kind of discrimination in the United States, its effects had a permanent echo; hence the fact that the narrator refers to it in the first pages of the memoir (AG, 7). In fact, the experience of discrimination shapes Marafioti's Romani ethnic identity as much as does cultural heritage. In the pages in which she refers her childhood in Moscow, the narrator remembers how she was insulted by school mates (AG, 32–34) or even by strangers (AG, 62–63). It is clear in the text that rewriting discriminatory traumatic experiences was not an easy task for the author, but she keeps a resilient stance and avoids representing herself as a victim. Sheer trauma is barely visible on a few occasions, such as when Marafioti's teenager boyfriend, Ruslan, who grew up with her while touring with the ensemble, was killed in Romania when participating in a Romani protest:

> After one particularly explosive demonstration, Ruslan and a few local Romani got caught up in a fight with some *gadjee* boys. No one knew who instigated the fight, but it ended with the participants scattering to escape the police. Later Ruslan was found dead behind the local pet clinic. He'd been beaten to death. (AG, 69)

The narrator briefly considers how she fell into despair after the loss of her friend (AG, 72), but she does not elaborate on her feelings or the psychological impact this event had on her. In a way it is understood that grief can only be explained by silence. In a similar way, Marafioti refers to other traumatic experiences, such as her parents' alcoholism or divorce, without delving into the internal turmoil she (and her younger sister) experienced. In *American Gypsy* there is an untold narrative of pain that tacitly transpires through the magnitude of some of the events the narrator portrays.

Marafioti's family arrival to the United States was the end of the parents' marriage; during that time, she faced the challenge of learning a new language and understanding a different culture while she underwent poverty and parental neglect, mostly due to her mother's alcoholism and her father's detachment. These experiences are usually lightly depicted, concealing the anguish they certainly generated in the young Oksana. The narrator's stance is a resilient one; Marafioti allows herself to look back into her life only to recover what made her a strong woman, a gifted writer, and a proud Romni.

Throughout the book, Marafioti creates different representations of herself according to age, location, and sociocultural context. However, the narrative viewpoint has more of an impact on the reader than do her depictions of her experiences. The narrator comes across as a wise woman who looks back without resentment or a judgemental attitude. In this sense, the autobiographic narrative emerges as a cultural mediation tool—in Vygotsky's terms. The content of the book offers an attractive account of Romani cultural practices and of the narrator's distinctive experiences, depicting evolving images of herself as she survived them. Still, the most powerful image is the embedded and tacit one of the author/narrator during the process of writing. Marafioti is an accomplished writer with a genuine love for language and literature that is supported by intertextual references, literary devices and, overall, the writing technique. All these elements bring forward a new Romani subjectivity, that of a resilient, poised, intelligent and skilled writer.

In the same way, the narrator in *Gypsy Boy* comes across as a kindhearted and strong adult, despite he was abused by those who should have loved and protected him as a child. Mikey's account could be easily described as ineffable or indescribable, but remarkably it has been written and read. Inadvertently, the readership can picture the author: a broken child who grew up to resignify his past experiences by writing about them. The very narrative in the first person builds an implicit subjectivity of the author/narrator, the future Mikey, who is not just a survivor, but an actual fighter, in a way his father could not have possibly imagined.

Finally, these autobiographies express the tensions that depicting the Romani identity involves. It seems fitting here to go back to Vygotsky, who argues that our inner speech derives from the internalization of social values and beliefs, which are constantly examined through an internal dialogue (cf. Vygotsky, in: Wertsch 1985, 61). This is particularly

relevant in the construction of an autobiography, a literary modality in which authors ponder how to represent themselves in the social sphere. However, the internalization of the hegemonic social principles and beliefs is problematic when it comes to marginalized individuals. W.E.B. Du Bois used the notion of double-consciousness to refer to the conflictive subjectivities of African Americans, highlighting the ambivalent, dual subjectivity of racialized subjects, who strive to reconcile their ethnic bodies, behaviours, values, and experiences with those of the hegemonic group in their societies. Du Bois's double-consciousness points at the conflictive inner speech of a victim of racial oppression who has, nonetheless, interiorized ways of learning and understanding that stem from the parameters that are at the source of racial discrimination. This tension appears embedded in Romani autobiographies as authors split in two: narrator and character, both racialized subjects but both immersed in the values around which racial hierarchies are constructed.

The narrator in *Gypsy boy* is an adult who was forced to leave his family and community once he came out as gay during his teen years. As revealed in the last chapter and epilogue of the book, he writes after a healing process that involved performing, creative writing, and teaching. At this point he has lived outside his original community longer than he lived in it, but he still speaks of "our people" (GB, 278). However, at certain points in the narrative he sits in a liminal zone in which he looks at his ethnic group from a distance:

> The Gypsy race is an old fashioned and, sadly, a very bitter one. They live, breathe, sleep, grieve, love and care for only their own people. They don't like or trust the ways of others and don't have contact or friendships with other races […] It is tragic, both for the Gypsies who distrust and hate, and for the other races that never get to see the more human, generous side of the Romanies. (GB, 66)

Walsh reflects on how this conservative stance of the Roma is connected to the historical persecution and marginalisation they have experienced, which forced them to protect themselves by means of isolation. However, on some other occasions this connection is not that clear, and the image he presents of the Romani community is not only essentializing, but also builds on hegemonic representations and prejudices:

> Almost all Gypsy men are violent, it's ingrained in the culture and the life they lead and impossible to avoid. […] it was a rarity for a Gypsy man to do a good job for anyone. Especially if money were to change hands before a job was done; in that case the customer would almost certainly get nothing at all. (GB, 42; 162)

Marafioti is not shy about representing her own internalized racism in the past. She confesses that her parents advised her to hide their ethnic origin in school so she would not be bullied (AG, 7), and she learned to conceal this part of her identity, which implied a certain degree of shame. For her arrival in the United States, she dressed in a way that would make her look like an average girl "instead of a Gypsy one" (AG, 11). The young Oksana considered that certain Romani practices, such as panhandling and fortune telling, were at the source of social prejudices against Roma in the U.S.S.R. (AG, 100–101). She was therefore mortified when, shortly after their arrival in the United States, her musician father resorted to mediumship and divination (AG, 101) as a main source of income.

The autobiographical writing process makes explicit the contradictory dialogue between the inner and the social selves that cohabit within an individual. In this case, the first understands certain Romani practices and behaviours, while the second judges and assigns them a social value. Thus, autobiographies offer extraordinary insight on how Roma are repositioning themselves within society with tools, such as literature, that have been used to maintain social prejudices against them. The analysis in this essay highlights that, in terms of literary production, what is told—the narrative—is not more significative than the way in which it is told—the voice and the viewpoint—.

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Martin Shaw

Political Interventions in Space and Place in Uriah Burton's *Uriah Burton "Big Just": His Life, His Aims, His Ideals*

Abstract

Uriah Burton's collaborative life story is a rare text, and no research has been carried out on it. Burton makes several important interventions in the politics of space and place in the UK, as he fights, sometimes literally, for peace, rest, and safe living places. He is a self-proclaimed group leader, group representative, and peacemaker, and he fights for authority and influence to achieve his goals. The in-between positions that he adopts intersect with historically inculcated discourses of sedentarism, control, surveillance, and assimilation, and his efforts led to significant interventions concerning private caravan site provision for Romanies, Gypsies, Travellers, and people of no fixed abode. He is religious and fights for justified aims—a just war, which reverberates in his nickname "Big Just". However, he does have to negotiate and compromise to achieve his aims, as well as endure attacks on his personality, his representative status, and his ideas of right and wrong.

1. Introduction

Uriah Burton's 26-page life story, *Uriah Burton "Big Just": His life, His Aims, His Ideals* (1979), is a rare text. According to Phoenix Press (publishers), Burton ordered the book's publishing himself, and "approximately a few hundred were printed." Phoenix also "typeset the text and made negatives to print from but they were destroyed in a fire many years ago." (Smith 2019). In *King of the Gypsies: Memoirs of the Undefeated Bareknuckle Champion of Great Britain and Ireland* (2002), Bartley Gorman dedicated a chapter to Uriah Burton. He refers to Burton's life story as a "small, privately-published book" that is "prized among travellers" (2002, 55) and shares his view of Burton's significance: "When I was sixteen, I admired only two fighters: Rocky Marciano and Uriah Bur-

ton. Everyone had heard of Marciano, the world heavyweight champion who never took a backward step and never lost a fight. But Burton was known only in the secretive world of the travellers." (2002, 54).[1] I have not found any research that has focused on Burton or his life story, but he has been featured in a few research articles, in local media outlets, on special interest websites and blogs (and their commentary functions), as well as in a few life stories.[2] Burton may not be well known outside of the "world of travellers", but he decided to fight to improve his own family's and others' "peace". He also made significant interventions in the politics of place and space concerning the issue of private caravan site provision, and he was the main actor in an informal justice system on his caravan site. This article will focus on these three interconnected interventions in place and space.

In each of these interventions, Burton adopts similar and different I/we perspectives that enable him to use his self-proclaimed roles as family and group leader, group representative, and peacemaker to accomplish his aims. This I/we perspective is neither individual nor collective, but oscillates in the relational in-between spaces depending on the context of the intervention. Burton embodies what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as third space (1994, 53–56), but he occupies two interrelated third spac-

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[1] Gorman's text on Burton is quoted in Keith Duggan's article in *The Irish Times* (April 20, 2013). The focus of the article is the boxer and Irish Traveller Tyson Fury (world heavy weight champion 2020). Tyson refers to Burton as his great-granduncle and states that he is "fighting royalty. Uriah is on my father's side and Bartley Gorman, the other undefeated champion, is on my mother's side."

[2] The research articles are included in this article, but Burton has also been mentioned on discussion forums on boxing webpages such as *BoxRec* (*Boxing Record Archive*), Michael Blackett's *The History Of Bareknuckle Boxing* (2014), and Tapatalk (2008). Burton also erected a stone memorial to his late father, Ernest Burton—see the webpage *Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales* (2018). Burton is mentioned in Cole Moreton's *Independent* article on Bartley Gorman's funeral (2002), as well as a 2013 article by Katharine Quarmby in *The Guardian* about an eviction battle, which includes Noah Burton (a family member). A further mention of Burton is in an archived messageboard, *BBC: Home* webpage "Local Heroes: Bartley Gorman—Comments 2007/8". Also see Dominic Reeve (2015, 100). Reeve asks about the previous owner of a Bedford Van and informs the reader of the answer: "Uriah Burton the renowned Romani fighting-man who had used it in his carpet selling days". Also see Currie, 2009.

es. He has to deal with various people, and not just, for example, local residents and council officials, but also the people whom he refers to as "my people". It is from within these third spaces or in-between positions that his ideals and aims are gradually transformed into practice. Burton learns to negotiate and compromise, while maintaining a focus on accomplishing his goals.

The first intervention begins with Burton proclaiming his aim to literally fight to bring about what he refers to as changes "in my own people" (1979, 5). His aim is to stop the violent and disrespectful behaviour that effectively fragments intra-group and inter-group relations, and to restore forms of behaviour that support cultural and intercultural exchange. Burton refers to himself as a "leader amongst my people", states that he "would establish himself as stronger man in order to become the best knuckle-fighter in Britain" and make peace (179, 5), and that he has "the help and support of God" (1979, 5). I will frame Burton's fight as just war because he argues that his cause is just, that he protects the innocent, that he fights for a greater good, and that he has divine guidance (Mosely "Just War"). The second intervention involves Burton's practical intervention in the politics of space and place, which involves his fight to find and establish safe living spaces for his own people and others. Burton depicts himself, his family and his own people as constantly being moved on (1979: 14), and decides to buy his own land and to develop safer living spaces for others—a caravan site. Burton's actions involve the intersecting and historically inculcated discourses of sedentarism, control, surveillance, and assimilation, which, in turn, involve the negotiation of regional and local legislation, negative public opinion and in-group opinion. The third intervention involves the informal justice system that Burton fronted on his caravan site. The idea to control behaviour on the site is directly associated with the first intervention's control and change of behaviour, but the aim here is to create a safe place to live. I will analyse this third intervention as an effort to deconstruct perceptions and projections of otherness, while creating a space that deconstructs the sedentarism-nomadism dichotomy. This last intervention will include analyses of different and overlapping forms of surveillance.

However, before the analysis of the three interventions, I will provide an insight into the construction of the life story, as its construction reveals insights concerning the obstacles that Burton needed to overcome to achieve his goals.

2. The Construction of the Life Story

There is no paratextual information concerning the production process of the 26-page life story, but there are several in-text clues. The title is written in the third person, and the content of the anonymously written "Preface" indicates that the writer knew Burton well (possibly a family member). Late in the life story, the reader is informed that Burton could neither read nor write (1979, 25), which indicates that the life story text is the result of transcription or a series of transcriptions. Someone also organized the text into chapters with headings, chapter-to-chapter cross-referencing and transitions, and included the text from four letters. There are also references to an intended reader, which would not be common in a transcribed or dictated text. It is also clear that the contents of the text that was sent to the publishers for printing and published in 1979 was compiled from a series of texts produced over a longer period of time, and for different purposes.

The life story was produced and packaged in several stages and presumably (re)compiled when it was sent to the publishers. For instance, parts of pages 19 and 20 were printed almost word for word from an article in the November 17-edition of *The People* in 1963. Furthermore, directly after the last page of the life story there is a reply letter dated November 30 1978. The writer refers to "the enclosed account of your life story and work. There is much wisdom in the part headed Uriah the idealist and the final chapter". In his re-reply letter, Burton refers to the text as a "book" and in another letter dated December 8, 1978 a "booklet". Moreover, the reader is informed in the life story text that Burton gave "one of his books" to a "gentleman" in 1978 (1979, 25), and in a letter dated January 26 1979, a booklet is mentioned: "*This booklet has been acknowledged from different ministers and leaders throughout the world*" (1979, inserted between pages 12–13, original italics). There is also a reference to an "article" in the life story text: "Four copies of this article have been sent to every country in the world" (1979, 23). The life story seems to be an assemblage of texts produced over at least a 16-year time span, and several transcribers (and a journalist) were likely involved in its production.

However, the life story does follow a number of the conventions of life story as it begins with the phrase "I was born", closely followed by a statement of primary authentication: "I am a true Romany, and proudly proclaim to be a genuine Gipsy and claim to be a leader amongst my

people" (1979, 1). Burton also adds a further level of authentication: "I am a British citizen, and my family's roots stretch back into this country's soil for hundreds of years, and it is for this reason that I claim the right to speak out for the love of my country and for the welfare of all the people of the world" (1979, 1). The introduction infers that Burton's intended audience is quite broad, which, once more, suggests that the intended audience of this part of the text may not be identical with the intended audience of the text as it is packaged in the published life story itself.

3. Uriah Burton: Fighting for Peace

In this sub-section, I will analyse the beginning of Burton's aim "to make peace" (1979, 5), which I frame as just war and an intervention in the politics of space and place. He refers to his experiences in Ireland and England and the effects of social changes that he saw "in my own people" and then decides to fight for peace (1979, 5). Burton admits that fighting for peace is "a contradiction and paradox", but then provides examples of when he was able to "remedy circumstances which could have become ugly" (1979, 5). In order to accomplish his aims, he takes up an in-between position both literally and metaphorically, as he depicts himself using his "ability and gift of strength" (1979, 5) to fight a series of opponents in order to (re)establish a sense of peace. He also states that it was during this process that he "acquired the knickname 'Big Just'" (1979, 6, original spelling).[3] Burton also professes that he has "but one ally, one person on his side, and that is God" (1079, 1, 5), which partly explains his use of religious intertexts and the framing of his actions in terms that suggest just war.

Burton's decision to fight for peace is fueled by his varied experiences in Ireland and England and various forms of nostalgia. Burton states that he was born in Liverpool and that his early life was "spent around Cork and the Irish Free State" (1979, 1), which included periods spent

[3] The spelling may just be a mistake, as different sections of the life story include different spellings. For example, in the first section of the life story, "Uriah—The Man and His Aims" the spelling "Gipsy" is used (1). In other sections, "gipsy"(3), "gypsies" (14), "gipsies" (21), and "gypsy" (25). Bartley Gorman is also spelled Barclay Gorman (10).

in Dublin, Lisburn, and Belfast, where he dealt with "all sections of the community regardless of their religion" (1979, 4). He retells stories of "many happy times in the Free State of Ireland, going to fairs and joining in the events there", including his experiences of seeing "50 or 60 tinker families on both sides of the road" (1979, 4). These nostalgically framed beginnings soon change into a discourse of loss, as Burton states that many of the "tinker families" moved to "England and they have lost the unpolluted beauty of Ireland" (1979, 4), and adds that "Ireland itself seems to have lost much of the happiness that I remember of those times, like the spontaneous 'ceilahs' on the village crossroads, where everyone joined in and enjoyed themselves (1979, 4). This change to reflective nostalgia is consolidated (Boym 2007, 13), as Burton asserts that "not all memories were happy ones", that on "occasions there was suffering and life was hard for many people" and that "many families broke up and in many cases left for England, and people remaining home had to work hard to raise a living" (1979, 4). This particular conflation of present and past reflections motivates Burton to instigate change.

Burton's just war and his efforts to establish peace involve the restoration of particular forms of behaviour that he believes were lost due to societal change. He states that when "I came to England I felt a great change in my own people. I carried on my Romany life, going to horse fairs and race meetings, where all types of tinkers and gipsies would gather, but there was no rest from the continual drunks and bullies and fights would start" (1979, 5). The familiar meeting places are still open for visits and social interaction, but Burton identifies a threat to the meetings' role in the co-maintenance of valued and changing traditions. He then makes a statement of intent: "In order to make peace, I decided I would establish myself as a stronger man in order to become the best knuckle-fighter in Britain." (1979, 5). This expression of restorative nostalgia (Boym 2007, 13–14) includes a desire to restore the rest and peace that characterized his earlier experiences. However, Burton does acknowledge the unconventionality of this statement: "It is perhaps strange that I should take this line, but it was this show of strength and brought rest and contentment for a great number of years" (1979, 5). Overall, Burton's stance does not deny the hardships of the past, or present, but it is a commitment to restore the positive behavioural traits that he had experienced. His just war involves fighting for authority and influence so that he can reinstate self-respect, co-respect and co-recognition and what they can

enable—the ability to be at rest, live in peace and enjoy the horse fairs, race meetings and other gatherings.

Burton tells a particular story that illustrates his aim to make peace, as he literally positions himself between two groups that seem destined to fight. He narrates that he had arrived at the fair in Doncaster with his own family, and "met a large gathering of travellers and for the first time ever, a big group of Irish tinkers, also camped on the site." (1979, 7). As the story continues, Burton states that the "young men from the tinkers' side started to have fun by ripping one another's shirts off. The English travellers did not like this, but I realized for the years I had spent in Ireland, that this was just the usual way of letting off high spirits and having fun" (1979, 7).[4] The actions of the "Irish tinkers" are misinterpreted, and after the pubs had closed Burton heard voices "trying to stir up trouble" (1979, 7):

> The confrontation was between the Irish and English, only a few yards from my caravan. I put on my trousers and shoes and opened the door. I saw a group of English travellers with golf clubs in their hands on my right. I looked to the left and saw the Irish, with no shirts on, getting ready for the fight. I asked first the English, and then the Irish to move back and to my joy and amazement they did. (1979, 7)

In his life story, Bartley Gorman retells this story and comments: "None but the boldest and strongest could have done such a thing" (2002, 58). He also proclaims that Burton "had a strange presence about him, effectively ran the big gypsy gathering at Doncaster races for many years" (2002, 57). The story is significant as it represents a practical example of Burton keeping the peace, including the change of behaviour that he fights for—with some help.

Burton was also religious and states that he could only succeed in his mission with "the help and support of God" (1979, 5), and the religious intertext that he employs is imbued with a history of contestation over safe places and spaces. It is difficult to ignore the intertextual reference to Genesis and Moses' parting of the sea in Burton's story (Exodus 14: 19). If the two stories are integrated, Burton has help from a greater power, as one force of nature, the wind, keeps the two faces of water divided

[4] See Stockins (2000, 126) for a depiction of Irish Travellers "stripped to the waist and fighting one another". Stockins refers to what he observed as "bare-knuckle tag fighting" and states that they were the first people he "had ever come across who fought purely for fun".

(two groups). In the Bible version, Moses's people can then escape their pursuers who want to enslave them (Exodus: 21–24). However, the enslavement in Burton's story refers to the lack of mutual conventions of conflict that lead to unjust war (Mosely "Just war"), as illustrated by the golf clubs-versus-fists scenario in the story. This lack of mutual recognition is a major obstacle for the peace of mind and rest that Burton wishes to re-establish. Furthermore, the link to Moses is not incidental, as Burton claims to be "a descendent of one of the Lost Tribes of Moses which he led over the Land of Nod and since that time we Romanies have suffered persecution and injustice without a country of our own" (1979, 1). In the Bible, God exiles Cain to the Land of Nod for murdering his brother Abel. He is cursed to be a "fugitive" and "vagabond", as any crops he attempts to grow will fail (Genesis 4: 15–16). This narrative is similar to the more well-known legend of the nails, which depicts a Gypsy being asked to make four nails, but when he finds out that the nails are for the crucifixion of Christ, he runs away with the fourth nail, and the Gypsies have suffered persecution ever since.[5] There are various versions of the story,[6] but in the case of Burton's just war he has achieved a position of authority through which he could "remedy circumstances which could have become ugly" (1979, 5). His self-adopted in-between position caused the two groups to disperse, and thus symbolizes the kinds of intra-group and inter-group behavioural change that can lead to the peace and rest that Burton fights for. The meeting places and spaces become safer places for cultural and intercultural exchange.

4. Uriah Burton: Fighting for Living Space

This section will focus on Burton's struggle to construct and develop a private caravan site (1972–73), which, according to Acton, "opened up the route to private Gypsy site provision that had been closed since the

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[5] Shaw identifies a similar usage of this story in Silvester Gordon Boswell's life story (1970). Shaw argues that Boswell uses the story to convey the possibility of improved relations between Gypsies and their fellow British citizens because of the 1968 Caravan Site's act (Shaw 2019, 80–81).

[6] See Pickett and Agogino (1960) and Groome (1899, xxvii–xxxi).

1960 Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act" (1998 and 2019).[7] By building the site, Burton made several interjections into an ongoing discourse of spatial regulation that involved the actions of, among others, politicians, lawyers, administrators, the police, and local residents, as well as the subjects of the spatial regulation—people who self-identify as Romanies, Gypsies or Travellers and people with no fixed abode. Uriah Burton's intervention is not just between changing strategies of state and public surveillance and coercive assimilation strategies, but a much more multifaceted intervention. The obstacles that Burton needed to overcome included attacks on his personality, his self-adopted representative status, and his understandings of right and wrong.

The spatial regulation involved the ongoing and changing definitions of rural and urban spaces caused by ongoing practices of enclosure, urbanization, and the movement and resettlement of people. These changes led to a re-imagining of rural and urban spaces and the people who lived there, including their work-related and leisure activities. Bancroft explains that the "transformation of the countryside" after World War II involved an exponential increase in regulation: "Rural areas are designated for either residential or agricultural/industrial use. The home is separated from the workplace. Gypsy-Travellers in the countryside have faced increasing pressures because of this." (2005, 17). Bancroft also paraphrases McKinley and Taylor (1998) when he explains that the all-encompassing surveillance associated with the Foucauldian concept of the panopticon gave way to light and dark zones—the light, ordered zones are "protected against undesirable individuals" (2005, 17). Burton's caravan site is positioned on the fringe or periphery of (Greater) Manchester—on the periphery of both rural and urban space, as well as agricultural and industrial space. It would seem as though the "light zones" that need protecting are actually everywhere in Burton's story. The forms of surveillance that Burton infers in his stories of the change from travelling to buying land and on towards constructing living spaces involve a mixture of surveillance strategies—panopticon-like surveillance and synoptic surveillance.[8]

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[7] See Clark and Greenfields (2006, 79). Greenfields states that the earliest statistics for the number of caravans on private sites was 1,194 in 1979, but by 1994 there were 3,271.

[8] See Foucault (1995, 201–203) and Mathieson (1997, 219–220).

In a chapter entitled "URIAH—The Creator" (1979, 14–15), Burton conveys his own experiences of the practical effects of the politics of place and space in 1964. He explains his own collectivized knowledge of the system of spatial control and surveillance:

> In common with all my people, we were constantly moved off many [sic] many sites, every time we tried to pull in anywhere, we were pushed off. It was not possible to settle down and on one occasion in 1964 we were moved from demolished prefabs in Wythenshawe and the police told us we had to go. I had another site mapped out, but refused to disclose where it was because had I done so, the police would have been waiting for me and turned me from the site. (1979, 14)

The passage includes several interconnected "I/we" relational narratives, as the situation of stopping, being moved on, stopping, being moved, seemingly *ad infinitum*, is narrated in terms of the collective experiences of a "we" (the in-group affected by the actual experience), "my people" and even "me/we", which are all indicative of Burton's roles of representative spokesperson and self-designated leader. Burton positions himself between the police and the "we" group of people targeted for eviction. The police are also depicted doing their jobs efficiently, making it difficult to ignore the absurdity of this game of cat and illegalized mouse. Burton also keeps his next "mapped out" destination a secret, as he knows the police "would" repeat the eviction process. He has little control over the main events in this game, but he knows the rules—he has a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1990, 66). He knows that he has to delay the repetition of the events in the game, which means that he needs to find a place to stop where the group can stay as long as possible before they are reported, found and evicted.

Even if Burton has experiential and therefore embodied knowledge of the game, he does not control it, as the police and local residents control the eviction process. The surveillance of the few by the many is encaptured in the term synopticon, which relates to the influence of modern mass media (Matheisson 1997, 219–220), which, in this case, refers to regional and local media coverage, as well as the transmission of information by word of mouth. However, not all of "the many" report the presence of the group to the police, which infers the co-presence of both panopticon-style and synoptic surveillance. This co-presence of surveillance forms is also (in)directly associated with what Robert W. Lake refers to as Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) relations, and Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU). These terms have been used to refer to lo-

cal resistance to the planned usage of community space such as nuclear power plants, prisons, systems, housing projects, prisons, shelters, and clinics" (2008, 87). Burton and those that he refers to as "my people" cannot control this aspect of the game, but Burton does find a way out of the game, only to struggle with the rules of another related game.

When Burton purchases land, the game is interrupted, but he cannot escape the discourse of space and place or forms of resistance. He has to learn another interrelated set of rules and he manages to complete the initial step: "Eventually, I bought a piece of land at Partington and was allowed to have 12 caravans on the site." (1979, 14). Burton applied for permission to deploy caravans on his own land, but others had to allow him to do so. However, the place itself is part of another (macro) game, as Partington was designated as an overspill estate in the 1960s (700 inhabitants). Manchester council made a decision to demolish "the inadequate Victorian terraced housing in the city centre" and re-house the residents and the population of Partington grew to 9000 by the 1970s (Trafford Council 2020). In a survey of existent local authority residential sites carried out in 2001–2002, it was reported that 70% of sites were located in "fringe areas of towns and villages" and 19% in rural areas (2002, 18). Partington was and is on the "fringe" of Greater Manchester and Burton's land fits directly into this pattern of peripheralism, but this does not mean that he can avoid the effects of surveillance by the many. He states that he decided to "extend the area. It was necessary to fetch in many hundreds of tons of soil in order that I could build up the land and this led to a lot of trouble with the neighbourhood." (1979, 14). Even though Burton has previous experience of this kind of resistance, he still does not fully understand the local people's reactions: "Again, this to me was the usual misunderstanding of my desire to create a place where my people could live, but the general public were opposed to what I was doing and seemed to find all difficulties." (1979, 14).[9] The complaints are not mentioned, but in Pat Niner's summary of obstacles to traveller site provision in Government reports in 1977 and 2002, resistance from local residents was top of the list (2002, 46). NIMBY and LULU objections are still evident, even if Burton owns the periphery-positioned land.

The anonymous writer of the "Preface" describes Burton as someone who does not give up when he has made up his mind, and he continues

[9] See Richardson and Smith-Bendall (2012, 34–37) on the many reasons for stopping caravan sites from being built.

to work through the system of rules, regulations and resistance to accomplish his goals. He states that he had "meetings with the Council and I was able to create a much larger area of land" (1979, 14). However, he was in need of further planning permission to "make more room for many of my people", and this was at first refused by the Bucklow Rural District, which led to a public enquiry. He eventually gained planning permission from the Department of the Environment in 1973 (1979, 14).[10] Thomas Acton's comments on Uriah Burton during a planning appeal reveal different levels of resistance:

> I spoke for him at his planning appeal, in 1972, and saw how his rich Gypsy friends mocked his public stance, and how racist villagers denigrated him, and saw him run from the end of his testimony to weep in his motor; and I saw how he triumphed over all these setbacks to create a Romani caravan site on which non-Gypsies were always welcome, where the poor, the rich and the homeless found sanctuary side by side. (1985)

Burton seems to have fought his way through the intricacies of this part of the game, but he had to endure attacks on his personality from "his rich Gypsy friends", as well as being "denigrated" by the "racist villagers" in his in-between position as representative of the undesired group(s).

Burton did achieve planning permission, but he had to make sure that the site passed an assessment, which included both social and material requirements. The inspector who conducted the enquiry is quoted: "'I am of the opinion that one of the most important features of this case is that it relates to an apparently genuine and determined effort by a Romany gypsy family to provide from their own resources, without demands on public authority or charity, a caravan site for gypsies and travelers.'" (1979, 14). The positive "features" mentioned relate to both micro-level (the caravan site itself) and meso-level (social) responsibilities, as the family used their own money, and not charity or public funds. The family is also praised for "not overcrowding the site" and for not allowing the site "to deteriorate into scrap sorting nor gathered rubbish" (1979, 14). This discourse of order, control and surveillance relates to the visual appearance of the place from the inside, but, more importantly, from

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[10] See Smith-Bendall (2009, 181–207) on being moved on, negative experiences and planning permission issues, dealing with a council, a planning officer, as well as her own role in helping others to gain planning permission. Also see Smith-Bendall, 2013, 161–162 on her life on a private site and different ways of being sedentary, but also travelling.

the outside, looking in.[11] The inspector is also reported as stating that "my family had shown the authority with which gypsies could control a site occupied by gypsies and travellers, and also that we had worked extremely hard, and made the completed part of the site into a model of appearance which many caravan site operators could learn from" (1979, 14–15). Burton's family seems to have learned the intricacies of this particular game, which includes the necessary authority to control the behaviour of the site residents. The assessment of the site as a "model of appearance" also infers that the social and material environment inside the site and outside have more similarities than differences.

The description of the inspector's assessment of the site intersects with a discourse of assimilation, which in this case infers a movement from travelling to caravan sites, and then on towards a sedentary life-style, but Burton interrupts this discourse. Sibley refers to the "idea of sedentarism as the only appropriate mode of existence is enshrined in property law and reinforced through the valorization of the community, neighbourhood and associated sentiments, like feelings of belonging and rootedness" (2010, 94). This movement towards a "fixed bounded space" (2010, 94) seems to be consolidated when Burton refers to his "tremendous work in providing proper drainage to the site, so that people could have water closets, washing facilities with hot and cold water, and permanent caravans on a site on which they could rest and stay and have little gardens" (2002, 15). However, Burton's site also includes transit pitches for people who only "wanted a short stay", which interrupts the ultimate aims of the assimilation discourse, and he "did much work planting trees to screen the site" (2002, 15). The site provides a broad spectrum of living spaces that deconstruct the sedentarism/nomadism dichotomy, and there is a degree of privacy from in-lookers and on-lookers. The family's maintenance of the site also embodies an interconnected but parallel system of law and order that both aligns itself with and disturbs the methods of coercion that aim to assimilate those perceived as unassimilated.

[11] The depiction of the inspector's use of "scrap-sorting" indicates that the inspector knows that scrap is not just rubbish collection to the people on the site, but one of their ways of making money. However, "scrap-sorting" is still directly associated with "gathered rubbish", which infers that both are understood as spoiling the order and affecting perceptions of the site. This discourse of order and cleanliness re-inscribes the derogatory stereotype of the dirty Gypsy.

5. Burton: The Caravan Site and Informal Justice

This sub-section focuses on Burton's interventions in the practical aspects of control and surveillance on his caravan site. Burton governs the site by applying his own system of informal justice. He adopts in-between positions with the aim of establishing peace and rest for the people on the site, and improved relations off the site.

Burton enacted his version of law and order on the caravan site: he acted as judge and enforcer of an informal justice system, which infers the control of others' behaviour. Bartley Gorman provides his own description of how Burton ran the site:

> In 1964, Big Just bought a plot of land at Partington, near Manchester, and put twelve trailers on it. […]. It became his private fiefdom, which he ruled with his own version of the law. He would preside over open-air trials of anyone who broke the rules of the camp, dispensing fines or ordering men to do physical exercise or hard labour as punishment. Two pairs of boxing gloves hung permanently from the branch of a tree to settle disputes. A track ran around the camp and sometimes Hughie would order a miscreant to rise at 6pm [sic] and run several laps. Young lads would be shackled in a shed, where they had to sleep on straw. Their families could bring them food and water but they would have to spend several days in there as punishment. (2002, 64)[12]

Gorman's description suggests kidnapping, involuntary imprisonment and panopticon-style control, surveillance, and punishment. However, Burton contests this description when he reports on how he received his nickname, Big Just—it was "said that I acquired it because of the way in which I administered justice as I saw it." (2002, 21). However, Gorman also supplements his assessment by stating that Burton "had iron principles and was known as 'Big Just' for his impartiality in sorting out disputes" (2002, 58). Further nuances on Burton's actions reveal the framing and aims of his form of informal justice.

The people who "broke the rules" on the site or beyond the site were held responsible for disturbing the peace on the site, and for the image

[12] Bartley Gorman took over the title of King of the Gypsies from Uriah Burton, which, in this case, meant the title of bare-knuckle champion. He knew Burton from his reputation, rumours and then personally, and he states that his first encounter with Burton was near his home in Wales (60). He recounts a story of a fight for "Burton's vacant crown" (108), which he won, and states that Burton sent him a message: "Hughie himself even sent me a telegram of congratulations" (111).

of the site residents off the site, which infers a conflation of variations of panoptic and synoptic surveillance. Susan Caffrey and Gary Mundy report on a conference on Romani law:

> Sylvia Dunn, secretary first National Association of Gypsy Women, asserted at a conference on Romani law, that police would bring errant boys to Uriah Burton, the Romani owner of a site. As long as the parents of the boys would agree to the punishment that the site owner decided for them, the police would not prosecute. Sylvia Dunn said, 'he had a trotting track and used to make them run on it twice a day a number of lengths and he would run alongside them. It was after an exercise like that they soon learnt their lesson the hard way.' (1997, 265–266)

Gorman and Dunn convey similar, but different perspectives on Burton's working methods. However, when the two descriptions are conflated, they reveal the reason that Burton (and his family members) gained planning permission; that he/they had "shown the authority with which gypsies could control a site occupied by gypsies and travellers" (1979, 14). This relates to a panopticon-style surveillance that leads to the behavioural self-regulation of the site's occupants. This may be one reason the police condoned Burton and his family's methods of controlling the site, including the punishments. Burton's knowledge of this changing game leads him to attempt to create a balance between parallel forms of panopticon-style and synopticon-style surveillance. By controlling the behaviour of the residents on the site, and, by extension, their observed behaviour outside the site, Burton and his family attempt to establish and maintain peace on the site, as well as a broader spectrum of acceptance and tolerance within the broader community.

6. Conclusion

The in-between positions that Burton (un)intentionally adopts enable him to make significant changes in the politics of space and place for a range of different people. His own experiences and recollections of life and of social change in Ireland and England acted as catalysts that urged him to fight for peace—a just and justified war. The struggle to create the circumstances where peace can prevail involved negotiations and the ability to compromise without losing sight of his initial aims. Burton made significant interventions in the politics of space and place, and even though his methods may be unconventional, as he states him-

self, he did make a difference. However, he had to endure attacks on his personality, his self-adopted representative status, and his self-acclaimed role as leader of "my people" (1979, 1). The caravan site included transit pitches, enabled a variety of ways to be both sedentary and mobile, and accommodated people from different backgrounds. The informal justice system employed on the site was deemed just, and maintained peace on the site, but it was also an attempt to maintain relations with the broader society. Burton did make a difference, and maybe it is time that his actions were recognised.

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Kirsten von Hagen

"L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre/Battit de l'aile et s'envola". Rewriting and Mythic Bricolage in the Work of Contemporary Francophone Roma Authors

Abstract

In the last past decades, Romani writers have tried to create their own literature with the aim of representing their minority and establishing their own language. This serves, among other purposes, to differentiate themselves from the representation of Roma in the majority society, as well as from the associated stereotypes reproduced in art and culture. With the help of the concept of rewriting, stereotypes are deconstructed, and an attempt is made to create a new identity through the creation of a new *écriture*, which both plays with the prejudices of the majority society against Roma and at the same time breaks away from them. The intention is not to create a literature by Roma for Roma, but to make their works accessible to world literature, which is done, among other things, through the retelling of myths, as well as through intertextual references.

1. Introduction

Since the 1940s, there have been increasing attempts by Roma authors to develop their own *écriture* in the mode of polyphony and mythic bricolage, which oscillates between their own minority culture and the literature of the majority society. At the same time, this can be understood as a response to deconstruct the well-known heterostereotypes, as they have existed since the early modern era, for example in Cervantes' novella "La gitanilla", by subjecting them to a revision, which often deviates from the prescribed narrative patterns and dominant genre specifications of the majority culture in the form of mythic bricolage (cf. von Hagen 2020, 95). Forms of masquerade, hybridisation of identities, and polyphony are narrative topoi that subvert common stereotypes in these texts in the mode of rewriting and break up common attributions and topoi. These

narrative procedures, as they can be observed in texts by Roma women authors, serve to establish a small literature that can at the same time be understood as world literature, since it breaks open and questions common patterns of knowledge of the entire world. A particularly striking example of such procedures is Miguel Haler's autofiction *Les mémoires d'un chat de gouttière* (*memories of an alley cat*) (2011), reminiscent of magical realism, which simultaneously inscribes itself in world literature because it takes up Virginia Woolf's well-known text *Flush: A Biography* (1933), which also oscillates between fiction and biography. Other texts that inscribe themselves in world literature through forms of intertextuality and myth-bricolage as well as a re-writing of stereotypes are Sandra Jayat's novel *La longue route d'une zingarina* (*The Long Road of a Zingarina*) (1978), Anina's programmatic self-quest *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* (*I am a Gypsy and I remain one*) (2013) and Virginie Carrillo's poetic-dramatic text collage *La vierge noire* (*The Black Virgin*) (2016). Re-writing is understood here as counter-discursive writing as defined by Gymnich (2006). The analysis of self-presentations also takes into account the phenomenon that alterised subjects—in order to become visible—often have to inscribe themselves in predefined images and patterns of representation "that are available to them in the field of hegemonic representation with its exclusion effects" (Schade/Wenk 2011, 105; cf. also Hertrampf/von Hagen 2020b). This tension becomes productive as in-between/third space (Bhabha 2000). Using the concept of rewriting, i. e. forms of writing against predefined images of the dominant society or subversions/revisions of representational and epistemological orders through counter-discursive re-enactment are brought into focus. The subversive functions of rewritings and their identity-forming role are investigated (Gymnich 2006). These oscillate between a confirmation of common heterostereotypes in the form of a conscious self-construction and a more or less subtle subversion of traditional forms of foreign representation. On the one hand, the works explore new forms that reflect borrowings from familiar patterns of autofiction; on the other hand, the authors attempt to develop their own form of autofiction by recourse to Roma myths and a design based on oral narrative tradition. In doing so, they often make use of familiar oppositions of centre and periphery between re- and deconstruction, borrowing from magical realism as well as subtly exploring modes of the "writing between worlds" outlined by Ette (2005).

The first author to be presented as an example in this context is Sandra Jayat, who came out with her autofiction *La Longue Route d'une Zingarina* in 1978, a text that was also well received by the dominant society in the 1980s. Recommended as reading in French school lessons, the volume achieved sales figures of more than 40,000 copies (cf. Blandfort 2015).

2. Sandra Jayat's Forms of Mythic Bricolage in *La Longue Route d'une Zingarina* (1978)

In the form of a mixture of poetry, orally transmitted stories and myths, and a novel of development characterised by digressions, this autofiction describes the difficult search for identity of the young Romni Stellina. Stellina lives with her family in their winter camp on Lake Maggiore, which she leaves before her 15th birthday. She also thus abandons her marriage to her cousin Zerko, because she sees no alternative to escape it.

The text, which is organised in a polyperspective manner, describes the difficult situation of a young woman who not only was born between the countries of France and Italy, but who, through her decision to leave the family and thus the encrusted traditions, also sets out on her own in search of a new home and an identity. Toninato writes:

> Jayat's work portrays Romani women as independent characters with a strong sense of justice. They refuse to accept a subordinate role in society and take full control of their lives, regardless of the consequences. This is far removed from the stereotypical view of Romani women as victims of their own culture. (Toninato 2014, 111)

In the text, different myths and narratives overlap, including the oral ones of the Roma and those of the majority society. In the first part of the novel, which describes her long journey to Paris, there are many Roma songs and poems that construct their own mythical world, which, especially in the second part, which is characterised even more by their own poetry, leads to their own aesthetic reminiscent of "oraliture"[1]. This is particularly evident in the topos of the bird as a symbol of freedom, as already

[1] "Oraliture" is a concept that was coined in the French-Caribbean context (cf. Mirville/Glissant/Chamoiseau 1994, 151–158). However, as Blandfort has pointed out, it can be made useful for the analysis of Roma literatures (cf. Blandfort 2015, 84–99). Markus Klaus Schäffauer understands the term scriptOrality,

found in Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875), one of the most famous foreign representations of the 19th century. First, to consider the figure of Carmen, constitutive of her representation on the operatic stage, alongside the equally central Seguidilla, is the Habanera sung by Carmen and the chorus ("L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" ("love is a rebellious bird"), 1st act, no. 5). Here she explains that love comes from the Gypsies and refers to the topos of the love of freedom attributed to them: "L'amour est enfant de Bohème, il n'a jamais connu de loi; Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime; Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi."[2] In the second stanza, Carmen herself is associated with the evasive principle of love: "L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre/Battit de l'aile et s'envola."[3] The bird finds a central symbolic function throughout the text as an opposition of coercion and freedom.

Not only does the song musically expose the lawlessness and freedom of the "Gypsies", but the word "bohème" also figures here in a double sense of the word: as an expression for the "Gypsy", but also for an alternative way of life, that of the artistic bohème. Jayat revises precisely this topos in the form of a re-writing.

Here, too, marriage is understood as a cage, but not marriage as a whole, as in the femme fatale Carmen, but the forced marriage of a young Romni in her teens: "Pourtant, j'imagine mon corps dans cette robe comme un oiseau impossible à apprivoiser"[4] (Jayat 1996, 11sq.) In Jayat's work, the focus on one's own body is put into a kind of forced corset with marriage, whereas in Carmen free love is contoured as the sign of the Gypsy woman stylised as femme fatale, but also the love of freedom of the entire people to which she belongs.

This is different with Jayat, who contours this freedom rather as a necessary consequence of various social conflicts and negotiation processes, i.e., not as a freely chosen situation, but as a last resort. Jayat describes a young Romni's search for self-determination between cultures. In Jayat,

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which he coined in relation to Latin American literature, as "a specific historical constellation of logocentrism […] that emerges from phonocentric fixation of origin in combination with a graphocentric teleology" (Schäffauer 2000, 59). All translations in this essay are mine.

2 "Love is a child of Bohemia, it has never known any law; If you don't love me, I love you; If I love you, beware".

3 "The bird you thought you were catching/Flapped its wings and flew away"

4 "However, I imagine my body in this dress as a bird that cannot be tamed"

the bird already figures in the paratext and thus controls the reading by giving the topos a somewhat different direction. The text is preceded by a motto, a poem by Jayat with the programmatic title "Laisse grandir l'oiseau" ("let the bird grow"), which explicates the metaphor right at the beginning. The journey is already mapped out here when it says: "Laisse grandir l'oiseau/Je briserai la cage/De l'enfant tragédien/Je prendrai la liberté"[5] and further: "Mon parcours sera long/Difficile solitaire invisible/Bavard ou silencieux/Mais je serai libre"[6] (Jayat 1996, 5). The bird in the cage, which wants to be free and embarks on a long wandering, focuses more on the processual, the process of becoming, the search for an ego between speaking and silence, visibility, and invisibility. The dialectic of speech and silence that distinguishes Roma literature, which for a long time was characterised by mistrust of the language of the dominant society, is also prefigured here. The bird, which structures the text as a leitmotif, especially in the first part, is accompanied by another animal within the framework of animal symbolism, the dog, which, unlike the bird, stands for loyalty and commitment and contrasts with the cat attributed to Carmen, which also signifies freedom. The dog's name, Toska, refers to another opera, *Tosca*, composed by Giacomo Puccini, whose premiere took place on 14 January 1900 at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome. In her loyalty and jealousy, the title heroine Tosca is at the same time a counter-image to Bizet's Carmen. In this way, the animal symbolism and the operas cited create a mythic bricolage whose ambivalences also reveal the fragility of identitary attributes and subvert common patterns of construction. Thus, a sense of belonging, the community she seeks, is only ever temporarily possible for the protagonist. Belonging is conveyed to her primarily by her widely ramified family and by the prejudiced children of the dominant society.

At the same time, Jayat's protagonist is repeatedly confronted with the common hetero stereotypes, as she is called a "Sale bohémienne! … Voleuse d'enfants!"[7] (Jayat 1996, 51) and is thus aware of her marginalised position, her marginalisation. In France, the country she is looking for,

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5 "Let the bird grow/I will break the cage/Of the tragic child/I will take the freedom"

6 "My journey will be long/Difficult and lonely, invisible/Talkative or silent/But I will be free"

7 "Dirty Gypsy! … Thief of children!"

she also realises that this stereotyping does not automatically change. Stereotypes are constructed here and subverted and dissolved by the context. Here, too, there are nuances, for the last family she meets is at the same time the one that does not send her off into the morning with encouragement, but mentions something to her with an ironic smile: "Tu voulais voir la France, la France est grande!"[8] (ibid., 94). At that moment, she realises that nothing has changed, the longed-for arrival in what she considers France has not changed her situation. The clouds, the autodiegetic narrator remarks, are still the same. She takes up the image of life as a journey when she realises, in the form of a paradox, that although everything has changed because she has reached her destination, nothing has changed because she still feels pursued: "Tout a changé, car j'ai atteint mon but. Rien n'a changé, car je me sens traquée comme je le suis depuis Sesto Calende"[9] (ibid., 94). The word "traquée" that she chooses in this context is revealing, as it is used for both humans and animals. For a large part of her journey, she is accompanied by the dog, Toska, who keeps her company. In many situations, the dog proves to be more humane than the humans Stellina encounters, which results in a subversion of common heterostereotypes. The focus is on his capacity for empathy (Jayat 1996, 61). He almost appears as the protagonist's alter ego. When he is hit by a truck during one of his evasive manoeuvres in front of the puddles, following a playful impulse, the driver continues on his way without caring about the fatally hit animal.

Although the theme of being on the road plays a major role in her text, Jayat does not show the topos of the road as we know it from other foreign attributions, a conventional dichotomy of nature and civilisation, freedom and conformity. It is not the stereotypical image of the free and happy 'Gypsy' that dominates in majority society, but the text very clearly and differentiatedly shows the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Jayat's novel makes it clear that this life in the roulotte has a tradition but is also linked to numerous prohibitions of the dominant society. At the same time, life offers freedom and happiness in the impermanent, but the novel also shows the high the price that the protagonist and her family have to pay for that.

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8 "You wanted to see France, France is great!"

9 "Everything has changed, because I have reached my goal. Nothing has changed, because I feel stalked as I have been since Sesto Calende".

Although the Roma in this text are portrayed in their typical fields of activity—as fortune-tellers, healers, horse traders—Jayat shows the background in a differentiated way. Her grandfather is able to heal, but, as in the picaresque novels, he also appears as a hero who partly knows how to exploit the gullibility of his well-heeled clientele for his own ends, which leads to a clear sympathy effect. For example, when a baker's wife is looking for a remedy against rats, he says he needs sugar and tobacco instead of a remedy that contains no harmful substances. It becomes clear that the grandfather never acts this way out of ill-will or uses really dangerous ingredients for his attempts at healing. Stellina, too, is later forced to play a game with the customs officials, acting cunningly like a fox. The chosen image of the fox makes it clear that this is a matter of survival, as otherwise Stellina could not possibly cross the border.

As in Bakhtin's conception of carnivalesque, what happens here is merely a temporary reinterpretation and reversal of the all-too-common relations of dominance. The journey is to be seen as a threshold situation that begins with the departure at the beginning and then continues on the road. Bakhtin understands the chronotopos of the threshold as a site of crisis and transition, both culturally and within the development of a literary figure (Bakhtin 1986, 375sq.). He also ascribes to the threshold a prominent ideology-critical function in genre-innovative forms of inversion and border-crossing through forms of carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1986, 316). The threshold obtains its function above all through the moment of temporal completion, of crossing over. As such, it can also be seen as a transgression of genre conventions. Here, too, we are dealing with an exploration of new forms, a novel of development and an anti-education novel. Above all, this novel ascribes a central function to being on the road and to the process of education, which here, however, takes place above all in oral dialogue and in exchange with nature and other people on the journey. The processual, a becoming in the sense of Derrida, is emphasised again and again: "Nous sommes des nomades parce que la seule chose permanente dans la vie c'est le changement"[10], explains the grandfather (Jayat 1996, 44). This corresponds to Derrida's demand of becoming worldwide, which is conceived of as a process of a new humanisation that wants to be considered a radical difference.

Born in the no-man's land between Italy and France, the Romni becomes a borderline figure who develops a critical attitude towards the

[10] "We are nomads because the only permanent thing in life is change".

way of life of the Roma community as well as the dominant society and sets her own fluid images against this space. The character participates in different groups, thus representing hybrid identity constructions. Just as Stellina herself is a speaker, she is also an object of autofiction. This process of increasing hybridisation creates a figure of cultural translation and reflection that attempts to bring the human into view as a category beyond racial typologies and cultural classifications.

"Mon pays … C'est partout où il y a un humain … Un humain libre à côtoyer. La terre est partout terre"[11], Jayat's text reads (Jayat 2010, 102). If the stereotype of the cheerful "Gypsies in a green wagon" is part of the tradition of images of the majority society—one only has to think of Thomas Mann's novella *Tonio Kröger*—then here the deterritorial way of life is turned in a modern way into a code of cultural multiple belonging, as it is not only found in the political program of various Roma organisations, but also belongs to the definition of the global citizen of the world (cf. Blandfort 2015, 125ff.).

The image of the border is striking because, on the one hand, it is a metaphor for an *écriture* that moves between orality and writing, between auto- and heteroimages. On the other hand, the protagonist, who in the paratext uses the Italian attribution "Zingarina" as a diminutive for a female Roma, is an adolescent in the liminal space of adulthood. Spatially and temporally, the text is also set in a liminal situation between the countries of Italy and France, in the entre-deux where Stellina was also born. This entre-deux also becomes the marker of an *écriture* that moves between cultures and also dissolves media boundaries. The text is thus an assemblage of images, poems, and dance that can be read as an expression of the search for a language of one's own.

Like other texts by the author, the intermedial text in the current folio edition opens with a cover artistically designed by the author herself, whose imagery is reminiscent of Marc Chagall. In a later, longer version of the novel, *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* (*The Zingarina in the Wild Grass*) (2010), which will only be referred to in this essay briefly in a comparative perspective, she sets off for Paris to meet her uncle Django Reinhardt; the later version of the text also integrates considerably more of the author's lyrical texts. The self-designed book cover of the edition *La longue route d'une Zingarina* features a woman bent forward, looking

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[11] "My country … It is wherever there is a human … A free human to be around. The land is land everywhere".

at a shrub with brown withered leaves and gazing at them with an inward, slightly melancholic gaze. She is wearing a red, long dress, and her long, reddish-brown hair falls open over her shoulders. Flies seem to be buzzing above her head, but the images could also be dark thoughts weighing her down, or even symbolise the constriction and exclusion caused by the projections of mainstream society, which cumulates in persecution. This corresponds with the text itself, as the narrator says in the context of the time of the occupation: "Parce que nous vivons dans la nature, ils nous prennent pour des sauvages! Nous n'avons même pas droit à une de leurs misérables cartes de nourriture. They veulent nous faire mourir comme des mouches!"[12] (Jayat 1996, 28). A few, smaller green leaves appear between the brown leaves. The painting points to the situation of the protagonist, who at the beginning sees the fig tree that promises fruit, referring to her happy childhood, withering away when she leaves her family. The few green leaves are to be read in the context as a signal of hope, which can conquer the dark thoughts and fears. The emblematically arranged caption "c'est ça la vie!"[13] seems to reinforce this statement and point to the importance of choosing one's own path in life - despite all difficulties, a symbol of departure and life. This also affirms the role of dance and music. Here, it is not the dance itself that is portrayed in the familiar stereotypes, as in the texts of mainstream society—one only has to think of Hugo's Esmeralda dancing in the glow of the fire with glittering ear hangings or Mérimée's and Bizet's Carmen performing an erotic dance that is under the sign of exoticism—but an autonomous dance that directs the gaze inwards and puts one's own mood into words: "Aux premiers accords, seules mes épaules frémissaient et, à mesure que le rythme de la guitare s'accélérait, tout mon corps s'enflammait"[14] (ibid., 30). This means that it is no longer the stereotypical dance in front of the fire but dance itself that has advanced to become a medium of expression of inwardness, an art form that takes place in the signum of agency. Following Kockelman, the term is negotiated in a broader sense as "capacity whereby social actors (whether individual or institutional ones)

[12] "Because we live in the wild, they think we are savages! We don't even get one of their miserable food cards. They want us to die like flies!"

[13] "That's life!"

[14] "At the first chords, only my shoulders quivered and, as the rhythm of the guitar accelerated, my whole body was on fire".

effectively transform a context of action and thereby enlarge the sphere of their enablements" (Kockelman 2007, 388). The concept of rewriting is used to focus on forms of writing against predefined images of the dominant society or subversions/revisions of orders of representation and knowledge through counter-discursive re-enactment.

3. Myth-Bricolage in the Work of Virginie Carrillo's *La vierge noire* (2016)

Virginie Carillo's text, which oscillates between autofiction, novel, and performance and was also presented in a multimedia performance that combined dance, text, and music, is also about forms of rewriting that are linked to a reconstruction of memory. Life in the extermination camp is remembered, expulsion and exclusion are evoked, which at the same time take on global dimensions and include the extermination, the Porajmos in Romany i.e. the genocide of the European Roma during National Socialism. The grandmother of theatre-maker Virginie Carrillo, "mamita", as she is lovingly addressed in the second person in the text, was deported by German rulers and taken to one of the numerous extermination camps, where all other relatives met their death:

> Tu n'as plus jamais revu ceux que tu aimais. Leurs corps se sont perdus dans un feu de débauche et de haine. […] Tu cherches dans ton reflet, l'effroi ou la monstruosité que tu peux bien leur inspirer. Peut-être tes yeux noirs, ta peau, couleur ébène ? [..] Tu veux croire qu'il y a quelque part, sous une autre lumière, un pays ami. Tu reconstruis une ombre de vie au milieu des cadavres. […] Nous étions des esclaves, privés de droit, voués à une mort certaine. Ils ont été cinq cent mille gitans en Europe à mourir à Dachau, à Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald … dans des camps de la mort ! (Carrillo 2016a, 14f.)[15]

The text is a mixture of poem, song, dance, novel, and play, bringing together different voices in an aesthetic of dialogicity and polyphony inspired by Bakhtin. By addressing the grandmother, the absent other in

[15] "You never saw your loved ones again. Their bodies are lost in a fire of debauchery and hatred. […] You search in your reflection, the fear or the monstrosity that you can inspire in them. Perhaps your black eyes, your ebony skin? […] You want to believe that somewhere, under another light, there is a friendly country. You rebuild a shadow of life among the corpses. […] We were slaves, deprived of rights, doomed to certain death. Five hundred thousand gypsies in Europe died in Dachau, Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald … in death camps!"

the second person, a special atmosphere of intimacy, of tension is evoked, which locates the entire text in an intermediate space between the individual and the general, the private and the public. *La vierge noire* already refers to a mythical level through the paratext, since on the one hand the Roma were persecuted for a long time because of their alleged lack of religion (although many of them were Christians), and, on the other hand, some Roma cultivated their own tradition, which is commemorated in the form of the pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Here, the black Sara is carried through the streets in a procession to express veneration for Sara, the black servant of Mary (cf. Engbring-Romang 2014). The paratext already points to an ambivalence, an ambiguity and a mythic bricolage that is characteristic of the entire text.

The text thus obeys the principle of the in-between-world writing of literatures without a fixed abode, as Otmar Ette has described it:

> Ein mobiles Koordinatensystem wird entworfen, das die Orte aus der Erfahrung, die Räume aus der Bewegung, die Vergangenheit aus dem Erleben und die Gegenwart aus dem Prozess sich herausbildender Zukunft entstehen und ein bewegliches Netzwerk sich bilden läßt, in welchem […] die Bewegungen der Vergangenheit nicht von den Bewegungen (in) der Zukunft zu trennen sind.[16] (Ette 2005, 10)

Mamita, who was taken to a concentration camp as a little girl and is repeatedly categorised with various notions of the foreign Other, returns in a text punctuated by poems in italics, in a discourse of memory that links global history with personal fate. In this way, the genre-hybrid text simultaneously constitutes the history of a persecuted people, of lost memory, rites, customs. It tells of a people "sans avenir"[17] as well as its own life story, which led from being on the road to a sedentary lifestyle: "Un grand cri de bonheur, de liberté"[18], as Carrillo said on the occasion of the performance of the text at the Art Studio Théâtre as part of the Printemps de la Création 2016 festival (Carrillo 2016b). The text inscribes itself in an orality, an oral tradition, when it speaks of "ces contes

[16] "A mobile coordinate system is designed that allows the places to emerge from experience, the spaces from movement, the past from experience and the present from the process of emerging futures, forming a mobile network in which […] the movements of the past cannot be separated from the movements of (in) the future".

[17] "without future"

[18] "A great cry of happiness, of freedom"

que l'on clame au coin de feu"[19] (Carrillo 2016b). Flamenco rhythms and music are resigned here and recoded into expressions of artistic freedom. In poetic-dreamlike sequences, the past and the present, individual and collective history or memory are restaged, with the construction of time and identity assuming a separate significance. Through the interplay of several media of memory—dance, music, text—a re-reading of several myth fragments is made possible, which at the same time results in a metaisation. The immanent level of the dramatic event (characters, plot) overlaps with the situational level of the theatre (author, director, actor, stage, audience) as well as the drama- and theatre-transcending level (cf. Wodianka 2005, 65). In this way, the spectator witnesses the creation of the myth and, on the one hand, participates in the creation of the myth, but at the same time, through metaisation, the spectator is permanently made aware of this very process. This enables the viewer, like the mythologist in Roland Barthes' description, to reflect on and resignify the process at the same time.

In the theatre space, the texts, chansons, music and dance merge into a polyphonic tableau that forcefully dissolves the boundaries between the past and the present, the foreign and the own. In the form of the vectorisation described by Ette, a new experiential space of particular intensity emerges, a mythic bricolage in which old myths, such as that of the dancing salamander-like "Gypsy" Esmeralda, are invoked just as much as that of the corrupting seductress Carmen, only to be subtly subverted at the same time: "La gitane avance, visage d'ange, cheveux noirs, avec son regard froid, un bout de lune glacée"[20] (Carrillo 2016a, 30). The black topical hair is countered by the face of the angel, just as the now cold gaze, the icy moon superimpose it in another layer of meaning, a "glissement de sens"[21]: "Ô toi, Carmen, femme martyre, laissant des traces de sang, laissant des traces de larmes, quand son regard se perd sur des nuées et des cimes, sa liberté imagine des voyages incertains"[22] (Carrillo

[19] "those tales that are told by the fireside"

[20] "The Gypsy woman advances, angelic face, black hair, with her cold gaze, a piece of frozen moon"

[21] "shift in meaning"

[22] "O you, Carmen, martyred woman, leaving traces of blood, leaving traces of tears, when her gaze is lost on clouds and peaks, her freedom imagines uncertain voyages".

2016a, 30). In a performance in which several codes coexist according to the procedure described by Hölz, these myths are both re- and deconstructed:

> Die starre Rolle der Differenzetikettierung wird ‚performativ' in der Weise unterlaufen, dass die Alterität als inszenierte, durch Maskerade, Travestie, Spiel, Parodie oder Imitation hervorgerufene Merkmalsbeschreibung in Erscheinung tritt.[23] (Hölz 2000, 9)

Here, too, writing is staged as the key to a successful education, which thus once again figures as a synonym for adaptation and integration. The difference here is that the addressee does not read herself, but listens to the old stories. Moreover, the daughters do not want to submit to this dictum of the spoken language, which is seen in opposition to their own freedom. At the same time, however, writing is understood as a means of evasion, of fantasy travel, which again dissolves the opposition:

> Parfois, il te lit des histoires et tu l'écoutes comme si tu écoutais les mots de Dieu. Les livres sont pour toi des voyages inconnus que tu n'as pas encore parcourus. Térésa a neuf ans et toujours pas de cartable. L'institutrice ne comprend pas son sentiment d'indépendance et de liberté. Elle a sa place parmi les écoliers, elle va s'habituer. Aller à l'école, étudier, avoir de bonnes notes, jouer dans la cour aux jeux des autres enfants, et essayer d'attraper les nuages, toujours plus haut sur la balançoire.[24] (Carrillo 2016a, 31–32)

In the image of the swing, which is topically associated with freedom, for example, in eighteenth-century rococo paintings, but also in Fontane's *Effi Briest* or in current performance art to suggest a temporary break from the codes of behaviour, a pendulum movement connects differently semanticised spaces with each other. In the end, Térésa, Mamita's daughter, will also acknowledge reading as a means of education, de-

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[23] "The rigid role of difference labelling is subverted 'performatively' in such a way that alterity appears as a staged description of characteristics produced by masquerade, travesty, play, parody or imitation".

[24] "Sometimes he reads you stories and you listen to him as if you were listening to the words of God. Books are unknown journeys for you that you have not yet travelled. Teresa is nine years old and still has no schoolbag. The teacher does not understand her sense of independence and freedom. She has her place among the schoolchildren, she will get used to it. Going to school, studying, getting good grades, playing in the playground with the other children, and trying to catch the clouds, higher and higher on the swing"

spite all attempts to defame and exclude her as a "sale gitane"[25] (Carrillo 2016a, 32). Only in this way can "la peur de l'autre"[26] (Carrillo 2016a, 33) be overcome and stereotypes dissolved, as the following passage, which addresses one of the most powerful and oldest stereotypical Gypsy figures, Cervantes' Gitanilla, makes clear:

> Progressivement, Térésa arrête ses explorations et dévore toutes sortes de publication. «Au milieu du son des tambourins et des castagnettes, au plus fort de la danse, s'éleva une rumeur pour célébrer la beauté et la grâce de la gitane, et les gamins accouraient pour la voir et les hommes pour la regarder. La petite gitane de Cervantès.»[27] (Carrillo 2016a, 33)

In that this myth is only present as a quotation, a meta-mythical configuration simultaneously addresses the process of myth re- and deconstruction, which already becomes clear in Cervantes' performatively designed text.[28] The meaning of myth thus becomes free for re-mythification as its performative core, the mechanism of exclusion, is exposed. What Barthes writes about the task of the mythologist also applies here:

> […] son statut profond reste encore un statut d'exclusion. […] Sa parole est un métalangage, elle n'agit rien ; tout au plus dévoile-t-elle, et encore, pour qui ? […] Et puis le mythologue s'exclut de tous les consommateurs de mythe, et ce n'est pas rien.[29] (Barthes 1957, 265f.)

As Stephanie Wodianka rightly states, the "meta-mythical renarration" is the only possible form of destroying the myth (Wodianka 2005, 61); additionally, the special form of mythic bricolage should be mentioned again here (cf. von Hagen 2006a, 194).

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[25] "dirty Gypsy"

[26] "the fear of the other"

[27] "Gradually, Teresa stopped her explorations and devoured all kinds of publications. 'Amidst the sound of tambourines and castanets, at the height of the dance, a rumour arose to celebrate the beauty and grace of the Gypsy woman, and the children ran to see her and the men to look at her. The little Gypsy girl of Cervantes'"

[28] Cf. von Hagen 2006b.

[29] "[…] His profound status still remains one of exclusion. […] His word is a metalanguage, it does not act anything; at most it reveals, and yet, for whom? […] And then the mythologist excludes himself from all the consumers of myth, and that is no small thing".

The performative element, which makes the Other a foreign Other in the first place through the attribution of stereotypical images, is already present in Cervantes on several levels, including the paratext, which arranges different identities like cue balls on a billiard table and thus emphasises the mobile element through the masquerade of the character, who is only apparently a Gypsy girl, advanced to a “gitanilla” by others and her own performance. The identity-constructing glances of the others are also central here. If this performative element is subsumed at the end of Cervantes’ novella in favour of a codifying gesture of inclusion when the supposed Gypsy girl is established to be the beautiful aristocratic Preziosa (cf. von Hagen 2006b, 171), in Carrillo’s text, precisely this performative element becomes the core of a performance that simultaneously reconstructs and deconstructs different images of the imagination in a *glissement de sens*, a de- and re-mythification at the same time.

The two forms of autofictions by Jayat and Carrillo mark different varieties of Roma aesthetics, in which a mythic bricolage is stylistically formative. This form of rewriting can also be seen in Miguel Haler’s text *Mémoire d’un chat de gouttière* (2011), which can thus also be assigned to this form of rewriting. Like Barthes’ *S/Z,* the story of a tomcat plays with gender categories as well as with the fixed and the fluid, with different constellations of space and time. With reference to narratives of other marginalised authors such as Kafka (as a Jew in Prague) or Virginia Woolf (as a woman among male authors), the polyphonic text constitutes an amalgam of travel diary, memoir, and adventure novel, which can be read at the same time as a manifesto of ecocriticism and an appeal for mindful interaction.

4. From the Cat’s Point of View: Haler’s *Mémoire d’un chat de gouttière* (2011)

In particular, the combination of a global orientation against a capitalist backdrop with the construction of hybrid identities, which also manifests itself in emancipating nomadic writing, is stylistically formative for Haler’s text. In this context, it is striking that even the paratextual title refers to the older tradition of autobiographical writings by French authors—memoir literature—but subverts the genre in an ironic game and thus creates a space for alternative identity designs that plead for the fluid against fixed descriptions. The plural of the genre, “mémoires”, which

seems to plead for a plurality of different memories, narratives and thus ego constitutions, makes the fluidity clear.

In the process, central discourses, such as the question of the human and the animal, as they are currently also moving Animal Studies, acquire new perspectives. The text explores the boundaries between the foreign and the own. On the one hand, the text ties in with the oral tradition of the Roma, but on the other hand, it also emphasises the necessity of a written discourse, which is supposed to make the visibility of the alternative designs possible in the first place. The oral tradition continues to be cultivated by finding its way into a traditional genre of the majority society—autofiction—which is at the same time subtly subjected to reécriture. The form of oraliture or scriptorality is specifically reflected in the novel by clarifying in the paratext that tape recordings form the basis for the later elaborated autofiction. The dichotomy of written and oral form is mirrored in domestic fiction by the cat's dependence on the guitar-playing unsuccessful poet Miguel Haler to publish his orally communicated autobiography fixed on cassettes. Haler thus inscribes himself as an author figure in the text by resorting to the editor fiction, as was common especially in the eighteenth century for authenticating correspondences and mémoires. Thus, in the epilogue, the autodiegetic narrator changes to a homodiegetic one, that of the author Miguel Haler, who reports that he had no success in publishing this "étonnant récit", which he only edited and smoothed out a little, although he sent the manuscript to numerous publishing houses. Only when his own memory was awakened by the voice on a CD that he received 24 years later did he write down the cat's last thoughts, which took on a testament-like character. In this way the text also resembles the original texts of this type of text, i.e. the confessions of Augustine, Montaigne or Rousseau (cf. Haler 2011, 175). Unlike these autofictions, however, the last recording of the rooftop cat—according to the editor's fiction—ends with a clear ecological manifesto, even an eco-ethical appeal:

> Il me faut maintenant clore la chronique de mon étrange histoire mais je voudrais toutefois vous avouer une chose avant de me taire tout à fait : aujourd'hui, je suis complètement intégré dans ma condition féline. Les affaires humaines ne m'attirent plus du tout. Je vois, par le truchement de la télévision et des journaux, les choses affligeants que les hommes peuvent se faire entre eux : guerres, massacres et autres atrocités effroyables …) Vous, les humains, n'avez pas de prédateurs, vous vous multipliez, mais par contre vous êtes en train de massacrer et d'anéantir toutes les espèces animales qui vous entourent … […] Vous devenez si nombreux, bientôt six milliards et ce n'est pas fini, que vous enva-

> hissez tout… Ceci vous entraîne à faire de la déforestation à outrance et à transformer notre belle planète en une immense poubelle !! À cause de ceci, vous allez modifier tous les écosystèmes pour faire tout crever.[30] (Haler 2011, 174)

The address in the second-person plural, the self-exclusion from human society, contrasts with the signature; and thus, the reader learns here for the first time the name of the fictitious author, Victor Schlume, a name that virtually exhibits its own strangeness due to the unfamiliar sound. The text itself mixes different registers of language, relies on dialogicity in the sense of Bakhtin. The style of the novel consists in the combination of styles; the language of the novel is a system of "languages". Each marked element of the novel's language is directly determined by that subordinate stylistic unit into which it enters: by the stylistically individualised speech of the hero, by the narrator's commentary, by the letter, etc. (cf. Bakhtin 1979, 157).

The boundary between the animal and the human becomes blurred, just as the boundary between cultures is dissolved. The numerous breaks are striking: the cat remembers his life as a human being and reflects on both forms of existence, but finally accepts the new form of life by recalling his former self. A complex narrative structure that repeatedly mixes different styles, genres, languages and codes also draws attention to the difficult writing situation of the Roma, which manifests itself here once again in a re-writing that seeks its own language for what it has experienced, moving between the oral tradition of memory and the written, over-formed one of the dominant society, and thus constituting a form of self-empowerment.[31]

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[30] "I must now close the chronicle of my strange story, but I would like to confess one thing before I shut up: today I am completely integrated into my feline condition. Human affairs no longer attract me at all. I see, through television and newspapers, the distressing things that men can do to each other: wars, massacres and other appalling atrocities…) You humans have no predators, you are multiplying, but on the other hand you are massacring and annihilating all the animal species that surround you… […] You are becoming so numerous, soon six billion and counting, that you are invading everything… This is leading you to deforest excessively and to transform our beautiful planet into a huge bin!! Because of this, you are going to modify all the ecosystems to make everything die".

[31] Ursula Maria Egyptien also uses the example of the autobiographies of Cohen, a Jew in the Diaspora, to show how difficult it is to find one's own language in comparable situations (cf. Egyptien 2000, 58).

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Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf

(Romani) Biofiction as World Literature: A Case Study of Núria León de Santiago's *Mahler's Angel*

Abstract

The following article analyses the biofiction *El ángel de Mahler* (*Mahler's Angel*), published in 2014, by the Spanish Romani female author Núria León de Santiago to illustrate the extent to which a productive overlap exists between the genre of biofiction on the one hand and that of Romani literature as world literature on the other.

León de Santiago's biographical novel offers an excellent example of cross-cultural representation: a world-famous Jewish-Austrian musician, Gustav Mahler, becomes the protagonist of a work by a Romani author writing in Spanish. Moreover, *Mahler's Angel* is a "veiled autobiography" (Layne/Tóibín 2018, 151), in so far as the book not only presents a new perspective on Mahler's life but also negotiates the writer's autobiographic concerns regarding ethnic minorities in general and the multiple in- and out-group discriminations of Roma-women in particular. Thus, León de Santiago's biofiction is a paradigmatic example of contemporary world literature "on the move" (Ette 2003) in a globalized world.

1. Reflections on Biofictions and/as World Literature

The roots of literary fictions that process (auto-)biographical elements have been around for over a hundred years, and since then authors all over the world have been exploring the possibilities of storytelling between fact and fiction. Since the 1980s, however, the form of 'fictional biographies' or 'biographical fictions' emerged as an autonomous genre under the catalytic influence of postmodernism and postmodern theory. In fact, the French critic Alain Buisine conceptualized the literary trend by coining the term 'biofiction' in 1991.[1]

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[1] In German-language research, the term was introduced by Middeke/Huber (1999).

As a worldwide literary trend, biofiction has the character of world literature.[2] In fact, there are several arguments for considering this hybrid genre as world literature, i.e., as a literature that is dedicated to Goethe's ideal of the *Bildungsroman* insofar as it uses the process of education and development of an individual to shed light on our shared world and its values. Furthermore, the capacity of the genre of biofictions to encompass worldly themes lies in the fact that they contribute to bridging the gap between canonical literature and popular mainstream literature. The genre thus strengthens the cross-cultural revival and contemporary re-evaluation of important historical personalities from around the world by integrating cultural icons from the world canon into the cultural consciousness of new generations regardless of their social, cultural and ethnic origin. Therefore, following David Damrosch's conception of world literature as a mode of reading rather than a selection of canonical works, biofictions could be understood as world literature insofar as they configure a vision of the world, not only through presenting diverse literary influences, transcultural hybridity, and cultural recycling, but also through revealing parallel developments across spatio-temporal, ethnic, and political spaces. Not least, biofictions partake of world literature through their ideological/political stance, that is, their very individual re-interpretation of normative facts that emphasizes the constructive and, not least, hegemonic character of national, cultural, and biographic narratives.

2. Romani Literature as World Literature

Romani literatures not written in Romany but in the languages of the majority are artistic expressions of the deterriorialised and transnational diaspora community of Roma.[3] In fact, these literatures always differ from national literatures with their aesthetic standards and literary canons. Following Cécile Kovacshazy (2009, 137) Romani literature be-

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[2] The great interest that researchers have taken in this genre is reflected in the conference "Biofiction as World Literature" at the Catholic University at Leuven (1.–4. September 2021), see https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/biofiction-as-world-literature.

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of Romani literature as diasporic literature, see Hertrampf (2021a).

comes an exemplary case of de- or polycentered notions of world literature. Postcolonial as well as diasporic perspectives:

> call into question the nation-based, proleptic emphasis of world literature, and the modernity of the world economic system that underpins it. Rather than a literary history comprised of national masterpieces that will be surpassed by transnational expressions, disaporic writers conjure a literary past marked precisely by the circulation, translation, and revision which Goethe identifies as hallmark of the contemporary era of world literature. (Frydman 2012, 233)

In his *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity* (1996, 66), Éduard Glissant describes Roma as the epitome of a people of diversity characterized by cultural *métissage*, world openness, and transgressive dynamism. Consequently, the literary self-expression of Roma is "without fixed abode" (Ette 2003) and is characterized by its aesthetic diversity; Romani literature is therefore a paradigmatic example of multiple border-crossing "literatures on the move" (I use here a term coined by Ottmar Ette 2003). At the same time, we see the proximity to Damrosch's understanding of world literature when he states:

> World literature is […] always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two faci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone. (Damrosch 2003, 283)

Therefore, Romani literatures and especially biofictions written by Romani authors can be understood as world literature insofar as they configure a transcultural and hybrid vision of the world, recycle and combine diverse literary traditions, and present a re-interpretation of past realities by emphasising political and social continuities.[4]

3. Núria León de Santiago: Spain's First Female Romani Writer

Like in all European countries, written Romani literature (in Spanish) is a fairly recent development in Spain, emerging only at the beginning

[4] Also see Hertrampf (2021b).

of the 20th century.[5] The Sevillian poet, artist, and revolutionary Helios Gómez is generally considered the first Romani author to write in Spanish.[6] Not least because of Franco's reprisals against all Spanish minorities, any literature penned by Roma was subsequently rendered virtually non-existent. A certain exception, however, is flamenco poetry, although it should also be noted here that, apart from José Heredia Maya, only a few Roma flamenco poets have achieved national recognition. But even after the period of transition to democracy after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, literary productions by Roma remained virtually invisible. A certain turning point can only be seen from the 1990s onwards. Nevertheless, Roma writing in Spanish who, as mediators, deliberately cross cultural-ethnic boundaries between the surrounding society and their own group, continue to be the exception to this day.[7]

Although Spanish Romani literature had its origins in lyrical works, today's Romani literature production is almost exclusively concentrated on narrative texts. Furthermore, it is striking that literary work and political engagement are closely linked. Joaquín Albaicín, undoubtedly the best-known and most productive Spanish Romani author of the present day, is a founding member of the International Romani Writers' Association and, in addition to his literary activity, works as a socio-politically active journalist. Spanish Romani authors of younger generations like Sally Cortès Santiago,[8] Marcos Santiago Cortés or Núria León de Santiago appear confidently in public and on social networks as *gitan@s* and are involved in various NGOs and Romani associations for the empowerment of Roma in general and Romani women in particular.

In fact, Núria León de Santiago is an outstanding personality. The daughter of the famous flamenco legend La Chana is the first female Spanish Romani author. She is quite consciously open about her Romani origins, but repeatedly emphasizes with vehemence that she is also a Spanish author who wants to be perceived as such:

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[5] Cf. Hackl (1987); Hertrampf (2011 a und b).

[6] In contrast to other countries, it is striking that there is no written literature written by gitanos in Caló, Spanish variant of Romany.

[7] For more detailed surveys see Hertrampf (2011a and b), (2019).

[8] See my other chapter in this book, entitled "Female empowerment through literary overwriting of stereotypical images of Romani femininity: An exemplary analysis from Spain: Sally Cortés' novel *When the stars are silent* (2018)".

> So, like any other writer, I write about what excites me: about Mahler, and another book is coming out soon, 'Cenizas en la boca' ('Ashes in the Mouth'). Neither of them is about Gitanos. Because I see no reason to write about Gitanos. Because I am a writer and I am also Gitana; and apart from Gitana, I am a writer. For me, the two are so fused that I don't care what order you put it in. (Ibarz 2016, 16; translation MOH)

By placing Gustav Mahler, i.e. a historical *payo* personality, at the center of her first novel *El ángel de Mahler* and by only marginally establishing thematic references to the minority group, León de Santiago emancipates herself from thematically self-referential forms of aesthetic expression by Romani authors.[9] In addition to this, León de Santiago uses aesthetic patterns of majority literary production and thus distances herself from the attribution as minority or "gitano" literature and inscribes her novel in the literary field of international contemporary literature, in which biofictions belong to the fictional mainstream.[10]

4. Núria León de Santiago's Biofiction *Mahler's Angel* as World Literature

By placing the world-famous Austrian musician at the centre of a Spanish-language novel and linking his biography to the fate of a young woman from the Romani diaspora, the author hybridises European music history with the fate of structurally discriminated and disadvantaged Jews and Roma, thus creating a biofiction of truly world-literary content.[11] It is noticeable that in addition to Mahler's prominent historical personality, the focus is primarily on socially marginalised women. In addition to the first-person narrator, Fanah Leonovah, a Russian Romni, plays an important role in the life of Mahler's literary character. According to the narrator, Mahler meets the gracefully dancing Romani street

[9] For a more detailed analysis of the novel see Hertrampf (2020).

[10] In fact, this also applies quite specifically to biofictions about Gustav Mahler's life. In German contemporary fiction *Mahlers Tode: Ein Gedankenspiel* (Mahler's Deaths: A Game of Thought; 2010) by Axel Koppetsch, *Die Heimkehr: Vom Sterben und Leben des Gustav Mahler* (The Homecoming: On the Death and Life of Gustav Mahler; 2011) by Guy Wagner, *Das brennende Herz: Gustav Mahler* (The Burning Heart: Gustav Mahler; 2017) by Hassan Ardjah and the story "Mahlers Heimkehr" (Mahler's homecoming; 2014) by Walter Kappacher have appeared.

[11] For an interpretation of the novel see also Hertrampf (2022).

musician Fanah by chance in the German Hanseatic city of Lübeck in 1891. He feels so strongly emotionally attracted to her that he intends to marry her immediately. It is interesting that León de Santiago uses this encounter to stage Mahler's special sensitivity and knowledge of human nature, which transcends all social prejudices and clichés and underlines the fact that music and dance have a cross-border and unifying effect in transnational communication.

Although the plot is set at the beginning of the last century, the author works out the supra-temporal moments with her current reinterpretation and reassessment of Mahler's life. Despite his character flaws, Mahler's courageous decision in favour of the socially marginalised Romani woman makes him a person to identify with and a role model. In this way, the author updates the historical setting and shows the timeless omnipresence of the most diverse forms of exclusion in a supposedly so tolerant and transnational cultural community, in the way that the European elites understand today's Europe.

Like any biofiction, *Mahler's Angel*, which runs to around 800 pages, relies on passages of indeterminacy that are filled imaginatively. The composition and structure of the novel show a high degree of literary composition, whereby the special trick is that the author pretends to base her literary production on the documents of a certain Elisabeth Mahler, which she claims to have received in the year 2000 with the estate of Aurore Montoya, a friend of La Chana (the author's mother). "Despite the doubts they may raise, the documents contained in this book do exist." ("Pese a las dudas que puedan suscitar, los documentos que contiene este libro existen", 12), the author asserts in her preface to the novel. While León de Santiago supposedly relies on actual written documents, which she pretends to have translated from German into Spanish, studied meticulously for over four years, and supplemented with further research on Mahler's personality, it remains unclear whether the supposed contemporary documents are authentic or already the result of a process of fictionalisation. Therefore, the real existence of Elisabeth Mahler shows just as little evidence of authenticity as the notes (allegedly) made in Weimar shortly before her death in 1971. According to these documents, however, Gustav Mahler met Elisabeth in 1891 when she was a nine-year-old orphan girl, first made her his foster daughter, then his mistress, and remained in close contact with her until his death in 1911.

According to Bethany Layne and Colm Tóibín, biographical fiction is not only "Anchored Imagination" but

> […] in a way, like all fiction, a sort of veiled autobiography made of elaborated versions of the self that would otherwise remain hidden—using the bare bones or a set of facts that are available to deliver on feelings that have not until then had a focus. (Layne/Tóibín 2018, 151)

In fact, this is the case in *Mahler's Angel,* which not only depicts Mahler's life but at the same time negotiates autobiographic concerns of the author. Núria León de Santiago grew up in a family influenced by music and became enthusiastic about Mahler's work at an early age. This very personal interest, combined with the musician's eventful and moving biography, prompted the author to also deal with him in literature. One aspect in particular is of importance to her. That is the racially motivated discrimination that Mahler faced in the form of anti-semitic campaigns and that are parallel to experiences of Romani minorities. In an interview, Núria León de Santiago states: "The fact that Mahler was Jewish was an extremely important part of the concept. What happened at that time left a terrible impression on me, and that somehow caused me to take special care of Mahler, Mahler as a literary figure." (Ibarz 2016, 16; translation MOH) Thus, for the author, who sees herself as a *gitana* and a Spaniard in equal measure, and above all as a Spanish-speaking author who defends equal rights for all people, it is not central to stand up exclusively against discrimination of Roma, but against every form of disadvantage and exclusion. And yet, even though her main character is not a representative of the Roma minority, the invention of the character Fanah shows that she is also concerned with her own cause, that is, with the struggle for acceptance of the Roma.

The novel's direct socio-political engagement with the transnational topic of stigmatisation and discrimination also involves the biofiction in a world dialogue about overcoming the timeless theme of the powerlessness of minorities. Thus, the novel is a plea for tolerance and acceptance of individual and collective diversity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, for the return to the greatest value of humanity, which is unconditional love that overcomes. In this way, *Mahler's Angel* can be read as an attempt to develop a transcultural as well as trans-ethnic (Romani) aesthetic—right in the sense of world literature.

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Emilia Kledzik

Roma Art as Postcolonial *Contact Zone*: *Re-Enchanting the World* by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas

Abstract

This essay presents analysis of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's work *Re-Enchanting the World*, presented in the Polish pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2022. As an interpretative tool it uses the term "contact zone", created by Mary Louise Pratt, to describe the hybridity of post-colonial culture. Like post-colonial art, contemporary Roma art also makes use of visual and textual images of people called "Gypsies" produced by European ethnologists and historians in the 18th and 19th centuries. This gesture of transformation is characterised by a critical perspective and an intention to restore the subjectivity of the people affected by this image. By way of comparison, the essay presents an example of current conceptualisations of the history of Romani literature, in which the heritage of "Gypsy studies" is uncritically acknowledged as the historical heritage of the Roma.

1. Introduction: *Contact Zone* in Postcolonial and Romani Studies

In her monograph *Imperial Eyes: Travel Literature and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt demonstrated how the writings of European travelers from the mid-18th-century onward produced images of remote parts of the world in order to neutralize the processes of colonization. According to Pratt, transformations in travel writing intersected with other forms of knowledge and expression and were correlated with shifts in capitalist economy (Pratt 2008, 5). Pratt was also interested in how the peripheries responded to this narrative as well as in discourses that emerged from this dialogue.

The global travelogue colonial discourse and the local ways in which it is absorbed resemble the forms of representation that Western European culture produced for local communities of people called "Gypsies". Just as the colonial discourse was enmeshed with the dynamics of capital-

ism, the discourse of "Gypsy Studies", which portrayed Roma people on the margins of mainstream society, was linked to the emergence of a modern model of citizenship (Lucassen 1996). Grounded in the modern European perspective, the colonial discourse resembled a complex trend of describing the "Gypsy" community, which emerged at the end of the 18th century and became a multi-contextual and dynamic response to political changes in Europe. This complex system of knowledge, together with the network of its distribution in universities, scientific societies, journals, as well as in the press and literature, is—in many respects—analogous to Edward Said's construct of Orientalism by virtue of its binary formation, interdisciplinary approach, and scholarly authority (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007, 153).

The contemporary and past situation of Roma communities has been frequently analyzed with postcolonial tools. It has been mentioned in migrant studies (Kostka 2019), art history (Junghaus 2013), literary studies (Toninato 2020) (Kledzik 2023), sociology (Kocze, Nidhi 2009), and anthropology (McGarry 2017). Roma communities in different parts of the world are believed to have been victims of the same forms of exclusion/representation as people of different skin color, former slaves, or their descendants. However, the discursive and institutional underpinnings that have historically legitimized the process of excluding Roma people from civic societies in order to then offer a method of reintegrating them on condition of adherence to a particular social pedagogy, have not yet received critical attention on the same level as colonial discourse. At the same time, the mechanism of discursive construction of "Gypsy" culture and the image of the "Gypsy" in European culture as a hermetic phenomenon have been comprehensively described in imagological works analyzing exoticized portraits of "Gypsy" men and women (Bogdal 2010) (Brittnacher 2012). However, in my view, a comparative analysis of the construct of "Gypsy culture", as a counterpart to the orientalizing account of the inhabitants of the colonies, makes it possible to see postcolonial practices in contemporary Romani art, in which two essentialisms—of colonial oppression and of anti-colonial resistance—meet and intertwine (Silverman 2022).

In *Imperial Eyes* Mary Louise Pratt devoted a monograph to this very phenomenon: the clash between the colonial narrative and its transformation by the subaltern. The researcher was interested in "transculturation", or, in her definition, the way conquered or marginalized populations select and transform patterns that the dominant or metro-

politan culture has transmitted to them. Although these communities are unable to "control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying degrees, what they absorb into their own, and what they use of it" (Pratt 2008, 6). This encounter between colonial discourse and its re-writing by those affected by that discourse occurs, as Pratt writes, in the "contact zone", which makes it possible to assimilate, process, respond to or reject the image of the colonized. The "contact zone" is defined as:

> Space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other, and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (Pratt 2008, 6)

Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" captures the way in which the conquering and the conquered are shaped by their mutual relationships. Paola Toninato has applied this concept to Romani studies and defined it as: "the border zone where Romani and non-Romani languages and cultures come into contact" (Toninato 2020, 171). In my perspective this is also a space of intertwined "Gypsy Studies" and contemporary Roma discourses. In the postcolonial perspective, the "contact zone" becomes not only an area of mutual exchange and translation, but also an area where colonial and anticolonial discourses become visible and sometimes deconstructed.

Both aspects of the "contact zone"—a fusion of the Romani and non-Romani worlds and intertwining the colonial, exotising discourse of "Gypsy studies" with intimate microhistory—are present within Malgorzata Mirga-Tas's exhibition *Re-Enchanting the World*, presented at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Małgorzata Mirga-Tas is a Polish-Roma artist who in various ways plays with colonial discourse by deconstructing and transforming it into a narrative affirming her local Roma community. Her artistic idiom, particularly the work presented at the Biennale, is a particular kind of Romani, post-colonial rewriting, which also reflects the shift of emphasis that often appears in post-colonial works from the global/national/ethnic (generalizing in multiple ways) to the local/private. She also shows which elements from the complex knowledge system of "Gypsy studies" can be accepted by the Roma artist and under which conditions.

Re-Enchanting the World also carries other meanings: the title of the exhibition is a reference to Silvia Federici's work with the same title, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Fed-

erici 2018). Federici, in criticizing the world of global capitalism, affirms relationships between women; she thereby endorses collaborative work as alternatives to the economic world, as well as a project of society without hierarchies and divisions between the space of nature and culture and of building ties with all Others, including animals, plants, and inanimate matter. This element of equality, pacifism, and working together is important to the private story told by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. It also echoes the philosophy behind the creation of her works, which are produced collectively, in a female, family community.

The composition of Mirga-Tas's Venice exhibit was inspired by Renaissance frescoes by Francesco dell Cossa and other 15th-century painters from the school of Cosmè Tura from the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara (cf. illustration 1).

Mirga-Tas reproduced the interior of this palace's famous Hall of Months using patchwork tapestries. This added a new interpretive context to her work, one related to the universality of the European representation of the Roma, and its timeless and transnational character. In Mirga-Tas's artwork, which is modeled on the tripartite design of the frescoes, the tapestries in the lower section tell her family history; the middle section shows women involved in Roma emancipatory movement and symbols of the zodiac signs; and the top section is a reworking of etchings of "Gypsies" by the 17th-century artist Jacques Callot (cf. illustration 2).

The postcolonial "contact zone" becomes visible between the upper and lower sections of Mirga-Tas's work. In the former, the artist used canonical scenes from the lives of the people called "Gypsies" based on Callot's sketches, characteristic of the pre-modern portrayal of these people as known from late medieval city chronicles and Renaissance painting. In turn, the lower section of the frescoes shows images from the lives of Roma and non-Roma relatives of Mirga-Tas. These are scenes from her family home in Czarna Góra. They depict mainly women, their common activities, and their working together. Scenes from daily life of residents of Czarna Góra are contemporary, but also date from the past: for example, the one showing a potato harvest. Some of them coincide with Callot's prints: for example, the scene of a card game.

Below, I will try to characterize the specifics of the "contact zone" between the colonial discourse of "Gypsy Studies" and the artist's family microhistory. I will place this dialogue in the broader context of the contemporary reception of "Gypsy Studies".

Ill. 1: Hall of the Months, Museo Schifanoia, Ferrara, courtesy Musei di Arte Antica di Ferrara. Photo: Daniel Rumiancew

Ill. 2: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Re-enchanting the World (March), 2022, textile installation (fragment), 462 x 387 cm. Photo: Daniel Rumiancew. Courtesy of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas

2. The Colonial Model of "Gypsy Culture" Reused in the Work of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas

As recognized by art historians, the image of people called "Gypsies" in Western art has been subject to numerous deconstructions by contemporary Roma artists (van Baar 2020), (Junghaus 2013), (Weyhert-Waluszko 2013). Their focus is mainly on the ethnographic status of the art produced by Roma artists, resulting from it being seen in line with colonial discourse: anything "Gypsy" becomes equated with being naïve and premodern.

As it was in the case of colonial discourse, the image of the "Gypsy", since 17th century simultaneously produced and consolidated by Western literature and visual arts, had its scientific underpinnings. The first to bring attention to the problematic notion of "the true Gypsy" constructed by early ethnographers, historians, and anthropologists was Thomas Acton. Published in 1974, his book *Gypsy Politics and Social Change* marked the beginning of a criticism of "Gypsy Studies" and an important cornerstone of Roma political activism. Acton suggested that the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in Liverpool in 1888, was the flagship model of the ideology of "the true Gypsy". He named several interconnected elements as the most important features of this academic construct that Gypsy Lore created and promoted:

- Origins in India. This foundational thesis for traditional "Gypsy Studies" was first advanced in the late 18th century based on a selective comparative analysis of the Hindustani language and the language of the Hungarian Roma (see also: Willems 1997). All other features of "true Gypsy" identity were based on the idea that "Gypsies" are a non-European community, and therefore their culture should be defined in opposition to European cultures.
- Cultural hermeticism. According to Gypsy Lore scholars, "oriental" origins implied that ethnic homogeneity was preserved only under restrictive conditions. "True Gypsy" culture was accessible to a few outsiders who were ready to confront its otherness and able to win the trust of people called "Gypsies". "Gypsy" discourse in English, for example, called such people "Romani Rye", following the title of George Borrow's trendsetting series of books from the mid-19th century.
- Exotic customs, resulting from non-European origins. "Gypsy" cultural rituals related to the taboos of sexuality and death were of particular interest to scholars of "Gypsy Studies".

- Nomadic lifestyle and the reluctance to establish lasting ties with the land and majority society. (Acton 1974, 87–93)

Nomadism was the most important element, aside from Indian ancestry, in shaping how "Gypsy" people presumably differed from European national societies. It was used to explain a number of other properties of "Gypsy culture", for example, its oral character and lack of historical memory. In particular, these two factors—the lack of written records and the lack of memory of the past—were counterpoints to the curriculum of philology studies emerging in European universities at the end of the 19th century. The dogma of "Gypsy nomadism" was based on another important assumption: that only natural space, i.e., located away from modernized areas, is the place where "Gypsy culture" can fully manifest itself. If "Gypsy people" were to be removed from this space and placed in another, modern one, this culture would disappear.

While stressing the exotic and uncivilized nature of "Gypsy people", "Gypsy Studies" sanctioned the practice of portraying them in circumstances that Western European discourse associated with depicting other species, that is, visually, presenting their anonymous portraits to make anthropological features and unusual clothing visible. "Gypsies" were presented performing physiological activities or with the intent of disclosing their instinctive (so-deemed "irrational") lifestyle. Literature and early folk studies stressed their ability to communicate with the world of nature, which was lost in settled societies but attributed to the "Gypsies" portrayed as speaking the "language of animals" or possessing the ability to control the weather (Brittnacher 2012). Additionally, the artifacts of "Gypsy" folk culture that were produced or co-produced by "Gypsy Studies", especially "Gypsy" songs and legends, depicted "Gypsy" people in a natural setting, and thereby functioned as evidence of their close relationship with nature.

The combination of features and ways of portraying the community of people called "Gypsies" since the Enlightenment often relied on gossip, anecdote, or counterfeit evidence. This has been the case since the first early ethnographic work on the subject, still a source of direct or indirect references today: the treatise by Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellman entitled *Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung* (English title: *Dissertation on the Gipsies: being an historical enquiry, concerning the manner of life, family economy, customs and conditions of these people in Europe, and their origin*), published in 1783

in Göttingen. In the spirit of Enlightenment democratism, its author deliberately linked the colonial process with his work on "Gypsy people". He wrote that, while Europeans were bearing the burden of civilizing peoples outside their continent, they were overlooking a local, neglected group with similar needs:

> We send Apostles to the East and West, into the most distant parts of the Earth; and, as will be shown below, into the very country, to the brethren of the Gipsies [sic!], in order to instruct the people who know not God. It is not inconsistent, for men to be solicitous for those who are without, and to throw off and leave to chance those, who, equally wretched, have brought their errors home to us. (Grellmann 1783, 80–81)

Grellman's work opened with a lecture on the reasons why European societies used different terms to refer to "Gypsies". This part constituted a homogenous, unified "Gypsy" subject of scholarly discussion. It was crucial for Enlightenment scholars to determine to what extent "Gypsy identity" constituted a racial phenomenon, that is, to what extent "Gypsy people" should be treated as biologically determined, according to the ideas of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a researcher of racial differences who collaborated with Grellmann (Blumenbach 1793). Therefore, the subject was then further clarified by a physiognomic description, harking back to craniological research. Grellmann closed the section on the differences between "Gypsies" and the majority society with a detailed account of customs related to food, drink, marriage, education, illness, death, burial, ancestry and language, the "Gypsies'" path to Europe, and their place in European history. The conclusion of Grellmann's dissertation provides a commentary on the assimilationist policies of Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II, which were enforced with uneven consistency against "Gypsies" in parts of the Habsburg Empire in the second half of the 18th century.

Much like in other portrayals of colonial Africa, South America, and other areas that were targets of European imperialism Grellmann looked at the people called "Gypsies" as if he were a designer of modern civil society. A scholar educated by an Enlightenment liberal university (Willems 1997, 34–35), he was interested in the possibilities of creating a system that would constitute a community of people of all classes. For this reason, the passage on physiognomy and the "Gypsy race" is central to his work. It typifies the representative colonial link between skin color and the predestination to be "savage", which in turn created the need for European interference. Black skin—evoking associations with

the inhabitants of overseas colonies—was, on the one hand, proof of the non-European origin of the group he studied, while on the other—in view of Enlightenment pedagogical thought—it was shown to be impermanent, a consequence of neglect, possibly even seen as repulsive: "Their dark brown or olive colored skin with their white teeth appearing between their red lips, may be a disgusting sight to an European, unaccustomed to see such pictures" (Grellmann 1783, 10). However, the color was a simple result of poor hygiene, according to Grellmann, and not an intrinsic biological trait. The effective protection and nurture of the modern state, which should take care of those whom earlier regimes had neglected and exiled to the margins of civilized society, had the positive outcome, in Grellmann's view, of producing useful citizens who were indistinguishable, for instance by their appearance, from other members of the community:

> Experience also shows us that it is more education and manner of life, than descent, which has propagated this black colour of the Gipsies, from generation to generation. Among those who possess music in Hungary, or serve in the Imperial army, where they have learnt to pay more attention to order and cleanliness, there are many to be found, whose extraction is not at all discernible in their color. (Grellmann 1783, 10)

The resemblance of "Gypsies" as described by Grellmann to the inhabitants of areas colonized by Europeans was not limited to skin color. It also encompassed such important characteristics as absence of religious beliefs, impulsive behavior, exotic customs, and appearance used by European visual arts of the 17th and 18th centuries to create picturesque landscapes (Toninato 2020).

Grellmann's work had already been a publishing success by the end of the 18th century, and was soon translated into English, Dutch and French. In "Gypsy Studies" in the centuries that followed, it was deemed a rudimentary source of knowledge about the history, customs, and language of the people called "Gypsies". Not only was the information in Grellmann's book widely quoted, copied, and adapted, but also its structure was applied in similar cross-sectional "Gypsy Studies" books, also written in the 20th century. Grellmann and his many followers established "Gypsies" as a homogeneous group with common physiognomic features and customs and a common history.

As shown by Wim Willems in his groundbreaking work *It the Search of the "True Gypsy"*, Grellmann had almost no contact with people called "Gypsies", and his knowledge of them came from anecdotes, press ar-

ticles, fiction, and visual art (Willems 1997, 61–65). In the mid-18th-century, the western European image of the "Gypsy" was shaped by such works as *La gitanilla* by Miguel de Cervantes, *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, and the stories about the famous robber Cartouche (Bogdal 2011, 122–123). In the visual arts, however, creations by Caravaggio, Georges de la Tour, Francisco Goya, and Jacques Callot were influential in shaping the image of the "Gypsy".

Les Bohémiens or *La Vie des Egyptiens* by Jacques Callot, a series of four etchings dating back to the 30s of the 17th century, present four scenes from the lives of people called "Gypsies": the passage, the feast, the avant-garde of the march, and the stopover (the fortunetellers). Enlightenment scholar Heinrich Grellmann did not refer directly to Callot's work, but in his influential monograph he replicated many of the elements highlighted in it as "Gypsy": theft and divination, exotic appearance and dress, lack of hygiene, life on the road, non-European ancestry. As an aside, it should be added that the theory developed by Grellman about the origin of "Gypsies" from the Indian Peninsula was formulated in opposition to the thesis reproduced by Callot about their Egyptian ethnogenesis.

The two etchings presenting marching people show figures of men, women, and children dressed in fine, bizarre, long coats and large hats

Ill. 3: Jacques Callot, *Les Bohémiens or La Vie des Egyptiens*, fragm. [*Le Halte des Bohémiens: Les Apprêts du Festin*], District Museum, Tarnów, Poland, public domain.

with fluffy feathers. They walk or ride on horseback, carrying weapons, vats, baskets and other items. They are accompanied by animals. The etching depicting a stopping place shows people eating meat roasted over a campfire, playing cards, and repairing damaged clothing. A woman, who is visibly pregnant in an etching depicting the march, gives birth under a tree, assisted by a group of female companions.

The last etching shows a stop at a roadside inn: some of the members of the "Gypsy" group break into the building, some of them escape from the owner chasing them with a stick. Women are presented as fortune-telling to other guests of the inn.

All four etchings have been provided with rhymed distiches that draw the viewer's attention to the characteristic elements of "Gypsy life":

> These poor beggars, rich in fortunes, have nothing with them but things to come.
> They are not brave emissaries who wander in foreign lands.
> You who take pleasure in their words, guard your people, your money and your guns.
> At the end of the road they find their destiny, that they have come from Egypt to this feast.

Callot's works, from their early reception, were perceived as a realistic record, based on the actual experiences of the artist, who as a 12-year-old presumably ran away to the "Gypsies" and spent some time with them (Sullivan 1977). The realistic reception of Callot's prints was also influenced by their 19th-century reception. Walter Scott used ekhphrasis to describe one of them in his novel *Guy Mannering or: The Astrologer* (1815) (Bogdal 2011, 188) (Brittnacher 2012, 39).

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas has made transformations of Callot's artwork an important part of her *Re-Enchanting the World*. She selected a number of scenes and then recreated them in the form of large-format tapestries, sewn from colorful materials of varying textures and patterns. She chose details from Callot's work, depicting walking figures and figures riding horses, a childbirth scene, a meal around a campfire, the skinning of an animal, as well as broader panoramas, such as a break-in at a country inn. Her presentations are not exact reproductions of Callot's prints: she decided to add some elements but also to omit others. Regardless, the resemblance between the 17th-century prints and her tapestries is clear and recognizable enough to be considered a form of re-writing the classic visual narrative about people called "Gypsies".

Under Mirga-Tas's needle, scenes of "Gypsy life" literally and figuratively take on color: they become particular, narrated stories with indi-

vidualized characters. Instead of a wandering and camping crowd, we see distinguishable characters in colorful costumes with visible facial expressions. The hardships of wandering life become clearer: we see that some of the wanderers are not wearing shoes, and that there are children among them who are carried and carted off in various ways. We can more clearly see the emotional ties linking the figures depicted by Callot: a female figure who assists a woman in labor tenderly pulls back her hair; a young mother lovingly wraps her infant in a burlap.

As we read in the catalogue of another Mirga-Tas exhibition, which also includes variations on Callot's works, the artist "processed the portraits of her own ancestors created by non-Roma four hundred years ago" (*Travelling Images* 2022, 223). Thus, in the image of "Gypsy life" produced by Callot she perceived her ancestral history, which she recognized and rewrote in her own way. This intention has also its material aspects: through the materials with which she copied Callot's works. These include fabrics collected in the artist's hometown of Czarna Góra in southern Poland, taken from her closet and the closets of her family members.

In this way she symbolically tamed one of the first proto-ethnological, visual narrations about the Roma, made it dynamic and lively, softened its one-dimensional, exoticizing character, but also humanized it by showing empathy to people depicted in humiliating contexts (e.g. the labor scene). One of the curators of her exhibition, Wojciech Szymanski, wrote that "This reappropriation of ancestral portraits created four hundred years ago is, at the same time, an exercise in identity, the restitution of history and regaining control over contemporary ways of constructing a Romani visual narrative" (Kusek/Szymanski 2022, 66).

Similar to the process of coloring black-and-white photographs, Mirga-Tas's stitching of Callot's works resulted in the scenes he presented being easier to imagine for the modern viewer. Mirga-Tas did not question the whole visual narrative about people called "Gypsies" but drew attention to its hitherto under-emphasized, hidden elements: the beauty and dignity of the marchers, emotional ties between the group members, hardships and joys of life on the road.

A similar style of reception, stressing the realistic character of Callot's visions, is represented in Ethel Brooks' commentary: "In these etchings, Callot depicts four elements of encampment: the search for a stopping place, the work involved in setting up camp, the process of preparing meal at the end of the day, the packing up camp and moving on. Each of these etchings, for me, is about making a home and what I have else-

where called keeping body and soul together. We Romani people have kept body and soul together through our work, our bonds with each other, and our love: from fortune-telling to horse-breeding, recycling and metalwork, we have labored to make our home in the face of violence" (Brooks 2022, 115–116).

Ethel Brooks admits that Callot's etchings present stereotypical "Gypsy life", but she wants the viewers to look closer, to see some authentic features of Roma culture, which can be translated into the language of contemporary critical theories: "Romani feminism in the family" (Brooks 2022, 116), "human and non-human connections" (Brooks 2022, 116), "connections within communities, with the place itself and its natural and man-made elements" (Brooks 2022, 116). "Romani women brought fortune-telling to Europe, reading palms and reappropriating the tarot" (Brooks 2022, 122), she says, repeating one of main stereotypical features of the "true Gypsy woman". In this way, parts of the early modern visual "Gypsy lifestyle" summary by Callot become incorporated into the Roma identity discourse. The elements of the imagined collective identity, which for Callot's contemporaries and for the author of the sketches himself, gave rise to fear, contempt, and fascination for people called "Gypsies", in Mirga-Tas's artwork remain a sign of Roma heritage, but with an opposite, affirmative valuation.

Thus, the artist takes on Grellmann's Enlightenment narrative of people neglected by state institutions. She looks at these people with compassion and concern—as to her ancestors. Still, one of most important element of the Romani staffage that Mirga-Tas has incorporated is life close to nature, which, according to the Enlightenment Romani scholar Grellmann, was a consequence of exile:

> They had been accustomed in their own country to live remote from cities and towns; now they became still more inhabitants of the forests and outcasts, as, in consequence of the search, which was made after them, or at least threatened to be made, they judged themselves to be more secure, in deserts and concealment, than they would have been in frequenting the places of abode and having free intercourse with the civilized inhabitants. (Grellmann 1783, XIV)

This act of appropriation also shows that contemporary Romani art can constitute a platform of dialogue for the communities that have been addressed by the discourse of "Gypsy studies" in different parts of the world. This discourse, similarly to colonial discourse, acts as a normative center. As indicated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen

Tiffin, the comparatist potential lies in identifying this code, whereby it is possible to study "the effects of colonialism in and between writing in english [sic!] and writing in indigenous languages in such contexts as Africa and India, as well as writing in other language diasporas" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 23).

Re-writing and appropriation of the colonial visual discourse about people called "Gypsies" is also Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's way of dealing with the conception of world art both as analogous to the Goethenian conception of world literature (Eckermann 1837, 315–330) and as a colonial idea of an ethnographical museum (as opposed to global art) (Davidsson 2017, 3). In one of her exhibitions, *Atlas*, she directly engages in a dialogue with the global, universal vision of "the Gypsy" by showing its three common aspects present in world literature and art: the costume, the hand (fortune-telling), and the picturesqueness (*Travelling Images* 2022, 105–131). In *Wesiune thana* she played with the concept of the ethnological museum as a common place of presenting Roma artefacts (*Travelling Images* 2022, 26). Mirga-Tas analyzed the context in which the houses of Roma blacksmiths relocated from her native village were placed in a Polish ethnographic park. Through her transformations of this exposition, the mechanisms that distinguish ethnographic museums from contemporary art museums became apparent: the former is focused on the past and cultural differences, while the latter exudes progressiveness and community. Modifying the classic ethnographic exhibition, the artist pointed out that Roma art is usually automatically classified as naive, folk, and non-progressive.

3. Including "Gypsy Studies" in Contemporary Romani Studies

As shown above with regard to Mirga-Tas's tapestries, Romani identity discourse and Romani art, similarly to discourses and arts in other post-colonial cultures, face the challenge of reworking the mainstream knowledge about the people called "Gypsies" regarding their origins, culture, customs, etc. Discussions center on which of the components of "true Gypsyness" developed by "Gypsy Studies" enhance the affirmative self-narration of the community of today's Roma: whether it is Indian ancestry, a history of expulsion from Western European cities, nomadism, or a special bond with the world of nature.

The need to address this problematic heritage also applies to contemporary Romani Studies, which rarely look to postcolonial studies for inspiration to write a new history of the Roma and their cultural heritage. While art and identity discourse freely dispose of postcolonial tools of hybridization and mimicry, in academic discourse the situation is more complicated. Below, I will give two examples in which the refusal to recognize "Gypsy discourse" as colonial discourse, or the failure to recognize elements of colonial discourse in past narratives about people called "Gypsies", leads to the reproduction of colonial narratives and skewed scholarly conclusions within Romani Studies.

The first example concerns the synthesis of the history of "Gypsies" on the European continent. Grellmann's work constructed a historiographical narrative, which has been replicated by "Gypsy Studies", about the people called "Gypsies": it brought together information from late medieval city books, which indicated that these people had aroused fear, loathing, and curiosity since their arrival at the gates of Western European cities. This narrative, with references from historical sources, is still replicated today in countless contexts, and treated as a "history of Roma/Gypsy people" rather than a selective reading of medieval sources filtered through Enlightenment state conceptions. In the 19th century it was reproduced and developed by Paul Bataillard (Bataillard 1849), and in the 20th century by Martin Block (Block 1936), Jerzy Ficowski (Ficowski 1953), and Agnus Fraser (Fraser 1992). To this day, many dissertations on the history of Roma begin with a historical section about the arrival of people called "Gypsies" to Europe and their dispersion and persecution in Western Europe. We can still encounter instances when this section is treated as a historiographical synthesis, rather than an Enlightenment construct that theorists of the time used to criticize premodern state institutions.

The second example concerns the importance of the folklorist texts collected in the "Gypsy Studies" paradigm for the new history of Roma literature. In the work *Roma Writings. Romani Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*, texts such as translations of the Bible into Roma languages made on commission of evangelical missionaries (Marinov 2021,43–44), or collections of songs and poems edited by folklorists (Zahova 2021, 13), have been identified with Roma literature and even gained the status of the cornerstone of independent Romani culture. The universalizing assumption of such a literary history is that Romani-language writing

(even produced by scholars of "Gypsy Studies") is a tool for the emancipation of Roma elites and a document of this process (Zahova 2021, 3).

The identification of the discourse of "Gypsy Studies" with Roma literature/art has only a seemingly affirmative function. It claims to be locating the roots of the latter where the roots of most national literatures lie, namely, in the 19th century. However, this leads to a number of misunderstandings, stemming from a failure to take into account the postcolonial condition of contemporary Roma communities. The narrations that are supposed to be affirmative turn out—from today's perspective—to be exoticising.

Without taking this into account, the noble intention of restoring agency to the Roma becomes the opposite of itself. A case in point is how *Roma Writings* presents a woman described in the treatises of one of the influential Austro-Hungarian scholars of "Gypsy Studies" in the late 19th century, Heinrich von Wlislocki. Gina Ranjičić, his alleged "Gypsy wife" and the author of the "Gypsy" songs and fairy tales published by Wlislocki, as proven by Martin Ruch and Wim Willems, was a persona invented by her mentor (Ruch 1986) (Willems 1997, 182–188). Zahova notes this fact: "There is a lot of uncertainty and doubt about the authenticity of Gina Ranjičić as a personality and as the actual author of the poems attributed to her by Wlislocki" (Zahova 2021, 13). However, she then goes on to say that:

> Undoubted, however, is the fact that references to her are nowadays forming narratives about the first Romani language literary writings. No matter whether she was a real or invented personality and author of these poems, Gina Ranjičić is today considered by many as the world's first Roma poetess. Her poems in Romani language have been reprinted from the works of Wlislocki and published in Roma poetry collections (Taikon 1964) and anthologies (Acković 2012), and even in mainstream literary periodicals, as 'Gypsy poems' (Birtingur 1966). Roma activists' writings refer to Ranjičić as the first Roma poetess, and, despite the lack of any documentation of her as a historical figure, the Roma Museum in Belgrade has commissioned for its collection a portrait of Ranjičić that is accompanied by the explanation "this is Gina Ranjičić, the first Roma poetess, in the way we imagine her appearance". (Zahova 2021, 13)

Wlislocki's fabrication was not an isolated incident in the world of Romantic folklorists. The most famous example of such a counterfeit that had a cultural effect was the *Poems of Ossian*, a collection of purportedly medieval Celtic songs created by James Macpherson, which was foundational to British Romantic poetry. The key question, however, is one that flows from a postcolonial standpoint: to whom were Gina Ranjičić's

Gypsy songs, created by Heinrich von Wlislocki (Wlislocki 2020), addressed (and for whose needs were they created)? Their audience was Austro-Hungarian academics and the Western European international Gypsy Lore Society. Thus, Gina Ranjičić and her poetry had been fashioned to fit "Gypsolorist" expectations that its critics briefly referred to as the benchmark of "true Gypsyness".

Contemporary Romani Studies, aware of the fact that the history of "Gypsy studies" is full of such falsifications and formatting, might look to postcolonial studies in order to critically revise art and literature created under auspices of "authentic Gypsyism". Academic work, as opposed to art, does not have the possibility to reuse this system of knowledge in any meta-context; it has to either deny it or put it into critical perspective. The story of creating, taking over and reformulating the visual image of people called "Gypsies" can also be told with artistic methods. *Re-Enchanting the World* by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas artistically develops the "Gypsy Studies'" heritage in a postcolonial direction.

4. Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's Work as Postcolonial World Art

In addition to processing some of Callot's narratives about people called "Gypsies", there are also postcolonial conclusions from Margaret Mirga-Tas's work about the (in)possibility of completely rejecting of the criticized orientalizing, colonial discourse.

Postcolonial art in general puts emphasis on autobiographical themes, seeking "words and forms to fit their experience" (Boehmer 2005, 217) by underscoring "the need for a lively heterogeneity of styles and speaking positions in their work" (Boehmer 2005, 219). It so often stands against European realism, retrieving "suppressed oral traditions, half-forgotten histories, unrecorded private languages" (Boehmer 2005, 220). Postcolonial art it is a thoroughly hybrid medium, which straddles private histories and local traditions and the colonial narratives.

Contemporary Roma art is part of postcolonial art and world art that is no longer defined in the spirit of a universalist, 19th-century concept consolidating the hegemony of European national societies, but rather as a discourse affirming localness, family histories, and histories of rootedness. In Mirga-Tas's case, this aspect is revealed in the lower strip of tapestries dedicated to her family hometown Czarna Góra. Sewn using

the same technique as Callot's work transformations, they present scenes from the everyday life of her family and *mise-en-abyme* inserts related to the creation of the exhibition. The scenes depict figures sewing Mirga-Tas's works, women chatting and drinking coffee, hanging laundry, sewing and repairing clothes, playing cards, collecting potatoes, plucking a hen's feathers, and a funeral. These are typical scenes from the life of a Polish rural community, and there is not a trace of the exoticism, strangeness, and otherworldliness so characteristic of Callot's works.

In the case of these scenes, the textiles from which Mirga-Tas's works were fashioned are of particular importance. Taken from the wardrobes of the depicted are "appropriated materials infused with energy" (Warsza 2022, 90), but also mediums of microhistories. The narratives captured on the tapestries not only contradict the stereotype that "Gypsies" are a group devoid of collective memory and uninterested in their own history, but also affirm a history different from that proposed by the broad cadres of imperial discourse, a more human history that speaks of a vision of "an intimate world, full of feelings and values, based on communities of like-minded people" (Domańska 2005, 23).[1] Microhistory as a method is rooted in the attempt to incorporate peripheral or marginal events, figures, and communities into the historical picture.

> This is a method suited to the writing of history on the margins, where documentation may be scant. It assumes that the lives and activities of the subaltern classes need not be told in the aggregate, but can be seen (at least some of them) in the particular (…). Microhistorians see this particular focus—the individual, event, or text—as a uniquely situated nodal point of social, political, economic, and ideational forces. In this way, and perhaps most radically, microhistory undermines the model of historical "centres" and "margins" in the first place (Murray 2004, 411).

The compositions of everyday life scenes from Czarna Góra are partially based on the photographs taken by Mirga-Tas's family member and Roma activist Andrzej Mirga. Before becoming an advisor on Roma issues to Polish and international institutions, he studied ethnology at the Jagiellonian University and authored a comprehensive study of the situation of Roma in Poland after the WWII (Mirga 1998). The series of photographs was taken in Czarna Góra in the 70s. Including these pictures into Mirga-Tas's artwork symbolizes regaining control over Roma

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[1] "świata intymnego, pełnego uczuć i wartości, który oparty jest na wspólnotach ludzi podobnie czujących"

visibility, which in the form of sketches and photographs legitimized "Gypsy studies" discourse in numerous (proto)ethnographic books. They replace the outside perspective with the internal one of the portrayed community, thereby fulfilling one of the postulates of postcolonial poetics (Buckley 2005).

In Roma aesthetics, as a type of a postcolonial aesthetics, the search for one's own identity becomes another example of local knowledge (Geertz 1983). In the postcolonial world, locality does not cease to exist, but becomes an important strategy of resistance not only against a homogenous image of the "Gypsy" but also against globalization. Reformulations of the concept of world literature towards the affirmation of localness and deconstruction of the literary canon lead in the same direction. Mirga-Tas, creating frescoes for her own Renaissance palace, not only captured scenes from the life of the local Roma community from the village of Czarna Gora. In compliance with the rules of postcolonial aesthetics, she also included in them an element of untranslatable otherness (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002, 236). Such an element in postcolonial literature usually manifests itself in language, its orality, non-obvious linguistic constructions, and incomprehensible formulations (Bassnett 2006). A viewer from the majority culture has a sense of incomplete understanding and uncertainty, while one from the former subaltern culture feels that their language and culture are institutionalized. Roma recipients of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's art, confirming a similar procedure performed by the artist, testified that her works contain elements legible to those immersed in the culture of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's community, incomprehensible and invisible to viewers functioning in (for example, Polish) majority culture.

Given the artist's Polish and Roma identity, the significance of Mirga-Tas's Venice exhibition goes beyond the concept of a national pavilion and continues previous projects concerned with the visibility of the Roma at the Venice Biennale and, symbolically, in the international arena of contemporary art. The most important of these was the Primo Padglione Roma project from the 52nd Biennale in 2007 titled *Paradise Lost* and curated by Tímea Junghaus (Wagner 2007). The "paradise lost" in question meant a confrontation with the Enlightenment idyllic image of "Gypsy life" as a modern utopia. This utopia, as I have tried to show above, applied not only to the people called "Gypsies", but also to non-European communities subject to the processes of colonization as European colonialism and imperialism were advancing. Change in

colonial discourse shifted to "Europeanizing" the conquered areas and communities, that is, to "civilizing" them. Some elements of this utopia included different strategies of orientalization and exoticization of the Other, whose iconic symbols (such as colorful costumes, fortune-telling props, etc.) became "rewritten", in the works presented in the pavilion. The essential message of the 2007 Roma pavilion was a critique of nation-centric art, taking place through and by means of transnational Roma community. The project was thus a unique way of capturing Roma identity: as simultaneously homogeneous and diverse, progressive and essentializing. *Re-Enchanting the World*, the exhibition held in the Polish pavilion, also proved that there is room for such projects in the once nation-centric space.

5. Conclusion. Mirga-Tas and Postcolonial *Contact Zone*

Elke Boehmer writes that the goal of postcolonial writing, on the one hand, is "the emphasis on historical reconstruction; the ethical imperative of reconciliation with the past" (Boehmer 2005, 221). On the other hand, as Boehmer notes, indigenous writers "see themselves as still-colonized, always-invaded, never free of a history of white occupation." Postcolonial art is "a medium through which self-definition was sought" (Boehmer 2005, 217).

In this essay, I have tried to prove that this postcolonial "contact zone" is a constitutive feature of contemporary artistic Romani discourse and one of the most important characteristics of its aesthetics. I defined postcoloniality as a way of transforming the discourse of "Gypsy Studies" that came into being in the 18th century, which has many common features with the discourse of European colonization. Until now, research has approached the postcoloniality of Romani art as a feature stemming from the post-colonial condition of Romani communities, namely, their centuries-long marginalization and exclusion. However, as I have shown, Romani art mainly results from the typical inability of postcolonial communities to completely reject the orientalizing, exoticizing mode of representation produced by European modernity. As is the case with post-colonial communities, the reworked discourse of "Gypsy Studies" can become an important element of the Roma identity narrative.

The model of “true Gypsyness” created by “Gypsy Studies” was based on a set of traits—an idea reproduced by many scholars, amateurs, and academics—that perpetuated the notion of “Gypsy” otherness and exoticism. That model was persistently used in academic works, popularization works, fiction, and visual arts. Since those traits were constitutive of almost every aspect of “Gypsy life”, they also defined the requirements that “Gypsy art” had to meet, especially various types of folk art. “Gypsy” scholars studied the biographies and works of “Gypsy” folk poets and properly shaped and transformed them to fit the pattern of “true Gypsy” identity.

One should be aware of the research context in which these biographies were created. Referring to the body of knowledge produced by “Gypsy Studies” about the people called “Gypsies” is one of the most important challenges of contemporary Romani art. Postcolonial artists face a similar task as they grapple with a colonial discourse that has been partially assimilated and rewritten by their local communities. This assimilation and transformation take place in the “contact zone”, a space in which a hybrid, dialogic, and heterogeneous postcolonial subject is constituted. Małgorzata Mirga-Tas’s *Re-Enchanting the World*, created for the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2022, is one example of such a “contact zone”. Mirga-Tas has made a multi-level postcolonial rewriting of the etchings of 17th-century artist Jacques Callot, while acknowledging Callot’s story and restoring subjectivity to the characters he depicts and agency to herself as an artist portraying the Roma. Due to the technique used to transform Callot’s work and represent Mirga-Tas’s family history by sewing tapestries from pieces of fabric, the project has autoethnographic potential. As such, it also involves “partial collaboration with an appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror” (Pratt 2008, 7).

Romani contemporary art, as exemplified by the Mirga-Tas’s exhibition, is ready for a critical rewriting of the “Gypsy Studies” paradigm. The legacy of “Gypsy Studies”, still sometimes uncritically incorporated into the framework of current Romani studies, awaits a similar process.

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II. Female Romani Literatures: (Re-)Writing and Empowerment

Florian Homann

Las Gitanas and the Female Perspective in the Rewriting of Spanish History: Oral Tradition and New Meanings in Flamenco Lyrics by Romnja Performers

Abstract

In flamenco singing, the music is considered the primary aspect according to which individual components are assembled into sets, often causing the connections between individual verses to be ignored. But the lyrics have always been a central aspect of flamenco, and many lyrics originated from coherent longer poems that were later simply fragmented. This explains why romances performed by women play such an important role in flamenco, especially in the highly esteemed singing performed in private. Romnja performers have not yet been appreciated as tradition bearers, although they have actually kept alive the legacy of the old storytelling ballads. Into the present times, singing in specific modalities texts about the cruel pogroms of the 18th century that destroyed Gitano family structures by separating men from women and children, among other atrocities, maintains collective memory and avoids oblivion, and thus becomes a form of rewriting official history by female voices.

1. Flamenco Lyrics and Spanish Romani Collective Memory

If today's feminist Romnja advocacy aims to speak out and be heard in order to rewrite history, one way is through music, with flamenco in particular giving voice to all Spanish Roma. In Spain, there exists a great interest in flamenco poetry since Antonio Machado y Álvarez published his collection of self-heard flamenco lyrics under the pseudonym 'Demófilo' in 1881. From today's perspective, however, the flamenco texts of that time are considered very misogynistic, or it is said, not entirely wrongly, that they at least silence female experiences (López Castro 2007, 512–513; Buendía 2001). The almost exclusively male perspective

of the first-person articulated in the texts is based on the 19th century prejudices that only men could express themselves. Yet female singers have always tried to deconstruct these old stereotypes about music and their minority. Just one example among many is the songs of the most famous female singer of the 20th century, the *gitana* Pastora Pavón 'La Niña de los Peines', who created her own lyrics and changed the gender of the speaking entity.

Although the relationship between flamenco lyrics and the collective memory of Spanish Romani people seems obvious, it is complex. This complexity lay in the importance of an oral tradition in flamenco, depending to a great extent on the reinterpretation of older models that are considered original. In Granada, intellectuals like Federico García Lorca organized the famous singing competition Concurso de Cante Jondo in 1922 to save the 'true' deep flamenco from oblivion, admitting only some basic modalities that will become important for this essay. There are particular modalities of flamenco, sung acapella, that are linked to the Romani collective memory. This study aims first to answer some basic questions in this regard. How did the lyrics of these modalities emerge? And what is the relationship between these lyrics, their production and later oral transmission, and, finally, the collective memory of Spanish Roma? On the one hand the origin in *romances*[1] can explain why the lyrics of these modalities actually tell the story of the persecution of the Romani people on the Iberian Peninsula. I argue that the original texts of the modality *martinetes*, which are still sung today or rather sung again in a highly fragmented form, were produced by Roma who used formulas of epic Spanish romances; Roma had been one of the most important transmitter groups of these romances since the Spanish Golden Age. Therefore, in this case, the Gitanos' heritage of flamenco is not primarily explained by the musical performance, but by the literary thesis that the mentioned modalities indeed stem from narrative and extensive romances. Such romances function in the sense of epic-based ballads using an oral form of transmission that makes them both news bulletin and media of collective memory in the Roma community. On the other hand, the contributions of women in creating and transmitting these *martinetes* in oral performances have not yet been studied in

[1] By *romance* I mean the verse form and thus the literary genre of the same name that has existed in Spain since the Middle Ages.

depth: To what extent can these lyrics, in the case of performance from a female perspective, be considered a rewriting of Spanish history?

After providing this background on the development of flamenco modalities and the role of oral performances in the collective memory of Spanish Roma, I first argue that some of the original texts may have been composed by Romnja, although these were not literary writers, as they were composing on the spot using formulas and formulaic techniques in their oral composition (cf. Lord 1960, 24) and subsequently transmitting in the oral tradition to the present day. Moreover, I argue that women have been essential transmitters in the long chain of oral tradition, keeping alive the memory conveyed in the lyrics. The cultural heritage of many of these texts can be attributed to women, who were transmitters, to a certain extent, giving these women the means to modify the texts according to their interests.

2. Flamenco: World Music and Literature

Flamenco culture is primary a musical culture that can be categorized into numerous—one may even speak of hundreds of—*palos* and *estilos*, which are different musical modalities. These are arranged in a genealogical tree that hierarchizes the basic modalities that were promoted, for example, in the abovementioned singing competition Concurso de Cante Jondo in 1922, such as the *soleá*, *seguiriyas* or *martinetes*. In traditional flamenco there are no songs in the strict sense, but kinds of improvised pieces or sets made up of several old stanzas, performed in one of these modalities. In their live performances, the artists assemble these pieces from several possibly autonomous text elements, which thus do not necessarily have to be thematically related:

> Thus, a typical rendition of a *soleá* (one of the *palos*) might consist of a string or 'set' of four or five *coplas* or verses, which would probably be in different *estilos*, punctuated by guitar interludes (*falsetas*), all conforming to the characteristic twelve-beat *compás* and familiar chordal progressions of that *cante*. (Manuel 2010, 107)

This example of *soleá* as a typical basic modality is usually generalized in flamenco, although many texts also have a coherent context, at least in their origin. These will be of particular interest for this study, but seem to stand out as exceptions in flamenco, where the emphasis is mostly on combining short textual elements to create the musical items:

> a typical traditional flamenco item, whether in concert or on a commercial recording, has few of the essential attributes of a 'song' or composition, being instead a 'set' of two to five coplas, which each constitute thematically unrelated and wholly independent and complete lyric statements. (Manuel 2010, 108)

My research, however, contradicts this absolute independence of the individual elements, which seems to be, nevertheless, the standard in flamenco today.[2] These lyrical texts come from a long oral tradition, in which the complete original texts have been forgotten and the concentration on selected elements is responsible for the reduction to the extremely short lyrical statements used now (Homann 2021, 44). The name of the original author was also lost in the process. Subsequently, however, theses lyrical texts are attributed to the so-called *creadores*, mostly 19th century artists, as apparently their own inventions, due to these mechanisms of appropriation of older texts and their particular musical performance style. These mythical artists are in many cases Gitanos, which is why flamenco as a musical culture was first attributed to members of this ethnic group. Already here, the contributions, mostly performed in a private context and closer circle of friends, of female artists become essential. Mercedes Fernández Vargas 'La Serneta' (1837–1912) created up to seven of her own styles of *soleá* singing, which are still performed thanks to her followers like La Niña de los Peines, since there are no recordings of La Serneta's original versions.

Some of the basic modalities are even ascribed exclusively to Roma, namely the acapella modalities, the so-called *cantes a palo seco*, and of these particularly *tonás* and *martinetes*. The reason for this belief, if it is rooted in the textual origins of the lyrics, is well-founded; earlier arguments, however, which were based on the assumption that only Gitanos had biologically the necessary depth in their bodies to perform this type of music—what Mairena called "razón incorpórea" (quoted in Soler/Soler 2004, 244), that is, embodied reason—, have now been refuted. The dominant explanation, which existed until the end of the 20th century, for the connection between Roma and acapella modalities existed only because Demófilo stated in the foreword to his collection of song texts from 1881 that his informant, Juanelo, a Gitano singer from

[2] My argument therefore relates particularly to the period of origin of various modalities, some of which predate the emergence of flamenco as a musical culture and modern art form. However, numerous examples of longer coherent texts can be found even today (Homann 2021, 330–335).

Jerez de la Frontera, had mentioned Gitanos as originators for these particular modalities and that these were sung in the forges to the beats of the hammers. This opinion was held without opposition, reinforced by the singer Antonio Mairena when, from the middle of the 20th century, he reevaluated the 'original' deep singing called *cante jondo*, based on the 1922 singing competition and then published his canonical book in 1963, in collaboration with the Gadje poet Ricardo Molina. In any case, these theories are rejected nowadays. As recently as 2013, Cáceres and Campo dismantle two preconceptions, namely "the widespread idea that gypsy blacksmith's trades have constituted […] mythical places where gypsy tradition would have remained pure" and the related assumption that *martinetes* would have been always "performed with the rhythm of the hammering on the anvil" (Cáceres/Campo 2013, 445). In agreement with these scholars, however, I do not want to contradict that *martinetes* and other related flamenco forms are intimately linked to the Gitanos and that they were often performed in forges. Rather than ascribing the origin of *martinetes* entirely to the Gitano blacksmith working with the hammer, however, I see the blacksmiths' shops as centers where Romani could gather and sing after work.

To break down the cemented thesis about the supposed origin and preservation of primitive 'pure gypsy' singing, known as *primitivo cante gitano*, Steingress (2013, 168) considers the fact that flamenco culture emerged instead in a specific sociohistorical context of the 19th century. Flamenco as we know it today emerged as an urban art form performed by members of the lower social classes (Steingress 2013, 201). Rural workers migrated to cities such as Seville and Cadiz, where the traditional chants, the popular *cantares* they brought with them, were perceived as a new musical style and identity-forming creations (Steingress 2013, 359). Thus, the folkloric basis, existing as raw material since centuries ago, must be distinguished from the 'new' art form. The theater of the time played a major role in this process, as audiences in the Late Romantic period were particularly interested in the habits of characters from lower social classes as well as Roma (Steingress 2013, 291). In this context, the Cafés Cantante, in which the proto-flamenco developed into a modern art form, could prosper in the second half of the 19th century.

But apart from this development into a public spectacle, Cruces (2014, 828) as an anthropologist emphasizes that flamenco has lived since then in two different contexts, for which Cruces employs the Marxist distinction between exchange-value and use-value of commodities. One type

of flamenco is the more commercial, shown in public, while the other is practiced at home, by some families or Romani clans in their private spheres and daily habits, even before it came into fashion. Both types are still being practiced. Today, after this development, flamenco is known mainly as World Music. In this sense, the lyrics—the literary components of music—can be considered a special form of World Literature, related to the collective memory of an ethnic group.

3. Flamenco and the Appropriation of Traditional Poetry

Flamenco singing is linked on a literary level to centuries-old cultural expressions, such as the interpretation of ancient Spanish romances, among others. All researchers of different directions, such as the sociologist Steingress (2013, 285) or the lawyer Suárez Ávila (1989), who takes the position that the flamenco origin must be attributed exclusively to the Gitanos, agree on one observation: Since their arrival on the Peninsula, the Gitanos have been known for being striking interpreters of this Spanish tradition that had its heyday right in the Golden Age (Piñero 2008, 21). Numerous literary texts bear witness to this, not only Cervantes's exemplary Novel *La Gitanilla*. The *romancero*, since its own origin, through the fragmentation of the medieval epics, lives from the dynamics caused by an oral tradition that appropriates and modifies the most popular texts (Piñero 2008, 16–19). Although the fashion for *romances* had died down in the 18th century, the Romani population of Andalusia, in the century of the Enlightenment, completely adopted *romances* as their own cultural heritage, which they kept alive orally until the renewed upsurge during Romanticism. Thus, it is no coincidence that the first informants from whom interested intellectuals transcribed in writing for their *romances* in the 19th century were Romani. Serafín Estébanez Calderón 'El Solitario' tells in his famous text "Un baile en Triana" from the collection *Escenas andaluzas* (1847), which contains all kinds of picturesque scenes and local customs, that the Rom Antonio Monge Rivero 'El Planeta' performed the "Romance del Conde Sol" at an event he actually attended. The writer does not yet use the term flamenco, while he does describe a type of *romance* singing that was performed in this particular form mainly by Romani musicians. The versions of the Gitanos, which in the following years became part of the repertoire of

the flamenco singers, differ greatly in length, form, and content from the general Andalusian folklore repertoire as it was interpreted among the rural population. A notable example of this is the non-professional interpreter and worker of a tobacco factory Juan José Niño, born in the province of Cádiz, who in 1916 performed his unique repertoire of ancient and rare *romance* texts in front of Manrique de Lara in Triana (cf. Catarella 1993).

Both forms, those with exchange-value and those with use-value, of singing *romances* and later flamenco are connected: The private form is the model for the publicly exhibited art form, which in the 19th century is still predominantly executed by male artists. That is why we cannot yet find documented performances of singing women, which did exist, especially in private settings.

Flamenco lyrics, both from the oral tradition and from new textual productions, are easily said to form the collective memory of the Spanish Romani people. However, since the old theories of the exclusive Gitano origin of the genuine[3] singing have been disproved, it has not yet been conclusively demonstrated why the lyrics of the *cantes a palo seco*, especially the *martinetes*, can in fact be attributed legitimately to Gitanos.

The Gitanos play an essential role in the development of any entertainment art that existed before flamenco. While José Cadalso in the *Cartas marruecas* speaks already in 1789 of a party with Gitano entertainers, Zoido presents a poster from the second half of the 18th century announcing *bailes jitanos* [sic!]. While the term flamenco became common only from about 1850, the *tonás*, for example, were already known in the second half of the 18th century, associated with the Rom Luis Montoya Garcés 'Tío Luis el de la Juliana'. Since the name *tonás* is simply a linguistic deformation of *tonadas*, a way of singing certain narrative texts, it is

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3 The expression genuine singing refers to the theory that only the singing of the gitanos is original, 'pure', authentic flamenco, because they are the only ones who can present it unadulterated, in other words, 'primitive' in the positive sense, especially when they perform it in private settings. These ideas are the basis of the projects to valorize the 'old' original singing forms carried out both by Mairena and Molina (1963, cf. Cenizo 2004) and by the organizers of the Concurso de Cante Jondo competition in 1922, who focused on reorienting performances to this idea of a *primitivo cante gitano* that commercialization threatened to dilute, as taken from Demófilo's preface (Luna López 2012, 103).

easy to conclude that this person was simply a flamboyant performer of *romances*, from whose recitations later flamenco styles stemmed.

Due to the mechanisms of orality, the continuous traditional transmission over the years generates new meanings in both the *romance* texts and subsequently the flamenco lyrics. Since flamenco singers take over older texts whose exact origin and authorship are no longer known, each performer in the chain can call himself a new creator of the text, since the collective heritage of the text allows him to change it. Thus, many texts can be adapted to the communicative needs of the minority. The most outstanding example is the adaptation of the medieval Spanish hero Bernardo del Carpio, already a great model for Don Quixote, whom the Gitanos have made one of their own over the centuries by modifying the *romance* about him, in addition to naming their children frequently Bernardo del Carpio and other identity-forming measures (Suárez Ávila 1994). Still today, fragments of this *romance* are sung in different flamenco styles and renowned flamenco families bear the surname Carpio. The Gitanos cultivate the *romancero* with its own use-value, that means, they also incorporate this medium, which in the Middle Ages was primarily a suitable form of communication and propaganda, into their daily lives and its most famous verses into their normal speech. Therefore, besides the recitation of the old traditional texts, they are also able to compose new texts, quite simply with the assonant rhyme type, in order to preserve for posterity certain messages and information in their culture, which was presumably still highly illiterate in the 18th century. That is why many flamenco texts—mainly of the *cantes a palo seco as tonás and martinetes*—, fragments from earlier *romances*, may be considered a form of Romani self-representation.

4. The *Martinetes* as Storytelling Lyrics of Roma Persecution

Today, the composition of a musical piece of *martinetes* also works according to the mechanisms of the connection of three to five possibly even independent four-line *coplas* (Martín 2011, 187). Literary and thematically, however, these elements are by no means to be considered completely separate: They almost always speak of the persecution of minorities, in most cases explicitly of the persecution of Romani peoples (Homann 2020). For the same reason, offering oppressed minorities

and their collective memory a voice they otherwise do not receive, these chants become important to Romani women.

In this vein, Cáceres and Campo (2013, 462) conclude their review of the genesis of the *martinetes* with the fact that these are structurally related to the *romances*, while the main difference between the traditional *romances* and the *martinetes*, besides musical interpretations, are theme-related; in the lyrics of *martinetes* the protagonists are the Gitanos themselves: the texts narrate specific events that occurred to Gitanos. Furthermore, the two anthropologists explain that etymologically, it was not the hammer of the blacksmith, but hydraulic tools of the same name that led to the naming of today's *palo* (Cáceres/Campo 2013, 459–460). This explanation provides a direct link to one of the most significant events in the history of the Romani people and their persecution on the Iberian Peninsula. Fragments of texts that speak of the persecution of the Romani demonstrate a direct relationship of the verses with La Prisión General de los Gitanos of 1749[4].

During the reign of King Fernando VI, the Marquis of Ensenada organised a raid, planned in secret and set in motion simultaneously throughout Spain at dawn on July 30, 1749 (Jiménez 2020, 225), with the aim of arresting all people considered Gitanos a difficult term to define, which led to an extremely chaotic situation. This designation could have referred to anyone who belonged to the ethnic group but might have been well integrated into Spanish society (e.g., employed as a blacksmith); in the raid, these integrated Roma were captured first. In colloquial language, the term Gitano could pejoratively also refer to all vagabonds, smugglers, and minor criminals, regardless of their ethnicity, who lived just what was called a 'Gypsy lifestyle'. Although the vagabonds and minor criminals were to be captured first, they were still free after this initial raid, which could only be directed against the members of the ethnic collective who were settled and had been reported in censuses (Martínez 2014, 29–44). The confiscated goods and forced labour of the Gitanos were to cover the costs of the operation.

The action, called today, among other designations, the "attempted extermination" (Jiménez 2020, 221) of all Romani people, failed and was omitted from Spanish documentaries and history books. Most of the

[4] While the translation of Gómez Alfaro (2014) is The Great 'Gypsy' Round-up in Spain, sometimes simply called The 1749 Great Round-up, Martínez (2014) speaks of The General Prison, La Prisión General, as an 'extermination' project.

captured Roma did not live as vagabonds, but those who had no abodes were still free because they had no home where they could be captured. Therefore, a second raid took place in the autumn, and, as a result, many individuals caught in the first raid were released back into freedom to make room for the new prisoners. More than 2,000 Romani individuals remained in prison until in 1763, when "the general pardon was decreed" (Jiménez 2020, 226). Nevertheless, according to the latest estimates, a total of twelve thousand people lost their lives, a quarter of the Spanish Roma population in the 18th century (Matache/Bhabha 2021, 257).

Families, women and children were particularly affected. To avoid procreation, the captured Gitanos were separated after the first raid, which brought terrible consequences as "family structures were destroyed and, therefore, the traditional channels of cultural transmission were broken" (Jiménez 2020, 227). The female members of the family were forcibly deported with their children under the age of seven to hospices and houses of mercy in Saragossa, Valencia and Malaga, while the male convicts were transported to labour camps such as La Carraca Naval Arsenal in San Fernando, harbour of Cádiz (Martínez 2014, 55–59). The male Roma were abused like the galley slaves in the centuries before. However, since galley slavery had been abolished in 1748 they had to rebuild the arsenal, working in the mud provoked by a flood in 1737 (Zoido 1999, 168). The work of rebuilding the shipyards required the hammering in of thousands of bolts by a machine called a *martinete*, which worked by repeatedly dropping a weight lifted by more than 20 forced laborers. Campo and Cáceres (2013, 459–460) explain that the term *martinetes* refers to such hydraulic hammers of pre-industrial ironworks, generally used in the 18th century as a machine to nail stakes. Today, many short stanzas, often combined with other ones, speak of this forced work. Demófilo has divided the *martinetes* of his collection into two sections. Besides the typical *coplas* with a single stanza, which can be combined seemingly at random, we find, and this is the important point here, the longer and connected *martinetes corridos*, which have more than one stanza with four verses and really tell coherent stories of the Romani collective memory (Machado y Álvarez 1975, 149). The beginning of the coherent *martinete* number seven from the collection by Machado y Álvarez (1975, 152) is also used by historian Antonio Zoido (1999, 203) as evidence of how those who were affected themselves reported the horrific historical event: "A ciento cincuenta hombres nos

llevan a La Carraca"[5]. The forced workers operated with half their bodies in water (Zoido 1999, 168), showing that there exists a common formula in a variety of contemporary *martinetes*, such as the one performed by singer David Carpio in Jerez on April 30, 2017: "con el fango hasta las rodillas y las enaguitas remangadas vinieron…"[6]. The catastrophic working conditions are reflected in the texts.

Many reasons exist for the failure of the entire action to capture Gitanos. In the naval bases, the older men were not able to do the work they were supposed to do. Another problem was that the young men were needed in the towns where they had previously settled. The problematic consequence was an extremely chaotic situation, because no one could know who could be freed and who still had to wait for their freedom. Since the goods of all Gitanos were confiscated, the freed persons could no longer pursue their previous regular professions, e.g. as blacksmiths. Separated families had great difficulty reuniting when their members were set free at different times. A stanza that is still performed today, among others by El Capullo de Jerez in the *martinetes* of his 2003 album *Este soy yo*, informs about the problems caused by the separation of Romani males and females:

Sentadito estaba yo en mi petate
con la cabeza echada para atrás.
Yo me acordaba de mi madre
¿Mis niños como estarán?[7]

The large number of further relevant examples, which cannot be discussed in detail here, has already allowed me to conclude that the primary texts of the *tonás* and *martinetes* must have been *romances* about the Great Round-up, its aftermath, and the subsequent forced labor (Homann 2020). Thus, this present-day literary form of Roma self-representation must have been composed in its genesis—as a news medium—by illiterate Gitanos who used the techniques of oral formulaic composition and revisited the formulas of traditional *romances*. Parry and his disciple Lord (1960), studying the formulaic character of the Serbo-Croatian epic

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[5] 150 men of us are sent to La Carraca (own translation).

[6] They came back with mud up to their knees and the rolled-up petticoats (own translation of own transcription and recording).

[7] I was sitting on my mat / with my head thrown back. / I remembered my mother / How are my children? (own translation).

in the first half of the 20th century and applying it to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, demonstrated the exclusively improvised oral composition of the epic ballads, based on the use of a repertoire of memorized formulas and themes, which allows performers to improvise and orally shape the text at the moment of performance. The Gitanos, as perfect connoisseurs of the *romancero*, were able to create the ballads with their storytelling content in the same way and improvise the assonant rhymed lyrics directly in oral form by using the familiar *romance* verses, paralleling what Parry and Lord identified for the Serbo-Croatian storytellers: "the formulaic style enters into the consciousness of a young singer as he learns to use it for the telling of tales" (Lord 1960, 45).

However, the exact moment of the creation of each text cannot be reconstructed, since the consequences of the Great Round-up continued, and new texts must have been created until Carlos III erased the previous and failed policy from all documents and, from 1783 on, relied on new means of forced integration, when "the King of Spain Carlos III enacted the last Royal Order for the control and assimilation of Gitanos or Calé" (Gamella/Gómez Alfaro/Pérez 2014, 147). As a result, they were forbidden to call themselves Gitanos and to dress as such. The ban on the term Gitano paved the way for forgetting the intended genocide in the official national memory. The oblivion prevailed until the rediscovery of documents such as, in 1994, the *Libro de la Gitanería de Triana de los Años 1740 a 1750*, a book written under the pseudonym The Bachiller Revoltoso and not for publication in the middle of the 18th century[8]. Thanks to the subsequent research of historians, the Great Round-up is again a topic in Spanish memory culture, where the survival of details in short flamenco verses is highly valued. These texts resulting from a long oral tradition since 1749 are extraordinarily important.

However, nearly all 19th century singers who are known and whose performances of *romances*, *cantes a palo seco*, and *martinetes* are documented in any way, are male. The contribution of Romani artists who keep these texts—some of which may have even been composed by women—alive by transmitting them or, where appropriate, modifying from a female point of view the lyrics that had been transmitted by male

8 We can see this in the title of the book *Libro de la Gitanería de Triana de los Años 1740 a 1750 que escribió el Bachiller Revoltoso para que no se imprimiera*: Book of the Gitanería Triana of the Years 1740 to 1750 that the Bachiller Revoltoso wrote *so that it would not be printed* (own translation).

singers, has not yet been appreciated. Therefore, I now examine the extent to which these texts, when performed by Romnja singers, can be considered rewritings of official history.

5. Romnja Contributions to the Collective Memory: Rewriting of Spanish History

Jiménez (2020, 229) highlights several rebellions and successful escape attempts by women in the Great Round-up to conclude that Romani of both sexes "have not been apathetic and passive in the face of our own historical destiny" (Jiménez 2020, 230). For example, 52 of the 600 Romnja imprisoned in the Royal House of Mercy in Saragossa escaped in January 1753 after following the legendary leader Rosa Cortés. The women were important actors in the struggle against the imprisonment, oppression, separation of their families, and, last but not least, in the fight against forgetting the racist discrimination. Matache and Bhabha (2021, 265), in supporting the case for reparations to Roma, note that while memory can serve as a political tool for victim groups, its counterpart, oblivion, is a powerful tool for oppressors. The authors regret that European institutions do not promote public awareness and mobilization to improve the situation in the way they should (Matache/Bhabha 2021, 270).

In the case of Romnja, the concept pair about the values of a product or an activity—like singing flamenco or *romances*—in combination with the concept pair about the different dimensions of collective memory help to explain why women have not yet been appreciated as tradition bearers, although they have actually kept alive the legacy of the old storytelling ballads in a domestic setting.

The attempted genocide in Spain, which remained forgotten on an official level, could survive only in Romani collective memory. According to Jan Assmann's categorization of memory, collective memory consists on the level of communicative memory—a dimension of the recent past, connected to the living bodies of the transmitting persons—and on the level of cultural memory, which is detached from the necessity of communication through contemporary witnesses and secured in stable media. According to the Egyptologist, the transition of a remembered event from one dimension to another takes about 80 to 100 years (Assmann 2010, 117). The more or less complete *romances* about the raid and its consequences must have been transmitted in private singing between the

middle of the 18th and the middle of the 19th centuries. After that, a transition to the cultural dimension was necessary to maintain the memory. This was exactly the moment when flamenco culture emerged as a musical art form. The singing of flamenco in public, with its exchange-value, implies the adaptation of the musical pieces and lyrics to the desires of the public, which in the Romantic period wished a lyrical expression of genial subjects expressing their individual emotions: The paying audience would not have been as interested in monotonously recited and lengthy narrative stories about past persecutions as in short and musically sparkling expressions of strong personal feelings such as pain or heartbreak. Accordingly, *palos* such as the *soleá*—deformation of *soledad*, meaning loneliness in Spanish—became part of the musical canon. This motive also explains the evolution towards short stanzas, given that the flamenco lyrics in the Cafés Cantante of the 19th century generally must have lost their narrative elements. Fragmentation led to the excision of concrete details and data about the historical event and, as a result, the origin of the lyrics of *martinetes* as storytelling texts was ignored.

Thus, the only setting in which the old texts could survive in a longer and narrative form is the daily private singing, the performance of flamenco with use-value in the Romani family. Here the women who were often described as excellent singers, but who rarely allowed to show their talent in public stand out. In the 19th century in particular, women singing, especially in the disreputable ambience of Cafés, was frowned upon and associated with activities such as prostitution. The women performing at the time, mostly in dance, though there were some examples of singers, turned their backs on show business as quickly as possible once they were married. This negative view of public performance opportunities for singing women persisted in part until the late 20th century. Pedro Peña (2013, 35) relates that his mother María Fernández Granados 'La Perrata', with whom he recorded the *romance* of Gerineldo on a family project album in 1999, was not desired by her husband to sing in public, despite her appearances on the television series *Rito y Geografía del Cante*. The fact that she sang *romances* and was known for her talent—as evidenced by her invitations to the television series—testifies to the reality that women were the main bearers of this tradition, including in Roma families.

In the general folkloric *romancero* of Andalusia, the main transmitters since the 18th century have been the women, who used the texts for entertainment, for example, in the shared housework, transforming the

texts and giving them new meanings according to their interests (Ruiz 1991, 30–35). Cervantes' protagonist Preciosa, who claimed to be a Gitana, was not accidentally a young woman who performed with other female singers. In Roma families of the more recent past, the older women, given their higher position, were responsible for the flamenco modalities that were not performed by the men in public (Suárez Ávila 1989, 574). These are interpretations of old *romances* with two different musical moods and functions. On the one hand, there are the *romances* sung in a festive tone to celebrate the bride's virginity at the wedding celebrated behind closed doors (Suárez Ávila 1989, 581). On the other hand, there are the tragic *tonás* and *martinetes* that keep the aforementioned remembrance of the 18th century alive. Although Demófilo emphasized that his informant particularly appreciated the *romances*, he indicated as early as 1881 that these were rarely sung in public. They only became known again with the 1922 singing competition in Granada. Highly praised by Lorca, they were also recorded from that time on and have been part of the fixed canon of flamenco since Mairena's project of reappreciation. Since then, it has also been documented that they are likewise performed by women who are almost exclusively Gitanas, which is remarkable since the singers otherwise try to cover almost all styles. The *martinetes* and *tonás* based on *romances* are very suitable for social engagement and self-empowerment of the Romnja by singing their lyrics when they talk about their traumatic experiences of persecution. Singing acapella, without guitar accompaniment or dance, the female artists can raise their voice and claim their right to finally be heard after centuries.

When Amparo Agujetas performed the following lyrics in Seville on November 24, 2017, she immediately recalled the separation of families and the forced deportation of women in the 1749 Great Round-up with this six-line stanza:

A la puerta llaman,
me metieron en una sala.
Y me llevaban de conducción
y yo le dije a la partida
que me aflojara los cordeles,
que los brazos a mí me dolían.[9]

[9] They knocked on the door / they put me in a room / and they were driving me / and I told the leader / to loosen my ropes / that my arms were hurting me (own translation of own transcription and recording).

Due to syntactic irregularities, all verses seem to be fragments of earlier narrative texts that were subsequently reassembled. The frequently repeated formula about knocking on the door, often with the addition of nocturnal hours, alludes to the raid in which the Roma were surprised at night in order to arrest them at home. Confinement in a large hall refers to the improvised places of assembly before the separated women and children were taken to their destinations. During the deportation on foot, the women, who had not knowingly committed any crime, were tied together in long rows and treated very badly (Zoido 1999, 150–172), in this case by tying their hands too tightly. In this case, one can certainly speak of a coherent narrative text, which in the concrete performance of Amparo Agujetas is framed by two thematically related stanzas that speak of her bad state of mood as a consequence of the Round-up.

Also, I recorded *martinetes* from Rocío Parrilla in Jerez on 25 of March, 2017. In her case, she recites a short text that can also be interpreted as part of the descriptions of the cruel operation, during which all the confined prisoners are ordered to be quiet and then to stand up, presumably to be deported to their destinations:

Y suena un toquecito de silencio,
Ya nos mandan a callar,
y entonces al toquecito –primo mío– de Diana
que nos mandan a levantar.[10]

The bugle call used in the military to wake the soldiers is called El toque de Diana. Considering that the entire raid was carried out by the Spanish military, it is not far-fetched to conclude that these verses stem from narratives about the Great Round-up from the perspective of the victims. All captured Roma were taken directly to confinement centers at dawn, where they were ordered to keep quiet, only to be awakened again early in the morning to begin their path of forced deportation.

Rocío Parrilla combines this text with a stanza about the consequences of the Round-up in a Romani neighborhood like Triana in Seville, where some of the liberated Roma returned, but with their family members still in detention and contact interrupted due to the lack of resources:

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[10] And there sounds a call for silence / and we're told to be quiet / and then at the little call—my cousin—of Diana / they send us to stand up (own translation of own transcription and recording).

En el barrio de Triana
ya no hay pluma ni tintero
para yo escribirle a mi madre:
que hace mucho tiempo que no la veo.[11]

In this case, a lyrical I at least rudimentarily literate expresses itself, but has neither ink nor pen to write to the mother, in all probability still in captivity in a faraway place. Countless situations are reported in which Roma have tried to legally claim the liberation of their family members (Jiménez 2020, 229), often with the help of written documents, which certainly in many cases must have been drafted by an assisting literate person. In these cases, too, obstacles were put up for Roma, and the lack of material documentation will logically have led to personal oral communication through informants, for which *romances* have been suitable since the Middle Ages. The simplicity of the assonant rhyme *e-o* in the second and fourth verse indicates its probable descent from an orally improvised *romance* text.

Rocío Parilla concludes her musical piece with a very typical verse of *martinetes*, in which she swears by the truthfulness of what is said, which is another indication that these texts were originally narrative in character and were concluded with these vows:

Si no es verdad,
Eso lo que yo digo,
Que Dios me mande la muerte
Si me la quiere mandar.

Thus, what female interpreters of *romance* fragments in the musical style of *martinetes* are doing today can be considered a 'new' interpretation of 18th century reform politics, inasmuch as the goal of many researchers and activists is "to create a counter-narrative of the history of Roma people" (Jiménez 2020, 221).

[11] In the Triana neighborhood / there is no more pen or inkwell / for me to write to my mother: / I haven't seen her for a long time (own translation of own transcription and recording).

6. Conclusion

The primitive texts of *tonás* and *martinetes* really told—or rather must have told earlier—the stories of the persecution of Roma with terrible events like the 1749 Great Round-up, and etched those events into their communicative memory. The texts about the terrible raid have also survived as cultural memory, but not really in their complete narrative form of the former *romances*. Modifications and especially an extreme kind of fragmenting occurred when passing from one dimension to another during Romanticism and the emergence of flamenco as a modern art form in the 19th century. Mainly the collective of Romani women kept the communicative memory alive by singing *romances* in a private and non-commercial context, or flamenco with use-value. This collective uses the ancient texts to share and transmit their memories of the horrific 1749 raid that separated families and represents attempted genocide. Any form of singing *martinetes* consciously can be considered a form of rewriting Spanish history that makes a forgotten event known again. Given the circumstances in which Romnja have had the opportunity to practice their art publicly in the last centuries, the mere act of singing these modalities through publicly accessible flamenco appears as a verbal feminist commitment and political self-empowerment to speak and be heard. In this way, today's female singers can contradict the prejudice that maintains they are merely reproducing old lyrics, which, moreover, would have an androcentric or misogynic content.

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Paola Toninato

The Work of Memory in Female Writings of Romani Holocaust Survivors: Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka

Abstract

The chapter discusses the work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka, who were the first survivors of Sinti and Romani descent to publish their memoirs about the events of Romani Holocaust (Porrajmos) in Germany and in Austria respectively. It argues that for these authors writing provides an important vehicle for individual agency and enables them, while working through their traumatic memories, to express their unique individual perspective. Whilst dealing with their individual issues and life stories, however, Franz and Stojka continue to draw inspiration from their cultural heritage and remain painfully aware of the wider problems faced by their group. Their struggle for autonomy and self-expression is therefore coupled with their people's struggle for recognition. By proudly claiming their cultural heritage alongside their status as survivors, these authors were able to break some of the most persistent "Gypsy" stereotypes and became eminent representatives of their communities

1. Voicing the Memories of a Silenced Community

The fate of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust has only belatedly received attention in the academic and public arena (Kenrick/Puxon 1972 and 1995; Hancock 1996; Milton 1991 and 1998; Zimmermann 1996; Lewy 2000; Margalit 2002; Joskowicz 2016 and 2020). Despite suffering terrible losses under the Nazis and their allies in the period between 1933 and 1945,[1] having been singled out, together with the Jews, as an "alien

[1] Although the exact number of Roma and Sinti victims remains unknown, it is estimated that 500,000 Roma and Sinti have perished during WWII (see Kenrick/Puxon 1995, 150). Some estimates place the number even higher (Vossen 1983, 85–86; Hancock 2007, 405).

race" (*Fremdrasse*) and therefore a danger to the purity of the "Aryan" race, the Roma's case was not heard at Nuremberg nor at other post-war trials. The Roma's "invisibility" as Holocaust victims has also meant that their first-hand accounts and testimonies were ignored. As a result, the Romani *Porrajmos*[2] (unlike the *Shoah*) "has become an almost forgotten footnote to the history of Nazi genocide" (Tyrnauer 1998 [1982], 97). It took until the 1980s for German authorities to recognise that Roma and Sinti had been persecuted by the Nazi regime for racial and ethnic reasons. The official recognition of the Romani genocide came as a result of the political mobilisation of Roma and Sinti, which led to the creation of a number of committees and pan-Gypsy organisations, especially the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (*Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma*) (Fraser 1992, 316–318; Milton 2002, 180–202). In Austria Roma and Sinti have been fully recognised as victims of the Nazi regime only since 1988, after years of mobilisation from independent researchers, activists, and artists (Thurner 2007, 64).

The lack of public recognition of the Romani Holocaust was the outcome of a process of marginalisation and exclusion of Romani groups from mainstream European society, which long predates the events of WWII (Fraser 1995). It is part of the erasure of the "Gypsy" presence from "official" European history and culture (McLaughlin 1999; Toninato 2019) and the result of misleading stereotypes, for example, the portrayal of Roma and Sinti as living in an eternal present and having *no sense of historical memory*, which has left a lasting impression in the collective memory worldwide (Trumpener 1992).

The repercussions of the silencing and "institutional forgetting" of the Romani Holocaust are severe. However, the lack of recognition of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims has been fundamentally challenged by a growing body of research, political campaigns, and importantly, by the existence of oral narratives about the Holocaust among the Roma (Pahor 1980; Stojka 1992; Kenrick/Puxon 1995; Sonneman 2002; Bársony/Daróczi 2008). Roma's *Porrajmos* narratives and highly traumatic memories circulated mainly within the protective family and group boundaries, but this phenomenon applies to Holocaust survivors in general (Langer 1991; LaCapra 2001). Roma and Sinti testimonies fell on

[2] *Porrajmos* is the term used by the Roma to refer to the Romani Holocaust. It literally means "devouring". Other expressions used to define it are *Baro Porrajmos* ("great devouring") (Hancock 2002, 34) and *samudaripen* ("mass killing").

deaf ears and were effaced by official Holocaust renditions where they simply had "no place". While memories of Jewish suffering during the Nazi regime are officially commemorated, in both United States and Europe, the memory of Roma persecution is not yet part of a widely shared cultural memory.

From the 1980s onwards autobiographical accounts and memoirs of Roma and Sinti Holocaust survivors began to be published, breaking the silence maintained by institutions and public authorities on the subject. During this time, and in the following decade, a growing number of Romani authors from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland began to publish their work in an effort to counter persistent discriminatory attitudes and violence toward their people. In Germany and Austria, the events of the Holocaust have indelibly marked a generation of Romani authors, which includes Philomena Franz, Ceija Stojka, Otto Rosenberg,[3] Walter Winter[4] and Alfred Lessing.[5]

In this chapter I will focus on the work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka, who were the first survivors of Sinti and Romani descent to publish their memoirs about the events of Holocaust in Germany and in Austria respectively. Philomena Franz was born in Germany in 1922 to a Sinti family of musicians who had lived in the country for centuries. In 1943 she was deported first to Auschwitz and later transferred to the Ravensbrück and Wittenberg camps. She managed to escape, but lost most of her family. Her autobiography *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* (Between Love and Hate), originally published in 1985 and reprinted in 2001, is an account of her imprisonment in the concentration camps. The first

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[3] Otto Rosenberg, a Sinto from Berlin, published his autobiography *Das Brennglas* in 1998. The book was published in English the following year as *A Gypsy in Auschwitz*. Rosenberg's work is discussed by Grobbel (2003) and Rosenhaft (2004).

[4] Walter Winter's memoirs, *Winter Zeit: Erinnerungen eines deutschen Sinto, der Auschwitz überlebt hat* (1999), were based on four recorded interviews carried out by historians Thomas Neumann and Michael Zimmermann. They were published in 1999 and translated into English in 2004, published by the University of Hertfordshire Press.

[5] Alfred Lessing is author of the memoir *Mein Leben im Versteck: Wie ein deutscher Sinti den Holocaust überlebte* (My Life in Hiding: How a German Sinto Survived the Holocaust, 1993). Other Romani writers who published autobiographical texts include Dido Ernst and Lolo Reinhardt, author of the memoir *Überwintern: Jugenderinnerungen eines schwäbischen Zigeuners* (1999).

part of the book is devoted to describing the author's happy childhood, which contrasts dramatically with the atrocities of Auschwitz. Franz has also published a book of poetry (*Stichworte*, Franz 2016) and a collection of fairy tales (*Zigeunermärchen*, Franz 2001). In 1995 she was conferred the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), and in 2001 she was named 'Woman of Europe 2001' for her contribution to European integration and intercultural understanding.

Three years after the publication of Franz's autobiography, Ceija Stojka, a Romani poet and artist born in 1933 in Austria to a family of Lovara Roma, published her memoir *Wir leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (We Live in Hiding: Memories of a Roma-Gypsy, Stojka 1988), which raised public awareness of the persecutions suffered by the Austrian Roma. As a child, she and her family were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and then Bergen-Belsen. She managed to survive, together with her mother and four of her five brothers, but she lost her father and her seven-year-old brother Ossi. In 1992 she published a second autobiography, *Reisende auf dieser Welt* (Travellers in This World) (Stojka 1992), in which she described her life in postwar Austria, while *Träume ich, dass ich lebe? Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen*, (Am I Dreaming That I Am Living? Freed from Bergen-Belsen), published in 2005 (Stojka 2005), recounts her experiences as a prisoner in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her book *Meine Wahl zu schreiben—ich kann es nicht* (My Choice to Write—I Have None), published in 2003 (Stojka 2003), is a bilingual collection of poems in German and Romani.

Franz and Stojka devoted their lives to promoting awareness of Romani suffering during the Holocaust and fostering intercultural dialogue. By proudly claiming their cultural heritage alongside their status as survivors, these authors were able to break some of the most persistent "Gypsy" stereotypes mentioned above: first, that Roma and Sinti are frozen in a purely oral, "illiterate" culture,[6] and, second, that they have no sense of historical memory. Stojka and Franz became eminent representatives of their communities, and their example of testimony was fol-

[6] Research has in fact shown that a body of Romani written literature began to emerge in Europe since the early 20th century (Eder 1993 and Eder-Jordan 1997; Toninato 1999 and 2014; French 2015; Kovacshazy 2009; Zahova/French/Hertrampf (2020); Roman/Zahova/Marinov 2021).

lowed by many other Romani Holocaust survivors who decided to voice their accounts of survival.[7]

In the following I will discuss Franz's and Stojka's important contribution[8] to the growing body of Romani literature as female authors who use writing as a powerful tool for self-expression, but I will also dwell on their role as mediators between cultures and as moral witnesses who have been able to work through their painful memories and re-articulate them in the form of "dialogic" memories (Assmann 2015). The main questions I shall address are: What is the specific function of Romani women writing? What lies behind their decision to publish their life narratives? Is there something specific about Romani women's Holocaust accounts?

2. Romani Women Re-writing Their Traumatised Selves

The female approach to writing among the Roma and Sinti is a complex phenomenon. It has been suggested that, at least within some Romani groups, that writing was limited to marginal, instrumental uses mainly performed by their female members in interactions with the *Gadje* (non-Roma).[9] Romani female writers, however, have been able to redirect this instrumental use of writing towards literary purposes and more in general for purposes of self-expression, thus circumventing the severe limitations imposed on them by their group (Toninato 1999). Despite their ability to negotiate and reconcile their literary activities with the demands of their group, the publication of Romani women's writings is not a straightforward event, and has often very serious consequences, as in the case of Bronislawa Wajs (known as Papusza). Papusza, who learnt to read and write without any formal schooling, endured the painful experience of the Nazi occupation of her country and after the war devoted herself to literary work. Shortly after the publication of her poetry collection under the title *Songs of Papusza* by *Gadjo* poet Jerzy Ficowski, she was excluded from her group, the Polska Roma, who considered her association with Ficowski a form of betrayal (Papusza's poems were used

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[7] See in particular the authors quoted in footnote 3, 4 and 5.

[8] In the following, unless otherwise stated, translations from German are mine.

[9] See for example the Slovenian-Croatian Roma and the Sinti in northern Italy (Toninato 1997 and 2014).

to justify the policy of forced sedentarization of the Roma implemented by Polish authorities at the time). Papusza's poetic talent and her legacy continue to inspire the following generation of Romani writers, many of whom now regard her as the "mother" of Romani literature. Having her work published and read by the non-Roma, however, came with a painful cost: Papusza's fate was to spend the rest of her life in solitude, suffering mental breakdown and eventually abandoning poetry altogether.

While purely instrumental uses of writing by Romani women are tolerated, the publication of written texts, especially when concerning sensitive aspects of Romani life and culture, is regarded with suspicion and perceived as a threat potentially leading to assimilation (Toninato 2006). By devoting themselves to writing and cultural communication, Romani women openly defy patriarchal authorities because they do not conform to their traditional roles. When family and societal pressure is particularly strong, as seen above, the writing process becomes "complicated", fragmented; it turns into an activity that is best to keep hidden, away from the hostile gaze of the other group members.

In the case of Ceija Stojka, the publication of her memoir *Wir leben im Verborgenen* was initiated by author and film director Karin Berger, as Ceija Stojka herself reveals: "She [Karin] was the one who ran around to publishers" (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).[10] Within her family, however, Ceija Stojka encountered strong disapproval: "Often writing was complicated", she reports, "because my partner did not really understand the purpose of it" (Stojka 1988, 97). Disapproval turned into outright rejection when Ceija Stojka decided to let her brother Karl Stojka, also a Holocaust survivor, read her manuscript; he told her to destroy it (Stojka 1988, 98). After that, she decided to hide the manuscript in the kitchen, which she perceived as a safe place. In addition to the opposition of her family members, she had to face the indifference of mainstream pub-

[10] The collaboration between Romani authors and non-Romani scholars is indeed a recurrent pattern in Romani literature, and led to the publication of a number of autobiographical and biographical texts, either self-authored or co-authored (see the case of Ilona Lacková's autobiography *A False Dawn: My Life as a Gypsy Woman in Slovakia*, translated and edited by Milena Hübschmannová and published in Czech in 1997 under the title *Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou*, and Giuseppe Levakovich's autobiographical account *Tzigari* published in 1975 (Levakovich/Ausenda 1975); see also *Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman* (Gmelch 1986 [1991]).

lishers, who did not consider the publication relevant. In an interview Ceija Stojka revealed: "A German [publisher] rejected it, saying, 'Who will want to read this now, after fifty years?' But then Picus in Vienna accepted it. We were very lucky" (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).

Despite the obstacles and difficulties encountered in their path, both Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka were able to accomplish their writing projects.[11] Their determination shows that for them writing fulfils a vital need that is greater than the fear of negative reactions from family and group members and that, at a certain stage in their lives, becomes too powerful to be suppressed.[12] As for many other Holocaust survivors, the need to tell her story became for Stojka an absolute obligation, taking over her life. Compared to this "moral imperative", ordinary life tasks seem trivial and meaningless. This confirms what psychiatrist Dori Laub, himself a Holocaust survivor, remarked after having interviewed hundreds of survivors at the Yale Video Archive: "[S]urvivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed 'external evil', which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion" (Felman/Laub 1992, 79). Franz and Stojka decided to fight that struggle to try and achieve some control over their Holocaust traumas and to reclaim some agency over their lives.

There is a sense of urgency in their work, as well as a certain awareness of the healing power of writing. Having experienced the struggle entailed in "working through"[13] their recollections—Franz reveals that she wrote her memoir "in tears and on the knees" (Franz 2001, 101)—both authors confirm that this helped them to find release from the traumatic memories of the camps. In this regard, Stojka states that, after she started writing, her memories came *pouring out* (Stojka 1988, 97; my emphasis). She also says that she felt the need to talk to somebody, but that no one who would listen to her (Stojka 1988, 97). These words hint at the sense

[11] Although Philomena Franz did not encounter resistance from family members as Ceija Stojka did, she mentions facing poverty and discrimination in the post-WWII period, and, like Ceija Stojka, she struggled to secure compensation for Holocaust survivors.

[12] "Finally, I did not let myself be deterred anymore. Even when they said I should go into the kitchen I did not obey anymore. Too much was coming my way; I had experienced too much and had to struggle for too long" (Stojka 1988, 98; trans. Riegler 2007, 275).

[13] LaCapra 2001.

of isolation and lack of understanding experienced by many Holocaust survivors, unable to find a sympathetic audience and struggling to attain validation from those around them.

This sense of isolation results from the nature of the Holocaust, which in the Nazi system was meant to remain "an event without a witness" (Laub 1992, 75). In the Holocaust's world, Laub explains, "the very imagination of the *Other* was no longer possible. There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered" (Felman/Laub 1992, 81–82). To this we can add that in a traumatic situation in general the individual sense of self is compromised, because trauma itself "destroys the belief that one *can be oneself* in relation to others' (Herman 1992, 53; emphasis in original). By contrast, the act of writing as form of communication, even self-communication, breaks the sense of isolation felt by the survivors. As argued by Langer, "writing invites reflection, commentary, interpretation, by the author as well as the reader" (Langer 1991, 57). Moreover, the writing process contributes to "consciousness-raising" and intensifies the individual's "sense of self" (Ong 1982, 174). In particular, autobiographical writing enables the female writing subject to go a step forward. As Smith and Watson emphasise, autobiography entails the creation of a discursive space through which women can "redefine themselves" as autonomous subjects able to express their individual voice (Smith/Watson 2002). Through their life writing, Romani women have the opportunity to carve out for themselves a space for individual agency, resisting traditional female roles.

How do Romani women express their individual worldviews? In the cases of Franz and Stojka, writing provides an important vehicle for individual agency. This is confirmed by the way in which they portray themselves in their texts. Their memoirs, like Holocaust testimonies in general, "are not spontaneous outbursts of information" as Zoë Waxman clarifies, "but come from the careful representation of experience" (Waxman 2006, 128). This is particularly evident in Philomena Franz's autobiography. In the section devoted to her experiences in the concentration camps, significantly entitled "My Holocaust", the reader encounters a strong-willed young Sinti woman who does not conform to the image of the helpless victim. Upon arrival to Auschwitz on 21 April 1943, at 4 o'clock in the morning, she describes in a dry, factual style the initial encounter with the infernal world of the Holocaust: the sorting out in ranks according to age and gender, the "peculiar" smell, the deeply shocking

view of trucks filled with dead bodies, a complete silence suddenly interrupted by the frightening orders of the SS. Then, the relentless sequence of dehumanising procedures to which the prisoners are subjected:

> "Line up! Undress!" […] Everyone undresses slowly. It is very cold. I have goose bumps. Contemptuous, curious, professional looks sweep over my body. The dress I was wearing a few moments earlier is replaced by a striped one, made from coarse fabric. My feet are now inside large wooden clogs. In two minutes, a civilian is turned into a prisoner of a concentration camp. (Franz 2001, 61)

The narrator observes with disconcerting realism the initiation rituals to life in the concentration camp, the progressive degradation imposed on the prisoners, but she describes this from her own point of view, highlighting her feelings and reactions, and framing the whole scene with a laconic comment—which signals to the reader the agency achieved over these traumatic memories—her dizzying and sudden descent into the world of the damned of Auschwitz. Franz describes how, shortly after her arrival, despite the initial shock and disorientation, she rebels against the idea of becoming a prostitute for the SS: "No, no, I cry, I want to die like the members of my family, like my brothers and sisters whom you have killed here. I don't want to become your whore. Kill me!" (Franz 2001, 63). By refusing to be subjected to the SS's sexual exploitation, she remains truthful to her family and to herself, resisting their attempt at destroying her identity and humanity. Her countenance stands out in stark opposition to traditional stereotypes about exotic and promiscuous "Gypsy" women. Moreover, her behaviour contrasts sharply with the portrayal of a co-prisoner, a girl with "lifeless eyes" who is walking as being "in a dream" (Franz 2001, 62), and displays some of the features of the *Muselmänner*, the "living-dead" described by Primo Levi, those who "march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead in them, already too empty to really suffer" (Levi 1986, 90). The young Philomena, by contrast, despite being filled with feelings of despair, is never completely resigned to her destiny. She deliberately attempts to take advantage of the situations she faces, trying to gain some food, often with the collaboration of other women (included her sister, who is tortured for having helped her in her failed escape attempt), and although she fails to escape from Ravensbrück, she succeeds in running away from a forced labour camp near Wittenberg, hiding until the end of the war.

Ceija Stojka's memoir "*Träume ich, dass ich lebe?*" (Am I Dreaming I'm Alive? Stojka 2005) describes her struggle for survival at the concen-

tration camp of Bergen-Belsen. She was eleven when she was sent there, together with her mother and her sister, after having endured internment in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. The memoir adopts the perspective of a child, tempered by an adult narrator, and this enables her to present the events from a unique viewpoint. In her simple, unadorned style, she conveys a more "choral" image of the women and the children in Auschwitz, and creates the image of a very strong and resourceful woman: her mother. She collaborated with other women in the camp in order for them and their children to survive: "These women—Tschiwe, Mimi, and Mama—have stuck closely together. They were three Austrian women who, from Roßauer Lände (in Vienna) passing through Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen, had always been together" (Stojka 2005, 38). Women and children in Stojka's group showed a remarkable spirit of adaptation: "We survived by eating everything. Pieces of wood, grass, we were chewing everything" (Stojka 2005, 41). The role of Stojka's mother in her survival is crucial not just in the physical sense (that is, by providing food and shelter): she constantly provides her with emotional support and reassurance. Ceija reports "talking a lot" with her (Stojka 2005, 35), thus gaining life-saving advice on how to survive in a deadly environment and, most importantly, sharing stories and narratives.

Scholars have pointed out that Roma and Sinti have a well-established storytelling tradition that has played a crucial role in preserving their group identity and has insured intergenerational transmission of culture (Dick-Zatta 1986, Heinz/Hübschmannová 1983, Hübschmannová 1985 and 1987, Tong 1989). Indeed, the Romani oral tradition had a vital function in preserving cultural memory and sustaining the sense of ethnic continuity between the prisoners and their communities that was so dramatically disrupted by the events of the Holocaust. Through the narration of family history, the individual is reminded that, even in the isolation of the concentration camps, s/he is not alone and s/he is able to symbolically reconnect with family members and, by extension, with the wider group—comprising of both the living and the dead.

Another way in which Franz and Stojka express their unique individual perspective is evident in their writing style. A growing number of scholars has recently commented on the literary merit of the texts of these two authors;[14] in particular, analyses have noted the use of meta-

[14] See, among others, Eder 1993 and Eder-Jordan 2010, Zwicker 2010 and 2011, Auraix-Jonchière 2020, and Bauer 2020.

phors from the natural world, which reflects its crucial role in the Romani *Weltanschauung* and culture. For Roma and Sinti, nature is not only a repository of romantic stereotypes, but it was an integral part of the itinerant tradition they were forced to abandon during the Nazi regime. In their prose and poetry, both Franz and Stojka represent the bare, lifeless space of the concentration camp, in opposition to the natural world, which they regard as the main source of life and an emblem of their past freedom (Franz 2001, 65; Stojka 2005, 21–22, 27). For them, Nature is thus the embodiment of what is good and benign and is opposed to human barbarity:

Nature is our original maternal ancestor
The wind is the Roma's brother
The rain is the Romnja's sister
And all the rest is part of it

(Stojka 2003, 37)

As a painter, Ceija Stojka devoted her work to reproduce not only images of her ordeal in the concentration camps, but also images of her childhood, when her Lovara family was still travelling: these are paintings mostly characterised by brightly-coloured images depicting horses, caravans, and countryside landscapes. By contrast, her black-and-white paintings and pen-and-ink drawings most often depict life in the concentration camps.

In Philomena Franz's prose and poetry, readers equally find an abundance of metaphors from the natural world. To express her feelings of loneliness and isolation while being detained in prison, she uses the metaphor of the bird unable to fly: "I am a bird, I can't fly. My wings have been clipped" (Franz 2001, 56), and in her poems the natural and the human world merge into each other as if they coexisted in perfect harmony:

> I name the trees, the leaves in autumn, how they dance—like children, in a merry-go-round.
>
> (Franz 2016, 13)

> *If you lie down in the tall grass and a thunderstorm is coming, then you hear the rustling of the stems and it sounds like music. When the wind brushes the grass, it's the same as though it spoke a language.*
>
> (Franz 2016, 35; emphasis in original)

Franz's and Stojka's longing for nature during their imprisonment in the concentration camps signifies their longing for freedom and for life as it was before the events that led to the *Porrajmos*, which coincided with forced sedentarization and, at the same time, with the violent interruption of their childhood. When anguish and desperation become too intense to bear, their intimacy with nature provides them with a symbolic language through which they can articulate their emotions and sufferings. It also enables them to keep a connection to their individual life story and to what it meant for them to grow up as Roma and Sinti, reminding them of the key components of Romani identity and enabling them to resist the dehumanization process encountered in the concentration camps.

3. Romani Authors as Witnesses

In the preface to *Zwischen Liebe und Hass*, Philomena Franz points out: "I wrote this book as a Gypsy. A Gypsy from the Sinti tribe. As a woman who grew up within this tribe" (Franz 2001, 10). We find a similar claim in Ceija Stojka's memoir *Wir leben in Verborgenen* and in later interviews, where she revealed that the book was a gift to her mother: "I always stood for what she believed in. I am proud to be a gypsy (sic), as she was." (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).

The fact that for both authors the decision to publish their books coincided with the proud affirmation of their ethnic identity seems to confirm that in Romani women's writing collective and individual claims are closely interconnected (Toninato 2014, 168–170). Whilst dealing with their individual issues and life stories, they continue to draw inspiration from their cultural heritage and remain painfully aware of the wider problems faced by their group. Their struggle for autonomy and self-expression is therefore coupled with their people's struggle for recognition. This explains why Franz and Stojka started writing around the same period, the 1980s, when revisionist attempts arose in European society, and they had to deal with episodes of anti-Gypsyism against members of their family. In this hostile social climate, exposing oneself in public was a danger, but they could no longer keep silent: "[…] if I present myself to the Austrian public as a Romni from Vienna, then for me it is a big gamble, a risk", recognises Stojka, "but we have to open ourselves up,

otherwise things will go so far that at some point all Roma will fall into a hole" (Stojka 1988, 154).

Stojka emphasises the invisibility of Roma Holocaust survivors in postwar Austria and the refusal of recognition as Holocaust victims: "Nobody cared about us at all […]. The Gypsies hardly came up, they were not there, they did not exist. But we were there just like the poor Jews, we suffered just as much" (Stojka 1988, 137). As mentioned above, this apparent "invisibility" of the survivors explained why, until the 1980s, there was no public commemoration of the Gypsy *Porrajmos* and no official recognition of the Roma as Holocaust victims.

Acknowledging the full extent of the Romani Holocaust is a priority not only to do justice to the victims, but to address the present situation of the Roma and Sinti in Europe. The risk is that, if the Romani Holocaust is not properly recognised and processed in the collective memory of the non-Roma, current anti-Roma attitudes will not change. If the *Porrajmos*, like the Jewish Holocaust, has to become a watershed in the history of mankind, its memory must include the voice of survivors like Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka. Their work plays a vital role in reinstating the truth of the *Porrajmos* against Holocaust deniers. A further, equally crucial aspect of their endeavour is reaching out to future generations, educating them so that they may learn from the past and be warned about the risk that similar atrocities may happen again. This didactic-ethical function of Holocaust memory is precisely what prompted Philomena Franz's engagement with the public, especially with students and teachers, and is typical of what Steffi De Jong called "the primary function of the witness to history" (De Jong 2018, 37).[15]

Holocaust survivors can influence and help to rewrite history at different levels: acting as "moral witnesses", as Avishai Margalit called them, that is, as people who witnessed *and* suffered the consequences of radi-

[15] "The primary function of the witness to history is education … The educative role of witnesses to history can thereby serve different ends: it can be cognitive, providing the audience with information that they did not have before the encounter; it can be affective, making them respond emotionally in a way in which they have not responded before; it can be an end in itself, making the audience discover historical details that it did not know before; and it can be a means to an end, for example, when this historical knowledge is used in peace and human rights education. Most often, we find a combination of those four functions" (De Jong 2018, 37).

cal evil (Margalit 2002, 147). Moral witnesses draw their authority from having experienced directly the Holocaust; their mere survival is an act of defiance, and stands as a testament to human dignity in the face of extreme acts of inhumanity. They can also become "creators of memories", giving voice, as in the case of the Romani writers here discussed, to "subaltern subjects" of history, such as women and children. Incorporating the perspective of the subaltern enables these survivors to highlight less-known aspects of Holocaust memory that would otherwise remain invisible. Their focus is not on the persecutors, who are only briefly sketched in their narratives, but on the voiceless *victims*. In Ceija Stojka's narrative, the silent presence of the dead surprisingly offers "comfort" and reassurance to the surviving Roma prisoners: after being reassured by her mother, Ceija finds refuge among them: "If the dead hadn't been there, we would have frozen to death" (Stojka 2005, 26); "We were not alone also because we were surrounded by the buzzing of so many souls" Stojka 2005, 40). The dead are not scary to the child because they are recognised as members of the same ethnic group: "They were our protection and they were human beings. Human beings we used to know…" (Stojka 2005, 39–40). The strong link between victims and survivors is at the origins of feelings of guilt and shame due to the fact of having survived when so many others died (Bettelheim 1979, 297), but, on the one hand, from the Romani child's perspective, the dead become protectors and symbolise the continuity between generations that enable the Roma to exist. On the other hand, the survivor provides their silenced memories with a voice, thereby giving meaning to their atrocious death.

Doing justice to the dead is certainly a crucial function in Franz's and Stojka's testimonies; however, they refuse to join the traditional power struggle opposing victims and persecutors: Franz's often quoted statement—"When we hate, we lose. When we love, we become rich" (Franz 2001, 10)—is a pivotal example of this refusal to perpetuate the cycle of hatred, echoed by Stojka who stated:

> You can't counter hatred with hatred. I got rid of all that, the evil, and then chose the path of goodness… I'm not even angry with the people who did evil things to us… when all's said and done, they are human beings, and that's just what human beings are like (quoted in Tebbutt 2005, 47).

It is as if, by undergoing extreme suffering, and witnessing man's inhumanity to "the Other", these *Porrajmos* survivors developed a more acute awareness and a wider understanding of what it means being "human".

Instead of serving the instrumental purposes of the "official" political Holocaust discourse, their memories facilitate the establishment of an alternative discourse that includes *both* victims and victimizers, Roma and non-Roma. Their memoirs encourage the active participation of the reader: both authors use the present tense in order to break down the chronological barrier and involve him/her more directly in the narration. Rhetorical questions are scattered throughout the texts, making the reader stop and meditated upon the relevance of the *Porrajmos* to the present relationship between Roma and non-Roma. In other words, their texts are purposely dialogic.

4. Conclusion: Towards a Dialogic Memory of the Porrajmos

Historically, the Roma's presence has been removed from collective memory through an "institutional forgetting" that reflects the tendency to exclude them from mainstream society. This has led to erasure of the Romani Holocaust from history and lack of recognition of Romani memories about the *Porrajmos*. From the 1980s onwards, Roma Holocaust testimonies have begun to emerge in the public sphere of a number of European countries, breaking the silence that was maintained for too long on Roma sufferings. In this regard, Romani women survivors like Franz and Stojka have contributed to bringing the *Porrajmos* to the centre of the public debate, regaining agency over Romani representations of this event up to the present.

Romani women survivors show us that it is not only important to remember, but to move away from forms of memory that homogenise the past and adopt a binary oppositional logic. This is akin to what Aleida Assmann calls "dialogic memory", that is, a form of a memory that includes the point of view of oppressed minorities hitherto silenced and ignored, mirrors the complexity of contemporary societies, and contributes to reconfiguring historically divided memories into a shared, more self-reflexive memory (Assmann 2015).

Romani women's written memories, forged by past sufferings but firmly engaged with the present, are the result of an important critical practice that contributes to filling persisting voids and silences within European memory while interrogating the present. The work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka is an invaluable example of the emancipatory

and healing potential of dialogic memories. Their legacy as moral witnesses who experienced the most extreme attempt at dehumanization and yet worked tirelessly to foster dialogue and mutual understanding is bound to continue to inspire future generations to come.

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Sidonia Bauer

Arguments on the Empowerment of Sinti*zze and Rom*nja Through the Resource of Social Space in Travelling Communities

Abstract

This article explores elements of Sinti/Manouche culture, featured in anthropological research as *avant-texte*, and, more specifically, as auto-representations by Sinti*zze. The line of argument pursued in this article seeks to expound, emphasize and critically engage the vital traditional role of women in the respective travelling communities. The potential for empowerment of Sintizze and Romnja is predicated on practiced forms of social organization which will be elucidated through an analysis of gendered space and poetics of space with respect to horse-drawn living wagons. Based on a sociopoetic approach and on the anthropological conception of social space (Lefebvre), as well as on space and gender research (Massey), the article examines feminine auto-representational literary texts and the cultural context to which they remit.

1. Introduction

The present study focusses on the production of space in travelling communities in Western Europe, especially Sinti*zze and Manouches. Piasere (2009, 19) has outlined a model that shows the populations of principally peripatetic Sinti*zze, Manouches and Rom*nja at the time of the Second World War. The travelling communities were then spread across large parts of France, Northern Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, whereas prevailing settled communities were and still are found in Spain and the Balkan countries. There are today as well as historically Rom*nja, Sinti*zze as well as Manouche families attached to a rather itinerant or semi-travelling lifestyle. In France, the presence of Rom*nja, Sinti*zze, and Manouche does not exceed 0,5 percent of the population (Piasere 2009, 14).

The minority in itself is not homogenous, but rather composed of its member groups as a dynamic kaleidoscope (Liégois 2019, 82). It is crucial to emphasize the heterogeneity of Rom*nja and Sinti*zzei-communities, as well as their regional, national and, more rarely, transnational attachments (Sutre 2021). Proposing a transversal study of gendered space may therefore appear as a quite unprofitable purpose. I will therefore proceed as follows. First, a clearly defined community will be demarcated. Their production of space will be explored from an ethnological perspective, with a particular focus on gendered spaces. The family, as a representative example, will then be set into relation with literary representations of gendered spaces in Romani-literature produced by the respective community. Here, my primary focus will lay on French Manouches, encompassed in the Sint*izzi-Manouche perimeter. The results can consequently only concern the community under scrutiny. Within the modern political use of Romani writing (Toninato 2016) and the politically formed European Romani movement (Liégeois 2019, 93), the heterogenous groups of Rom*nja, Sinti*zze, Manouches, Calé et al. converge in order to attain more political strength for the scattered and oppressed communities. The transnational networking has, for example, led to the constitution of the European committee of the Romani Union (founded in 1991), whose task consists in coordinating the cooperating associations of Romanies across Europe. The arguments deployed in this article are intended to unfold as a synchronic mosaic, the precious stones that contribute to the Romani mosaic as a whole. The aim is to foreground cultural elements that illustrate the vital importance and strength of women in the Sinti-Manouche societies of itinerant tradition. The approach is predicated on spatial analyses instantiated by Henri Lefèbvre in his *Production of Space* ([1974] 2000). In Lefèbvres work, space is a mere social product. Doreen Massey, in her *Space, Place, and Gender* ([1994] 2001) accentuates the gendering of space and its implicit, but nonetheless forceful, impact on sexuality and gender roles. Space and gender, following her argument, are inextricably interlinked. I will venture to relate the gendering of a particular space to a corresponding gender relationship in everyday-life.

2. The Prominent Position of Sintizze

In literature, the most famous "Gypsy" figures are feminine. Not only the physical beauty and foreignness of "Gypsy" women are factors for

attraction, but from the 'gitanilla' of Cervantes to Mérimées Carmen, Sand's Moréna (*La Filleule*), and Apollinaires "tzigane" ("La Tzigane"), the sovereignty, strength and liberty of the feminine figures are striking features. Often, the profession of "bohémienne", as synonymous with fortune telling, endows Sinti*zze and Rom*nja with a special irreducible power, similar to the Greek sphynx. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that young attractive girls are often accompanied by old women, serving as their protectors or protectors of tradition. Associated with sorceresses, the old women are usually subject to negative connotations: such as Preciosas' grandmother in *La Gitanilla*, "la Vougne" of *Miarka fille à l'ours* and Azucena in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*.

After a secular era of mere hetero-representation, Roma literature emerges after World War II (Blandfort 2015, Eder-Jordan 2015). The emerging writers are principally women, from Bronislawa Wajs ('Papuzsa'), to Philomena Franz, Ceija Stojka (French 2015, 3), to Sterna Weltz, Sandra Jayat, and Louis Helmstetter ('Pisla'). Their *œuvres* delineate the outstanding role of Romani elders and grandparents. Jayat's autofictional *La longue route d'une Zingarina* (Jayat 1996) insists on the importance of grandfather Narrado, a painter, just as Franz dwells on the character of her grandfather Johannes Haag, a recognized musician (Franz 1985, 2016, 2017). Ceija Stojka highlights the role of her Mama Sidi and her "Tante Gescha" (sister of Ceija Stojka's father) (Stojka 1992, 19). Pisla's narration *Sur ces chemins où nos pas se sont effaces* (Helmstetter 2012), conversely, is transcribed from oral narration to the fixed form by her daughter Marie Weltz, who, in turn, opens her *Secrets Tziganes* (Weltz 1989) with a depiction of her beloved and honored grandmother:

> Ma grand-mère avait encore un gros poêle à bois émaillé et décoré de fleurs irisées, haut et rond […]. Quand elle prenait nos mains dans les siennes, une chaleur nous envahissait qui nous faisait monter le rouge au visage. Elle se prénommait "Madone". […] Avec ses marmites émaillées, ses porcelains, ses timbales chiffrées elle avait l'allure des "grandes dames". Je sus plus tard que c'en était une.[1]

[1] My grandmother still had a big wood stove, enameled and decorated with iridescent flowers, high and round […]. When she took our hands in hers, a heat overcame us which flushed into the face. She called herself by her first name "Madonna". […] With her enameled pots, her porcelains, her galvanized cups, she had the allure des "grandes dames". Later on I knew she was one (Weltz 1989, 10, my translation).

The British Romanies also manifest a special warmth and grace regarding the generation of the grandparents, particularly to the grandmothers, such as "nan" for Damian Le Bas in *The Stopping Places* and Zilla Boswell in *Zilla Smith. An English Romany.* The attachment to the older generation arises not only from efforts to conserve the cultural memory of a time when peripatetic lifestyle was attached to horses and thus to natural environments, professional places, such as fairs, and a vivid community life, which had almost disappeared by the end of 20th century. Moreover, especially in the areas dominated by the Nazis, few survivors could actually relay cultural information. Furthermore, the act of honoring the 'old' people, the grandparents' generation, is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition. One status that is especially highlighted amongst Romani writers and anthropologists is the role of the *phuri daj* (old-wise-women):

> la qualification de reine traduit peut-être une réalité: il est certain qu'une femme âgée [phuri daï], par ses conseils plus que par ses orders, peut exercer son influence. Sa propre famille, mais aussi un entourage plus lointain, peuvent faire appel à sa sagesse, à son experience, à sa connaissance des coutumes et des traditions du clan. (Vaux de Foletier 1983, 30)[2]

The wisdom of the old person asserts her (or his) sovereignty over reforms of traditional norms. However, her (or his) role often seems to consist in the opposite, namely transmitting and conserving tradition in a sclerosed manner rather than transforming or reforming traditions. In this sense, an old woman also appears as the witch *dhrabarni* (selon Matéo Maximoff) from the point of view of the reformer (Voso in *La Septième Fille*). The sovereignty of the *phuri daj* over all other group members seems to be a relic from an ancient form of matriarchy, contemporarily preserved especially in 'nomadic' ways of life (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112). Consequently, social hierarchy, inasmuch as it is still premised on these few ancient relics, does not only hark back to a patriarchal system (cf. French 2015, 4). Social weight is attained on the one hand by age, and on the other hand by gender (in one older age group, the man attains the public/civic rights, for example within the *kriss*) (vgl.

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[2] The qualification of a queen might translate a reality: it is certain that an elderly woman [phuri daj], more by her suggestions than by her orders, can exercise her influence. Her own family, but also a wider environment can appeal to her wisdom, to her experience, to her knowledge regarding customs and traditions of the clan (Vaux de Foletier 1983, 30, my translation).

Maciejwski 1994, 43). Further, hierarchy is attained by intelligence (moral, social, practical and cognitive intelligence, and integrity have to go hand in hand) (cf. Williams 2022). The social capital is also determined by the surrounding society. Within the patriarchal system of French and German society from the *Ancien Régime* to the Modern Nation State to the National Socialist regime, women, even the wise older women, the *phuri daj*, would not have been taken as a serious negotiation partner by the political interactors of the majority society.[3] The travelling groups have therefore organized their bands according to their contemporary European system, appointing kings, queens and dukes, as well as military degrees: captains, lieutenants and colonels. According to the *sintizza walchi* Philomena Franz, eldest woman of her tribe, men and women are equal in contemporary Sinti society.[4] Field research has revealed such equality in a private speech circle, for instance, if the head of a family is male, the mother's or wife's opinions are equally valued. Before committing a decisive verbal act, a good Sinto has reflected and discussed the subject matter with his wife and come to a harmonic result, which he will address within the wider circle. We can thus assert that the aphorism "Behind every wise man stands a wise woman" would be a norm in Sinti culture, to which has to be added, that the old wise woman (and the status of grandmother can easily be attained at the age of forty) does not necessarily have a partner at her side. On the contrary, she proves to be single and thus sovereign (such as the *dhrabarni*, if in the context of Roma Kalderash): "Si le chef de tribu assure la cohésion du groupe, la phuri-daj en assure l'unité, elle en est la mère. C'est la grande initiée"[5] (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112). Stoyanovitch emphasizes that the supposed matriarchal origin reaches back to a period when women were normally equal to men, with its prevalence in travelling communities i.e., in Germany and, consequently, in France:

[3] Cf. "You could not imagine the lieutenants, marshals and intendants of Alsace, Lorraine and Trois-Évêchés negotiating with an old woman called *phuri-daj* in order to resolve judiciary and territorial conflicts". (Vaux de Foletier 1961, 212)

[4] Personal remark in 2022. The *phuri daj* and head of dynasty was then 100 years old.

[5] If the tribal chef assures the cohesion of the group, the phuri-daj assures its union, for she is its mother. She is the great initiated one (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112, my translation).

> A l'origine, elle [la culture tzigane] aurait été matriarcale. La preuve en seraient certains vestiges de ce régime là même où elle est aujourd'hui nettement patriarcale: l'existence de la phouri-daï (chef de tribu féminin), la place qu'occupe la femme dans le foyer conjugal, certaines pratiques dans le mariage. Nous avons déjà montré le rôle éminent joué par la phuri-daj dans un domaine des plus délicats, à savoir celui de la tradition, domaine dont dépend en grande partie la préservation de l'individualité ethnique de ce people. (Stoyanovitch 1974, 17)[6]

Maciejewski stresses the subordination of the men under their mothers, calling the gender organization an "'inwardly directed matriarchy'" (Maciejewski 1994, 43, "nach innen gestülptes Matriarchat"). Therefore, according to Maciejewski, the ruling Sinti, according to their psychosexual structure, are less fathers, but rather "sons of their mothers" (Maciejewski 1994, 44) and can evade the constraints of patriarchy. If analyses of social structures and the prevalence of Sinti*zze and Rom*nja in public writing hint at the importance and status of women in travelling Romani communities, albeit in the general communitarian arrangement of the respective communities, we should direct our attention to an empirical study that allows us to gain a precise insight on that status.

3. Manouche's Production of Gendered Space

The concept of space's gendering and gendered space leads us to the works of Doreen Massey and her predecessor Henri Lefèbvre. Already Lefèbvre stated that "the existence in space of the phallic verticality (which comes from far, but has the tendency to increase) requires an interpretation" (Lefèbvre 2000, 46). He ventures to analyze this verticality in modern architecture. The "forceful sexuality" expressed by representational means (Massey 2001, 184) is the "phallus" as the "dominant form of space" (Lefèbvre 1991, 302), which for Lefèbvre, as for Massey,

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[6] In its origins, it [Romani's culture] would be matriarchal. Proofs of this would rest in certain parts of this regime where nowadays it is clearly patriarchal: the existence of a phouri-daï (feminine chef of the tribe), the place that the woman occupies in matrimony's home, certain practices of marriage. We have already shown the eminent role the phuri-daj plays in one of the most delicate domains, that means the tradition, domain on which the ethnic individuality of this people principally depends. (Stoyanovitch 1974, 17, my translation)

"in short" means "violence" (Lefèbvre 1991, 302). The gendered approach interprets the phallic conception and production of space as a violent and dominant masculine appropriation of space. Regarding the conceived space, Lefèbvre posits: "Over abstract space [...] reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire" (Lefèbvre 1991, 309). Massey, in fact, analyses the gendering of space and its implicit but forceful sexuality in a capitalist United Kingdom throughout the 19th and 20th century (Massey 2001, 184). She studies the space's lived practices and the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces and spatialization under a gendered perspective and concludes "that space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through" (Massey 2001, 186). Subsequently, the gendering of space and place both reflects and entails repercussions on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in societies (Massey 2001, 186). She thereby offers a construction of femininity through a feminist geography (Massey 2001, 189). The traditional sexual division of labor in social production is one argument for gendered space as economic structures play a considerable role in gender roles and relations (Massey 2001, 198). The social organisation and nature of women's work defines, among other aspects, their gender relationship to men. The empowerment of women's spaces outside of domestic spaces and the possibility to earn money can be reasons for a greater independence and freedom (Massey 2001, 200), in economic terms, social relations, as well as spatial and social mobility. If the dominant society is generally characterized by a vertical architecture representing the phallic principle, the construction of Romani social space seems to offer an alternative.

4. Romani Construction of Space

In the field of architecture in the broadest sense (Lafitte 1972, 68), hence encompassing the composition and configuration of stopping places, Romani culture favours a horizontal alignment. The very specific and, at the same time, most famous house of Romanies is the mobile home. The horse-drawn living wagons (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 11) were, at least from the late 19th century onwards, the most significant emblem of the travelling people (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 11), called wagon, *vardo* or *vurdia* in Romani. The form of the standardized *vardo*s, labeled

Pont-du-Château, Spenger, Reading, or Burton, is mostly characterized by the arched roof, the bow-top, which is a roof as arched as a bow or smooth hill. Each of the conventional Traveller living vans in the U.K. demonstrates/has a circular shape, from the Reading to the Ledge, the Bow-Top, the Burton, the Pot-Cart, to the Open-Lot (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 14). The same holds true for the French *roulottes* and the German Spenger-*Wohnwagen*.[7] Rising from a rectangular chassis, the shape of the vehicle gradually obtains a rounded form. The gypsy caravan further features a long axis, which tends to be crafted in a streamlined fashion, a barrel-shaped roof, as well as arched windows and doors. On the outside, the van is equipped with four round and strikingly large wheels, while the interior is marked by a round stove and stovepipe. On the whole, the "Gypsy" caravan is therefore defined by smooth and round, as well as horizontal shapes.

Most "Gypsy" vans are crafted after the Reading style and its specificity of a body slung between tall wheels (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 78). Prosperous "Gypsy" families like to remember and to describe their ancient status symbols. In the chapter "Gypsy Caravan" in her autobiography *Zwischen Liebe und Hass/Between Love and Hate*, Philomena Franz evokes her ancient *vardo*:

> Ich kann mich noch gut an unseren Zigeunerwagen erinnern. Das war nicht ein Leiterwagen mit einer Plane. Schon eher ein Wohnwagen. Ein herrlicher schöner Wohnwagen, von innen und außen mit Holzschindeln belegt. Mit geätzten Scheiben, auf denen Schlösser und Burgen dargestellt waren. Acht Meter lang und 2,50 Meter breit. Damals hatte er schon 2000 Mark gekostet. Soviel Geld musste man für ein Haus bezahlen. […] Unser Wohnwagen war eine Pracht. Mit gewölbten Schränken, die vom Boden bis zur Decke reichten. Alles aus Mahagoni, mit bleigefassten Spiegeln. […] Der Wagen war mit Linoleum ausgelegt: gelbe Rosen, auf blauem Untergrund. In der Mitte des Wagens das Wohnzimmer mit einem blauen Plüschsofa mit gelben Blumen. […] Der Herd, verchromt. Das Ofenrohr, blau emailliert und wieder mit gelben Blumen bemalt. Die kupfernen Töpfe an den Wänden.
> Schon von außen war unser Wagen etwas Besonderes. Links und rechts waren große Laternen angebracht, mit Silber beschlagen. Oben auf der Laterne, je ein großer silberner Adler auf einer kleinen Kugel […] (Franz 2016, 14)[8]

7 Testimony by Philomena Franz, October 2022.

8 I can still remember our Gypsy van very well. This was not a simple bow-top. Nearly a caravan. A magnificent splendid caravan, furnished with wooden shingles, on the inside as on the outside. The glass panes were etched with drawings of palaces and castles. Eight meters long and 2,50 m wide. In those days, it cost

In a vividly descriptive manner, the Sintizza pictures the ancient emblem and pride of her family, the *art déco* “Gypsy wagon”. Her recollection of this home and means of transport resonates as a hymn to the richly detailed beauty, the splashy colorfulness and—with the triple evocation of yellow flowers—her family’s attachment to the bloom of nature. Buth identifies Philomena’s writing as unpretentious, but precise and smooth, supple and born nearest to the heart (Buth 2023).

Besides the extravagant design of the *vardo*’s body connected with rich Romani families, it is basically the wheels that impress. The wheels have also been chosen as the Romani symbol for “Roma” as a political transnational community (Liégeois 2019, 91). In a recent drawing (5th November 2022) by Philomena Franz, the wheels draw noticeable attention.

Fig. 1: *Rad./ Wheel*. Excerpt. Drawing by Philomena Franz, 5th November 2022, felt-pen/crayon

2000 Mark. That’s the money you had to spend for a house. […] Our wagon was a glory. With arched cupboards, reaching from floor to roof. Everything made of mahagoniy, with mirrors framed with lead. […] The wagon was furnished with linoleum: yellow roses on a blue background. In the middle of the wagon, there was the salon with a blue plush sofa and yellow flowers. […] The stove, chrome-plated. The flue, enameled in blue and painted with yellow flowers too. The copper pots on the walls.
Even beheld from the outside, our caravan was something special. On the left and right, big lanterns were attached, coated with silver. On top of each lantern there was one big eagle on a little globe (Franz 2016, 14, my translation).

On the eye-level of the child she was when travelling with a Spenger wagon with her family and grandfather, her perspective focusses on the center of the wheel and, thus, the axles and the grain of the wooden wheel. Wheel and eye merge into each other in that the wheel is endowed with an eye itself, an eye surveying the road, the wayside, and the implicit spectator. The perspective is horizontal, implying the endlessness of the journey towards the (ever-elusive) horizon. The horizontal alignment furnishes a consciousness of infinity, an existential insight provided in addition to the road and the wheel—and the glance of the eye. Philomena thus tends to anthropomorphize at least the part of the wagon that is the wheel. However, the roof just like the wheels impart the cyclic (not phallic) desire that prevails in Sinti-Manouche "existential philosophy" (Liégeois 2019, 84).

The house-on-wheels, furthermore, enables a domestic mobility, a paradox for the established settled way of living in which "kitchen" and "home", attached to female space, are synonymous to immobility and privacy. The *vardo* becomes, in fact, the paramount domestic status symbol for Romnja (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 43). Nonetheless, as in most travelling families, both men and women are working, with Romnja often spending their day, at least partially, outside of their homes. As Rodney Smith observes in 1860, a young husband is the manufacturer of goods he produces in the perimeter of the *vardo*. His young wife is the seller of the products; she often leaves the wagon in the morning and returns to a common place later in the afternoon (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 44). She thus lives a double mobility: the mobility of the home in addition to the economically conditioned professional activity of selling. As Romanies tend to travel in groups, the stopping place harbours a number of *vardos*. In the following section, we will have a glance at the composition of the mobile homes occupying stopping places. The analysis will focus on the ethnologic research of Yasuhiro Omori in the period from 1972–1976 concerning the Manouche-family of Didi Duville (Omori 1977, 31, 37).

5. The Example of the Duville Manouche Family

The big Duville family is part of the 28 % of basket makers who still used horse drawn living wagons at the end of the seventies. A counting of Travelers in 1961 revealed that there were more than 50.000 itinerants

on the *routes de France* (Omori 1977, 30) while by the end of 1970s, there were probably 25.000 itinerants (Omori 1977, 70). Located across the five departments of Indre et Loire, Loir et Cher, Sarthe and l'Orne et l'Eure, the Duville family included 120 family members. Their principal activities consist in horse trading and basket making (Omori 1977, 34). The field study by Omori describes the use of space with respect to the organization of everyday life on the one hand, and the functioning of the stopping places on the other hand. The descriptions pivot around the inner workings of the stopping place, as well as the interaction with the outside environment. The gendered approach places particular emphasis on the fixed functions of space in everyday life.

Omori shows that for about 40 % of a day (ca. 9,5 h), the living wagon is not used by anybody, as life is going on in the outside space. About 30 % (7–8h) of time is dedicated to sleeping, while only 27 % of a day's activities take place inside the mobile home. These activities include leisure time, changing clothes, putting on make-up, and drop-ins to pick up tools and materials for the preparation of food or work. The van further provides a resort for isolation in case of illness, for personal discussions, and sfor helter during particularly cold periods in winter (Omori 1977, 121). On the whole, we observe that everyday life is not taking place inside the *vardo*, but in the space outside of it. The kitchen place is installed in a perimeter of about 10 meters (Omori 1977, 144) and the meal is taken there or on the *vardo*'s drawbar or stairs (Omori 1977, 145). Basket-making is also exercised around the *vardo* (Omori 1977, 146). The surrounding space further serves as a salon for visitors (Omori 1977, 148). In winter time, the outside space is reduced and concentrated in a circle around the fireplace (Omori 1977, 148). The spaces' gendering as described by Omori does not allow us to draw significant gender differences. Women hardly spend more time inside the mobile home than men, and both domestic work and economic production take place in a perimeter of about 10 meters around the *vardo*. In addition to the quasi-shared places of home ('house'work or home-offices in both cases), Sintizze, as well as Sinti pursue economic activities in the outside communities or landscapes, selling products and providing the family with nutrition. We can even determine a pivotal place for the Sintizze in everyday life (Omori 1977, 81). It is she, who often supplies the family with vitals, who is mostly in charge of the household and the education of the children, who also maintains social contacts with *gaujo/Gorgio* (non-Gypsies) (peasants, patrons, neighbours), and who shares eco-

nomic tasks with her husband and family members or friends. Moreover, in public and juridical questions, the *phuri-daj* is generally requested. The space's almost equal gendering thus resonates with the almost equal social status of peripatetically orientated Sintizze vis-à-vis their men in everyday life.

What is more, the composition of the *vardos* generally follows a round and centered principle, according obviously to former "circles of life" (Lorier 2010, 40), rooted in military art in Punjab, the presumed original region of Sinti groups. According to Lorier, "Les tents n'étaient pas placées au hasard: ells formaient des cercles de plus en plus petits et de moins en moins denses, avec, au centre de la place, la plus grande, celle du chef."[9] (Lorier 2010, 35) .

Even in recent decades, the principle of placing the tent/*vardo* of the most important head of the group in the center of the gathering of *vardo*s, is maintained. Weltz describes how "Les voitures se resseraient en cercle autour du feu et formaient un rampart naturel"[10] (Weltz 1989, 11). Omori's field research reveals the group's need for flexibility when looking for a stopping place. Sutre underlines the importance of hospitality of the target location (Sutre 2021, 142). Owing to the permanent hostility toward 'nomads', the arrival at a self-chosen place could hardly ever be certain in advance. In the best case, the *vardo*s are indeed parked in circles or semi-circles (Omori 1977, 87 and 90, example of the 1974 stopping place at Loire et Cher) around a fire. But in many cases, the Manouche family has to stop on field paths in order to remain invisible and thus at rest. The linearity of the road entails an alignment of the rolling houses (Omori 1977, 89 and 91, example of the stopping place Besse-sur-Braye, Loir et Cher). Even thus aligned, the position of the *vardo*s exposes social relations: Didi's *roulotte* is placed in the center from where the line extends to the most distant relatives at the ends (Omori 1977, 90).

We can therefore postulate the horizontal and circular alignment of Sinti-Manouche architecture and production of space in everyday life. The preponderance of spaces connoted as feminine leads us to conclude

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[9] "The tents were not assembled arbitrarily: they formed circles, getting smaller and smaller and less dense, while at the center of the place there was the biggest one, the one of the chief " (Lorier 2010, 35, my translation)

[10] "t]he wagons surround the fire in circles and form a natural fortification" (Weltz 1989, 11, my translation).

a social background in which women play an eminent role regarding the organization and guarantee of life. As the creative force, it is the woman who primarily assures the survival of the next generation and, therefore, of her ethnic group. If the figure of the man evolves in the foreground for many reasons (from the warrior to the lieutenant, from the artist's model to the virtuoso in the orchestra, from the marginal robber to the political negotiator), the acting Sinti*zze and Manouches perform in the background of a family life directed and kept alive essentially by women. And they have, in fact, performed this way throughout hundreds of years of persecution, repression, reclusion, and extermination.

To counter Lefèbvre's statement "Over abstract space […] reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire" (Lefèbvre 1991, 309), we can posit that in the Sinti-Manouche's everyday production of space the "reign" is exerted through a sociability (co-)produced by women (and men), which favours female co-construction, perpetuation, and fulfilment of desire. It is only logical that through the transfer into sedentary life, the mobile, open, sociable culture cannot live on. For this reason, matriarchal elements are especially present in peripatetic communities, whereas in sedentary families, the feminine background of the culture tends to vanish and to be substituted by a mere patriarchal pre-eminence, that corresponds to traditional gender concepts of the major societies.

6. Horizontal and Circular Production of Space as Social Circumspection

The use and production of space in travelling Sinti*zze and Manouche communities is tantamount to a central place attributed to women within Romani societies. The overwhelming circularity in spatial formation and production, from the composition of wagons at a stopping place to the architecture of horse drawn living wagons, can be related to an underlying premise of matriarchy in peripatetic lifestyles. Feminine mobility, economic strength and social equality within the domestic perimeter of the mobile home are in this way foregrounded and resist a patriarchally organized lifestyle as a more recent social organization. Such qualities are further favoured through living in settled houses and the loss of ancient economic activities (i.e., selling, fortune telling, dancing, singing, healing, seasonal work such as fruit harvest, acrobatics, showbusiness performed by Sintizze). The round, smooth, flexible, open style of Sin-

ti-Manouche production of space can moreover be linked to the art of dancing, as Sterna Weltz (Weltz 1989, 12) and Philomena Franz, in the following passage, illustrate:

> Wenn ich im Bett lag und sah hinaus wie sich die Bäume weich bewegten, beugte ich mich in sie hinein, verband mich mit ihren Bewegungen. […] Wie ich tanzte als Tänzerin, so bewegten sie sich, schüttelten die Finger wie eine wunderbare Tänzerin auf der Bühne, die nach Gefühl tanzen muss: Frei die Formen, die Figuren. […] Wenn die Herbststürme aufkamen und die Bäume sich bogen, kam die Natur mir weich vor: Weiche Beine, sie taten sich gegenseitig nicht weh. Die Bewegung war ohne Schmerz, umsichtig. Blätter tanzten im Wind wie Kinder. (Franz 2017, 28)[11]

Attributing the movement of the trees to a dance and conflating that movement with the Sinti's expressive dance evokes notions of freedom of movement, suppleness and softness, flexibility, elasticity, and cautiousness to pre-empt sorrow and the hurting of others. In fact, the round forms express the desire for analgesia, one that resists the "phallic" desire that is synonymous with domination and the emergence of violence.

Here, the importance resides in the Sinti*zze' and Manouche's acceptance of these values as constituting the basics of their proper cultures, at least whilst living the peripatetic lifestyle. This aspect should not only be conserved unconsciously by tradition, but be highlighted as a conscious value to be preserved and deliberately chosen. In a renewal of the Sinti, Manouche and Romani lifestyle, one that will have the courage and power to convert the culture instead of perpetuating sclerosed rules and laws (Liégeois 2019, 85), the feminist arguments, based on the traditional production of space, are substantial and valuable resources to be mobilized once again. A self-aware empowerment can thus base its arguments on resources from within.

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[11] When I lay in bed and saw outside, the smooth movements of the trees, then I merged in them, connected to their movements. […] Just like I danced as a dancer, they moved, shaking their fingers just like a wonderful woman dancer on the stage, having to dance by following her feelings: liberty of forms, of figures. […] When the autumn storms emerged and the trees bowed, then nature seemed smooth to myself: soft legs without hurting each other. The movement was without sorrow, cautious. Leaves dancing in the wind just like children [my translation] (Franz 2017, 28).

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Lorely French

Kinderweihnachten 1944 in Ravensbrück: Memories of Austrian Romni Ceija Stojka as World Literature[1]

Abstract

Ceija Stojka, Austrian Romni writer, artist, and survivor of three concentration camps, tells in her first memoir the story of a children's party in 1944 in Ravensbrück concentration camp, the *Kinderweihnachten* [Children's Christmas]. The poignant narrative joins numerous others by inmates from several countries in various languages—in print and archival sources—as works of world literature. An examination of the most notable variation in the individual renditions about who actually organized the party—the camp's officers or the inmates—leads to an analysis of Stojka's initial particular belief that the officers were the organizers and her subsequent reflections on why she might have come to this conclusion. This essay examines that belief within the context of Romani cultural concepts, and especially that of *baxt*, meaning both happiness and luck.

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[1] "Children's Christmas" (my translation; unless otherwise noted, all translations in the essay are mine). This essay expands on research for my annotated English translation of Ceija Stojka's memoirs. I thank Pacific University for supporting my sabbatical year 2018–19 to complete the research, translation, and writing. I am indebted to the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst/German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for a stipend to research in the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial during that sabbatical year. I am grateful to the archivists and scholars in the Archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial, including Cordula Hundertmark, former Deputy Director and Head of Scientific Services Department; Monika Schnell, Head Archivist; Matthias Roth, Researcher; Dr. Insa Eschebach, former Director of the Ravensbrück Memorial; and Dr. Sabine Arend, former Head of the Repository, for helping me locate resources. I also thank Bärbel Schindler-Saefkow for sharing her knowledge and presentation "Kinderweihnacht im KZ–Ravensbrück 1944: Eine wahre Geschichte." I am indebted to Nuna Stojka for providing valuable information about her mother-in-law, Ceija Stojka, and Karin Berger for generously sharing her time and knowledge. I also thank Hayden Christensen for assisting in editing the final manuscript, supported by a Summer Undergraduate Research and Creative Inquiry grant at Pacific University.

1. Biographical and Historical Background for Ceija Stojka's Narrative

In her first memoir, *Wir leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* [*We Live in Secrecy: Memories of a Romni-Gypsy*] (1988), Austrian Romni artist, writer, and activist Ceija Stojka (1933–2013) tells the poignant story of a children's party that occurred at Christmas time in 1944 in Ravensbrück concentration camp.[2] Her narrative joins numerous others by inmates from several countries in various languages as they tell of one evening when children in the camp were allowed to have treats and partake of various traditions—singing carols, viewing a puppet show, admiring a decorated tree—to celebrate the holiday. Stojka was an 11-year-old inmate in the camp. She had already survived over sixteen months in Auschwitz-Birkenau and had been transported to Ravensbrück before an estimated 4,200 to 4,300 Roma and Sinti men, women, and children were gassed as part of the liquidation of the so-called "Gypsy Camp" [Zigeunerlager] on the night of August 2–3, 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau. After some six months in Ravensbrück, Stojka was deported to Bergen-Belsen and was interned there until the camp's liberation on April 15, 1945. She was fifty-five when she published her first memoir. Her account of the children's party is one of the only known published renditions of the story from the perspective of a Romni child survivor. She also created a remarkable painting of the event, which is now housed in the Ravensbrück Memorial archive (Ill. 1).

The Ravensbrück concentration camp lay about ninety kilometers north of Berlin and was situated next to the resort city of Fürstenberg on the Havel River. The camp opened in May 1939 and was the largest concentration camp built exclusively for women in the German Reich. Ravensbrück was intended for groups whom the Nazis considered enemies of the state—such as communists and Jehovah's Witnesses—and those deemed inferior, immoral beings, "asocials"—such as prostitutes, criminals, disabled, and "Gypsies" [Zigeuner]. The camp was not offi-

2 Stojka's memoir first appeared in 1988. An edition with this first memoir and her second one, entitled *Reisende auf dieser Welt*, which had been published in 1992, appeared in 2013 with some changes. The German quotes in the footnotes will come from the 2013 edition. Quotes into English will come from my translated edition *The Memoirs of Ceija Stojka* (2022) cited as *Memoirs* with the page number following.

Ill. 1: Ceija Stojka, "Weihnachtsessen in Ravensbrück, 1944," Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück/ Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten (cited as MGR/SBG) V1616 L2. Photograph by Matthias Reichelt. Reproduced with permission from MGR/SBG and the Stojka Family Estate.

cially designated as a camp for Jews, and only about 10 percent of the prisoners were Jewish. From 1941 to 1945 the camp complex contained a men's camp. Between 1939 and 1945, some 120,000 women and children, 20,000 men, and 1,200 female youth were registered as inmates in Ravensbrück. Deportees came from over thirty nations and ethnic groups, and the variety of languages they spoke was most likely just as varied.[3] Romai women and children were interned in Ravensbrück from its earliest years. The first transport of minors aged fourteen and above arrived in the camp in July 1939 with a transport of Sinti and Roma women from the Burgenland in Austria (Eschebach 2020, Buser 2011). Stojka, when arriving at Ravensbrück, remarks on the presence of numerous women

3 For a detailed history and description of Ravensbrück see Strebel (2003).

and children in her barracks (*Memoirs*, 58). According to incomplete lists of arrivals in the camp, an estimated 881 children—from two to sixteen years old and from eighteen different nations—were imprisoned there, of which Roma and Sinti children comprised a major part.

Archival documents and published witness accounts by adult women inmates present several other published and non-published versions of the 1944 Christmas-time festivities. Some were written down at the time of occurrence and others were compiled immediately after the liberation of the camp. Some are included in first-hand witness statements while others were passed down orally through generations. Some, such as Ceija Stojka's account, were written, told, and published many years after the event. The genres include memoirs, poetry, witness accounts, interviews, and newspaper reportages. The versions at hand today arose originally from speakers of many languages, including Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Hebrew, who were interned in Ravensbrück for the various reasons listed above. The narratives are largely housed in the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial and thus translated into or documented in German.[4] The exact nature of the festivities as described by participants and witnesses varies, depending on the inmate's age, nationality, ethnicity, location of her barracks, and role in the camp.

Damrosch describes the process whereby a text becomes world literature: "A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch 2003, 6). Owing to the variety of languages and nationalities as well as the diversity of narrative forms that the stories about the Ravensbrück 1944 festivities represent, I argue that Ceija Stojka's piece has become world

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[4] See Bobkova (2018), Breur (1997), "Das Weihnachtswunder von Ravensbrück" (1993), "DÖW [Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands]/ Wien; Sammlung KZ-Ravensbrück" (2000), Freyberg, Jutta von and Ursula Krause-Schmitt (1993), Hozáková (1995), Hunger (n.d.), Jarzycka (1946), Katzenmaier (1996), Knapp (2003), Lundholm (1998), Mangold (2002), Möbius, Dagmar (2010), Müller (1981), *"Nur deshalb sind dem Tode wir entronnen, damit wir an dem Frieden bau'n": Zum Internationalen Friedenstreffen d. Frauen in Ravensbrück am 10. September 1949* (1949), Phillips und Schnell (1999), Rolfi and Bruzzone (2016), Salvessen (1993), Schulenburg (1983), Stanislawa (1946), Stojka (1999), Stojka (2003), Stojka (2013), Vermehren (1946), Vetter (2003), and Wiedmeier (n.d.). In the scope of this essay, I cannot examine the details of all these narratives.

literature. Her story, however, is more than just one single independent piece of literature that has moved into the broader world beyond its linguistic (German) and cultural (Romani) point of origin. Rather, the narrative has transcended the focus that Damrosch places on the individual work to become part of a larger world literary phenomenon encompassing several individual narratives of many linguistic and cultural points of origin. While one can read each individual rendition of the story in and of itself, varying accounts collectively tell the world of the remarkable events related to the children's celebrations in Ravensbrück concentration camp at Christmastime, 1944, and the overarching story deserves to be told over and over again.[5]

One cannot deny, however, the marked variances between the content of the stories, whether in the descriptions of preparations for the ceremony, the exact nature of the celebrations, the times the celebrations occurred, the people who were present, or the reactions of the participants. One main notable variance concerns the organizers of the festivities. Stojka's narrative implies that the SS officers and guards were largely responsible for organizing the event. In contrast, several other stories emphasize how the women inmates were the main instigators and organizers. The extent to which the SS was involved in actually facilitating and sanctioning the events remains fully unknown. My analysis attempts to show how the differing accounts suggest that the reality probably lies in the middle of these two conflicting views with both parties having some amount of responsibility. Stojka's viewpoint, as that of the other inmates, depended on her particular circumstances in the camp. My comparison of many narratives investigates how Stojka processed her experiences in light of stories about the camps that continually surfaced. On the one hand, Stojka observed life in the camps from the perspective of a child. On the other hand, she also often locates her memories within others' collective experiences. Ultimately, I interpret the root of her interpretation within cultural values and beliefs stemming from her upbringing as a Lovara Romni. Taken together, individual nuances in Stojka's and

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5 Further artistic projects and public presentations have taken the event of the children's Christmas festival at Ravensbrück to be true. On December 13, 2014, the WN/BdA Berlin and Lichtenberg organized an event to commemorate 70 years since the Ravensbrück Children's Christmas Festival 1944. The Tandera-Theater staged a play called "1944 – Es war einmal ein Drache" ["1944—Once Upon A Time There Was A Dragon"] based on the story by Bodo Schulenburg (1983).

the other women's stories emerge as world literature through a collective narrative of resistance, hope, caring, solidarity, and resourcefulness.

I must first stress, as scholars of Holocaust memoirs have continued to prove, examining the similarities and differences in accounts of what happened in the camps does not mean to judge which rendition is right or wrong, but rather to demonstrate the complexities of such stories and the processes whereby people, and especially children, form and formulate memories and then continually revisit those memories as adults.[6] Ceija Stojka's writings, artworks, interviews, and conversations reveal that she was constantly reexamining her past and incorporating new revelations about life in the camps that other survivors and researchers were espousing with her own memories. After the war, she traveled extensively throughout Austria as she worked selling carpets at markets and fabrics door to door. In her daily life, she kept herself informed of current events by regularly viewing television news reports and listening to informative radio broadcasts. She admits that news could spark memories or cause her to reinterpret those memories.[7] Her narratives thus also stand as works-in-progress that engage readers in the reciprocal, ongoing process of memory recollection. Examining her stories within the context of the collective teaches researchers and readers to be especially fastidious in providing sources and resources for stories and information. Scholars need to recognize the "fragility of memory" (Schacter 1996) to recall, revise, distort, and forget as well as the individuality of perspective incurred by the vastness of the camps and the multitudes of victims and perpetrators. The process of gathering contextual narrative webs inspires readers, in the words of Christopher Browning, to look "at memory not in the collective singular but rather in the individual plural, not collective memory but rather collected memories" (2003, 39).

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[6] It is impossible to list all the studies about Holocaust survivors' memories and the process whereby they revisit those memories over and over, sometimes with variations, as well as the relationship between trauma and memory; relevant studies include those by Caruth (1996), Felman and Laub (1992), Jonathan Friedman (2002), and Lawrence Langer (1995).

[7] See, for example, in her interview with Karin Berger (*Memoirs* 205–206).

2. Ceija Stojka's Narrative in the Context of Other Women's Narratives

Ceija Stojka's story begins by relating how "[e]inmal" (Memoirs 62)[8] the entirety of the camp commanders, SS-men and SS-women were standing around the main square and talking amongst themselves. The female guard supervisor, Oberaufseherin, Dorothea Binz and another brutal female guard Rabl,[9] then came over to the prisoners looking friendly. This caused the inmates to wonder what was going on, surmising that the change in composure must have to do with fear, perhaps towards the Allies approaching and the National Socialists' demise. The guards announced that the commandant had invited them to a Christmas celebration. "Es gibt Kuchen und warme Milch. Um sechs holen wir euch ab" (Stojka 2013, 45).[10] After being led to another barracks—a move that Stojka stresses was totally out of the ordinary, for the children were never allowed to move very far from their block—she describes the room, which matches her painting: "Die Baracke war sehr festlich hergerichtet. Ein langer Tisch stand in der Mitte, ganz in Weiß und viele Bänke waren hingestellt. Am Barackenende war ein großer, wunderschöner Christbaum, darauf hingen Gold- und Silbernüsse, große Äpfel, gelbe und rote" (Stojka 2013, 45–46).[11] Stojka notices from the calendar on the wall that it was December 24, 1944. The children were delighted in receiving warm milk with sugar, cake with raisins, a piece of bread, and an entire sausage. But rather than devouring all the goodies for themselves, many of the children had the same idea: to hide some of the food to bring home to

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[8] "[O]ne time" (Stojka 2013, 44).

[9] Ceija Stojka refers numerous times in her memoirs to the *Oberaufseherin* Dorothea Binz, who was notorious for her cruelty to prisoners. My research into the identity of SS-guard "Rabl," to whom Ceija refers here and in paintings, led me to two possibilities. The first could have been Margarethe Rabe, who was born on October 2, 1923 in Neustadt/Glewe. The other "Rabl" could have been Emma Raabe. She was born on September 3, 1882, and thus would have been sixty-one and sixty-two years old when Ceija was in the camp.

[10] "There will be cake and warm milk. We'll pick you up at six" (*Memoirs*, 62).

[11] "The barracks was very festively decorated. A long table stood in the middle, all in white, and many benches had been arranged. At the end of the barracks stood a big, beautiful Christmas tree with gold and silver nuts hanging on it, and big apples, yellow and red" (*Memoirs* 52).

their mothers. "Das war die Rettung!" (Stojka 2013, 46).[12] She continues to conjecture as to why the SS were being unusually good natured, as she remarks that an SS-man saw them, but just laughed. After eating, the children had to sing the German Christmas carol "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht" (Silent Night, Holy Night) for the guards. At the end of the evening, the children were all allowed to bring an apple, some nuts, and a branch from the tree back to the barracks. Upon returning to the barracks, their mothers received them with relief. Sidi Rigo Stojka, Ceija Stojka's mother, had tears come to her eyes upon seeing the children and the luxuries they brought back. The festival ultimately gave them hope: "Wir alle glaubten, jetzt wird es vielleicht ein bisschen besser" (Stojka 2013, 47).[13]

Other narratives prove clearly that festivities did occur in Ravensbrück around Christmas time in 1944; they are all noteworthy, but not all reports involve children. According to one account, the women in the Siemens camp, which lay outside the main camp, had stolen paper rolls from the factory and had made drawings using charcoal from the oven (Arend and Eschebach 2018, 160). In the Polish barracks, Zofia Pociłowska had made a manger from plexiglass plates stolen from airplane production facilities and paper (Arend and Eschebach 2018, 160). The German political prisoner, Lieselotte Thumser-Weil, extols Christmas 1944 as one of her best Christmases. She was twenty-seven years old and did not have any children. She describes three women who went from barracks to barracks in the middle of the night holding candles and singing Christmas songs in Russian. In the midst of severe hunger, filth, and chaos: "Da stehen nun drei Menschen und bringen Dir eine Freude – für mich war das das Licht des Lebens. Wenn die drei Frauen beim Klauen des Rupfensackes erwischt worden wären, wäre sie erschossen worden" (Freyberg and Krause-Schmitt, "Nur weil ich mich stur gestellt habe." Interview mit Lieselotte Thumser-Weil 16).[14]

Regarding festivities specifically for children, numerous stories exist, mostly ascribing to the women prisoners the roles of instigators and

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[12] "That was our salvation," she exclaims (*Memoirs* 63).

[13] "We all believed that things might get a little better now" (*Memoirs* 63),

[14] "Then suddenly three people are standing there and bringing you happiness—for me that was the light of my life. If the three women had been caught stealing even a burlap bag, they would have been shot."

main organizers. A poem by an anonymous Austrian prisoner refers to the phenomenon as "Das Weihnachtswunder von Ravensbrück."[15] One inmate states in a private witness account: "Weihnachten 1944/45 wurden 400 Kinder in Ravensbrück heimlich beschert. Unter einem Weihnachtsbaum wurde ein Kasperltheater aufgebaut."[16] An Italian political prisoner, Bianca Paganini Mori, reports that the German prisoners put up a beautifully decorated tree in the barracks, began to sing Christmas songs, and called everyone over (Rolfe and Bruzzone 2016, 259). Survivor Maria Wiedmeier saw the entire production as an initiative not only for the children, but also for the mothers. The adults prepared songs, saved food from any packages they might have received, and found leftover materials to make dolls, clothes, balls, and toys to give to the children. The mostly Polish women in Block 1, where the kitchen was, prepared three extra open-faced sandwiches for each of the 400 children. Women in many barracks gathered 20 tables and tablecloths, and the outside workforce brought little Christmas trees into the camp. For Wiedmeier, the entire festival was a success: "Nie im Lagerleben haben wir so glückliche Kinderaugen gesehen!"[17]

Charlotte Müller, a German communist resistance fighter during the war, also credits female inmates with initiating the idea for a children's party. She describes the initiative as occurring in "einer kleinen Gruppe von Kameradinnen" ("in a small group of comrades") (Müller 1981, 167). They decided to stage a puppet theater and to ask inmates to give up food to give to the children at the festivity, and to enlist the help of inmates to make presents for the children. Most difficult, Müller states, was to get permission from the camp's administration. Müller and the others reasoned, however, that with the Red Army closing in on Berlin and the daily retreats of the German Army, the camp officers and guards might panic and begin to regret the horrors they had committed. They thus might allow more benevolent acts such as the children's Christmas party to atone for their actions and to try to prove their good-hearted-

[15] "The Christmas Miracle of Ravensbrück"; "Das Weihnachtswunder von Ravensbrück (1993), 16.

[16] "At Christmas 1944/45 400 children in Ravensbrück were secretly given presents. A Punch-and-Judy puppet show happened under a Christmas tree" MGR/SBG, SlgBu, Bd 04 Kinder Bericht 39.

[17] "We had never seen such happy children's eyes in the camp's life" (MGR/SBG Bu_Bd_34 Ber. 635, 2).

ness. Müller went with a group of fellow inmates to ask head guard Binz if they could stage a party, who did not immediately say “yes,” but wanted to know the details first. Müller claims not to have told her about the presents, and that Binz finally did give permission. Preparations went on as planned, with inmates organizing the puppet theater show, collecting food from the extra rations, and making gifts. Some women were punished when bits of fabric and yarn that they had stolen from their work in the tailor shop were discovered by the SS in the Blocks (Müller 1981, 167–70). Müller states that Edmund Bräuning, the Schutzhaftlagerführer and assistant to the camp commandant Fritz Suhren, and the female guard supervisor Binz entered the party ceremoniously at the beginning and Bräuning gave a quick welcome to the children, but then left abruptly after the choir sang and the children became sad (Müller 1981, 177–78).

German political prisoner Ilsa Hunger confirms Müller’s account by describing various women in each block throughout the camp organizing different parts: sewing, knitting, stuffing, constructing from any old materials they could find, to make piles of toys, dolls, clothing, and balls. She also describes the puppet show they wrote with a prince and princess, robbers, magicians, and an evil dragon. They made little gift packets with apples, baked goods, bread, jam, anything they could find and save. She states that they received permission from the camp administration, at first only to put on the puppet show, but not for distributing presents. According to her, the presents were hidden throughout the barracks, so that in the end, the children received them anyways. 500 children aged two to fourteen attended, and, according to Hunter, they were delighted at the puppet theater. She claims that for children and adult prisoners alike, the festivities instilled in them hope and a will to live, despite the miserable conditions.[18]

Hermine Jursa, an Austrian communist in the resistance movement who was in Ravensbrück from 1941 until its liberation in 1945, mostly describes the organizing, building, and staging of the puppet theater. At first, she states, the women organized everything “secretly” amongst themselves, dividing up the tasks. The Czechs made the puppet heads while the Polish painted them and sewed the clothes; Toni Bruha wrote the fairytale for the show, and Hermine Jursa acquired the theater from the furniture-making shop in the men’s camp. But then, she states, the

[18] “Weihnachten im KZ” in: *“Nur deshalb sind dem Tode wir entronnen, damit wir an dem Frieden bau’n”* (1949, 6–7).

SS caught wind of the event and could not do anything to stop it. Consequently, they assumed credit for its staging and gave their permission (Berger et al. 139–40). Vera Bobkova, a Soviet prisoner, states that the camp leaders decided suddenly before Christmas 1944 to organize a celebration with presents for the children. The prisoners were forced to sew dolls, bears, cats, and other toys from rags. The Russians interpreted this sudden gesture of goodness as a sign that: "die Faschisten stehen mit einem Fuß am Grabe" Vetter (2003, 58).[19]

3. Perspectives on the Organizers of the Children's Christmas Festivities

The idea that Ceija Stojka's testimony gives a certain amount of credit to the SS for organizing the party gives readers pause to consider why she might have had this perspective. As with other child survivors, Stojka witnessed life in the camps from a very personal perspective.[20] Rumors and stories circulated constantly as hunger, violence, and fear could distort concepts of time and place. Children especially were confronted with actions that they could not comprehend, explain, or recognize within the scope of their own life experiences. In an interview from 1999 in the Bergen-Belsen archive, Stojka recognizes that her rendition of the SS planning the party might have been based on rumors she heard as a child: "Ja, es hat eine Weihnachtsfeier gegeben in Ravensbrück, die organisiert wurde von den SS-Männern von Auschwitz, hat, also haben wir's gehört. Was wirklich wahr ist, das weiß ich nicht, wer es wirklich organisiert hat […]" (Stojka 1999, Cassette 2, TC 18:06).[21] Later, in 2003, in an interview conducted in conjunction with the exhibit on female guards at Ravensbrück, Stojka mentions the possible existence of rumors about the organization: "[…] also das habe ich aber auch erst jetzt gehört, dass es nicht die SS waren, Ich dachte immer, dass es die SS Frauen waren. Und die SS Männer die Güte gehabt haben und uns dann zu Weihnach-

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[19] "the fascists are standing with one foot in the grave."

[20] See Eschebach (2020, 1–2); Hiemesch (2017, 404).

[21] "Yes, there was a Christmas celebration in Ravensbrück that was organized by the SS-men of Auschwitz, that's what we heard. What's really true, I don't know, who really organized it."

ten, also einmal 1944 eingeladen haben. Aber die Enttäuschung habe ich fünfzig Jahre später erfahren, dass das die Lagergemeinde war" (Stojka 2003, 9).[22]

Again, Stojka's revisiting what she might have understood as a child in comparison with what others might have heard or experienced does not negate either's experience of the event, but rather shows the complex process of memory building that continually digs deeper and deeper into her dark past. The truly unbelievable goodness of the party contrasts significantly with the horrific events and changes happening at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. These included the presence of many children in the camp, Himmler's order of a mass exterminations to begin at the Ravensbrück women's camp, the mass shootings that occurred in Ravensbrück in the winter of 1944–45, the building of gas chamber and crematorium, and the sterilizations of "Gypsy" females. For this reason, the fact that the Nazis could have allowed the women to organize such an event might still be unfathomable to some survivors such as Ceija Stojka. In his talk at the commemoration of the 74th year since camp liberation, Dr. Richard Fagot, a Jewish nine-year-old boy in Ravensbrück in 1944, recalled the Christmas party as "ein Erlebnis, das einen riesengroßen Eindruck auf mich gelassen hat."[23] He remembered living in Block 22 at the time with 28 people, some of them Roma and Sinti women, some German prostitutes. From the party, he remembered the warm lighting and the little bags with sugar cubes. He also insisted that the party was organized by the SS, not by the inmates. In such a system of tyrannical terror, he believed, the mothers would have stood no chance in having an influence on the organization of such a party.

Some survivors, also in contrast to Ceija Stojka's account, do not depict the festivities in such a positive light for the children, but these renditions are mostly from observers who were adults at the time. Georgia Peet-Tanewa explains that most of the children were Jewish or from

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[22] "so I also just now heard that it wasn't the SS. I always thought that it was the SS women. And that the SS men had the goodness of their hearts and then invited us to Christmas, one time in 1944. But then I was disappointed to learn fifty years later that it was the camp community."

[23] "an experience that left a huge impression on me." Dr. Richard Fagot, "Zeitzeugengepräch," [Witness Conversation] at the "74. Jahrestag der Befreiung Ravensbrück," [74th-Year Commemoration of the Liberation of Ravensbrück] 13 April 2019.

Greek-Orthodox countries, and hence had never experienced a Christmas celebration. The celebration was, according to Peet-Tanewa, more for the organizers than for the children in the camp. That is why she does not say anything:"[…] wenn sie dann all diese Klischees bringen, leuchtende Kinderaugen usw" (Arend and Eschebach 2018, 161).[24] Again the political prisoner Charlotte Müller describes the children starting to cry when the camp choir began to sing "O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum" [Oh Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree]. She believes their sadness was due most likely the memories that so many of them might have had of more cheerful past Christmas celebrations at home. The children did cheer up and laugh at the Punch-and-Judy puppet performance (Müller 1981, 178). Likewise, again the Austrian communist resistor Hermine Jursa observes: "Die Kinder haben nicht lachen können. Diese Blicke! Wie wenn sie sagen möchten: Gibts [sic] so etwas? Erst nach und nach, wenn der Kasperl lustig war, haben manche gelacht. Aber alle hatten große, traurige Augen. So etwas hatten sie noch nie gesehen, sie haben doch immer Aufseherin und Häftling miteinander gespielt" (Berger et al. 1987, 140).[25]

Obviously, the details of the children's Christmas festivities vary according to the memories, as well as the ages, ethnic groups, nationalities, barracks locations, and reasons for internment of the women who tell of their experiences. The necessity to relate the details here is to display these variations in the context of a composite world literature. Analyzing situational reasons for the divergences, and especially for Ceija Stojka's story, emphasizes the specific influential factors of her age and Romani ethnicity that make her perspective unique and noteworthy. Related to age, her view as child is, unfortunately, is a rare one, for most of the children who would have witnessed the event most likely perished in the next couple months or, if they did survive, have not published anything about the party. Besides the above-related oral description given by Richard Fagot in his public talk, the only other comparable telling occurs

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[24] "when everyone then brings in all these clichés, sparkling children's eyes, etc." (Private interview with Gabriele Knapp; printed in Arend and Eschebach 2018, 161).

[25] "The children couldn't laugh. These looks! As if they wanted to say: Is this really happening? Only after some time, as the puppet performance became funny, did some of them laugh. But they all had big, sad eyes. They had never seen anything like this, they only had always seen a female guard with a prisoner playing."

in Sarah Helm's book *Ravensbrück,* in which she devotes a chapter to "A Children's Party." She does not, however, provide exact sources for her information, which seems to be based on a combination of published and unpublished survivor accounts and on Helm's own personal interview with a Jewish child survivor, Naomi Moscovitch, seven years old at the time of the party, and living in Israel at the time of the interview. I thus hesitate to include her findings among the archival sources I cite here, although they are interesting. Helm states how the organizers recorded planning a party amongst themselves without telling the camp officials, but then fractures broke out because the different groups, largely national in nature (French, Polish, Belgian, Russian, German) on the party committee started to disagree. When the date for the event came under question, Dorothea Binz agreed that the organizers could use the entire Block 22 for the event, but "only children would be admitted, along with twenty organizers. No mothers or camp others must attend" (Helm 2016, 476). According to Helm, the inmates did all the preparations: a Czech artist made puppets for a puppet show, a Siemens worker from the camp found foil for decorating the tree, French prisoners used rags to make toys, the kitchen provided bread and butter, Norwegians and Belgians donated sugar from their food parcels, because they were the only prisoners receiving food parcels at that time.

Helm claims that Oberaufseherin Binz and Schutzhaftlagerführer Bräuning were in attendance at the party, but she paints a much bleaker picture than renditions such as Ceija Stojka's, writing as an adult from a child's perspective. Helms cites from Sylvia Salvesen's *Forgive—but Do Not Forge*t (without giving the exact source): "As soon as the party began, however, things started to go wrong" (Helm 2016, 476). The children were so starved and weak that they could hardly move; some even had to be carried to their chairs, and most could not laugh at the puppet show. A specific children's choir had practiced to perform, in which Naomi Moscovitch sang, but when the choir began singing "Oh Christmas Tree" many children started to cry. In her rendition, after the singing, her mother came and stood outside the window and shouted to Naomi and her brother that they had to get out quickly because this was not their religion, and they should not be celebrating. She then talks about hearing from others about an explosion: "The others told me that the Germans threw hand grenades in the window and that was how they wanted to finish off all the children" (Helm 2016, 479). Ceija Stojka's rendition does not support this account of the bombing, and neither does any

other written testimony. Helm, however, gives contrasting information: "and yet several other surviving children remember something similar" (Helm 2016, 479). She explains: "As no written evidence survives of the bombing, and the adults didn't talk of it, it is hard to believe the story, and yet, as this is the way the children remember things, for them it is clearly true" (Helm 2016, 480). Herein lies perhaps the crux of the matter and the importance of Ceija Stojka's narrative. The memories of the children who remember the day are true.

Memories of the organizers have appeared in various forms throughout the past seven decades, passing varying renditions along which have contributed to the emerging collective memories. Ceija Stojka's account belongs to the collective with individual twists based not only on the stories she might have heard as a child, but also on the perpetual sense of hope that resurfaces many times in her narratives. Additionally, Ceija Stojka's memoirs, and the story of the Childrens Christmas offer material for the burgeoning research on child survivors of the Holocaust, and more broadly on children who have experienced war, violence, political upheaval, and forced migration—a subject that remains all too relevant in our contemporary times. Indeed, the value placed on testimonies by child survivors has intensified since the 1990s as scholars and readers have come to appreciate the perspectives that the so-called "Generation 1.5" offer on life in the camps. Susan Rubin Suleiman formulated this term for the generation that stood between "Generation 1", or the adult survivors and "Generation 2," the children of those survivors who were born after the camps (Suleimann 2002). Whereas child survivors who relate their stories have heard remarks such as: "What do you know—you were only a child", researchers have come to recognize the importance of children's perspective on the terror that was occurring around them, and that the children actually took active roles in everyday life in the camps.[26] In relating how the children stole food to bring home to their mothers throughout the party, Ceija Stojka's narrative shows how children can maintain control of their own actions and thoughts and offer hope to subsequent generations. While child survivor memoirs demonstrate how important support and protection from family and friends were, they also prove that children were not helpless and passive victims. In his observations on Bergen-Belsen, upon liberating the camp, Captain

[26] See Buser (2011), Eschebach (2020), Gring (2014), Hiemesch (2017), and Rahe (1994, 1995, 2002, 2012).

Derrick Sington, commander of the British unit that led the liberation, describes in his account the many children who were "unnaturally mature"; in the face of dealing with situations related to sick and dead family members, such children "became expert at organising food and medicaments" (Sington 1946, 173–74). Plunged suddenly into a violent, horrible, deadly world, children such as Ceija Stojka had to assist in finding food and clothing, in providing care to sick and injured family members, and in dealing with perpetual death.

4. Reflections on Ceija Stojka's Perspective as a Romnja and the Concept of *Baxt*

Related to Ceija Stojka's Romani heritage, the story of the children's Christmas festivities also belongs to one of several poignant narratives in Stojka's memoirs in which survival ultimately becomes based not on individual physical or moral fortitude or lack thereof, but rather on whims, good fortune, happenstance, and, in some cases, even a kind of *deus ex machina*.[27] The way in which Ceija Stojka writes about these events ties in with the concept of *baxt*, a term in the Romany language that loosely means both happiness and luck, as with "*Glück*" in German, and also entails complex correlations between codes of honor.[28] As a main pillar of Romani morality, *baxt* will come to Roma who have lived an honorable life. Stojka could never understand what she as a young child with an innocent honorable soul could have done to deserve the Nazis' classification of her as dishonorable. For example, upon having to sew onto her clothes in Ravensbrück the black triangle indicating that she was "asocial" and "arbeitscheu", she asks: "Aber wie konnte ich arbeitsscheu

[27] In passages about Bergen-Belsen, she claims to have been saved from starving to death when the SS served pea soup served to the inmates of Bergen-Belsen during the final months before liberation (*Memoirs* 152–53). See the glossary entry "The liberation of Bergen-Belsen" in my translation of the *Memoirs* for interpretations of such narratives as instances with inexplicable motives that provide hope in times of despair (*Memoirs* 2022, 220–221).

[28] See Matras (2015, 86–96), Stewart (1997, 21–22; 165–66), and Solimene (2006, 116–22) for further explanations on the complex concept of *baxt*, as well as my interpretation of *baxt* as a motif in the stories of Austrian Rom writer Samuel Mago (French 2020).

sein, ich war ja noch ein Kind!" (Stojka 2013, 38).[29] Whereas many survivors have felt so-called "survivor guilt", which often necessitates finding a particular person or event that becomes responsible for life and death, thereby relieving the burden of individual guilt and forming a collective around those who survived, Ceija Stojka, in contrast, gives no indication in her works of possessing guilt for having survived while others died. Instead of focusing on her own sentiments in relation to the dead, she, as a Romani child and adult, honors the dead and their special significance for her life and that of other Roma. In many scenes in her memoirs, especially in the third one about Bergen-Belsen, the child Ceija and her playmates Burli and Rupa crawl into corpses to find warmth and protection. In this manner, as Paula Toninato observes in her essay in this volume, "the dead become protectors and symbolize the continuity between generations that enable the Roma to exist," while reciprocally, "the survivor provides their silenced memoires with a voice, thereby giving meaning to their atrocious death" (Toninato 2023, 145–165). Ceija Stojka's beliefs in divine justice were strong, as were her own drive, a kind of moral and ethical obligation she felt to tell her story, not necessarily for herself, but for future generations. To borrow from an observation that Karin Berger made to me, Ceija Stojka did not want to hate the Nazis because she believed that where such strong feelings of hate exist, could exist also strong feelings of love. Berger, in her own research and personal interviews with Roma survivors, also stated that she had not ever come across evidence of such survivor guilt among Roma, and my own research corroborates that assertion thus far. Here, the belief in *baxt* might play a role in determining responsibility for survival and for the optimistic view of a child about the SS's role as organizers of the festivities.[30]

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[29] "But how could I be work-shy? I was still only a child!" (*Memoirs* 57).

[30] Worthy of mention here are other written and visual works by Ceija Stojka in which she depicts Christmas as being both joyous and tortuous. In her personal notebook from 2002, for example, she describes the Christmas of 1942 right after her father had been arrested and then, as she learned later, deported to Dachau and subsequently gassed in Schloss Hartheim as a victim of the T4 euthanasia program: „Es War Weinachten 1942 Der Vater in Tachau Der Christbaum Brante Lichterlo 6 Kinder mit mit Mutter in der Baletzgasse 42, 16. Bezirk Verfolkt u gejakt Von dem Braunnen Vollk des Atolf Hitlers Reschiem Er jakte die SS Soltaten mit iren Fangnetzen auf uns alle" [transcribed as Stojka wrote] [It was Christmas 1942 Father in Dachau The Christmas tree is ablaze with fire 6 children along

Despite the immediate joy the Christmas festivities bestowed upon Ceija Stojka and her mother, the improved conditions for which she and her mother had hoped did not occur. In the deepest despair during the last days of Bergen-Belsen, her mother exclaims: "Why haven't they killed us yet? That's incomprehensible. It would be a lot better if we didn't have to suffer anymore" (*Memoirs* 70).[31] But Ceija Stojka and her family do not give up, and her narratives continue to reflect that hope. The sentence immediately following her mother's desperate question anticipates the forthcoming liberation, as she exclaims: "But then the sun shone again" (*Memoirs* 70).[32] With that liberation came further trials and tribulations as the family took almost four months to return to Vienna, only to live through subsequent decades of denied requests for financial restitution for the lost years. The *Kinderweihnachten* circulated in her head until she was able to write and paint about the extraordinary event, still very much from her child's perspective, yet as an adult not riddled with survivor guilt, but rather feeling blessed with her calling to tell the story to future generations and to fight against forgetting. Ceija Stojka's narrative about the children's Christmas at Ravensbrück stands in the company of other pieces in world literature that, as a collective, tell the many stories of one major event in world history.

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with their mother in the Baletzgasse [Paletzgasse] 42, 16th District Persecuted and hunted down By the brown-shirted people of the Adolf Hitler regime He had the SS soldiers hunt us all down with their dragnets.] (CST_26_2002_12_23_bis_2003_03_18_ (35).tif). Her desire to keep alive precious childhood memories of happy times contrasts with the horrific reality overshadowing the idyllic scene. This same desire seems to be surfacing in the retelling of the Children's Christmas at Ravensbrück. I thank Carina Kurta of the Ceija Stojka International Association for finding this passage for me. In another of Ceija Stojka's story "Weihnachten" [Christmas] she connects three Christmas celebrations—1942, 1944, and 1995—whereby the final one brings her back to joyous, free times, "[…] wie einst die Rom ihre Weihnachten draußen auf der Wiese feierten, als sie in ihren Wagen waren. Auch damals hatten sie alles, was sie brauchten. Heute ist es einfach, denn heute ist die Welt frei, was du brauchst, kannst du dir kaufen." ([…] just like the Roma celebrated their Christmas outside when they were in their wagons. Then, too, they had everything they needed. Today it's easy because today the world is free; you can buy whatever you need"). (Stojka 2001, 297)

[31] "Warum haben sie uns noch nicht umgebracht? Das ist unbegreiflich, es wäre ja schon besser, wenn wir nicht mehr leiden müssen" (Stojka 2013, 57).

[32] "Doch dann schien wieder die Sonne" (Stojka 2013, 57).

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Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf

Female Empowerment Through Literary Overwriting of Stereotypical Images of Romani Femininity. An Exemplary Analysis from Spain: Sally Cortés Santiago' Novel *When the stars are silent* (2018)

Abstract

The article explores the extent to which female empowerment can be articulated in the medium of literary narrative by overwriting stereotypical images of Romani femininity without actually being part of committed literature. I would like to exemplify this form of "popular" involved literature with the novel *When the stars are silent* by the Spanish-speaking author Sally Cortés Santiago.[1]

1. Sally Cortés Santiago as an Example of the Spanish Romani Literary Scene

Like in all European countries, written Romani literature is a fairly recent development in Spain, emerging only at the beginning of the 20th century.[2] Even if a certain turning point can be seen from the 1990s onwards, Spanish-writing Roma who, as mediators, deliberately cross cultural-ethnic boundaries between the surrounding society and their own group, continue to be the exception to this day.[3]

Among the few Spanish Romani authors, it is, however, very striking that they are always politically engaged: while this phenomenon already applies to Joaquín Albaicín, born in 1965 and undoubtedly the best-known and most productive Spanish Romani author of the present

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1 The novel examined here, *When the stars are silent*, has so far only been published in the original Spanish under the title *Cuando callan las estrellas*. All text quotations are my own translations.

2 Cf. Hackl (1987), Hertrampf (2011 a und b).

3 Cf. Hertrampf (2011a and b), (2019),

day, it is a peculiarity that applies almost without exception to Spanish Romani authors of younger generations, especially to Romnija. Whether Núria León de Santiago, the first female Romani author writing in Spanish, or Sally Cortés Santiago, both consciously present themselves as Romani women in the Spanish media and are committed to demanding social, ethnic, and gender equality in the Roma community and within Spanish society.

Sally Cortés Santiago is a modern-day Romani woman who was born in 1984 in Alicante, Spain.[4] She is mother of three children and has been working in different NGOs to break stereotypes on Roma insofar as her main goal is to increase the visibility and acceptance of Roma. In doing so, she uses a wide variety of artistic media as vehicles for promotion, visibility, and empowerment of Romani culture. Actually, she is a strong defender of Romani women's rights and currently works as a social mediator in the Romani women's association Arakerando. In fact, Romnija are the main protagonists and backbones of all her social and literary work. She is the author of plays such as *Caminos rotos* (*Broken roads*) (2015) and *Memorias de una gitana* (*Memories of a gypsy woman*) (2016), which have been performed by "Romís Arakerando", the theatre company of Arakerando. Her debut novel *Cuando callan las estrellas* (*When the stars are silent*) was published in 2018 and was followed in 2021 by the fantasy novel *Alas* (*Wings*).

2. *When the stars are silent*: An Empowering Women's Novel Between Dystopia and Romani Mythology

The novel is a rather unusual mixture of political dystopia, socially critical novel, and "chick lit," that is, a piece of popular fiction targeted at younger women who narrate about romantic relationships of young contemporary female protagonists living in metropolitan areas. In fact, we find all the following situations in the novel: young women have their first love experiences, become jealous rivals, and worry about their appearances; the action takes place in a big city and the protagonist gets into the circles of the beautiful and the rich via her photography job as well as into the milieu of fashion; and, finally, the novel makes a plea for true love that defies all rules. *When the stars are silent* is therefore a

4 Cf. Bermúdez (2022).

women's book in more ways than one: it is the book by a female Romani author who tells of a strong and self-confident Romni. Actually, only Romnija appear in the story, so the Romani community here is focused on its female members.

The group's internal auto-criticism that is practised is particularly interesting, because the protagonist, as the author's alter ego, appeals to young Romnija to live a modern life as a self-determined woman, but without denying her own cultural identity and breaking with moral ideals:

> My personal opinion about *gypsias* was that our life consisted of a constant renunciation, as a consequence of our customs and traditions that we had maintained for centuries. We were always different from the rest of the world, and most of the things that a young girl of our age would do, we could not do, unless we did them by hiding and lying. Most of us gave up studies, gave up many jobs, gave up friendships, and gave up love, if it meant jeopardising your integrity as a *gypsia*. But to this day, I've never had to worry about anything like that because I never went against my grandmother or any other *gypsio*. (Cortés Santiago 2018, 31)[5]

In fact, the first-person narrator also emphasises that, contrary to all prejudices, she, her sister, and her grandmother are extremely bookish (cf. 49), but she does not conceal the fact that this is not viewed in an unrestrictedly positive light within the Roma community—we know this criticism of the written literature of the majority society, for example, from the biography of the Polish Romni poet Papusza (Bronisława Wajs), who published her works: "Éramos de las pocas gypsias en el Gueto que habíamos conseguido, pero no sin esfuerzo y críticas por parte de nuestra propia gente." (52)[6]

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[5] For all following quotations from this edition, only the pages are given. "Mi opinión personal referente a las *gypsias* era que nuestra vida consistía en una constante renuncia, a consecuencia de nuestras costumbres y tradiciones que manteníamos desde hacía siglos. Siempre fuimos diferentes l resto del mundo y a eso se le sumaba que la mayoría de las cosas que solía hacer una chica joven con nuestra edad, nosotras no podíamos hacerlas, a no ser que lo hiciéramos escondidas y mintiendo. La mayoría de nosotras renunciábamos a los estudios, renunciábamos a muchos trabajos, renunciábamos a amistades y renunciábamos al amor, si podía suponer hacer peligrar tu integridad como *gypsia*. Pero hasta el día de hoy, nunca me había tenido que preocupar por algo así porque nunca llevé la contraria a mu abuela un a ningún otro *gypsio*." (31)

[6] "We were among the few gypsies in the Ghetto that had made it, but not without effort and criticism from our own people." (52)

Another striking element of the novel is that Cortés integrates magical elements of oral Romani narrative literature. In fact, the legend of the founding myth of the Romani people is central to the understanding of the novel and explains the title. When the stars are silent, the Roma are silent; after all, the novel poses the question of who can really succeed in silencing the Roma, despite thousands of years of attempts by whites.

The book begins with a prologue in which the central theme of alterity of the Romani people, whose members Cortés calls “gypsios” and “gypsias”, is prominently addressed. What is interesting here is that the legend, which is orally passed on intergenerationally, is marked as deeply unrealistic, but at the same time also strengthens group membership. The fact that the grandmother tells the children the legend again and again to go to sleep in view of the difficult living conditions shows that it has a self-assuring and strength-giving effect:

> Cuando éramos pequeñas y nos íbamos a dormir, mi abuela María siempre nos contaba una antigua leyenda gypsia para que pudiésemos dormir tranquilas bajo la luz de las estrellas y que nosotros sueños volaran hasta llevarnos tan lejos como nuestra imaginación nos permitiera. La historia narraba cómo aparecieron los primeros gypsios en la tierra, una historia fantástica, demasiado increíble para ser cierta y poder créela, pero que s nosotras nos encantaba escuchar cada noche, acurrucadas bajo un lío de mantas, haciéndonos soñar hasta sumergirnos en lo más profundo de la historia y desear formar parte de ella. (9)[7]

The mythological interpretation of the people’s origin as descendants of the stars reflects the positive self-image. Ultimately, the legend explains the non-acceptance experienced from the outside on the one hand and the self-perceived foreignness in this world via the cosmic origin of the Roma on the other. In this way, the stigmatisation as ‘others’ is countered by a positive reinterpretation as self-confident others:

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[7] “When we were little and went to sleep, my grandmother Maria always told us an ancient gypsy legend so that we could sleep peacefully under the starlight and our dreams would fly away to take us as far as our imagination would allow us to go. The story told of how the first gypsios appeared on earth, a fantastic story, too incredible to be true to be believed, but one that we loved to listen to every night, curled up under a mess of blankets, dreaming ourselves into the depths of the story and wishing we were part of it.” (9)

> Y de ese amor entre estrellas caídas y humanos fue que apareció una nueva raza, los gypsios, o como posteriormente los llamaron, zíngaros, gitanos, cigány o roms. Una raza que nacía con la marca de una estrella dorada detrás de la oreja, para recordar su procedencia. Un pueblo que nunca se sintió de este mundo porque, en realidad, pertenecía a dos; que nunca llegó a ser aceptado porque, en verdad, desprendía un algo tan diferente que no era de este mundo. Una mezcla de lo conocido con lo desconocido de las estrellas, así decían que era el interior de los gypsios, todo un universo sin conocer. Aún dicen que en los ojos de muchos podemos encontrar restos de esa luz tan característica y mágica, pero solo es eso, una bonita leyenda, que supongo que fue inventada por los antepasados gypsios para dar una historia a su historia. Un pueblo que en realidad nunca supo de su procedencia, de dónde venían o hacia dónde debían dirigirse. Un pueblo que, para su desgracia, durante siglos fue perseguido y despreciado, despojado a la fuerza de sus costumbres, su lengua, su magia. Siempre fueron diferentes, siempre fueron iguales. (11)[8]

The setting of the novel is Gran Capital (Big Capital) located in south-eastern Spain. The city is subdivided into different socially and racially segregated sectors. This spatial conception already shows that the novel's plot is situated in a society that is massively marked by racism and exclusion. Indeed, the politically fascistic system of rule in the post-war world depicted in the novel is reminiscent of Nazi fascism, in which Jews and Roma, among many other social subgroups, were persecuted and exterminated.[9]

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[8] "And it was out of this love between fallen stars and humans that a new race appeared, the gypsios, or as they were later called, zíngaros, gitanos, cigány or Roma. A race that was born with the mark of a golden star behind the ear, to remind them of where they came from. A people who never felt they belonged to this world because, in reality, they belonged to two; who were never accepted because, in truth, they had something so different that they were not of this world. A mixture of the known with the unknown of the stars, that was what they said the interior of the Gypsies was like, a whole universe unknown. They still say that in the eyes of many we can find traces of that characteristic and magical light, but it is just that, a beautiful legend, which I suppose was invented by the Gypsies' ancestors to give a story to their history. A people who never really knew where they came from or where they were supposed to go. A people who, to their misfortune, for centuries were persecuted and despised, forcibly stripped of their customs, their language, their magic. They were always different, always the same." (11)

[9] The deportation of the Roma is indeed up for consideration in this dystopian world as well: "Si alguna vez los rebeldes políticos consiguieran su propósito de deportar a los *gypsios*, ¿adónde nos mandarían? Por desgracia no teníamos lugar de procedencia, como en el caso de las demás razas, no teníamos ni idea de cuál

In Gran Capital, Roma are only allowed to live in strictly controlled ghettos. Largely deprived of personal rights, movements of Roma are meticulously monitored and regulated:

> Estábamos rodeados de redes localizadoras, y más los ciudadanos que vivíamos em el extrarradio de la Gran Capital, o como los capitalinos decían, en el nuevo Gueto. Era una manera de controlar nuestras entradas en la Gran Capital, puesto que todos los habitantes del Gueto teníamos toque de queda para estar en nuestra zona y si lo cumplíamos, nos metíamos en serios problemas, a no ser que tuviésemos permisos especiales firmados siempre por algún habitante del planeta de los ricos […](16)[10]

Apart from the obvious borrowings from the great literary distopias of 20th century—we think of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)—, Cortés creates another reminiscence of the inhuman perversity of the Nazi dictatorship via the founding myth. If wearing the sewn-on yellow Jewish star was supposed to stigmatise Jewish people in the Nazi era, in Cortés' novel all members of the minority carry a magical innate bodily mark that marks them as *gypsios*. The above quote, for example, contains the reference to the golden star behind the ear that all *gypsios* have (cf. 11) and in fact, all *gypsios* try to hide this sign to prevent racial discrimination: "[…] soy muy consciente de cómo intentáis ocultar la marca para no tener problemas por la Capital […]." (50)[11]

The exact temporal setting of the novel's story remains vague, but it is clear that the plot is set in an indeterminately distant future that is char-

era nuestra procedencia y las estrellas quedaban un tanto lejos […]" / "If the political rebels ever succeeded in their aim of deporting the Gypsies, where would they send us? Unfortunately, we had no place of origin, as with the other races, we had no idea where we came from, and the stars were a long way away […]" (112).

[10] "We were surrounded by locator nets, especially those of us who lived on the outskirts of the Big Capital, or as the capital's inhabitants called it, in the new Ghetto. It was a way of controlling our entry into the Big Capital, since all the inhabitants of the Ghetto had a curfew to be in our area, and if we complied with it, we got into serious trouble, unless we had special permits always signed by some inhabitant of the planet of the rich […]"(16)

[11] "[…] I am well aware of how you tried to hide the mark so as to avoid getting into trouble in the Capital […]." (50)

acterized by the consequences of a devastating Third World War that had ended 15 years before as well as by the consequences of climate change:

> A causa de innumerables cambios climáticos y aumento del nivel del mar, la mayoría de los continentes habían perdido grandes superficies de tierra, quedando sumergidas en el fondo del mar, la mayoría de los continentes habían perdido grandes superficies de tierra, quedando sumergidas en el fondo del mar y enterrando así centenares de ciudades enteras. Todo ahora era muy distinto, puesto que ahora todos los continentes se dividían entre las nuevas Capitales – donde solamente vivían los ricos y poderosos – y los Guetos – donde solo habían gente humilde, con muy pocos recursos, y cómo no, nosotros, los gypsios. (15)[12]

When the stars are silent is narrated from an autodiegetic narrator,[13] that is from the point of view of the main protagonist Serena Vargas, a 22-year-old Romni. After the murder of her parents by radicals during the Third World War, Serena had become the main support for her sixteen years old sister Lola and her grandmother María. The novel begins with the first day that Serena works as a trainee assistant in a photography studio. With this new job, she becomes a permanent border-crosser, because from now on she commutes every day from her self-identified "ghetto" to the main sector of the city. Following Juri Lotmann's spatial theory, the transgression of the border between two disjoint semantic spaces, which is difficult to pass, already points to a particular event that has a lasting influence on the plot. In the unknown world of the "whites", Miguel Duarte, the photo studio's manager, who takes care of Serena despite her ethnic and social alterity, becomes her mentor. In contrast to

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[12] "Due to countless climatic changes and rising sea levels, most of the continents had lost large areas of land, submerging them to the bottom of the sea and burying hundreds of entire cities. Everything was now very different, since all the continents were now divided between the new Capitals - where only the rich and powerful lived—and the Ghettos—where there were only humble people, with very few resources, and of course, us, the Gypsies." (15)

[13] However, there are some passages in which the autodiegetic perspective switches to Marcos (you have not defined who Marcos is yet; you first talk about him on the next page; clarify here who he is), so that we also experience his emotional world and evaluation of the events. This procedure illustrates the inner conflict of both protagonists in view of their socially forbidden love for each other in a particularly vivid way and intensifies the sympathy for ultimately both characters (cf. 69–77, 99–101, 155–158, 172–174, 185–186, 247–249, 271–275, 335, 331–334, 375–381, 383–388, 395–400).

the vast majority of inner-city residents, Miguel proves to be a humanist who rejects any racist or social exclusion and advocates the unconditional idea of equality: "Yo no tengo ningún problema con que seas gypsia, te respecto, y además fuera de esa pequeña marca y costumbres diferentes a las nuestras, eres persona como yo." (50–51)[14] Moreover, as the story progresses and Serena and Lola face increasing racist hostility, Miguel, as an adjuvant, encourages her on her journey through life and speaks to her of courage: "Serena, estarás preciosa, debes tener más confianza en ti misma y no compararte con las demás, cada persona vale por sus propias virtudes y tú tienes muchas, te le aseguro." (213)[15] Together with his friend Darío Colussi, a renowned Argentinian photographer, Miguel becomes an advocate for the Roma. In an exhibition, photographs of Serena are to show her natural beauty as well as her talent as artist. In a way, this didactic impetus recalls Jean-Jacques Rousseau's celebration of the *bon sauvage* as the individual of integrity, not morally degenerated by an excessive civilisation:

> […] es exactamente lo que queremos enseñar, la diferencia entre la belleza de la Gran Capital, que es una belleza absolutamente artificial en su mayor parte, y la belleza del Gueto, una belleza pura y sin alterar, ¿no estás cansada de estereotipos? Pues es la manera de demostrar al mundo lo que valéis y lo que sois capaces. (211)[16]

On Serena's first day in Gran Capital, Miguel invites her to dinner at the seven-star luxury hotel Gran Hotel Silver. There, she has a decisive encounter with Marcos Mulier, the heir to the Gran Hotel Silver. This unexpected encounter electrifies Serena and affects her physically: "Esa mirada me atrapó de una manera extraña que nunca había experimenta-

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[14] "I don't have any problem with you being a gypsia, I respect you, and besides, apart from that little mark and customs different from ours, you are a person like me." (50–51)

[15] "Serena, you will be beautiful, you must have more confidence in yourself and not compare yourself with others, each person is worth their own virtues and you have many, I assure you." (213)

[16] "[…] that's exactly what we want to show, the difference between the beauty of the Big Capital, which is an absolutely artificial beauty for the most part, and the beauty of the Ghetto, a pure and unaltered beauty, aren't you tired of stereotypes? Well, this is the way to show the world what you are worth and what you are capable of." (211)

do y me produjo una corriente eléctrica desde las piernas hasta la cabeza, pasando por mis brazos hasta llegar a la punta de mis dedos." (21)[17]

The meeting, which is quite erotic for Serena, is deeply unlikely not only because of the exclusionary racist system of the dominant society, but also because of the traditional rules of behaviour within the Romani community, where young women do not leave the house unaccompanied by a (male) relative:

> No estaba acostumbrada a ruborizarme con tanta facilidad, pero la cercanía de aquel hombre me hacía sentir una electricidad por todo el cuerpo, por segunda vez en aquel día, que no antes había experimentado y que me ponía de los nervios, y para qué negarlo, las gypsias no solíamos estar en estos aprietos, siempre estábamos acompañadas por algún familiar que no lo permitía. (22–23)[18]

If the encounter between Serena and Marcos is already very improbable, this also applies to Lola, who meets Marcos' younger brother Izan by chance and falls in love with him. The tender love story between the younger siblings serves as a reversed mirror image for the main plot. Unlike his brother and father who are sympathetic to a group of white supremacists, Izan is full of respect and regard for others and is longing for a world of freedom for all people regardless of their ethnic belonging. It is interesting that the comparatively superficial amorous relationship is much more light-hearted than that of Serena and Marcos. This is not least due to the fact that they meet in a heterotopic space in-between, in reference to Michel Foucault.[19] This "Calita Mágica" ("Magic Cove", 107)

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[17] "That look caught me in a strange way I had never experienced before and sent an electric current from my legs to my head, down my arms to my fingertips." (21)

[18] "I was not used to blushing so easily, but the proximity of that man made me feel an electricity throughout my body, for the second time that day, that I had not experienced before and that made me nervous, and why deny it, we gypsias were not usually in this situation, we were always accompanied by a relative who did not allow it." (22–23)

[19] Cf.: "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places-places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society-which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are out-

where Lola and Izan meet is a space of peaceful coexistence and thus a utopian space in the midst of the dystopian world of racist segregation:

> En realidad no pertenecía ni al Gueto ni a la Capital, era una zona completamente neutral, donde solo iba la poca gente que la conocía y no tenía ninguna clase de prejuicios de compartirla ni con los del Gueto ni con los de la Capital. […] La verdad era que en aquel lugar no había ninguna clase de diferencia entre los del Gueto y la Capital, todos parecíamos iguales. (105)[20]

Serena, on the other hand, does not know this magical place of humanity, and she constantly crosses borders of different semantic spaces that vary socio-politically as well as culturally, from both an external and internal group perspective.

Although Marcos' adherence to white supremacist ideas, a love affair develops between the *gypsia* and the white hotel heir. Thus, their romantic relationship expresses the disagreement between two factions distinguished by ethnicity, phenotypic characteristics, and socioeconomic status. These differences bring them closer and further apart, and finally generate confrontations that even endanger Serena's life.

Actually, this mutual physical attraction is inexplicable for both of them and brings them into massive inner conflicts. Marcos is involved with red-haired Aria, whose name is, of course, telling: "Aria" comes from Persian meaning something like "the noble" and "the pure", and, at the same time is reminiscent of the term "Aryan" as a designation for the "white race". Marcos compares Serena, whose name means "cheerful, friendly", to the jealous Aria. In his racist-essentialist worldview, all *gitanas* are easy girls: "nunca haría algo así, y no puedes compararla con

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side of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias." (Foucault 1986, 24)

[20] "It didn't really belong neither to the Ghetto nor to the Capital, it was a completely neutral area, where only the few people who knew it went and didn't have any kind of prejudice to share it neither with those from the Ghetto nor with those from the Capital. […] The truth was that in that place there was no difference whatsoever between those from the Ghetto and those from the Capital, we all looked the same." (105)

mujeres como vosotras, ella es una mujer de verdad […] vosotras no sois más que simples gypsias insoportables y bastante vulgares." (60)[21]

Serena bravely and confidently returns this racial prejudice and, in contrast, emphasises the moral integrity and sincerity of Romnija.[22] Furthermore, she uses the (equally unacceptable) prejudice against red-haired women—a clear attack on her rival Aria—, and thereby beats him with his own weapons, so to speak:

> Si supieras un poco más de los gypsios, en vez de dedicarte exclusivamente a odiarnos porque te da la real gana, sabrías que ninguna gypsia se acuesta con un hombre porque sí. A saber si las que se dedican a quedarse embarazadas a traición son mujeres explosivas y pelirrojas que van casi desnudas […] y fíjate, son justo las que te van a ti. (60)[23]

As far as the group-internal transgressions are concerned, however, it is important to emphasise that Cortés proceeds very cautiously with regard to sexual relationships. She exposes Serena's sexual desires without disregarding the moral standards set by the arbiters of good manners. She appropriates the capacity to eroticize through language, expresses pleasure without apparent censorship, and refers to the bodies of those who love each other in an organic way. In doing so, Cortés tries to detach herself from the stereotyped images of Roma in general and Romnija in particular created by literature and the media.

At times, however, Cortés also reuses, entirely in accordance with the principle of the stereotype cycle,[24] images and motifs that have emerged

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[21] "Aria would never do such a thing, and you can't compare her to women like you, she's a real woman […] you are just unbearable and rather vulgar gypsies." (60)

[22] In the end, Cortés also makes a strong case for the fact that only true, sincere love counts and that this is also valued as more important than pure convention. This is shown, for example, when Serena separates from her fiancé from the ghetto and the grandmother shows understanding: „[…] ella también estaba de acuerdo en que sin amor nada duraría eternamente."/„[…] She also agreed that without love nothing would last forever." (149)

[23] "If you knew a bit more about gypsios, instead of just hating us because you feel like it, you would know that no gypsia ever sleeps with a man just because she wants to. You'd know that the ones who get pregnant by betrayal are explosive, red-haired women who are almost naked […] and look, they're just the ones who go for you." (60)

[24] Cf. Dreesbach (2005), Rez (2006, 63).

(not only in Spanish literature) since the early modern period to describe the gitana in the literature of the majority society and have been persistently used and perpetuated ever since. A prominent example of such images are the eyes of the *gitana*, which are, as often portrayed in majority literature, as fascinating as they are captivating, as found in Prosper Mérimée's description of Carmen or in Emila Pardo Bazán's presentation of a graceful young gitana in the novella "La maldición de gitana" (1898).[25] Serena's gaze has the same fatal effect on Marcos, who is attracted to her against his will. In an internally focalised passage, Marcos reflects on the enchanting effect of Serena's eyes on him:

> Pero es que esa mirada enigmática, ese cuerpo, ese pelo negro y esa boca, me estaban volviendo loco ya no sabía cómo sacármela de la cabeza, era como si su cuerpo llamase al mío y este no se pudiera resistir. […] Estaba seguro que había magia en sus ojos porque hasta el día de hoy nunca me había pasado algo parecido, y menos con una gypsia. (70–71)[26]

Cortés, however, links the stereotype of the sexually-erotically fascinating eyes of Romnija, which is especially widespread among white non-Roma men, with the self-characterisation of the *gypsios* as "children of the stars". In this way, the physical particularity from their own perspective becomes a positively perceived alterity that distinguishes the Roma as special people from the 'normal' people: "Buscaba ese brillo especial que mi abuela siempre nos aseguraba que teníamos las gypsias. Ella siempre nos decía que cuando una gypsia era feliz o estaba enamorada de verdad, ese brillo o luz aparecía, como si fuese una especie de heren-

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[25] Right at the beginning of the novel, Serena refers to this power of the gaze: "It was very common among Gypsies that our eyes attracted the attention of people who were not […]" (24)/"Era muy común entre *gypsios* que nuestros ojos llamasen la atención de la gente que no lo era […]" (24)

[26] "But that enigmatic look, that body, that black hair and that mouth were driving me crazy, I didn't know how to get her out of my head, it was as if her body was calling out to mine and I couldn't resist. […] I was sure that there was magic in her eyes because to this day nothing like that had ever happened to me, and even less with a gypsia." (70–71)

cia que nos quedó de las estrellas de la leyenda […].” (20)[27] And indeed, Serena makes this power her own in order to become the agent of action herself. In fact, it is Marcos who first takes what he wants from Serena by first humiliating her verbally and then kissing her passionately. Serena counters this bodily appropriation, which mirrors social power relations, by reversing the erotic power relations with the power of her magical gaze, thus proving that she is just as self-determined a woman as Aria:

> Su mandíbula se tensó al ver que miraba hacia sus labios, era obvio que se encendió algún interruptor de alarma entre ambos. Esta vez fui yo quien lo pilló con la guardia baja y, con un impulso que no sabría decir de dónde lo saqué, lo besé. Quería demostrarle que yo no tendría tanto dinero, pero podía ser tan mujer como Aria a pesar de ser una gypsia despreciable para él. (61)[28]

With time, the two grow closer, and Marcos manages to love Serena without using the perfidiously selfish strategy of verbally humiliating her, which he had initially used to combine his feelings for the Romni with his racist mindset. A decisive turning point is reached when he caresses her with the words “mi *gypsia* preciosa” (“my precious gypsia”) (143). The term, however, is ambiguous: the adverb means “beautiful; precious”, but it also evokes the intertextual reference to Miguel de Cervantes’ “La gitanilla” for his protagonist Preciosa. If we bear in mind that Preciosa only grew up with *gitanos*, but is in fact of noble origin, Marcos’ hidden wish that his great love is actually only a supposed Romnija seems to resonate here. Thus, we cannot speak of real acceptance of her being Romnija, but merely an endearing term that ultimately belittles her.

In the long run, the burden that this true but “forbidden and impossible love” (cf. 92) places on them in both public and family life is so

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[27] “I was looking for that special glow that my grandmother always assured us gypsias had. She always told us that when a gypsia was happy or really in love, that glow or light would appear, as if it were a kind of inheritance left to us from the stars of legend […].” (20)

[28] “His jaw tensed when he saw that I was looking at his lips, it was obvious that some alarm switch was turned on between the two of us. This time it was me who caught him off guard, and with an impulse I couldn’t tell where I got it from, I kissed him. I wanted to show him that I might not have as much money, but I could be as much of a woman as Aria despite being a gypsia despicable to him.” (61)

crushing that they drift apart again. Serena tries to keep her wits about her and her attachment to Romani costumes. Consequently, she realises that it is very unusual for a young Romni to be unmarried in her early 20s (cf. 288), and thus she decides to get engaged to Andrés, whom she genuinely values (cf. 78–79) but does not love. Earlier, she wants him to be a platonic friend, a concept, however, that does not exist within the Romani community (cf. 137).

In the end, the engagement to Andrés is only a retarding moment, as it shows Serena all the more clearly how much she desires Marcos. For this love she is prepared to cross all boundaries and even neglect her Romani customs that would not accept a marriage to a *gadjo*, a non-Rom; when she sees Marcos again after a period of absence, she realises: "En ese momento no existían Andrés, ni mi abuela, ni su familia, ni los rebeldes, ni Lola y Izan, solo nosotros." (111)[29]

But her relationship with Marcos is still full of twists and turns. Marcos becomes increasingly aware that he, too, only really loves Serena, and he increasingly shows himself publicly with her, which only fuels the jealousy of Aria, from whom he eventually also breaks up. And yet he betrays Serena by having sexual relations with Aria and Zoe, Miguel's new white co-worker. Only when Serena, who has been receiving hate and threatening messages for some time, is kidnapped and life-threateningly injured by the right-wing extremist Ian, does Marcos realize his moral debt to her. In keeping with the romance genre, the happy ending includes a surprising twist: Marcos' parents, of all people, urge him to marry Serena. While Serena, who, on the one hand, is looking for true and sincere love, but, on the other hand, feels obliged to her Romani origins, still hesitates, her grandmother as governor and intergenerational mediator of the Romani heritage encourages Serena to marry Marcos. The grandmother María justifies the legitimisation of this "forbidden and impossible love" with the founding myth: Luna—like society with its rules and laws—tried to prevent the love between the earthly boy of the night and the fallen star, but their love gave birth to the Romani people. Thus, María gives her blessing: "La vida es difícil, pero es evidente que

[29] "At that moment there was no Andrés, nor my grandmother, nor his family, nor the rebels, nor Lola and Izan, just us." (111)

las estrellas se empeñan en uniros, vuestra historia quedará escrita allí arriba, de eso estoy segura, acabe bien o acabe mal […].” (402)[30]

Serena feels empowered by this story and blessing as a woman, and even more so as a Romni. In a statement that can also be understood in a metaliterary way, which establishes a connection to storytelling as well as to the novel's title, she makes clear her self-efficacy, her power over cosmic fate, and the concerns of her fellow human beings: “Las estrellas podrían escribir lo que quisieran allá arriba. Donde todas las historias de amor eran creadas, pero yo […] yo las haría callar.” (406)[31]

The novel ends with an epilogue by the grandmother, who reflects on the fate of her granddaughter. She once again makes reference to the cosmic origins of the Roma and thus concludes by emphasising once again the plea to live true love with self-confidence despite all the obstacles and impasses of life:

> Cada vez que una estrella fugaz aparecía, sabía que una nueva estrella había bajado a buscar un amor como lo hizo la primera estrella, un amor, como el que yo también encontré, un amor, como el de mi nieta Serena y su Marcos, a pesar de que aún no hubiesen aceptado. Las estrellas siempre nos movimos por impulsos y el amor era uno de los que más nos impulsaba a hacer las locuras más bellas.
> La vida no era fácil, en eso la Luna tenía razón, pero no por eso debíamos abandonar aquello que nos empujaba a vivir día a día, aquello en lo que creíamos, y necesitábamos apostar por ello, a sabiendas de que no siempre se ganaba, pero tampoco siempre se perdía.
> La necesidad de vivir, simplemente, la vida que nos negó (409).[32]

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[30] “Life is difficult, but it is clear that the stars are determined to bring you together, your story will be written up there, of that I am sure, whether it ends well or badly […].” (402)

[31] “The stars could write whatever they wanted up there. Where all the love stories were created, but I […] I would silence them.” (406)

[32] “Every time a shooting star appeared, I knew that a new star had come down to look for a love like the first star did, a love, like the one I also found, a love, like that of my granddaughter Serena and her Marcos, even though they had not yet accepted. We stars were always moved by impulses and love was one of those that drove us to do the most beautiful crazy things.
Life was not easy, the moon was right about that, but that did not mean we had to abandon what pushed us to live day by day, what we believed in, and we needed to bet on it, knowing that we did not always win, but we did not always lose either.
The need to live, quite simply, the life that was denied us.” (409)

3. Conclusion

Much more could be said about this popular novel, but regarding the initial the purpose of my study here, I have shown how Sally Cortés Santiago, in the mode of a mixture of dystopia and romance novel, manages to critically question stereotypical images of Romani women. With Serena, Cortés creates a protagonist who does not allow herself to be intimidated by hatred and discrimination. She defies pejorative prejudices and shows that she can advance professionally and privately without denying her identity and pride as a Romni. Although the plot—even in the dystopian genre—is decidedly improbable and—ultimately in keeping with the genre of "chick literature"—sometimes simplistic, if not kitschy, the novel is an expression of a strong will for female Romani empowerment.

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Viola Parente-Čapková

“Thanks to her ‘dissident’ status, she was granted cultural asylum.” The Figure of Romani Woman Artist in Kiba Lumberg’s Literary Work

Abstract

The figure of the (woman) artist is a central element in the literary works of the Finnish Romani writer, artist, and activist Kiba Lumberg (*1956), including one of her comic books. Lumberg’s take on the subject is pronouncedly autobiographical, highlighting the important role of the artist’s gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other aspects of her identity, although constantly problematizing and ironizing that identity. This essay begins with looking at the *Memesa* trilogy, but then concentrates on Lumberg’s last novel, *Irtiottoxxx* (2018, Breakxxx), which has thus far been largely ignored by the Finnish literary establishment. In *Irtiottoxxx*, which takes place in Italy, the lesbian “half-Romani” artist Memesa (the protagonist of Lumberg’s earlier novels) is no longer the first-person narrator, but only a narrated figure in the background. However, with the help of the “Memesa narrative” embedded in the discussion on artists’ rights and their position in society in general, Lumberg continues to discuss the role of the artist in the context of the—allegedly liberal and generous—Finnish cultural institutions and the art market. Lumberg’s critical view of the position of the artist—namely the aging woman artist—within the cultural institutions and in society in general is analysed with the help of contextual, multi-layered intersectional analysis of her last novel. There, the motif of art as salvation culminates in a kind of a feminist utopia.

1. Kiba Lumberg and her Work

The figure of a creative woman is a central element of Finnish Romani writer of Kale descent, artist, and activist Kiba Lumberg’s (born 1956) literary work, including one of her comic books. Lumberg’s take on the subject is pronouncedly autobiographical, or, better to say, autofictional. The book highlights the important roles of the artist’s gender, sexuality,

ethnicity, nationality, and other aspects of her identity, although constantly problematizing and ironizing those roles and foregrounding the protagonist's position in between various groups and identities. One of the important themes of Lumberg's literary work has been the clash between a creative woman and the surrounding society, be it institutions and instances of power of the majority population, or the pressure and expectation of the minority, in this case, the Roma community. At the same time, her works touch very personal issues like the embodied self of an aging woman artist and her intimate relationships.

The *œuvre* of Kiba Lumberg comprises a screenplay for TV series, comics, visual art, video art, performance art, a children's book, and four novels. The three first novels form together the Memesa trilogy, consisting of the novels *Musta perhonen* (*Black Butterfly*) (2004), *Repaleiset siivet* (*Tattered Wings*) (2006) and *Samettiyö* (*Velvet Night*) (2008); the fourth novel is *Irtiottoxxx* (Breakxxx) (2018). Lumberg has been active as a curator of exhibitions; she has held workshops and courses; and she has founded an art group, an art gallery, and a publishing house, all with a strong political commitment and concern for women, minorities, and left-wing politics.[1] In her capacity as the artist-activist, Lumberg has been denouncing the drawbacks of the Nordic welfare state, which sets high expectations in terms of a positive approach to alterity, but, according to her, often fails to meet them. At the same time, she has been equally critical of minority, namely Romani, cultures, their customs, and their way of treating women and various forms of otherness, including non-heterosexual identities (see Koivisto 2008; Lappalainen 2012; Parente-Čapková 2018b; Kauranen, Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2021; Bergman 2023[2]). Being openly feminist and critical of the heterosexual normativity, Lumberg has had to face at least a "triple marginalization" (cf. Ryvolová 2023), balancing between "establishing literary self-expression in diasporic cultural productions" and considering "aesthetic appropriation of major society's literary traditions" (Hertrampf 2020, 43).

[1] For more on Lumberg's life, work and activism see e.g. Parente-Čapková (2018a and b); Kauranen, Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne (2021); Rossi (2005).

[2] Eric Bergman has analysed the *Memesa* trilogy using the concept of *nepantla* (meaning, roughly translated, "torn between ways" in the Aztec language Nahuatl, see Bergman 2023, 3).

Memesa trilogy can be also viewed within the concept of "inner criticism" (see Hertrampf 2020)[3]. Lumberg's position within the Romani community in Finland has been difficult, and she has often spoken about the death threats that she had to face because of her defying the rules of the Roma culture. In 2007, she accused the Romani activist Miranda Vuolasranta, President of the European Roma & Travellers Forum, of defamation, after Vuolasranta wrote an open letter, in which she, according to Lumberg, grossly offended her and her family.[4] "Olen pelännyt jo vuosia ja pelkään edelleen, mutta jonkun on uskallettava sanoa ääneen myös romanien ristiriidat. Eikö sananvapaus koske kaikkia suomalaisia?"[5], said Lumberg to Finland's most well-known newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (Stenbäck 2007). "Olen hylännyt heimoni arvot, mutta en voi vaieta taiteilijana. Aion jatkaa toisinajattelijana ja vien asiani vaikka Euroopan tuomioistuimeen."[6] (Stenbäck 2007)

As it has been pointed out (Parente-Čapková 2018b), Lumberg, like many other Romani writers, has been using various stereotypes in representing the Roma struggling with the historical "burden of representation" (Toninato 2014, 116[7]). Lumberg's generic repertoire is close to

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[3] I would like to thank Beate Eder-Jordan and Marina Ortrud Hertrampf, who have brought this concept to my attention.

[4] Vuolasranta, who had been awarded, for example, the Golden Wheel Cross Award by the International Romani Union, has been criticised by several of Finland's Romani artists for acting as if she were representing the voice of the Roma and downplaying the problems within the Romani community. Vuolasranta has always been open about representing and promoting Christian values. After Lumberg sued her for defamation, Vuolasranta had to pay a substantial fine in 2008.

[5] "For years, I have feared for my life, and I am still afraid, but someone has to speak aloud about the controversies among the Roma. Doesn't freedom of speech apply to all Finns?" (Stenbäck 2007). All translations in the present text are mine.

[6] "I have abandoned the values of my tribe, but as an artist, I cannot be silent. I intend to go on as a dissident and I am ready to pursue my cause even to the European Court of Justice." (Stenbäck 2007).

[7] Toninato is referring to Maria Lauret, "Introduction", in *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, ed. by Helena Grice et al., 1–9. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. For the "burden of representation" of the Roma within the context of the literature of Finland, see Landon (2008) and Parente-Čapková (2011). For more on Finland's Romani literature, see Rantonen (2018); Gröndahl & Rantonen (2013).

many other women writers from ethnic minorities, for example, in her way to use narrative strategies known from the genres of autofiction, ethnoautobiography, *woman-centred novel*, *Bildungsroman* or (feminist) *Künstlerroman*, the lesbian/queer picaresque, novel for girls, and literary pamphlet (Parente-Čapková 2018b, esp. 20–21; Lappalainen 2012; Gröndahl 2010).

A more complex approach is to view Lumberg's novels in the context of Romani writing. Research on Lumberg's work can contribute to the examination of works by Romani writers on a larger scale, showing the common features of the Romani writing as both minor and world literature (Hertrampf 2020), and the specificities of Romani writers from different countries from Western, Southern, Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe (see e.g. Toninato 2014; French 2016; Zahova 2016; Hertrampf 2020). Lumberg writes in Finnish, and although her novels manifest some of the features that have been attributed to Romani literature (e.g. the moment of multiple consciousness, cf. Toninato 2014; some strategies both in terms of content and style, see Parente-Čapková 2018b), she is considered to be part of contemporary Finnish literature, although existing on its very margins (see e.g. Gröndahl & Rantonen 2013).

In this article, I will discuss the figure of the creative woman beginning with the *Memesa* trilogy, and then concentrate on Lumberg's last novel, the self-published *Irtiottoxxx* (2018), so far largely ignored by the Finnish literary establishment. I will look at Lumberg's texts with the help of a contextual, multi-layered intersectional analysis.

2. A Many-Sided Woman Artist and Her Multiple Consciousness

As indicated above, the Memesa trilogy can be read as a feminist or queer artist's novel depicting the development of the Romani woman Memesa from her childhood until her forties. As a child, Memesa is inspired by strong female role models in the Romani community, be they the "resisting women" within the community, who put up with many hardships, but never surrender (as Memesa's mother), or the women who resist their "destiny" by leaving the community. A special case is Memesa's relative Zaida, who lives her own life in the capital Helsinki. She is a singer, but her talent is manifold; she is very skillful in "using" men for

her purposes and getting what she wants. Memesa's role is completely different. After escaping from her home as a teenager, she discovers the power of art, and succeeds in studying it at an art school. Art as creative self-expression in music, singing, dancing, and visual art becomes more and more important in her life. She manages to enter a school of applied arts to study traditional Romani handicrafts, but also design, history of art, ceramics, and music. She faces prejudice from the majority society, but also very much from within the Romani community. In this way, Lumberg's writing enters in dialogue with the texts of Romani women writers who "demonstrate that the unrelenting conflict with the non-Roma is not the only problematic issue affecting the life of the Romani people […]; an even deeper conflict lies at the heart of Romani society, a conflict that, despite being silenced through the forceful imposition of male authority, remains unresolved" (Toninato 2014, 111). In Lumberg's case, the multiple consciousness is truly manifold, given her concern for social justice and for the freedom of expression of one's sexuality.

Memesa is gifted in various forms of art. When she performs "Gypsy songs"[8] with a band in a cultural centre, she is enthusiastically applauded by the non-Romani members of the audience. The organizers from the cultural centre comes to congratulate her, but "an old and fat Gypsy man" from the audience begins to shout: "'Sie etosa! Tollasissa vaatteissa näyttäyvyt ja rietastelet mustalaisten eessä! Kehtaatki tulla häpeisemmää meijät!'" (M 481)[9]

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[8] The issue of using the word "Gypsy" is, of course, very difficult, sensitive and complex, especially when the author of the text comes from outside the Roma community. I am aware of the complexities and ethical issues connected with the issue of naming (see Parente-Čapková 2011; Kauranen/Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2021, 249). Jan Červenka (2015) has shown that the words that more or less correspond to the English "Gypsy" cannot be always translated like that. However, the most adequate translation of the Finnish word "mustalainen", which Lumberg uses in her texts and which is a Gadje word for the Roma (meaning "the black one"), does seem to be "Gypsy". Nowadays, it is unthinkable to use "mustalainen" as a neutral word. I am using, of course, Roma/Romani when speaking about the community Kiba Lumberg comes from, and "Gypsy" when quoting Lumberg's text or referring to it.

[9] "You are disgusting! To show off in such clothes and behaving lecherously in front of Gypsies! You have the guts to dishonour us like this!" M = *Memesa* trilogy.

Memesa shouts back, and the man keeps insulting her, because "her tits shine through" her clothes which are "too thin"; she should be, "at least", ashamed (M 482).[10] The demand that a woman should be ashamed for the very fact of her physical existence first infuriates Memesa, but eventually she answers laughing: "'Eihän näitä tissejä voi taskuunkaan laittaa …'" (M 482).[11] The man is confused, since he is obviously not used to Romani women talking back and being sarcastic, and asks: "'Mikset sie oo niiku muutkii mustalaistytöt?'" Memesa answers: "'Kun mina halua olla oma itteni. En kenenkään käskettävä.'" (M 482)[12] After that, she claims to understand why she is "like a red rag" to the Roma—especially to Romani women:

> He pukevat yllensä vangin puvun ja tyytyvät kohtaloonsa. Minä muistutan heitä vapaudesta. Uhmaan lauman lakeja enkä häpeä fyysisyyttäni. Se satuttaa ja raivostuttaa katkeria naisia, eivätkä he voi katsoa minua. Heidän on pakko marssia salista ulos. Mustalaismiesten silmissä taas olen lavalla laulava portto. (M 483)[13]

Memesa does not wish to be associated with the Roma culture; she wants to "find her own star" (M 483), and she is relieved when the "Gypsy course"—the specific course devoted to making or studying "Gypsy art"—in the art school is over, and she can go on with "regular" courses. She finds her closest friends in the Helsinki artistic community. She has problems with breaking through as a visual artist, but eventually, she finds a gallery owner (a member of Finland's Swedish community[14]) who likes her art, and she begins to hold her own exhibitions. They are reviewed also by members of the Romani community:

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[10] "On niin ohkaset vaatteetkii et tissitkii paistaa läpi! Häpiäisit edes!"

[11] "I can't put my tits in my pocket …"

[12] "'Why aren't you as other Gypsy girls?'—'Because I want to be myself. Not to be commanded by anyone.'"

[13] "They wear that prisoner's dress and acquiesce to their destiny. I remind them of freedom. I defy the herd laws and I am not ashamed of my corporality. All that hurts the embittered women and makes them furious, and they are not able to watch me [on the stage]. They have to march away from the [concert] hall. In the eyes of the Gypsy men, I am a whore, singing on the stage."

[14] The Swedish-speaking community, called the Finland-Swedes, has been a minority in Finland since the turn of the 20th century. It belongs among Finland's "historical minorities" just as the Romani community does. Although the custom to view the Finland-Swedes as rich descendants of the former ruling class

> Samaa jaaritusta näiltä Helsingin niin fiksuilta, omilla aivoillaan ajattelevilta mustalaisilta, jotka ovat perustaneet kulttuuriyhdistyksiä uskonnon ja kommunistisen aatteen alle. Loukkaan heidän tapojaan ja mustalaiskulttuurin sääntöjä vähäpukeisilla ihmishahmoillani ja omalla pukeutumisellani. Pukeudun kuin kuka tahansa valtaväestön edustaja. (M 496)[15]

In spite of her defiance, Memesa admits that it took a long time before she got—at least partly—rid of a constant fear of a possible confrontation with the Roma on the streets of the capital. The same theme of the protagonist defying the Romani community is explored in Kiba Lumberg's comic works, namely in the section "Kokaro—Yksinäinen" [Kokaro—The Lonely One] of the *G!psy Com!x!* (Lumberg 2010). Here, we have a character named Tekla, "an androgynous person dressed in a black leather jacker, white T-shirt, baggy sweatpants and dark sunglasses" (Kauranen/Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2020, 254), evoking portrayals of bohemian artist figures. In the comics, she is shown on a tram and then outside it, being approached by a group of Roma. They comment critically on her clothing and accuse her of dishonouring and shaming the whole tribe. After the verbal exchange, they attack her physically, and the scene ends with Tekla half lying, half sitting on the ground, being photographed by a foreign tourist (Lumberg 2010, 22).

Similarly, Memesa also emphasises the irresolvable nature of her conflict with the Romani community:

> Olen aina pitänyt itseäni ihmisenä, en minkään rodun edustajana, mutta kaaleille rotu ja merkit tummaan heimoon kuulumisesta ovat tärkeitä. Minua ne asiat eivät kiinnosta. Tärkeintä on ihmisyys ja elämä, jota voi elää vapaasti. (M 486)[16]

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has been many times denounced as stereotypical and misleading, the Finland-Swedish community has, for historical reasons (Finland belonging to the Swedish realm from the mid-12th century until the beginning of the 19th century), enjoyed a very different status than the Romani community.

[15] "The same rambling from these Helsinki Gypsies, so smart, thinking with their own brains, Gypsies who have founded cultural associations in the name of religion or communism. I offend their habits and laws of the Gypsy culture with my half naked figures and by my own way of dressing. I dress like any other member of the majority society."

[16] "I have always considered myself a human being, not a representative of a race/ethnicity, but to the Kale, the race and the signs of belonging to the dark tribe are important. I am not interested in these things. The most important thing is humanity and life, which can be lived freely."

Memesa also follows other Romani artists' stories—she reads in a newspaper that a Romani pop singer Antti Svarts has again "kicked the hornet's nest" and has received death threats from the other Kale. He needs to have body guards to accompany him in public places. Memesa thinks, "Outoa kun kukaan, virkavalta tai poliitikot, eivät ota kantaa asiaan. Mieshän on kohta henkisesti ihan loppu." (M 520)[17] She is interviewed about her experience with death threats and mentions in particular a Romani activist with an official position and the people around her:

> Kyllähän niitä on tullut. Etenkin tietyt romanijärjestöt ovat sitä mieltä, että pilaan mustalaisten maineen ja lisään rasismia. Taustalla on muiden vanhoillisten kaaleiden lisäksi vaikuttanut eräs virkaapitävä romaniaktivisti. Yksittäisiä uhkauksia, puhelinsoittoja. […] mustalainen sanaa ei edes saisi käyttää, vaan pitäisi puhua romaneista. Suurin osa heistä on uskovaisia tai muuten vain jäänyt 1500-luvulle. He haluavat edelleen pitää yllä vanhoja tapoja ja kulttuuria, ja kieltävät yhteisön sisäiset ongelmat. Yhteisön sisällä kaikkien pitäisi olla samaa mieltä ja pukeutua tiukkojen normien mukaisesti, ja jos et noudata sääntöjä, olet vainottu. (M 523).[18]

Memesa says that she is aware of risking her life when talking like this. She invites her sister, who, together with her young daughter, have also been threatened by Romani men. Memesa wishes the majority society politicians would intervene, expressing her trust in their possibilities to change things for the better. When criticizing the conservative Roma, she brings up the way her work has been appreciated by the majority community: "Olen tehnyt töitä veitsi kurkulla vaikka valtaväestöltä olen saanut positiivista palautetta, koska olen tuonut taidekenttään toisenlais-

[17] "Strange that nobody, official authorities or politicians, takes a stance on the issue. The man is going to have a burnout soon."

[18] "Yes, there have been [the death threats]. Especially certain Romani organizations think that I am spoiling the reputation of the Gypsies and provoke more racism. In the background, apart from other conservative Kale, there has been an influential Romani activist. Some threats, phone calls. […] in fact, the word Gypsy should not be even used, one should speak about the Roma. Most of them [the conservatives from the Romani organizations] are religious or stuck in some other ways in the 16th century. They would like to keep up old customs and culture, and they deny the problems inside the community. All community members should share the same opinions and dress according to strict norms, and if you don't comply with the rules, they harass you."

ta tekotapaa ja ajattelua." (M 523)[19] She criticizes all conservative cultures and the politicians who evade these issues: "Ihmisoikeudet koskevat kaikkia kansalaisia ja kansanryhmiä." (M 523).[20]

Indeed, Memesa gets more threats, reports offences to the police, and tries to get help from lawyers. However, she is skeptical about her options: "Mustalaisaktiivinaisella on valtion tukema organisaatio takanaan, kun taas minä keikun kuin pieni vene valtavankokoisen laivan peräaalloissa, jossa potkurit pyrkivät murskaamaan kaiken kohdalle sattuvan." (M 538)[21] Memesa is attacked on the internet, she suffers from insomnia and nightmares, and lives in constant fear, seeing strange men following and watching her. Again, art functions as refuge and consolation.

One of the turning points of the *Samettiyö* is when Memesa gets an invitation to join a group of Hungarian artists in a project aimed at their participation in the Venice Biennale. What Memesa and the Hungarian artists have in common is that they do not live a "Gypsy life", but that they "live doing art" (M 487).[22] A large part of the last section of the book, "Palazzo Pisani", is dedicated to the preparations of Memesa's participation in the Venice Biennale and the event itself. Memesa takes part in the Biennale by exhibiting her work, a black Kale skirt pierced by knives.[23] "Minä edustan Suomea",[24] Memesa says in the chapter depicting the opening. She meets more artists, curators and organizers, one of

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[19] "I have been working with a knife on my throat, even though I have received positive feedback from the majority community, since I have brought a different way of doing [art] and a different way of thinking."

[20] "Human rights concern all citizens and all national and ethnic groups."

[21] "The Romani female activist has got behind her an organization supported by the [Finnish] state, while I am floating here like a small boat in the wake of an enormous ship, where the propellers try to crush anything that gets in their way."

[22] "[—] ettemme elä mustalaiselämää, vaan elämme taidetta tehden."

[23] The art work described in the novel closely resembles Lumberg's work Musta perhonen (Black Butterfly), which she exhibited in the Venice Biennale in 2007 (see e.g. http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/eng/2007/tour/roma/img-06.htm). The installation, composed of prison bars, through which the spectator views it, has been interpreted as criticism of the Finnish Roma forcing young girls to wear the traditional Romani dress and, more generally, to comply with the customs, habits, and unwritten rules of the community.

[24] "I represent Finland."

them being the Finnish Helena-Maria, a charming and successful woman from the majority population. However, Memesa's colleague Minna is very critical about Helena-Maria, indicating repeatedly that Helena-Maria might be an impostor (M 512, 555–556). Memesa seems to be suspicious as well, but she is too infatuated with the beautiful woman. "'Niin, kyllähän taiteen ympärillä tietysti pyörii kaikenlaisia ihmisiä, epämääräisiäkin', sanon ja jatkan: 'Muttei kaikki ole sellaisia.'"[25] (M 512), Memesa concludes.

Eventually, Minna is proven right in her skepticism towards Helena-Maria. Memesa falls madly in love with this "Scandinavian blonde" who, at times, seems to reciprocate her feelings, especially when association with Memesa and her art seems to pay off. Memesa suffers, feeling inadequate, ugly, poor, and—"… ja nainenkin vielä …" (M 555),[26] who cannot, unlike many male artists, offer money and security. Indeed, Helena-Maria seems to use any opportunity to advance her career by means of socializing (and, as Memesa suspects, not only socializing) with men. When, in a bar, Memesa talks about how "… kuinka heteromaailmankuva on pilannut ihmiskunnan kehityksen ja polkee ihmisoikeuksia ympäri maailmaa. Kuinka heteromiehet raiskaavat ja vahingoittavat pieniä lapsia." (M 584),[27] Helena-Maria refuses to translate Memesa's words from its original Finnish into English, so that a man they meet there would understand. The conversation takes place in English, which Memesa does not speak and is thus dependent on Helena-Maria translating for her. However, Helena-Maria seems only interested in impressing and/or using the man, showing no interest in Memesa's scathing criticism of heterosexual matrix and male violence.

The same motifs—a "dark Romani artist's" infatuation with a beautiful blond woman—appear in Lumberg's second comic book, *Hullun taiteilijan päiväkirja* (2010) (*The Diary of a Mad Artist,* 2011). Here, the protag-

[25] "There are all sorts of people orbiting around art, you bet, including scrappy ones. […] But not all of them are the same."

[26] "on the top of it, a woman."

[27] "the heterosexual worldview has ruined the development of mankind and how it tramples human rights around the world", "[h]ow heterosexual men rape and harm small children."

onist's[28] preoccupation with her looks and her complaints about being "too fat" and "ugly" balance between a caricature of a woman (artist) "putting too much thought into her looks and appearance" (Kauranen/Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2021, 262) and injecting a considerable portion of self-irony into the text (Kauranen/Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2021, 262). These portrayals can be interpreted as combining a more general critical look at the society, which is able to view women, including women artists, only through their body image, and genuine feelings of distress and anxiety caused by the unrequited love.

3. Curators, Promoters, People "orbiting around art," and "dissidents"

The artist-protagonist in Lumberg's works complains about various difficulties she has to struggle with, from bureaucracy to promotion, which impedes her from concentrating on the art itself: "There is no way in hell I'm going to mess with all this rigamarole! Back and forth about the works for the exhibit, data, printing, cost of insurance, command of English—which I don't have—marketing the art abroad, etc. What a poor artist needs is a secretary." (Lumberg 2011a, 44). However, she never has any, and feels to be a prey to people who "orbit around art" (cf. M 512) and the lives of artists and their work. The character of Helena-Maria in *Samettiyö* represents a caricature of such a person in the figure of an art curator, who is not an artist herself. Memesa loves making her art and improving and perfecting her skills, insisting on not following the fashionable trends (M 525). She is very critical of the recent development in the sphere of arts:

> Taiteestakin on tullut liukuhihnatavaraa. Kilpailu on kovaa […]. Nuoremmat perustavat työryhmiä, joissa kuraattorit ja nuoret taiteilijat tekevät yhteisprojekteja […]. Julkisuudessa käydään aikamoista kujanjuoksua siitä, kenestä tulee tunnettu ja kuka jää jalkoihin. […]. Eriarvoisuus näkyy tälläkin alalla. Varakkaan taustan omaavat etenevät urallaan helpommin. Nousevana kaupallisena taiteen ammattikuntana ovat kuraattorit, joille toiset antavat näyttelyiden sisällön ja teeman suunniteltaviksi. Minä olen syrjässä tuosta kaikesta. Me, jotka kuljemme omaa polkuamme, suunnittelemme teemat ja sisällöt pää-

[28] In our article from 2021 (Kauranen, Parente-Čapková & Vuorinne 2021), we decided to differentiate between the protagonist of the *Hullun taiteilijan päiväkirja* and the real author by calling the former Kiba, and the latter Kiba Lumberg.

> sääntöisesti itse, mutta ei aina. Hyvä kuraattori on taiteilijalle kuin muusa, joka antaa taiteilijan tuoda ja keskittyä työhönsä. (M 525–526)[29]

The tone, which resembles that of a pamphlet, shows Memesa engaging in the contemporary debates on curators and various art promotors who, often together with some artists, dominate the art world. As has been often brought up, the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millenium have been the "golden age" of curators, agents, and promotors, mainly in visual arts, but also in other forms of art, including literature (see e.g. Perloff 2010; Kuusela 2015; Gelmi/Lappalainen 2015[30]). The trend of questioning the artist's central role in the production of art (O'Neill 2012, 9) has led to some curators becoming international stars (O'Neill 2012, 4–5). The phenomenon has also been visible and debated in Finland, especially after the 2007 Lyon Biennale with the 50 curators involved. The trend continued, and in the 2013 Venice Biennale, there were two artists and three curators representing Finland (Kuusela 2015, 35).

In *Samettiyö*, curators and other art promoters are seen in a critical light, but they are not vilified if they understand that they have to act like "an artist's muse", i.e., not weakening the role of the artist. Their treatment is much more polarized in Lumberg's last novel, *IrtiottoXXX*. The novel takes place in Italy, but the lesbian "partly Romani" artist Memesa is no longer the first-person narrator, but a narratee who does not have her own voice (cf. Kauranen/Parente-Čapková/Vuorinne 2021, 266). However, with the help of the "Memesa narrative" embedded in the discussion on artists' rights and their position in society in general, Lumberg continues to discuss the role of the artist in the context of what she sees as the allegedly liberal and generous Finnish cultural institutions.

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[29] "Art has become a commodity, too. Competition is tough […]. The younger ones are finding working groups in which curators and young artists do projects together […]. In public, they are throwing down the gauntlet to determine who will become famous and who will be trampled underfoot. […] Inequality exists in this field as well. Those from a rich background advance quicker. A new commercial art profession are curators; some people commission them to plan exhibition substance and themes. I am outside all these practices. Those of us who walk our own path plan themes and content mostly ourselves, but not always. A good curator is like an artist's muse, who lets the artist create and concentrate on her work."

[30] In 2015, a whole issue of the Finnish art history journal *TaHiTi* was dedicated to the issue of curating and mediating art.

Lumberg also discusses the position of journalists and the situation in the media. The protagonist (and the narrator of most sections of the book) is Memesa's close friend, a former journalist Nina, a member of the majority Finnish-speaking population, although she emphasizes having "Karelian blood".[31] Nina lost her job after having discussed "unpleasant issues" in her articles. She is divorced and recovering from breast cancer that had resulted in a double mastectomy. She takes a refuge in a remote mountain village Del Grappa[32] in Italy.

Nina calls herself a "toisinajattelija" (I 11[33]) who walks her own paths, just as Memesa did in *Samettiyö*. As with her other fictional works, Lumberg brings up the same issues when interviewed about the novel, emphasizing that she is serious about "bold" journalists being silenced: "Mediasta on tullut liian yksiääninen. Jos olet iäkäs nainen, tinkimätön toimittaja ja totuuden asialla, joudut kevyesti sivuun."[34] (Lassfolk-Feodoroff 2018) In the same interview, Lumberg also mentioned the issue of having received death threats as well as experiencing censorship: "Tarvitsemme moniäänisyyttä ja taitavaa journalismia, mutta saamme tiukasti rajattua 'totuutta'" (Lassfolk-Feodoroff 2018).[35]

One of the principal motifs in the novel is an escape from Finland. Memesa is also characterised as a dissident. While in *Samettiyö*, Memesa

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[31] Karelia is a region in Eastern Finland, situated around Finnish-Russian border. Part of Finnish Karelia was annexed to the Soviet Union as a result of World War II. Karelian identity, formed also by Karelian dialects, has been traditionally strong in Finland. Karelia had a relatively dense Roma population. After the War, people from the ceded territories were evacuated to Finland; the evacuees from these territories included almost two thirds of the Finnish Roma (see e.g. Lähteemäki-Smith 2011, 4; Pulma 2012, 154). Nina's Karelian identity is interesting also because Lumberg herself comes from Lappeenranta in South Karelia.

[32] The village seems to be fictional. Nina mentions once Cortina, which could be an allusion to Cortina d'Ampezzo, a tourist centre in Veneto. In the same region, there is also a place called Bassano del Grappa, but the village in the novel is depicted as a much smaller place, situated in the mountains.

[33] "dissident" (I = *Irtiotto XXX*).

[34] "The media has become too monological nowadays. If you are an aging woman, an uncompromising journalist, and you pursue the truth, you are likely to be ignored".

[35] "We need multiple voices and skillful journalism, but what we get is a tightly limited 'truth'".

is happy to represent Finland abroad; in *IrtiottoXXX* the reader learns at the beginning of the novel that she had left the country for Sweden, together with her partner: "Hän sai 'toisinajattelijan' statuksella kulttuuripakolaisturvapaikan, kun oli Suomessa toisinajattelijana niin ajettu nurkkaan, että ei saanut enää teoksiaan mistään suunnasta esille." (I 23).[36] Nina, who had experienced discrimination as a journalist, remembers Memesa saying that after she turned 59, she did not get any grants and subsidies any more:

> Pyrittiin elävältä hautaamaan ihminen, joka on taiteessa rohkea ja luova. Joka nousi vääristyneitä rakenteita vastaan ja sanoi, että Suomen taide- ja kulttuuriympyrät ovat rajoittuneita ja syrjiviä. Naiset kohtaavat eri organisaatioissa ikärasismia, jopa naiset syrjivät toisia naisia. Ystäväni sai tuntea syrjinnän joka suunnassa. Memesa ei ole hetero, ei hyväksy tapakulttuurien säädöksiä eikä myöskään noudata niitä. Ystäväni on suorasanainen eikä kumarra niitä tahoja eikä kulttuuripoliittisia henkilöitä, jotka ovat saaneet virkoja taiteilijoiden selkänahkaa repimällä. Ymmärrän hyvin, että ystäväni lähti pois Suomesta. En nyt sanoisi kuitenkaan, ettei Ruotsissakin olisi samoja ongelmia. (I 48)[37]

Memesa's story, as narrated by Nina, relates to some events depicted in *Samettiyö* and, again, evokes some elements from Lumberg's life. Nina speaks about plots and conspiracies against Memesa, and about the conservative Roma, especially one of them, "[…] vanhoillisten helluntairomanien keulakuva ja mekkoromani, 'romanien ihmisoikeusaktivisti', jota 'suvaitsevat' politiikan huipulla olevat […]" (I 30)[38]. According to

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[36] "Thanks to her 'dissident status', she was granted cultural asylum, since she was, as a dissident, so ostracised that she could not exhibit her works anywhere."

[37] "They tried to bury alive a person who is bold and creative in her art. Who defied the perverted structures and claimed that Finland's art and cultural circles are limited and discriminative. Women face agism in different organizations, even from other women. My friend [= Memesa] was discriminated in all circumstances. Memesa is not heterosexual, she neither approves of the rules of customary beliefs nor does she comply with them. My friend is very direct, and she does not bow to those circumstances or to cultural and political persons who have achieved their posts by exploiting artists. I understand well why my friend left Finland. However, I would not say that the same problems do not exist in Sweden."

[38] "a spearhead of the conservative Roma from the Finnish Pentecostal Movement, one wearing the Romani costume, 'the Romani human rights activist,' 'tolerated' by the powerful politicians". The Finnish Pentecostal Movement is one of the principal revivalist religious movements in Finland. The Roma began to convert

Nina, if a Romani person, let alone artist, does not comply with the customs of their culture, they are put on a blacklist.

Nina knows that "Taiteilijat eivät saa oikeastaan mitään, jos ei ole apurahaa tai teosten myynnistä saatuja tuloja." (I 31).[39] The financial issues *vis à vis* art and its creation are more in focus in *IrtiottoXXX* than in *Samettiyö*, and they are often discussed together with the activities of curators and other promotors. Nina, obviously influenced by Memesa's views, sees them mostly in a critical light: "Erilaisia toimitsijoita, mielessäni ajattelen. Heille taiteilijat ovat kuin karjaa, jota lajitellaan täällä eri karsinoihin, ja jokaisesta päästä saavat rahaa." (I 31)[40] The curators and promotors orbiting around art are greedy, they live by the artists' work, and they demand to be "[…] heitä pitää arvostaa ja heidän pitää aina olla näkyvillä enemmän kuin taiteilijoiden."[41] (I 33). Throughout the book, Nina is confronted by a Finnish woman Sanna, who also knew Memesa. Sanna runs an artists' residence in the Del Grappa village and, eventually, turns out to be another "greedy art curator and promotor", crafty and calculating. She resents Memesa, who had visited the village earlier and painted a large mural admired by the locals. Sanna racializes Memesa as a "[…] hurjasta mustalaistaiteilijasta […]" (I 131),[42] but, at the same time, she claims that she does not want other Finnish people to move and live permanently in Del Grappa. Gradually, the reader gets to know that Sanna had been jealous of Memesa, had tried to exploit her, and had ousted her out of Del Grappa; as the story evolves, Sanna becomes more and more hostile and aggressive. The main contradiction does not appear to be Memesa's Romani identity, of which Memesa herself is critical, but her being a (Finnish) artist, who could "spoil" Sanna's exclusive position in the Italian village.

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to Pentecostalism in the 1960s and have formed a group within the movement. See e.g. Roman 2015.

[39] "[a]rtists don't really get any money, if they don't have grants or income from the sales."

[40] "All kinds of agents, I think. They see artists as cattle, which is to be sorted in various pens, and they get money for each head."

[41] "more respected and more visible than the artists."

[42] "fierce Gypsy artist."

4. From the Critique of Organized Exploitation to Feminist Utopia in a Mystical Paradise

Nina appears to be Memesa's most loyal and devoted friend, talking about her in a pronouncedly positive way and always taking her side. She tends to identify with Memesa. Since Memesa did not allegedly have the "time and possibility" to come back to Del Grappa, Nina acts as "her eyes and ears", pondering what Memesa experienced and felt when she visited the village herself (I 60). Most of all, as narrator, Nina acts as a kind of "spokeswoman" for Memesa. Only in one chapter, in the middle of the book, the focalization and even narration shift to Sanna, who is contemplating the "strangeness" of all artists and writers, whom she does not understand; the focalization and narration shift there and back.

Nina is happy to be far from Finland, though at times, she sticks to her Finnishness: "Olen suomalainen juuri niin kuin pitääkin." (I 119).[43] She likes the Italian cordial way of accepting foreigners, but she is very critical of the Italian male chauvinism as well as of the European Union, although exclusively in relation to Finland. She claims that "[…] Euroopan unioni on Suomelle kuin hirttoköysi." (I 106),[44] since the Euro stole jobs from Finland. Further on in the novel, there are critical voices of acquaintances telling Nina that Finland is not what it used to be: "national property" has been sold to foreign companies, and the majority population can't get work because the jobs go to immigrants (I 162).

As a journalist, Nina realized that "[…] ei haluta tutkivaa journalismia […]." Journalists are not supposed to write "[…] mitä tapahtuu tai ketkä päättävät mutta eivät kuitenkaan ota vastuuta." (I 106)[45] This is juxtaposed with Nina's memories of Memesa's complaints that the artists have been enslaved and exploited to be "[…] politiikan, valtion ja eri kunnallisten ja yksittäisten organisaatioiden riistojuhdiksi."[46] (I 129).

Thanks to her mural and her pleasant behavior, Memesa is remembered fondly by the inhabitants of Del Grappa. Nina gets acquainted

[43] "I am Finnish just the way I should be."

[44] "the EU is Finland's noose."

[45] "nobody wants investigative journalism […]." "about what is really happening or those who are in charge, but unwilling to accept their responsibility."

[46] "beasts of burden for the politics, the state, and various civic and private organizations."

with the villager Ilario and his friends, who speak about Memesa with affection and would like to have her permanently living in Del Grappa. Nina also meets the municipal manager, who is very friendly and open to new ideas. She begins planning to buy an abandoned house, which she eventually does, with the intention to reconstruct it and convert it into a home for artists. She also gets involved in planning to convert the upper part of the village, described as frightening in the first half of the novel, into similar places for all "[…] jotka haluavat elää täällä […]", "[…] jotka haluavat muutosta elämäänsä ja haluavat lähteä pois maasta, jota eivät enää koe omakseen, voisivat löytää täältä uuden alun."[47] (I 203) The villagers support her efforts to revive and revitalize the village and the whole region.

Eventually, the house is bought and reconstructed. Memesa, who is disappointed by her life in Sweden, where the situation is similar to Finland, has decided to build her new network in Estonia and Italy. She returns to Del Grappa with her assistant and partner, a blond beauty called Katri, and another "refugee" from Finland, the artist Eva. Together with Nina, they celebrate the renovated house and the beginning of their new life.

Dreams, visions, and inexplicable, almost mystical phenomena play an important role in the story. Certain elements of magical realism were present already in Lumberg's earlier novels (Lappalainen 2012; Parente-Čapková 2018b), but here in Lumberg's last novel they occupy much more space. At the very end of *IrtiottoXXX*, a mysterious dark woman from Nina's dreams comes to the housewarming party and gives Nina a bouquet of flowers and a box with a ring full of small rubies. This dark woman leaves immediately afterwards, but the feast goes on. Everybody is "[…] paikassa, jossa ihmiset ovat kuin samaa perhettä." Nina concludes: "Elän nyt ja kuolen sitten kun on kuoltava. Tämä on minun paikkani, jossa saan olla poissa maailman kuohuista ja silti tietää, mitä tapahtuu." (I 231)[48] These words echo a line uttered by the "Kiba" character from the *Diary of the Mad Artist*: "The only way is to do creative work

[47] "people who want to live here"; "who want change, who want to leave a country they don't feel is their own, they could find a new beginning here."

[48] "grateful to live in a place where people are like the same family." "I live now, and I will die when my time comes. This is my place, where I can be far from the world's fury and still know what is going on."

and concentrate on that, and do my best at what I can, what I am able to do." (Lumberg 2011a, 87).

5. Conclusion

Lumberg's last novel develops themes and motifs present in her earlier works. *Samettiyö,* the last part of *Memesa trilogy,* concludes, however, with an enigmatic scene in which Memesa is hit and paralyzed with something that appears as a black eclipse, but she still longs for the light that she had found in art. In contrast, the ending of *IrtiottoXXX* is pronouncedly idyllic and utopian, a happy end as in a fairy tale. The art promotor and curator Sanna leaves the place; although she clearly plays the role of the "serpent in paradise", she is also portrayed as a victim of agism and male chauvinism. The protagonist Nina feels mostly sorry for her (I 170). The issue of art curators and promoters as "parasites" is highlighted and sharpened in comparison to Lumberg's earlier works, but, at the same time, partly softened by the feeling of compassion with the curator character and by means of the happy ending.

The relationship to the Romani identity portrayed in Lumberg's last novel seems consistent with the earlier works, although also partly subdued. There are mentions of racism from the majority population towards Memesa, but the main problem appears to be the pressure from the conservative part of the Romani community and from the cultural and art institutions in Finland. Memesa's "courage" and her "dissident" identity are highlighted in relation to all instances that feel limiting and restricting. The fact that there is a non-Romani narrator in the book who, nevertheless, partly functions as Memesa's voice, suggests that the criticism takes place on various levels.

The relationship to Finland and Finnishness in Lumberg's last novel appears ambivalent in a most intriguing way. In Nina's and, indirectly, Memesa's thoughts and lines, there is the basic trust in the Finnish authorities and establishment; both Nina and Memesa identify with Finland and Finnishness. This is in tune with Lumberg's way of empha-

sizing her belonging to Finland and Northern Europe,[49] although Finnish society is a target of severe criticism. While in the trilogy, Memesa accuses the representatives of the Finnish welfare state of racism, indifference, cruelty, and cynism (Parente-Čapková 2018b), in *IrtiottoXXX*, there is harsh criticism of the way things in Finland "have developed" lately. Culturally, it appears desirable that Finland is viewed and views itself as a part of Europe. Interestingly, Lumberg herself comments on this issue in the above-quoted interview: "Oikeastaan tarina on myös oodi Euroopalle ja rakkaudentunnustus Suomelle. Isoja asioita pienessä kirjassa."[50] (Lassfolk-Feodoroff 2018) However, the European Union as an institution, and especially its immigration politics are viewed negatively. The voices in the book criticizing the integration of immigrants into the Finnish society are not questioned at all, but rather presented as "dissident". The point of view of the immigrants to Finland is not present in the text, not even reproduced; at the same time, Nina, Memesa, and others are warmly welcomed into the Italian village.

All the women in the book seem to identify fully with the ideas and practices of gender equality, typicaly of the Nordic society. From the point of view of gender, the main point of criticism is the position of aging women, be they artists, curators, journalists, or women in general. The way the "men's world" and institutions discriminate against aging women is repeatedly brought up and emphasized also by the author herself in interviews given after the publication of the book. The identity of an aging woman is analysed from various viewpoints—from her position in the labour market and cultural institutions to her very corporal existence and health issues—a continuation of the theme Lumberg had explored mostly in her *Diary of the Mad Artist* (cf. Kauranen/Parente-

[49] Lumberg has repeatedly brought up this issue also when being interviewed: "I have Gypsy blood, but I consider myself Scandinavian, European and a world citizen" ("Minussa on mustalaisverta, mutta pidän itseäni kyllä skandinaavina, eurooppalaisena ja maailmankansalaisena") (Immonen 2016).
"Even if I have a multinational background, I am happy I was born in Finland and was given the Scandinavian values." ("Vaikka taustaltani olen monikansallinen, olen iloinen, että olen syntynyt Suomessa ja saanut skandinaavisen arvomaailman.") (Yliherne 2019).

[50] "As a matter of fact, the story is an ode to Europe and a declaration of love for Finland. Big issues in a small book."

Čapková/Vuorinne 2020).[51] According to the author's own comments, men are not to blame for women "pumping plastic tits into their bodies"; it is the patriarchal structures that are to blame (Lassfolk-Feodoroff 2018). Art, solidarity, and shared, common humanity offer the ultimate hope, refuge, and consolation, resulting in a kind of a utopian dream, appearing to offer a solution also to the "longing to belong": "Yhteinen ilo kaikuu ylös vuorille korkeuksiin kuin kiittäen." (I 231)[52]

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[51] In the *Diary of the Mad Artist,* Kiba claims that there is "some old boys' club that decides [who gets apartments and studio spaces in an artists' space], based on who knows who" (Lumberg 2011a, 73).

[52] "The shared joy echoes up to the mountains, till the heights, as a kind of thanks."

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