

European Roma Lives beyond Stereotypes

EDITED BY EVE ROSENHAFT AND MARÍA SIERRA

European Roma

Lives beyond Stereotypes

edited by

Eve Rosenhaft and María Sierra

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General Introduction

Eve Rosenhaft and María Sierra

The history of Roma in Europe has often been written as a history of outsiders. In writing this book, our aim is to make them visible as insiders to European society. The vision of Romani minorities in Europe which is widely shared by scholars, policymakers and the informed general public is one of enduring marginality. Scholarly writing on the history of these groups has focused on analysing the policies towards them, especially policies of population surveillance and mobility control, which involved managing groups designated as *nomades*, *Zigeuner*, *zingari*, Gypsies (and so on) in the context of “racialized” governmentalities. As nation states redefined their populations in terms of citizenship, Roma came to be defined as “strangers”, perceived not only as foreigners, despite having deep historical roots in Europe, but also as dangerous. The transformation of European states thus led to the othering of the “Gypsy”; even among minorities they were subject to a “state of exception”, a people not simply oppressed by the laws but standing outside the law.¹

Against this background, research into the so-called “Gypsy question” has revolved around mechanisms of restriction and exclusion: controls on cross-border mobility from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards; the use of criminal law to prosecute social deviance, based on new concepts of social danger emerging from physical anthropology and medicine; the genocidal outcomes of governmental and police practices

¹ See, for example, Jennifer Illuzzi, *Gypsies in Germany and Italy 1881–1914: Lives Outside the Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

under National Socialism and in Europe more widely between the 1930s and 1945, and their aftermath; and the internalization of difference by Romani people themselves, in which identity construction and social and political activism have drawn on that historical narrative of marginalization and repression. In this sense, scholarship has joined its voice to a powerful shared conviction that the best we can hope for is that through effective social policies and public education they may at last be “included”.

This book challenges that vision of marginality, offering an alternative to the rhetoric and programme of “inclusion” or “integration” as it applies to Romani groups in Europe. Rather, it sets out evidence for their cultural contribution to Europe’s public space/s, considering them as active subjects of cultural production and, more particularly, as agents in the processes of building shared European commons and identities. We started with a twofold hypothesis: first, Romani groups have made a meaningful contribution to the development of local, national and transnational public spaces in Europe; second, certain historical features of these groups – adaptability, mobility, multilingualism – constitute a cultural matrix rich in possibilities for European identity. From this point of view, Romani minorities are not Europe’s others, but quintessentially Europeans. The histories we recount in the chapters that follow are shared histories.

We have explored these propositions and gathered evidence in the context of four linked case studies, each of which focuses on a distinct “space” or set of spaces: politics and discourses of citizenship, spaces of economic exchange (specifically horse fairs), musical performance and circuses. Each of the component case studies is transnational in scope and explores developments from the late nineteenth century to the present. The structure of the volume reflects the case study approach, with a part devoted to each of the four key spaces. The reality of historical discrimination is present here; each of the case studies takes account of existing inequalities. But our purpose was to read against narratives of continuing marginalization and assess the scope for Romani people to act as cultural agents even in disadvantageous contexts. In order to do this we pay close attention to interactions and exchanges between Romani and non-Romani actors in spaces that they share or where they come together. Here, we have found evidence of practices such as contestation, resistance and hybridity transforming conflict into a source of creative innovation. As long-term or periodic contact zones, these spaces have had the potential to act as gateways to the acceptance of diversity, by fostering familiarity based on difference, even if they were subject to disruption and closure at key historical moments.

We explore these contact zones through the lens of Romani lives – lives, as we put it, beyond stereotypes. In each of the 12 main chapters we consider the careers of named individuals and the ways in which they changed the world around them. Part One offers examples of Romani intellectuals and representatives whose actions have served to open up the space of European citizenship, calling for the reconsideration, expansion and enrichment of

traditional civic categories. Separate chapters analyse the life and work of Spanish artist and labour activist Helios Gómez (1905–56), Canadian writer, educator and activist Ronald Lee (1934–2020) and French poet and novelist Sandra Jayat (1939?–), each of whom took part in shared struggles to make space for Roma in the public sphere while also reflecting on what it means to be Roma. Part Two focuses on the people who were part of the Romani presence at horse fairs, a presence which often involved performances of various kinds as well as the buying and selling of horses (which was itself highly performative). The first of the three chapters uses the case of England’s Brough Hill fair as the jumping-off point for a study of how their presence shaped the physical and imaginative space of the fair. Two more focus on German families and their twentieth-century representatives, Christlieb Laubinger and Reinhard Florian. They both tell of lives in which unexpected forms of activism grew out of different experiences of discrimination: the travelling Laubingers responded to intensified police pressure by joining a mass emigration, or “invasion”, which took them from itinerant trading in Germany to the showgrounds and horse fairs of Scotland and England, while Reinhard Florian survived the Nazi persecution of a settled and integrated Romani community and deployed the skills he learned from his horse-dealing father to become an activist for Romani rights and memory. Part Three illuminates the role of Roma as composers and performers of music in Central and Eastern Europe. Two of the chapters draw on sketches of individual soloists and impresarios to give focus to collective accounts of historical musicianship – Hungarian virtuosi and Romanian ensembles, respectively. The third chapter recounts the life of the legendary Polish street violinist Cororo, whose performances shaped the sonic experience of Kraków’s urban space. Travelling shows and circuses are at the centre of Part Four. Each of its chapters illustrates how the skills of adaptation and communication that these occupations called for equipped Roma to make an impact: as pioneers of cinema like the Gurêmes, Braccos and Biddalls bringing “the world within one’s grasp”, as showmen like the Bossles delivering exotic cultures and sensational popular science to the provinces, or like Raymond Gurême, evading capture to join the resistance to Nazism.

The reasons for focusing on lives have to do both with our own approach to historical understanding and narrative strategies and with what we want readers to take away from the book. It is most often through accounts of individual lives that we are able to make visible both the complex social and institutional processes that make people “marginal” and the everyday dynamics that nevertheless allow them to take meaningful action and control over their lives.² Moreover, putting faces to a complex history is important for a book which we hope will be read by non-specialists and used by activists and teachers.

2 Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Something else that becomes clear when we are able to see people's lives in fine detail and in the round is that Roma are always more than Roma. They are men or women; they are artists or writers, craftsmen or businesspeople or – more often than not in modern Europe – members of the working class, the rural poor, a local underclass; they are able-bodied or, like Corro, disabled. Notoriously, some travel for a living and some do not. Especially for those who suffer from double disadvantage, this can mean they present the biographer with familiar challenges in intensified form. At many points we have had to acknowledge that in the case of Romani subjects the conventional approach to writing “biographies” faces real conceptual and practical problems. To be sure, as these chapters show, the range of experiences of Romani groups and their scope for action has historically been very wide and continues to be so. As a result, our subjects include prominent public and cultural actors who have left their own archives of their lives – published and unpublished letters, diaries and memoirs, records of performances, business records. Such are the activists and artists profiled in Part One, many of the musicians whose careers are charted in Part Three and some of the circus entrepreneurs and showpeople who populate Part Four. But among our subjects are also people whose presence in the everyday lives of their society is recorded only through the eyes of the police and other state authorities, who often figure in accounts by non-Romanies as anonymous members of a group (of travellers or performers) and whose identity was traditionally defined in terms of family belonging rather than individual achievement. This calls for a variety of research and narrative strategies, as well as for reflection on what it means to reconstruct radically subaltern lives. It can mean digging deeper to mine underused sources, or giving a new kind of attention to the silences of the record (as in Chapter 4).

Among the heroes of their own lives who appear in these pages are also some of the many Roma whom we encounter first and most insistently at the moment of their destruction, as victims of the twentieth-century genocide that reached its peak in the Second World War. The lives of Sandra Jayat, Christlieb Laubinger, Reinhard Florian, Raymond Gurême and the Bougliones all stand in the shadow of the Holocaust, whose local dimensions and individual effects are discussed in the respective parts. The murder of hundreds of thousands and the forced sterilization of thousands more, carried out in Nazi Germany and its allied and occupied states, destroyed family archives and broke the chain of orally transmitted family histories, making biographical research difficult. Paradoxically, nevertheless, the fact that “Gypsies” were the largest single group after the Jews subject to the Nazis’ genocidal policies has placed a people long thought to be outside of history at the centre of Europe’s key historical trauma.³ It

3 Katie Trumpener, “A ‘People without History’ in the Narratives of the West”, *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992): 843–84.

is this that has drawn the attention of many scholars to Romani history in the past 30 years, if too often in the spirit of reinscribing the character of Roma as victims of history. But it was also the Holocaust experience and especially their fight for recognition and compensation after 1945 that impelled Europe's Roma to articulate their place as a people in Europe and in its history.

Beyond those individual stories in which the Holocaust plays a direct part, then, the experience and memory of genocide is present everywhere in this volume, inasmuch as it was a turning point in the construction of a modern Romani identity: the Holocaust – the experience, the fight for recognition of the victims, the symbolic burden and capital that it implies – has been decisive in the formation of the current self-perception of the Roma as a transnational people in Europe. Even though there were precedents in the interwar period, this process really started with the first initiatives of Roma activists (and supporters) in the 1960s, who began to picture their fight for recognition and their demand for rights in terms of an ethnic collective identity.⁴

That is, it was in the light of the genocide that Roma began to provide their own answers to the question that has in some sense been at the base of all published accounts of their life and history: Who are the Roma? This remains a meaningful question for us as historians. It is not our purpose in this publication to answer it, but we nevertheless have to recognize the paradox that while (as above) we acknowledge the great variety of Romani life and culture we nevertheless want to give an account of experiences and practices that they have in common and that allow us to speak of a “Romani contribution” to European culture. Their own answer, the construction of a Roma identity felt and claimed as a collectively owned reality, is directly linked to a rejection of the consequences of a racial policy, that of Nazism, that rested on a constructed anti-identity: the idea that the “Gypsies” everywhere in Europe shared an indelible character that determined (in this case for the worse) their social conduct. But that involves a second paradox, which is also hinted at in places in this book. The modern construction of a Roma identity from the inside out arises from the rejection of this other-definition, the racial reification of the so-called “Gypsies”; but, at the same time, it involves a mirroring search for the group's particular and shared qualities, now understood in terms of culture and ethnicity.

In varying versions, this operation of reducing and essentializing a collective identity has historically been a necessary condition for the emergence of organized protest within social groups placed in subaltern positions, as the case of the women's movement clearly shows. It triggers

4 Sławomir Kapralski, “The Consequences of the Genocide for Romani Memories and Identities”, in *The Legacies of the Romani Genocide in Europe since 1945*, ed. Celia Donert and Eve Rosenhaft (London: Routledge, 2021), 284–303.

an identity turn, one that produces a sense of community which makes it possible to imagine an agenda around common interests. It is understandable, therefore, that this same reaction has occurred among the Roma.

In this case, though, the affirmation of collective identity has had to prevail over an especially dense and powerful discourse, in which the majority society has represented the “Gypsies” over the centuries as the essence of otherness, outsiders who are particularly disturbing among the wide panoply of inner enemies imagined by Western culture because they are, after all, insiders. With all its systems of representation – which recur as the backdrop in the contributions of this book – this discourse evolved throughout the modern age from exotic stereotypes to racialization, climaxing in that scientific-police version of “Gypsy” as an enemy of the civilized society that was the basis of the Nazi genocide. This is perhaps the most complete othering achieved by modern Western culture, and Romani scholars were among the first to acknowledge how difficult it is to dismantle.⁵

The power and pervasiveness of these imaginings of “Gypsies” have posed challenges to us, too, as we set out to think and write about real Roma, and the challenges are compounded by the uniquely important role that scholars and scientists not unlike ourselves have historically played in this process of stereotyping. For generations, “Gypsyologists” working in a variety of disciplines laboured to produce a normative image of the “true Gypsies”, appropriating the right to define what it means to be Roma in the name of expert knowledge. The Gypsyologist tradition, which emerged in Britain in the nineteenth century and bound together an international network of researchers from different disciplines, was particularly influential, not least because its proponents often displayed sympathy and affection for their subjects.⁶ Some of the problems inherent in the filtering of the Romani experience through the Gypsyologist lens are discussed by Tamara West in Chapter 4. The system of racial categorization to which “Gypsies” were subject in Nazi Germany was the work of men and women who called themselves scientists.⁷

It was only at the end of the twentieth century that scholars began to call for a critique of research traditions and practices as they applied to the Roma, and this was a decisive turn.⁸ This called for taking a fresh view of

5 Ian Hancock, *Danger! Educated Gypsy: Selected Essays* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010).

6 A sharp analysis is offered in Ken Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsyism”, *Social Analysis* 44, no. 2 (November 2000): 129–65.

7 Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 246–62.

8 Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to the Final Solution*, trans. Don Bloch (London and Portland, ME: Frank Cass, 1997); David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities, 1500–2000: From Egyptians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2004).

our own scholarly attitudes, as we revisited and deconstructed the mentality of the majority societies in which we were educated. Typically, earlier generations of scholars had been satisfied to deplore the persistent stigmatization and persecution of “Gypsies” while reinforcing conceptions of their otherness. Instead, critical Romani studies foregrounds the ways in which the whole complex of institutions and practices that define mainstream society works to maintain a notion of “Gypsiness” that reinforces prejudice and legitimates exclusion. In this reading the Roma have been the object of a cultural, legal and political project driven by the need to elaborate a perfect outsider character that acts as a foil to the dominant models of insider identity. Thus, the Romani “other” encapsulates the fears of a society that considers itself “civilized” and assigns disruptive tendencies – nomadism as a way of life, absence of patriotic identity or economic discipline, primitivism, sexual promiscuity and so on – to what is actually a heterogeneous range of social minorities.

This new critical approach calls not only for the insistent interrogation of stereotypes (which is actually the study of the majority) but for approaches that place the Romani subjects, their experience and their agency, at the centre of analysis. That is what this book seeks to achieve, but it involves challenges of its own. On the one hand, there is the practical difficulty that we have already mentioned, of recovering from the archives the traces of historical subjects who have remained invisible for centuries behind a thick layer of stereotypes, and/or have deliberately avoided appearing in the public record in order to escape stigmatization. But, on the other hand, there is a more difficult ethical challenge: we must avoid reproducing stereotypes when, in exploring Roma identity and culture, we identify markers or practices that we are tempted to characterize as “distinctive traits”. This – whoever it comes from – would simply be a more sophisticated way of objectifying and reducing Romani senses of belonging that actually sustain very diverse, fluid and versatile social realities. These two kinds of difficulties – methodological and ethical – frequently overlap. For instance, how can and how *may* we speak, as this book aims to do, about Romani contributions to European culture, when in some cases the people making those contributions would rather not draw attention to their Romani background, as a legitimate self-protection strategy? For this reason, all the chapters in this book constantly remind the reader about the relations of power inequality in which Romani actors have historically had to create themselves in contact with mainstream society.

In this sense, reflecting on the question of identity (Who are the Roma?) and how we deploy it in this book is closely allied to the work of identifying Romani agency – the question What do/can Roma do? – which is central to our project. We start from a notion of identity as a shifting, fluid and open sociocultural construction, in which political and cultural elements merge, the individual and the collective interact, and the public and the private connect. These are processes that involve both

the positive definition of an “I/we” and the creation of images of alterity for the “others”, and can involve internalization and adaptation, as well as rejection or avoidance. Scholars of colonial relations have described best how members of a colonized group incorporate into their self-perception some traces of otherness imposed by the dominant, colonial gaze. Hybridity is the term that critics have developed for this creative power of combining own and other identity, which also characterizes internal subaltern groups and racialized minorities like the Roma.⁹ It implies a capacity to move or translate between cultures, and can be used in the analysis of collective images and self-images. But hybridity also invites us to recognize that identity is a matter of material possibilities. In this sense, as Joep Leerssen puts it, “identity is not about one’s given place, but about one’s position, imposed or chosen”.¹⁰

Imposed or chosen: this opens up a wide range of possibilities for the historical subject but also for the historian. Identity works in two ways in this book. We try here not to take a vision of Romani identity as the starting point for research; rather, we conceive it as our horizon or the point of arrival. This is most apparent in Part One, where we explore how individuals have worked to devise and articulate in new ways what it means to be Roma. At the same time, all the chapters share the premise that identity cannot explain the histories we are describing, because it has itself been historically constructed in ways that hide the traces of the fabrication process. One of the things we are doing here is to follow those traces and expose that process, which is as much social as individual, as much material as intellectual.

We imagine this book, then, as one that may illuminate dark corners of the past and present of the Romani people in Europe as well as of European history as a whole – integrating “mainstream” history into Romani history and vice versa. We can see new dimensions of Romani agency when we understand that (even) identity is a process whose subjects are active agents with the ability to refashion and redeploy stereotypes and the capacity to generate new cultural references for the community. This creativity takes place in contact zones where Roma as historical subjects have not chosen their position; consequently, they have fewer resources than those who operate inside (and are favoured by) the dominant cultural framework.¹¹ But even in these disadvantageous contexts, their actions give rise to cultural exchanges and contributions that have created and enriched Europe’s public spaces and continue to do so.

9 The idea of colonial hybridity was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

10 Joep Leerssen: “Identity/Alterity/Hybridity”, in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 335–42 (here 340–41).

11 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

The term “contribution” could imply treating Romani groups and individuals as either heroes or secondary participants in the life-worlds that they share with people who are not Roma. We have tried to avoid both of those pitfalls. Rather, we look for “contributions” in defiance of complacent expectations that Roma are or have been absent from those spaces, or that their presence has been essentially disruptive or subversive. In fact, co-production would be a better term than contribution. Our purpose, again, is not simply or primarily to erode negative stereotypes by counterposing the positive roles of Romani European citizens. Rather, the case studies that follow call into question those stereotypes productively by showing how artificial (and thus changeable) are both the spaces “assigned” to Romani minorities and the presumptions about their collective identity.

Our attention focuses, then, on the spaces where the exchanges between Roma and non-Roma make it possible to appreciate the capacity of the former for agency, in multiple senses. One of these is the ability to withstand cultural colonization and to preserve what is perceived as traditional in the community, but at the same time to actively adapt. Romani economic strategies shaped the horse fairs described in Part Two and Part Three’s musical arenas as public spaces inconceivable without a Romani-“Gypsy” presence, and, as Part Four shows, gave Romani showpeople a dynamic role in the dissemination of new cultural technologies. Another is their day-to-day implementation of strategies for modulating their self-presentation as Roma-“Gypsy”, depending on the context, which we can see operating in an especially dramatic way at critical moments like border-crossing (Chapter 5), but can be also identified in numerous episodes in the everyday life of Romani communities, when read against the grain.¹² Likewise, attention to the space of politics, which is the theme of Part One, allows us to appreciate the agency involved both in formulating an ethnic collective identity as a platform for activism demanding rights and recognition and in establishing the contacts and exchanges with other kinds of sociopolitical movements that inspire the formulation of new concepts of citizenship itself.

Within these contact zones, then, places at once conflictual and creative, we can see the enormous variety and versatility of ways “to be” Roma, ways of being that are often consciously *performed*. Bearing in mind the underlying and persistent inequalities of power that shape spaces of contact, our framework can explain both those strategies of performing identity that take advantage of exotic topoi and, by contrast, those which seek to erase or suppress a highly problematic ethnic label. This applies not only to narrowly

12 An example of the flexibility of “identity” in interactions between Roma and state authorities, here in the context of migration controls, can be found in Adèle Sutre, “‘Are you a Gypsy?’ L’identification des tsiganes à la frontière américaine au tournant du XXe siècle”, *Migrations Société* 26, no. 152 (2014): 57–73.

economic strategies which aim to create opportunities in the world of work or commerce, or to conventional political strategies which serve the demand for collective rights. The chapters below also illustrate the hard work of searching for an individual identity – a discursive construction of the self looking for a place in the world – that draws on resources common to the community but at the same time branches into countless personal variations. From this point of view, our decision to take a broadly biographical approach to our study of European Roma has borne fruit. Applied to an individual, a family, a group, a generation, the biographical approach makes it possible to study social phenomena in a modest and (hand)crafted way, without taking too much for granted, analysing the life strategies that all human beings develop and the practices of self-reflection, self-awareness, self-representation and self-positioning that allow us to subjectively think the world and our place in it.

In this and other ways, the contributors to this volume, all academic scholars, hope that we have succeeded in pointing out new directions and provoking new questions for future research. One of the purposes of the collaboration that produced it was to test the possibilities of bringing together a range of national histories and of different disciplinary approaches to tell a pan-European story through the medium of life narratives. Four teams – one each from Spain, Britain, Poland and Finland – looking at examples from nine countries approached their subjects using a range of disciplinary tools: literary criticism, musicology, visual anthropology, participant observation, critical archival research. What we share is a *historical* perspective, which at the start forced us to be focused on change and transformation and accordingly both deliberately subversive of the positivism of the old social sciences and optimistic for the future. We are optimistic, among other things, that the kind of detailed research that we have done has opened up new questions and shown new possibilities for seeing and understanding Roma as subjects of their own history.

We are also optimistic about the possibility that the conditions of prejudice and marginalization that frame these Romani lives can change. By helping to denaturalize the conditions of the present, reflection on the past can contribute to this. Indeed, the evidence we offer that the physical and cultural border-crossing practised by Romani men and women past and present can be considered in terms of its impacts on shared European cultures – that these eternal outsiders were always insiders – may have something to tell us about the experiences of other minorities and the ways in which cultural diversity shapes public spaces more generally. But that depends on a second move on the part of scholars: widening the conversation to include both members of Romani communities and the wider non-Romani public. All of the stories we tell here are the product of active engagement with Romani actors: those chapters that rely mainly on archival sources involve close attention to the voices of the Roma as they emerge from the sources, and the authors have learned from the advice

of the children and grandchildren of our subjects. The chapters that focus on the recent past all involve a degree of what is called co-production, the active participation of the Romani subjects in making the narrative, by providing interviews, inviting researchers into their homes and workplaces, and commenting on drafts. These stories belong first of all to them, and their contribution to the project belies the idea, still propagated by some scholars, that Romani communities have no interest in their own history.¹³

At the same time, this book seeks an audience beyond either the scholarly or the Romani community. We have tried to adopt an approach and structure that make the book accessible to readers without a specialist knowledge of Romani studies. The introductions to each part provide basic background and context while also explaining the authors' aims and some of the challenges they have faced in doing their research. We have also made a point of trying to produce engaging narratives (not always easy for scholars) which will help readers to see the Romani experience as part of a *shared* history. For readers who want to take their own research further, we have provided references in each chapter, and there is a select general bibliography of English-language publications at the end of the volume.

Finally, we need to explain our use of terms. Over the 600 years in which Romani groups have lived in Central and Western Europe, a wide range of words has been used to name and characterize them, the most common of which were not their own but invented by the majority communities. Those terms which remain part of everyday speech and cultural idiom in Europe – Gypsy, *Zigeuner*, *Gitane*, etc. – are widely (though not universally) rejected by Roma themselves as insulting and discriminatory. As authors who come from very diverse backgrounds and fields of specialization, who speak and write different languages and who are working with sources in a still wider variety of languages, we have had to negotiate challenges both ethico-political and linguistic in finding ways to speak about our subjects that are both respectful and meaningful in their respective historical and cultural contexts. The introductions to the four parts of the book explain the options taken in each based on the specificities of topic and place. Bridging the four parts, the authors follow a series of common criteria. We have generally used the terms “Roma” (noun) and “Romani” (adjective) in our own writing. Although we are aware that they are not uncontroversial and that there are other legitimate options, we are following the guidelines of the First International Romani Congress held in London in 1971 here. Roma/Romani are internationally recognized autonyms (names given by the people to themselves). At the same time, we are bound to acknowledge

13 A reflection on this issue may be found in María Sierra, “Historia gitana: enfrentarse a la maldición de George Borrow”, *Ayer* 2019 (2018): 351–65. On the principle and politics of co-production, see *Nothing about Us without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production*, special issue of *Roma Rights* 2 (2015).

the plurality of Romani lives and cultures, and so we sometimes speak of Roma minorities, Roma communities, etc., to reflect the variety of historical realities widely accepted by the Roma themselves. Similarly, we use “Manouche”, “Kalderash”, “Sinti”, “Gitano” as appropriate to designate specific individuals or groups – speakers of particular dialects of the shared Romani language (or of none), members of particular traditional trades, adherents of particular versions of shared cultural practices – in their respective national and regional contexts. By contrast, “Gypsy” (*Zigeuner*, *Gitane*, etc.) is used only when quoting historical sources or when the Romani actors themselves use that self-identification, contextualizing the speaker’s intention.¹⁴

There are also Romani terms for non-Roma that occur occasionally in these chapters: *gadje*, *gorgio*, *payo* and others. Here, too, we use them when quoting or paraphrasing Romani actors.¹⁵ Finally, the mini Tower of Babel that is our collaboration faced us with some real challenges of translation. One of the most problematic traits assigned as a stereotype to the Roma, nomadism, called for a special terminological hygiene. While in English and German “nomad” is understood as a misrepresentation of the nature of Romani travelling with implications of inborn rootlessness, in French it is unavoidable as an administrative category in widespread use and in Spanish it is used as mere adjective – without pejorative overtones – to describe a non-sedentary lifestyle. Consequently, we have chosen not to use the term “nomads” (except in French – *nomades*) preferring terms such as “itinerant”, “ambulant” or “travelling” to refer to mobility (beyond the fact that, moreover, “Traveller” is a specifically British self-designation employed in this book). This is just one example of the self-critical vigilance that our academic and linguistic diversity as authors has reinforced, as we worked to be consistent with the ultimate objectives of this book – another effect of the denaturalization inherent in history as a discipline.

14 For an introduction to these questions, see Yaron Matras, *The Romani Gypsies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 2015), 15–24.

15 We are grateful for the inspiration provided by Romani cultural activist Miguel Ángel Vargas for helping us to contextualize this lexical space.

Part One

Politics

Introduction

The Spaces of Politics: Roma Experiences of Citizenship

María Sierra

Among the many clichés that have circulated about the Romani people and are still repeated today is the one about their supposed indifference towards the space of politics, understood as one of the key spheres of Western modernity. Quite apart from the fact that the notion of Western modernity as a cultural paradigm is itself problematic, this cliché is merely the extension of a common prejudice that has long considered “Gypsies” as archaic beings, detached from advanced forms of social organization. It is a view well embedded in the received wisdom of European- (and American-) majority societies and manifested in a set of stigmatizing statements that have long been present in anti-Gypsy discourses: that they are subjects on the fringes of the law, if not downright criminals, not to mention unproductive, incapable of living in accordance with group norms, inward-looking and resistant to change. According to the best known “Gypsyologist” of all time, the famous British traveller and writer George Borrow, the line that separates the Roma from the rest of society cannot be erased, bearing in mind that the former are “a sect or caste [...] who have no love and no affection beyond their own race; who are capable of making great sacrifices for each other, and who gladly prey upon all the rest of the human species, whom they detest, and by whom they are hated and despised”.¹

¹ George Borrow, *The Zingali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain* (London: John Murray, 1841), 3–4.

There have been readings of the dividing line traced by Borrow, expressed here in emotional terms, in all areas of European life: economic activity, social relations, cultural spaces and, of course, the political sphere too. In the latter, and always following the stereotype, the Romani people only obey their own internal laws and played no part in the historical process of constructing modern citizenship. By perpetuating their traditional clan system of self-government, the Roma could not even be thought of as agents of political change in any universal sense. A century after Borrow, another expert on Romanies, the French abbot André Barthelemy, was convinced that there were limiting conditions to this possibility. Such was the weight of “their lack of education, their spirit of independence, their nomadism” that they were incapable of thinking about organizing themselves as a nation or following a leader of their own.²

Borrow would certainly never have contemplated the possibility, but Barthelemy was in reality witnessing the maturation of a Romani political movement, not only in France, but in other European countries, and even offshoots in America. His words too expressed rejection, reflecting his fear and apprehension at the thought of those he regarded as subalterns subject to tutelage having autonomy with political consequences. The birth and consolidation of this political movement, while long neglected by specialists in political history and political science, is now becoming better known, thanks to the work of scholars who have shown how the Roma asserted their rights when the world was divided into blocs during the Cold War.³ Following in the wake of these scholars, the main aim of Part One of this book is to go beyond the space of stereotypes to offer a brief but substantial selection of the ways in which the Roma have participated in the historical process of fighting for recognition and the expansion of citizens’ rights, a process – with all its limitations and conflicts – that has characterized the protean “short twentieth century”.⁴ Furthermore, the contributors to this

2 “leur inculture, leur esprit d’indépendance, leur nomadisme, les empêchent de se créer une patrie ou d’accepter l’autorité d’un chef” (*Le Figaro*, 18 May 1971).

3 Some of the key references for the spaces dealt with here are: Jean-Pierre Liégeois, “Naissance du pouvoir tsigane”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 16 (1975): 295–316; Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Thomas Acton and Ilona Klimová-Alexander, “The International Romani Union: An East European Answer to West European Questions?”, in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 157–226.

4 Following the term coined by Eric Hobsbawm to define the period from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

book have set out to approach the subject from innovative points of view, in order to offer not only new information arising from their research, but also rich and complex interpretations of the meanings of Romani political agency in this specific historical context.

To that end, three case studies have been chosen to analyse Romani involvement in the sphere of modern politics, defined here as the set of public spaces, interconnected on various levels and shared with other, non-Romani subjects, where power is exercised, represented and negotiated. These three cases reveal the historical Romani ability to produce political artefacts – ideas, symbols, strategies, images – of universal utility, which have helped to expand the notion of modern citizenship and extend the spectrum of rights that modern citizenship can (and should) accommodate. The three life stories that are discussed in each of the three chapters also provide insights into the complex process of constructing individual and collective identities as they become visible, taking into account their areas of intersection and temporal fluidity so that, ultimately, it is possible to appreciate how much the political, public and “private” spaces overlap. The cases are those of Helios Gómez (1905–56), a Spanish Gitano who was a graphic artist and militant worker in the interwar period; Sandra Jayat (1939?–), a Tzigane of Manouche origin and the author of a body of literary and pictorial work proclaiming the richness of Romani culture in post-war France; and Ronald Lee (1934–2020), a Canadian Rom of Kalderash origin, a political and social activist on both sides of the Atlantic from the 1960s until his recent death in January 2020.⁵

5 The following terminological choices have been maintained throughout Part One. In general, the preferred terms are “Roma” (noun) and “Romani” (adjective) because, although they are not without controversy, they are self-referential and were chosen with political intent at the First World Romani Congress held in London in 1971. At the same time, the word “Gypsy” is used as part of the historical discourse being analysed, despite its pejorative content. In the case of Ronald Lee, the term “Gypsy” is respected as it was chosen by the writer himself, who used it to define himself and deliberately place himself among the most stigmatized sectors of society during the countercultural movements of the 1960s. For similar reasons, we have preferred to keep the terms used by the other subjects of these studies to refer to themselves and their communities, with cultural and national implications in this case: “Gitano” in the Spanish case, “Tzigane” in the French and “Zingarina” in the Italian; they are the words used by Helios Gómez and Sandra Jayat respectively in their writings and pronouncements; they are also useful as they inform us of the framework of lexical possibilities from which they raised their voices. Finally, “Kalderash”, “Manouche” and “Kalé” are, like “Sinti”, terms for the various historically constituted Romani world communities with generally accepted territorial, cultural and identitarian connotations.

Roma in Politics: General Coordinates and Proper Names

In order to explain why we have opted for the biographical approach, it is necessary to briefly outline the general historical framework of Roma presence within European political space in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the first place, there was a long tradition of institutional, legal and social anti-Gypsyism driven by the European monarchies throughout the modern age, which aimed at the forced assimilation or even the expulsion or annihilation of the Romani populations. Hence the construction of the stereotype of *Gypsies* as a “problem” that majority societies had to deal with goes back a long way. In the nineteenth century, official anti-Gypsyism was legally mitigated in countries with liberal governments whose constitutions were framed in such a way as to protect all citizens equally, at least in theory. Even in these cases, however, traditional anti-Gypsyism not only remained stubbornly embedded in lower-ranking laws but was updated at the level of cultural representations that were accepted by most of society.

With regard to cultural assumptions, the romantic idealization of the “Gypsy world” was compatible with the stigmatization of those labelled as “Gypsies”. In addition, one of the by-products of the prolific scientific development in the late nineteenth century and first third of the twentieth was the creation of racial typologies that consolidated dangerous stereotypes, such as those that described the Roma collectively as archaic, work-shy, amoral and prone to crime. The Nazis used many of these arguments when they included the European Romani population among the targets of their policy of racial cleansing, turning them into genocide victims.⁶

The persecution and harassment of the Roma in modern and contemporary Europe have therefore been transnational phenomena, and the emergence of Romani movements demanding rights for a minority group subject to such protracted ill treatment should be situated against this background. With some early precedents in the last third of the nineteenth century, the Romani associational movement first started to gather momentum in the period between the two world wars, showing particular signs of promise in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe. According to Klímová-Alexander, this was the time when a modern form of associationism arose, increasingly independent and based in ethnic identity, even though some of their initiatives continued to be influenced by non-Romani authorities.⁷ A number of politico-cultural initiatives that came into effect in the decades between the wars sought to defend the

6 Anton Weiss-Wendt, ed., *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013).

7 Ilona Klímová-Alexander, “The Development and Institutionalization of Romani Representation and Administration. Part 2: Beginnings of Modern Institutionalization (Nineteenth Century–World War II)”, *Nationalities Papers* 33, no. 2 (2005): 155–210.

dignity and rights of citizens, as well as the specific culture of various Romani minorities scattered across Europe. These initiatives were quite different in scope and intention and ranged from a brief, exceptional period when the Roma were recognized as a national minority in the USSR to Romani activism in Hungary, the emergence of the “royal dynasty” of the Kwiek family in Poland, which was recognized by the authorities, and Romanian support for an international pan-Romani movement.⁸

The racial persecution by the Nazis all but destroyed the political momentum that had started to build up before the Second World War. Nonetheless, two longer-term effects of this process should be emphasized. The first was the formation of a small but active Romani middle class of professionals, artists and intellectuals, which gave rise to spokespersons who drew attention to the plight of this minority in the press, the theatre, civil associations and so on. They initiated a discourse on ethnic identity to show the general public the situation of a cultural minority that had not obtained recognition as a minority – unlike others defined by religious or territorial criteria – after the First World War. Although the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis destroyed that social fabric, some elements of that discourse would be recovered later.

The second effect, related to the first, was that the initial phase of Romani organization during the interwar period can be understood in terms of a reservoir of political symbols attributable to a distinct Romani cultural identity that could be drawn upon later (among them, the notion of *Romanestan* itself).⁹ In the period following the Second World War, the resurgence of this Romani movement proved to be an exceptionally challenging process, not only because the previous associative fabric had been destroyed, but also because of the general persistence of negative attitudes to “Gypsies” across Europe.¹⁰

Despite the difficulties, there were people, before and after the war, who were bold enough to use the label of “Gypsy” as a watchtower from

8 Will Guy, ed., *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001); David M. Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies in Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romany Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (London: Duke University Press, 2000).

9 María Sierra, “Creating Romanestan: A Place to be a Gypsy in Post-Nazi Europe”, *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2019), 272–92.

10 The first post-war organizations were developed in countries like Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, where the new communist authorities initially shared the idea of ethnic harmony in a multi-ethnic state and delayed the policies of forced assimilation of the Roma. See Ilona Klímová-Alexander, “The Development and Institutionalization of Romani Representation and Administration. Part 3a: From National Organizations to International Umbrellas (1945–1970) – Romani Mobilization at the National Level”, *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 5 (2006): 599–621.

which to look out into the space of politics. With effort, imagination and commitment, they set about reversing the negative burden that belonging to the Romani minority had traditionally involved, and turning that background into a platform from which to contribute to the construction of shared public spaces. In this first part, we are looking at a productive activity within the space of political activity that can be addressed through biographical history. While it may be particularly difficult to apply such approaches to groups that have historically been subordinated, as noted in the Introduction to this book, in the space of politics it is not only possible but also very effective, because it allows us to contrast the details of individual lives that contradict the stereotypical images, and which can be revealed by means of a wide range of documents. Thus, our approach involves presenting the stories of three people who create discourses that speak to us, loud and clear, of Romani political interest and political imagination. Analysing them in their specific historical contexts will allow us to appreciate the capacity for political agency of a group that is generally looked down upon in the space of modern citizenship.

There is no question here of creating civic heroes, since these biographical profiles do not escape the contradictions inherent in any process of identity construction that addresses public space with political or mobilizing intentions. It would not be fair to the subjects of the biographies themselves, who faced their own personal development in this area of their lives with doubts and self-criticism. Nor is this our understanding of the exercise in historical research offered here; rather than an idealized narrative of a life trajectory that the historian endows *a posteriori* with artificial meaning, biographical history is a complex way of composing the questions and historical account by focusing preferentially on the narrative construction of the self inserted in its specific and changing historical contexts. It aims to understand the process of constructing meanings that all human beings face – the meaning of our lives, the meanings of our environments – and explain it in relation to the framework of material and cultural possibilities in which we are inscribed.¹¹ This sort of biography allows us to transcend the dichotomies between public and private, objective and subjective, self and outside world to offer a more complex explanation of the historical past, in which the social is not just the backdrop or context of the individual, but its very raw material. Meanwhile, the individual – placed in the foreground – reminds us of the openness of history, the plurality of possibilities existing in the past.

With these ideas in mind, in the biographical profiles offered here,

11 Stephen Brooke, “Subjects of Interest: Biography, Politics and Gender History”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société Historique du Canada (JCHA/RSHC)* 21, no. 2 (2010): 21–28; Sabina Loriga, “Écriture biographique et écriture de l’histoire au XIXe et XXe siècles”, *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 42 (2010): 47–71; Isabel Burdiel and Roy Foster, eds, *La historia biográfica en Europa: nuevas perspectivas* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2015).

preference has been given to documents produced by the subjects in question. As well as the manifestos, press articles, novels, short stories, poems, oil paintings, drawings and other personal documents that they produced at different times in their lives, they also turned their hand to various forms of autobiographical writing, and as a result of this documentation, we have been able to recover and give preferential place on many occasions to the first-person voice of the subjects of the biographies. In addition, the use of other documentary sources and methods of critical discourse analysis allows us to properly contextualize these voices. The object of this mixing of sources is not to evaluate their greater or lesser “authenticity” in the sense of their correspondence to “historical truth” – both of which are notions that are as open to manipulation as the purposes of historical writing are varied – but to enrich, from the standpoint of critical coherence, the range of possible interpretative keys within which readers can reach their own conclusions.

Causes and Encounters

The multiple causes to which the three activists who figure here devoted their energies, and the diversity of the individuals and networks they collaborated with, are in themselves indicative of the complexity of the issue at hand. Roma political activism has generally been studied with reference to the autonomous associational movement that emerged in different national contexts in Europe before and after the Second World War. However, as will be seen from the three biographical profiles presented in the following chapters, participation in the public sphere and the politicization of the actions of these historical Roma agents also extended to other causes, which they shared with other, non-Roma activists, and matured within other social movements. In fact, the life of Helios Gómez, which opens this first part, was essentially dedicated to two causes that he understood as being interrelated: the cause of the workers and the cause of anti-fascism. He devoted himself, at great personal risk, to both of these causes during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. It was within this framework that he thought of the rights of the Gitanos, as forming a part – an especially mistreated part – of the great proletariat. As the reader can see in Chapter 1, his commitment to the struggle for social justice, first during the turbulent period of the rise of fascism in Europe, and later after the triumph of Francoism in Spain, marked out for him a destiny of exile and imprisonment that he probably could have avoided had he settled for enjoying his success as an internationally recognized graphic artist. On the journey that took him to Barcelona, Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Leningrad, Helios Gómez wove a network of friendships, collaborations and solidarity with intellectuals and activists dedicated, like himself, to the workers’ cause in Europe between the wars. When Spain became the epicentre of the fight against fascism during the Civil War (1936–39),

his networks were those of his chosen political families, communism and anarchism, with whom he collaborated by turns until the end.

For those Romanians who wanted to raise their voice in the European public sphere after the Second World War, the cause of the fight against anti-Gypsyism – which had led to the Romani genocide – and the demand for specific rights for this minority were priorities that could not be put off any longer, regardless of the path chosen.¹² This was not incompatible with the fact that the Roma cause could be combined with and strengthened in the defence of other causes, however. This was understood and practised by, among others, Sandra Jayat and Ronald Lee, the subjects of chapters 2 and 3. In Lee's case, reflection on the situation of the Roma in his native Canada led him to conceive the alliance of all the wretched of the earth as a challenge, drawing inspiration from Frantz Fanon as well as his own life experiences. The political calling of his concept of the Roma cause became evident in his European period, when he participated in initiatives such as the British Gypsy Council, the Communauté Mondiale Gitane [World Gypsy Community] founded in France and even the preparation of the First World Romani Congress held in London in 1971. His particular interest in what was happening in European centres (such as Strasbourg) where power was negotiated, or the choice of the Council of Europe or the UN as interlocutory institutions for Roma demands were also explicitly political.

At this point, a comparison of his profile with that of his contemporary Sandra Jayat could lead us to the hasty conclusion that her experience and work do not belong to the space of politics. Here we argue just the opposite, starting from an open conception of the political in the sense proposed by Pierre Rosanvallon and Serge Berstein: a space in which the cultural is purely political – and it is so in many ways.¹³ The case of Jayat in fact allows us to explore other ways of combining advocacy for the Roma

12 On the role of the Roma genocide, the reparation of victims and the memory of the Holocaust in the formation of recent Romani identity, see Huub van Baar, "Romani Identity Formation and the Globalization of Holocaust Discourse", *Thamyris/Intersecting* 20 (2010): 115–32; Sławomir Kaprański, "The Memory of Genocide and Contemporary Roma Identities", in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma*, ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 229–51. The role of Romani writing on the Holocaust in the formation of post-war memory and identity, starting with the first publication of Philomena Franz's *Zwischen Liebe und Hass: Ein Zigeunerleben* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), is fundamental. A study of this writing is Marianne Zwicker, "Journeys into Memory: Romani Identity and the Holocaust in Autobiographical Writing by German and Austrian Romanies" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2010), <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/6201> [accessed 12 January 2020].

13 Pierre Rosanvallon, *Pour une histoire conceptuelle du politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2003); Serge Berstein, "L'historien et la culture politique", *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire* 35 (1992): 67–77.

cause with various individual and collective causes, supported by – and at the same time generating – other encounters. Jayat devoted most of her extensive literary and pictorial work to creating a positive image of the Romani people, in an attempt to dismantle the plethora of negative stereotypes that were still in circulation. She found a way out as an artist and, along the way, vindication of Roma culture and the search for a place of her own in the Parisian avant-garde went hand in hand. In her case, the result is eminently political, because she created a discourse that seeks to empower the Romanies, including a reflection on the place of women at the intersection of the categories of race and gender.

In defending their causes, these three activists modulated their voices and launched their strategies in contact with other actors, Roma and non-Roma. Taking into account the common framework of anti-Gypsyism but without settling for a generic or static definition of it, these biographical studies allow us to look at the complex reality of the conflictive environment in which these activists established their social relations. We understand these environments as “contact zones” in the sense proposed by Mary Louise Pratt, that is “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power”.¹⁴ They are simultaneously spaces of confrontation and cultural exchange, of struggle and redefinition of power. The participants engage with unequal resources, but the encounter itself provides opportunities to fight inequality. The social networks woven within these spaces are an important part of this framework of opportunities.

The voice of Helios Gómez, the first of the cases studied here, was based on the international political networks of the working-class movement. Being a Gitano, as we shall see, was not incompatible with being a class-conscious worker, for the common foe of both was fascistic capitalism. In the later cases of Sandra Jayat and Ronald Lee, the Roma/non-Roma divide carries far greater weight, largely as an effect of the Romani Holocaust, but mainly, and above all, because anti-Gypsy harassment continued even after Nazism had been defeated.¹⁵ At the same time, the differences between these two cases bring us into contact with the multiple ways of being Roma in the space of post-war politics. Through her work as a writer and painter, Jayat created a network of contacts that included Romanies active in the world of French culture (the family of Django Reinhardt, Gérard Gartner)

14 A term from the field of linguistics that has passed into the humanities and social sciences, with fertile readings from feminist theory and critical racial studies: Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

15 On what can be considered an all-out pursuit of the victims of the racial politics of the Third Reich, see Sybil Milton, “Persecuting the Survivors: The Continuity of ‘Anti-Gypsyism’ in Postwar Germany and Austria”, in *Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-Speaking Society and Literature*, ed. Susan Tebbutt (New York: Berghahn, 1998), 35–48.

and also prominent non-Romani artists and intellectuals (Jean Cocteau, Marcel Aymé, Marc Chagall). On this basis, she used her voice to denounce her experience of anti-Gypsyism and developed cultural capital out of her past that was recognized by her non-Romani interlocutors. Without denying the conflict, Jayat chose to affirm the possibility of intercultural dialogue and friendship. The coordinates within which the Romani consciousness of Ronald Lee was shaped speak of a different contact zone. In Canada, where those branded as “Negroes”, “Indians”, “commies”, etc. were associated with the “Gypsies” and consigned to the underworld of “undesirable classes”, he found the colonial relationship that the white elites had constructed for all these groups insulting, and in contradiction with the official integrationist political discourse. Lee rebelled against it. In the course of his struggle he established collaborative networks, preferably between European and American Roma (or activists of non-Roma origin but strongly linked to their cause, such as Grattan Puxon). But, in addition, the contact zone of modern politics, with all its asymmetries of power and its burden of conflict, enabled him to imagine other spaces and generate other relationships with the non-Roma that could be used in the struggle for recognition. I refer here to the academic world, which Lee appreciated for its political value: his criticism of the *gadjo* academic system was compatible with his presence in it and the project for a Romani academy, in a tension both conflictive and productive.

Constructing Identity, Imagining Politically

The complexity of these contact zones is revealed in even greater wealth of detail if we focus, lastly, on the processes of identity construction that develop within them. As noted above, studying the past by looking closely at these processes is one of the most attractive potentials of the biographical method. In critical practice, this approach allows us to appreciate the fluid, “constructed” nature of identities, to understand the complementarity of feelings of belonging and to explain the political effects of all this.

The three cases studied here speak of the permeability and mobility of identity boundaries, the compatibility between different collective affiliations in the processes of construction of the self and the margin of action that subjects have to define their own identity. Helios Gómez was and always felt himself to be a revolutionary worker and, from a certain moment in his life, also a Gitano. Sandra Jayat regarded herself as an artist as much as a Tzigane. Ronald Lee constructed himself as a Romani while living as a second-class Canadian. Using the notion of “emotional community” formulated by Barbara Rosenwein, we might propose that the sense of belonging and the same identity configuration that produces it are primarily the result of our emotional coordinates and that we tend to live trying to reconcile the norms and emotional styles of the different communities to

which we feel attached.¹⁶ Since emotions are a human trait, they tend to be understood as seemingly universal and timeless. It is easy to overlook the artificial, changing – not to say changeable – nature of associations based on emotional norms (which, moreover, are closely linked to gender norms). This is the case with groups that we consider to be more natural, such as the family. With others involving associations and identities with more direct readings in public spaces, we are more aware of their sociocultural construction, but tend to ignore the emotional substratum. Taking note of the set of individual and collective identities constructed over a lifetime as the product of emotional work (what William Reddy calls “emotional navigation”) through an open process of attachment to different emotional communities helps us to appreciate not only the complexity of the identity phenomenon in itself, but also the political potential that the cultural shaping of emotion can have.

The identities of the Romani activists whose life stories are told here are not a simple consequence of belonging to a particular community that is assumed to be obvious, but the result of personal choices made out of a sense of political commitment, a commitment to the Roma collective and culture, as well as to other causes. In all three cases, calling themselves “Gypsies” was an act of rebellion with political intent: Gómez emphasized that he was a Gitano from the tragic moment of the Spanish Civil War and made it his emotional refuge in Franco’s prisons. Lee referred to himself as a “Goddam Gypsy”, provocatively assuming the feeling of contempt that this entailed, rather than proceeding to a whitewashing of his ethnic identity to ensure a more comfortable life for himself. Jayat turned her Manouche past into her artistic present. Without erasing problematic episodes – such as her escape from an arranged marriage – she plunged into the affective world of her childhood to create verbal and plastic images of a culture she chose to be associated with.

All processes of identity construction are contradictory in themselves. Defining oneself as a Gypsy, Gitano or Rom implies objectifying some ideal image that fixes and essentializes positions that are much more fluid in reality. This type of cultural operation contains paradoxes, such as using some of the representations created from outside the community with less than noble intentions as part of the panoply of characteristic features of the chosen collective identity. Thus, in drawing attention to the value of Romani culture, Jayat emphasizes such details as the generic love of freedom and empathy with nature, Lee points out that the Gypsy “exists to beat the system”, Gómez elaborates metaphors that identify the

16 Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, *Passions in Context* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–32, <http://www.passionsincontext.de/index.php?id=557> [accessed 12 January 2020]; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Gypsies with Andalusia In other words, they are part of a dialogue with majority society stereotypes about what a “Gypsy” is. As in any other case, in the formation of self-attributed identities, alterity sneaks in through the back door of interpellation to create a wide range of hybridizations.¹⁷ As we know from the history of other social and political movements, it is precisely this process of reduction and symbolic sublimation that lends mobilizing capacity to an identity that is felt to be collective and for which rights are claimed. On more than one occasion, this process has undergone the resignification of images of alterity that were originally composed with the intention to disparage: “anarchist” and “queer” are two examples of pejorative labels that have become self-designations, asserted positively with pride and used defiantly with political intent.

Taking stigmatizing representations and turning them into a public platform from which to speak out and demand rights has been part of the historical process of Roma political mobilization. In the cases studied here, choosing to be identified as Romani/Gypsy/Tzigane was a form of empowerment that lent authority to discourses of protest in the public sphere and promoted political action. The ideas, strategies, images and contact networks put in place have served both to claim the civil rights of a group that has been punished throughout its history and to open up the space of modern politics. In absolute terms, their contribution is obvious, for example in the fight for social justice in general, and in the fight against racism, in particular. When read in relational terms, however, other facets of the presence of these Romani political agents are revealed. The creation of links between their own cause and the causes of other disadvantaged groups, which can be found to varying degrees in each of the three cases studied here in Part One, anticipates postcolonial proposals for decentering modern politics – by undermining common assumptions about its actors, its places, its reasons – and compels a critical reconsideration of this space. Focusing on education as a political tool for change – which Lee emphasized repeatedly and Jayat has pursued to great effect through such powerful means as children’s literature – obliged them to face problems that are of interest to us all, such as the use of our educational systems to perpetuate power relations or the difficulties of articulating cultural diversity within them.

Finally, the imagination of which they have shown themselves capable in managing to raise their voices from places of enunciation reserved for subalterns has enriched the landscape of European politics. Transnational aspirations and the Europe-America connection have prompted formulas such as “Romanestan”, a model that Lee and other fellow travellers invested

17 Joep Leerssen, “Identity/ Alterity/ Hybridity”, in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 335–42.

with such politically attractive components as the deterritorialization of the institutions responsible for ensuring the rights of a collective. Political artefacts demanding freedom of movement across national borders are as necessary today as the anti-fascist internationalism to which Helios Gómez contributed with images that remain intelligible in our present. In both cases, the imaginative boldness of these projects of sociopolitical formulas that were considered utopian at the historical moment of their enunciation should be recovered for future projects, in Europe and globally.

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Chapter 1

Helios Gómez: To be Roma in the Revolution

Juan Pro

The Europe of the interwar period, with its conflicts and upheavals, was the setting for multiple ideological, intellectual and artistic debates, some of which were decisive in defining Europe's identity and, later, the way the world would develop. That labyrinth of ideas and proposals was the world in which Helios Gómez (1905–56), a Spanish graphic artist and militant worker of Romani origin, lived and worked. The richness and originality of his artistic production was on a par with the intensity of his political and social commitment, which exposed him to first-hand knowledge of censorship, persecution, exile, imprisonment and combat in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39. These two dimensions of his life story – artistic creation and social commitment – are lasting legacies that we can reconstruct today, drawing attention to the problematic place that Romani identity occupied in both.

Two features characterized the life of Helios Gómez from the very beginning: on the one hand, the mobility of a person to whom borders meant nothing, which in no way conflicted with his profound love for Spain and the Gitanos, and on the other, the class consciousness of someone who never wanted to be anything other than a worker, a worker-artist and a fighter for the workers' cause. Those were the interwar years and both of these vital characteristics – his mobility and his class consciousness – should be construed within the specific historical context of that Europe, which was so different from the present one. Nevertheless, there are elements of the life and work of Helios Gómez that have

universal value and hold up well as valid testimony across the intervening years right down to the present day.¹

An Artist of the People

Helios Gómez was born in Seville (Andalusia) in 1905 and raised in a family originally from the rural area of Extremadura. This environment provided the elements that shaped his early identity: first, Gitano culture, which flourished in Triana, the neighbourhood where his family settled; second, the ideas of his freethinking father, an anarchist sympathizer; and, lastly, the hard experience of the worker's lot. He started work as an agricultural day labourer when he was a child, then more permanently – possibly at the age of 14 – as a pottery painter at the Cartuja ceramics factory in Seville.² He was undoubtedly more than a craftsman who painted pottery, but a precocious artist, whose social consciousness was sharpened by his experience of the factory.

The first news that we have of his drawings is closely linked to his revolutionary activity. He was arrested, at the age of 16, for taking part – along

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- 1 This explains why Helios Gómez continues to attract the attention of a wide public, in large part thanks to the activity of the Associació Cultural Helios Gómez [Helios Gómez Cultural Association] devoted to the recovery of his memory and promoted by the artist's son, Gabriel Gómez. Apart from academic research, his importance is shown by monographic exhibitions dedicated to him. Some examples are: the Centro de Arte Moderno Julio González in Valencia (1998), the Museu de Granollers, Catalonia (2005), Robres, Aragon (2007), the Biblioteca Arturo Frinzi of the University of Verona, Italy (2009), the Museo de la Autonomía de Andalucía-Casa Museo de Blas Infante de Coria del Río, Sevilla (2010), the Espace Robespierre in Ivry-sur-Seine, France (2010), the Espace Niemeyer in Paris, the Headquarters of the French Communist Party (2010), the Douarnenez Film Festival, France (2012), the Château Royal of Collioure, France (2013), the Museo Memorial de l'Exili, La Jonquera, Catalonia (2014), the headquarters of the Cervantes Institutes in Munich and Hamburg, Germany (2016), the House of the History of the Ruhr Area/Haus der Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets in Bochum, Germany (2017), the Image Centre La Virreina in Barcelona (2020–21) and so on, besides collective exhibitions also showing works by Gómez at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico, the Centro Recoletos in Buenos Aires, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Musée des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Luxembourg, the Institut d'Histoire Ouvrière, Économique et Sociale of Seraing (Belgium), etc. There have also been two documentary films: *Días de Ira: Helios Gómez 1905–1956* (directed by Felipe González Rodero, 1998) and *Helios Gómez: tinta y munición* (directed by Pilar Távora, 2019).
 - 2 Gabriel Gómez Plana and Caroline Mignot, "Seis naranjas y tres granadas: vida y sueño de un artista comprometido", in *Helios Gómez. Dibujo en acción, 1905–1956* (Seville: Centro Estudios Andaluces, 2010), 16–17.

with a large group of women workers, many of whom were Gitanas – in a popular attempt to storm the *cárcel del Pópulo* [Populo Prison] in Seville and free the prisoners. When the police searched Gómez, they seized “a water-colour plan of the jail and the immediate surrounding streets, with everything numbered; a notebook explaining the numbering and another small notebook with many names and notes”.³ From that time on, carrying out the Revolution and drawing were the two sides of an intense life that seemed to repeat the same idea for another 30 years: drawing in order to trace the path of freedom for the people, and ending up, as on that first occasion, in prison.

He received some artistic education of an academic kind, since he attended classes in the Industrial School for Arts and Crafts in Seville, as well as taking evening classes in the School of Fine Arts (with less than stellar grades, incidentally). Nevertheless, the first biographer and scholar of Helios’s work, the German art historian Ursula Tjaden, argues that he did not acquire the representative elements of his style as a result of that early training, but from other more subtle sources of inspiration, such as the wrought ironwork tradition, which was a common trade in Triana at the time, mainly practised by Gitano craftsmen, and Helios undoubtedly had first-hand knowledge of it. After that would come contact with other artists who did things that were very different from the classic models and academicism that was taught in the evening classes he had attended.⁴

The fact that Helios was good at drawing induced him to leave the Cartuja ceramics factory to start illustrating printed works when he was still very young. The first was called *Oro molido* [Rolled Gold], by Felipe Alaiz, an anarchist writer from Aragon who was in Seville to edit the newspaper

3 Pedro G. Romero, “Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen”, in *Helios Gómez. Dibujo en acción, 1905–1956* (Seville: Centro Estudios Andaluces, 2010), 25.

4 Ursula Tjaden, *Helios Gómez: artista de corbata roja* (Tafalla: Txalaparta, 1996), 19–21. After Ursula Tjaden’s initial study, *Das grafische Werk von Helios Gómez: eine Untersuchung zur politisch-engagierten Kunst Spaniens in den 20er/30er Jahren* (Munich: Scaneg, 1993), came a series of others by the artist’s son, Gabriel Gómez, together with the historian Caroline Mignot, who have gradually revealed and disseminated aspects of the life of Helios Gómez, for example in Gabriel Gómez and Caroline Mignot, *Visca Octubre: el front de l’art* (Granollers: Museu de Granollers – Associació Cultural Helios Gómez, 2005); Gabriel Gómez and Caroline Mignot, *La revolución gráfica* (Barcelona: Associació Cultural Helios Gómez – Associació Catalana d’Investigacions Marxistes, 2009); Gabriel Gómez and Caroline Mignot, *Helios Gómez. Poemas de lucha y sueño* (Barcelona: ACHG-Memorial Democràtic, 2010); and Gabriel Gómez Plana, *Un gitanillo en la Ciudad de los Muchachos (las generaciones perdidas)* (Barcelona: Associació Cultural Helios Gómez, 2020). Subsequently, the figure of Helios Gómez has been analysed, with an emphasis on the utopian dimension of his political activism, by María Sierra, “Helios Gómez: la invisibilidad de la revolución gitana”, *Historia y Política* 40 (2018): 83–114.



Fig. 1 Helios Gómez in front of his works at the Kursaal futurist exhibition in Seville. Published in *La Unión*, 11 July 1925. (Hemeroteca Municipal de Sevilla)

Solidaridad Obrera [Workers' Solidarity].⁵ Alaiz had many connections in the avant-garde, such as Rafael Barradas, Joaquín Torres-García, Salvador Dalí and Robert and Sonia Delaunay.⁶ At 18, therefore, Helios Gómez came of age, so to speak, three times: with that first illustrated book, by joining

5 Felipe Alaiz, *Oro molido* (Seville: Barral, 1923).

6 Romero, "Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen", 27; Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 73.

the ranks of the anarchist union, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo [CNT, National Confederation of Labour], and through the coup d'état of General Primo de Rivera. Primo de Rivera ended the constitutional system in Spain and instituted a military dictatorship, clamping down especially on the anarchists, which helped create the climate of clandestine revolutionary activity and intellectual fervour that finally defined Gómez's personality.

He took the first step in this process initially without leaving Seville – which was torn at that time between the weight of tradition and the dynamism of the modern movements – by starting to frequent places, the Kursaal Cabaret in particular, where he was able to find nonconformist intellectual life. The Kursaal Cabaret was a rendezvous for intellectual and artistic bohemians and Gómez held his first and only exhibition in Seville there in 1925. That *café chantant* must have provided a suitable environment to develop his concerns, because the three elements that later marked his personality converged there:⁷ first, the intellectual and artistic avant-gardes, who met in the private rooms (where Ultraist soirées centring on magazines such as *Grecia*, *Gran Guiñol* and *Mediodía* were held); second, revolutionary political activism, particularly anarchism, since different labour groupings of that tendency used to meet on the upper floor; finally, there was also a Gitano presence, in the form of flamenco, since important musical performances by leading artistes such as Pastora Imperio and Niña de los Peines were held in the main hall. It is assumed that the young Helios Gómez was personally acquainted with all three milieus. During that period, there was also the influence of the Ultraist visual artist from Argentina, Norah Borges (sister of Jorge Luis Borges).

A Travelling Artist

His ambitions, nevertheless, called for a wider audience and a bigger world. As soon as he could, Gómez took the leap and went to Madrid and Barcelona, two larger cities in which to put his skill as an artist to the test and connect with high-flying intellectuals. In 1926, he held exhibitions in Spain's two major cities. Immediately afterwards, in 1927, he took another leap, this time to the main European centres of the artistic avant-garde in the interwar period, namely Paris and Berlin. Gómez advanced his education by actively seeking out the most innovative intellectual and artistic currents in Europe in order to absorb their teaching and offer whatever his own creative personality could contribute.

He rapidly moved up towards the main European centres of artistic innovation and revolutionary struggle without giving the slightest thought to the political, linguistic or cultural barriers facing someone whose formal

7 As Romero points out in "Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen", 26.

education and training was limited, and largely self-taught. The fact is, though, that every move Gómez made was made in response to specific circumstances. His initial departure from Spain during the dictatorship was due to the police persecuting him for his militant anarcho-syndicalism.

In Paris, he found refuge among the networks of Spanish exiles, with whom he collaborated on the magazines they published, *Tiempos Nuevos* [New Times] and *Rebelión* [Rebellion], to keep the struggle against the dictatorship alive and to collect funds to help political prisoners. He also showed his work in the art galleries of Saint-Michel and Montmartre. Expelled from France in 1928 for taking part in the demonstrations against the execution of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States (a subject he even wrote a poem about), he settled temporarily in Brussels and then in Berlin. In each of these places he continued to work as a graphic artist, making his mark in newspapers such as *Vendredi* [Friday] in France, *La Renaissance d'Occident* [The Western Renaissance] in Belgium, or the *Berliner Tageblatt* [Berlin Daily] in Germany. He also illustrated a theatre play by Max Deauville, *Rien qu'un homme* [Just a Man, 1928] and collaborated with the Rote Hilfe Deutschlands [German Red Aid], the German branch of the internationalist social service.

By that time, he had achieved his own style, straddling the lines between futurism, cubism and expressionism, and was well received as an artist. He had picked up several influences, assimilated them and allowed them to mature through his contact with the European avant-gardes of the 1920s. The popular themes that he treated in his early days increasingly gave way to social and political agitation. His artistic interest soon focused on the graphic arts, drawing and woodcuts, which were fundamental in the communication media in those years of the rise of propaganda. In Germany, he perfected his technique by studying printing and layout.

Even so, it was not easy for him to earn a living. He managed to do so with occasional contributions as an illustrator to newspapers and magazines, and also by designing film sets. As a result of his relationship with the UFA – the largest German film studio of the time – he appeared as an extra in a 1929 film set in Spain, *Die Schmugglerbraut von Mallorca* [The Smuggler's Bride of Mallorca], thanks to which we now have a fleeting image of Helios Gómez in movement, albeit dressed as a bullfighter.

In 1930, the situation in Spain started to change with the fall of the dictator, Primo de Rivera, and the ensuing political crisis, which paved the way for the end of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Second Republic in April 1931. Gómez believed that the moment had come to return to Spain to play a role on the revolutionary stage that was predicted. He established himself in Barcelona, which was the capital of leftist agitation at the time, as well as the centre of publishing and graphic arts in Spain.

A Revolutionary Communist

These were intense years, intense in a political sense, because his lifelong militancy in the labour cause shifted from anarchism to communism, possibly the result of friendships he had made in France and Germany. In 1930, the same year in which he had achieved a position of some responsibility in anarcho-syndicalism as the representative of Graphic Arts in the CNT in Barcelona, he bade farewell to his former co-religionists, publishing a leaflet that explained the reasons for his “conversion” to communism. He mentioned theoretical reasons (the inability of anarchism to take mass revolutionary action or to propose specific solutions to overcome capitalism), tactics (the need for strong political direction to unify the working class) and ethics (accusing the anarchists of sabotaging unity). Gómez was part of a small group of anarchists that transitioned to communism during the Spanish Dictatorship, looking for a more effective workers’ organization; this was well before the key moments for the international labour movement, such as Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 or the Spanish Civil War in 1936. His manifesto concluded by posing the dichotomy he perceived in the Europe of 1930, in which there were only two possible sides:

Workers! Revolutionaries! Just think about it. We face two clear alternatives: fascism or communism. There is no other choice. There is no other way. Those who do not go along with communism, no matter their ideological language, will find themselves, sooner or later, among the ranks of fascism.⁸

Soon after, he was arrested – in May 1930 – on the occasion of King Alfonso XIII’s last visit to Barcelona, in a pre-emptive round-up of leftist militants to “maintain order” on the streets. On 14 April 1931, when the Republic was proclaimed in Spain, there was widespread celebration across the country. Demonstrations and other events were also held, either to remind the politicians of the promises they had made or to press them to introduce more immediate radical changes; Gómez opted to take part in one of the most markedly revolutionary of these: the storming of the women’s prison in Barcelona to set the prisoners free. In June, he took part in the mobilizations that accompanied the general strike in Seville. In the spring of 1932, he was arrested in Madrid as he was leaving after giving a lecture entitled “Bourgeois art and proletarian art” and was sent to jail in Jaen.⁹

8 Helios Gómez, *Por qué me marcho del anarquismo* (Barcelona, 1930), online at <https://noticiasayr.blogspot.com/2014/10/por-que-me-marcho-del-anarquismo-helios.html>.

9 Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 30.

These were also hectic years in an artistic sense. In 1930, when Gómez was back in Barcelona, the German section of the International Workers' Association published his portfolio *Días de Ira* [Days of Wrath], probably one of his most brilliant works as a graphic artist, which was also published in Spain the following year.¹⁰ This work was a sketchbook of hard-hitting drawings about repression in Spain under the Bourbon monarchy and the dictator Primo de Rivera. Each of the 23 drawings was accompanied by a poem, also written by Gómez. Its publication was not easy, since we know that *Días de Ira* was prepared three years before, when the French magazine *Tiempos Nuevos* announced that its forthcoming edition would be published on behalf of and for the benefit of the prisoners' relief committee. *Días de Ira* eventually appeared in German, published by the refounded Anarchist First International, with a preface by Romain Rolland no less, a prestigious French writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915 and was, at that time, a militant pacifist and admirer of Tagore, Tolstoy and Gandhi (and also of the Soviet Union).

It was all success and recognition in the "hinge years" at the beginning of the 1930s, when Helios Gómez decided to return to Spain. His illustrations in the press were published on both sides of the Atlantic on the strength of the artistic and political networks of contacts that he was putting together. In Argentina, he connected with the anarchist cells of Buenos Aires, where his woodcuts were reproduced in the newspaper *La Protesta* [Protest].¹¹ In France, he contributed to Henri Barbusse's weekly, *Monde* [World], which was communist-oriented, but with certain unorthodox pluralist tendencies. Gómez's contributions to this paper implied a leap into the wider world of contemporary cosmopolitan avant-garde art, since artists of the calibre of Georg Grosz, Raoul Dufy, Juan Gris, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Jean Cocteau, André Derain and Diego Rivera, among others, were all published in *Monde*. The paper was printed in black and white and so lent itself to the type of woodcuts that Gómez was making, which were not at all out of tune with the dominant style. His first woodcut was published in *Monde* in 1930 and others followed throughout that year, signed, and occasionally on the front cover, alongside, for example, one of Picasso's.¹² The first was printed beside two articles that had a Spanish theme: one by J.G. Gorkin on the fall of Primo de Rivera, the other by Carlos Esplá on the return to Spain of Miguel de Unamuno (who was a member of the magazine's

10 Helios Gómez, *Días de Ira. 23 dibujos y poemas del terror blanco español* (Berlin: Internationale Arbeiter Assoziation, 1930). Recently reissued: Helios Gómez, *Días de ira*, 3rd ed. (Barcelona: Associació Cultural Helios Gómez, 2012). An analysis can be found in Luis González Barrios, "Días de ira (1930) de Helios Gómez: La encrucijada del artista revolucionario de entreguerras", *Neophilologus* 103, no. 3 (2019): 365–79.

11 Romero, "Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen", 32–33.

12 *Monde*, Paris, year III, no. 92 (8 March 1930).

nominal management committee, along with Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorki and others).¹³ Many more drawings followed, some that were originally in *Días de Ira*, such as those used to illustrate two articles by Julián Gorkin on labour and Joaquín Maurín on the situation in Spain.¹⁴ He also did a portrait of Maurín for another magazine in the same year.¹⁵

Although the political space of Spanish communism at that time was rife with dissension and division, the fact that Helios Gómez was close to Joaquín Maurín and Julián Gorkin sheds useful light on his position: he sympathized with people who represented the communist left or had recently arrived from anarchism, and were still in tune with it, to some extent. Their brand of communism was critical, revolutionary and utopian. While they admired the USSR, they had their differences with Stalin, so much so that they would end up forming their own party separate from the Communist International, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista [POUM, the Worker's Party of Marxist Unification], and would become a target of Stalinist persecution. Helios Gómez, who undoubtedly identified politically with the POUM, did not in the end join it, although he did publish a drawing in the magazine of that heterodox party.¹⁶ In any event, he was eventually expelled from the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and hounded by the orthodox communists. His initial admiration for the Soviet Union was not unconditional and at the end of his life he would spell out his misgivings about it in writing.

At the same time as his illustrations were appearing in *Monde*, he was contributing to newspapers in Barcelona with a wide circulation, such as *La Rambla de Catalunya*, newly founded by the President of Barcelona Football Club and the Royal Automobile Club of Catalonia, Josep Sunyol. Sunyol was a Catalanist republican politician who was attempting to establish a popular newspaper with mass readership in Catalan. Gómez collaborated on this venture from the outset with two woodcuts per issue, which appeared in the political section, the most outspoken part of the paper (the first pages, also the most numerous, were devoted to sport and motoring). His collaboration in this successful journalistic experiment for the masses was a significant one: his woodcuts appeared in the first issue and in almost all of those that followed until February 1931. His portraits, used to illustrate articles about people in the news, became regular features, as did woodcuts that accompanied the editorial, "Ciudadania" [Citizenship], and short comment pieces typically protesting about censorship, prisoners and so on. Gómez also regularly supplied the untitled woodcuts that were inserted into the

13 *Monde*, year III, no. 69 (15 February 1930).

14 *Monde*, year III, no. 117 (30 August 1930): 9: "Le travail" [Labour] (included in *Días de Ira* as "El capitalism"); and *Monde*, year III, no. 129 (22 November 1930): 9 (included in *Días de ira* as "La ley de fugas").

15 *La Rambla de Catalunya (esport i ciudadania)*, no. 15 (7 July 1930): 14.

16 *Juventud Comunista* (Barcelona), no. 37 (3 June 1937).

white space from which censored articles had been cut, with the citation “this issue has been subject to censorship” (it was common practice in the newspapers of the time to leave a blank space where a censored article had previously been, with a note that denounced the censorship).¹⁷

Meanwhile, Gómez continued to illustrate books whenever the occasion presented itself.¹⁸ In addition, he made theoretical pronouncements on art with the authority conferred by the prestige of his own creations, positioning himself as following in the wake of the social art represented by such artists as Daumier or Grosz, and, in Spain, Francisco de Goya:

Art is the cause of the spirit, and to reproach an artist for social activity is to try to neutralize, sterilize a force with deep redemptive roots ... To speak out in the social sense as an artist is to masculinize concerns and undo the shackles that strangle humanity.

But social art reveals itself, and is a far cry from the stale allegorical graphics of flags and broken chains. Social art jumps over the scrawny worker dying alongside a well-stocked shop window and a plump tight-fisted capitalist. It takes a step further, surpassing all that lyrical weeping of past centuries, so replete with “class” literature that it “declassifies” the human mission of art and its blunt, anti-anecdotal, artistic social sarcasm.¹⁹

The life and career of Helios Gómez – both artistically and personally – was undoubtedly at its peak, which would continue during the years of the Second Spanish Republic, from 1931 to 1936, and even until 1939 (although at that time it was already conditioned by the circumstances of the Civil War). As a result of his fame and reputation, he was invited by the Soviet authorities to travel to Moscow to represent Spain at the International Congress of Proletarian Artists, which had been organized in Leningrad to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917.²⁰ He was thus one of the many intellectuals and artists who travelled

17 *La Rambla de Catalunya (esport i ciutadania)*, no. 1 (7 April 1930): 11; no. 2 (14 April 1930): 7; no. 3 (21 April 1930): 12; no. 4 (28 April 1930): 12; no. 7 (19 May 1930): 12; no. 9 (2 June 1930): 12; no. 15 (7 July 1930): 14; no. 16 (14 July 1930): 11; no. 17 (21 July 1930): 12; no. 19 (4 August 1930): 11 and 12; no. 21 (18 August 1930): 10; no. 22 (25 August 1930): 7; no. 23 (1 September 1930): 12; no. 24 (8 September 1930): 7; no. 25 (15 September 1930); no. 27 (29 September 1930): 1; no. 31 (27 October 1930): 16; no. 34 (19 November 1930): 12; no. 36 (1 December 1930): 12; no. 46 (9 February 1931): 15.

18 For example, Miquel Matveev, *La revolució russa de 1905* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1930).

19 Helios Gómez, “L’element estètic i l’element social en l’art”, *L’Opinió. Setmanari socialista* (Barcelona), 16 May 1930.

20 According to Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 76–77, the invitation to travel to the USSR came from the VOKS (Всесоюзное общество культурной связи с заграницей

to the USSR as “political pilgrims” in those years.²¹ By then, he was already affiliated to the Communist Party in Spain and travelled to Russia with a starry-eyed view of the work of the Revolution, which he expressed in a series of reports that he published in the Catalan newspaper *La Rambla* in 1934,²² as well as various pieces contributed to the weekly *L’Opinió* [Opinion], including a poem dedicated to the Russian Revolution.²³ During the year and a half that he was in Russia (from autumn 1932 to February 1934), he had occasion to travel throughout the country, to find out what Soviet reality was like – despite official attempts to restrict his observation to the classic “tour” for foreigners – and to publish a new portfolio of 20 drawings, *Revolución española*.²⁴ He also performed the militant act of going to work as a factory hand in the Kuznertroy factories in Western Siberia, where he was granted the honorific title of *udárník* [shock worker], a highly productive worker in the Soviet Union.²⁵

Gómez’s admiration for the Soviet Union encompassed many aspects of the revolution, and the picture he sketched was a utopian one, ranging from collectivization to the promotion of culture, even gender equality. His admiration extended to the question of ethnic minorities, in particular the Rom, whose age-old exclusion seemed to him to be a thing of the past – indeed, the communist regime even provided them with spaces to develop their own culture, as he commented with respect to the existence of a newspaper (*Nevo Drom*), a theatre (the Romen Theatre in Moscow) and Romani schools.²⁶

At the same time, there is no doubt that Gómez’s critical eye also noticed the problems of the Soviet system, which were obvious under Stalin’s dictatorship. His commitment to the revolution was also a commitment

– Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul’turnoi Sviasi s zagraniitsei, All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries).

- 21 María Sierra, “Helios Gómez”, 85 and 92. On the general phenomenon of these “political pilgrims” to the USSR, see Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 22 Helios Gómez, “La vida en l’URSS. Dos anys entre els bolxevics”, *La Rambla*, articles from no. 263 (6 August 1934), no. 264 (13 August 1934), no. 265 (20 August 1934), no. 268 (10 September 1934), no. 269 (17 September 1934), no. 270 (24 September 1934) and no. 271 (1 October 1934).
- 23 Helios Gómez, “Leningrad, 7 de novembre”, *L’Opinió* (Barcelona), no. 111 (3 June 1934): 7.
- 24 Helios Gómez, *La Revolución Española* (Moscow: Ogis-Isogis, 1933). Half of these drawings (numbers 4 to 13) were exclusive to this portfolio, while the other ten had already appeared in *Días de Ira*, or would figure later in *Viva Octubre*; many of them also appeared independently in the press.
- 25 J.F., “Un gran artista revolucionario. Los gitanos en la guerra civil”, *Crónica*, 18 October 1936.
- 26 Sierra, “Helios Gómez”, 99–101.

to art, and he could not overlook the way in which the avant-gardes, experimentation, creative freedom and pluralism had been suppressed and “socialist realism” imposed in their place. Being in the USSR enabled him to make contact with many artists and foreign intellectuals who were visiting the country. He became particularly friendly with Gerd Arntz, the great German graphic artist, who had considerable influence on Helios. Even so, his position in the country was always marginal, and although he had an exhibition at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, only his friends went to visit it. Gómez’s discomfort with the “Homeland of Socialism” was bound up with the repressive actions of the Stalinist police. He was in fact separated from his sentimental companion, Irene Weber (known as “Ira”), in an episode that has never been properly clarified and that led to his return to Spain.²⁷ Gómez’s departure from the USSR was so abrupt that he was not even able to collect the 100 original works from his exhibition (which are still missing).

It should be pointed out that it was never very clear how orthodox Helios Gómez’s communist ideology was. He was accused on occasions of being a Trotskyist, or an “incorrigible anarchist”, not to mention the times he was regarded as a Stalinist in the service of Moscow.²⁸ He was accused of being a traitor and had heated debates with the party leadership. He was in truth a rather unorthodox communist; perhaps he could be called a libertarian communist.²⁹ He was initially affiliated to the Catalan-Balearic Federation. In December 1930 and January 1931, he was a contributor to *L’hora. Setmanari d’avançada* [The Hour: Advanced Weekly], the Catalan magazine of the Bloc Obrer i Camperol [Workers’ and Peasants’ Bloc], in which its leaders, Andreu Nin and Joaquin Maurín wrote.³⁰ In that fluctuating heterodox relationship with communism, he ended up being expelled from the Balearic Communist Federation and joined the Communist Party of Spain in 1931. From March 1932 onwards, he contributed to the party’s theoretical magazine, *Bolchevismo*.³¹

In 1934, his priorities remained clear. On his return journey to Spain, he visited the places in Vienna where there had been fighting in February

27 Romero, “Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen”, 34. He recalled it later in Helios Gómez, “Erika. Canto de amor y lucha” (1946), quoted on p. 350 of Gómez and Mignot, *Helios Gómez*, 331–88.

28 Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 42.

29 Romero, “Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen”, 31.

30 In issue no. 1 (10 December 1930), he did the illustration for the front cover and another woodcut inside to accompany an article against the Somatén (the conservative armed militia that propped up the dictatorship); in issue no. 3 (14 January 1931), he published two portraits, of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and illustrated an article on a man condemned to death.

31 *Bolchevismo. Revista teórica del Partido Comunista de España*, quoted in Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 76.



Fig. 2 Helios Gómez in Vienna in 1934. Photograph by Gerd Arntz. (Associació Cultural Helios Gómez, Barcelona)

in the so-called “Austrian Civil War”, a failed workers’ uprising against the threat posed by the Dollfuss government’s shift towards fascism. When, shortly afterwards in the same year, a similar situation occurred in Spain, Helios Gómez did not hesitate to join the so-called “Revolución de octubre” [October Revolution], an uprising – which also failed – of leftist and Catalan nationalist forces against the coming to power of reactionary groups that reminded some of Italian fascism, German Nazism or recent events in Austria. Gómez was arrested for his part in that uprising, and incarcerated on the prison ship *Uruguay*. While he was there, he started the drawings that he would publish in Brussels the following year: a portfolio of 20 illustrations, following the same format that he had already used with *Días de Ira* and *Revolución española*.³² The recent attempted revolution in Spain is presented there as the popular response to the disappointment of the Republican regime, which had been unable to transform social structures, or even to carry out the most urgent reforms in a country marked by backwardness and inequality:

32 Helios Gómez, *Viva octubre: dessins sur la révolution espagnole* (Brussels: E.P.I., 1935).

The Republic, there was no doubt about it, meant the land for those working it, work for the unemployed and a decent wage for everyone.

And what happened? Events tell us clearly what governments think; the works of the Republic reveal the same capitalist social structures beneath the artificial glitter of politics. Change isn't happening, the same bunch of rich scroungers are still at the top, and the vast majority of workers in conditions of utter poverty at the bottom.³³

Revolution and art are always united, but the Revolution comes first. The art historian, Jean Cassou, wrote of him in the prologue to *Viva Octubre* [Long Live October] that "he is a revolutionary, because he is an artist, and he is an artist because he is a revolutionary ... For him, painting, life and struggle are the same thing".³⁴

That struggle, that revolution, was the working-class revolution that was spreading across Europe at the time as an alternative to the spectre of fascism. For Gómez, interethnic transnational class identity took priority over anything else, including being Spanish, Andalusian, even Gitano, which was why, at that time, references to his belonging to the Romani people were not prominent in his artistic production except as an integral part of *the people*, victims of oppression and subjects of the longed-for Revolution. So, whereas in the 1920s his artistic output had consisted of Andalusian themes and subjects, social commentaries and portraits of popular types mixed with avant-garde experimentation, in the 1930s, revolutionary subject matter was uppermost, with a more realistic style that sought an immediate emotional effect and propagandistic effectiveness. It was only in the later stages of his career as an artist, in the 1940s and 1950s, after defeat in the Spanish Civil War and the dashing of all his youthful hopes, that Gitano and Andalusian themes reappeared as central figures, now in an intimate style close to surrealism.³⁵

A Romani Soldier in the Spanish Civil War

The fact that Gómez was a Gitano did not go unnoticed by others, however. Jean Cassou – one of the founders of the French section of the Association of Writers and Revolutionary Artists in 1932 – referred to him in the prologue to his portfolio as "a young Gypsy". Among his words of admiration for Helios Gómez, a certain stereotypical view of Gypsiness and Spanishness based on "feeling" and "fieriness" slipped in, and gradually, Gómez, too, openly acknowledged – and never renounced – that part of his identity.³⁶

33 Gómez, "Introducción", *Viva octubre*.

34 Jean Cassou, "Prólogo" to Gómez, *Viva octubre*.

35 González Barrios, "Días de ira (1930) de Helios Gómez", 366.

36 Gómez, *Viva octubre*.

In October 1936, he was interviewed by the influential illustrated Madrid magazine *Crónica* [Chronicle] when the city was under siege by Franco's army, which had risen up three months earlier (with the support of Hitler and Mussolini) against the democratic government of the Republic. The magazine featured Gómez as a hero, photographed with bandages covering shrapnel wounds sustained in the early fighting of the war against the military rebels. The journalist portrayed him in the heroic colours typical of the time:

Helios Gómez is in Madrid. He had to be here. The destiny of this great artist, Gitano and revolutionary, always commands that he be where the people – no matter in what part of the world – are experiencing hours of dramatic struggle. For 15 years, and Helios Gómez is 30, wherever a rebel movement has broken out, a surge of popular protest, in Spain, France, Belgium or Germany, Helios Gómez has been there, with his pistol on his belt to fight, and a pencil in his hand to capture in magnificent drawings of virile dynamism, of poignant emotion, the episodes of proletarian struggle.³⁷

In his replies, however, Gómez was focusing for the first time on speaking up about the plight of the Gitanos, a dimension of his struggle for equality that he had never explored before:

The Gitanos – says Helios Gómez – are victims in Spain of long-standing injustice. An atmosphere of picturesqueness has been created for them, of low cunning, with the false pedigree of tambourine players. Some cannot imagine the Gitano except as a capricious, troublemaking being, or a source of fun for “boisterous merrymaking”. No one wants to acknowledge that the Roma have the distinction of a race that has preserved an almost aboriginal purity, a race like the Jews or the Arabs, just as fit as any other for work, art and ideological thinking.

Thus Helios Gómez embarked on another struggle, this time protesting against “the quaint cliché of the Gypsy as lazy and capricious”, which he considered typical of backward countries, and demanding “their full inclusion in social life”. The model at this stage was – as far as he was concerned – still that of the Soviet Union, and the path to be taken that of the war that had recently started against fascism and all the scourges inherited from the past. The example of the many Gitanos throughout Spain who had fought against the military uprising gave him hope that the struggle undertaken would also lead to their emancipation from all the sufferings of the past:

37 J.F., “Un gran artista revolucionario. Los gitanos en la guerra civil”, *Crónica*, 18 October 1936 (and for the following quotations).



Un dibujo de Helios Gómez, que representa al proletariado español en marcha.

Helios Gómez está en Madrid. Tenía que estar aquí. El sino de este gran artista, gitano y revolucionario, le manda siempre estar donde el pueblo—no importa en qué parte del mundo—viva horas de lucha dramática. Desde hace quince años, y Helios Gómez tiene treinta, donde quiera haya estado un movimiento de rebeldía, una conexión de protesta popular, en España, en Francia, en Bélgica, en Alemania, allí ha estado Helios Gómez: la pistola al cinto para combatir y en la mano el lápiz para plasmar en magníficos dibujos de viril dinamismo, de patética emoción, los episodios de las luchas proletarias.

Helios Gómez es avellano, trastero, de esa raza de artistas intuitivos, individualistas, celosos de su libertad, que forjan filigranas de hierro en las fraguas de la Cava y decoran con espontaneidad genial las maravillas ordinarias de la Cartuja.

Helios, pese a su juventud, es una personalidad de prestancia internacional como revolucionario. Puede considerarse un *reconocido* de persecuciones: ha sido detenido por las autoridades de distintos países setenta y un veces y ha estado sometido a cuarenta y dos procesos. Expulsado de España, de Francia, de Bélgica y Alemania, se refugió en Rusia, el único país cuyas cárceles no inspeccionó al dibujante.

En Rusia, Helios Gómez ha vivido dos años. Interesado por la gran experiencia laboriosa de los Soviets, Helios abandonó los lápices, y fué a trabajar en las famosas fábricas de Kuznetzoy, en la Siberia Occidental, donde conquistó el título de «Udarnik», es decir, obrero de choque, que es en Rusia una especie de elección de honor del trabajo.

El estallido de la guerra civil española sorprendió a Helios en Barcelona. La primera ametralladora que se tomó a los facciosos en la calle de Caspe estuvo en manos de Helios. Luchó en las rías barcelonesas, y luego, en campos de Aragón. Cuando el capitán Bayo fué a Hita y a Mallorca, Helios Gómez iba de comisario político de la columna Beltrán. Asistió en todas las operaciones; fué herido por unas esquivitas de metralla, y ahora convalece en Madrid, en la residencia de la Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas.

He aquí una vida extraordinaria, colmada de sucesos y de riesgos, como una línea recta de formidable ímpetu al servicio de las causas revolucionarias.

Helios no quiere hablar de sí mismo; desdeña su gran caudal de anécdotas, que tejerían una gran novela de aventuras. Puesto en el trance de la información periodística, Helios se acoge a un tema que es para él tan apasionante como el de la política: el de los gitanos. En el gran artista constituye una obsesión el combatir el tópico pintoresco de la gitanería peregrina y arbitraria, el llegar a conseguir la reivindicación de los gitanos, su incorporación plena a la vida social, el reconocimiento de sus virtudes raciales.

—Los gitanos—dice Helios Gómez—son víctimas en España de una injusticia tradicional. Se les ha hecho una atmósfera de pintoresquismo, de picardía, de un falso casticismo de pañuelos. Hay quien no concibe al gitano sino como un ente arbitrario y errador, o un motivo de diversión para las sjarguas. No se quiere reconocer que los gitanos tienen la categoría de una raza conservada casi en su pureza aborigen: una raza, como la judía o la árabe, tan capacitada como

Un gran artista revolucionario: Helios Gómez.

Los gitanos en la guerra civil.



Otro dibujo de Helios Gómez, que alude a la lucha de los mineros asturianos en Octubre.



El célebre dibujante gitano y artista revolucionario Helios Gómez.

crónica

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cualesquier otros, para el trabajo, para el arte y para las concepciones ideológicas.

Hace una pausa, como ordenando sus recuerdos, y continúa:

—Es típico en peculiar de los países que viven retrasados políticamente. Una de mis mayores emociones en Rusia fué comprobar que los gitanos han sido allí totalmente integrados en la vida social. En la gran República de los Soviets, los gitanos tienen la misma categoría social que todos los demás habitantes. Trabajan en todas las industrias; han formado hórreos agrícolas, que, organizados y dirigidos por gitanos, dan un magnífico rendimiento. Tienen en el comercio de ganadería, ellos lo controlan y fomentan en varias Repúblicas. En el Cáucaso se dedican a la cría caballar para las necesidades de la famosa caballería roja. En Mosed existe el Tejano-Teatro, exclusivo para los gitanos, y de esta raza son hoy muchos de los principales artistas del Teatro de la Opera. En Rusia, el gitano, considerado como individuo de una raza tan apta como todas para las actividades sociales, tiene una categoría política y social igual a la de todos. Esto es lo que hay que conseguir en España.

—Se lucha aquí—le interrumpo—con toda una tradición: el gitano es uno de los componentes de lo que hemos dado en llamar «la pañuelita española».

Lleno de fe, Helios me interrumpe:

—Ese es uno de los tristes absurdos con que acabará la guerra civil. Ya se está viendo de lo que el pueblo español es capaz. Lo pícaro y lo pintoresco con que especulaban el señoritismo y los intelectuales se han transformado, sorprendiéndolos, en una fermidad dramática, en una heroica epopeya popular. Con los gitanos ha ocurrido lo mismo. Esta guerra es su justificación y su reivindicación. En Sevilla, los gitanos de la Cava, de Pagés del Corro y del Puerto Caxanero se estuvieron diez días batido desesperadamente contra Queipo de Llano. En Barcelona, los gitanos de Sans, la herriada de mayor significación proletaria, fueron los primeros que se movilizaron, y con escopetas de caza, con viejos pistoles, con navajas, cortaron el paso, en la plaza de España, a las fuerzas del Cuartel de Pedralbes. Luego lo visto a los gitanos batirse como héroes en el frente de Aragón, en Bujarroz y en Pina. Gitanos vinieron con la columna Bayo a Mallorca y desembarcaron en Puerto Cristo, y allí, en una centuria del Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña, habiéndose peleado como leones en un parapeto que se llamó de la Muerte. Y ahora mismo, en una columna de Caballería que se está formando, los primeros inscritos son gitanos. Yo te digo que de esta guerra civil que alumbrará tantas cosas magníficas ha de salir, también en España, la reivindicación de los gitanos, su integración total a la vida civil.

Y Helios Gómez, el gran artista, al hablar de los suyos, tiene en el gesto y en la mirada un fervor de iluminado.

J. F.

Fig. 3 Helios Gómez in besieged Madrid during the Spanish Civil War, 1936. Interview article “A Great Revolutionary Artist: Helios Gómez. The Gypsies in the Civil War”, *Crónica* journal (Madrid), 18 October 1936. (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid)

And I tell you that, from this civil war that will give birth to so many magnificent things, the recognition of the Gitanos, their full integration into civic life, must come about in Spain too.

And when Helios Gómez, the great artist, talks about his people, his gestures and his gaze take on the passion of the visionary.

Indeed, as soon as the civil war broke out, true to his principles Gómez enlisted to fight and became a soldier. He was a combatant even before he was a soldier, since he took up arms to face supporters of the coup on the streets of Barcelona on the day of the military uprising (there are photographs showing him fighting in Via Layetana). But, above all, he responded to armed aggression with his skill as an artist, meeting the great demand for pictures that were needed for propaganda purposes.

In previous years, Gómez's work had already become a political statement, seeking to make an emotional impact with visual exposés of repression, poverty and lack of freedom, at the same time as offering a hymn to the resistance and the heroism of popular struggles. This placed him at the heart of the modern propaganda that political and union groups needed to produce in the scramble for the support of the masses that was going on all over Europe. In Spain, that struggle had intensified during the years of the Second Republic (1931–36) as a result of accelerated democratization and social mobilization. The civil war of 1936–39 exacerbated that trend, making Spain the epicentre of the clash between democracies and dictatorships, fascism and communism, which had a continental if not global dimension.

After the election victory of the Popular Front in February 1936, he set up – together with his colleagues in the group *Els Sis* [The Six] – the Union of Professional Illustrators in Barcelona, of which he was the president.³⁸ The aim of this organization, linked to the socialist *Unión General de Trabajadores* [UGT, General Workers' Union], was to meet the heavy demand for posters and propaganda material that was anticipated in that climate of political polarization. This was the source of many of the posters produced in the city during the civil war for the parties and unions on the Republican side, as well as those supporting the campaigns of the Barcelona City Council and the Catalan government (the *Generalitat*). It has even been said that “the whole of the organization of Republican propaganda in Barcelona was coordinated by Helios Gómez from the SDPC”.³⁹

His importance to Republican propaganda was enormous, both inside and outside Spain. For example, one of his paintings, *Evacuación* [Evacuation] was exhibited in the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the Universal Exposition of Paris in 1937, alongside works by such renowned artists as Julio

38 Carles Fontserè, *Memòries d'un cartellista català (1931–1939)* (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 1995), 171–72.

39 Romero, “Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen”, 33.

González, Joan Miró and Picasso's *Guernica*.⁴⁰ A drawing by Helios Gómez with the caption "Spain: Battleground for Democracy" was also used for the front cover of a New York publication as part of the campaigns to promote support for Spanish Republicans in the United States.⁴¹

His prestige at that time was enormous. Some witnesses have spoken of the aura of the international revolutionary that surrounded him after he had returned from his long journey round Europe.⁴² In 1936, he was appointed "political commissar" in one of the workers' militias that undertook the defence of the Republic during the first months of the war. He devoted himself so wholeheartedly to his mission – which consisted of monitoring the loyalty to the regime and the ideological discipline of the military units in his charge – that his artistic output declined for a time. He was "making Revolution" by other means.

He fought in the ranks of the Bayo Battalion in the Balearic Islands, playing an active part in the reconquest of Ibiza, and later fought on the Aragonese, Madrid and Andalusian fronts. In Andalusia, however, his relationship with the communists was strained as a result of an incident that occurred after the defeat of the Republicans in El Carpio. It seems that, as political commissar, he displayed authoritarian tendencies, going as far as to execute Captain Arjona, a well-known communist, for disobedience in 1937. News of the matter reached the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain, which issued a statement, officially expelling Gómez for his "anti-communist behaviour".⁴³ Well aware of Stalinist methods, Gómez feared for his life and fled, seeking refuge in Barcelona among his former anarchist colleagues.⁴⁴ At that time, coincidentally, the Secretary-General of the Anarchist Confederation (CNT) was Mariano R. Vázquez, known as Marianet, who was also of Gitano origin.⁴⁵ The communists were indeed looking for Helios Gómez to kill him; this was a time when score-settling

40 Ursula Tjaden even maintains that there was a formal relationship between Picasso's *Guernica* and Helios Gómez's drawings of previous years (according to the opinion expressed in the documentary *Helios Gómez: tinta y munición*, 2019).

41 *Social Action* (New York), 1 January 1937. Quoted by Manuel Antón, "Tinta y munición: Helios Gómez en la Revolución y la Guerra Civil Española", in *Manuel Antón: Crítica cultural e ilustración*, no date (http://manuelanton.weebly.com/uploads/4/8/3/0/48305959/tinta_y_munici%C3%93n_-_helios_g%C3%93mez_en_la_revoluci%C3%93n_y_la_guerra_civil_espa%C3%91ola.pdf), 16–17; and reproduced on 32.

42 Fontserè, *Memòries d'un cartellista català*, 219–28.

43 *Mundo Obrero* (Madrid), 3 July 1937.

44 Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 45–47 and 81.

45 Isaac Martín Nieto, "Gitano, ignorante y traidor. Mariano R. Vázquez en la literatura histórica militante libertaria", in *No es país para jóvenes. Actas del Encuentro de Jóvenes Investigadores*, ed. Alejandra Ibarra Aguirregabiria (Vitoria: Instituto Valentín de Foronda – Asociación de Historia Contemporánea, 2012), n.p.; M. Muñoz Díez, *Marianet: semblanza de un hombre* (Mexico City: CNT, 1960).

and making ideological enemies disappear was the order of the day in the Republican rearguard.

From 1938 onwards, withdrawal from the war front enabled Gómez to pay more attention to his artistic work, although his commitment to the defence of the Republic did not diminish. He was appointed “cultural commissar” of the 26th Division (the former Durruti Column). In Barcelona, he organized an exhibition in memory of the anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti, the founder of the legendary anarchist military unit. He was also responsible for the publications of the division, in particular its newspaper, *El Frente* [The Front].

From 1936, *El Frente* was published as the “War Bulletin of the Durruti Column”. Its layout was sober: blocks of text without graphic support. From 9 May 1938, the typesetting was more modern and dynamic, with lots of photographs, prominent headlines, varied and modern fonts. From July, it was printed in two different colours, the colour changing with each issue; a special issue that looked like a magazine was even published on glossy paper. This undoubtedly reflected the involvement of Helios Gómez, whose drawings frequently appeared, all unsigned (except for the header drawing, which was renewed on 11 August 1938 and did carry Gómez’s signature).⁴⁶ Incredible as it may seem, Gómez continued to design and print the bulletin to high standards while on the move as the course of the war – which was already proving disastrous for the Republicans – forced them to retreat before Franco’s advance. Finally, in February 1939, he left Spain, crossing the French border with the whole of his division.

A Fighter in the Hour of Defeat

The defeat of revolutionary ideals and democratic legality, as represented by the Spanish Republic, was not the only thing to leave a bitter taste at that time. For more than three years, while Hitler’s army advanced in triumph across Europe, Helios Gómez remained locked up by the Vichy Regime in various internment camps in the south of France, first in Bram (from 2 March 1939), then in Argelès-sur-Mer (26 September 1940). He escaped from the latter camp (7 December 1940) and tried to flee to the United States with the support of Varian Fry’s rescue network,⁴⁷ but was

46 *El Frente: Órgano de la 26 División*, no. 127 (11 August 1938), 4 woodcuts and the new header; no. 128 (15 August 1938), 2 woodcuts; no. 129 (22 August 1938), 3 woodcuts; no. 132 (12 September 1938), 2 woodcuts; no. 134 (26 September 1938), 1 woodcut; 135 (3 October 1938), 3 woodcuts.

47 Helios Gómez appeared on the list of the persecuted to be got out of Vichy France, drawn up by the American journalist Varian M. Fry, sometimes known as “the American Oskar Schindler”. There were not only Spanish Republicans on that list, but also, and principally, Jews and members of the French Resistance. Gómez did



Fig. 4 Helios Gómez after the Republican defeat in the Spanish Civil War, drawing an image for the unfinished series *Horrores de la Guerra* [Horrors of War] in the Camp of Montolieu (France), 1939. Photograph by Guillermo Fernández Zúñiga. (Archivo ASECIC – Asociación Española de Cine e Imagen Científicos, Madrid)

discovered, arrested and sent back to the camps. After a week in Vernet d'Ariège (8–14 April 1941), he was sent to the terrible camp of disciplinary repression in Djelfa (Algeria), where he was forced to work on the Trans-Saharan Railway. He was in Djelfa at the same time as the Spanish writer, Max Aub, a Republican like Gómez, who left a portrait of the harsh camp regime in his book of poems *Diario de Djelfa* [Djelfa Diary].⁴⁸

In 1942, in order to escape the ill treatment that he was receiving at the camp, he applied to the Spanish consulate in Algeria for a visa. He obtained that visa, which enabled him to return to Spain, first to Seville, then to Barcelona, where he settled with his wife and had a son. He soon regained his strength, demonstrating that in the midst of despair and the repression of Franco's dictatorship, his revolutionary spirit remained alive. First of all, he joined the AFAR, the Agrupación de Fuerzas Armadas de la República

not manage to get out, although other European intellectuals on the list, such as Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, André Breton, Alma Mahler, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Jean Arp, Wanda Landowska, Victor Serge, Remedios Varo and as many as 2,000 other people, had better luck, Varian Fry, *Surrender on Demand* (New York: Random House, 1945).

48 Max Aub, *Diario de Djelfa* (Mexico City: M. Aub, 1944).

Española [Grouping of Armed Forces of the Spanish Republic] and the ANFD, the Alianza Nacional de Fuerzas Democráticas [National Alliance of Democratic Forces], two clandestine organizations that were fighting the dictatorship. Then, at the beginning of 1944, when the course of the Second World War pointed to an early defeat of the Axis forces, who were Franco's allies, he set up a new anti-Francoist organization called the LNR, Liberación Nacional Republicana [Republican National Liberation]. This small organization published an information sheet entitled "Lid" [Fight] in Madrid, where Gómez was writing optimistic news reports on episodes of resistance against the dictatorship.⁴⁹

During the same years of clandestine militancy, he was also a founding member of the Casa de Andalucía in Barcelona, one of the numerous centres of sociability for the many internal migrants of Francoist Spain. Gómez helped to found that regional centre with Francoists of Andalusian origin, including a number of soldiers, who had settled in Barcelona.⁵⁰ This paradox shows the shift that was taking place in his world view, one that would soon be expressed in his artistic production.⁵¹

In 1945, Gómez was arrested and spent 18 months in the Cárcel Modelo [Model Prison] in Barcelona, where he wrote the autobiographical poem "Erika" (1946). There, for the first time, he provided a glimpse of the dark side of the Soviet regime.⁵² Against the backdrop of his love story with Ira in Russia, he showed his awareness of the limitations of Stalinist Russia, which he had preferred to ignore in the 1930s because of the polarized political and social context in Europe.⁵³

In 1948, he was visited at home by a representative of the government, the minister José Antonio Girón de Velasco, who offered him a post in the single (compulsory) trade union if he agreed to place himself at the service of the Franco regime. Gómez turned him down.⁵⁴ The invitation was not as odd as it might appear at first sight. The leaders of the dictatorship's hierarchy knew of Helios Gómez's reputation, his credibility and influence over the workers. They also knew of his artistic talent and the impact he could have on propagandistic communication and probably considered that he could be useful to them at a time when Franco's regime was using Andalusian Gypsy cultural stereotypes to construct a model of the patriot that would standardize what it was to be "Spanish". Gómez, however, refused.

49 Tjaden, *Helios Gómez*, 30–48.

50 Romero, "Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen", 30–31.

51 Gómez Plana and Mignot, "Seis naranjas y tres granadas", 16.

52 Helios Gómez, "Erika, canto de amor y lucha", in Gómez, *Poemas de lucha y sueño*, 331–88.

53 Gómez Plana and Mignot, "Seis naranjas y tres granadas", 19.

54 According to the testimony of his son, in Gómez Plana, *Un gitano en la Ciudad de los Muchachos*, 36–37.

Two days after refusing to collaborate with the regime, he was arrested again. He was not released from prison until 1954, despite the fact that no formal charges were ever brought against him and he was never tried. In the *Cárcel Modelo* in Barcelona, where he was a prisoner – at the insistence of the prison chaplain and in exchange for a transfer to mitigate the distressing conditions in which he was living – he painted a work that broke with the whole of his previous ideological and artistic career. He painted a fresco dedicated to the Virgin of Mercy, in cell no. 1 of Gallery IV of the prison, henceforth known as the “*Capilla gitana*” [Gypsy chapel]. Both the religious theme of the work and the colourful, spiritualist, pictorial style laden with symbols reminiscent of surrealism seem to point to a break with the commitments of previous years. It is not that simple, however. Some authors evaluate this last period of his work positively, seeing it as a moment of formal freedom when “the most imaginative, innovative version of Helios” would appear without him “in any way renouncing political critique”.⁵⁵ It is true that this interpretation of freedom is difficult to reconcile with such a prolonged period of imprisonment, the loss of everything that Helios had fought for and the end of hope. Paintings of virgins and angels are a long way from the Helios Gómez who, in 1930, had written that powerful poem, accompanying a no less powerful woodcut, in which believers were hypnotized bodies obediently walking towards the cross like robots, or perhaps prisoners with their hands tied behind their backs:

fleeing from life
 are the working class made stupid
 by the cross,
 the holy rebellion
 of the light
 choking in their entrails.⁵⁶

At the same time, the Virgin of the *Capilla gitana* is somewhat unconventional. More than anything, she is a mother with child (perhaps evoking his wife, Mercedes Plana, who died in 1946, and his son Gabriel, from whom he had been separated as a result of imprisonment?). All the figures in the mural are “Gypsified”. They are all represented as Gitanos, especially those suffering like martyrs, surrounded by barbed wire. The allusion to the internment camps and the suffering of the victims is so palpable that the Francoist authorities subsequently tried to erase the work, at least partially. From this perspective, “the *Capilla gitana* has come to be considered a manifesto”.⁵⁷

55 González Barrios, “*Días de ira* (1930) de Helios Gómez”, 377.

56 Gómez, *Días de Ira*, 7, “Die religion/la religion/religión/de Godsdienst”.

57 Gabriel Gómez Plana and Caroline Mignot, “Introducción”, in *Helios Gómez*, 57.

In any case, that period of captivity between 1948 and 1954 coincided with a powerful rediscovery of Gómez's Romani roots. They were also years of much writing. In both texts and painting, the exploration and defence of Romani identity came to the fore, contrasting with his earlier emphasis on class perspectives and ordinary people. According to his son, while in prison he wrote "about a hundred rather dreamlike poems and Andalusian ballads, a novel set in Sevillian anarchist circles, a covert condemnation of Franco's dictatorship in his *Historia de los Gitanos* [History of the Gitanos], an essay on Romani art".⁵⁸ The Gitano and Andalusian subject matter was dominant in his essays, as well as his poems, with titles such as "No hables mal de los gitanos" [Don't Speak Ill of the Gitanos], "Sevilla, novia asediada" [Seville, a Bride under Siege], "Danza del Sur" [Dance of the South], "La gitana y el ángel" [The Gitana and the Angel], "Rumba gitana" [Gitano Rumba], "A Federico García Lorca" [To Federico García Lorca], "Yo soy gitano" [I Am a Gitano], "Belsen" (which was about anti-Gypsyism and the Nazi genocide), "Risa del río" [Laughter by the River], "Romance verde y blanco" [Green-and-White Ballad] – alluding to the colours of the Andalusian flag – and so on.⁵⁹ While the nostalgic *costumbrismo* in these texts sets the dominant tone, with a hymn of praise to the Gitano way of life, the social protest has to be read between the lines. His pictorial and written works during these years closely parallel each other.

Any revolutionary discourse was strictly banned and prosecuted and the merest hint of class language or democratic protest was severely punished. Even so, there was still room for some social criticism by way of proclaiming the suffering of the Roma and calling for their recognition and equality. After all, the Francoist imaginary had not included the Gitanos among their declared enemies, the alleged "anti-Spain conspiracy" comprising Marxists, Jews, Freemasons and separatists. It may be, then, that in those times of despair, apart from seeking a final emotional refuge in his Romani identity, this never-say-die revolutionary was still sending out a message of criticism, between the lines, to those in power and to mainstream society.

Prison had been a constant in the life of Helios Gómez, since he had been arrested 76 times since he was a teenager.⁶⁰ Even after it came to light in 1950 that he was being held in jail illegally – insofar as the specific

58 Gómez Plana and Mignot, "Seis naranjas y tres granadas", 14. The title of the autobiographical novel that he managed to write at that time is *Pacheco, la vida de un anarquista andaluz* [Pacheco, the Life of an Andalusian Anarchist] and is kept in the Archive of the Associació Cultural Helios Gómez in Barcelona. He also planned a graphic novel whose title was to be *Gabrielillo Vargas, gitano rojo* [Little Gabriel Vargas: The Red Gypsy]. See Romero, "Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen", 29–30.

59 Gómez and Mignot, *Helios Gómez*.

60 According to the testimony of his son, quoting the words of Helios Gómez himself, in the documentary *Helios Gómez: tinta y munición* (2019).

charges brought against him could not be substantiated and the case had been dismissed – he was kept in prison, apparently by a decision of the prison warden. He was released in 1954, thanks to the intervention of the lawyer of the communist leader, Joan Comorera, who had become a friend of his. He was destitute, in a Spain hostile to his ideas; the Franco regime was politically consolidated and its reactionary principles had permeated the collective psyche and all aspects of life. Gómez just about managed to survive thanks to some friends who put him up for free in the Residencia Sant Jaume in Barcelona, a kindness which he repaid by painting murals in a number of the rooms.⁶¹ He attempted to resume his artistic career by painting commercial works, but had little success. There was no place for him in the Spain of that time. He died in 1956 from a liver disease contracted in prison.

After his death, the works that Gómez left behind in the residence were plundered by people who worked there (as had happened on other occasions by art dealers and middlemen who appropriated his works whenever he was arrested or forced to flee). That was the fate of the unpublished series *Horrores de la guerra* [Horrors of War] that he began between 1937 and 1939,⁶² a series of black-and-white drawings that no longer reflected the heroism of the workers' struggle or the condemnation of social injustice, but despair and chaos. His artistic assessment of the struggles of the previous years showed war only as death and destruction, bringing the tradition of Goya's nineteenth-century engravings into the twentieth century.

What Remains?

One only has to look at the black-and-white fire blazing in the woodcuts of Helios Gómez, to take just one example from his oeuvre, to see his creative critique of injustice, the beauty of his compositions, or to turn the pages of the magazines to which he contributed to be affected by the enthusiasm of those who sought to make the world a better place, even at the cost of their own lives.

His legacy is his art, which continues to speak forcefully against social injustice and in favour of struggle, hope and solidarity. But his life, too, was his legacy: lived as a work of art, a nomadic life committed to a cause, in which the sincerity of the pursuit and the generosity of personal sacrifice stand out above all. In this respect, Helios Gómez is representative of an entire generation of Europeans to whom he contributed his personal vision as a Spaniard, Andalusian and Gitano.

61 Gómez Plana, *Un gitanillo en la Ciudad de los Muchachos*, 81–88.

62 Gómez Plana and Mignot, "Seis naranjas y tres granadas", 15.

Some have even gone so far as to question whether Helios Gómez really was Roma. He himself ignored that link for many years, when he thought class identity was the priority in the revolutionary struggle and universalist criteria took precedence over all others. Then, from 1932 at least, there are mentions of his Gitano origins in the press. In 1936, as we saw, he raised his voice to defend the dignity of the Roma as part of the ongoing Revolution, and in the final years of his life, he embraced the Gitano heritage and promoted that Romani identity in his art, when the circumstances and his own situation had changed dramatically.

He may have been the first Gitano intellectual in Spain. At any event, he has been recognized as a precursor of contemporary “Romani art”, together with other artists who were not Roma.⁶³ Here the question of Romani identity shows its political, culturally constructed component. Perhaps the Romani heritage really was in Helios Gómez’s genes (the details of his genealogy are uncertain); perhaps his self-identification as Romani did not coincide with any “objective” definition. Ultimately, this is not important. What is important is his personal, voluntary affiliation to Gitano culture. It infused the environment of the Triana quarter in Seville, where he grew up, mixed in with popular, Andalusian and working-class culture.⁶⁴ As far as he was concerned, the differences between all these cultural contributions were not important, but rather added to and mutually reinforced each other. We would have betrayed that cosmopolitanism and broad-mindedness if we had continued to refine the classification even further by distinguishing what was Romani in his personality from what came from other sources.

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63 Gérard Gartner, *Les sept plasticiens précurseurs tsiganes* (Les Ormeaux-de-Baran: Marinoël, 2011).

64 Romero, “Helios Gómez, un artista lumpen”, 29.

Chapter 2

The Long Road in Search of a Tzigane Language: Sandra Jayat

Begoña Barrera

After the horrors of the Second World War and the trauma of occupation, it seemed very unlikely that Paris would once again be that wild party that Ernest Hemingway had experienced and written about. Nevertheless, despite the worst prognoses, as early as the 1950s, the metropolis gradually started to rise from the ashes, encouraged by the arrival of foreigners in pursuit of the mythical City of Light or indeed any dream yet to be realized. The life of Sandra Jayat is one of the stories woven into that Paris, to which many – like her – flocked to heal the wounds of various wars. Jayat was from a travelling Manouche family and settled in what was still the centre of European culture, where she would pursue a long and prolific career as a writer and painter from the early 1960s until well into the twenty-first century.¹ Her creative purpose had always been to produce a positive, dignifying representation of Romani identity, and this made of her texts and plastic art powerful working tools and instruments of self-assertion. At the same time, her literary language and paintings drew from the common source of the avant-garde movements that were still active

1 Manouche is the name of a specific branch of the Roma used by many French Romani groups to refer to themselves. For the use of endonyms (such as Manouche, Kalderash or Sinti) and the resignification of some exonyms (Gitano or Gypsy), see the Introduction above by María Sierra. This chapter uses the terms Romani, Manouche and Tzigane (sometimes Zingarina) to refer to Sandra Jayat, terms which the author herself uses to describe her ethnic identity.

in post-war Paris and contributed fresh insights that her contemporaries came to respect and value.

The imaginative effort that sustained her artistic career and the political will underlying the impulse to bring dignity and respect link Jayat to a whole transnational generation of Romani authors and activists whose writing and art became tools used to challenge the stereotypes about their life and culture.² Apart from being in tune with the concerns of the transnational Romani movement, Jayat's work also shared some of the intentions attributed to Romani artists and writers, fundamentally the desire to transcend the classic genres while appropriating some of what they had to offer, and to go beyond the labels of primitive or naïf art in order to be considered on an equal footing with canonical Western creations.³

This participation in a joint endeavour and a common aesthetic framework did not deprive Jayat's work of a remarkable originality. Setting up a constant dialogue between biography and creation was one of the most distinctive features of her life and career. Her literary and artistic career was always underpinned by re-readings and interpretations of her own experiences, enabling her to contribute *real* personal examples of oppression and marginalization. She did this in her paintings, poetry collections and, especially, two autobiographical publications, *La longue route d'une Zingarina* [The Long Journey of a Zingarina, 1978] and *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* [The Zingarina or the Wild Grass, 2010], in which Jayat related, in the first person, the suffering that racism had caused her and the sense of liberation she had felt on arriving in Paris.⁴ The objective of these accounts of her past went beyond merely providing examples of the sufferings and successes of a Manouche woman of her time. Jayat used them to give structure and meaning to her own life, presenting it as the journey of someone who, after battling against the odds, had succeeded in rising above the barriers imposed by racism, discovered herself as a creator and reached a pre-eminent place in the Parisian cultural scene.

All these characteristics turn the creative journey of Sandra Jayat into an excellent case for considering two interrelated phenomena: firstly, the various readings that Jayat made of herself and the Romani world in her work, a process that was connected to the historic mobilization of this people in defence of its rights and dignity; and, secondly, what remained of her enduring artistic legacy in that Paris of the second half of the twentieth century that became her workshop and her home. This chapter therefore

2 Paola Toninato, *Romani Writing: Literacy, Literature and Identity Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

3 Tímea Junghaus, "Roma Art: Theory and Practice", *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 59, no. 1 (2014): 25–42.

4 Sandra Jayat, *La longue route d'une Zingarina* (Paris: Bordas, 1978) and Sandra Jayat, *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* (Paris: Max Milo, 2010).

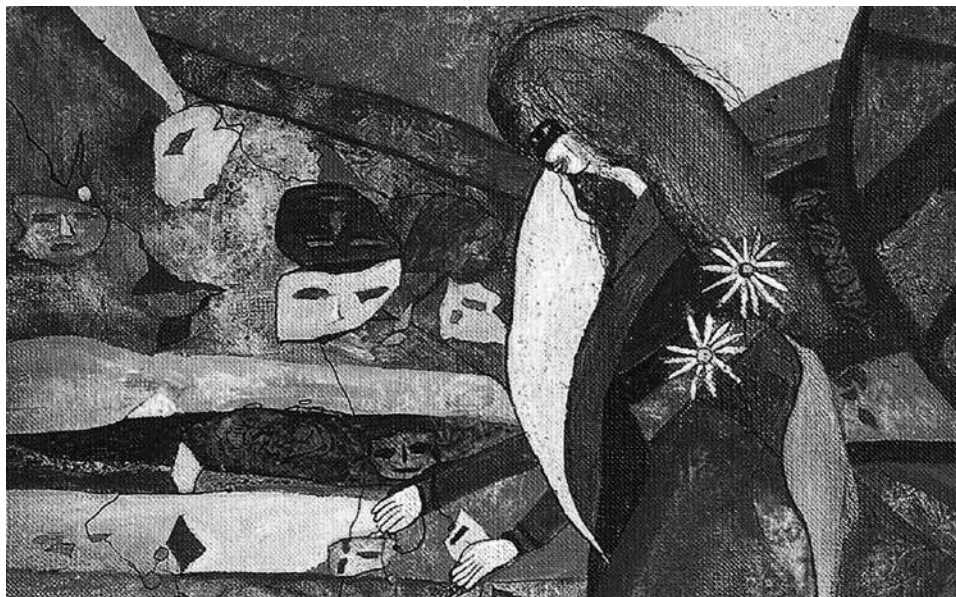


Fig. 5 *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* (Paris: Max Milo, 2010). Cover illustration by Sandra Jayat. (with permission of the publisher)

covers both the childhood and early youth of the author – given that her artistic and literary work cannot be understood without them – as well as her development as an artist and intellectual in the French capital. These life circumstances are considered here from a dual perspective. The first gives priority to the first-person testimony of Jayat in her works – in other words, it integrates the author's memory into the biographical account that these pages seek to present; the second complements this by putting the references for this autobiographical memory in dialogue with historiographical explanations, not with the intention of correcting them in terms of supposed historiographical accuracy, but with the desire to create a richer framework of reference from this interaction which will help explain the biographical journey.

La longue route

At the end of the 1930s, Italy became hostile territory for those Romani groups (like Sandra Jayat's family) who used to travel across the north of the country in the spring and summer but settled in a fixed location during the cold winter months. According to an account by Jayat's grandfather, shortly before she was born, some members of her family were arrested by the blackshirts and tortured in the name of the *difesa*



Fig. 6 Sandra Jayat (with guitar) and La Guigne, wife of Django Reinhardt, early 1960s. (source: <https://www.facebook.com/django.liberchies/photos/pcb.904201653039472/904199733039664/> (accessed 2 December 2021); every effort has been made to identify the copyright holder)

della razza [defence of the race].⁵ With their detention, humiliation and punishment, the group started to suffer the first consequences of the escalating racism that was spreading throughout the country as the racial policy of the fascists gathered strength and supporters.⁶ Closely following the remembered testimony of her grandfather, Jayat told how the rest of her family decided to cross into France in search of peace after some family members were imprisoned. It was while they were crossing the border “somewhere between two countries” that Sandra Jayat was born, between 1938 and 1939.⁷

But France, too, had a long-standing tradition of rejection of the Romanies going back to the previous century, which had forced several generations to live harassed by the state control established by the laws of 1912, and in perpetual fear of expulsion.⁸ Shortly after Jayat’s group had settled in “a little corner of really good earth that seemed tucked

5 Jayat, *La longue route*, 18–21 and Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 13.

6 Giovanna Boursier, “Gypsies in Italy during the Fascist Dictatorship and the Second World War”, in *The Gypsies during the Second World War: In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Vol. 2, ed. Karola Fings and Donald Kenrick (Paris and Hatfield: Centre des Recherches Tsiganes/University of Hertfordshire Press, 1999), 13–36.

7 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 35.

8 Christophe Delclitte, “La catégorie juridique ‘nomade’ dans la loi de 1912”, *Hommes et Migrations*, nos 1188–89 (1995): 23–30.

away from the whole world” close to the town of Moulins,⁹ the French government issued a statutory order in April 1940 prohibiting the free circulation of the itinerant population (principally Romani groups) in mainland France on the pretext that “vagrant” individuals posed a threat to national security. Following the signing of the armistice agreement and the German occupation, persecution of these groups intensified further with the establishment of a new law that required their internment in camps throughout France.¹⁰ Jayat’s family was split up as a result of this persecution. They all had to leave the places where they had set up camp; some were imprisoned in what Jayat tellingly refers to as “death camps”; others, like Jayat herself and her grandfather, were able to hide in empty houses and abandoned farms in the region. At some unspecified point, probably still during the war, the continuous attacks and abuse aimed at family members who had refused to hide led them all to decide to set off on their travels once more in search of peace, this time to the south of France (i.e. the unoccupied territory where the internment policy did not apply).¹¹

The time frame connecting these events with their settling once more in northern Italy is rather hazy. By the time Jayat had turned 14, her group was on the move again through Lombardy, and the reference point is a camp close to Sesto Calende on the banks of Lake Maggiore. Her two most important autobiographical stories both begin here, in this camp, on the eve of her fifteenth birthday, when her grandfather told her that she would be married the next day. The prospect of a rushed, forced wedding terrified Jayat so much that she abandoned the camp where she had grown up: “I am leaving to safeguard my form of freedom and escape the tradition that imposes marriage at the age of fifteen”, states Jayat’s alter ego in one of her accounts.¹²

At some point in her journey, or maybe before starting it, Jayat made it her first objective to cross the border into France and then make her way to Paris to meet a “cousin”, a musician whom her grandfather had talked about for years, Django Reinhardt. During the months it took her to make it to Paris, the news of her flight had travelled more quickly than she had, which meant that she was regularly recognized in the French and Italian Romani camps where she sought temporary refuge. While she was in these camps, apart from receiving all kinds of assistance, Jayat grew familiar with the climate of uncertainty in the other families who were suffering the effects of the restrictions on settlements in the northern part of Italy and the continuous harassment and humiliation from the majority population. Their hatred of Manouches was a phenomenon that she had experienced

9 Jayat, *La longue route*, 20.

10 Marie-Christine Hubert, “1940–1946, l’internement des Tsiganes en France”, *Hommes et Migrations*, nos 1188–89 (1995): 31–37.

11 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 36.

12 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 11.

during the war and was now experiencing again, the main difference this time being that she was alone and not protected by her group. The constant refusal even to give her a glass of water, the threats of ill treatment and the insults turned her journey into a constant battle for survival. She only appeared to feel safe in the company of children, to whom she later dedicated some of her early books – among them, significantly, the one in which she told the story of this journey.¹³

Jayat reached Paris in spring 1955. She managed to survive in the early months thanks to a Jewish family who gave her somewhere to stay in their home and later let her use a small studio in the heart of Montmartre where she started to paint, write and establish her first contacts with the world of art and literature. These early friendships played a crucial role in enabling Jayat to make contact with the family of Django Reinhardt, who had died barely two years before she arrived in the French capital. Even though she was never able to meet him personally, the memory of Django became a constant motif in her work and a strategy that she employed time and again to assert herself in the artistic and intellectual circles of 1950s Paris.¹⁴ Equally important was the patronage of writers, such as Marcel Aymé and Jean Cocteau, both of whom she met in her early years in Paris and whose protection was a decisive factor in launching her career as a self-taught writer and painter.

The 1960s was a time of intense literary activity for Jayat. She started out as a writer in 1961 with her first book of poems entitled *Herbes manouches* [Manouche Grass], with a cover designed by Cocteau and a preface by J.B. Cayeux. Her 1963 book of poems *Lunes nomades* [Nomad Moons] contained a preface by Marcel Aymé and illustrations by Marcel Mouloudji, while the illustration on the front cover of the third in 1966, *Moudravi: où va l'amitié* [Moudravi: Where Friendship Goes], was designed by Marc Chagall. This circle of friends, together with her determination to write in French – a decision that was tied to common practice among French Tziganes ever since Matéo Maximoff had opted to use the majority language to spread Romani culture to a wider public¹⁵ – gave Jayat the opportunity to start

13 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 42; Jayat, *La longue route*, 53, 54, 65, 68 and 75.

14 There have been numerous biographies of Django Reinhardt. The standard references are still those by his friend Charles Delaunay, see *Django mon frère* (Paris: Eric Losfeld, 1968) and *Django Reinhardt* (Newcastle: Ashley Marks, 1988). Most of the literature on Django the musician is in French. Outstanding among them are Noël Balen, *Django Reinhardt. Un géant sur son nuage* (Paris: Lien commun, 1993); William Patrick, *Django* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 1998); Alain Antonietto and François Billard, *Django Reinhardt: rythmes futurs* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2004).

15 Matéo Maximoff, *Dites-le avec des pleurs* (Romainville: self-published, 1990). A reflection on the cost of translating Romani oral customs to a majority language such as French can be found in Gérard Gartner, *Matéo Maximoff. Carnets de route* (Paris: Alteredit, 2006), 103–04.

publishing with well-known publishers. *Lunes nomades* and *Moudravi: où va l'amitié* were published by Seghers Éditions, a French publishing house founded by Pierre Seghers, a famous poet linked to the Resistance who became one of the principal promoters of the new poetry in Paris after the Liberation.¹⁶ In parallel with these publications, Jayat was also a driving force behind the work of young writers of her time, as demonstrated in the appearance of *Poèmes pour ce temps* [Poems for This Time] a collection of compositions by promising young Parisians, presented by Jean-Pierre Rosnay and Sandra Jayat, the “poétesse gitane” [Gypsy poetess]. In the introduction to the collection, the showcased poets stated their belief “that it [was] still possible to write poems, to work for a poetry that would not continue to be the privilege of a caste of initiates and closed circles”, and expressed their gratitude to both Rosnay and Jayat for having supported and appreciated their project.¹⁷

All these activities bore witness to personal affection for Jayat and the appeal she had among the cultural circles of 1960s Paris, their interest clearly ignited by the originality of her poetic imagery, which drew on experiences from her childhood until her early years in Paris. In the first of her books, *Herbes manouches*, Jayat deployed a complete array of symbols relating to the Manouche camps of her infancy and dedicated poems to the *roulottes* [caravans], the guitars and horses, the wisdom of the older folk, the fire that lit up and marked the centre of the camp, and so on. Despite the fact that these images clearly drew on the more bucolic and exotic stereotypes of Manouche life (or perhaps precisely because of it), the critical reception of this first book of poems was positive. Michel-Claude Jalard, an art critic and expert on jazz music, wrote a review for the *Gazette de Lausanne* declaring that, while the author had not yet completely mastered poetic technique, her work could be expected to continue to mature as her vocabulary became richer and her compositions less “systematic”. Nevertheless, despite these typical weaknesses of youth, Jalard was cheered that the “Gitane poetess” had not succumbed to “some third-rate notion of Gypsyism” and defined hers as a “sensibility concerned above all with finding her own voice”,¹⁸ and indeed, the search for her own style seemed to be one of her main unstated purposes in these early works. Thus, with the likely intention of avoiding any “third-rate notions of Gypsyism” and also combating the age-old negative stereotypes about her ethnic group, the poetic discourse of *Herbes manouches* – like a good

16 Bruno Doucey, *Pierre Seghers: poésie la vie entière* (Paris: Éditions Musée du Montparnasse, 2011).

17 Jean-Pierre Rosnay and Sandra Jayat, *Poèmes pour ce temps. Jeunes poètes 1963*, with an introduction by Jean-Pierre Rosnay and Sandra Jayat (Lyon: Imprimerie nouvelle lyonnaise, 1963).

18 Michel-Claude Jalard, “Herbes manouches”, *Gazette de Lausanne*, 9–10 December 1961: 28.

many of her publications and subsequent painting work – set out to dignify and elevate the Romani lifestyle as Jayat thought of it.

Barely two years later, in 1963, when Jayat published her second book, *Lunes nomades*, her calling to find her own individual voice and demonstrate that her Manouche origin could be a source of inspiration that personalized her work already seemed clear. *Lunes nomades* returned to the same subjects that had already appeared in *Herbes manouches* and included new references, such as the poem dedicated to her close friend “Babik, son of Django”, a direct reference to the artistic genealogy that she sought to emulate. Jayat also began to develop a corpus of symbols of the Romani world that were combined with references to herself in the first person in lines such as, “As a child I used to live in freedom ... At twenty I found freedom in words” or “For a long time / I have been walking on a river of sand”, and titles such as “If I were what I am not / I would like to be what I am”.¹⁹ In any case, it was the composition that opened the book of poems, “Interdit aux nomades” [No Entry for Gypsies] that made the clearest reference, not only to her own life story but also to the imaginary of racism and exclusion shared by French Romanies. Not surprisingly, therefore, its first two lines, “Why not / No entry for the moon” found their way into the title of an anonymous article published in *La Voix mondiale tzigane* [The Tzigane Voice Worldwide],²⁰ the journal of the Communauté mondiale gitane [World Community of Gypsies], published from 1962 by Vanko Rouda), which was used as a platform to call for the ethnic mobilization of the Tziganes outside France and to report abuses by the national authorities, such as banning nomads from camping freely.²¹

Scarcely three years later, in 1966, that evolution towards poetic maturity that Michel-Claude Jalard had foreseen started to flower with the appearance of *Moudravi: où va l'amitié*, thanks to a more elaborate symbolism and Jayat's more ambitious treatment of her subject matter. *Moudravi* was a nomad sage, a sort of representation of Manouche tradition and a figure that Jayat could evoke as a symbolic interlocutor, to whom she could address her words. The structure and content of this book of poems were considerably more complex than in the previous ones. Instead of focusing only on a sequence of images about Romani life and customs, the central thread of this book of poems is a much more profound humanistic reflection on personal relations. For the first time, the writer was devoting a composition to interpreting her experience as a woman and a Tzigane and calling for men and women in her community to work together: so, in “Femme je le suis” [Woman I Am], she writes, “Woman I remain visible

19 Sandra Jayat, *Lunes nomades* (Paris: Seghers, 1963), 8, 84, 16, 21 and 34.

20 “Un accord intéressant les Tziganes yougoslaves travaillant en France”, *La Voix mondiale tzigane*, no. 20 (1965).

21 María Sierra, “Creating Romanestan: A Place to Be a Gypsy in Post-Nazi Europe”, *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2019): 272–92.

to suffering / Woman I am, like that tree that resembles you / Look my hands are naked / And they do not pick up the spit from the ground / [As a] Woman, I do not walk an easy path ... Man or Woman / We are human / Come, let us fight together".²²

Likewise, in other compositions, Jayat sets out her vision of friendship as a site on which to build intercultural dialogue and, in poems such as "L'amitié existe" [Friendship Exists], she pauses to reflect upon the nature of that relationship.²³ Nevertheless, the ones that stand out both for their number and compositional quality are those that explicitly express her longing for a cosmopolitan world, like that of 1960s Paris, in which it was possible to build new friendships based on respect and appreciation of difference. Good examples are: "Chacun est chacun" [Everyone is unique], "Mon ami du Nil bleu" [My friend from the Blue Nile], "Mon frère de Malaga" [My brother from Malaga], "Mon ami d'ailleurs rencontré à Paris" [My out-of-the-way friend I met in Paris], "Complainte du gitan retrouvé" [Lament of the Gypsy that I found again], "Mon ami de Tunis" [My friend from Tunis], "Mon ami gitan" [My Gypsy friend], "Mon ami de Grenade" [My friend from Granada], "Mon ami disparu" [My lost friend].²⁴ The last part of this collection closes with several compositions that are more introspective and retrospective in tone. In "Au-delà de toutes mes étapes" [Beyond All My Stages],²⁵ the imaginary of the Manouche world of her childhood is set aside, and she refers explicitly to that moment in her life where Jayat was at the time; integrated into the intellectual circles of Paris and recognized as a *poétesse gitane*, she was wondering about the identity she had constructed in those circles, which had been instrumental in helping her succeed in life. This is how she expresses it in "Qui suis-je mes amis" [Who Am I, My Friends]: "Who am I to you, my friends / a Gypsy, a bohemian / Who relays the voices of a distant past / To mingle with your black-carnation voices".²⁶ Finally, the poem that concludes the book, "Tout me reste à dire" [Everything Remains for Me to Say] shows Jayat's commitment to growth in her career as a writer.²⁷

These anxieties about her identity and future were noticed by her contemporaries. In an interview granted to the official *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* at the beginning of the 1970s, the interviewer stated that Jayat had confessed to her that, "instead of being proud of her success, her family thinks it is 'shameful to write books'". While it is difficult to be sure who she was thinking of when she referred to "her family" (whether her Italian relatives or those who had taken her in when she arrived in Paris), it seemed very clear to the interviewer that rejection had not diminished

22 Sandra Jayat, *Moudravi: où va l'amitié* (Paris: Seghers, 1966), 16.

23 "L'amitié existe", in Jayat, *Moudravi*, 50.

24 Jayat, *Moudravi*, 119, 132, 54, 134, 137, 140, 142, 144 and 147.

25 "Au-delà de toutes mes étapes", in Jayat, *Moudravi*, 157.

26 Jayat, *Moudravi*, 179.

27 "Tout me reste à dire", in Jayat, *Moudravi*, 193.

Jayat's desire to persevere in her vocation: "and yet she had wanted so much to be successful in her career, to show people that a Gypsy was capable of writing a book". Even so, this determination in her pursuits seemed to have taken its toll: "I do not think that Sandra Jayat has found complete happiness. She mixes with all kinds of *gadgé*, but told me that she does not feel she is one of them. Yet when she is with her own people, she no longer feels one of them either", the interviewer acknowledged in an afterthought that seemed to go back to her composition "Qui suis-je mes amis".²⁸

Between Image and Word

In parallel with this early literary output, Jayat also excelled as a painter in the 1960s. Personal contacts once again played a decisive role. Painters such as Henri Mahé – who introduced her to the use of new artistic techniques such as lithography and fresco painting – and the gallery owner Émile Adès – who exhibited her work alongside that of artists such as Chagall, Dalí and Dedalo Montali – helped her gain access to the artistic community of Paris, although the climate in the French capital during those years was undeniably propitious for it. After the end of the war, the influx of artists had reshaped the aesthetic scene (sometimes referred to as the Second School of Paris), in which artists combined their desire to learn the modern idiom of the avant-garde with the determination to retain some of the cultural difference that would keep their identity alive, all without being labelled exotic, eccentric or passé.²⁹ In this context that revived the debates between different types of abstraction, between abstraction and figuration, between the very notion of a "school" and individualistic activity, not forgetting the renewed importance of surrealism, Jayat developed as an artist.

Where the poems in *Moudravi: où va l'amitié* were evidence of Jayat's perception of Paris as a world where cultures converged, so her pictorial

28 Daphne Maurice, "Sandra Jayat, the Gypsy Poetess", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, ser. 3, 52 (1973): 90. Toninato refers to such misgivings, stating that the attitude towards Romani intellectuals has often been an ambivalent one, admired by some, perceived by others as "risk factors" because their intellectual activity in academic and scholarly circles involved crossing ethnic boundaries. Toninato, *Romani Writing*, 164. The same reluctance to be educated in a different tradition of literacy can also be interpreted as a way of resisting any sort of acculturation: Ian Hancock, "Standardisation and Ethnic Defence in Emergent Non-Literate Societies", in *Language, Blacks and Gypsies: Languages Without a Written Tradition and Their Role in Education*, ed. Thomas Acton and Morgan Dalphinis (London: Whiting and Birch, 2000), 19–23; Martin P. Levinson, "Literacy in English Gypsy Communities: Cultural Capital Manifested as Negative Assets", *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 1 (2007): 5–39.

29 Serge Guilbaut, *Paris pese a todo. Artistas extranjeros 1944–1968*, exhibition catalogue (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2018).

expression gave an account, using other media, of the wide variety of forms of plastic expression available in the French capital. The use of dreamlike forms, free association of motifs and projections of her childhood memories onto her paintings was clearly linked to the aesthetics of surrealism and expressionism,³⁰ which were still clearly flourishing in the middle of the century, and gave Jayat the opportunity both to express herself and obtain financial benefit from her creations. Among the defining characteristics of Jayat's visual art, the most original and significant was the dialogue between her literary work and her painting. A good example of this is the way that she added writing to her canvasses, which not only had a decorative function but also hinted at her vocation as a writer. It was a feature that placed her firmly in the same line of formal experimentation typical of the historic avant-garde movements, Cubism in particular, which was preoccupied with the artistic value of the non-pictorial.³¹ Similarly, symbolic motifs such as the hand referred directly to the creative work of writing and design, while some images, such as guitars, dancers or birds, for example, were taken up again and reinvented in the form of a visual imaginary that was used to refer to the Manouche world of her childhood. The complementarity of pictorial and literary elements was far from unusual in the Parisian intellectual circles that Jayat moved in, and it may have been the example of friends, such as Marc Chagall himself or Jean Cocteau, which influenced her decision to develop her creativity using different forms of expression. What seems clear though is that she herself was aware of it and fostered among the critics a view of her written and graphic output as different facets of an artistic career with no boundaries between genres. From there she asserted: "When I write a book, it is like my painting ... words ... sentences somewhat closed, but I do not feel claustrophobic".³²

This dialogue between painting and writing was possible because Jayat continued working in both fields. In the 1970s, her literary activity was aimed at children, like other contemporary Romani authors, such as the Swede Katarina Taikon. Jayat was conscious of the role that children's literature had played in creating and spreading a view of Romani groups as "uncivilized" (immiserated, irrational, illiterate),³³ and decided to put together a set of images that would present the harmony and virtues of the Gypsy world, recovering certain elements from the oral tradition of her community that

30 Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 165. For a description of Jayat's style, see Sophie Aude, "Image et langage dans les œuvres d'artistes roms contemporains", *Études Tsiganes* 36, no. 4 (2008): 10–37.

31 Nikos Stangos, *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994).

32 Ariette Laurent-Fahier, "Sandra Jayat: un destin exceptionnel", *Créations* 52 (1991): 30.

33 Jean Kommers and María Sierra, *¿Robo de niños o robo de gitanos? Los gitanos en la literatura infantil* (Seville: Editorial de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2017).

had been distorted, obliterated or were simply unknown as far as the majority culture was concerned. These interests found expression in the joint publication of two tales, *Kourako* and *Les deux lunes de Savyo* [The Two Moons of Savyo] in 1972. These tales for children told stories of young Romanies who left their camps to go on a journey, the first in search of a magic guitarist who lived in the midst of nature, the second to reach “the moon of the Tziganes”. In both cases, the figure of the Gypsy was a sublimation of positive aspects of her culture that Jayat also considered to be defining characteristics: the desire for freedom as the driving force of life, music as a form of emotional expression of the people, the connection with and respect for nature as a fundamental principle and the notion of “the journey” – individual or collective – as a means of learning and personal growth.³⁴

Apart from persisting in her efforts to present the positive side of the Romani world, these works were a way of preparing the ground for her book *La longue route d'une Zingarina*, published in 1978, which was again aimed at children. In this tale, Jayat for the first time transformed the memories of her childhood experiences into an autobiographical story that supplied the essential references for discovering what her life had been like before she arrived in Paris. Setting aside the references it contains to specific events, it should be stressed that this 1978 tale is both autobiographical fiction and an exercise in reflecting on her own process of transformation between the time she abandoned the camp at the age of 15 and the moment she crossed the French border some months later. Probably the most interesting and distinctive feature of *La longue route d'une Zingarina* is Jayat's description of the feelings of Stellina, the main character in the story and her alter ego. The meaning of her journey on the road to Paris soon loses the sense of a “flight” and turns into a kind of initiatory journey. Jayat's figurative use of “the road” was connected to countercultural literature, an exploration of the metaphor of the journey as the search for individual and collective identity, following the Beat trail in *On the Road*. The same image of the journey also linked up with its figurative use in Romani literature symbolizing travelling. It can be seen in the work of authors such as Ronald Lee, Iliaz (or Iljaz) Šaban and Rajko Đurić, who used the metaphor of “the journey”, “the path” or “the road” to stress the forced exiles of their groups, or to demonstrate pride in their itinerant nature.³⁵ These figurative uses are more deeply rooted in Romani authors writing in French, who have commonly employed the motif of the journey to refer to the “existential nomadism” that characterizes their culture and, hence, their literature.³⁶

In *La longue route d'une Zingarina*, Jayat uses Stellina to depict both the cruelty of the marriage being forced on her by her family and the lack

34 Sandra Jayat, *Kourako suivi de Les deux lunes de Savyo* (Tournai: Casterman, 1972).

35 Toninato, *Romani Writing*, 92–97.

36 Julia Blandfort, *Die Literatur der Roma Frankreichs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

of understanding of the *gadje* [non-Roma] who repudiated and insulted her as she made her way to Paris. At the same time, her story also mentions feelings of physical and emotional security in the various camps of distant relatives who had offered her shelter and fed, clothed and looked after her. The story is constructed therefore as Stellina makes her way through two worlds: the hostile, dangerous world of the *gadje*, and the world of the Romani families and camps, which could be oppressive places because of the weight of tradition or refuges that afforded a temporary escape from the abuse and intolerance of majority society. In the course of this journey, Stellina gradually acquires what the writer considered to be all the most important traits of her people (fighting for freedom, special sensitivity to nature, empathy for Roma and non-Roma, and so on) until she herself is the very embodiment of the ideal Tzigane.

To a large extent, these three works of the 1970s marked the culmination of Jayat's career as a writer. After the 1970s, and particularly in the 1980s, she tended to channel her energies more in the direction of consolidating her career as a plastic artist and promoting cultural projects in collaboration with other Roma. The friendship she established with another artist, Gérard Gartner, was a determining factor in this endeavour. The son of a Manouche mother and a Kalderash father, Gartner built his creative career as a self-taught sculptor through his close friendship with Alberto Giacometti. By 1980, Gartner, like Jayat, had a large network of contacts in the Parisian art world and was determined to use them to work in support of Romani artists. Hence, at the beginning of the 1980s, they both started to consider the possibility of organizing an exhibition that would show the world the many ways in which Romanies were developing their creativity.³⁷

These plans cannot be separated either from the collective efforts that had been forged over the previous ten years at three World Romani Congresses (1971, 1978 and 1981) or from the exciting prospects that the agreements reached at these meetings offered. Furthermore, movements for the defence of cultural specificity had promoted other types of projects directly related to the plastic arts by Roma. As Ágnes Daróczi points out, a large number of Romani visual artists started to organize themselves in the early 1970s to demand that their work should not simply be labelled as primitive, naïf or folk art, and that it should receive the recognition and social prestige it deserved beyond the specific Romani community to which the artist belonged. Those efforts bore fruit in the first National Exhibition of Self-Taught Artists of 1979, which was organized by Daróczi herself and shown in the Pataky Gallery in Budapest.³⁸ This first exhibition had

37 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 241.

38 Menyhért Lakatos, Ágnes Daróczi and Zsigmond Karsai, *1st National Exhibition of Self-Taught Artists* (Budapest: Népművelési Intézet, 1979); Ágnes Daróczi, "Roma Visual Artists in Hungary and Europe", in *Meet Your Neighbours: Contemporary*

a strong impact among European Gypsy artists and, although Jayat does not mention it, it seems likely that its philosophy and approach inspired the *Première mondiale d'art tzigane* [First World Exhibition of Tzigane Art] that she and Gartner were planning.³⁹

With the institutional support and funding of the Ministry of Culture and the Paris City Council, Jayat and Gartner obtained permission to hold the exhibition at the *Conciergerie* in May 1985. The official narrative of the exhibition was intended to show the diversity of Romani art, principally European. Among the many works included were those by the Italian Renaissance artist Antonio Solario, nicknamed “Lo Zingaro” (c. 1465–1530); Otto Müller (1874–1930), a painter of the German *Die Brücke* expressionist movement; Serge Poliakoff (1900–69), a Russian expressionist who settled in Paris; Django Reinhardt himself; Torino Zigler, a contemporary of Gartner and Jayat; and works that tended to expressionism and allegory.⁴⁰ Most of those represented, principally those who worked before the twentieth century, had not used their work to assert their identity as Romani. Nevertheless, their inclusion as part of the official narrative of the exhibition served to demonstrate not only the originality and quality of the alleged transnational Romani art but also the thriving genealogy of the style, developed right at the heart of the most important European plastic arts movements of Modernity.

The *Première mondiale d'art tzigane* was the project in which Jayat's commitment to seek recognition for the Roma in art was most obvious, but it was not the only one. In the years leading up to the end of the century, Jayat continued to invest her efforts in her painting, producing works for galleries and merchants, constantly asserting the distinctiveness and originality of her ethnic heritage. Some of the galleries where her paintings were exhibited during those two decades included the seventeenth *Salon de l'Île-de-France* in 1984, the *Beaux-Arts du Grand Palais* biennial in Paris in 1985, the *Galerie des Muses* in Paris in 1985, the *Salon international d'art contemporain* in Anvers in 1985, the *Musée Bourdelle* in Paris in 1992, the *Modern Art Museum of China* in 1994 and the *Jacob Javits Center* in New York in 1998. Her prestige as an artist led in 1992 to her being asked to design a special issue of French stamps with the theme “*Les Gens du voyage*” [the Travelling People]. As *Le Monde* put it, a few days before it was launched, the painter had chosen to “depict a guitar, some musical notes and a white bird of freedom to symbolize the culture of the *travelling people*”.⁴¹

Roma Art from Europe, ed. Tímea Junghaus and Katalin Székely (Budapest: Open Society Institute, Arts and Culture Program, 2006), 18–25.

39 Junghaus, “Roma Art”, 25–42.

40 Association des initiatives tziganes, *Première mondiale d'art tzigane* (Paris: Association des initiatives tziganes, 1985).

41 Anon, *Le Monde*, 28 November 1992.



Fig. 7 “Les Gens du voyage”, postage stamp designed by Sandra Jayat, 1992. (every effort has been made to identify the copyright holder)

Her commitment to the art world continued to develop in parallel with her career as a writer, by experimenting with genres that she had already practised in the past: poetry, the short fictional story and the novel. In *Je ne suis pas née pour suivre* [I Was Not Born to Follow, 1983], Jayat returned to poetry to develop that Manouche imaginary based on the symbols of freedom, communion with nature and brotherhood, which were displayed both in her writing and the accompanying illustrations.⁴² Her next two narrative works, *El romanès* [The Romani, 1986] and *Les racines du temps* [The Roots of Time, 1998] are stories about Gypsies, narrated in the first person by Roma. These stories are halfway between realistic fiction and autobiography. While *El romanès* relates the experiences of a Spanish Gitano, Romanino, “El Romanès”, during the Second World War, *Les racines du temps* is a story for young people about the adventures of Libèra, a young Romani girl, as told by a wise old man, Ribeiro Verde, to a boy, Maggio. By introducing Roma of various nationalities as main

42 By the beginning of the 1980s, the dual perspective in her work of the visual and the literary had become one of its most admired qualities. Anne-Marie Tassel and Alain Antonietto, “Sandra Jayat. Quand les mots ne suffisent pas je peins”, *Études tsiganes* 1 (1984): 1.

or secondary characters in these stories (the meeting between Libèra and her friends Solaro “el Gitano”, Livio “the Manouche”, Tomass “the Gypsy” and Vassile “the Rom” is especially powerful), the writer was portraying the world of the Roma as both transnational and cosmopolitan, in which the roads they travel and the camps of other Romanies are meeting places.

Finally, in *La Zingarina ou l’herbe sauvage* (2010), the writer distanced herself from fictional and semi-fictional children’s tales to resume the story of her own life, using the experiences of Stellina. Instead of continuing the account she had started decades earlier in *La longue route d’une Zingarina* (1978), which concluded as the heroine crossed the border between France and Italy, the new book starts with Stellina refusing to be forced into marriage and running away from the camp and, this time, goes as far as the early years of the young girl in Paris. While the subject matter remains the same, the second work is no longer a children’s book, but one aimed at adults. Jayat’s purpose is to explore further the meaning of her journey from the north of Italy to Paris, but concentrating this time on the encounters that took place along the way, which are once again the central element used to organize the account.

Hence, unlike the 1978 work, the centre of interest of *La Zingarina ou l’herbe sauvage* is the transnational dimension of Jayat’s culture, the possibility of dialogue between Tziganes and non-Tziganes, and mutual understanding from the point of view of difference. For Jayat, the affinities she struck up during the journey, and particularly those when she arrived in Paris, were proof that those with a “Tzigane spirit” could adapt well to contexts that were completely alien to their own way of life, in which what was valued and celebrated was precisely their ethnic difference. In this new book, Jayat even found space to take up the history of the Nazi persecution of Roma, but linking it this time to the persecution that the Jews also suffered. *La longue route d’une Zingarina* had omitted all reference to that particular issue, whereas *La Zingarina ou l’herbe sauvage* – written at a later stage in Jayat’s career, when there was greater knowledge and awareness of the *Samudaripen* (the Romani Holocaust) in the world’s Roma population – included a reflection on it in the form of a story. Upon her arrival in Paris, Stellina lodges with a Jewish family whose mother believes that the young Manouche girl is Sarah, her own daughter lost in the Nazi horror. This situation – a fictionalized transcript of Jayat’s own experience – leads Stellina to recognize that, while some parallels can be drawn between the suffering of the two peoples, hers has a unique history that should not be overshadowed by anybody else’s: “even though we have suffered the same oppression that has set up camp in the present and will remain indefinitely in the present, I am not Sarah!”⁴³

43 Jayat, *La Zingarina*, 141. The two works are compared in Cécile Kovacsazy and Julia Blandfort, “Dialogue des cultures: réflexion sur l’identité romani à travers les

In *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage*, Jayat collected together and strategically reformulated many of the key themes that she had exploited repeatedly in her earlier works. The ideas of the journey, change and freedom that had been appearing since her first books returned to the forefront once more, but were this time derived from past experience that she narrated in the first person. Her own life was presented as an inexhaustible source of tales and stories that demonstrated the possibility, and especially the duty, to foster a mutually enriching dialogue with other ways of life. Jayat illustrated this dialogue with continual references to the intellectual figures who had supported her – and thanks to whom, as she would highlight in due course, she had come to have a role of some importance as a member of the Parisian cultural scene. The search for legitimation as an intellectual of the time was undoubtedly one of the tacit objectives of this later work. *La Zingarina ou l'herbe sauvage* not only presented Stellina (Jayat) as yet another member of the scholarly and bohemian circles of Paris during those years, but implicitly demonstrated that her success in those environments had come about because she had known how to use her ethnic background to good advantage as a characteristic that distinguished her in a positive sense from the rest.

Conclusion

The importance of Sandra Jayat in today's French cultural scene appears to be beyond question. The awards for her work from the 1970s are proof of the stature and credibility of her intellectual output and of the impact of her work in the cultural field.⁴⁴ It is no surprise that, in the majority of cases, her work has been highly praised for the originality of the form and content of its discourse. Her childhood supplied images and subjects to reflect upon, while the creative freedom of Paris in the second half of

romans de Sandra Jayat”, *Études tziganes* 46 (2011): 205–15. On the determination to have one's own story of the Holocaust that would not be confused with or fade into invisibility beneath the better-known account of the suffering of the Jews, see Ian Hancock, “Uniqueness of the Victims: Gypsies, Jews and the Holocaust”, *Without Prejudice: International Review of Racial Discrimination* 1–2 (1988): 45–67.

44 Grand Prix de la littérature enfantine [First Prize for Children's Literature], 1972; Medaglia d'oro dalla fondazione fra Scrittori, Poeti, Pittori e Giornalisti per la Pace nel mondo [Gold Medal of the Foundation for Writers, Poets, Painters and Journalists for Peace in the World], 1976; Prix International Toulouse Lautrec de peinture [International Toulouse Lautrec Prize for Painting], 1978; Grand Prix du Livre for her poetic work, Stockholm, 1978; nominated member of the National Committee for the defence of the memory of racist and anti-Semitic persecutions perpetrated by the *de facto* authority known as the “Government of the French State”, 1998.

the twentieth century encouraged her to probe and explore the possibilities of genres and different forms of artistic expression that were previously unknown to her, but which she ended up adopting as tools for her own particular purposes. From her handling of literary genres such as poetry or storytelling, or the visual languages of Expressionism and Surrealism, arose a hybrid style in both form and content. The use of French to tell popular Manouche legends that she had learnt in Italy, introducing the oral narrative tradition into her texts, integrating visual imagery based on the Manouche camps and conveyed in a Parisian avant-garde style, endowed her work with a unique quality that earned her the recognition of her peers.

Nevertheless, the main purpose of Jayat's career was not (or was not only) the conquest of fame as a creator and intellectual. Her works are proof that the visual arts and literature are valuable tools for promoting empowerment that complement the struggles of social movements. Jayat's contribution to the collective commitment of emancipation has been to raise the profile of an ethnic heritage that she considered to be undervalued and misunderstood, and which she sought to valorize as a cultural resource and source of inspiration for Romanies and non-Romanies. Her career therefore unfolds in the liminal space between two worlds that she always considered herself to belong to: bohemian Paris, the epicentre of majority European culture, and the Romani world, an inexhaustible source of raw materials that enabled her to understand herself and to interpret the world around her.

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Chapter 3

Ronald Lee: Discovering Romanestan between Canada and Europe

Carolina García Sanz

The writer and educator Ronald Lee was one of the most prominent activists fighting for the civil rights of the Romani diaspora in North America. His life story and his voice – committed, belligerent and iconoclastic – allow us to explore Romani participation in the social and political movements of the explosive 1960s. He dreamt of a fairer world from which – as the UN urged in its resolution 2106 (XX) of 1965 – all forms of racial discrimination would be eradicated.¹ With this target in mind, he joined the battle to reform his native Canada as an inclusive, multicultural country, and even though he failed in the attempt, he did not give up. There was still Europe, a continent with nearly 500 years of Romani history. He decided to go into voluntary exile and took up residence in London, where he collaborated with the British Gypsy Council and the Communauté mondiale gitane [World Gypsy Community] in setting up the First World Romani Congress (1971). Lee’s involvement sheds light on the collective effort, spanning two continents, to achieve an organizational framework – under the umbrella of the United Nations – that would protect the Roma as a nation without a territory (1978). Indeed, he was credited with a key role in the imagining of *Romanestan*: a space that the Roma could call their own, one that was

1 “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination”, adopted and open for signature and ratification by the General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965, which came into force in 1969.

more political and emotional than geographical.² It was a vision that he never stopped believing in after the age of utopias came to an end. His Romanestan was not just an idea to be thought about or a feeling that was felt; it was, above all, an action to be performed. In 1997, he helped set up the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, whose main purpose was to assist immigrants from Eastern Europe. A firm advocate of education as an instrument for the empowerment and preservation of his cultural heritage, Lee was the author of the dictionary *Learn Romani – Das Duma Romanes* (2005) and its later enlarged edition, *Romani Dictionary: Kalderash–English* (2010), which is notable for including American and European linguistic variants.³

The life story of Ronald Lee, therefore, is a privileged vantage point from which to observe the Romani revolution as it unfolded – like so many others – during the radical decade of the 1960s. Lee’s particular journey between two continents also allows us to evaluate his activism in terms of capacity for agency, starting with the very imagining of Gypsy Power and then as he interacted in spaces of transversal social and political struggle where there was dialogue and cooperation with non-Roma. Two aspects of his activism can be highlighted: first his ethnic militancy, as he conceived it from the standpoint of the Canadian national scene, and, second, his creativity in contributing to a Romani political project based on European identity, but universal in scope. These two elements converge in the radical, often contradictory, discourse of a social warrior with two different names, one *gadje* and the other Romani: Ronald Lee and Yanko. The first was born in Montreal in 1934 and the second during the traumatic deconstruction of the Canadian nation in the 1960s.

A Stranger in His Own Land

Ronald Lee provided several versions of his origins in the course of his lifetime. One of these was that his father was a Kalderash musician who had emigrated to Canada in the interwar period when things became difficult on the old continent. There, he married and settled permanently in European, bohemian Montreal after the Second World War. But the Lee family always retained an identity and way of life that Ronald himself described, in retrospect, as genuinely Romani: “I began my life as a Rom”.⁴

2 Donald Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies)* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 218.

3 Ronald Lee, *Learn Romani: Das-Duma Rromanese* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005); Ronald Lee, *Romani Dictionary: Kalderash–English* (Toronto: Magoria Books, 2010).

4 Taken from the interview granted to the Romani activist Hedina Sijerčić, editor-in-chief of *Romano Lil*, by Ronald Lee in his capacity as Director of Advocacy in

As a teenager, he was a seasonal worker at carnivals and fairs, following in the family tradition. However, it was not until he reached adulthood that he became aware of his personal background, which would – at one and the same time – distance him from and bring him closer to many of his fellow Canadians. It all began in the 1950s, when he decided to accompany a travelling Kalderash group that was offering its services to repair cars and household appliances around the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

This period of his youth on the road would shape his thinking about what being a Romani meant from the point of view of diversity, with a sensitivity alert to linguistic and cultural differences between various groups that he would cultivate for the rest of his life. These differences had their roots in Europe, but they were also the result of the relations established with Canada and its local population. The Vlax Romani community comprised Machvaya from the United States and Kalderash from Eastern Europe and the strategies they used to adapt to Canada illustrated the syncretic diversity of that idiosyncrasy and would be reflected in Lee's own personal experience.⁵ Living in the midst of these groups taught Lee that his people, who had embraced Pentecostalism in Toronto and adapted to the demands of Canadian life, had nevertheless managed to resist abandoning their language or giving up working with metal as itinerant economic activity or institutions that rule the community such as the Kris Romani, the traditional court used by the elders to govern and resolve disputes in their *kumpanias* [groups].

Consequently, Lee's travelling experiences in those years, which he combined with attendance at night school, revealed another Canadian world to him, one that was everywhere and nowhere, both invisible and chameleonic.⁶ His people could live camouflaged as English and/or French speakers, as whites and/or Indians and in rural environments and/or big cities: *Roma le Romensa thaj Gadzhela Gadzhensa* [Romani among Roma and non-Roma among outsiders]. Paradoxically, those 25,000 people with the ability to be everywhere at once were only ever seen through the lens of the cliché "Gypsy" (which was as anti-Gypsy as it was steeped in ignorance).⁷ In the best of cases, they were seen as people who lived in clans and earned a living in shifty activities, fortune telling and dealing in second-hand

the Roma Community and Advocacy Centre, Toronto in 1999, <http://www.oocities.org/~patrin/righthandpath.htm> (accessed 13 November 2019).

5 Matt T. Salo and Sheila M.G. Salo, *The Kalderas in Eastern Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1977).

6 Rena C. Gropper, *Gypsies in the City: Culture Patterns and Survival* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1975). Cf. Anne Sutherland, *Gypsies: The Hidden Americans* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1986).

7 Twenty-five thousand Romanies is the figure supplied by Lee. The total population of Canada in the 1960 census was 17,870,000: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/98-187-x/4151287-eng.htm> (accessed 13 November 2019).

cars; in the worst of cases, they were simply regarded as crooks from the slums. Furthermore, since the 1930s, during the Great Depression and the subsequent process of renegotiating the Canadian constitution with a more centralized federal system promoted from Ontario, certain groups also became police targets. It was during that period that regulations penalizing those who worked as unlicensed musicians and itinerant fortune tellers in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal started to proliferate.⁸ On his journeys, Lee witnessed the police harassment and administrative obstacles that prevented his people from earning a living from their professions.

The common perception of them in majority society was that they were an immigrant group. They were considered to be strange individuals and a potential danger to the Canadian “lawscape”.⁹ Gypsies were one of the classes of individuals recognized as “undesirable” and included in North American migratory regulations between 1880 and 1914.¹⁰ But the Roma were just one migrant people in a country created by immigrants, and many, like Ronald Lee, had in fact been born in Canada. Some groups had arrived in territories like Nova Scotia even before the Westminster Parliament had passed the British North America Act (1867), giving the official seal of approval to the British union with Canada as “one Dominion under the name of Canada”.¹¹ However, nobody remembered the relationships between Roma and non-Roma families that were so necessary for survival in the difficult world of the pioneers, carrying out such valuable activities as midwifery, natural medicine or horse-trading with the Indians. This latter business was placed at the service of the Canadian expeditionary forces during the First World War.

That initiatory stage “on the road” forced a young Ronald Lee to open his eyes not only to the painful reality of a Romani homeland without a territory that was threatened by repressive laws, but also to the marked social, economic and political contrasts with his other homeland, the one into which he had been born.

8 For police repression in the United States and Canada, see one view in Ian Hancock, *Danger! Educated Gypsy: Selected Essays* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010), 205–09.

9 Emma Patchett, *Spacing (in) Diaspora Law: Literature and the Roma* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 2–6.

10 Adèle Sutre, “Are You a Gypsy?” L’identification des tsiganes à la frontière américaine au tournant du XXe siècle”, *Migrations société* 52, no. 26 (2014): 57–73.

11 In 1862, according to a reference contributed by Cynthia Levine-Rasky, *Writing the Roma: Histories, Policies, and Communities in Canada* (Manitoba: Fernwood, 2016), 32.

An Explosive Cause to Fight for

For a generation of Canadians, the iconic television footage of the centre of Montreal on 17 May 1963 showing Sergeant-Major Walter Leja, his face disfigured, body covered in blood, together with the remains of a letterbox shattered by the bomb left by the Front de libération du Québec [Quebec Liberation Front], were a macabre metaphor for the idea of a nation that had also been blown sky high.¹² Revolution was inevitable and it could no longer be a “quiet” one, as Jean Lesage’s French-speaking bourgeoisie would have wished.¹³ There were too many second-class citizens at war with a certain idea of the Canadian nation. It was around that time that Ronald Lee’s literary alter ego in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Goddam Gypsy*, at nearly 30 years old, self-taught, with a short-lived marriage to a non-Romani woman behind him, would face the eternal dilemma of the Romanies: the *gadje* road or the Gypsy one?¹⁴ He could have chosen to pass himself off as a member of mainstream society. He knew what he had to do: hide the fact that he was a Romani. But he chose not to. Far from hiding his identity, he embraced it to be recognized as a son of that Canada in disarray.

Among the rest of the emancipatory causes in Canada during the traumatic sixties, Lee’s fight was the most marginal and least conspicuous in the vast sea of those aggrieved for reasons of class, gender and ethnicity. The rich, urban, white Canada of Ontario lived alongside another poor, rural, White Canada, a slum-dwelling Black Canada and a Red Canada condemned to ostracism on the reserve. It was precisely so that the Romani struggle would not run aground among so many different causes that it was imperative for it to find its own discourse and voice amid the noise of the Canadian revolution in the sixties. The inspiration would come from Europe.

Lee captured his experience as an activist in *Goddam Gypsy*. The pages of this “saga of a Canadian-born Rom” take us deep into a difficult personal exorcism, but they also provide us with a complete, reliable picture of an entire historical period.¹⁵ For his fictional alter ego, it would be a chance encounter with Juanito from Spain, or Kolia (his Romani name), in an all-night eatery on the highway that showed him the true road: *Rom sim tai Rom merava* [A Gypsy I Am and a Gypsy I’ll Die]. That European

12 See this picture for Canadians of English-speaking culture in Michael Ignatieff, *Blood & Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (London: BBC Books, 1993), 111.

13 The “Quiet Revolution” is identified with the liberal francophone project of Jean Lesage, who came to power at the beginning of the 1960s, opposed to the reactionary conservatism of the Union nationale of Maurice Duplessis.

14 Ronald Lee, *Goddam Gypsy* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1971); reissued, significantly with a different title, as *The Living Fire* (Toronto: Magoria Books, 2009).

15 Katie Trumpener, “A ‘People without History’ in the Narratives of the West”, *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992): 843–84 (here 883).

Romani offered him a way of life that was much more exciting than a boring office job. He gave him a new identity, Yanko, the Romani name that “old Doikitsa” baptized him with: “I had left one life to look for a different one, but I hadn’t figured to run into an ambulant European Gypsy on the Montreal–Ottawa highway. This ought to be interesting”.¹⁶

As far as Lee was concerned, in terms of self-representation, the Canadian Roma were suffering the consequences of having been separated for so long from the true path, the one followed by his people on the old continent. Despite the disparate origins, professions, religious creeds and lineages in the Canadian group, its members thought of themselves as collectively distinct from the Europeans. They knew nothing of the Kalderash camps on the outskirts of Paris, or the Gitano basket weavers in Spain or the Sinti horse breeders in Italy and Germany. They had never heard of Yanosh, crowned King of the Roma in Poland in 1937, nor had they experienced the Nazi genocide, or been forced to assimilate through the communist policy of sedentarization, which lay behind the first migratory wave of Roma people from different countries of Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary, in the 1950s.¹⁷ The survival strategies in the North American context, where they were represented as an eccentric minority ethnic group that nobody understood, had ended up diluting them into nothing.

Lee would be fascinated by Ionel Rotaru, who had been crowned King of the Romanies in 1959 in France as Vaida Voevod III, and enthusiastically embraced Rotaru’s organization, the *Communauté mondiale gitane*. In 1961 he became the editor of *O Glaso Romano*, the Canadian supplement of the organization’s journal *La Voix mondiale tzigane*, which was notable for its belligerent activism and multicultural philosophy. From that same Montreal platform, he spearheaded the crusade in support of the Irishman Grattan Puxon, who was arrested in Dublin in 1964 on a charge of possessing explosives. Puxon’s problems with the law revolved around the international campaign in favour of the Irish Travellers, led by the Evangelical pastor Clément Le Cossec and Rotaru himself. British politicians, such as the Labour MP Norman Dodds, and well-known sympathizers of the stature of Nobel Prize winner Bertrand Russell, were also committed to the cause and took part in the campaign.¹⁸

Although Ronald Lee’s activism was tied to the Romani movement

16 Lee, *The Living Fire*, 3.

17 For Romani creativity when forging pan-nationalist historical myths, see Ilona Klímová-Alexander, “The Development and Institutionalization of Romani Representation and Administration: Part 3b: From National Organizations to International Umbrellas (1945–1970) – the International Level”, *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 4 (2007): 182–83.

18 Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 156.

in Europe, he was aiming for results in Canada. From 1965 onwards, he began to work with Russel Demitro, “a great man” and leader of the Roma in Montreal. Demitro belonged to one of the historic clans established in the eastern provinces of the country. His brother Frank had defended his people, “rifle in hand”, when a few miners had tried to massacre them in June 1935 while they were camped on Cape Breton Island. That sad event was commemorated by the Canadian Roma in the song “Kheza, de ma ki katrinsa te kosav o rat pa mande” [Kheza, Give Me Your Apron to Wipe the Blood from Me].¹⁹ Through his collaboration with the Demitro clan, Ronald Lee acquired deeper knowledge of the workings of the Kris Romani, which he would use later in writings of an ethnographical nature about his people in Canada.²⁰ During the next two years with Demitro, he would invest most of his time and effort in campaigns to build bridges of understanding between the Roma and majority society. On the one hand, he lent his voice to petitions for the abolition of regulations in Montreal that made it difficult to carry out certain occupations; they should be regulated, but the priority of the regulatory framework should not simply be to repress, but to make it easier to obtain licences in activities such as second-hand car dealing and fortune telling. On the other, he worked tirelessly to combat stigmatizing prejudices and their dissemination in the public media.

Knowledge was the best way to defeat the ignorance that fed prejudice. Between 1967 and 1969, Ronald Lee published three profiles in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* entitled “The Gypsies in Canada: An Ethnological Study”.²¹ He pointed out in advance that his intention was less to explain with data than to illustrate “the spirit and the philosophy of the modern Romany as I have found him in North America”:

He is a strange man, this modern Gypsy, so basically honest that he would not even steal a box of matches, yet he exists to beat the system which is out to beat him: a chameleon, master linguist, Jekyll and Hyde character, half occidental and half oriental. You know nothing about him, he knows much about you. Always on the prowl, he looks for that one loophole in the staid and super sophisticated society around him that will enable him to make a fast buck ... he is invisible and he has many weapons: you have a name but he has two: one you never know

19 Levine-Rasky, *Writing the Roma*, 38.

20 Ronald Lee, “The Rom-Vlach Gypsies and the Kris-Romani”, in *Gypsy Law Romani Legal Traditions and Culture*, ed. Walter Otto Weyrauch (Berkeley: California University Press, 2001), 188–230.

21 Ronald Lee, “The Gypsies in Canada”, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 46 (1967): 38–51; *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 47 (1968): 12–28; *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 48 (1969): 92–107.

and one he is always changing. Today he is Tom Jones, yesterday he was William Stanley and tomorrow he might be Adam Strong.²²

This passage resulted in a contradiction since Lee sounded like the familiar kind of Gypsylorist ethnologist while aiming at doing a different kind of scholarship. In using the *gadje* knowledge platform *par excellence*, this ostensibly ethnological work was actually a declaration of intent about the agency of a new power: Gypsy Power.

Mundro Salamon Carries on the Fight from the Dignity of the Ghetto

The figure that embodied Gypsy Power as Ronald Lee envisioned it was Promethean man, a revolutionary, someone capable of the most audacious acts, like himself when he chose to follow Vaida Voevod III's path from France.²³ That Gypsy road would not only reveal the path of hope for his people but would intuitively lead to universal redemption. That was what the real power of Romani agency was all about. Its symbol could well be Mundro Salamon, the Gypsy tarot card personifying the Romani hero who "can converse with both God and the Devil" and whose wisdom on occasion "manages to save people from the clutches and lures of the Devil".²⁴ Hence, once he had found the discourse for his own cause, Gypsy Power, it was not only possible but his duty to form alliances for his epic struggle on the Canadian front.

As Katie Trumpener has pointed out, what Lee's autobiography actually tries to do is "to create itself as precisely what Canada is not: as a utopian Romanestan, as a polyglot, dialogic space in which travellers with different languages and cultural experiences can interact freely with each other".²⁵ The scenario, strategy, weapons and allies were determined by the counter-cultural approach of his struggle, since Mundro Salamon, as well as Yanko and Ronald Lee, would, in reality, be defined by his actions as anti-hero in *Goddam Gypsy*:

I wanted to fight back, somehow, to form an army of all those who had wanted to be Canadians, to help build a great country, but had been shut out, branded "Negroes", "Indians", "Gypsies", "radicals", "crackpots"

22 Lee, "The Gypsies in Canada", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 46 (1967): 38.

23 For Rotaru's utopian European formulation, see María Sierra, "Creating Romanestan: A Place to Be a Gypsy in Post-Nazi Europe", *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2019): 272-92.

24 Lee, *Living Fire*, 3.

25 Trumpener, "People without History", 883.

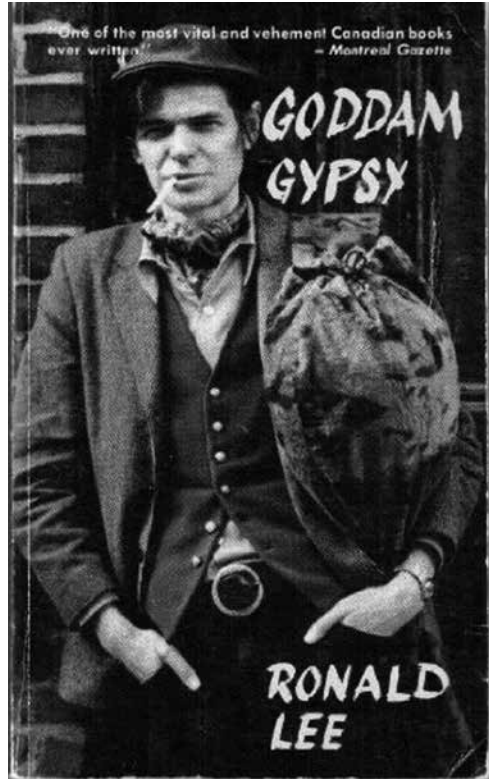


Fig. 8 Cover of *Goddam Gypsy*, by Ronald Lee (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1971). (with permission of the publisher)

and “commies” in a Canada, where the only true Canadian must be white, English Christian, and to believe in Easter Bunnies, tooth fairies, football and one white man being worth twenty of any other kind.²⁶

Lee’s alter ego was a Romani but also a beatnik, a social pariah who had deliberately chosen the term “Gypsy” to assert himself before the Anglo-Saxon majority society. The “passion, creativity and rebelliousness and, too often, violence” behind his ethnic militancy is represented in literary form as a “living fire”, one that crackled to the same irregular rhythm as the entire Beat generation. His journeys in *Goddam Gypsy* are, to some extent, reminiscent of the young Americans in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) who turned their coast-to-coast trips into a way of life.²⁷ Nevertheless, Lee’s journey, both the fictional and the real one, was not like that of the

26 Lee, *Living Fire*, 161.

27 A manifesto of the disenchantment of a whole generation of North Americans inspired by the imagination of a *canuck* (French-Canadian) emigrant: Jack Kerouac, *Jack Kerouac. La Vie est d’hommage: textes inédites*, ed. Jean-Christophe Cloutier (Montreal: Boréal, 2016).

main characters in Kerouac's novel, Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise, who referred to "holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road".²⁸ The purpose of Lee's journey was to defeat the relentless process of "Canadization":

Soon, there would be no more talk about Gypsies in Canada's slums; soon "Gypsy Power" would cease to be an issue. The age-old myth of the violins, the caravans, the earrings, blazing campfires and the savage knife fights over the tribal virgin would come back into its own on T.V., in novels and in the movies, while the real Canadian Gypsies were becoming hoodlums, dope addicts, prostitutes and alcoholics following the natural process of the Canadization of off-white minority groups.²⁹

In *Goddam Gypsy* the world of the underground, identified with Yanko and his stigmatized group of European Romanies, was recreated in a language that was as brutal as it was supportive of those who accompanied him on his descent and pilgrimage into the underworld of Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. Indians, immigrants, revolutionaries and criminals resisted a hostile Canada transfigured into police violence by painfully surrendering to the nihilistic search for meaning in meaninglessness, and a life without inhibitions full of alcohol and wild vindictive sex with white women whom they used and then despised.

Lee's aggressive discourse against "Canadization" would certainly have been influenced by nativist and Marxist proclamations against Anglo-Saxon colonization and the culpable complicity of the elites in Quebec. The French-speaking nationalists, on the one hand, condemned the conservative leader Maurice Duplessis as a *roi nègre*, while the moral shock of the war in Algeria (1954–62) and the rise of the anti-Vietnam war movement, at its peak in the late 1960s, on the other, were only making the contradictory, culturally combative climate in Montreal even tenser.³⁰ At the same time, as songs like Raymond Lévesque's *Quand les hommes vivront d'amour* [When Men Live on Love] were becoming anthems of peace, articles like those of André Laurendeau in the newspaper *Le Devoir* [Duty] or Raoul Roy in the *Revue socialiste* [Socialist Review] were giving vent to explosive belligerence.³¹ From this side of the ideological barricade, it is not surprising that Ronald Lee's subversive imagination should feed on the philosophy

28 Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 237.

29 Lee, *Living Fire*, 223.

30 André Laurendeau, "Maurice Duplessis à l'Assemblée nationale: la théorie du roi nègre", *Le Devoir*, 18 November 1958, in David Meren, "An Atmosphere of *Libération*: The Role of Decolonization in the France-Quebec Rapprochement of the 1960s", *The Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 2 (June 2011): 263–94 (here 276).

31 Meren, "An Atmosphere of *Libération*", 274.

of authors like Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire and especially Frantz Fanon, with his emblematic work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Nevertheless, Lee's *Gypsy Power* was rather more than a phrase, than a pale reflection of the Black Power Movement. In his autobiographical novel, the subaltern nature was influenced by a world of emotions, the doors to which were opened for him by his second wife, who belonged to the First Nations. He had met Marie in a bar in Ottawa while he was on the road. This new sentimental union brought Lee into contact with the drama of the indigenous populations, who were as forgotten in the tribal system of the reserves as they were vulnerable to racist federal policies, some as terrible as the ones that had been defended in the past by the Toronto League for Race Betterment. For that reason, members of the Red Power movement also roused themselves at that time and started their own journey, which would end up exploding in 1974 in cities such as Kenora (Ontario); indeed, the social hygiene movement would cast a very long shadow over the Indians.

This was demonstrated by the fact that the end of the federal veto on the First Nations' land claims (1951) and recognition of their right to vote in federal elections (1960) were accompanied by the Sixties Scoop, government programmes that prioritized the adoption of Indian children by white families. It was a transracial adoption policy that sought assimilation to "white middle-class norms" to shore up the ethno-cultural hierarchy established a century earlier.³² It was no coincidence that state-supervised adoption in the experience of the main character of *Goddam Gypsy* should constitute an issue in the development of the plot. As with almost everything that happens in the novel, it was a topic that transcended personal circumstance. Neither was it a coincidence that the first of the seven illustrations included in *Goddam Gypsy* should be Mundro Salamon, the tarot created by Louis Thomas, the author's uncle, who gave it to Marie as a gift.

Romanestan Is Where My Two Feet Stand

After the 1967 International and Universal Exposition, or Expo 67, in Montreal, Ronald Lee decided to leave Canada to start a new life in London with his family. The organization of that event had enabled the country to display the pageantry of its centenary celebrations to the world while also proudly showing its new flag with its 11-point maple leaf. For Lee, however, this was only an illusion, a facade to hide the true face of Canada. It was precisely his job at the Expo as curator of a thematic pavilion on Canadian wildlife that increased his contempt for the hypocrisy of a country that

32 James Rodger Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 336–61.

could so smugly display the richness of its natural ecosystems yet conceal and repudiate the diversity of the human beings who had been born there. In the novel, his children would suffer the consequences of the ethnic legacy of their parents, being doubly discriminated against for their entire lives in that country. Moreover, Lee was disillusioned with his invisible struggle in Canada, where he had not managed to change the laws “to find recognition and equality in the land where I was born” and Europe once again offered him an incentive, a goal.³³ His Romani brothers, with whom he also shared a homeland, were over there too, waging the same war.

Lee had been in correspondence with one of their leaders in particular, Grattan Puxon, and had taken a keen interest in the steps being taken to organize the struggle in the United Kingdom. The Gypsy Council was formally established in December 1966 and the slogan “Travellers of the World Unite” had resounded loud and clear in Canada. To support that initiative, Lee even recorded an impressive speech that he sent to his companions, a speech celebrated for the mythic expression: “The ground at my feet is Romanestan”. A young non-Romani sociologist committed to the movement, Thomas Acton, interpreted these words as exemplifying the pan-nationalist, territorial profile of Lee’s political activism inspired by Zionism after the Second World War. As Acton says, Lee was “one of the most determined advocates of the foundation of a Gypsy nation-state in an actual territorial homeland”.³⁴ Nonetheless, Lee’s words only anticipated the journey that lay ahead. His baggage, so to speak, was the same as it had always been: his personal experience of the Canadian-Romani Vlach community, their linguistic and cultural differences, and his long-standing intuition that it was not possible to define the nature of his people in a territorial sense. He would later reiterate his earlier intuition with a slightly modified version of his iconic expression: “Romanestan is where my two feet stand”.

Two factors turned out to be decisive in convincing Ronald Lee that London should be the new general headquarters from which to carry on the fight. The first was the need for urgent supportive action concerning the brutal evictions that were being carried out in the West Midlands between 1967 and 1970.³⁵ In these evictions, the treatment of the Gypsy Council had become “a kind of ‘ideal type’ of local authority harassment”.³⁶ It called for a full-scale war against the forces of law and order. The second factor was the expectations generated by the British Parliament’s passing of the Caravan Sites Act in 1968, an exciting prospect that soon turned to disappointment. Being visible also meant being exposed. The extreme

33 Lee, *The Living Fire*, vi.

34 Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, 234.

35 “Test Case for Strasbourg”, *Romano Drom*, April 1970: 1.

36 Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, 175–78.



Fig. 9 Ronald Lee among Romany rights activists, May 1969.
(The National Archives, Kew, London, AT 25/101)

right would rise against the spaces of public visibility that had been won by Romani activism. The populist discourse of fear inciting racial hatred was politically very profitable. According to right-wing speeches, the do-gooders in the Labour government were responsible for expelling the white Anglo-Saxon: “In this country in 15 or 20 years’ time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man”.³⁷ In April 1968, Enoch Powell, a leading Conservative MP and an ultranationalist, delivered this line in his famous “Rivers of Blood” speech to a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham. It was a tirade riddled with apocalyptic and racist references directed at the Race Relations legislation passed between 1965 and

37 Enoch Powell’s so-called “Rivers of Blood” speech was delivered to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on 20 April 1968: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09zo8w3> (accessed 3 July 2020). See also Richard Ritchie, ed., *Enoch Powell: A Nation or No Nation? Six Years in British Politics* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1978).

1968 that outlawed discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origin.

In the electric political climate following the social and student protest movements that shook 1968, Ronald Lee began to develop his activism in London. There he wrote *Goddam Gypsy*, the stinging account of his Canadian failure, and he combined his work as a model-building engineer with the “making” of Romanestan, in which his role became increasingly important during 1969. At the end of May, for example, he took part in various meetings, alongside Grattan Puxon and Tony Smythe of the National Council for Civil Liberties, to guarantee the historic rights of the Romanies on Epsom Downs during Derby Week. The attitude of the racecourse organizers was reminiscent of times past: in 1936 a group of Roma who, over the years, had entertained racegoers with fortune telling and sold trinkets were banned from setting up camp at the races even though the public very much enjoyed their presence. Bernadette McAliskey (a young activist and MP from Ulster, who won her seat in Westminster when she was only 21 years old) eventually took up this high-profile cause.³⁸

Romano Drom: London, Strasbourg, New York

In 1950 the Council of Europe had adopted the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the first of the modern treaties based on the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which established an ethical obligation for member countries to guarantee these rights, and not just for their own citizens. That protocol, article 14, in particular, explicitly prohibited legal discrimination. This had two implications: first, it would open up a space that would make it possible to legally fight for the civil rights of the Roma at a European level; second, it would lend momentum to a formal political declaration of the Roma as a nation without a state. Ronald Lee had followed the various campaigns arising from this normative framework as the Canadian delegate of the Communauté mondiale gitane and would now have the opportunity to take an active part in them.

In June 1969, Lee was responsible for editing the first issue of the journal of the Gypsy Council, *Romano Drom* [Romani Road]. Its editorial line reflected the claims that the Roma group put before the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The delegation that had attended that meeting with European members of parliament in January of the same year was backed by associations in 14 countries. As well as a 200-page dossier with information and complaints compiled by the movement, they provided graphic material shot in England by Granada TV (ITV). The problems of evictions and police brutality that the Romani population had to face were the main

38 The National Archives, Kew (TNA), AT 25/1010.

topics. In Paris, 200 families were resisting eviction from the camp in La Courneuve. The protests were led by the Evangelical pastor Steve Demeter, Charles Reinhardt, a cousin of Django, and Matéo Maximoff, the author of the celebrated novel *Les Ursitory* [The Ursitory].

Furthermore, the recent visit to the United Kingdom of the secretary of the Commission on Social Affairs of the Council of Europe, Marc Sand, had also put the local authorities on the spot in the heated battle over the Walsall evictions in the West Midlands.³⁹ In his article “The Gypsies and Civil Rights” Lee focused on systematic breaches of the conditions of the Caravan Sites Act and on the pressure that the Roma lobby brought to bear at the Council of Europe. The image of the British government, in particular of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), was at stake in the eyes of continental Europe.⁴⁰ It was a hard-hitting editorial in which Lee invited the administration to cooperate, but at the same time anticipated a very difficult autumn of mobilizations:

The Gypsy Council have no wish for further confrontations with the authorities which have resulted in ugly battles with council men and police over the past winter. But until the authorities concerned are ready to act like reasonable and humane people, the protest movement will continue and grow ... The issues at stake – the basic right to a place to live and education for our children – can no longer be considered as local affairs. It is not a matter of a few trailers parking “illegally” on some piece of waste-land set aside by a planning committee for development “sometime in the future”. The Romanies of Britain are part of the great international Romany Community. We have sought representation at national level, through the Gypsy Council, and have raised our complaints at international level at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.⁴¹

Lee used every rhetorical weapon available to him, such as criticizing the British government for imposing economic sanctions on African apartheid regimes: “Our rights, as a minority, are guaranteed under the United Nations Charter. It makes a mockery of this charter when Britain fights for the right of people in other countries and neglects a minority group that has lived for 500 years in this island”.⁴² It seemed that hypocrisy was not the exclusive preserve of his native Canada nor were the territorial, national and ethnic hierarchies of majority societies.

39 “London Gipsy Problem under the Microscope”, *Evening Standard*, 17 April 1969, in TNA, AT 25/96.

40 Council of Europe. Commission on social questions Gypsies. Register File, Reference Number 266/69, TNA, AT 25/96.

41 *Romano Drom*, 1 June 1969: 1.

42 *Romano Drom*, 1 June 1969: 1.

In September 1969, the Council of Europe adopted its landmark resolution 563 (report by Daniel Wiklund of Sweden) with the recommendation to the Social Commission of the same organism that it should “take all steps necessary to stop discrimination, be it in legislation or in administrative practice, against Gypsies and other travellers”.⁴³ With such international backing for its cause, the movement set about organizing the First World Congress, which opened in London in the spring of 1971 with the Yugoslav delegate, Slobodan Berberski, as President and Puxon as Secretary. The congress approved the pan-national symbols of the movement, such as its own national day (8 April became Roma Nation Day), a flag (green and blue, symbolizing the earth and the sky, with a red cartwheel in the centre representing the Romani road and freedom) and an anthem, “Gelem, gelem”, composed by Žarko Jovanović as a tribute to the victims of Nazi genocide.

Work was divided into five major areas (education, social problems, culture, war crimes and reparations, and language).⁴⁴ Although Lee decided to return to Canada in 1970, he sent a voice recording to the Congress reciting his poem “Angla Mande Dui Droma”, which was “about the agonising dilemmas of the educated Rom”.⁴⁵ Thomas Acton recently recalled “the awed silence as his sonorous, absent voice echoed around the school dining hall in which the congress was held”.⁴⁶ Indeed, education had been one of the major fronts that Lee opened up in his London period. In 1969, together with Vanko Rouda and Matéo Maximoff, he attended a meeting to present a series of proposals on the subject to the British Minister of Education. It was necessary not only to guarantee that children had access to the education system, but also to promote their education in Romani. From this came the project to create the first Romany School close to a camp in Ilford. The project was publicized in *Romano Drom* by another activist, Frederick Wood, and received the support of the Hollywood actor of Roma origins, Yul Brynner, and the French guitarist Manitas de Plata. The congress in London, therefore, was an opportunity to take stock of everything that had been achieved after the frenetic activity of the previous decade.

Nevertheless, the task that still lay ahead was even more daunting. An agenda had to be agreed that would translate the principle *amaro Romano drom* [in our own way] into specific objectives under the umbrella of the

43 For a sceptical view of the impact of the resolution, see Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, 178–83; for a contrasting opinion, see Jean-Pierre Liégeois, *The Council of Europe and Roma: 40 Years of Activity* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2013).

44 Grattan Puxon, “The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the First Romany Congress in Retrospect”, in *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romany Studies*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), 94–113 (here 107).

45 Thomas Acton, “Ronald Lee RIP”, <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/news/2020/01/ronald-lee-rip> (accessed 11 March 2020).

46 Acton, “Ronald Lee RIP”.

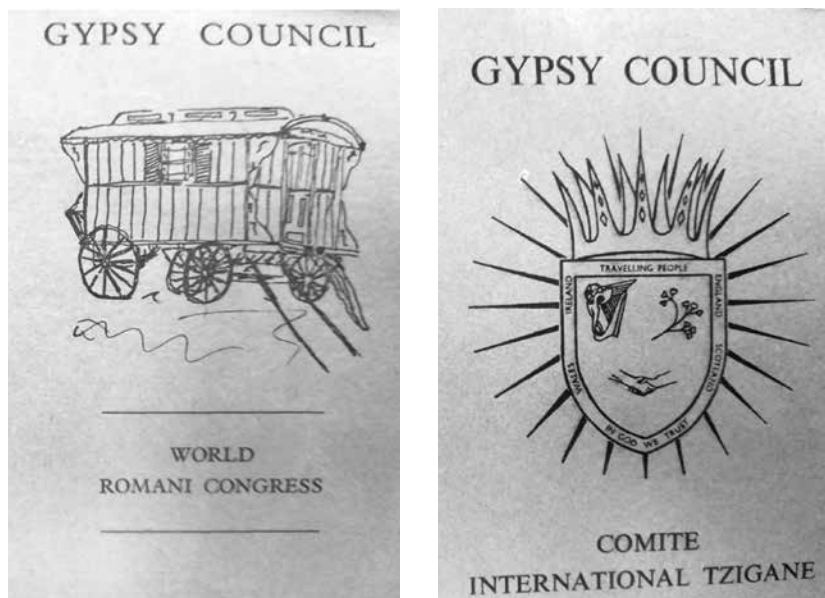


Fig. 10 (a and b) Gypsy Council membership card. (The National Archives, Kew, London, AT/153)

new organization International Romani Union (IRU) in the late seventies. One of the consequences of the London congress had been to expose Ronald Lee's difficult relations with the Council, which he had left because he disagreed with them over strategy. Political management of the principle "our state is everywhere where there are Roma because Romanestan is in our hearts" was quite a challenge for a parent organization that included groups from a dozen countries, each with very different sensibilities. Ronald Lee's views on the movement were actually more in line with those of a young scholar in the United States, Ian Hancock, who had lived for a while in Canada, and Yul Brynner, who would later be designated honorary president of the IRU. This was how Lee recalled it much later:

The dream was that the IRU would be an umbrella organization that would take all the problems of Roma in the different countries they lived in to the United Nations. What happened?

Roma leaders from Europe got too concerned with local issues. There has been too much in-fighting between leaders who represent Roma, *Sinti*, *Manouche*, *Kaale* and *Romanichels* who don't want to unite as Roma.⁴⁷

47 Interview with Hedina Sijerčić, 1999.

During the internal rivalries of the 1970s, doctrinal contradictions and blatant power struggles sprang up, both in the Gypsy Council and within the IRU.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the IRU was swinging towards the East European group while conflicting views of organizational schemes arose. It was precisely at this juncture that there was a shift in Ronald Lee's own view of the opportunities in Europe and the organization of the movement.

Lee started to look at Canada again and at the strategy in North America. Nevertheless, even in that difficult period of the 1970s, which was dominated by Lee's personal situations and the complications of organizing the movement in contrast to the imaginative ferment of the previous period, a great moment still lay in store for him. In 1978, together with Yul Brynner, Ian Hancock and the Boston activist John Tene, Lee was part of the IRU delegation that presented the United Nations with a petition requesting the recognition of his people by granting the Romani Union the status of an NGO. In Manhattan, Lee carried "the first Canadian Romani flag" made by his daughter, Diana "Johnny" Lee; it was a day that he would always remember with emotion and a feeling of triumph.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that this success was a collective effort, but also a personal one, after the long road that he had travelled since 1951.

O Drom si baro [The Road Is Long]

O Drom si baro
 Hay zhal dur
 Si amen, tan te zhas
 Hay zhanas kana aresas
 Serel amen o tan katar tradilyam.

[The road is long
 It goes far
 We have a destination
 And we'll know when we get there
 It will remind us of the place we left]

Ronald Lee opened *Goddam Gypsy* with this poem written in Romani dedicated to Marie, his second wife and companion on the road at the

48 Thomas Acton and Ilona Klímová-Alexander, "The International Romani Union: An East European Answer to West European Questions?", in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 157–226.

49 See the photograph with which Ronald Lee recalls this moment on his personal website, <https://kopachi.com/highlights/with-yul-brynner-at-the-un/> (accessed 13 November 2019).

time. Many years later, in 1999, in an interview with the Romani activist Hedina Sijerčić, from Sarajevo, Lee explained that what he was trying to express in those lines of verse was the tragedy of the Romani people. The “road” symbolized their eternal fate, to be condemned, without right of appeal, always to discrimination:

What it basically means to me, is that the road symbolizes the life of the Roma. Wherever you come from, you leave prejudice, persecution, stereotyping of the Roma behind. Nobody sees you for who you really are. But it doesn't matter where you go because when you get there, you will run into what you thought you had left behind.⁵⁰

By that stage, Lee was a member of the management team of the Toronto Roma Community Centre, founded in 1997. By an ironic twist of fate, the geographical, intellectual and emotional journey that he had undertaken four decades earlier in his Promethean rebellion against that metaphorical “road” had also taken him back to his point of departure: Canada. Lee had resumed collaboration on the ground with George Demitro, Russel's son, and the expatriates Zoltan Hering and Dule Jovanović, with whom he would work welcoming Romani immigrants fleeing the ruins of the Soviet bloc. Lee, who had first-hand experience of the legal discrimination against his family as migrants as a Romani child in Canada, was extremely sensitive to the social and political issues involved. But neither his personal circumstances nor those of the country were the same. His involvement in the Romani movement during the 1970s and 1980s and his subsequent drift had left him disappointed, but he had also learnt something. Many of his intuitions, views and proposals had been tested by the ideological and structural weaknesses of the associative network at the international level. Europe as a political, legal and, to some extent, emotional space had also disappointed him.

In 1985, with John Tene and Grattan Puxon, among others, he was part of a Romani delegation that went to a meeting of the US Holocaust Memorial Council in Washington, DC to protest because there were no representatives of their group among its members.⁵¹ This historic demand would be satisfied under the leadership of Ian Hancock during Bill Clinton's presidency. The forceful figure of Hancock, the IRU delegate in the United States and Professor of Romani Studies at the University of Texas, became the reference point for a North American movement that no longer looked to Europe when it came to calling for power through its own agency and

50 Interview with Hedina Sijerčić, 1999.

51 Ronald Lee, “The Roma Civil Rights Movement in Canada and the USA”, at <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/roma-civil-rights-movement-canada-and-usa/> (accessed 13 November 2019).

taking credit for its results. The Pan-American Association of Roma NGOs (SKOKRA) was founded in 2002 and was joined by Jorge Bernal, Ronald Lee and Ian Hancock. Lee, who opted to take a back seat at the time, saw Hancock as an inspiring figure not only in the sphere of political activism but also in the creation of a Romani academy, two factors that could not be separated in his understanding of knowledge as an activist: “Roma nationalists and intellectuals are doing what is necessary to create a Romani nation and a Romani history and like Zionists, some of us want to see our people survive with pride in their origins”.⁵²

For that reason, when Lee moved to Kingston (Ontario) in the 1990s to lead a quieter life, his philological and historiographical work gave him the opportunity to continue the task of “making” Romanestan. His literary output, often produced in collaboration and within the framework of publishing initiatives championed by Hancock, was openly combative. Nevertheless, his studies of the diachronic evolution of Romani, the different dialectal variants in Europe and America and the history of the Romani diaspora brought him recognition in educational institutions such as the University of Toronto, where he taught a spring seminar on the Romani Diaspora in Canada from 2003 to 2008.

The truth is that not even the recognition he achieved as an activist and Romani intellectual in white Anglo-Saxon Canada, against which he had rebelled half a century earlier, toned down Lee’s belligerent opposition to social and political injustice. After that, his main cause was the defence of the Geneva Convention and its application to Romani immigrants from Eastern Europe, especially Czechs and Hungarians who asked for humanitarian asylum in Canada in the 1990s. When the anti-Gypsy discourse of criminalization started to intensify in the media in Toronto and Vancouver, the social warrior went back into action from Kingston: “It’s time to get off my arse, go to Toronto and kick arse”.⁵³ For many Romanies, the European Union had failed when it came to protecting them and guaranteeing their physical and moral integrity after the collapse of the communist system, but they still had an opportunity in Canada. The Roma Community and Advocacy Centre in Toronto, together with the Western Canadian Romani Alliance in Vancouver, made sure of it by advising and representing them before the Immigration and Refugee Board and the Canada Border Services Agency. It is not unreasonable to think that the activity undertaken in this area influenced the decision of Queen’s University in Kingston when they decided to award him an honorary Doctor of Law degree in 2014.

52 Ronald Lee, Patrin email discussion list, 17 August 2000, cited by Yaron Matras, “The Role of Language in Mystifying and Demystifying Romani Identity”, in *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter Images of “Gypsies”/Romanies in European Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 53–78 (here 73).

53 Ronald Lee, “The Roma Civil Rights Movement in Canada and the USA”.

Ronald Lee passed away in January 2020, but his legacy as an activist lives on. His “making” of Romanestan will continue. The study of Lee’s personal biography brings us closer to the rich, diverse journey of the international Romani associational movement, constructed on the experiences of generations and individuals marked by the disparate geographical and political contexts in which they were forged. The specific case dealt with in this chapter refers us to an assertion of identity from the countercultural powder keg of Canada in the 1960s, but it also shows us an American perception of European identity and public space, either as something to be aspired to or as a disappointment. One of the reasons why the creative efforts of Romani activists like Lee have been accused of a lack of originality is precisely because they have tried to adapt to the different ideological currents prevailing in the twentieth century by borrowing many of their ideas. The Romani revolution is a rich and colourful puzzle whose pieces often do not fit together properly.⁵⁴ This, however, is not unique to the Roma project, nor is eclecticism in itself politically negative. On the contrary. In this particular case it demonstrates, on the one hand, the ability of the Roma people to survive the strong political and cultural tides that were unleashed in the traumatic aftermath of the Second World War and, on the other, it provided the elements for Ronald Lee to carve his own path through life as a subject able to make a positive contribution to transforming unjust political and legal environments. This, at least, is the conclusion that may be drawn from the highly personal yet universal journey that Lee started out on in the 1950s. Proof of this is the success of his best-known work, *Goddam Gypsy*, which has been translated into Spanish, German, Czech and Japanese, among other languages.

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54 Michaela Mudure, “Ronald Lee – A Canadian Roma Writer”, *Language and Literature: European Landmarks of Identity/Limbă si literatură. Repere Identitare în Context European*, ed. Alexandrina Mustăţea (Pitesti: Editura Universităţii din Pitesti, 2009), 306–12.

Part Two

Economic Life

Introduction

Travelling and Trading: Romani Horse Dealers in the Making of Europe's Economic Multiculture

Eve Rosenhaft and Tamara West

The following three chapters explore the place of Romanies in the economic life of European communities between about the 1880s and the 1930s, foregrounding families whose members were active as horse dealers. In Germany, the focus is on the Laubingers, Florians and Habedanks. In England, it is not one specific group or family that stands at the centre but rather a more diffuse network. The accounts give particular attention to the kinds of exchange and interaction in which those families were involved when they attended horse fairs. Interactions at the fair were both financial and cultural, and extended well beyond the buying and selling of horses. In fact, even as the importance of these fairs to the agricultural economy waned, they continued (and continue) to thrive as places of amusement – part of what the twenty-first century calls the visitor economy. The presence and active participation of Sinti and Roma defined the fair in both of these dimensions – the market in key goods and the market in sensations. They contributed to shaping the fair as a physical, experiential and imaginative space which they shared with non-Romani visitors, showpeople and traders.

Dealing in horses has historically been an intrinsic part of the lives of many European Romani communities. For those who travelled to earn a living through itinerant trades – as performers, basket weavers, tinkers

or kettle menders, peddlers and the like – horses were companions and workmates on the road, and exchanging or selling them at a profit a natural complement to other activities. This symbiotic relationship is inscribed in Romani culture as an abiding respect for horses. The men of settled Romani households have also engaged in horse trading in many countries, and the way in which this still takes place all over Europe underlines its symbolic and identity-affirming nature.¹ During the decades covered by these chapters, the trade was a vital part of the economy, and it was one of the nexuses of monetary exchange that bound Romani to non-Romani people, particularly though not exclusively in the countryside. It was also a point of cultural interaction and exchange, though one peculiarly coloured by mutually held stereotypes – the crafty “Gypsy” and the stupid *gadjo/gorgio*.² Through their trading activities, Romani men and women thus made their own particular contribution to the ethnically segmented market for goods and services that we refer to in the title to this introduction as an “economic multicultural”. In Germany, the horse trade in which they filled an important niche was dominated by members of another ethnic minority, Jews. And the horse fair, which brought buyers and sellers together, was one space in which the multicultural became visible and audible.

All three chapters explore experiences of travelling and trading, mainly at horse fairs though also very much in the journeys and experiences between. Drawing upon different case studies and framed by distinct regional, national and international backdrops, they nevertheless intersect across the same timeline and activities. Chapters 4 and 6 each explore how different lives briefly converged and overlapped at specific horse fair sites, respectively Brough Hill in England and Wehlau in German East Prussia, though they take different approaches to situating the Romani actors in the fair and the fair in their lives. Chapter 5 describes in detail the Laubingers, a German Sinti horse-dealing family, and their journeys, companions and interactions at horse fairs and beyond. Following them to Britain, it connects the English and German cases and allows us to reflect on differences and similarities between the two national experiences while exposing the radical transnationality of the European space inhabited and shaped by Roma. All three chapters share a concern with biography as an idea and a practice and an effort to recover the ordinary lives that

1 Michael Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 141–63; Colin Clark, “Not Just Lucky white Heather and Clothes Pegs: Putting European Gypsy and Traveller Economic Niches in Context”, in *Ethnicity and Economy: “Race and Class” Revisited*, ed. Steve Fenton and Harriet Bradley (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 183–98; *Gypsy Economy: Romani Livelihoods and Notions of Worth in the 21st Century*, ed. Micol Brazzabeni, Manuela Ivone Cunha and Martin Fotta (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2016).

2 *Gadjo* and *gorgio* are the Sinti and English Romani terms for people who are not Roma.

nevertheless leave extraordinary traces, as well as a focus on the sites and diverse experiences of the horse fairs that brought Roma and non-Roma together to trade.

Romani Actors in the Space of the Horse Fair

Romani horse dealers operated in a number of different market contexts in the nineteenth century. Large annual or semi-annual markets and fairs played a special role in both rural and urban life and were particularly important dates in dealers' calendars. Most were founded by royal charter during the late Middle Ages or early modern period.³ They provided occasions to trade in cattle and horses, but also in goods such as wool, textiles and foodstuffs. These periodic fairs attracted dealers from across regions and nations and also from neighbouring countries. By the nineteenth century, specialized horse fairs had developed, often (like the Wehlau fair discussed in Chapter 6) filling a separate "slot" in a succession of fairs and markets. New specialist markets emerged to serve the needs of growing cities in the last quarter of the century, and took on many of the features of a periodic fair; the Weissensee horse market in Berlin, founded in 1885, is an example of this.⁴ Meanwhile, the fairs held in smaller market towns on a weekly or monthly basis provided routine opportunities for buying and selling.

All of these fairs were sites of transactions and experiences extending beyond the sale of horses. Even where commodity markets were not formally part of the event, visitors could find or make space to sell goods. Fairs also provided occasions for leisure activities, both informal sociability and amusements laid on specifically as part of the event. As tourist attractions, horse fairs contributed significantly to the economies of the towns that hosted them, and in a number of German cities they were associated with lotteries. Local economies also benefited from the fees raised for stabling and retail stalls. Importantly, fairs allowed visitors not only to trade but also to share knowledge and culture.⁵

The decades covered by these chapters were a time of rapid and intense social and economic change. Industrialization and the growth of cities had been underway for a century in Britain and made an accelerated if

3 Henrik Egbert, "The Culture of a Market: A Case Study of Open-Air Horse Markets", *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 163 (2007): 493–502 (here 495–96); Andre Allix, "The Geography of Fairs: Illustrated by Old-World Examples", *Geographical Review* 12 (1922): 532–69.

4 *Bericht über die Gemeinde-Verwaltung von Neu-Weißensee, pro 1. April 1880/6* (Neu-Weißensee: Renné, 1886), 21–23.

5 Harald Bathelt, Francesc Golfetto and Diego Rinaldo, *Trade Shows in the Globalizing Knowledge Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

relatively late appearance in Germany after the 1870s. By the end of the period, motor vehicles were replacing horsepower at a significant rate. In real though uneven ways, rural life was being transformed, and the specific impact of this on Romani horse dealers is reflected here, in the German case perhaps most clearly in the career of Christlieb Laubinger. In England, annual fairs were already being described as a shadow of their former selves by the 1880s; it was a steady decrease in cattle sales, for example, that led some of them to become mainly horse fairs. This did not, however, impact on visitor numbers. Quite the contrary, in fact. The emphasis of the fair shifted gradually towards the experiential, or visitor economy, and host municipalities put efforts into attracting tourists to replace dwindling numbers of traders. The railways enabled people to make day trips to the fairs, which they did in vast numbers and often in special trains chartered for the occasion. The trade in horses remained brisk, at least until the First World War in Britain and well into the 1930s in Germany.

Romani visitors partook in every element of the fair and every kind of activity within it, so that horse fairs feature in both Romani and non-Romani memories as places of regular encounter. Each fair had its own spatial structure; these are not always easy to identify and sometimes they resist mapping. At both Brough Hill and Wehlau there were “Gypsy” encampments away from or at the edge of the main showgrounds. But Romani people were present in most of the fair’s key spaces. They were there as horse dealers. They sold goods like textile items, pottery and baskets. And they were also part of the entertainment: as performing musicians or acrobats, operating puppet shows or other fixed amusements, as fortune tellers – or as spectacles by their very presence. A single Romani family typically engaged as far as was feasible in all of these activities over the period of the fair, albeit subject to a gendered and generational division of labour. Fortune telling (reading palms or cards) on the part of the women is an example of how activities, the interactions they involved and the spaces in which they took place, were gendered. Because it often (though not always) took place in occasional or unregulated spaces in or on the fringes of the fair, fortune telling is also a good example of how lives not only intersected but often sought one another out there.

All of these activities involved transactions, sometimes among Romani traders but most often between them and non-Romani visitors, and each transaction had a performative element. The story of the 1906 “German Gypsy invasion” of Britain in Chapter 5 is about horse dealers whose route was marked out by the fairs they visited. The “invaders” engaged in almost continuous performance in every sense of the word and these performances reflected and addressed the structures of power within which Romani men and women operated. Both place (as a physical site) and the space within it (the physical, emotional and imagined activities, actions and interactions therein) are governed by relationships of power, and performance is one way of navigating in situations characterized by unequal power relations. But

spaces are not fixed. They are constantly in flux, colliding and overlapping, recreated with each new action or reaction. We might see the way in which arriving horse dealers aggressively occupy the showground, described in different contexts in chapters 4 and 5, as an example of those “articulations of power” that reconfigure space.⁶

In most transactions with non-Roma, the performance of difference – “Gypsyism” – served as a protective or ingratiating strategy to negotiate power relations in which the balance was weighted to the non-Romani side – or to satisfy a customer for whom the experience of the exotic was the object of their purchase. If we focus on the economic kernel of our narratives, though, a very particular kind of interaction comes into view: the ritual of buying and selling a horse (described in Chapter 6). This called for self-conscious performance on both sides of the transaction, because of the asymmetry of information which is intrinsic to every market situation. Sellers know more about their wares than buyers, and this is a particularly acute problem with horses, where each one is a unique exemplar of any one of a wide variety of different breeds and where the only checks on fraud were the veterinary examination at the gate and the possibility of an appeal to law afterwards. Completing a sale under these circumstances called for performance by both buyer and seller, and this implied the flattening or even reversal of power relations, as each party demonstrated his own competence and acknowledged the competence of the other. The dialogue drew on the buyer’s underlying wariness of the “Gypsy” (who, as seller, had the upper hand) but would never have taken place if he had actually accepted the public stereotype of Romani horse dealers as cheats and thieves. The negotiation described in Chapter 6 does not differ in any way from negotiations between non-Romani horse dealers in Germany.⁷ In this sense, the focus on market interactions reveals spaces in which equal agency, mutual respect and intercultural competence are on display.

Work, Mobility and Belonging

At the same time, however, each of these chapters shows how such spaces were constantly under pressure from anti-Gypsy stereotypes and the hostility of the authorities. Always objects of official suspicion, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century travelling families were subject to increasingly intrusive policing. Even families, like the Florians and the Habedanks described in Chapter 6, who were settled, integrated and engaged mainly in agricultural work and local services suffered by being framed in law as

6 Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose, “Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities and Subjectivities”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18, no. 4 (2000): 433–52 (here 441).

7 Egbert, “The Culture of a Market”, 498–99.



Fig. 11 “Putting a Gang of Gypsies over the Dutch-German Border” (1908). This postcard circulated in French, German and Dutch versions. (courtesy of Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum deutscher Sinti und Roma)

itinerant traders. This reflected the connection in the public mind between mobility, “Gypsies” and danger.

Mobility was embedded in the everyday lives of those Romani groups which engaged in seasonal itinerant trades, and in those families being on the road was celebrated as a form of freedom unique to their way of life and fiercely defended. This very freedom, however, put them at a disadvantage as European nation states consolidated their systems of governance, imposing regimes of policing, public welfare and education that presumed that their citizens had fixed addresses. Increasingly, proof of residence was a precondition for the enjoyment of civic entitlements. The complement to these developments was the ever-tighter enforcement of border controls. This gave a powerful political frame to the long-standing suspicion of “Gypsies”: the fact that they moved around challenged the political order. But state actions added an element of compulsion to their mobility: in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the stereotype of “nomadism” was realized as Roma were kept under surveillance and forced to keep on the move.⁸ Indeed, the existence of a border could be

⁸ See, for example, Jennifer Illuzzi, *Gypsies in Germany and Italy 1881–1914: Lives Outside the Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

defined by the fact that “Gypsies” were being pushed across it. The ways in which Romani mobility defined national space by challenging it, so to speak, was widely visualized in photographs that tell us that their presence at a border set the terms simultaneously of “Gypsiness” and of “borderness” in the popular as well as the bureaucratic imagination (Fig. 11).

In England, for most of the nineteenth century, travelling families were subject to vagrancy laws. These criminalized both the absence of regular work and forms of work often undertaken by them, like fortune telling. Acts on hawking and peddling introduced compulsory licensing. Statutes regulating the use of the road were deployed to push them off the roadsides, and later in the century changes to the laws on the use of common land denied them camping places. Under health and housing legislation, caravans became subject to inspection as “moveable dwellings”, and the compulsory schooling of Traveller children became enforceable by law in 1908. These laws, which left much to the discretion of the local magistrates, were deployed with particular harshness against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. And because the jurisdiction of magistrates and the police was geographically bounded, a central experience of their life was moving back and forth between counties and parishes to avoid penal sanctions.⁹ New anxieties about threats to the integrity of the nation found expression towards the end of the century in popular and legislative mobilization against immigration, much of it directed against Jews arriving from Eastern Europe. This culminated in the Aliens Act of 1905, which features in Chapter 5 as a possible measure to stem the “German Gypsy invasion”.¹⁰

German policy towards “Gypsies” was forged in the context of the political unification that took place in 1871.¹¹ This created a federal state and called for both the new national government and those of the component states (*Bundesstaaten*) to adapt their practices regarding nationality and mobility. In the new Reich, German nationality consisted in being a citizen of a *Bundesstaat*. Acquired by birth or naturalization, it was officially affirmed in the context of particular documentation procedures, associated for example with marriage, travel requiring a passport and work. Anyone engaged in buying and selling or in any form of itinerant work had to be licensed, and the licence stated nationality. As the German authorities became increasingly preoccupied with “fighting the Gypsy nuisance” from

9 David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

10 David Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

11 Here and in subsequent chapters, we use the terms Roma, Sinti, Romani and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller without inverted commas as self-designations recognized by the international Roma community. “Gypsy”, in inverted commas, represents the label applied to Romani people by others, mainly in official documents.

the 1880s onwards, the issuance of licences to trade became a central instrument of control within *Bundesstaat* borders. The licence was a *de facto* (and *de facto* compulsory) identity document; checks for such licences were a key duty of rural police forces, and penalties for trading or being on the road without a licence constituted the typical “criminal record” for “Gypsies”. Where Sinti or Roma crossed borders, nationality was the critical distinguisher: someone travelling in one *Bundesstaat* who was a documented citizen of another had no claim on local consideration and could be required to return to their “home” territory. Romani travellers who could not prove that they were “German” would be escorted to and pushed over the nearest international border. One outcome of this vicious circle of policing and criminalization was the creation of specialist police agencies. In 1899 the Chief of the Bavarian Police, Alfred Dillmann, created a Gypsy Central Office, which by 1925 had gathered data on some 14,000 individuals. After the First World War, this dynamic accelerated despite the creation of the democratic Weimar Republic. The interstate coordination of policing intensified, and in 1926 Prussia – still the largest of the constituent states in the new federal republic – made special identification papers compulsory for all travelling “Gypsies”.¹²

These circumstances placed Romani families in a permanent state of uncertainty, poised between belonging and non-belonging on terms which they could not control. In each chapter there are traces of the ways in which they negotiated their relationships with their respective nation states, including the simple evidence of military service, to which more than one family appealed when faced with persecution. Indeed, one response to the dilemmas which European states forced on Romani families was to attempt to settle down – not easy because they were unwelcome neighbours nearly everywhere.

Another response was escape, and some adopted long-distance travel as part of a self-conscious transnational identity. Transcontinental emigration, including to Australia and the Americas, appears as a strategy with increasing frequency towards the turn of the century.¹³ The German Sinti and Roma who undertook to “invade” Britain in 1906 (Chapter 5) displayed the same enterprise and inventiveness, and their experiences expose both the power and the contradictions of state policy. While remaining within the compass of Europe, they stretched its boundaries and tested the capacity of state and police agencies on both sides of the North Sea.

12 Simon Constantine, *Sinti and Roma in Germany (1871–1933): Gypsy Policy in the Second Empire and Weimar Republic* (London: Routledge, 2020).

13 Adèle Sutre, “‘They Give a Story of Wandering All Over the World’: A Romani Clan’s Transnational Movement in the Early 20th Century”, *Quaderni Storici* 46, no. 2 (2014): 471–98.

Comparisons and Contrasts, Breaks and Continuities

The English and German Romani travellers who met in 1906 would have recognized much in common in their everyday lives. By the 1930s their paths were diverging radically. The establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933 made possible the kind of final solution to the “Gypsy nuisance” that some policemen and politicians had long envisioned, by instituting a new social order based on principles of “race”. Under the Nuremberg Laws, which inscribed those principles in law, “Gypsies” were of alien blood (like Jews). They were denied the rights of citizens and access to education and training, becoming subject to forced labour and sterilization. With whole families interned from as early as 1935 in municipal “Gypsy camps”, individuals fell victim to the legislation that permitted the preventive detention of the “asocial” and “workshy”. Hundreds of men in particular were sent to concentration camps in 1937 and 1938, and very few survived the regime of slave labour and medical experiments to which they were subjected. A form of abuse suffered uniquely by Sinti and Roma among German victims of Nazism was the elaborate programme of identification, compulsory registration and racial categorization. This began as a research project led by the criminologist Robert Ritter through his Race Hygiene Research Unit, and became an instrument of policy under the 1938 decree issued by SS-Leader Heinrich Himmler, which instituted a “Solution the Gypsy problem on the basis of their race”. By the end of 1939, nearly all had lost their licences to trade, fortune telling had been criminalized and they were denied the right to leave their place of residence. In 1940 the first deportations of German Sinti and Roma to Poland took place, and in the spring of 1943 most of those who remained were deported to a special “Gypsy family camp” in Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the end of the Second World War, only a few thousand remained of the roughly 30,000 Sinti and Roma who had lived in Germany and Austria in 1939.¹⁴ Some of them resumed itinerant trading, but the world of the horse fairs was gone. In post-war East and West Germany some periodic fairs returned, mainly as visitor attractions. In Germany today horses still change hands at local markets, but Romani dealers are rarely on the scene. Sometimes Sinti whose families have not owned horses for three generations attend just for the pleasure of seeing the animals.¹⁵

In England, the place of horses and horse trading in interactions between Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and the wider society was also reconfigured, though in less violent ways. As the account of the end of Brough Fair in Chapter 4 shows, horse fairs were increasingly seen as, on

14 Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

15 Personal communication to Eve Rosenhaft, Bremen, 13 January 2019.

the one hand, a throwback to a less progressive time and, on the other, a glimpse into a rural past slowly fading from view. Moves to do away with them developed which overlooked the local meanings and economies that were still valued and important, often citing as a rationale the fact that they were primarily attended by Gypsies. Annual horse and cattle fairs were reduced to small-scale local agricultural shows that were relevant to a very specific small community or fun-fair oriented occasions. A paradoxical third outcome of this development was the shift towards a concept of the “Gypsy Fair” divorced from the historical functions of the market – a Romani-owned space designed to keep what was left alive. An example of this is the evolution of the much-documented Appleby Fair (Cumbria) since the 1970s. Meeting for three days at the beginning of each June, Appleby remains central to the culture, heritage and social interactions of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. At the same time it puts that heritage on display for others; it operates as a vast spectacle, drawing thousands of non-Romani visitors, and sensationalist media coverage.¹⁶ Significantly, fights to preserve “Gypsy fairs” in the face of efforts to close them down since the 1960s have been both sites of solidarity between Romani and non-Romani actors and important training grounds for activists in the national Gypsy, Roma and Traveller movement.¹⁷

Lives beyond Stereotypes and Biographies-in-Pieces

Giving attention to Romani people as economic actors brings into focus the ways in which their lives were intimately tied up in and materially important to those of the wider communities in which they lived. It is precisely the normality and continuity of such everyday interactions that has often been suppressed or forgotten in wider narratives. In reflecting on the place of the entangled Romani and non-Romani histories in constructions of British identity, Jodie Matthews writes of an “absent presence”.¹⁸ Making the absent present calls, among other things, for attention to aspects

16 On Appleby Fair, see Andrew Connell, “*There’ll Always Be Appleby*”. *Appleby Gypsy Horse Fair: Mythology, Origins, Evolution and Evaluation* (Kendal: Cumbria and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2019); “Memories of Appleby Fair”, <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/heritage/memories-appleby-fair> (accessed 14 July 2020).

17 Thomas Acton, “Human Rights as a Perspective on Entitlement: The Debate over ‘Gypsy Fairs’ in England”, in *Travellers, Gypsies, Roma: The Demonisation of Difference*, ed. Michael Hayes and Thomas Acton (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 1–16.

18 Jodie Matthews, “Where Are the Romanies? An Absent Presence in Narratives of Britishness”, *Identity Papers: A Journal of British and Irish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 79–90.

of the everyday lives of both groups which have been taken for granted and rarely documented. The study of the economic everyday of Romani subjects in the past raises very particular problems of access to information which also challenge a conventional biographical approach. It is not surprising that most research on “Gypsy economies” has been done by ethnographers observing contemporary Romani communities. The state of the sources reflects the paradox that as a group Romani people were both marginal in terms of their access to the means to express and enforce their own vision of their lives and – by the mid-nineteenth century – central to the preoccupations of the state authorities.¹⁹ As a result, they are highly visible in certain archives, but in very limited terms. The files are dominated by a one-eyed police perspective that singled out “Gypsies” among the rural and urban proletariat for those aspects of their lives that made them seem dangerous to public and political order.

As Chapter 4 makes clear, photographic sources often display the same one-eyed perspective. In the case of Brough Hill, much evidence of the fair was collated and curated by the romantic enthusiasts of the Gypsy Lore Society. We could trace generations of a fair-going Romani family solely via these archives if we wanted to, but the result would misrepresent the texture of their lives, because the purpose of the Gypsylorists was precisely to situate them in a space of “otherness”. While their accounts of Romani families at horse fairs are often detailed they are invariably selective, seeking out “pure-blooded” Gypsies through a colonial or Orientalist filter coloured by nostalgia for the rural idyll. Though more sympathetic than the police to their subjects, the Gypsy Lore Society too preferred to picture them (literally) as one-dimensional.

This second part of the book accordingly contrasts in matter and approach with Part One: here our subjects are not on the whole exemplary individuals intervening critically in the dominant public culture. It is only with the post-1945 career of Reinhard Florian which closes Chapter 6 that we see that beginning to happen, in the aftermath of the Holocaust which brought a brutal end to the worlds of the Sinti and Roma horse dealers. To be sure (as we see in chapters 4 and 5), both English and German popular media were full of stories about “Gypsy” kings, queens and chieftains, but seeing the people behind these celebrity titles and locating them in the negotiated relationships between Romani and non-Romani communities is a project in itself waiting to be undertaken. The lives we explore here are those of people who were quite ordinary in themselves, even if it is in their perceived extraordinariness that they usually become visible in the sources. Such “lives beyond stereotypes” offer themselves largely as fragments or, as

19 See Elisabeth Tauber and Paola Trevisan, “Archive and Ethnography: The Case of Europe’s Roma and Sinti (19th–21st centuries): An Introduction”, *La Ricerca Folklorica* 74 (2019): 4–12, and the other articles in this special issue of the journal.

they are called in Chapter 4, biographies-in-pieces. Reconstructing them calls for different kinds of readings of different kinds of sources.

These chapters reflect a variety of strategies for dealing with the gaps and silences in the archives. The study of representations of the Brough Hill Fair in Chapter 4 foregrounds and anatomizes these absences in the photographic record, while finding evidence for the agency of individuals in the critical reading of textual sources. Chapters 5 and 6 also involve the critical analysis of visual and textual sources. But the studies of the Laubinger, Habedank and Florian families are mainly experiments in reconstructing life stories through the careful assemblage and interpretation of fragments of information plucked from vital records and from published accounts. Here, too, a key strategy has been to read behind and against the grain of press reports and the writings of Gypsyologists, for whom Romani names were essentially decoration rather than pointers to real lives. Chapter 6 also sets Romani and non-Romani memories of a shared history in dialogue. This is not only for want of more “objective” evidence. Memoirs and collated first-hand accounts (more of which have survived on the English side) contribute a vital, multifaceted view of the everyday lives and activities of the fair, and help us to grasp the different spatialities of, and claims to, the fair. Similarly, the fact that in each chapter the “biographies” are embedded in wider, collective contexts – the horse fair, the group journey to Britain, the life-world of settled rural Sinti, above all the family – is more than a way of expanding the narrative. It reflects key aspects of Romani life in Europe and the peculiar balance of individuality, family and affinity in Romani tradition.

For all of the studies, the popular press has proven an unexpectedly rich resource. In the first instance, newspaper reports document the non-Romani perspective, often (though not always) a hostile one; but read with care they also provide a wealth of insights into Romani agency. Beyond this, though, they embody the challenge and promise of writing biographies-in-pieces. At once contemporary accounts and complex sources, often containing repeated tropes or sensationalist headlines, they are still our main window into the sites and activities of the fair beyond the carefully curated images of the Gypsyologists, or the circumstantial accounts of the authorities. The articles are sometimes purely informative, detailing numbers of horses sold or an arrest made; at other times they present us with a more scenic and, in some cases, vibrant vision, alive with people and the toings and froings of the fair. Along with associated popular media like postcards, advertisements and flyers, newspapers also offer us an alternative model of understanding. They remind us that space and time are not binaries,²⁰ and invite us to read the multi-temporal snapshots of the different spaces and activities of the fair as guides to the plurality of the lives travelling – in

20 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

some cases, crossing borders and oceans – to get to it. They capture the diversity and complexity of the experiences contained within the fairs. Here biography lies in seeing the sometimes distinct, sometimes shared spaces that are made up of lives and cultures that intersected briefly but in ways that were reproduced and valued year after year.

Chapter 4

Intersecting Lives: The Brough Hill Fair as Biography-in-Pieces

Tamara West

Brough Hill Fair was recognised as the biggest in the North, nothing but illness keeping any Romany away from it. It was the meeting place of all our people, and certainly a fair attended by dealers from all parts of the British Isles.¹

Brough Hill Fair was one of the largest and most well-known horse and cattle fairs in Britain, central to the lives of several different communities at the time. The above quote, taken from Silvester Gordon Boswell's *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, demonstrates that it was of key significance to Romani families. Boswell was writing retrospectively, at a point in time when Brough Hill Fair was no longer in operation. However, we can see his comments echoed in a newspaper article of November 1949:

Year after year, these same families meet at Brough Hill, and when this event is over return to their own rounds of fairs and shows until September sends them back to the bleak common again. One feels that even if there were no horses to sell, the festival of Brough Hill is now

1 Silvester Gordon Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, ed. John Seymour (London: Gollancz, 1970), 121.

so ingrained in their nature that they would come again just for the sake of reunion.²

The fair attracted locals, day trippers, drovers, farmers, armies looking to buy horses, and all manner of traders and performers. Indeed, there had been a market at Brough, in the north of England, since 1330, and a royal charter was conferred in 1549 to hold a longer sale. Held at the end of September, the fair was often accompanied by the wet and windy conditions that became known as “Brough Hill Weather”. In part due to its remoteness, it was a notorious fair, providing entertainment – both legal and illegal – to the masses who made the journey there from near and far for a short time away from their daily working lives. In the words of one newspaper article written in the 1920s, there was “a crudeness and sordidness about Brough Hill that does not mend with the passage of years. The old slogan, ‘There are no brothers on Brough Hill,’ finds expression on every inch of it”.³

Despite this remoteness, it was nevertheless accessible to different parts of the country, being on the route of an old Roman road and a later postal road. Its northerly location meant it attracted drovers from Scotland, who would drive their cattle down to the fair, just as it served local farmers who could drive sheep and ponies down from the fells. Over the years the focus of the fair shifted from cattle to horses, and during Victorian times, with the spread of the railways, it became something of a day out for people who would attend the fair for entertainment. Train companies ran special passenger services to the fair with people “packed like sardines”.⁴ Schools in the area were usually given the day off, with school logbooks detailing the all-encompassing nature of the fair.⁵ Despite some success post-Second World War, the fair declined and has not been in operation now for over 50 years.

This chapter focuses on Brough Hill in the first decades of the twentieth century, at a time when the fair was both at its height as a visitor destination and on the wane in terms of its traditional economic function as a horse fair. It is also at this point that the visual documentation of the fair and the people who attended begins to be particularly rich. The chapter initially explores the content of ethnographic archives in which we are able to find photographs and descriptions of well-known British Romani families visiting Brough Hill, for example members of the Lees, Herons and Boswells. These are used as a starting point to explore Romani presence at the fair and also to examine how it was carefully framed by others, asking what was left just beyond their viewfinder. Instead of re-presenting

2 Sidney Moorhouse, “Brough Hill Fair”, *Sport & Country*, 2 November 1949.

3 “Frolic and Frauds at Brough Hill Fair”, *The Penrith Observer*, 6 October 1925.

4 *The Mid Cumberland and Westmorland Herald*, 6 October 1906.

5 Appleby School logbooks, Kendal Archives, WDS 71.

the stories and people in those archives, this chapter aims to look instead for other descriptions and depictions of the fair. It does this in order to examine that which was left out, those messier everyday spaces which can be glimpsed through first-hand accounts, newspapers, postcards and reports. These show that Romani people were inseparable from Brough Hill Fair in terms of culture and commerce, but also in experiences and memories across different communities. They also show that while there were clearly distinct spaces and identities, there were also some areas of fluidity. The contention here is that the viewing of a more panoramic snapshot of the fair presents us with a multifaceted understanding of Romani and non-Romani presence, of identities and interactions that move beyond a binary division of belonging and non-belonging. To do this the chapter necessarily departs from the notion of a central figure or family, many of which have already been externally pieced together and documented by others. Instead of binding together traces of a whole life or a specific practice, it foregrounds instead the mosaic created by found, fleeting pieces of different lives.

The notion of the importance of gaps and silences, or the subject-in-pieces, is a concept often applied to oral history and to qualitative research, where an argument is made for the importance of what is not said, what is absent and for the necessity of including these as key elements of a complex whole.⁶ This can also be understood in terms of an absence-presence of a person or people, in memories, histories or archives.⁷ Here it is applied to an understanding that multiple histories, actions and interactions might converge, albeit temporarily, in a certain place, but that these narratives are necessarily incomplete and fade in and out, presenting a view of the whole via fragments. Better perhaps than a subject or a biography in pieces, we might call it a kaleidoscope of instances of lives jumbled together in the container that is Brough Hill. Certain histories are always less evenly documented, lives obscured due to class, gender or ethnicity. Jodie Matthews asserts more specifically in relation to British Romani histories and archives that they exist as an absent presence in that they were there, but their presence is not made explicit.⁸ By shifting the focus towards a

6 Stephen Frosh, "Disintegrating Qualitative Research", *Theory & Psychology* 17, no. 5 (2007): 635–53; Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). See also Sarah Mills, "Cultural-Historical Geographies of the Archive: Fragments, Objects and Ghosts", *Geography Compass* 7, no. 10 (2013): 701–13.

7 For a discussion of absence-presence, see Lars Frers, "The Matter of Absence", *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 4 (2013): 431–45; Avril Maddrell, "Living with the Deceased: Absence, Presence and Absence-Presence", *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 4 (2013): 501–22.

8 Jodie Matthews, "Where Are the Romanies? An Absent Presence in Narratives of Britishness", *Identity Papers: A Journal of British and Irish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 79–90.

landscape image of the fair, we can also explore some often overlooked lives and practices that took place. One example of this is fortune telling as a space of economic practice and of individual agency, but also a gendered and a working-class space (in terms of the majority of people who had their fortunes told), and as a practice that was both heavily romanticized and criminalized. Here we can explore the distinct spaces of identities and interactions such as Roma and non-Roma, performer and audience, trader and buyer. However, we can also perceive the blurring and uncertainty of these identities and identify a point where these intersected and became part of the fair and of the wider context of working-class and peripheral lives at the time.

Portraits: People on the Periphery

As we have already seen, Brough features in Boswell's account, where he details travelling to different fairs across the year:

Then on to Brough Hill, where a city of wagons, carts, accommodations and tents, belonging to all types and classes of people, assembled for this fair. There could be found on this hill Romanies and Travellers from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.⁹

Boswell's autobiography was published in 1970. In it Boswell, who was born in 1895 and died in 1977, details his long and eventful life and recounts visiting horse fairs, horse dealing, working in circuses, serving in the British Army during the First World War and trading as a scrap merchant. Later in his life Boswell was a central figure in the saving of Appleby Horse Fair, also in Cumbria and relatively close to Brough, when it was under threat of being abolished in the 1960s.¹⁰

Another factor in Boswell's account – and indeed his life – is his knowledge of, and the regular inclusion of stories about his family in, the archives and journals of the Gypsy Lore Society. It is not my purpose here to go into any depth about the specific members or histories of this society, as there are already several critical explorations.¹¹ However, a brief

9 Boswell, *The Book of Boswell*, 121.

10 For a detailed account of Appleby Horse Fair and of Boswell's role, see Andrew Connell, "There'll Always Be Appleby". *Appleby Gypsy Horse Fair: Mythology, Origins, Evolution and Evaluation* (Kendal: Cumbria and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2019).

11 See, for example, Ken Lee, "Belated Travelling Theory, Contemporary Wild Praxis: A Romani Perspective on the Practical Politics of the Open End", in *The Role of the Romanies Images and Counter Images of "Gypsies"/Romanies in European Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt (Liverpool: Liverpool University

context is essential in order to understand the sources drawn upon in this chapter. The Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) was founded in 1888 with the aim of bringing together those interested in studying Romani lore and peoples, and ran until 1892. It was revived in 1907, and based in Liverpool until 1973. The GLS and its ethnographic studies in the early part of the twentieth century were imbued by a colonial approach as its members chased, catalogued, recorded and pictured their “gypsy subjects”. The archive they created and filled with notebooks, articles, reports and photographs had as its focus what they considered to be prime examples of “real” Romanies. Here they displayed an obsession with racial profiling and pedigrees.¹² The GLS at this time sought to document and preserve the language, stories and customs of what they saw as an endangered people. As David Mayall comments, “The Gypsy lorists combined a faith in the scientific classification of people into races with the folklorist enthusiasm for obscure and disappearing people and ways”.¹³ They also sought to paint themselves into a romantic picture of their own making, of a travelling life to which they could choose to temporarily have a privileged access, gaining insights and being invited into a secretive “other” world. As a result of this, we have an in-depth archive of people and practices. However, any object created and curated by the GLS also needs to be viewed as limited by virtue not only of its ethnographic aim – to document what they considered to be exemplars of an imagined pure, authentic Romani culture – or of their inherent colonial and racist perspective, but also of their desire to portray their subjects as being necessarily apart from society and as occupying an often romanticized space.

Boswell’s account contains invaluable first-hand information in relation to his life, to horse fairs, to the wider life of a horse dealer, and – especially relevant to focus of this chapter – to the meeting of families at Brough. The account is not without aspects of nostalgia for childhood, and not without an external narrative framing, as any edited life story necessarily is. Boswell had previously published work in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (JGLS)*, which had already followed and provided accounts of the Boswell family. Boswell’s autobiography was told to and edited by John Seymour, himself very much versed in the studies of both the GLS and *JGLS*, and attuned to an earlier perspective centring on the romanticization of Romani people and a nostalgia for a “lost” rural life.¹⁴

Press, 2004), 31–50; Ken Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism”, *Social Analysis* 44, no. 2 (November 2000): 129–56; David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities, 1500–2000: From Egipcians and Moon-Men to the Ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2004), 187–214.

12 See Thomas Acton, “Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 7 (2016): 1187–1204.

13 Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, 188.

14 Martin Shaw, *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers: A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life Stories* (Umeå: Institutionen för Moderna Språk, Umeå Universitet, 2006).

Boswell details meeting up with different families at Brough Hill. For example, he tells us that it was at Brough Hill that he first met Oliver and Julia Lee and their family Relli, Lilly, Mena and Kissie. Oliver Lee was photographed by Fred Shaw for the GLS at Warcop, near Brough, in October in 1911 and we find later images in the GLS archives of his daughter Relli Lee – later Relli Heron – as a fortune teller.¹⁵ The GLS photographs taken by Shaw at Brough between 1911 and 1913 provide faces to several other names. Amongst others, we are met by the cavalcade of Herons passing through Brough Hill, by Oscar, Polius and Wani Heron (see Fig. 12), by Wiggi Lee and family outside their *vardo*, by Peter Lee and his family, and by Saiera Heron and her daughter seated in front of a wall, cooking pots before them.

In addition to photographs, accounts by GLS members who travelled to the fair also give an indication of some of the practices being undertaken, such as horse trading and fortune telling. Letters from Scott Macfie and William Ferguson tell us that in Brough, “There were many Lees, Herons & Boswells busy selling horses”.¹⁶ In his diaries the Reverend George Hall mentions meetings in 1912 with Peter Lee and Iza Heron, as well as with Amos Boswell, who is detailed as coming up to Brough to deal horses, and his wife Patience, a fortune teller.¹⁷ In 1913, Hall again details the Romani trade in horses: “Our Romany friends seemed to be getting through a fair amount of business so far as an onlooker could see”, and once again mentions Amos Boswell.¹⁸ Amos’s name can also be found in several newspaper articles. Indeed, members of the Boswell, Heron and Lee families all made it into the pages of local and national publications. Often these and similar short reports on the well-known Romani families we see in Shaw’s images convey a sense of timelessness or ritual, and they usually refer to a “King of the Gypsies” or “Romany leader”. For example, in 1927 *The Leeds Mercury* reports on the death of Amos Boswell, describing him as an “Old Chief”.¹⁹ A few years later, in 1936, the *Daily Mail* reports on William Heron’s death, describing him as “probably the best known horse dealer at the annual horse fairs”. Among the mourners listed were Oscar Heron (brother), and Mr and Mrs Oscar Heron, his son and daughter-in-law, and Noah Heron were also present.²⁰

15 University of Liverpool Special Collections (ULSC), SMGC Shaw P.38 (Oliver Lee, 1 Oct 1911); SMGC Shaw P.235 (Gypsy fortune teller, Relli Heron [al. Young] daughter of Oliver Lee, Cinderella – 26 Jun 1927).

16 William Ferguson to Scott Macfie, 6 October 1910, ULSC GLS A14 (Letter books to RASM July–Dec 1910).

17 George Hall, diary entry 30 September 1912 (Brough Hill Fair), University of Leeds Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Collection (ULGRTC), Hall Diaries.

18 George Hall, diary entry 30 September 1913, ULGRTC, Hall Diaries.

19 *The Leeds Mercury*, 14 July 1927.

20 *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1936.



Fig. 12 Oscar and Polius (sons of William and Jane) and Wani Heron (daughter of Noah and Rodi Heron), Brough, 1 October 1911. (University of Liverpool Special Collections, SMGC Shaw P.32)

The GLS photographs of families, and indeed of the fair itself, are defined by a contextual emptiness. A photograph of 1913, for example, foregrounds rows of caravans with little in the background or surroundings to suggest anything other than a Romani presence (see Fig. 13). Even when the subjects are active, they are still enclosed; a 1913 image of Owen and Conrad, sons of Goliath Heron and Oti Gray, has them in a space which suggests they are trading, but which again has no hint of the fair that, as we will see in the next section, was at the time equated to the wild west.

That is not to say that there was not a separate physical space. Most of the Romani visitors to the fair did occupy a separate site at the fair in terms of camping and living quarters, as is clear from the descriptions in other accounts. Boswell also tells us that the encampment was a separate area:

On the hill we had our own site on the Warcop side, just through the gate against the wall, and I noticed that for many years this site was never used by any other people than the Romanies – the women using their tents and wagons for their palmistry business during the Fair.²¹

The mention of the palmistry business is important, however (and will be returned to in the next section) as it implies the link to the wider fair.

21 Boswell, *The Book of Boswell*, 122.



Fig. 13 Brough Hill Fair, 29 November 1911. (University of Liverpool Special Collections, SMGC Shaw P.28)

The issue, then, is not that the images depict a separate Romani encampment area and living space, which of course existed and contained within it the family and community activities that took place during the fair and that were central to Romani economic, social and cultural life and heritage. Rather it is the implied isolation from and lack of interaction with – or contribution to – any of the other spaces of the fair that is problematic. One particular scene, a Shaw image from 1911 (Fig. 14), shows as usual a field with a row of caravans in the foreground. Unlike the other images, this one allows us to finally glimpse the fair in the background. The tops of the fairground carousels are visible in the distance, a hint that there is something beyond the desolation of the hill. However, the scene itself remains populated only by a few handfuls of people.

The GLS provides us with no images of the “thick of the fair”, no sense of Brough Hill as other sources picture it. Despite this focus, there are sentences which inevitably have to return the people to the fair, albeit with some disappointment that they couldn’t wholly confine them to a demarcated space: “You couldn’t get at the Gypsies: the women were dukkering for dear life, and the men were busy in the fair”.²² The economies of the fair – financial, social, cultural – inevitably had to intrude into the idealized accounts. Even so, these are measured and confined as best they can be. So, even when we do find a description of

²² R.A. Scott Macfie to Augustus John, 1 October 1909, ULSC, GLS A29.



Fig. 14 Brough Hill Fair. (University of Liverpool Special Collections, SMGC Shaw P:78)

the fair itself as spectacle, it is one which harks back to something left over from a wonderful past:

It was amazing to see a huge concourse of thousands of people & thousands of horses in the middle of the hills with not a house in sight ... Yet it is a survival of our old English life; and, as a sight, simply amazing ... I had no idea that anything so splendid had been left to us.²³

George Hall, too, is keen to make the point that the fair, despite external change and progress, retains an authenticity: “happily, however, the distance of Brough Hill from the large centres of population has prevented the annual gathering from changing its character to any marked extent, or from degenerating into a so-called pleasure fair”.²⁴

These photographs, and the accounts which accompanied them, can only offer us a cropped image of the diverse lives of the fair and with them the activities and overlapping spaces that had significance and meaning across different communities. They are lacking a sense of the shared spaces and the wider context of everyday, often peripheral, lives and activities. Through the investigation of other sources relating to Brough Hill Fair, we can begin to explore the wider significance not only of Romani presence,

23 R.A. Scott Macfie to Eric Otto Winstedt, 2 October 1909, ULSC, GLS A29.

24 George Hall, diary entry 30 September 1913.

but also the site of the fair itself as indicative of shared – and distinct – identities and narratives.

Landscapes: Spectacles and Economies

And this is the recipe for a “Bruff” Hill Fair; Take equal parts of horses, gipsies, horse-dealers, farmers, and “potters”; thicken with miscellaneous humanity, and flavour strongly with fortune-tellers, quacks, “sharps” and “flats”, and a general assortment of the riff-raff to be found between Trent and Tweed; scatter into the mixture caravans, refreshment booths, gipsy tents, Aunt Sallies, roundabouts, and any old catch-penny lots you may have at hand, stirring in Bedlam and Babel until the composite mass is fairly thick. Then plaster it generously over half a mile of gently rising landscape on one of the peaceful foothills that nestle in the shadow of the rugged Pennines in the south-eastern corner of Westmorland, twenty miles from nowhere.²⁵

This newspaper article describing Brough Hill was written in 1911, so around the same time that the GLS images discussed above were taken. The vivid description enables us to pan out from Shaw’s quiet, tidy images, and let the whole hotchpotch of the fair to come into view. The article also includes photos of people at the fair described in captions as “Potters”: “The ‘Potters’ shown in our illustrations are the professional tourists who travel the country in two-wheeled, titled shandridans ... Brough Hill Fair is the great annual gathering of the potter clans, most of the families having a horse or two for sale”. Here the Romani visitors to the fair, and other Gypsy and Traveller communities there, are still evidenced as occupying a separate, distinct space, just as the GLS and other accounts had described them as doing. They are also clearly an integral part of the fair itself – part of the mix, of the above-quoted “recipe” of “equal parts”. There is a spatiality to the fair which is ordered but also fluid.

Equally, when other newspaper articles describe a separate Romani area, it is nevertheless as a wider component of the landscape of the fair. For example, an article from 1864 tells the reader that “The first company met with on reaching the hill was the potters’ encampment along the wall. There was a long row of tops of carts forming the sleeping tents and homes of this migratory tribe”. Further along there are refreshment tents, all manner of stalls and then, of course, right in the middle “the business of the horse fair was being transacted to the very great danger of both buyers, sellers,

25 W. Carter Platts, “A Glimpse of a Famous Horse Fair”, *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 7 October 1911.

and spectators”.²⁶ The Romani presence is constantly separated as different from, and then reintegrated as a key element of, the whole. Here, Romani may well be the “potters” in the tents, they might also be the “horsey types” who sell ponies, or the “van-dwellers” who are described as part of the fair, the “hawkers” or “itinerant dealers” who trade in all manner of goods, the fortune tellers both in tents and also walking around the fair or the performers entertaining the crowds, just as they are a part of the crowds themselves.²⁷ In short, then, they are, as this 1912 article describes the scene, part of a whole fabric of “Rows and rows of tents, booths, stalls, vans, cheap Jacks – giving people ninepence for fourpence – hurdy gurdy men and tambourine lasses, rural visitors and friends, dealers of all kinds, buyers, sellers, drovers, pick-pockets and other shady characters”.²⁸

It is through newspaper accounts, as biased or sensationalist as they were, that a more vibrant picture of the life of the fair emerges, and of the people briefly contained and thrown together within it. Often a “wild west” metaphor is applied; in 1906, *The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury* pictured the horse dealers “bear[ing] down on unsuspecting crowds like scalp-hunting Apaches swoop down on their victims”. This same article reports that “the bustle of Brough Hill, with all its inaccessibility, is something western, astounding”.²⁹ And a report of the following day describes the fair in the year the “German Gipsies” mentioned in the next chapter of this book came to visit:

Cheap Jacks and quack doctors elbowed with sacred and secular vocalist, hawkers of almost every commodity from ice cream to oil paintings, thimble-riggers and three card sharps; while the proprietors of roundabouts, shooting galleries, cocoanut shies, and the rest of “the fun of the fair” that goes to make pandemonium, filled all the spare corners, while the gipsies – both native and German – were much in evidence, and plied their trade of fortune-telling whenever a fair member of the crowd could be induced to show her hand – and a bit of silver.³⁰

Here, then, we have a quite different picture of the fair at the time. It is a place of entertainment and trade, where you could buy anything and anything was supplied, right down to Methodist tents catering for the needy.³¹ Photographs from the time often concentrated on the entertainment spaces of the fair and on large crowds, quite far removed from the sleepy GLS images. Postcards showed scenes of crowds gathered in

26 *The Carlisle Journal*, 4 October 1864.

27 *The Penrith Observer*, 15 October 1912 and 6 October 1925.

28 *The Penrith Observer*, 24 September 1912.

29 *The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*, 2 October 1906.

30 *The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*, 3 October 1906.

31 David Kerr Cameron, *The English Fair* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 116–17.



Fig. 15 General view of the crowds at Brough Hill Fair.
(Beamish People's Collection)

front of makeshift entertainment wagons, or montages of different attractions including horses, Romani caravans and crowds.³² Large crowds and fairground attractions are also evident in several photographs of the fair taken in 1912.³³ In one we see in the foreground a carousel surrounded by people, women and men, and by horses, standing in the thick of the crowd; off in the background, we can make out further attractions, the tops of other stalls or tents.

Another (Fig. 15), taken from a distance, shows even bigger crowds, the site so packed out that it is difficult to see where the fair begins and ends. The same collection has a photograph entitled "General view of the fairground at Brough". In the same frame we see the carousel and crowds in the background, and in the foreground a caravan and woman, with people all around (Fig. 16).

The fair was an event that enabled people from different areas and social spheres to come together. It also took place at a time when issues of vagrancy were of key concern to the police force and wider Victorian and Edwardian society. Here the Vagrancy Act defined and criminalized those

32 Postcards, Kendal Archives, WDX882/1/2/130 (1910), WDX882/1/3/63 (Brough Hill Horse Fair), WDX882/2/2 (Postcard Bundle incl Brough Hill Fair).

33 Roland Scott Collection, National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield; Beamish People's Collection, Beamish Museum.



Fig. 16 General view of the fairground at Brough Hill Fair.
(Beamish People's Collection)

loitering, sleeping rough or begging, but it was something of catch-all term that could criminalize any public behaviour or activity deemed disorderly. Several arrests at Brough Hill Fair were made under the Vagrancy Act, even though the people arrested were not necessarily vagrants but a mix of people who had travelled to the fair and gambled, got drunk or got themselves into some other dodgy incident.³⁴ The fair, then, was a complex space, where both the practices of the fair-goers and the policing of them were set within a specific temporality.

Fortune tellers, more so than horse dealers, occupied these complex spaces of in-betweenness. They were confined to a Romani area of the fair, as Boswell tells us in the earlier quote, using their tents and wagons for palmistry. However, even within that space they became a key destination and experience for visitors to the fair. As Boswell continues: "Trips would come from Blackpool, Morecambe, Manchester and Lancaster and business was brisk. Hands could be read by real Gypsies, and I have seen as many as forty families, all Romanies, along this wall, with their palmistry tents".³⁵ In these tents and caravans they hosted all manner of visitors eager to

34 Guy Woolnough, "Policing Brough Hill Fair 1856–1910: Protecting Westmorland from Urban Criminals", in *Rural-Urban Relationships in the Nineteenth Century: Uneasy Neighbours?*, ed. Mary Hammond and Barry Sloan (London: Routledge, 2016), 32–45.

35 Boswell, *The Book of Boswell*, 123.

have their fortunes read. Outside, claims were posted about the skills or fame of the occupants, with large advertisements describing the fortune tellers as “Gipsy Sarah’s Eldest Clever Granddaughter”, “Gipsy Sarah’s Only Daughter” or informing the visitor of the prestige of other clients, such as “Palmist to Royalty”. Fortune tellers also went into the thick of the fair, as is evidenced by images from other fairs at the time.³⁶ At horse race meetings such as Epsom (a place which has its own history of Romani presence and activism) they were visited in the hope they might foretell Derby race winners as well as everyday fortunes, as old Pathé footage shows.³⁷ They were also part of the make-up of the travelling shows that were a key component of the horse fairs. A local Cumbrian newspaper article from 1932 entitled “‘Dukkerin’, An Old Showman’s Tale” tells a tale about a fortune teller, “old Leandia, who was travelling with us”.³⁸

In the newspapers, fortune telling is described as belonging to the rest of the slightly dubious dealings at Brough. However, it also appears as a practice that lies at the heart of the fair, one of the activities people actively want to go there to experience:

If people cannot get rid of their cash at a flash jewellery stall, or in connection with some alien stunt, they cheerfully part with it to the dusky ladies who purport to look into the future for them. “What’s in a name?” said Shakespeare, A lot, apparently, if the name happens to be “Gipsy Lee”, for there were about half a dozen “original Gipsy Lees” on the ground.³⁹

An article exploring Brough Hill 20 years later again has the fortune tellers as an integral element of the fair: “The usual fortune-tellers were there, with rival bearers of a famous gipsy name offering huge rewards to anyone proving the claim to be false”.⁴⁰ The same article references families having travelled from Blackpool, where they told fortunes to visitors to the popular seaside town.

Just as horse dealers travelled to each fair, so too would their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. Diaries from the GLS, as mentioned above, refer to Amos Boswell’s wife Patience being a fortune teller. In an example from another source, the account of a fairground worker published in the 1930s, the writer refers to a conversation at Hull fair with the fortune

36 See, for example, a Rowland Scott Collection photograph of Nottingham Goose Fair 1910, which depicts two fortune tellers next to the hustle and bustle of the entertainment area: <http://cdm15847.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15847coll3/id/69009/rec/6> (accessed 3 August 2020).

37 British Pathé, *Derby Crowds 1930–39* and *The Last of the Gypsies Meeting*, both 1929.

38 J.S. Fisher, “‘Dukkerin’, An Old Showman’s Tale”, *The Courier*, 27 April 1932.

39 *The Penrith Observer*, 6 October 1925.

40 Moorhouse, “Brough Hill Fair”.

teller “Madame Cavendish”, whose husband is described as making money as a hawker and horse dealer.⁴¹ Some fortune tellers of the time became hugely famous. Corlinda Lee reportedly told the fortune of Queen Victoria. Corlinda had been married to a well-known Romani horse dealer and entrepreneur, George “Lazzy” Smith, and she toured with his famous “Gipsy Balls” in the mid-1800s. She was buried, in 1900, as “Queen of the Gypsies” in the necropolis in Glasgow.⁴² Urania Boswell became the famous “Gypsy Lee”. She was the wife of another famous horse dealer, Levi Boswell, whose death in 1924 was widely reported by the newspapers, in which he was described as “King of the Gypsies” and said to have attended and traded at horse fairs across the country. Her death, the manner of which she had of course herself foretold, was reported not only in newspapers but also on film reels of the time which show packed streets lined with people watching as her horse drawn casket passes.⁴³ National newspapers reported that her funeral had been watched by 20,000 people and local newspapers reported on how she attended local fairs.⁴⁴

Closer to Brough, in the north-west of England lived the famous “Gypsy Sarah”, and her daughters and granddaughters who followed in her footsteps. Sarah Boswell told fortunes in Blackpool, Lancashire, a Victorian seaside resort that once drew huge crowds. Her death was widely reported in local papers, informing the readers that she would have been 99 the month she departed, and had lived in Blackpool Sand Hills for 77 years, telling fortunes to visitors.⁴⁵ The papers continued to carry stories and fortune telling advertisements, detailing how her crown had passed to her daughter or granddaughter – for example, granddaughter Daisy Boswell, who on the death of her mother, Ada (Sarah’s daughter), became “queen”.⁴⁶

Fortune telling, no matter how much it captured the Victorian imagination, was also a highly precarious activity that was criminalized, as “pretending to tell fortunes”, under the Vagrancy Act and often disproportionality penalized. Fortune telling was first made a criminal offence under Witchcraft laws, and then from Edwardian times onwards under vagrancy laws (the Vagrancy Act of 1824 and subsequent amendments). It was associated with Romani people and, by the nineteenth century, with more criminal classes (where fortune telling was seen as a front for other

41 Philip Allingham, *Cheapjack: Being the True History of a Young Man’s Adventures as a Fortune-Teller, Grafter, Knocker-Worker, and Mounted Pitcher on the Market-Places and Fair-Grounds of a Modern but still Romantic England* [1934] (Pleshey: Golden Duck, 2010), 150.

42 See, for example, <https://www.glasgow-necropolis.org/profiles/corlinda-lee/> (accessed 3 August 2020).

43 British Pathé, *As Befits a Romany Queen*, 1933.

44 *Daily Herald*, 29 April 1933; *The Wells Journal*, 28 April 1933.

45 *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 4 March 1904.

46 *The Lancashire Daily Post*, 6 June 1901.

crimes). Moreover, it affected people who were mostly working class and female.⁴⁷ Gipsy Sarah also had difficulties with the law in her fortune telling career. A few months after Brough Hill Fair in 1877, *The Carlisle Journal* reported “a raid upon gipsy fortune tellers at Workington” in Cumbria. A policeman noticed the camp had been visited by a large number of young women and sent a police sergeant’s wife and a servant to investigate: they found Sarah Boswell, and her daughter Emma, telling fortunes in exchange for money. Both women were charged with vagrancy and imprisoned for one month with hard labour.⁴⁸ Daisy Boswell, Sarah’s granddaughter, also had various troubles, as detailed in several newspapers in January 1909. Here we are told that “a Blackpool gipsy named Daisy Boswell, who was described as a granddaughter of Gipsy Sarah, of Blackpool, was summoned for pretending to tell fortunes at St Annes”.⁴⁹ We also learn that Daisy had calling cards on which was printed: “One of Gipsy Sarah’s granddaughter. Patronised by the King”.⁵⁰ The court condemned her to two months’ imprisonment with hard labour. On 9 December 1931 Daisy received her own obituary in the newspapers, just as her grandmother had, when *The Yorkshire Post* reported on the “Gipsies’ Royal Queen. Funeral of Daisy Boswell at Blackpool”.

The newspapers were often peppered with stories of fortune tellers on trial, for example that of Delia Young Morpeth in 1888. Delia, described as “a gipsy, of whom it is stated that her family had been gipsies for generations”, was camped in a village where hundreds reportedly came to see her to have their fortunes told. The defence was that “the prisoner and her family told fortunes at Blackpool during the season for 20 years”; however, she was found guilty and ordered to pay a fine of £5 and costs, or spend two months in prison (in this case the fine was paid).⁵¹ There are several more, reported on with glee in the newspapers. Many others though would not receive any newspaper coverage or have obituaries which bestowed on them the titles of “Gipsy Queen” as Sarah, Daisy and Gipsy Lee or Corlinda had. While certain sites, such as fairs, provided a more fluid space and opportunity, wider everyday life and activities remained precarious.

47 Alana Piper, “Fortune Telling”, in *A Companion to the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*, ed. Jo Turner, Paul Taylor, Sharon Morley and Karen Corteen (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), 92.

48 *The Carlisle Journal*, 7 December 1877.

49 *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 1909.

50 *The Herald*, 30 January 1909.

51 *The Herald*, 17 March 1888.

The End of the Fair

One old man, perhaps the oldest attender of the fair, was heard to declare that during the 78 years of his life he had attended Brough Hill about 140 times, and he never saw it so thin before. Many who formerly attended for business came only for pleasure.⁵²

In the late 1800s Brough Hill Fair was already seen as being past its imagined heyday. Railways and industrialization had changed it irrevocably, as lamented by the above excerpt from a local newspaper article written in 1864. By the beginning of the twentieth century there is a perceptible nostalgia for the spectacle of the fair, a sense that it was a glimpse into a past ever fading from view, ever in danger, a wild west that could not last. In 1911 the horse fair was being described as an experience that would soon disappear:

[A]s everyone knows, improvements effected in petrol cars and motor wagons have already displaced horse traction to an appreciable extent ... those who, not already having witnessed the spectacle, wish to see – and hear – a great typical English horse fair in something approaching the full tide of stir and bustle, should make the most of their earliest opportunity ... the horse fair is doomed to fade within the next few years into comparative insignificance.⁵³

The spectacle had necessarily always been a part of the fair. It was a place for all manner of lives and livelihoods. These livelihoods were still being made, decline or not, in the first part of the twentieth century. Horses were traded, goods sold, shows performed and fortunes told. The fair was a vibrant social and economic space, even if that economy had already shifted away from livestock. The experience of the fair continued, although its image began to crystallize not only as a romanticized portrait of a fading rural idyll, but at the same time as a vilified throwback to less progressive times, drawing with it a prejudiced perception of undesirable people and practices. Here, according to the British Home Office, “Fairs are almost without exception of no importance from the commercial point of view, and are in fact anachronisms which become continually more objectionable as modern traffic conditions develop and the standard of sanitation increases”.⁵⁴ This is echoed in letters and debates that centred around the abolition orders issued by the Home Office in the 1920s, in

52 *The Carlisle Journal*, 4 October 1864.

53 Platts, “A Glimpse of a Famous Horse Fair”.

54 Home Office Memo, 1 February 1923, National Archives, Kew (TNA), HO 45/442887.

which it was argued that fairs had degenerated into events solely for “low class dealers and gipsies”.⁵⁵

We can perceive here a moment where the loss of economic (horse and cattle trading) value had fragmented the fairs’ meaning, centrality and relevance across communities. Many smaller fairs met their demise, or their transformation into small agricultural shows. It should be noted, though, that in the 1920s several petitions against abolition orders were organized. These insisted that the fair was essential for local communities and economies; Ormskirk Fair is a case in point.⁵⁶ In other places, larger, well-known fairs such as Stow or Lee Gap were maintained. Decades later there followed the aforementioned “saving” of Appleby Horse Fair in which Boswell, alongside other members of communities involved with the fair, played such a central role. This led to the fair becoming stronger, precisely because of its centrality to the social life and cultural heritage of Gypsy, Romani and Traveller communities, as well as the large visitor numbers and visitor economy from outside of these communities it continues to attract each year.⁵⁷

Brough Hill retained its draw and its function, at least for a while. The 1949 newspaper article cited at the beginning of this chapter remained positive:

The pessimists may still talk of the days when a hundred or so horses changed hands within the two days, but the pageant of Brough Hill is still undiminished, The fair is too indelibly fixed in the minds of potter-folk, local inhabitants and visitors who never fail to attend it, to allow the passing of these things to extinguish its glory.⁵⁸

It was extinguished, however, and by the 1970s it was all over.

While the GLS images referred to in the first section of this chapter captured and preserved the faces and activities of several Romani families and their histories at Brough Hill Fair, they also isolated them from the fair, fetishizing and fixing them in a colonial gaze. The outside was minimized because the outside was troublesome, messy and diluted the “purity” of their subject by placing them in a real economic and social sphere. To concentrate only on an imagined “true” Romani and their “pedigree” was to blur everyday life and meaning into the background, and with it the

55 Statement of Superintendent of Lancashire Police, Ormskirk, 31 March 1922, TNA HO 45/11048, 138645/8.

56 Home Office correspondence about the abolition of the Ormskirk fair, TNA HO 45/11048, 138645.

57 For a sense of the history, memories and importance of Appleby Fair see, for example, <https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/heritage/memories-appleby-fair> (accessed 3 August 2020).

58 Moorhouse, “Brough Hill Fair”.

significance of the presence of Romani actors – both visible and invisible – at the fair. It also contributed to the obscuring of wider everyday Romani and non-Romani working-class presences and activities. The site of the fair, and the often precarious lives and livelihoods it was a brief container for, was more vibrant and complex than this. As we see in reports and images from the time, it was a kaleidoscope that presented different pictures and colours each time someone viewed it – of romanticized lives and times, of entertainment and excitement, of struggles and persecutions, of the small individual instances of everyday lives reflected back to create a picture in pieces.

Chapter 5

“Invaders”: Mobility and Economy in the Lives of the Laubinger Family

Eve Rosenhaft and Tamara West

The lives of many European Roma in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were defined by mobility. In the face of the increasingly hysterical efforts of police forces across the continent and beyond to pin them down, they travelled to make a living and they often travelled long distances. In 1906, there occurred a small-scale and temporary but nonetheless spectacular migration of German Sinti and Roma families to Britain. It was spurred by new policing measures in Germany and elicited an official response in the same spirit of anti-Gypsy suspicion from the British authorities. Accordingly, the story of the 1906 “German Gypsy invasion” has been told from the British point of view as an episode in the history of British migration control. This chapter uses new sources to focus on the agency of the German Sinti and Roma who undertook the journey across the North Sea, and on their interactions with their British hosts. Among them was Christlieb Laubinger, who travelled to Scotland with his partner and (probably) six children. His family and what we are able to reconstruct of their history stand at the centre of the narrative. In their travels to and around Scotland and England, following a route dictated by the local calendars of fairs and markets and pursued closely by the press as well as the police, the Laubingers and their fellow “invaders” joined the dots on a transnational map of the spaces in which Romani and non-Romani people had been interacting for centuries. The journey to Britain was an opportunity to deploy and test the skills and energies that were key to the making of those spaces and to their own

livelihoods. For the Laubingers, it was also the climax of a family history in which they were repeatedly faced with the choice of whether or not to stop moving – a choice that by the end of Christlieb’s life had been taken away from them.

Christlieb Laubinger was in most respects an ordinary man in the terms established by his Romani identity. The circumstances that defined his career in the permanent negotiation between his community and the state mean that the documentation on his life is fragmentary.¹ The record shows him to have been both adventurous and self-assertive, and there are some hints that he was recognized as a person of respect among Sinti and Roma. He had the dubious distinction of being among the 3,350 men and women listed in Alfred Dillmann’s *Zigeuner-Buch*, a 1905 handbook issued by the Bavarian police for use in the surveillance of “Gypsies” and others who “travel around like Gypsies” in order to carry out their business or trade. Laubinger merited a lengthy entry in his own right:

1342. **Laubinger**, Christlieb, Gypsy, basket weaver, horse dealer, b. 26.9.1866 (allegedly illegitimate) in Tannepöls, Bitterfeld District, Prussian Province of Saxony, when his mother, the Gypsy Maria, alias Mathilde Laubinger, was passing through, place of legal residence and nationality unknown (his claim to be legally resident in Tannepöls or Friedrichslohra, Nordhausen District, Prussian Province of Saxony, has proved false), allegedly married to Maria Mathilde, alias Elsa, née Weiss (born some time between 1863 and 1871, allegedly in Friedrichslohra, allegedly daughter of Karl and Elisabeth Weiss, née Brandt, musicians), has sometimes 4, sometimes 6 allegedly legitimate children with him, whose names and ages he reports differently at different times. Up to now Laubinger has travelled around with Anton Paul Kiefer, Johann Weiss, Franz Winter, Anton Jorkam, Otto Janus, Anton Krieger, Andreas Rigo, Ernst Treffer, Ludwig Karmann, Hermann Scheidel, Christian Michael Weiss, Gregor Hoffmann and Johann Reinhardt and has been convicted of begging and of not preventing his children from begging and vagrancy, and his alleged wife for begging.²

1 Except where otherwise noted, the details of the lives of Christlieb Laubinger and his family members set out below are based on information in the following sources: records of birth, death and marriage at www.ancestry.de (accessed 9 July 2020); Berlin City Directories (*Berliner Adressbücher*); police files in the Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt Magdeburg (02.05.02. C29 Anhang II) and the Landesarchiv Berlin (A Pr.Br.Rep. 030-02-03; Einwohnermeldekartei); genealogical records in the files of the Rassenhygienische und Bevölkerungspolitische Forschungsstelle, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (R165); the files of the International Tracing Service, Bad Arolsen; lists of Auschwitz prisoners at <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/auschwitz-prisoners/> (accessed 9 July 2020).

2 Alfred Dillmann, *Zigeuner-Buch* (Munich: Wild, 1905), 139.

Some of what the Munich police thought they knew was correct. Christlieb Laubinger was born on 26 September 1866 in Tannepöls near Bitterfeld in central Germany. Tannepöls was a tiny settlement of about a dozen families based on large farming estates.³ Christlieb was born in the inn there. His mother was the unmarried 21-year-old Mathilde Laubinger, one of the five children of the tightrope walker Jacob Laubinger and his wife Caroline Kiefer from Friedrichslohra.⁴ Mathilde is described on Christlieb's birth certificate as a "Händlerin" – a trader or peddler – and when Christlieb was born (as the police knew), she was just passing through Tannepöls. (He would later describe her on different occasions as a worker and a musician.) The mention of Friedrichslohra has symbolic force: the village was widely known for an 1830s experiment in "civilizing" the local Romani population.⁵ It persisted in the public mind as a point of reference for the modern history of German Sinti, and those who could prove descent from Friedrichslohra had a claim to special dignity as the Romani population became more diverse with the arrival of Roma from Eastern Europe mid-century. Other sources show that Christlieb's forebears certainly did belong to the substantial population of Sinti that was at home near Friedrichslohra, in the central region of Germany that lies between the cities of Braunschweig, Magdeburg, Leipzig and Erfurt and is bounded in the west by the Harz Mountains. Like many Sinti and Roma, he carried out a variety of trades. He sometimes described himself as a basket weaver (as in the *Zigeuner-Buch*); on birth and marriage certificates and in police lists he features as a musician and umbrella mender, too. Between 1901 and 1912 he is most often mentioned as a horse dealer in all the sources.

As the *Zigeuner-Buch* entry suggests, the record of Christlieb Laubinger's marriages and children is a complicated one. The puzzlement of the police (and of anybody who relies on paper archives to reconstruct a family history like his) reflects the realities of German Romani life and culture: marriages were contracted by agreement between the couple and their families and recognized by the community, but not always formally registered. Step-parenting and other forms of surrogate care were not distinguished from blood relationships, and when families travelled together, looking after children was a collective responsibility. And when it was a police officer who was asking who was who and who was whose child, there was no compelling reason to provide an answer that the questioner would recognize as strictly accurate.⁶

3 *Die Gemeinden und Gutsbezirke des Preussischen Staates und ihre Bevölkerung* (Berlin: Königlich-statistisches Bureau, 1873), 88.

4 See the report of the family's movements in 1849: *Allgemeiner Polizei-Anzeiger*, Coburg, 39/10 (20 August 1849): 54.

5 Panikos Panayi, *Ethnic Minorities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany: Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Turks and Others* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 51–52.

6 On Romani marriage and family practices, see Yaron Matras, *The Romani Gypsies* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2015), chs 2 and 3.

Official documentation records ten individuals born between 1891 and 1921 who were either formally registered as Christlieb's children at birth or were reported by him or reported themselves as his children. Two of these, Josef and Paul Laubinger, born in 1892 and 1895 respectively, were later identified by a linguist as being Romungri, members of a non-Sinti Romani group, and the dates and circumstances of their births also raise some doubts as to whether they could have been the sons of Christlieb Laubinger and his first wife Eva (Bortscha) Weiss. This suggests that Christlieb and Bortscha may simply have been sufficiently well-known for children not of their own blood to claim them. The fact that Josef also said in the 1930s that he had accompanied his father to Britain – presumably in 1906 – can similarly be taken as evidence either that he really travelled with Christlieb and Bortscha in his childhood, at least, or that the exploits of the couple made them legends in their own time among German Sinti and Roma.⁷

Certainly, the partnership of Christlieb and Bortscha Laubinger began early in their lives and lasted a relatively long time. Bortscha was the daughter (as the Munich police correctly noted) of musicians Carl and Elisabeth Weiss, who had married in the parish of Friedrichslohra in 1867. She married Christlieb at the age of 20 in June 1892, in the Rhineland village of Niedermendig; on that occasion, Christlieb acknowledged Bortscha's son Josef, born in a neighbouring village the previous December, as his child. In addition to this Josef, the younger Josef and Paul, the couple had at least four other children by the end of 1905: Michael Reinhard (Pfeffikon, Switzerland, 1897), Maria (Eiersheim, Baden, 1899), Elisabeth (Untermarchtal, Baden, 1901) and Bortja (born in a caravan in Ampfurth, Anhalt, 1905). Christlieb also claimed paternity of Helene, who was born to Catharina Reinhardt in a village in Hessen in November 1892. By the time Bortja was born, Christlieb and Bortscha had already legally divorced, but they were clearly still together at the end of 1905 and would make the trip to Britain with their children the following spring.

Invaders

In April 1906, Christlieb and Bortscha Laubinger left Germany with their children, travelling by steamship from Hamburg to Scotland. Their journey formed part of what would be referred to in Britain as the "German Gypsy invasion". In the two preceding years, there had been smaller-scale movements of so-called "foreign Gypsies" into and across Britain. They claimed to come from many parts of Europe, and sometimes they did, but in a great many cases they proved to be German.⁸ The 1906 "invasion" was

7 Hanns Weltzel, "The Gypsies of Central Germany, Part IV", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, third series 17 (1938): 104–09.

8 Colin Holmes, "The German Gypsy Question in Britain, 1904–1906", in *Hosts*,

of a much larger scale, involving more than 100 people of different Romani ethnicities travelling from different parts of Germany.

This was prompted in part by a critical turn in “Gypsy policy” in Prussia, the largest of the federal states that made up the German Empire. After several years of intensified efforts at regulating “Gypsies”, in February 1906 the Prussian Interior Ministry issued a blanket decree which aimed to consolidate existing measures, limiting the Romani presence and their mobility as far as the legal framework allowed.⁹ Under its terms, foreign “Gypsies” were to be refused entry to the territory and arrested and expelled if they were found in Prussia. Those who could demonstrate that they were citizens of one of the states of the German Empire were to be forced to settle down if possible. The authorities were to proceed with “utmost caution” in issuing identity papers to them; as a general rule, passports and certificates of good conduct or employment should be time-limited or not issued at all. Every effort should be made to find grounds to refuse licences to trade; key preconditions for licensing were proof that the applicant had “a dwelling under circumstances that give evidence of an intention to remain indefinitely” and that their children were continuously attending school. Where there was evidence of neglect, children were to be removed from their parents and placed in care. Any crimes committed by itinerants (and not only people of Romani ethnicity – all those engaged in other itinerant trades now fell into this category) were to be punished with particular rigour, and were to be kept under continuous police surveillance.¹⁰ One response of Sinti and Roma in the territory was to seek to comply with the regulations, formally at least, by purchasing property with a view to establishing fixed addresses.¹¹ Another was to leave. William Ward, former British Vice-Consul in Hamburg, reported that the travellers were “for the most part natives of Prussian Poland, which they have left on account of the new settlement law”.¹² The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* put it rather more colourfully: “The German Government, it appears, have notified the gipsies that they must settle down and pay taxes, hence the rush for Scotland, and it was rumoured at Hamburg before the steamer left that about 5000 of these nomad tribes intended to emigrate to Scotland”.¹³

Although the scale of the movement was unprecedented, earlier

Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society, 1870–1914, ed. Kenneth Lunn (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), 134–59.

9 See Simon Constantine, *Sinti and Roma in Germany (1871–1933): Gypsy Policy in the Second Empire and Weimar Republic* (London: Routledge, 2020), 17–18.

10 *Anweisung zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens vom 16. Februar 1906* (Berlin: Heymanns, 1906).

11 *Neue Hamburger Zeitung*, 30 August 1906; *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 13 April 1907.

12 W. Ward to the Home Office, 3 May 1906, National Archives, Kew (TNA) HO 45/10313/124855/32.

13 *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 26 April 1906.

experiences must have played a part in shaping the expectations and trajectories of the new visitors (as they also informed the repertoire of responses of the German and British authorities). Among previous visitors had been a group of 31 German Sinti from two families who had to be helped to return to Germany after seeking and failing to make their fortune in Britain; one of them, Franz Weirauch, may well have been the Franz Weihrauch who was among Christlieb Laubinger's companions in Scotland.¹⁴ Certainly the 1906 visitors were neither naïve tourists nor helpless refugees. As the British authorities suspected, they were very likely as aware as the steamship companies that carried them that the new Aliens Act stipulated that as long as the boat they arrived on did not carry more than 20 steerage passengers it was not subject to immigration checks. Three weeks after the Laubingers arrived, a newspaper report made clear the logistical challenges that the travellers had to anticipate and overcome, giving a strong impression of careful planning and organization: a group of seven had arrived at Leith to join another group of 19 who had already landed and were waiting for them in a lodging house near the shore. They now waited for their caravans, which were due to arrive with another party by steamer from Hamburg on the following day. They were orderly and "well supplied with British money", and when the third party arrived they made their way to Dalkeith *en route*, they said, to London. The report that one of their leaders stayed behind, with the intention of returning to Hamburg "to settle some business", adds to the impression of an organized enterprise in which extended families mobilized together.¹⁵ In the event, this group travelled to Dalkeith by rail, since no caravans arrived. In many other cases, however, numbers of horses and caravans made the journey across the North Sea, some initially transported to the port of Hamburg by rail.¹⁶

Once the Germans were in the country, they were clearly well informed or quickly learned from the locals about their destinations, and that intelligence circulated among them by various means. Kettle-menders headed for the territory of the Scottish tinkers in Galloway, while, as would become apparent over the following months, horse dealers knew where to find the horse fairs.¹⁷ When they were on the point of return in November 1906, the Sinti and Roma already in England refused to leave until they were joined by others whom they knew to be still in Scotland. Back in Germany

14 Correspondence between Prussian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Office London and German Embassy London, February 1905, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (GStA PK), I. HA Rep. 77, Tit. 423 Nr. 53 gen. vol. 10, 93–109 and TNA HO 45/10313/124855/1–18.

15 *The Scotsman*, 25 and 26 April 1906.

16 Hamburg police correspondence, Staatsarchiv Hamburg (StAHH) 331-3 288000, 3–4, 9–10.

17 On the German kettle-menders in Scotland, see Andrew McCormick, *The Tinkler-Gypsies of Galloway* (Dumfries: Maxwell, 1906), 404–28.

and on their way to their respective home cities, a group camping on the Lüneburg Heath maintained contact with others around the country by telephone and telegram.¹⁸

The British and German authorities seem to have noticed the “invasion” at about the same time in mid-April. On 18 April the Scottish Office reported to the Home Office in London that there were “German Gypsies (about 80) in Perthshire”, and the next day the Hamburg police recorded the first report of “Gypsies” arriving at Wandsbek railway station from other parts of Germany.¹⁹ By the time of the Scottish Office report, more parties had arrived in Hartlepool, England, and there were further landings at Leith and in English ports throughout April.²⁰ In Hamburg this precipitated a local crisis of management and a minor jurisdictional dispute among the port, immigration and criminal police forces, as the travellers had to be housed safely and their right to onward travel (that is, their German nationality) confirmed, or else accompanied to the border of Hamburg’s territory for removal. In Britain the presence of these largely unwelcome foreigners over eight months focused public and governmental attention on aspects of immigration policy and policing, in which the shipping lines responsible for transporting migrants were also caught up. In both countries and in the diplomatic interchanges between them, the question of what to do about the “invaders”, informed as it was by the desire of the authorities in every jurisdiction to wash their hands of them, exposed both the ambiguities in the regulations and the limits that the law still placed on states’ powers of exclusion. Meanwhile, the visitors made their way around Great Britain.

The first group to leave Hamburg for Scotland departed at the end of March 1906 on the *Coburg*. They were rapidly followed by others sailing on the *Buda*, the *Coblentz* and the *Cumberland* – all commercial steamers operated by the Currie Line, the last of which arrived in Edinburgh’s port of Leith on 3 April. Christlieb and Bortscha Laubinger and their children were among these earliest arrivals, a total of 46 individuals recorded by the officer at the port of Leith as “calling themselves showmen and horse dealers” and carrying £17 10s (the equivalent of £1,850 in today’s purchasing power) between them.²¹ Groups of travellers split up and re-formed at various points, and except where individuals are specifically named in press reports, of which there are few examples, it is not possible to be entirely certain of their movements. By keeping an eye on the names of people they were known to associate with and piecing together hints in the sources, we can reconstruct the first months of Christlieb and Bortscha’s travels as well as their return to Germany.

18 *Altonaer Nachrichten*, 15 December 1906.

19 Home Office Minutes, 18–23 April 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/25; Report from Station 7, Hamburg Police, 19 April 1906, StAHH 331-3 288000, 2–3.

20 Home Office Minute, 30 April 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/29.

21 Immigration Officer, Port of Leith, 18 April 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/25.

The first explicit report on their party is dated 14 April. By then they had reached Dunblane, most likely by a route that took them through Edinburgh to Dalkeith and then westward through West Lothian, Midlothian, Stirlingshire and Perthshire.²² Interviewed near there by the police with the help of a local German teacher, they claimed to be on their way to Italy and hoping to raise money for that journey by “giving exhibitions as acrobats and dealing in horses”. More plausibly, they said they had spent their money to buy horses and that they “bitterly resented” the way in which the police had moved them on; unable to earn any money honestly and with their horses unable to rest, they were in a “desperate” situation.²³ A reporter who visited them at Dunblane in their “seven or eight gaudily painted caravans” provided a pen-sketch of their “leader”, “Carl Sattler, a strongly-built, dark eyed, and fearsome looking individual”, and the “‘dandy’ of the tribe – a man of about thirty-five, who sported an Imperial beard and Kaiser moustachios [and] wore in his buttonhole a representation of the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany”.²⁴ Moving north from Dunblane, the party was turned back on the road. They were taken in charge by the police (who refused to allow them to open the doors or windows of their caravans) and then handed over in turn to the police of two neighbouring counties, finishing the day of 18 April in Clackmannanshire.²⁵ Seven caravans then made their way north-east again via Dollar to Kinross, selling one of their horses for £10 on the way, and finally headed south under police escort and across the Firth of Forth to Edinburgh.²⁶

On 21 April, eight of the party were arrested for trespass in North Gyle, in the Edinburgh suburbs. They appear under various names in the press. Those consistently named (though with variant spellings) are Christlieb Laubinger, Hugo Franz, Dungeke Rebstock, Heinrich Rosenberg, Heinrich Sattler, Paul Muller and Borado Gottschalk. The eighth man features in different press reports as Kula Rebstock and Friedrich Rentsch. They had camped without authorization at a stone depot by the roadside, and the police had decided to make an example of them, rousing them from their beds at 11.30 at night to be taken to jail in Slateford and Edinburgh; their protesting wives were allowed to travel to Edinburgh with the arresting officers. The men appeared before the Sheriff’s Court after two days in detention, handcuffed in pairs. Speaking through an interpreter from the German Consulate as a crowd gathered outside, they pleaded that they

22 The account of this part of the route relies on the press digest in Henry Thomas Crofton, “Affairs of Egypt 1892–1906”, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, new series 1 (1907–08): 358–84 (here 373–84); *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 April 1906.

23 Procurator Fiscal of Perthshire, 19 April 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/25.

24 *Dundee Courier*, 14 April 1906.

25 *The People’s Journal*, 21 April 1906.

26 *Dundee Courier*, 19 April 1906; *Perthshire Advertiser*, 20 April 1906.

had not known they were breaking the law, and that in any case they were aiming to leave the country as soon as possible, since “they had not been so successful as they expected in carrying on the business of horse dealing and giving acrobatic performances”. They were discharged with a caution and given a meal before being put on the train to Glasgow.²⁷

While the men were awaiting trial, the rest of the group proceeded west to Bathgate under police escort in “six caravans drawn by dilapidated horses and a basket vehicle drawn by some of the men”.²⁸ They then made their way to Glasgow, where they were directed to the showground at Vinegar Hill and set about trying to raise money for the fines that they anticipated would be imposed on the arrested men. Following their release, Christlieb and the others joined their friends at Vinegar Hill, where they remained at least until early June.

The next confirmed sighting of the Laubingers is at the end of November, when they were among 112 Sinti and Roma who sailed from Grimsby to Hamburg. There were others who returned to Germany earlier, disappointed with their experience in Britain, and the fact that the Laubingers were among the last to leave suggests that they had had a relatively successful sojourn.²⁹ Accordingly, it seems likely that the Laubingers belonged to the contingent which trekked north and west along the coast from Aberdeen towards Inverness during July and then returned through the Highlands to Stirling in August, when they numbered 57 people with nine horses and seven caravans. In July they declared that they were seeking out the horse fairs, and though it is not clear that they fulfilled their plan to visit the fair at Aikey Brae (near Peterhead) on 25 July, they did attend and trade at the fairs in Inverurie and the Falkirk Tryst.³⁰ The reporter who spoke to them *en route* to the Tryst in mid-August (“How they knew of the date of that old and historic market, which is fast falling into oblivion, they did not say”) asked one of the “chiefs” when they might return to Germany, “but to this query he only smiled, though he understood well enough what

27 *The Scotsman*, 23 and 25 April 1906; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 and 24 April 1906; *Glasgow Daily Record*, 25 April 1906.

28 *The Scotsman*, 23 April 1906.

29 The return of “Gypsies” from Britain was already being discussed as a problem in Hamburg and Berlin in May, and the first returnees began to appear at the beginning of June. In July the Consul General in London reported that Sinti and Roma had appealed to the Consulates in Dundee, Hartlepool, Sunderland and Hull for assistance to return: Reich Chancellor, Berlin, to Hamburg Senate, 15 May 1906, StAHH 331-3 28800, 15; *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 17 June 1906; Consul General, London, to Reich Chancellor, 7 July 1906, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77, Tit. 423 Nr. 53 gen. vol. 10, 166.

30 *The People’s Journal*, 14 July 1906; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24 July 1906; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 8 August 1906. Another group attended the monthly Falkirk Tryst in September: *Falkirk Herald*, 12 September 1906.



Fig. 17 Images of “German gypsies” circulated on postcards as well as in the press. (University of Liverpool Special Collections, SMGC 2/3/1/46)

was said”. The report made clear that the travellers were now at ease in the country, having picked up some English and even some Scots, and they were financially better off than they had been in the spring.³¹

After the middle of August 1906, the focus of public attention shifted to the Germans’ presence in England and Wales. Later in the summer the contingent that had been touring Galloway moved southwards and into England’s north-west. By September, the reports are too diffuse to allow any speculation as to where the Laubingers were, but the circumstances of their departure indicate that they were probably in Yorkshire in the last week in November.

As early as April, the *Edinburgh Evening News* observed that “the gypsies have been rolled into a kind of football, and they receive a kick at one place, and then at another, and so they are bobbing all around the country ... Where is it all going to end?”³² By the autumn, the “invasion” had become an object of intense political debate, with questions in Parliament that held the government accountable for the loopholes the Aliens Act and police authorities all over the country losing patience.³³

31 *Dundee Courier*, 14 August 1906.

32 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 April 1906.

33 Holmes, “German Gypsy Question”, 147–49.

Having allowed the “invaders” in, though, the Home Office recognized practical difficulties in enforcing the Act against them, since in spite of all the negative reports only one qualified for deportation as a convicted criminal. Since it appeared that most of the visitors were ready to go home in any case, the government simply encouraged local authorities to give them every assistance to do so.³⁴ The Home Office plan was for the police to move all of them towards Hull or Grimsby, under conditions that would “prevent them from getting money or other assistance or so to speak enjoying themselves here”.³⁵ A key role was played by William Cable of the Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress, who travelled to Yorkshire and Dumfries to meet with groups of visitors and persuade them to leave.³⁶ In the event, the Dumfries group were moved to Grimsby to be joined by a contingent from Hull, and it was from Grimsby that 112 visitors, including the Laubingers, departed for Hamburg on 28 November on a chartered ship, the *Lincoln*. They were served coffee and sandwiches while they watched the loading (by hydraulic crane) of the caravans into which they then settled for the crossing.³⁷

William Cable and two British officials joined the crossing. Cable had covered the bills for the charter, insurance deposit and rail fares (later reimbursed by the Home Office),³⁸ and was prepared to pay the returnees’ rail fares from Hamburg onwards when they arrived, but in the event he gave them some cash for their road journeys home and to compensate for a sick horse and a broken-down caravan.³⁹ He reported back from Hamburg that there had been “signs of violence during the installation of the second lot ... but fortunately they were very little trouble during the voyage, thanks to sea sickness”.⁴⁰ Before embarking, the travellers had told an interviewer that they were not sorry to be returning, although “they had fared well in Scotland, and were leaving richer than when they had arrived”. On their arrival, the *Hamburgischer Correspondent* appeared to confirm this, with a surprisingly triumphal report that having left Germany with four horses and caravans the travellers were returning with 17 caravans and 32 horses.⁴¹

34 Confidential draft, 14 November 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/53.

35 Home Office to Chief Constable of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 20 November 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/83.

36 W.J. Cable to [John] Pedder, Home Office, 25 November 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/83.

37 *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 28 November 1906.

38 Home Office Minutes, 6 November 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/103.

39 Department IV of the Hamburg police, 30 November 1906, StAHH 331-3 28800, 42-44.

40 W.J. Cable to [John] Pedder, 30 November 1906, TNA HO 45/10313/124855/103.

41 *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 28 November 1906; *Hamburgischer Correspondent*, 30 November 1906.

All of the passengers were able to disembark once they had provided evidence of German nationality – with two exceptions: Christlieb Laubinger could only offer a birth certificate in evidence, and Hermann Franz his identification as a militia member. They remained on board with Bortscha and the six Laubinger children until after all the caravans, baggage and horses had been unloaded and the men could be interviewed at police headquarters; the disembarkation of the horses was delayed because they had to wait for the city veterinarian to examine them and one had to be slaughtered on board. Laubinger and Franz were cleared for entry on 30 November, and the returnees proceeded to cross the border into Prussia at different points under police escort in three parties.⁴² We do not know which of these parties included the Laubingers.

Shaping Space, Sharing Space

The language of “invasion” made clear that the travels of the Laubingers and other “German gypsies” were framed within an existing understanding of belonging and non-belonging. For most of the British hosts, the visitors represented an undesired presence and imagined threat to their everyday settled lives. They also intruded upon an existing space of otherness and marginality – fairs and other sites that were normally occupied by “native” Romanies, travellers and showmen. With its relentless coverage of the visitors’ movements, the British press provided a kind of remapping for the locals: whatever their preferred source of daily news, readers would be advised (warned) when the “invaders” were on their way and where they were camping. Their departure would be reported, usually in celebratory terms, and the next locality up the road would receive the news. The reporting was almost entirely hostile, and one result of their notoriety was that when “Gypsies” were on the road they not only had to endure the attentions of the police and the ostentatious boycott by farmers and shopkeepers, but stone-throwing and verbal abuse as they entered settlements, and sometimes worse violence. In June, one group of respectable caravan travellers was spotted with a sign on their vehicle that read “No connection with the German Gypsies”.⁴³

At the same time (as the media attention also shows), both travellers and hosts recognized their journey itself as a spectacle, provoking as much curiosity as anxiety. But understanding and solidarity were also in evidence. The landlady of the New Ship Lodging House at Leith, where more than one party of arriving visitors spent their first night, made special efforts

42 Department IV of the Hamburg police, 30 November 1906; Cable to Pedder, 30 November 1906.

43 *London Daily News*, 18 June 1906.

to find accommodation for the women and children.⁴⁴ The schoolteacher who interpreted for the Laubingers' party in Dunblane went back home to collect money from "charitable people" and arranged for food to be delivered.⁴⁵ In Aberdeenshire, flint miners on their way to work donated their sandwiches to the hungry children.⁴⁶

For the visitors, the meaning of spaces of belonging and non-belonging is more complex. The reports and interviews show that their intention was always to trade their way across the country. They would have been aware of their marginality (from their experiences at home, on the one hand, but also from the experiences of the previous travellers to Britain in 1904–05). Their need for a safe space in which to earn a living and shelter from harassment was clear, as was the intense and exhausting forced movement from place to place which they endured. The visitors constantly, necessarily, adapted, creating new spaces of performance and interaction. For the Laubingers and their companions, we can see how these interactions worked at two specific sites: the Vinegar Hill showground in Glasgow and the horse fair at Inverurie.

Christlieb and Bortscha Laubinger and their companions stayed at Vinegar Hill from 24 April until at least the end of May. Vinegar Hill, in Glasgow's East End, had operated as a showground since the annual carnival was moved there in the 1870s. By 1906 it was a site where touring and resident showmen put on shows of various kinds and operated rides and amusements.⁴⁷ It included an area where showpeople parked their caravans, and this is presumably why it was first thought of as an appropriate location for the new arrivals. At the same time it was just the kind of place where they could hope to earn money by putting on their own shows – described by one local newspaper as "aerobatic performances of a sort". By their very presence they filled the space; visited by "hundreds of people" when they first arrived, they had to deal with the congestion on one occasion by leading a prancing horse out to break up the packed crowd. They soon moved their caravans into an enclosed carnival area which included the Whitevale Theatre, and made arrangements for people to pay to see them. George Green, owner of the enclosure, prevented other travellers from settling on the grounds in return for a share of the takings;⁴⁸ on 1 May it was reported that the visitors had earned £25 so far. They also engaged in other kinds of transactions; one sold his caravan (presumably to one of the local showmen) in order to raise some money and was able to buy it back a few days later,

44 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 April 1906.

45 Procurator Fiscal of Perthshire, 19 April 1906.

46 *Kirkintilloch Gazette*, 8 June 1906.

47 For a summary history and photographs, see <http://parkheadhistory.com/vinegar-hill/> (accessed 29 May 2020).

48 On Green and the Whitevale Theatre, see Trevor Griffiths, *The Cinema and Cinema-Going in Scotland 1896–1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).



The eighty German gypsies who landed at Leith the other day and made their way across country to Glasgow, have caused some stir throughout Scotland. Amongst other exploits they held up a baker's van and confiscated the contents. Their camp at Vinegar Hill, Glasgow, was visited by crowds of people, and an earnest pastor, who had taken the wanderers under his wing, succeeded in persuading the

THE INVASION OF SCOTLAND : GERMAN

Fig. 18 At Vinegar Hill: "The Invasion of Scotland: German Gypsies at their Glasgow Encampment", *The Graphic*, 12 May 1906. (Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans)

though at a higher price. They reportedly got along well with the other caravan dwellers on the site.⁴⁹

Among the performances that briefly tied the visitors to Glasgow society beyond the confines of the showground was a wedding that took place at Vinegar Hill on 26 April. The groom was Paul Muller, one of the men recently released from detention in Edinburgh, the bride a young woman called Lena. The ceremony took place on the stage of the theatre, and was in every respect presented as a spectacle. Before a paying crowd which included mostly East End locals but also "a good sprinkling of well-dressed women", and preceded by the orchestra playing popular tunes and some turns by "local artistes", the curtain rose to reveal the bride and groom dressed in a combination of garments that passed for "Romany costume". The whole party, similarly flamboyantly attired, sang and danced on the

⁴⁹ *Dundee Courier*, 26 and 28 April 1906; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25 April and 1 May 1906; *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser*, 5 May 1906.



whole camp to attend a special religious service. Last week a question was asked in the House of Lords as to the incursion of these gypsies, but Lord Tweedmouth, in his reply, said that they were birds of passage on the way to Italy, and that they did not come under the Aliens Act. Our photos are by Topical.

GIPSIES AT THEIR GLASGOW ENCAMPMENT

stage. At this point "Pastor Geyer", who was due to officiate, explained that in fact they could not be legally married because they had not yet been in residence in the city long enough. What the audience had seen, he said, was an example of their "own Romany rites, which gave them an idea of how these people married their own kith and kin". He went on to plead for the audience's understanding for these people, who were well-meaning, law-abiding Christians as well as documented German nationals. After some further singing and dancing, "evidently delighted with the cordiality of their reception [the visitors] expressed their intention appearing nightly the theatre".⁵⁰

There are other examples of German Romani visitors staging weddings in order to attract a paying audience. What is significant about this one is the relationship that it signals between the "invaders" and Pastor Adolphus Hanns Geyer. It was one in which both parties' interest in self-promotion combined in productive ways with piety in the widest sense. Geyer led an independent German Church in the West End. It was better known among

⁵⁰ *Dublin Daily Express*, 30 April 1906.

Glaswegians than the official Lutheran German Church, but he remained a social outsider, having taken an unconventional route to the ministry.⁵¹ Having started his ecclesiastical career ministering to poor travellers, he surely found his work cut out for him when the “invaders” arrived. On the Sunday after the Muller wedding, he held a special service for them at the showground.⁵² This was followed on the same evening by the baptism in his church of five children born on the road after the arrival at Leith; they were the triplet sons of Hugo Franz and Maria Kaefer, born on 16 April, and the twin son and daughter of Karl Sattler and Sophie Joschka, born on the 20th. Like all of the events surrounding the presence of the “Gypsies” in Glasgow, the baptism was widely covered by the press, which reported that the whole group had travelled across town to the baptisms in closed carriages, the men “comparatively well groomed” and the women “arrayed in their most gorgeous apparel”. To a church packed with 400 congregants, Geyer preached a sermon on the theme of welcoming outcasts to the feast.⁵³

The same pattern of commitment and attendance was repeated in the weeks that followed, as between 16 and 31 May, Geyer married no fewer than 15 couples in his church and accompanied them to the register office to legalize their marriages. Their names are the best guide we have to the families who travelled with the Laubingers. Christlieb and Bortscha Laubinger were among the (in their case not quite) newlyweds, marrying on 19 May. The press reported a “quartette of weddings” on that day; Karl Sattler, Heinrich Sattler and Dungke Rebstock also married then, their brides respectively Sophie Joschka, Maria Dokli and Helene Ferkina.⁵⁴ A week later, Hugo Franz married Maria Kaefer, and fellow Vinegar Hill resident Alexander Adler married Katherine Strauss. On the same day, Baturi and Josef Strauss, Josef and Franz Weihrauch and Gotthold Stephan married their partners; they belonged to a party that had been turned away from Vinegar Hill and travelled on to Paisley, but they were related to the Vinegar Hill families. On 31 May, Dungka Rebstock’s daughter Anna married August Engel; Pinka Remek, daughter of a horse trading family, married Muto Strauss; and Johann Franz and Nikolaus Kanzler were the grooms at two more weddings.⁵⁵

There is no evidence that the couples ever made reference to these proceedings after leaving Glasgow; they have left no trace in the German archives. But they clearly had a utility both material and psychological for the couples.⁵⁶ For Geyer, they offered an opportunity to perform charity

51 On Geyer, see Stefan Manz, “‘Germans like to quarrel’: Conflict and Belonging in German Diasporic Communities around 1900”, *InterDisciplines* 1 (2016): 37–61.

52 *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 April 1906.

53 *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, 5 May 1906.

54 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12 June 1906.

55 Glasgow Statutory Registers at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk (accessed 9 July 2020).

56 Near Fraserburgh in May, a group which may have included the Laubingers declined



Fig. 19 Making space at the Leek horse fair. (Staffordshire Libraries)

and to mobilize his congregation to do so; two women and two men were regular witnesses at the weddings. Through other kinds of public action, like appealing publicly for clothing for the newly baptized babies, Geyer enhanced his reputation as an independent Christian voice when establishment clergymen berated him for “casting pearls before swine”.⁵⁷ And the journeys of the families back and forth across the city connected the East and West Ends in a highly dramatic way.

The Romani travellers inhabited shared public spaces with equal confidence, and probably with a more familiar performance repertoire, when they visited horse fairs. There is a detailed description of the meeting of the Inverurie horse fair, which they attended on 10 July, in the *Aberdeen People's Journal*: although the “gipsies” had only “four or five horses, a ‘pownie’ and a rickety cart”, they staked their claim to respect by entering with a halloo and a shout of “for cho” and driving right into the middle of the crowd. They began business by selling off a broken down horse for less than half of their original asking price. As they proceeded they drew respectful comments from other dealers, one characterizing them as “dead wide” – men who knew their business. While giving the impression

the local pastor's offer of a German service, for fear of attracting a crowd, but later requested (in vain) that he marry nine couples and baptize 14 children: *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24 July 1906.

57 McKormick, *Tinkler-Gypsies*, 420–22.

of clowning, they eyed up the best horses, responding with dramatic disappointment at prices they thought too high but making a show of having the necessary funds when they were ready to close a deal. When a Scottish dealer offered too low a price for a horse “for a poor blind man in Aberdeen ... The expression on the German’s face, the guttural ejaculation and the characteristic inclination of the head plainly said ‘Don’t try to teach your grandmother how to suck eggs. I know that game myself’”. They also swapped horses, usually asking for cash on top of a horse received in trade. The reporter emphasized that they never lost their composure: “they were on good terms with everybody and nobody appeared to resent their presence in the least. The ‘horsey’ men believe assuredly with the poet that ‘A man’s a man for a’ that’”.⁵⁸ On the familiar ground of the horse fair, the confident assertion of the right to be there worked for the “invaders”. We may presume that Inverurie was not the only place where this happened.

Epilogue: Settling Down

Bortscha and Christlieb Laubinger separated permanently shortly after their return from Britain, and Bortscha went on to start a new family; she had three more children, and died in January 1944. Christlieb married twice more. His third legal wife and mother of his youngest children was the peddler Albertine Franz; she was the daughter of Philippine, a peddler and umbrella mender from Pomerania, and she already had a four-month-old son by Christlieb, Julius, when they married in 1917. Their witnesses were two elderly Sinti from the neighbourhood in north-central Berlin where Albertine lived. At their wedding, Christlieb declared his residence to be Osnabrück, but by that time he had been based in Berlin for over ten years.

Christlieb probably settled in the city in 1907, his family part of the movement of a substantial number of Sinti and Roma to Berlin which resulted in whole neighbourhoods becoming associated with the Romani presence. Observers who noticed an influx of Sinti and Roma there in 1906 attributed it to the effects of the February Decree. While the horse market at Weissensee in the north-eastern suburbs had drawn Romani families since the 1890s, new clusters were spotted in the northern working-class district of Wedding and particularly on the northern fringe of the booming city “beyond Gesundbrunnen”.⁵⁹ Until he moved in with Albertine slightly closer to the city centre, Christlieb gave an address in the Müllerstraße, in Wedding. Although he was never formally registered there, the families of four of the men with whom he had travelled to Britain were: the Berlin City Directories listed Hugo Franz, Karl Sattler, Nicolaus Kanzler and Karl

⁵⁸ *The People’s Journal*, 14 July 1906.

⁵⁹ See for example *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, 28 February 1908. See also Constantine, *Sinti and Roma*, 109–12.

Remek as horse dealers in neighbouring houses in the Müllerstraße, and when the Danish Gypsyologist Johan Miskow visited the site in December 1910, the Weihrauch and Strauss families were also there. Miskow, who noted that they still had some knowledge of English, emphasized that these families were living in respectable circumstances although only one (unnamed) was relatively prosperous. Their children attended school and they were in contact with the Mission established nearby in 1910. The men had adopted the dress of ordinary Berliners, though the women continued to wear brightly coloured dresses and kerchiefs – no doubt an aid in the fortune telling which was their daily occupation.⁶⁰

At the end of his career as an “invader”, then, Christlieb Laubinger seems to have been ready to settle down. He was born among the German Sinti who travelled for a living; the geographical spread of the locations where he married, where his children were born and where he was stopped by the police covered the length and breadth of Germany, but in October 1908 he made formal application to be licensed as a horse dealer in Berlin. The saga of that application is a further example of his self-confidence and tenacity: in the wake of the Prussian crackdown on travelling “Gypsies”, his application was rejected by the Office of the Berlin Police Chief on the grounds that he could not prove he had a permanent legal residence in Prussia. He proceeded to appeal six times over the succeeding nine months, and raised the stakes by sending complaints to the Prussian Provincial President and requesting that the Minister for Trade and Commerce give the application his personal attention. This left the Police Chief feeling vulnerable to a complaint about his management of the case, and he prudently sent all the correspondence to the Minister of the Interior – who confirmed the rejection of the licence.⁶¹ We can presume that Christlieb never learned to write; all his life, he signed official documents “+ + +”. But this did not prevent him from taking action in his own interest. In this case, he employed a Jewish lawyer, Heinrich Radt, whose offices were at the more salubrious end of the Müllerstraße.⁶²

Another example of Christlieb’s resourcefulness tells us something about the emerging dynamics of Romani life in the big city. On 9 December 1912, Hugo Franz reported to the local register office that he had witnessed the

60 Johan Miskow, “A Recent Settlement in Berlin”, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, new series 5 (1911–12): 14–37. On the Berlin Gypsy Mission, see most recently Constantine, *Sinti and Roma*, 110–12.

61 Correspondence in GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77, Tit. 423 Nr. 53 gen. vol. 10, 228–32. This episode is also described by Jennifer Illuzzi, *Gypsies in Germany and Italy, 1881–1914: Lives Outside the Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 97–98.

62 On Heinrich Radt (1876–1934), see Simone Ladwig-Winters, *Anwalt ohne Recht: Das Schicksal jüdischer Rechtsanwälte in Berlin nach 1933* (Berlin: Berliner Rechtsanwaltskammer, 2007), 243. Radt was one of a number of Jewish lawyers who acted for Sinti and Roma in these decades.

death of his friend Christlieb Laubinger three days earlier. A likely explanation for this lies in conflicts among different Romani families in Berlin. When Johan Miskow emphasized the respectability of Laubinger's horse-trading neighbours, he drew a contrast with those living in other parts of the city. One such settlement was in the Koloniestraße in Gesundbrunnen, some 3 km to the east. A pitched battle occurred there on 17 November 1910, reportedly between Romani groups from different neighbourhoods; shots were fired, one man was arrested on the spot and investigations and trials continued over the following two years. There were horse-trading Laubingers living at the address where most of the action happened, and there are some hints in the press reports that they (or other Laubingers) were involved.⁶³ The trial of one of the accused took place on 6 December 1912; it is tempting to imagine that in feigning his own death Christlieb was hoping to avoid being called as a witness.

The Müllerstraße colony had dispersed by 1930. The Franz, Weihrauch, Strauss and Kanzler families were living in Weissensee and the outer environs of Berlin.⁶⁴ Christlieb and Albertine spent some time in Western Pomerania, where their second son, Reinhold, was born in August 1920, and in Hamburg, but in 1935 the family was back in Berlin. They were registered in the Landsberger Chaussee in Lichtenberg – a long thoroughfare lined mostly by building sites, coal and lumber yards and allotment gardens.

By the spring of 1938 the Laubingers had been forced into the internment camp for "Gypsies" in the Marzahn suburb. Among their neighbours there were Maria and Elisabeth, Christlieb's daughters by Bortscha. In this camp, set up when Sinti and Roma were cleared from the streets in anticipation of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the Laubingers lived in two adjacent caravans from which the wheels had been removed. From now on, if they travelled it was not on their own terms. The Nazi regime had constructed a radical solution to the "Gypsy problem": forcing them to settle and punishing them for not working while denying them the means to earn a living. In 1938 Christlieb, Albertine and Julius were living on welfare. Only Reinhold was working, and when he fell ill and lost his job as a construction labourer he became subject to a December 1937 decree that ordered "preventive detention" for "asocial" and workshy individuals. He spent over two years in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Following his release in December 1940, he was continuously monitored by the police. In January 1942 he had found work, and the local police reported that his work and demeanour gave "no reason for complaint".⁶⁵ He nevertheless remained under surveillance until April 1943, when he was deported to Auschwitz with his brother

63 *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 November 1910; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 7 December 1912.

64 Johan Miskow, "Jaija Sattler and the Gypsies of Berlin", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, third series 10 (1931): 86–92 (here 87).

65 Patricia Pientka, *Das Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma in Berlin-Marzahn* (Berlin: Metropol, 2013), 129–31.

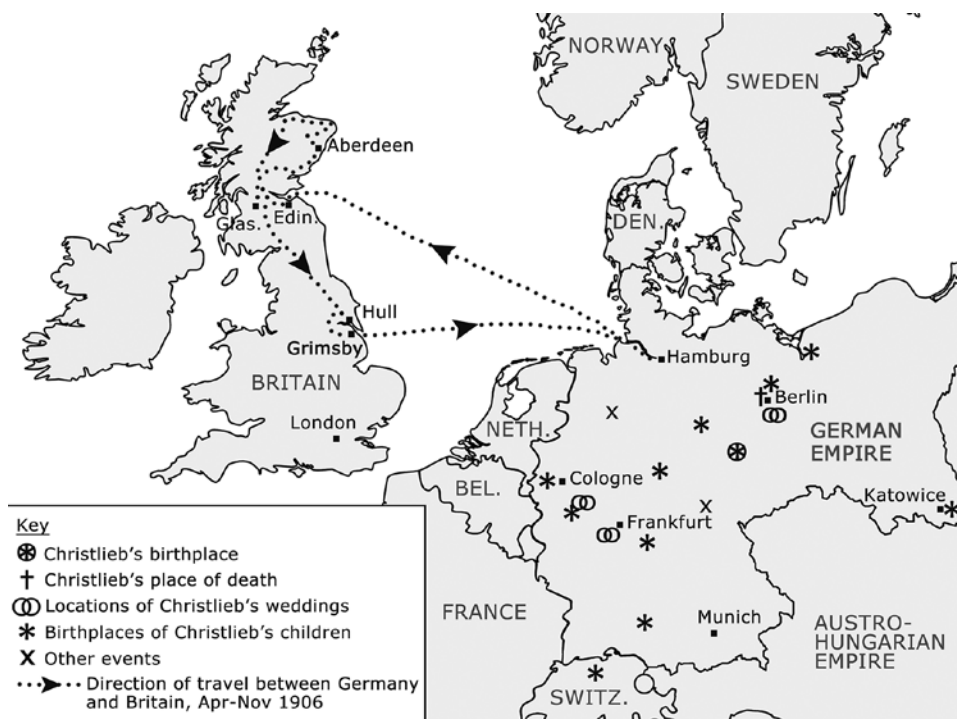


Fig. 20 The space of the Laubingers, 1866–1938. (Map: Emily Smith)

Julius. Very few of the Sinti of two generations who had been Christlieb Laubinger's travelling companions in Britain, or their children, survived the Holocaust. Christlieb himself did not live to witness the deportations; he died in Marzahn of cancer of the jaw, probably in November 1938.

Chapter 6

The Florians, the Habedanks and the Horse Fair at Wehlau

Eve Rosenhaft

In very significant ways, the recorded history of German Sinti and Roma as whole lives begins with the Holocaust. Neither the ethnographers and linguists, for whom the “Gypsies” were research subjects, nor the police, for whom they were a dangerous alien population to be controlled, were particularly interested in the pasts of their subjects – beyond an obsession with genealogy that served the rationales of both science and policing. When German Romani subjects themselves began to speak, it was largely in the context of Holocaust memory. They testified to their lives before the genocide as well as their Holocaust experience, first in their courtroom testimony and claims for compensation, and then in a wave of memoirs and interviews published since the 1970s. At first, these provided the foundations for historians’ reconstruction of the Holocaust as a historical moment, as well as for the self-construction of Romani collective memory and identity. They also point to the long history of lives “beyond stereotypes” that preceded the Nazi takeover, though in most cases the family members who survived to testify after 1945 were too young to have a detailed circumstantial memory of their life before the disaster.

Among those child witnesses whose families dealt in horses, memories of the days before the persecution often feature scenes of the trade and still more often of their own relationships with the animals. The violent end to that way of life which came with the closure of the horse fairs to “racial aliens” – both Jews and “Gypsies” – and the denial of licences to trade is remembered in traumatic terms. Indeed, in some respects, the search for

the longer history of such families begins with a scene of loss or terror in the stables: Hugo Höllenreiner, son of a Bavarian horse dealer, recalled in particularly vivid terms how the violence of the attacks against Jews on the “Night of Broken Glass”, 8 November 1938, spilled over to affect “Gypsies”. Five years old that night, he “heard my mother crying. I ran downstairs ... saw that our horses were running loose in the streets. That our stable was burnt down. And I saw that my mother was brushing at the side of one of the wagons where it was scorched”.¹ “Why are the people doing that?” Hugo wondered. “Why have they set our wagons on fire? Why? We haven’t done anything”.² Reinhard Florian, 14 at the time, remembers the result of his father losing his horse trading licence in 1937: “It was a catastrophe for my family, and not just an economic one. His horses, the business, contact with other dealers, with customers (mainly farmers), travelling – that was his life. That was what he knew how to do, and what he needed. Without the horse trade he was nothing, a nobody”.³

This chapter tells the story of Reinhard Florian’s family, one of those whose twentieth-century lives are relatively widely known because of the post-war testimony and activism of child witnesses like him. It explores the longer and wider histories of the Florian and Habedank families as economic actors. Living in the region of Germany known to their generation as East Prussia (specifically the area that is now an exclave of Russia, the hinterland of Kaliningrad), these families stand for generations of Sinti who filled a significant niche in the local and regional economies, though their acceptance as trading partners was always negotiated in terms of their ethnic outsider status. The chapter considers the ways in which these negotiations took place through the lens of the annual horse fair at Wehlau, known in its time as the largest in Europe. In the lifetime of Reinhard Florian, both the Wehlau horse fair and East Prussia became closed spaces for Sinti and Roma, but the chapter ends with a new beginning: Reinhard Florian’s contribution as Holocaust witness and activist to the creation of a new space both Romani and public.

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- 1 Quoted by Thies Marsen, “Der vergessene Völkermord: Das Schicksal der Sinti im Dritten Reich und die Rolle der Münchner Polizei”, *Hinterland*, <http://docplayer.org/22279440-Der-vergessene-voelkermord.html> (accessed 31 May 2020).
 - 2 Hugo Höllenreiner, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive Testimony (August 1999).
 - 3 Reinhard Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause, nach Ostpreußen! Das Überleben eines deutschen Sinto*, ed. Jana Mechelhoff-Herezi and Uwe Neumärker (Berlin: Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden in Berlin, 2012), 25. Other survivors with memories of horse trading include: Philomena Franz, *Zwischen Liebe und Haß. Ein Zigeunerleben* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985); Walter Stanoski Winter, *Winter Time: Memoirs of a German Sinto Who Survived Auschwitz*, ed. Thomas W. Neumann and Michael Zimmermann, trans. Struan Robertson (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004).

An East Prussian Sinti Family

Reinhard Florian's parents were Reinhard Habedank (born in 1896) and Florentine Florian (born in 1894). The couple never married, but formed a household with their children in the village of Matheningken, where Reinhard was born in 1923, before moving to Karalene. They had four daughters before Reinhard was born – Selma and Emma, born before 1919, and Hilde and Erna, born after the First World War. Hilde and Erna were taken into care as babies, and the family lost touch with them until a public health nurse who had been attending to the family came across the two girls in an orphanage in Königsberg. Reinhard Habedank and Florentine Florian had separated by about 1930 and Florentine moved to Stettin to live with her brother. Reinhard's second partner was Anna Ernst, whom he legally married in 1934. The couple had ten children between 1926 and 1943.⁴

The Habedank, Florian and Ernst families had relationships of blood and affinity, sealed by intermarriage and physical proximity, that went back more than a century and which also linked them to other families from their area of East Prussia.⁵ Florentine was one of 13 recorded children of Henriette Florian, and Reinhard's mother, Wilhelmine Habedank, had two other sons. Henriette was born a Broszinski and one of Wilhelmine's partners, possibly Reinhard's father, was also a Broszinski. The families were settled in villages around Insterburg (now Chernyakovsk). This was an overwhelmingly agrarian region with a relatively low population density. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the economy had been dominated by large estates. As a result of the Prussian land reforms, which were initiated in 1807 but implemented slowly over the following decades, independent farms multiplied only to be broken up and complex relationships of ownership and tenancy were established.⁶

What this meant for the Sinti families who made up a part of this agrarian community can be illustrated by the reports of two non-Romani visitors whom they hosted at different points during the nineteenth century. The first of these was Carl von Heister, a close and relatively sympathetic observer who had learned Romanes and published his "ethnographical and historical notes on the Gypsies" in 1842. He met Sinti in the coastal village

4 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 14–15.

5 Carl von Heister cites Florian, Habedank and Broszinski among 18 East Prussian Sinti names: *Ethnographische und geschichtliche Notizen über die Zigeuner* (Königsberg: Gräfe & Unzer, 1842), 149. He also names the Dombrowskis, Kleins, Cziblinkis and Paskowskis, who appear in the sources alongside or related to Reinhard and Florentine's families.

6 Patrick Wagner, *Bauern, Junker und Beamte. Lokale Herrschaft und Partizipation im Ostelbien des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 38–46.

of Labagienen west of Insterburg and conversed with them in Romanes until they all gave up trying and switched to German. (The Sinti families spoke the Low German dialect of the region.) Heister's hosts, the Anton/Florian family, were dressed "just like every other coastal peasant", though they wore more exotic costume for special occasions. Sixty-year-old Christian Anton, head of the family and a former chimney sweep, had lived in the village for 23 years and paid taxes. His children had been confirmed in the Lutheran church. He and his wife lived in one room in a farmer's house with six adult children and a baby. The rent they paid, 6 thaler, they raised by fattening pigs, rag picking and occasional work in the fields for the farmer; the latter had also given them a piece of land on which they could grow potatoes. (Heister reported that Sinti girls also worked as housemaids, nursemaids and spinners.) Their neighbours "gave a good account of this family and said the Gypsies were good, respectable people".⁷

A later visitor to the Florians may well have met Florentine Florian's parents. In 1887 the linguist Rudolph von Sowa visited the village of Klein Reckeitschen, where they were living and where Florentine was born. The village, known as a colony, had been founded as a settlement for veterans of the Napoleonic Wars. With a total population of about 400, including 22 registered "Gypsies", it was one of 27 villages in the Gumbinnen district which recorded 310 Sinti all together in 1887.⁸ Reinhard Habedank was born in another of these villages, Puskeppeln. Sowa was unimpressed by Klein Reckeitschen, describing "small houses scattered about the sandy plain ... more like caves". His eye firmly on what it was that made the "Gypsies" different – their primitive outsider character – he nevertheless observed that "The people did not live exclusively by themselves, for there were also a few German men and women among them".⁹ And the records of the period show clearly that the Sinti families were embedded in the village community. Florentine's father, Ferdinand Florian, described himself at her birth in 1894 as a horse dealer, but as late as 1891 he was officially known as a *Losmann* – a tenant farmer with a smallholding and a nominal but rarely enforced duty of labour service to the landlord. Other members of these extended families were also

7 Heister, *Ethnographische und geschichtliche Notizen*, 144–47. Heister's work is generally regarded as contributing to a negative image of "Gypsies". See, for example, Nicholas Saul, *Gypsies and Orientalism in German Literature and Anthropology of the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Legenda, 2007), 8.

8 "Blüchersdorf", <http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/GOV:BLUORFKO04VR> (accessed 4 June 2020) – Klein Reckeitschen was renamed Blüchersdorf in 1938; Rudolph von Sowa, "Die Mundart der ostpreussischen Zigeuner", *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 18 (1888): 82–93 (here 83–84). It is not clear whether the population figures refer to individuals, adults only or heads of household.

9 Rudolph von Sowa, "Statistical Account of the Gypsies in the German Empire", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 1 (1888): 29–33 (here 31).

described as *Losmann*, while one living in another nearby village qualified as a property owner. When another Florian-Broszinski wedding took place in 1875, the bride was lodging with a small independent farmer (not a Sinto), who was one of the witnesses to their marriage.¹⁰ There were also Sinti in the district who were well-established farmers. In their village near Goldap, the Dambrowskis had an eight-hectare farm with additional grazing rights that they had bought in the middle of the nineteenth century, although the adult children of the family also worked for other local farmers and the men traded in horses.¹¹

The symbiosis between Romani and non-Romani families was an unbalanced one. In 1842 Heister pointed out that many Sinti were to be found in jails and workhouses – not because of criminal acts but for “vagabondage” – homelessness that attested to a persistent social marginality and insecurity of employment. The Florians and their friends never travelled far. They do not feature in the police reports and manuals, like Alfred Dillmann’s 1905 *Zigeuner-Buch*, which typically collated sightings of “Gypsies” who travelled around the country and across the borders of federal states.¹² But they were nevertheless subject to police harassment and control when they were going about their business on the roads.¹³ The removal of Florentine Florian’s infant daughters from the family – whether voluntary or involuntary – attests to the difficulties of their everyday circumstances even in the 1920s. And once the Nazis came to power, their integration into local life did not prevent them from being registered, stripped of rights and property, questioned about their family histories, examined for the purposes of “racial” categorization and deported to camps and ghettos. It is telling, though, that the East Prussian Sinti were the one group of German “Gypsies” whose way of life challenged the categories of the “race scientists”. Sophie Ehrhardt and Robert Ritter of the Race Hygiene Research Unit, who were tasked by SS-Leader Heinrich Himmler in 1938 with determining the degree of alien blood in each “Gypsy” they identified, found it difficult to fit these families into their system. And this was precisely because by the 1930s the East Prussian

10 This account of the family history draws on records of birth, death and marriage (1875–96) available at www.ancestry.de. On rural employment structures and terminology, see Otto Gerlach, *Die Landarbeiterverhältnisse in der Provinz Ostpreußen* (Berlin: Parey, 1913).

11 Amanda Dambrowski, “Das Schicksal einer vertriebenen ostpreußischen Sinti-Familie im NS-Staat”, *Pogrom. Zeitschrift für bedrohte Völker* 80–81 (1981): 72–75.

12 See Simon Constantine, *Sinti and Roma in Germany (1871–1933): Gypsy Policy in the Second Empire and Weimar Republic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 35–42.

13 Rüdiger Benninghaus, “Zigeuner in ‘Warnlisten’ preußischer Bezirksausschüsse”, <https://gypsy-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/resources-bezirksausschuesse.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2020).

Sinti were so much like their neighbours.¹⁴ There is an uncanny echo of Heister's account in the story of the Dambrowski family's deportation to internment in Białystok in 1942. After some months, their mother formally applied to be allowed to return to Goldap, insisting on her husband's claim to consideration as a property owner and veteran of the First World War. Allowed home (at the cost of consenting to be sterilized), they were met at the station by their neighbours, who told them: "The Gestapo asked us whether you should come back, and we all signed".¹⁵

To return to the story of the Florians: in the 1920s, Reinhard Habedank and Florentine Florian were living in circumstances not very different from those of their parents, in the village of Karalene. They lodged in a house owned by a farmer, which they shared with other Sinti families, and both of them worked for the farmer to pay the rent. Florentine was responsible for the family's regular income. Her work peddling textile goods around the local area kept the household afloat between times when Reinhard was able to bring in larger sums from horse trading, and occasionally she also begged for food from farmers.¹⁶ Both peddling and begging on the part of women were intrinsic to the gendered moral economy of their village communities. The police and other hostile observers complained that farm wives, approached by "Gypsy" women while their husbands were away in the fields, were too generous, tolerant or fearful to take a stand against the "Gypsy nuisance".¹⁷ By contrast, an anecdote which a non-Romani woman recalled as an example of Sinti eloquence offers a snapshot of relations of good-humoured mutual regard:

It once happened that a Gypsy woman wanted to get some bread from a farm wife. But the woman didn't have much herself; she had had to keep postponing her baking day because there was too much work to be done in the fields. And she explained that to the Gypsy, because she normally never let someone who came to her door go away empty-handed. The Gypsy accepted her explanation, but remarked: "Still, madam, let me

14 Martin Holler, "Deadly Odyssey: East Prussian Sinti in Białystok, Brest-Litovsk, and Auschwitz-Birkenau", in *Mass Violence in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. Alex J. Kay and David Stahl (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 94–120.

15 Dambrowski, "Das Schicksal", 75.

16 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 14–15. In interviews and published testimony, Florian always refers to his "mother" when talking in general terms about family life. It is clear that his stepmother, Anna Ernst, played the same role as Florentine after she and Reinhard Habedank got together.

17 See, for example, the remarks of the Rural Chamber of Commerce of Brandenburg (1904) and the Provincial President in Magdeburg (1905), Geheimes Staatsarchiv preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin, I. HA Rep. 77, Tit. 423 Nr. 53 gen. Adh. 2, vol. 4, 78–80 and 117–21.

give you a housekeeping lesson: Before you cut into your last loaf, make sure you've started the dough for the next one".¹⁸

When East Prussian Sinti did take to the roads, it was most often to trade in horses, and Reinhard Habedank was one who made a success of the trade. Heister's 1842 informant Christian Anton had two horses, and most of the other Sinti Heister met in East Prussia similarly had at least one and sometimes two. These they not only kept for their own use, but took to the big horse fair at Wehlau and other smaller markets to sell or (more often) swap for better ones.¹⁹ In the twentieth century, most Sinti were still operating on a relatively small scale, making their money by buying worn out horses and bringing them back to condition for resale. Reinhard Florian remembered his father driving around the farmhouses to buy broken down nags that farmers were happy to get off their hands: "Sometimes that kind of horse spends up to a year with us. It's fed – well fed – and tended with lots of love, so generally nursed back to condition. Then it's round and fat, in good form and contented and ready to go back to work in the fields".²⁰

Reinhard Habedank features as "Gypsy and labourer" in the 1935 directory for Eichenberg, where he subsequently settled with Anna Ernst, but by that time, according to his son, he was already doing well in the horse trade. He had moved his business up a level from the small-scale reconditioning of working animals. Reinhard Florian remembered how even in earlier years his father would drive to market in a wagon pulled by two horses with three tied on behind, and resell the horses he had bought for 20 to 50 marks for 1,000 marks each: "We were wealthier than a lot of big farmers".²¹ Between 1934 and 1937 his stock of horses grew to 20 or more, and he had begun to breed them for sale. Unable to keep all the horses at home, he hired stable space in Georgenburg, the suburb of Insterburg where the state horse farm was located, and employed a stable hand.²² No records of the business have survived, and this is characteristic of Romani histories. A Hermann Habedank is registered as a horse dealer in the town of Insterburg in 1934, in premises on the road between Insterburg and Georgenburg. This may have been Reinhard's brother (born in 1892), and it may be that Reinhard's additional stabling facilities were either rented in his brother's name or provided by his brother.

18 Hannelore Patzelt-Hennig, "Die Zigeuner sind da ...", *Das Ostpreußenblatt* Folge 2 (31 May 1975): 17.

19 Heister, *Ethnographische und geschichtliche Notizen*, 150.

20 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13.

21 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13; Reinhard Florian, 2011 interview, *Sprechen trotz allem*, <https://sprechentrotz allem.de/interviews/view/1140> (accessed 4 June 2020).

22 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 11. Interviewed in 2005, Florian spoke of "20 to 25 horses on average": *Zwangsarbeit 1939–1945: Erinnerung und Geschichte*, <https://archiv.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/de/interviews/za062> (accessed 4 June 2020).

The Horse Fair at Wehlau

The high point of the horse dealers' year in East Prussia was the horse fair at Wehlau (now Znamensk), about 42 km west of Insterburg. First recorded in 1613, and established as a specialist horse fair in 1712, by the time Reinhard Habedank and Florentine Florian were born the Wehlau fair was regularly described as the biggest in Europe. The length and timing of the fair varied, determined by the local authorities on the basis of the weather and economic and other circumstances, but it was always held in July and lasted at least three days. Because it was timed to overlap with other livestock and commodities fairs it formed part of an extended period of summertime events.²³ It was visited by dealers from all over Europe, especially from northeastern Europe and Russia, and thousands of horses changed owners every year. East Prussia was horse country; the royal stud farm established in 1731 at Trakehnen, in the east of the province, gave its name to a breed of high-value pedigree horses, and there were some luxury horses on sale. But most of the animals traded at Wehlau were working horses which, before the availability of motor vehicles, were in demand for much more than farm work: visitors to the fair included "buyers from the mines – from Scotland, Belgium, Lorraine, the Ruhr and Upper Silesia ... Horse-tram managers, post offices, breweries, all find just the draught animal they need".²⁴ Even with encroaching motorization it was still a significant economic and social event in the regional calendar; according to one report, as many as 20,000 horses were counted as late as 1929.²⁵ And while most of the professional dealers who attended the fair were Jewish, the working horses that predominated in the sales were the stock-in-trade of Romani horse dealers.

Wehlau was a town still largely in its medieval form with a resident population that numbered just over 5,000 at the end of the nineteenth century, rising to 7,500 in 1933. The business of the fair packed the city and surrounding villages, with kilometre-long trains of vehicles and horses filling the approach roads on the day before opening. Even in the 1930s, the scene was still dominated by the covered wagons that were the working

23 See, for example, the market calendars in *National-Kalender für das gemeine Jahr*, vols 47, 52, 53 (Berlin: various publishers, 1871, 1876 and 1877).

24 "Anfang Juli: Zum Pferdemarkt nach Wehlau!", *Das Ostpreußenblatt* 1, no. 7 (5 July 1950): 235.

25 Werner Quednau, Reader's Letter, *Das Ostpreußenblatt* 12, no. 27 (8 July 1961): 4. Except where otherwise noted, the following account of the fair is based on Quednau and the following: Otto Steiniger, "Der Wehlauer Pferdemarkt" [probably written c. 1925], *Wehlauer Heimatbrief* 81 (September 2009): 259–82; Hans Sierski, "Aus den Tagen des großen Pferdemarkts", *Das Ostpreußenblatt* 12, no. 19 (13 May 1961): 11; Hermann Fischer, "Die Kreisstadt Wehlau", in *Heimatbuch des Kreises Wehlau* (Leer: Rautenberg, 1975), 102–208 (here 141).

vehicles of farmers and Sinti alike. The initial congestion is explained by the route that dealers had to take. The fairground was on the Schanzenwiesen, meadows outside the former city walls on the south side of the city. Although the city could be approached from the south, the main route into town was from the north, across the narrow span of the Lange Brücke that crossed the river Aller. In any case, all arriving dealers had to proceed through the city streets to the market square in order to pay their fees at the city treasury immediately adjacent to the town hall, and then pass out through the city gates to the south-west. On arrival at the fairground they faced another bottleneck, since there was only one entrance, at which every horse was subject to inspection by a team of veterinarians.

But the fair, which was advertised globally as a tourist attraction, brought many visitors who were not interested in buying or selling horses, and their presence contributed to the way in which the fair overwhelmed the townscape.²⁶ Special trains were laid on from as far away as Berlin. People came to the horse fair simply to soak up the atmosphere and provide an audience for the elaborate theatre of the negotiations between sellers and buyers. And while seeking out spectacle within the fair they constituted a spectacle in themselves. This spectacular character is evidenced among other things by the fact that events on the opening day were broadcast on the regional radio service (with commentary by a local Plattdeutsch comic).²⁷ The area where the horses were displayed, bought and sold was surrounded by stands selling food and drink, toys and trinkets. There was a fun fair with rides, shooting galleries and other cheap amusements in the adjacent field, and the horse fair marked the beginning of a season of entertainments and exhibitions that lasted several weeks. The restaurants and taverns in town were kept busy, since the normal curfew was lifted for market days. As in many seasonal tourist areas, locals earned good money by renting rooms, and demand for accommodation overflowed into other cities in the province. In acknowledgement of the economic importance of the fair, the local authorities made sure it ran smoothly. The Wehlau local government provided parking for visitors arriving in motor vehicles, and took responsibility for dividing up the sales areas and setting out hitching posts and drinking troughs for the horses. The town police force was reinforced by officers drawn from the surrounding rural communities for the duration of the fair.

In the memories of non-Romani residents and fairgoers, the “Gypsy” presence in East Prussia is closely associated with the Wehlau fair, and the fair with the Romani presence. The participation of Sinti and Roma was

26 In 1938, US newspapers counted the fair among the summer events that Americans visiting Europe might want to take in: for example, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 19 June 1938.

27 See *Der deutsche Rundfunk* 12, no. 27 (1–4 July 1934): 14, 26.

central to the life of the fair, and although their presence in significant numbers was brief and seasonal, it also helped to sustain the city itself. Like all other traders on the market, they paid their share of the hitching fees that helped fuel the local economy, and they spent their money at the booths and taverns there. They also contributed significantly to the visual and sensory impact of the fair.

Scores of photographs have survived that attest to the fascination of the fair and offer some hints about the arrangement and use of space there. The archive of images of the fair itself is dominated by three kinds of scene: panoramic views which take in a dense assemblage of wagons, more “readable” views of the horses hitched in rows awaiting scrutiny and sale, and images of buyers and sellers negotiating sales in various degrees of close-up.²⁸ Non-Romani residents of the city remember how “wagon was lined up with wagon and horse with horse, in exemplary order”,²⁹ following regulations that had been introduced as early as 1841 for the orderly hitching of horses and the separation of areas for the parking of wagons, entertainment and refreshment, visitor traffic and the display and sale of horses. In the eyes of the young Reinhard Florian, the market scene was chaotic but “with a secret internal logic”.³⁰

The visitors were also subject to a spatial order: the wagons and caravans of the “Gypsies” congregated in a distinct area to the south-west of the Schanzenwiesen, adjacent to the city park on the hill called the Glumsberg.³¹ By some accounts, if the Sinti dealers came from the surrounding area, only the men would travel to the fair while the women stayed at home, but for Sinti and Roma who arrived as families, camping together at a distance from the main business of the fair was the natural way to keep house during the fair, when other buyers and sellers filled the paying accommodation on offer in town. It was also a space for sociability and matchmaking.³²

From the perspective of the non-Romani fairgoers, the “Gypsy” camp was an attraction in itself, part of the entertainment. When the graphic artist Ludwig Loeffler toured East Prussia in 1873, he took a day trip to Wehlau for the fair. A visit to a “Gypsy” family featured in his report, with scenes of palm reading and paying to make a pencil sketch of a young man, and the surprised observation that of the men, who “are generally better looking” than the women, two were still wearing their military caps from the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. In the 1930s fortune telling and music were still part of the repertoire for Sinti and Roma hosting tourists on the

28 A great many of these can be viewed at www.kreisgemeinschaft-wehlau.de and <https://www.ostpreussen.de/bildarchiv.html> (accessed 10 June 2020).

29 Sierski, “Aus den Tagen”.

30 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 12.

31 Ibid.; Fischer, “Die Kreisstadt Wehlau”, 141.

32 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13.



Fig. 21 Organized chaos. (Bildarchiv Kreisgemeinschaft Wehlau, www.kreisgemeinschaft-wehlau.de, 111-0653)



Fig. 22 Romani women at the Wehlau horse fair. (www.flickr.com/photos/27639553@N05/15111124393; every effort has been made to identify the copyright holder)



Fig. 23 A Romani dealer at the Wehlau horse fair. (Bildarchiv Kreisgemeinschaft Wehlau, www.kreisgemeinschaft-wehlau.de, 111-0726)

Glumsberg.³³ Boys and young men could play their part at the showground by looking after the horses or showing them off to the buyers. It was in this more remote and liminal space that women, girls and younger children made their own contribution to the household and also to the fairground economy.³⁴

Meanwhile, the Romani men went about their business on the Schanzenwiesen, contributing to the landscape of the fair not only in material terms but also through their visible and audible presence. Although, as many observers noted, East Prussian Sinti were not easily distinguished from other East Prussian *Koppscheller* (the Plattdeutsch term for horse dealers) by their dress and speech, Sinti and Roma from other regions and traditions came to the fair. There is no evidence that they were restricted to any part of the fair, and photographs of them engaged in negotiating sales show both Romani and non-Romani participants and spectators in the scene. During a day's trading they would have frequented the food and drink stands on the showground, engaging in the forms of masculine sociability that the situation offered. Indeed, the consumption of alcohol was part of the trading process. As early as 1842 Heister observed

33 Ludwig Loeffler, "In den Ostsee-Provinzen. Tagebuch mit Feder und Stift", *Über Land und Meer. Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung* 29, no. 19 (1873): 364–66; Sierski, "Aus den Tagen"; Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13.

34 There are no photographs of Wehlau that show Romani women on the showground itself.

that when horses were successfully swapped, a bottle or two of schnapps were usually added to sweeten the deal. At the Wehlau fair the successful conclusion of a sale was celebrated with a drink of schnapps bought by the buyer, the *Magrietsch* which, in Reinhard Florian's words, "basically legalized the contract".³⁵

Florian gives a step-by-step account of a sale, following "fixed rules and of course a bit of theatre": the negotiation begins with the physical examination of the animal, starting with the inspection of the teeth, which will betray its age. The more interested the buyer is, the harder he tries to look uninterested, even disapproving of what he sees:

Whatever happens, my father mustn't know how much that farmer wants this particular horse. That will bring the price down. Then he walks around the animal a few times and inspects it from all sides. And then he turns to my father: "Looks pretty good, the nag. What do you want for it?" "Well, I thought X Marks". "Oh my goodness – no! That's too much". "Well then, I'll make an exception, just for you ... I'll make you an offer: Y Marks ...". "Well, that's still a pretty stiff price! Knock it down by 50". "And *Magrietsch!*" "Deal!"

Each price bid is accompanied by a clap of the hands between seller and buyer, and when the sale is concluded with a final clap, they can proceed to the schnapps stand.

This script could be repeated in any sale at any horse fair, and a negotiation like this one could last for hours. What makes Florian's account of his father's work distinctive is that it offers a vision of the sale from a Sinti perspective. This was a theatre in which the actors met on equal terms, but it was in the nature of the trade that those terms included shifting measures of trust and suspicion. In his own reflections on the trade, Reinhard Florian spontaneously commented: "There's always a little cheating in any business ... I can tell you, I was a dealer for a long time and ... that gave the Gypsies a bad reputation".³⁶ What lingered in his memory was the way in which practices that were part and parcel of the business of horse trading were projected onto Romani dealers as fraudulent. This was inherent in the psychology of asymmetric information that is present in any market situation: since only the seller knows how good his wares are, the buyer has to rely on a combination of his own expertise and trust in (or critical assessment of) the seller to reach the point where he is ready to close a sale. Both of these came with experience of the market and mutual familiarity. Grounds for mistrust were many, particularly when the seller was from an outsider group. The popular stereotype of the "Gypsy" horse dealer was that

35 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 11.

36 Florian, 2011 interview; also *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13.

he always dealt in substandard wares and succeeded in making sales only through double-talk and cosmetic tricks; an often-reported strategy was to make the horse more desirable either by talking it down or by getting a child to pretend they couldn't bear to part with it – more theatre.³⁷ But anyone experienced in horse dealing would be aware that positioning and handling a horse so as to make it appear healthier, bigger, stronger, more lively than it really was, and using every rhetorical trick to persuade a buyer that this was the horse he really wanted, belonged to a repertoire that was fully accepted and even recommended by “respectable” horse dealers.³⁸ Florian's account, moreover, is an example of the Sinto, so often an object of the non-Romani gaze, looking back knowingly: the object of his observation is the buyer, whom he knows to be putting on as much of an act as the seller. We also recognize the fine balance between familiarity and distance, self- and other-awareness in these relationships from the Sinti point of view when he expresses good-humoured contempt for the (non-Romani) farmers who sold their worn out horses to his father – “idiots” who, unlike Sinti, have no respect for their animals and treat them like machines.³⁹

Closing Old Spaces, Opening New Ones: Exclusion and (Non-)Return

When Wehlau celebrated the 600th anniversary of its charter in June 1936, one of the procession floats that represented key aspects of the city's life and history was dedicated to the horse fair; it was an imitation (or possibly authentic) covered “Gypsy” wagon with an imitation “Broszinski” family.⁴⁰ This was an irony entirely in keeping with the cruel absurdities of Nazi policy, because by this time real “Gypsies” were largely unwelcome. At the beginning of that same month, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior issued the latest of many decrees on “fighting the Gypsy nuisance”.⁴¹ Among the familiar measures of surveillance and control that it recommended to the police were the “monitoring of public markets, and especially horse fairs”.

37 For example, *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 July 1908; *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 2 March 1910; Walter Engelhardt, *Ein Memel-Bilder-Buch* (Berlin: Grenze und Ausland, 1936), 69; Patzelt-Hennig, “Die Zigeuner”.

38 See, for example, Franz Bittner, *Pferdehändler und ihre Geheimnisse* (Neudamm: Neumann, 1926).

39 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 13.

40 See photos 111-0584, 111-0602 and 111-0604 at www.kreisgemeinschaft-wehlau.de (accessed 9 June 2020).

41 Reproduced in facsimile in Eva von Hase-Mihalik and Doris Kreuzkamp, *Du kriegst auch einen schönen Wohnwagen: Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma während des Nationalsozialismus in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes und Apsel, 1990), 44–45.

As his son reports, a year later Reinhard Habedank had already lost his business, evidence that things were beginning to close in for Sinti horse dealers, as indeed for Jewish ones. The 1938 horse fair at Wehlau took place in the absence of both; Jews and “Gypsies” were formally banned from participating that July and never returned.⁴²

Reinhard Florian remembers things closing in at home, too. One of about a dozen Sinti children in his village school class, he was always aware of the suspicion of non-Romani outsiders, although he got along well with classmates and neighbour children who were not Sinti. Once Hitler was in power the atmosphere changed, especially after the Nuremberg Laws began to take effect. Reinhard had to leave school in 1937, aged 14, and take up work as an agricultural labourer. After working for a farmer he knew for a few months, he was transferred to a farm 40 kilometres away, and lost contact with his parents and siblings. In February 1941 he was arrested by the Gestapo and spent ten months in a series of prisons, before being sent to the concentration camp at Mauthausen. From February 1942 to May 1943 he was interned in Gusen concentration camp. Then he was transferred to Auschwitz, where he worked in the IG Farben plant at Monowitz. The death march from the coal mine in a subcamp of Auschwitz, and subsequent panicked relocations by the SS, took him back to Mauthausen and its subcamps. He was liberated at Ebensee on 6 May 1945.

After the closure of his business, Reinhard Habedank, by his son’s account a “small, delicate man”, had been forced to do hard manual labour in a brickworks: “I had never seen him cry. Now he was crying like a baby”. His wife Anna, too, lost her peddler’s licence and was forced to beg, from neighbours who were now less sympathetic than in the days before the Nazi takeover. In February 1942 Reinhard, Anna and the nine children still at home were placed under arrest in their own house before being shipped to Białystok along with most of the other East Prussian Sinti. There they were crammed into the city prison in atrocious conditions, and then sent on to Brest-Litovsk in September, where they were housed in the ghetto, taking the places of Jews who had been murdered. In April 1944 the survivors, fewer than half of those originally transported from East Prussia, were transferred to the “Gypsy family camp” at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The only members of the Habedank family to survive were Reinhard himself and Bruno (born 1926), his oldest son by Anna. Sent back to the Reich in August 1944, Reinhard spent the last nine months of the war in the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp. Bruno was sent first to Dora-Mittelbau and then to carry out slave labour in Harzungen and Oranienburg. Florentine Florian was arrested in Stettin in April 1943, charged under a law that made it an offence to take advantage of the wartime disruptions: she had claimed

42 “Jews and Gypsies Barred from German Horse Market”, *Chicago Tribune*, 7 July 1938.

compensation for the loss of a fur coat in a bombing raid. She was still in the women's penitentiary in Jauer in September 1944, but there is no trace of her after that.⁴³

At the end of the war, Reinhard Habedank and his two sons believed each other to be dead. Reinhard Florian and Bruno Habedank met by chance in 1948 and they tracked down their father in 1970, when he was living in the GDR. He moved to the West to join his sons in Bavaria, where they had both settled. When Reinhard Habedank died in 1986 he was living in Bayreuth near Bruno, who died in 2008. Reinhard Florian died in Aschaffenburg on 17 March 2014.

In the last 15 years of his life, Reinhard Florian made important contributions to redrawing the landscape of memory in Germany and restoring the lost Sinti and Roma community to the physical and imaginative spaces in which Germans picture their past.⁴⁴ Like so many Romani victims of the Nazis, he kept a traumatized silence in the early years, first speaking of his experiences only in the administrative circumstances of searching for his relatives and claiming compensation (which was denied at first). He came into contact with the organized Romani movement only in the mid-1980s, when he was asked by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma to give evidence on behalf of another compensation claimant, and in return received support for his own claim – this time successful. Between 1998 and his death he made his testimony available in a series of recorded interviews, starting with a contribution to the landmark Survivors of the Holocaust Visual History Archive at the University of Southern California. And in 2012 his memoirs were published in book form, a distillation of recorded and unrecorded oral testimony.

It is significant that Reinhard Florian's memoirs were published by the foundation responsible for the Berlin Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. During the planning and construction of that memorial, which opened in 2005, Sinti and Roma had raised eloquent challenges to its exclusive focus on Jewish victims – given that it was intended to be a site of national and international memory and that the dimensions of the genocide of the Roma were already well known. As one of the Sinti activists sceptical of the larger memorial, Reinhard Florian devoted his efforts to the creation of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism. That memorial, which opened in 2012, is a characteristically paradoxical space. A singularly beautiful and effective work of landscape art, and – importantly – a product of the victim community itself through collaborations of Romani activists with both Roma and non-Roma artists,

43 Jana Mechelhoff-Herezi and Uwe Neumärker, "Nachwort 'Heimat im deutschen Osten' – Leben, Verfolgung und Vernichtung der ostpreussischen Sinti", in Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 93–109 (here 98–103).

44 For this and what follows, see Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 88–89; Mechelhoff-Herezi and Neumärker, "Nachwort", 108–09.



Fig. 24 Reinhard Florian (r.) with Chancellor Angela Merkel and architect Dani Karavan at the opening of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism. (picture alliance/dpa Wolfgang Kumm)

it remains separate from and liminal to the larger memorial. It is almost hidden in the leafy Tiergarten Park, while the memorial to the Jews stands in a monumental open space. Seen from a perspective that decentres the larger installation, however, the memorial to the Romani victims partakes of the wider diffusion of Holocaust memory spaces out from the focus that is the Brandenburg Gate and into the Tiergarten, in which there are now also memorials to homosexual and disabled victims. And it sounds its call to remember and its warning against institutional racism from a place immediately adjacent to the seat of government itself, the old Reichstag building.

Readers of Reinhard Florian's memoirs will also be struck by the way in which he brings back to life a geographical and political space that was long forgotten: German East Prussia. His title, *I Wanted to Go Home, to East Prussia*, expresses the attachment to a particular landscape and a way of life shared between Sinti and others:

We all spoke the same language ... We all lived in the same place, swam in the Pissa, the stream that flowed there. We all loved the

landscape. Our home. We simple folk on the land were all poor. Maybe the “Gypsies” were a little bit poorer than the rest.⁴⁵

Florian’s nostalgia resonates with that of other Germans who had to leave East Prussia as a result of the war and who were also never able to return: the ethnic Germans who fled in 1944 as the Soviet army marched in or were expelled from the territory in the post-1945 settlement.

There is more than a little irony to be observed in the footnotes to this chapter: as a result of the destruction and dispersal of regional archives, the private memories and archives of these *Vertriebene* [expellees] are key sources for our knowledge about pre-war life, including relations between Sinti and their neighbours. The irony arises from the ways in which those memories have been framed in political discourse: since the post-war settlement led to the Soviet occupation and Russianization of East Prussia, the earliest memories of the home towns of the Florians and the Habedanks appeared in publications of the organized *Vertriebene* in West Germany, whose position was conservative and revanchist. After the collapse of socialism, new accounts of the expulsions and expellees came to form part of a national victimhood narrative that offered a challenge to the discourse of German guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust.⁴⁶

In terms of these national memory politics, we may thus expect to find Sinti and non-Sinti East Prussians on opposite “sides”. But everyday private memory preserves a shared dwelling space, which can be recalled and recreated through the sharing of memories in public space. In a relatively early published testimony, *Sintezza* Amanda Dambrowski exposed the complexity of this heritage: having been allowed to return to their village from internment in Białystok, the Dambrowskis faced the same challenges as their neighbours at the end of the war, in unsuccessful flight from the approaching Red Army and under occupation by Soviet troops in East Prussia and then Pomerania. When they were finally able to travel legally to the West, Amanda’s mother decided they should go to East Frisia in the coastal north-west – “because she thought it would be like East Prussia”.⁴⁷

45 Florian, *Ich wollte nach Hause*, 24.

46 See Dagmar Kift, “Neither Here Nor There? Memorialization of the Expulsion of Ethnic Germans”, in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 78–87.

47 Dambrowski, “Das Schicksal”, 75.

Part Three

Music

Introduction

The Space for/of Romani Music

Anna G. Piotrowska

The historical spaces of interaction between Roma and non-Roma are characterized by a strong sonic-musical component which has significantly structured their intercultural communication and can serve as a key to understanding the dynamics of these relations. This third part explores music as a factor in the construction and adaptation of Romani self-representation in non-Romani spaces and treats music as a medium facilitating exchange and mutuality. While presenting very distinct case studies of Romani musicians from different regions – Hungarian territories, Romanian lands and communist Poland – Part Three describes and analyses the role of the musical element in the interaction between Roma and non-Roma in each case, drawing special attention to its various dimensions by addressing the question of its meanings. All three chapters presume that music can and should be treated as one of the main axes of the relations between Roma and non-Roma. Part Three focuses on the collective biographies of Romani musicians from Central Europe, but also documents and accentuates the role of the individual in the musical presence of the Roma from the region. The key argument is that historically the Roma shaped the soundscapes of Central and Eastern Europe, especially the sonicity of its cities. The emphasis of Part Three is thus on those Romani performers who presented their music in public spaces, for example directly in the streets of capital cities of the region such as Budapest, Bucharest or Vienna, or in other important cultural hubs, be it Kraków or Iasi. We explore how in this way the everyday impact of Romani musicians extended beyond the

better-known inclusion of Romani music and “Gypsy” motifs in concert hall performances, while acknowledging that this dimension of the history calls for more detailed studies that rise above the level of legends, myths and fictional narratives.

Romani Musicians in the Collective and Individual Perspectives

The first chapter of Part Three, entitled “Romani Virtuosi: A Multifaceted Portrait” presents the most popular and still remembered (e.g. featured in films) Romani musicians, those whose achievements permeate the collective imagination of artists and scholars. These are predominantly musicians from Hungarian territories immortalized in books and other artistic productions (operas, operettas, paintings, etc.). The chapter highlights their contribution and roles in cultural exchange while focusing on the diversity of their life paths and the complexity of their careers. It discusses in detail the cases of the renowned violinists Panna Cinka, János Bihari, Jožko Pit’o and Jancsi Rigó. Each case is approached individually and serves as a basis for discussing the Romani input in European musical culture. While stressing the uniqueness of each life story, the chapter demonstrates how all the musicians discussed contributed to the development of musical culture, actively shaping the musical life of Central Europe during the nineteenth century. The selected Romani musicians are thus analysed as emblematic figures in the process of emancipation of women musicians, and as representatives of the idea of the “self-made man” as well as individuals who managed to infiltrate the wider popular imagination. As the chapter makes clear, the contribution of the Roma to the Central European musical scene was widely acknowledged and the work of individual Romani musicians recognized in the nineteenth century, as is attested by the dictionary of “great Gypsy musicians” compiled by the Austrian music writer and journalist Miklós Markó (1865–1933) and published in 1896. Markó’s work included short biographical entries for over 100 musicians. These were mostly living at the time of publication and enjoyed considerable popularity, but the dictionary also included the names of the legendary Romani musicians who had significantly contributed to the tradition of Hungarian Gypsy music which had become internationally renowned by the mid-nineteenth century, not least through the efforts of the composer Franz Liszt (1811–86). In Chapter 7 the best known of Markó’s subjects are re-examined with a critical eye. Their lives and achievements are situated within the context of the political and cultural situation of the region, and Markó’s account is supplemented by references to historical documents, literary texts and iconography.

In a similar vein, Chapter 8, on the Romani *lăutari* from the Romanian territories, looks at a well-known group of musicians in historical perspective. It draws a larger picture of their situation, initially – till the

middle of the nineteenth century – as slaves. Stressing the significance of the move from rural to urban milieux, the chapter focuses on Romani musicians from Bucharest as celebrated virtuosi admired by monarchs and fellow musicians alike, who performed in other European capitals as well. Although less widely advertised than their Hungarian peers, Romani musicians from Romania were also present, for example representing their country at the Parisian Exposition Universelle. Accordingly, the chapter outlines the successes of Romani musicians from Wallachia or Moldavia, but also explores the importance of the Romani *lăutari* for the Romanian economy. The significance of the Romani musicians in the formation of the Romanian national culture is also highlighted. Like Chapter 7's study of Romani musicians from Hungary, this chapter also moves from the account of Romani musicians in Romania as a more or less homogenous group to consider some outstanding individuals who influenced the development of Romanian culture. The chapter ends with a brief account of the difficult circumstances of Romani musicians in Romania under communism, while that issue is elaborated upon in more detail in the following chapter, which focuses on the Polish situation.

The third chapter of the Part, "The Story of Cororo, a Musical Genius from Kraków", uses a Polish case to discuss Romani street performers and the complexity of their situation as conditioned by the political situation – starkly affected by the communist regime and then by its fall. Against that collective backdrop, the focus is on the persona of the violinist Stefan Dymiter (1938–2002). Known as Cororo, Dymiter was a legendary Romani musician performing in the streets of Kraków in the second half of the twentieth century as the leader of his own street band. Unwelcome in the public space as far as the authorities were concerned, merely tolerated by others, he was admired by many passers-by and gained the respect of his peers, both Romani musicians and international music stars. The limitations of Dymiter's career revealed in the chapter seem to stand in stark contrast to his exceptional musical abilities. However, his unique performance style, his musical memory and interpretations make him a fine example of the so-called musical genius. A further significant dimension of Cororo's career discussed in the chapter is his disability, for he was not only blind but also had a visible physical handicap affecting his whole posture. The chapter argues that Cororo's iconic status should be considered as the ultimate effect of several factors. While their overlapping helped to generate the legend, it also allows us to take an intersectional approach to understanding the situation of Cororo, and of Romani buskers in general, under communism. The chapter draws on oral sources such as extensive interviews with members of Cororo's band, his collaborators and friends, and also with his fans, as well as on new documentary evidence. Close attention is also given to his music itself (recordings, videos, film excerpts), which is analysed from a musicological point of view.

The Gypsy Musical Stereotype in the Scholarship

While shedding new light on the position and role of Romani musicians, Part Three highlights the experiences of Romani people in a particular region. The specifics of the situation in Central and south-eastern Europe are either signalled or discussed at length in order to contextualize the particularities of regional performance cultures. Not only have the Roma been present in that part of Europe since the Middle Ages, contributing to the economy and culture of the region, but they also actively co-created its legacy. At the same time, they have been subjected to various political upheavals affecting the region, among which were the communist regimes of the second half of the twentieth century. While shifting political frameworks – socialism and its aftermath – were very important for this region, Part Three also considers issues of the identity and self-identity of Romani musicians in the light of such other material changes as patterns of urbanization, settlement and slavery.

All three chapters of Part Three focus on the iconic status of the Romani musicians and present them as full-fledged contributors to European musical culture. The position of Romani musicians was confirmed in the late eighteenth century by Heinrich Grellmann, whose study *Die Zigeuner* (1787) treated music as one of the highlights of Romani culture in general.¹ With time, the musical stereotype applied to the Roma acquired a specific – sentimental, even maudlin – dimension and the Roma *en masse* came to be depicted as romantic wanderers who loved nature and spent their lives in nothing but music-making.² Eventually – as several authors who have analysed these narratives as well as iconographic representations of the Roma underline – the putative musicality of the Roma ossified “as something that functions on the level of a collective genetic trait”.³ The discourse on the intrinsic association of the Roma with music was consolidated throughout the nineteenth century, and musicality came to be treated as one of “the most prominent aspects of Gypsy fetish”⁴ – glorified by some, perceived as irritating by others.⁵

It needs to be stressed that the stereotype of Romani musicality should be treated as highly ambiguous, for it comprises both ethnic and

1 Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to the Final Solution*, trans. Don Bloch (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), 53.

2 Adam Bartosz, “Gazetowy wizerunek Roma”, in *Romowie 2007. Od edukacji młodego pokolenia do obrazu w polskich mediach*, ed. Barbara Weigl and Magda Formanowicz (Warszawa: Academica, 2008), 98.

3 Anikó Imre, “Roma Music and Transnational Homelessness”, *Third Text* 22, no. 3 (2008): 325–36 (here 326).

4 Florentina C. Andreescu and Sean P. Quinn, “Gypsy Fetish: Music, Dirt, Magic, and Freedom”, *Journal for Cultural Research* 18, no. 4 (2014): 275–90 (here 281).

5 See Bartosz, “Gazetowy wizerunek Roma”, 98.

sonic elements and, like most stereotypes, is grounded in the sphere of half-truths, misperceptions, falsifications and insinuations. At the same time, though, as demonstrated in Part Three, that stereotype has worked as an avenue allowing for frequent and often positive representation of Romani culture. The stereotype, being one of the central cultural mechanisms in the reception of the other and/or the self,⁶ reflected the ambivalence of European intellectuals – like the above-mentioned Grellmann, but also George Borrow and many, many others – who have stressed the contribution of Romani musicians to local music-making and indirectly admitted their impact on European sonic spheres.

The musical stereotype of the Roma often features the hyper-emotionality and willingness to please the audience (at any price) that are part of a wider generic image of the Roma. They were seen as expressing their extreme emotions (such as love or hate), free of social or cultural constraints, usually with the help of music and dance.⁷ Endorsing the image of the Roma as children of nature, the musical stereotype usually presented Romani musicians as self-taught, impulsive and existing outside the mainstream of musical events. All three chapters in this third part revisit that stereotype, demonstrating the degree of incoherence in the myth, or pointing out its inaccuracies, while at the same time demonstrating the value of understanding musical performance in terms of such categories as identity, disability, gender or politics and culture. One of the themes permeating Part Three is that of “difference” as observed on various levels and applied to musical examples.

The musical stereotype is challenged here on various levels as it applies to musicians, audiences and musical style, showing that stereotyping – when used to judge individuals – can result in incorrect conclusions (like the assumption that Romani musicians gained their position easily, or effortlessly learned to play musical instruments). Part Three nevertheless emphasizes the role of music in the self-identification of the Roma and its function in negotiating relations with non-Roma. While all three chapters seem to support the idea that stereotypes have formed and still, at least partially, impact contemporary culture (regulating the system of inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minorities), their goal is to expose how the musical stereotype of the Romani musicians has affected not only artistic production and musical compositions, but also academic research and the general reception of the Roma.

6 Birgit Neumann and Martin Zierold, “Media as Ways of Worldmaking: Media-Specific Structures and Intermedial Dynamics”, in *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives*, ed. Vera Nünning, Ansgar Nünning and Birgit Neumann (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 103–18 (here 110).

7 Maira Balacon, “*Style Hongrois* Features in Brahms’s ‘Hungarian Dances’: A Musical Construction of a Fictionalized Gypsy ‘Other’” (PhD thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2005), iv.

The close link between the Roma and music has been commonly recognized in popular sayings, but also confirmed by scholars who have adopted a multitude of perspectives while studying it. These include, among others, the historical approach based on extensive studies of archival sources, references to premodern texts, etc. At the same time, ethnomusicological research has developed extensively, with a number of scholars preferring to apply sociologically oriented and ethnographic methods to documenting the musical cultures of various Romani groups. Additionally, a separate group of musicologists has shown considerable interest in artistic compositions (predominantly from the Western European musical canon) influenced by Romani music or in another ways alluding to “Gypsy” motifs. These compositions predominantly comprise stage works – ballets, operas and operettas featuring “Gypsy” heroes – but also songs whose lyrics allude to the idealized “Gypsy” lifestyle and purely instrumental works incorporating, for example imitations of the instrumental sound typical of Romani music-making, or attempts to mimic their performative manner. Accordingly the term “Gypsy music” is used in the scholarly literature to mean both music produced by the Roma themselves (hence also referred to as Romani music or music by the Roma) but also music produced by non-Roma who have referenced Romani culture in the titles of their compositions, the musical language or instruments used, or introduced Romani-related elements, characters, etc. into the plots of operas, operettas or ballets. Romani musicians, as argued in this third part of the volume, display a sometimes emotional but at the same time “common-sense” approach to the issue of labelling their own repertoire: some openly dislike being asked to “play something Gypsy” while others are either not troubled by it or prefer to avoid arguing about it. Part Three traces the changing uses of the term “Gypsy music”, alluding to the slow process by which it has come to be used “respectably/respectfully” without ever losing its ambivalent connotation.

Romani Musical Presence in the Zones of Contact

The visibility and the aural presence of Roma musicians and their music in public spaces is one of the most commonly recognized features of European sonic landscapes. Even if not explicitly articulated, it is reflected in most recent publications, whether they focus on more or less institutionalized forms of musical life such as concerts and stage performances, or connect the notion of public spaces with various music-making practices exercised in public areas – cafes, restaurants, pubs or even in the streets and squares. Such (predominantly) urban public spaces constitute “contact zones” between representatives of different cultures and enable Romani musicians to display their musical skills. However, as shown in the chapters of Part Three, the aural presence of Romani musicians in the public space of Central and

south-eastern Europe is not related solely to entertainment, nor should it be understood merely as a way of securing income for the Roma. This part demonstrates that Romani music-making in public spaces provides a unique opportunity to cultivate intercultural exchange and is a significant facilitator of that process, which can be difficult at times. The musical practices cherished by the Roma have impacted the dynamics of neighbourly relations between local communities and minorities, and affected various aspects of the sociocultural life of the region and even of individual nations. Music, being at once an artistic and social phenomenon, serves several important functions when performed in public.⁸ Accordingly, in the public places that accommodate Romani music, both performers and listeners representing various cultures (which might otherwise never interact) are exposed to other cultures and are called upon to renegotiate their relations by refreshing their own understanding of them, deconstructing and creating them anew.⁹ As clearly illustrated in all three chapters of this third part, musical practices provided by the Roma were instrumental in the process of shaping the position of the Romani minority – constantly (re-)established through the course of intercultural communications.¹⁰ However, as signalled, for example, in the chapter on *lăutari* from Romania, there are also dangers connected with music-making in public, in the direct exposure of Romani musicians to non-Romani audiences. Some contact zones might be devoid of clear structure and/or rules and their chaotic, unpredictable nature can lead to acute displays of social inequalities, thus turning them into arenas of conflict.¹¹

The Identity of Romani Musicians

Since medieval times, Romani musicians have been perceived in European culture as providers of musical entertainment, initially as wandering performers, then as settled providers of music in the towns and cities of Eastern and south-eastern Europe. While various authors claim that “the Rom have adapted extremely well to urbanization”¹² and succeeded in establishing close relationships with the dominant, non-Romani societies,

8 Paolo Prato, “Music in the Streets: The Example of Washington Square Park in New York City”, *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 151–63 (here 151).

9 Monica Rütters, *Juden und Zigeuner im europäischen Geschichtstheater: “Jewish Spaces”/“Gypsy Spaces” – Kazimierz und Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in der neuen Folklore Europas* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), 21.

10 See Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “The Cultural Contexts of Ethnic Differences”, *Man* 26, no. 1 (1991): 127–44.

11 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

12 Carol Silverman, “Negotiating ‘Gypsiness’: Strategy in Context”, *The Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 401 (1988): 261–75 (here 269).

it is also widely known that as a minority within European cities the Roma were often feared – perceived as mysterious and different, labelled as “Other” and consequently marginalized in ghettos. Nevertheless, Romani musicians were usually welcomed in public spaces and thus allowed to enter and co-create the zones of contact mentioned above. As intermediaries operating simultaneously in Romani and non-Romani spaces, Romani musicians could support interactions between these groups and encourage the flow of mutual knowledge and the exchange of information. Chapter 8, on Romani musicians from the Romanian territories, offers more insight into that issue, while tracing the process by which Romani musicians and other Roma came to settle in large cities.¹³ The migration of Romani musicians to the cities is explicitly discussed in the chapter on Romani virtuosi from the Hungarian regions. These musicians seized their chance as small entrepreneurs and began organizing musical groups, referred to as “Gypsy bands”, in the late eighteenth century. Boasting exceptional talents (and accordingly perceived as intuitive musicians gifted with innate musicality), Romani musicians often acquired a solid musical education and eventually were able to generate a very sizeable group of professionals open to innovation and aware of current musical trends. In the nineteenth century they came to be known for proposing new kinds of musical entertainment, taking on the role of cultural intermediaries between different audiences and intermingling repertoires of various origins. That feature remained unchanged and even in the late twentieth century in Romania “the entire repertoire of urban Gypsies ... most often referred to as *muzica lăutar* or music of the *lăutar*”, was in fact the music of “the professional or Gypsy musician”.¹⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, in Romania and in Hungarian areas the repertoire performed by Romani musicians became so popular that the composer Franz Liszt, seeking to grasp the phenomenon of Romani musicians, “discovered what he called and believed to be gypsy music, which was however Hungarian urban music propagated by gypsy bands”.¹⁵

That hybrid character of the repertoire offered by Romani musicians resurfaces across the whole of Part Three, because it affects the question of their identity. It is often interpreted as one of the key elements in constructing “cultural difference”, for Romani musicians are believed “to blur as well as to clarify the boundaries between themselves and other groups in society”.¹⁶ Practising this cultural difference as communicated

13 Cf. Robert Garfias, “Dance among the Urban Gypsies of Romania”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16 (1984): 84–96 (here 87).

14 Garfias, “Dance among the Urban Gypsies of Romania”, 87.

15 Béla Bartók, “Harvard Lectures (1943)”, in *Béla Bartók's Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 363.

16 Margaret H. Beissinger, “Occupation and Ethnicity: Constructing Identity among Professional Romani (Gypsy) Musicians in Romania”, *Slavic Review* 60, no. 1 (2001): 24–49 (here 26).

through a diverse repertoire and behaviours and an agility of mind, which Irish Travellers call “cleverness”, seemed crucial as it provided Romani musicians with the means of taking control, even manipulating their own image (as the case of Jansci Rigo perfectly illustrates).¹⁷ The sophisticated problematics of the identity of Romani musicians is considered – to different degrees – in all three chapters of Part Three, in terms of a quality that is never fixed and immutable, but constantly redefined and “performed rather than given”.¹⁸ The authors support the thesis of its hybrid and transgressive character, stressing that Romani musicians have always actively sought to negotiate their position while trying to “enhance their market niche and status”.¹⁹ What becomes clear when reading these chapters on Romani musicians is that their position – whether marginalized or rediscovered and celebrated – has always been “embedded in power relations, whether symbolic or real”.²⁰ In this context, Romani musicians have always been perceived as privileged within their own group, for musicianship has traditionally served as a “social elevator” enabling a better life, assuring economic security and sometimes even prestige.²¹ Hence they constantly needed to play with the borders of their ethnicity, sustaining their position *vis-à-vis* their own group but also as musicians in wider, non-Roma society. This delicate situation is acknowledged in all three chapters, with Romani musicians from Hungary, Romania and Poland presented as subjects of a specific “positionality” (in the sense of the “plural cultural, political, and ideological subject positions occupied by individuals in society”).²²

Concluding Remarks: Research Considerations

This third part of the volume provides unique case studies shedding light on Corroro as an obscure “Gypsy musical genius”, revisiting the role of Romani musicians from Hungary and assessing the situation of Romani

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- 17 On self-image, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 8 and 15. On “cleverness”: Sharon Bohn Gmelch, “Groups That Don’t Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 307–30 (here 314).
- 18 Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, “City Differences”, in *A Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 251–60 (here 256).
- 19 Beissinger, “Occupation and Ethnicity”, 26.
- 20 Bridge and Watson, “City Differences”, 257.
- 21 Erdmann Doane Beynon, “The Gypsy in a Non-Gypsy Economy”, *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 3 (1936): 358–70 (here 362).
- 22 Tina M. Campt, “Afro-German Cultural Identity and the Politics of Positionality: Contests and Contexts in the Formation of a German Ethnic Identity”, *New German Critique* 58 (1993): 109–26 (here 115).

musicians in the Romanian lands. It presents their public appearances and music-making on several levels: practical (focusing on actual performances), pragmatic (delving into economical aspects), but also cultural (considering the imaginative dimensions of the figure of the Romani musician). The idea of the acclaimed “Gypsy musicality” is thus discussed as a construct in need of elaboration: reconfirmed, remastered or reinterpreted (either magnified or diminished).²³ Part Three relies on a deep ethnographical approach, looking on the one hand at over 200 years of Romani contribution to the musical life of Europe, but on the other also adopting a transnational perspective, albeit with a focus on particular countries of Central Europe.²⁴ While relying on historical accounts, it also takes into account the contemporary situation of Romani musicians. Taking in a broad geographical space and a long chronological span allows us to demonstrate a multitude of topics and themes which emerge from investigations into the visibility and aural presence of Romani musicians and so-called “Gypsy music” in European culture, irrespective of political regimes or cultural fads. The input and the impact of Romani musicians on the European musical landscapes discussed here show that the notion of “Gypsy musicality” is not only a romantic ideal, a mythologized thesis permeating literary works and artistic production, or a scholarly thesis, but – in the form of well-established traditions of practical musicianship – a well-documented and important part of the European heritage.

23 See Anna G. Piotrowska, *Gypsy Music in European Culture: From the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2013).

24 See Anne Pryor, “Deep Ethnography: Culture at the Core of Curriculum”, *Language Arts* 81, no. 5 (2004): 396–405.

Chapter 7

Romani Virtuosi: A Multifaceted Portrait

Anna G. Piotrowska

In nineteenth-century Central Europe, the widely acknowledged input of the Roma in the musical scene was already being described in terms of named individuals, as is attested by *Cigányzenészek albuma*, the dictionary of “great Gypsy musicians” compiled by music critic Miklós Markó (1865–1933) and published in 1896 in Budapest.¹ Biographies of over 100 musicians are recorded in this richly illustrated book. The very idea of “Gypsy music” – by that time already a term used internationally – was already being debated in the nineteenth century; it was Franz Liszt who initiated the most heated discussion when he published his 1859 book *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*. But the figure of the “Gypsy musician”, especially the glorified and revered violinist, seems to have been taken for granted, especially by the Hungarians.² With a critical eye, this chapter revisits the figure of the “Gypsy musician”, highlighting the diversity of life paths and the complexity of careers enjoyed by Romani musicians. The chapter also reminds us of the enormous contribution of Romani virtuosi to the musical life of Central Europe during the nineteenth century, stressing their emblematic role in emancipating women musicians and establishing the status of virtuosi, as well as highlighting their lasting impact on popular culture.

1 Miklós Markó, *Cigányzenészek albuma* (Budapest: Sajatja, 1896).

2 József Ujfalussy, *Bela Bartok*, trans. Ruth Pataki (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1971), 274.

It is a well-known truth that “there is hardly a country where Gypsy musicians played such an important role in the development of a national musical style ... as was the case in Hungary”.³ Mentioned as early as 1423 as having received letters of safe conduct from King Sigismund of Luxemburg (1368–1437), the Roma are referred to in numerous documents attesting their activities as musicians. The fame of their musicianship was so widespread that when in 1783 Heinrich Grellmann published *Die Zigeuner*, he reserved special praise for the musical talents of the Roma who came from Hungary.⁴ During the nineteenth century many authors simply repeated these opinions, thus propagating the myth of the exceptional musical talents of the Hungarian Roma.⁵ The legend rested also on the popularity of small “Gypsy bands” (often referred to in German-speaking territories as *Zigeunerkapellen*) which came to be more organized in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the Hungarian lands, Roma who earned their living as blacksmiths often moonlighted as musicians. From the end of the eighteenth century, Romani musicians featured ever more frequently at folk events, slowly but effectively supplanting Hungarian folk musicians (who originally played the bagpipes) as they adapted to the expectations of rural communities.

Zigeunerkapellen usually comprised three or four instrumentalists, chiefly fiddlers, as well as a dulcimer player. That set-up was established by the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶ While the bands were designed to meet the demand for musical entertainment in rural areas, they were often modelled upon *Hauskapellen*, the ensembles kept by aristocrats to provide musical entertainment. Consequently, *Zigeunerkapellen* aimed to satisfy various musical tastes and their situation at the crossroads of different social groups conditioned their further progress.

In these bands the first violinist – performing the lead part (*prím*) – was known as *prímás*. The *prímás* played an absolutely crucial role in the band, in both musical and economic aspects, which of course were mutually dependent (the better the band, the better the money they could earn). The *prímás* often performed the dual role of conductor and soloist. Leadership talents were thus essential for maintaining the integrity of the band, while

3 Stephen Erdely, review of *Gypsy Music* by Balint Sarosi, *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 3 (September 1983): 550.

4 Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann, *Histoire des Bohémiens, ou tableau des mœurs, usages et coutumes de ce peuple nomade; suivie de recherches historiques sur leur origine, leur langage et leur première apparition en Europe*, trans. M.J. (Paris: Chaumerot, 1810), 111–12.

5 Tadeusz Czacki, “O Cyganach”, in *Pomnik historyi i literatury polskiej* [A Monument to Polish History and Literature], ed. Michał Wiszniewski (Kraków: D.E. Friedlein, 1835), 54.

6 See Bálint Sárosi, “Die Klarinette in der Zigeunerkapelle”, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29 (1987): 237–43 (here 238).



Fig. 25 A Gypsy ensemble.
(detail from the
*Transylvanian
Panorama* (1897) – a
collaborative work
of Hungarian, Polish
and German painters:
Muzeum Okręgowe w
Tarnowie)

it was also the responsibility of the *primás* to take care of the repertoire (possibly even compose it), and keep the band solvent. The *primás* was totally accountable for the success or failure of the whole group and had to understand the demands and caprices of the public. The interaction with listeners – both verbal and non-verbal (i.e. responding to the moods and needs of the audience by choosing appropriate pieces of music, performing certain gestures, etc.) determined the position of the band, affecting its economic status.

As a leader and employer hiring other musicians (not necessarily all of Romani origin), the *primás* was a figure respected in the Roma community as an entrepreneur. It was not unusual for the *primás* to marry the daughter of another musician, and often the children born to these couples carried on the tradition, even inheriting the same band known under their family name. It is almost a cliché that all Hungarian Roma claim that they are related to other musicians, “regardless of whether they or their ancestors have ever worked as such”.⁷ It is the *primás* who symbolizes, for both Roma and non-Roma, the essence of success: social acceptance and economic

7 Péter Szuhay, “Self-Definitions of Gypsy Ethnic Groups”, in *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian Society*, ed. Ernő Kállai (Budapest: Teleki László Foundation, 2002), 25.

independence. Unsurprisingly, they came to be revered, and the pantheon of celebrated and still well remembered musicians includes such renowned virtuosi as Panna Cinka, János Bihari and Jancsi Rigó.

Panna Cinka: The Legend of the Female Violinist

One of the most extraordinary violinists featured in Markó's *Cigányzenészek albuma* is Panna Cinka⁸ (1711–72), the only woman *prímás* featured there and one of the earliest Romani musical celebrities (to use the modern language). Cinka can be credited with paving the way for other female instrumentalists (not necessarily Romani) embarking on instrumental careers in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. A paragon of the female musician, she can also be viewed as a trailblazer setting new standards for the reception of Romani women as independent individuals responsible for managing their own careers.

To date, Panna Cinka has often been presented as a relative of the legendary Romani musician Mihály Barna – either a granddaughter or a niece.⁹ Clinging to that (false) genealogy seems important for at least two reasons: on the one hand, it attests that the validation of the position of a Romani musician (in general) is achieved by proving his/her musical ancestry; on the other, it reveals a patriarchal approach to female musicians whose status is demarcated by their relations with male musicians. Defining Cinka by her kinship with Mihály Barna also served as a guarantee of Cinka's exceptional virtuosity, highlighting the importance of family traditions in Romani culture and underlining the hereditary character of the musical heritage.

Although in reality not related to the legendary Barna, Cinka did indeed come from a family of musicians. She was born into a musical family in Sajógömör county (now Gemer in the Rimavská Sobota district of Slovakia). Her uncle had been a well-known *prímás*, while her father, Sándor (Alexander) Cinka, played in the band of the local landowner, János Lányi, who took Panna Cinka under his patronage, paying for her violin lessons in the town of Rožňava, for which she showed her talent at the age of nine.¹⁰ At 14 she married a double bass player – a smith by

8 The name Panna most probably comes from Anna or Hanna although the word *panna* in Slovak literally means a “maiden” – a (young) unmarried girl, possibly a virgin. The surname Cinka was also spelled Cynka or Csinka (distorted to Esinka), Czinka in Hungarian and in Romanian as Tinca. In Slovak, she is often referred to as Cinkova.

9 Jean-Paul Clébert, *Das Volk der Zigeuner*, trans. Albert von Jantsch-Streerbach (Vienna, Berlin and Stuttgart: Paul Neff Verlag, 1964), 134.

10 Josef Drenko, “*Rómska primáška Cinka Panna*”, in *Neznámi Rómovia: zoživotá a*

trade.¹¹ Together with her husband and two brothers-in-law (playing the cimbalom and the second violin), Cinka formed a typical *Zigeunerkapelle*. She was later joined in the band by her own children: although she is said to have had ten, only the four oldest sons and one daughter played with her.¹² Cinka also travelled extensively with her band giving concerts throughout the Habsburg Empire in summer, but in winter staying on Lányi's estate on the banks of the river Sajo (Slovakian: Slana). Cinka owned a house there, but supposedly preferred to live in a tent.¹³

Cinka became the epitome of a Romani musician: she performed in public while always working with her family.¹⁴ However, she was stereotypically described as pretty and portrayed accordingly by Hungarian painters such as Imre Greguss (1856–1910). At her death in 1772, her attractive appearance was emphasized in her obituary, “Lessus in obitum Czinka-Pannae fidicinae”.¹⁵ In other words, Cinka – as a Romani woman – operated in the space between “fantasies about and hatred of” the Roma.¹⁶ In reality, though, she was a dutiful servant who preferred to wear her red uniform, reminiscent of military garb. Her attire was not only asexual but also clearly signalled her social standing, since wearing it was compulsory for musicians hired by her landlord. However, Cinka's preference for this costume (confirmed when she asked to be buried in it),¹⁷ can be also interpreted as a sign of respect and gratitude towards her patron. It seems also quite natural that her preference for masculine garments might have been dictated by other – common-sense – reasons: it was more comfortable and more suitable for travelling. Besides, when she wore the uniform, Cinka, initially the only female member of the band, did not stand out visibly as a woman. In the late eighteenth century, female musicians performing in public were expected to wear appropriate clothes, garments that concealed their physical movements

kultúry Cigánov-Rómov Slovensku, ed. Arne B. Mann (Bratislava: Ister Science Press, 1992), 117–26.

- 11 Bálint Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians and Hungarian Peasant Music”, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 2 (1970): 8–27 (here 11–12).
- 12 See Ján Matej Korabinský, *Geographisch-historisches und Produkten-Lexikon von Ungarn* (Pressburg: Weber und Korabinsky, 1786), 206.
- 13 Carl Engel, “The Music of the Gipsies (I)”, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 21, no. 447 (1880): 219–22 (here 221): “Again, Esinka Panna ... excelled so greatly on the violin that the enraptured Magyars built a fine house for her to live in. She preferred, however, to live in a tent with her relatives”.
- 14 Carol Silverman, “Music and Power: Gender and Performance among Roma (Gypsies) of Skopje, Macedonia”, *The World of Music* 38, no. 1 (1996): 63–76 (here 67).
- 15 See József Waigand, “Totenklage über Panna Czinka”, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 12 (1970): 299–310.
- 16 Ethel C. Brooks, “The Possibilities of Romani Feminism”, *Signs* 38, no. 1 (2012): 1–11 (here 3).
- 17 Waigand, “Totenklage über Panna Czinka”, 299.

which could, indirectly, distract listeners from listening to music.¹⁸ Sexual overtones were not welcome, and were supposed to be avoided in public, especially by women musicians competing with men. As Richard Leppert notes, any woman performing publicly risked “upstaging her husband” by overshadowing his supposedly dominant position.¹⁹ Hence the role and the meaning of musicians’ outfits, particularly of female musicians, was located at the intersection of gender and social position. But, above all, Panna Cinka played the violin, the melodic instrument usually reserved for men (not only among Roma) in the eighteenth century. Holding the violin, not to mention mastering it, was seen as a strongly masculine act of assuming control and taking the position of power.²⁰ At European courts, it was men who played the violin in the musical ensembles that mushroomed at that time, masculinizing musicianship as a job enabling the display of male competency. The violin was appropriated by men and became undesirable for girls. As long as violin playing was cast as predominantly male-oriented, then, the leading role played by Cinka in her band as a *primás* might prompt severe objections as well as indecent associations. And in popular culture, women of Romani origin were often presented as the ultimate seducers.²¹

Ironically, then, the uniform Panna Cinka wore, which reduced her to the role of a servant, prevented her being equated solely with her femininity, and allowed her instead to be treated as a musician in her own right, deflecting the negative effects of the “male gaze” to which she could have been subject as a female public performer.²² When she dressed in men’s clothes, she clearly accentuated her position as a *primás* on a par with other male bandleaders.

18 Carl Ludwig Junker clearly stated in the *Musikalischer Almanach auf das Jahr 1784* that his feelings of “impropriety” were connected with the idea of bodily movement, linked with female dress. See Sanna Iitti, *The Feminine in German Song* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 35–36. Compare also: William Thomas Parke, *Musical Memoirs: Comprising an Account of the General State of Music in England, from 1784, to the Year 1830* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830), 120; Rita Steblin, “The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments”, *Canadian University Music Review* 16, no. 1 (1995): 128–44 (here 138).

19 Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 39–40.

20 Suzanne Cusick, “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex”, in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barker and Lydia Hamessley (Zürich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 36.

21 Bernard Leblon, *Gypsies and Flamenco: The Emergence of the Art of Flamenco in Andalusia*, trans. Sinead ni Shuinear (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003), 33.

22 On the concept of the “male gaze”, see Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.



Fig. 26 Romani youngsters from the Gypsy Youth Orchestra in Budapest wearing costumes that resemble the one worn by Panna Cinka (c. 1935).
(collection of Andrzej Grzymała-Kazłowski)

Panna Cinka was not only a performer, but a composer. While her acclaimed performance in front of Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa may have been the highlight of her career, her recognition as a Gypsy composer seems (from today's perspective) a real achievement. To begin with, there are severe doubts concerning the authorship of compositions that were commonly performed by *Zigeunerkapellen* like the one led by Cinka. Their repertoire was rarely attributed to Romani composers as it usually included folk melodies and popular dances, presumably featuring only a few works conceived by Romani musicians. It is almost impossible to determine whether these were original pieces, improvisations, or adaptations of existing tunes. But Cinka was already being credited as a creator of original compositions in the mid-nineteenth century, while her father and two brothers were traditionally claimed as authors of several compositions commemorating the Hungarian national hero Ferenc Rákóczi.²³ Her reputation as a composer was consolidated in the nineteenth century by István Fáy (1807–62), who published the collection *Régi Magyar zenegyöngyei* [Pearls of Hungarian Music] in five booklets between 1857 and 1861, where he included compositions attributed to

23 Drenko, "Romska Primáška Panna Cinkova", 118.

Cinka. Acknowledging her success as a composer seems crucial for at least two reasons: on the one hand, as an open acknowledgement of her capabilities as a female composer and, on the other, as a recognition of Romani composers as a group, for far into the twentieth century the Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) was insisting on “the conspicuous absence of gipsy composers”.²⁴

The fame of Panna Cinka grew after her death: she was mentioned by a number of authors writing about Hungary.²⁵ Her reputation transcended local borders and in the nineteenth century she became legendary all over Europe as a heroine of stories, novels, poems and plays (most notably the 1887 play *Czinka Panna* by Bálint Ökröss, 1829–89), musical works, and several widely circulated and eagerly copied portraits. Her popularity was notably rekindled at the end of the nineteenth century when Hungarians celebrated the millennium of their presence in Pannonia, recalling famous inhabitants of the region. In 1913 Endre Dózsa dedicated a whole novel to her,²⁶ as did György Temeshy in 1929; in 1948 Zoltán Kodály presented his opera *Czinka Panna balladája* [The Ballad of Panna Cinka], with a text by Béla Balázs, and foreign composers also referenced Cinka in the titles of their compositions.²⁷ She also survived in the collective memory of Romanians as tradition had it that she died in Oradea. The Romani quarter of Oradea (situated in the eastern part of the city near the Velența neighbourhood) was commonly known as Țincapana (Cinka Panna); although it was demolished before 1989 and renamed Eminescu, the old name was never forgotten.²⁸ Under communism, Cinka was celebrated in Czechoslovakia; since the 1970s a music festival to honour her has been organized in her birthplace, a monument to her erected, and stamps issued with her likeness. In 2008 the feature film *Panna Cinka* was released (directed by Dušan Rapoš with Slovakian, Czech and Hungarian cooperation), treating her life as a parable about women’s struggle for recognition.

24 Zoltán Kodály, *Folk Music of Hungary*, trans. Ronald Tempest and Cynthia Jolly (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), 9.

25 See, for example, Korabinský, or Martin Schwartner, *Statistik des Königreichs Ungarn* (Pest: Matthias Trattner, 1798) or Georg/Juraj Palković, *Známost vlasti uherské* (Pressburg: Symon P. Weber, 1804).

26 Endre Dózsa, *Czinka Panna* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Irodalmi Társaság, 1913).

27 For example: Helen Ware, *Hungarian fantasie: Cinka Panna (for violin & piano)*, op. 4 (New York: C. Fischer, 1917).

28 Zsuzsa Plainier, “All Gypsies Were Living There as Sound as a Roach: Heydays of a Roma Colony in Oradea (Romania) and Its Wrecking in Socialist and Post-Socialist Times”, *Studia Balcanica* 18 (2015): 269–79.

János Bihari: The Myth of the Gypsy Virtuoso

While Panna Cinka embodied the late eighteenth-century ideal of a musician (not necessarily a woman) still very much dependent on landlord and sponsors, in the early nineteenth century European musical audiences were smitten with the phenomenon of travelling virtuosi, musicians who pursued independent careers while dazzling listeners with an exceptional command of their instrument (or vocal mastery). Most notable was the Italian Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840), who stunned the public with his powerful performances. Paganini is considered as an archetypical virtuoso setting an example for numerous followers: he travelled extensively, giving almost trance-inducing concerts in most major and prestigious European cities, and was acclaimed as a performer and composer sometimes suspected of having gained his skill by diabolical means. Paganini played the violin, a small, portable, yet acoustically dynamic instrument which enabled a display of power and realized a vision of human domination over instrument in (among other things) his use of the bow to “whip” the violin.

The growing popularity of violinists, which was partly a result of their position in orchestras, whose line-up was established at that time, encouraged several Romani instrumentalists to embark on careers as travelling violinists. They followed Paganini’s example particularly in emphasizing the uniqueness of the supernatural (demoniac) connection with the instrument. The role of the violin in Romani culture is attested in a number of traditional stories explaining the special link between Roma and the instrument. As early as the nineteenth century, ethnological studies discussed the diabolical provenance of the “Gypsy” violin.²⁹

Personifying the instrument was not a novel concept, but it helped to underline the intimate bond with the violin cherished by Romani culture, and thus added to the air of mystery that informed the popularity of Romani violinists who were competing with non-Romani virtuosi. Even if not widely advertised, this rivalry was ever-present, as demonstrated in an episode from the life of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (the son of Johann Sebastian) recounted in a novel of 1858: in 1770, Bach was travelling with a group of Roma (!) and arrived in the German town of Darmstadt, where he charmed the locals with his violin playing. It was only after he was offered a job that his non-Romani identity was discovered and he was revealed as a

29 See Clébert, *Das Volk der Zigeuner*, 136–37. The human origins of the “Gypsy violin” explained its ability to move listeners, as if it was itself recounting the tragedy. In another story explaining the instrument’s devilish origins, the hero – a young Romani lad – wishes to marry a princess who is under a spell but has to bewitch her father first. With the Devil’s guidance, in his prison cell, he invents the violin using his own hair as strings.

professor of music and mathematics in Halle who had followed his instincts to join the group of Roma.³⁰

While there were several well-known Romani violinists at that time, one of the most renowned was János Bihari (1764–1825).³¹ He pursued his career as a *primás*, yet his position on the early nineteenth-century European scene should be considered in the context of the growing popularity of violin virtuosi, commonly arousing sensation and astonishment.³² Self-taught, Bihari founded his own group which initially (by 1801) comprised four fiddlers and a dulcimer player, but the line-up was seasonally expanded. As commonly accepted, Bihari travelled with his band, performing all over the Habsburg Empire; he held concerts in Eger, Pest and Pozsony (Bratislava), among other places, often staying in luxurious hotels. Enjoying widespread recognition, he was generously paid for his performances, especially as he was often invited by aristocrats to perform at private events. For example, in the summer of 1815 his group enlivened the party thrown by Kateřina Pavlovna, the duchess of Oldenburg, to honour her sister, the wife of Joseph, Prince Palatine of Hungary. To maintain his position, Bihari needed to constantly prove the quality of his musicianship in the face of growing competition.³³ For example, the head conductor of Romani musicians participating in the Springtime of the Peoples (1848), Ferenc Bunko (1813–89), gave concerts in Paris and Berlin and some Gypsy orchestras left in the 1850s for tours of the United States.³⁴

The skills and technical prowess (fast passagework, high positions, etc.) of the Romani violinists, coupled with the ability to seduce listeners with sweet tones, became legendary. Moreover, Romani virtuosi seemed to be able to avoid being accused of empty virtuosity. In 1840s several (non-Romani) instrumentalists faced attacks in the press which pointed to the inhuman, almost machine-like dexterity of their performances.³⁵ However, Romani virtuosi were always praised as stirring real passion, and their *Zigeunerkapellen* were treasured for the ability to express true

30 Clébert, *Das Volk der Zigeuner*, 140, citing Albert Emil Brachvogel, *Friedemann Bach* (Berlin: Janke, 1858).

31 Bálint Sárosi, *János Bihari* (Budapest: Mágus Kiadó, 2003).

32 Matthew Riley, *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder and Astonishment* (Burlington, VA and Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 31–32.

33 The elite of Gypsy virtuoso violinists comprised, among others, Marci Dombi (1801–69), Jancsi Sági Balog (1803–76), Karoly Boka (1808–60), Jancsi Kalozdi (1812–82), Ferenc Sarkozi (1820–90), János Salamon (1824–99), Ferenc Patikarus (1827–70), Mihály Farkas (1829–90), Karoly Fatyol (1830–88), Pál Rácz (1830–86), Naci Erdelyi (1845?–93) and many, many others.

34 Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 202.

35 Dana Gooley, “The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century”, in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75–112 (here 76).

sentiments. Obviously, they put a lot of work into producing shows that offered feasts not only for the ears but also for the eyes, spectacles that exploited both musical and visual effects. These performances often stressed the authenticity of their music-making; the tactic of emphasizing their difference from non-Romani performers (in both visual and audible terms) seemed equally important for their financial success. Another crucial factor deemed critical for their performative practices was the interaction between the *prímás* and the band. In the non-Romani orchestras of the late eighteenth century a dual model of leadership was preferred, with the keyboardist and the first violinist collaborating closely, while in Romani bands the *prímás* alone was responsible for the performance.³⁶

The attractiveness of *Zigeunerkapellen* like that led by Bihari was based on their uniqueness and the difference they offered while at the same time trying to comply with the current fashions. Unsurprisingly, Bihari's orchestra frequently performed in such places as Vienna, which presented numerous employment opportunities. Although "evidence detailing the circumstances in which Hungarian-Gypsy musicians entertained the Viennese is scarce",³⁷ it is well known that Romani groups provided entertainment in the period of the Congress of Vienna. As early as October 1814 Bihari appeared with his band in Vienna, where he resided for the whole year. Viennese circles were familiar with Gypsy bands and their musical idiom; such composers as Joseph Haydn – who served the Esterházy (a family of Hungarian magnates loyal to the Habsburgs) – heard music performed by Romani bands either in Vienna, or on the Esterházy estate in eastern Austria. Franz Schubert was also acquainted with that type of music, as was Ludwig van Beethoven, who is believed to have had an opportunity to listen to Bihari himself.³⁸ Franz Liszt, too, recalled that as a child he happened to hear Bihari and took delight in the sound of his violin. As if trying to explain his admiration for all Romani musicians, Liszt emphasized his early contacts with Bihari to justify his later infatuation with so-called Gypsy music.³⁹ Liszt himself came to be treated as an iconic figure in the world of the virtuosi, so that the impact of Bihari (the archetypical virtuoso) on him can be perceived as another contribution of Romani culture to European legacy.⁴⁰

36 With time, the role of the first violinist grew in all ensembles. See John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 392–93.

37 Catherine Mayes, "Reconsidering an Early Exoticism: Viennese Adaptations of Hungarian-Gypsy Music around 1800", *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 2 (2009): 161–81.

38 Julius Kaldy, *A History of Hungarian Music*, repr. (New York: Haskell House, 1969), 18.

39 Franz Liszt, *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* (Paris: Librairie nouvelle, 1859), 471–73.

40 Donald Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 23: Bihari "was one of the Gypsy musicians who influenced Franz Liszt".

Like Cinka, Bihari was not only a virtuoso but also a composer (especially of *verbunkos*).⁴¹ Although Romani composers were often accused of being “never more than second rate imitators of the regular Hungarian style” who “follow faithfully in the footsteps of other native and assimilated Hungarians”,⁴² Bihari elevated the *verbunkos* genre to the status of Hungarian musical heritage.⁴³ His name is often listed next to those of Hungarian composers such as János Lavotta (1764–1820) or Antal Csermak (1774–1822) as a pioneer who transformed *verbunkos* into salon music.⁴⁴ Works attributed to Bihari were published in the mid-nineteenth century by Fáy in the collection *Régi Magyar zenegyöngyei*. Furthermore, Bihari was credited with composing (in 1808) the piece *Krönungs-Nota* (supposedly for the coronation of Empress Maria Louisa), and he is said to have been co-responsible for writing the renowned “Rakoczy March”.⁴⁵ The tradition of celebrating Bihari as a composer was firmly established by the end of the nineteenth century. By that time the musicologist Julius Kaldy was claiming that Beethoven elaborated one of Bihari’s tunes in his overture dedicated to King Stephen, founder of the Kingdom of Hungary,⁴⁶ although Gábor Mátray suggested that certain pieces attributed to Bihari were actually composed by his son, also named János.⁴⁷ In reality, it is difficult to tell whether Bihari actually composed these works, or arranged well-known tunes elaborating on them in a form of variations. Musical scores with *verbunkos* that appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often featured the works that Mátray claimed for Bihari, attributed to other composers or described as anonymous. The character of these compositions (e.g. the disposition of instruments) would suggest, though, that they were arranged in a highly stylized form, probably based on popular tunes either of folk or popular origin. For listeners, their authors were irrelevant, for many tunes were widely known and adapted by many musicians.⁴⁸

41 *Verbunkos* (in Hungarian) or *Werbung* (in German) was music performed (most often by Gypsy bands) in the late eighteenth century when men were being recruited for the army. The genre later became standardized, either in its original or stylized form, and performed on other occasions as well.

42 Kodály, *Folk Music of Hungary*, 9.

43 Ernő Kállai, “Gypsy Musicians”, in *Roma Migration*, ed. András Kováts (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute of Minority Research – Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, Budapest, 2002), 75–96 (here 79–80).

44 László Dobszay, *A History of Hungarian Music* (Budapest: Corvina, 1993), 134.

45 Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies*, 22.

46 Mayes, “Reconsidering an Early Exoticism”.

47 Géza Papp, “Egy Bihari-verbunkos tanulságai”, in *Zenatudományi Dolgozatok, Szabolcsi Bence Emlékére Születésének 100. Évfordulója Alkalmából*, ed. Tallián Tibor (Budapest: MTA Zenatudományi Intézete, 2000), 37–50 (here 37).

48 Papp, “Egy Bihari-verbunkos tanulságai”, 37, 40.

The confusion connected with the authorship, however, did not discourage further attempts to present Bihari as a Hungarian composer. Gaining almost a cult status as a musician, Bihari came to be treated by Hungarian intellectuals as a representative of national tradition and was purposely depicted as a typical Hungarian.⁴⁹ He also served as an example of a splendid musician who promoted Hungarian music. These efforts supported Hungarian ambitions to acquire rights within the Habsburg Empire. Texts such as Mátray's 1853 biography and Ervin Major's *Bihari János* of 1928 added to the legend of Bihari as the greatest Hungarian violinist of the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The narratives employed by Mátray and Major illustrate how certain aspects of Romani culture were refashioned for the needs of the national movements and how they helped to endorse Hungarian national tendencies, even when Bihari's Romani ethnicity was acknowledged – as, for example, by Miklós Markó, who dedicated to him one of the longest entries in his dictionary of Gypsy musicians.⁵¹

Jancsi Rigó and Others: The Archetype of a Fairy-Tale Career

Bihari came to be so highly respected that even today Romani musicians, like Roby Lakatos (born 1965), claim to be related to him.⁵² Lakatos is believed to belong to “the seventh generation of direct descendants from János Bihari”.⁵³ Underlining musical ancestry is a typical strategy by which Romani musicians celebrate the continuity of tradition. Music-making is often inherited over the generations. Some famous musical families, like that of the violinist Pál Rácz and his son Laczi, were even featured in operettas, such as Emmerich Kálmán's *Der Zigeunerprimas* (1912). In some versions of the operetta, the name of Pál Rácz's son Laczi is changed to the similar-sounding Joczsi, which also resembles the name Jancsi. The latter is the diminutive form of János used by the Romani *prímás* János Rigó (1858–1927), who became popular at the turn of the twentieth century. When Miklós Markó published his dictionary in 1896 he mentioned him only once – as a member of the *Zigeunerkapelle* led by Józsi Simplicius

49 Kállai, “Gypsy Musicians”.

50 Gábor Mátray, “Bihari János, magyarnépzeneéletrajza”, in *Magyarország és Erdély képekben*, Vol. 2, ed. Ferenc Kubinyi and Imre Vahot (Pest: Emich, 1853), 156–61; Ervin Major, *Bihari János* (Budapest: Maretich, 1928).

51 Markó, *Cigányzenészek albuma*, 5–7.

52 Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies*, 150.

53 Michel Debrocq, “Roby Lakatos, the Nonconformist of the Violin”, trans. Charles Johnston, liner notes of the CD *Lakatos* (Hamburg: Deutsche Gramophone, 457 879-2 PY 900, 1998), 1.

Barcza (1847–1913).⁵⁴ But just at that time Jancsi Rigó decided to leave the orchestra to establish his own ensemble. While performing in Paris he met Clara Ward-Chimay (1873–1916), the daughter of a wealthy American married to a Belgian count.⁵⁵ The mother of two decided to divorce her husband for Jancsi. The affair was highly publicized, not only because of Clara’s American origins and her aristocratic connections, or because of the popularity of the bands (and especially their handsome violinists), but also because of their own efforts to advertise their romance.⁵⁶ In the late 1890s a number of articles of varying length appeared in Viennese newspapers, and when Clara died the whole affair was brought back to public attention.⁵⁷ One report read:

Princess Chimay met Rigó, the Gypsy violinist, who was then playing in a Paris cafe. She became infatuated with him and shortly afterward they eloped and for several years they were frequently heard of in various European capitals. They were together for about three years, and the last heard of the affair was in 1913, when she sued Rigó for \$100,000, which she alleged she had loaned to him.⁵⁸

At the peak of their popularity they actively solicited and attracted the attention of various artists intrigued by their story, who took it as a source of inspiration and/or a ticket to success. In 1897 a lithograph presenting Clara and Rigó entitled *Idylle Princière* was created by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901). In 1900 a musical farce entitled *Piękny Rigo* [Beautiful Rigo] was published in Polish by Konstanty Krumłowski (1872–1938), who most likely came across the news of the affair while staying in Vienna in the 1890s,⁵⁹ where it was gaining popularity among the literati and musicians.⁶⁰ The romance between the handsome, talented Romani

54 Markó, *Cigányzenészek albuma*, 106.

55 “Clara Ward Dies in Italy”, *New York Times*, 19 December 1916: 3: “the late Captain Eber Ward, the wealthiest man in Michigan, where he was known as the ‘King of the Lakes’. He left her more than \$3,000,000”.

56 “Deserted Her Gypsy Lover: The Princess Chimay and Rigo Have a Violent Quarrel”, *New York Times*, 28 January 1897: 2: “London, Jan. 27. A dispatch to The Mail from Vienna says that a violent quarrel occurred at Milan between the Princess Chimay (formerly Miss Clara Ward of Detroit, Mich.) and Janos”.

57 Bálint Sárosi, “The Golden Age of Gypsy Bands in Hungary”, *The Hungarian Quarterly* XLV, no. 173 (Spring 2004): 153–62 (here 154).

58 “Clara Ward Dies in Italy”.

59 Henryk Babral, “Posłowie”, in *Królowa przedmieścia*, by Konstanty Krumłowski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Secesja, 1991), 103.

60 In 1898 the operetta *Der schöne Rigo* by Carl Michael Ziehrer (1843–1922) had its premiere, but despite the name Rigo used in the title, it was set in Hungary in 1860 and did not tell the story of Jancsi and Clara.

musician and a beautiful lady not only resembled a Cinderella story but also seemed to sanction the myth of “Gypsy love”, specially reinforced and exploited in the realm of musical culture – one could mention here the opera *Carmen* (1875) by Georges Bizet and the operetta *Zigeunerliebe* (1910) by Franz Lehár – but also popularized in real life.⁶¹ Rigó was immortalized in Hungarian culture principally by the popular eponymous cake, still to be seen on display in Hungarian pastry shops and cafés, and featuring in cookbooks and on cooking websites.

Jancsi Rigó is not the only Romani virtuoso to be remembered locally. The *prímás* Jožko Pit’o (1800–88) is remembered in Slovakia. Although Markó mentions him in his dictionary as “József Pityó”,⁶² not only Hungarianizing the name but also giving 1790 as the date of his birth, Pit’o was celebrated predominantly locally in the Slovakian town of Liptovský Mikuláš. As was common among the Roma, Pit’o was taught the violin by his uncle and came to be noted for his excellent musical memory.⁶³ Having served in the army (where he was also employed as a musician playing not only the violin but also the French horn), he formed his own *Zigeunerkapelle*. He often trekked in the fields and meadows, with his violin under his arm, listening to peasant women singing and collecting musical ideas for his band. He would later arrange these songs (typical for the region of Liptov and Spiš and locally known as *trávnice* [meadow songs] since the lyrics reflected the work of mowing and drying hay). The tunes collected and arranged by Pit’o were duly preserved by his son Alexander (Šándor) – also a talented violinist – who harmonized them for the piano and eventually published them in 1905.⁶⁴ Pit’o’s name was not only popularized by his sons (who continued the musical tradition, performing throughout Hungarian regions). The *prímás* was also immortalized by a Slovakian painter, Peter Michal Bohúň (1822–78), hired by the local community who had collected the money to have the *prímás* painted, thus showing him their gratitude for his contribution to the local life.⁶⁵

The story of Jožko Pit’o epitomizes several features characteristic of the careers of Gypsy *prímás*es: to begin with, he was a member of a musical dynasty; secondly, he based his repertoire on popular and folk songs; and, finally, he actively contributed to the musical life of his region. Although Pit’o is cherished by Slovaks for preserving their traditional music, the

61 Sárosi, “The Golden Age of Gypsy Bands in Hungary”, 154.

62 Markó, *Cigányzenészek albuma*, 20–21.

63 Vladimír Majerčíak, “Legendárny *prímás* Jožko Piťo”, in *Neznámi Rómovia: zoživotá a kultúry Cigánov-Rómov Slovensku*, ed. Arne B. Mann (Bratislava: Ister Science Press, 1992), 127–38.

64 It was published as *Trávnice* by Karol Salva in Ružomberok.

65 Bohúň was living in the vicinity, and specialized in portraits – mainly of the nobility, but he also painted simple Slovakian folk. On Pit’o’s legacy, see also Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies*, 195.

status of “truly” Romani composer was reserved for another *prímás*: Pista Dankó (1858–1903). His compositions, sometimes compared with the Victorian music-hall repertoire in England,⁶⁶ were recognized by Kodály among others. Sceptical as he was of Romani creativity, Kodály nevertheless admitted that Pista Dankó was one of the most prolific composers, that he “wrote more than four hundred songs to contemporary Hungarian texts” even if still “strongly under the influence of indigenous Hungarian peasant music”.⁶⁷

By the time Miklós’s dictionary was published, more and more voices could be heard claiming that the style propagated by Romani musicians in general was too elaborate, too finessed, overloaded with redundant ornamentation.⁶⁸ Early twentieth-century recordings of music performed by Romani bands display a tendency to disfigure, or transform popular tunes (sometime beyond recognition) into more fashionable dance-type music.⁶⁹ But elaborating and embellishing tunes was never characteristic of all *Zigeunerkapellen*.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the frills, decorations and glitter found in their performative style were heavily criticized in the early twentieth century by national purists, including Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók (1881–1945). Bartók explicitly accused Romani musicians of distorting the beauty of folk music, asserting that they tended to “pervert melodies, change their rhythms to ‘gypsy’ rhythm, introduce among the people melodies heard in other regions and in the country seats of the gentry – in other words, they contaminate the style of genuine folk music”.⁷¹ In the first decades of the twentieth century – critical for the re-establishment of Hungary as an independent state, the style and role of Gypsy musicians were also defended as important for Hungarian culture. The French music critic of Hungarian origin Emile Haraszti (1885–1958) championed Romani musicians, urging that they should be treated as “true Hungarians”.⁷² He encouraged listeners to perceive their music as an amalgam of Hungarian and Romani traits.⁷³

66 Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies*, 195.

67 Kodály, *Folk Music of Hungary*, 9.

68 Gilbert Webb, “The Foundations of National Music”, *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 17th session (1890–91): 113–35 (here 129).

69 Recordings available online at: <https://gramofononline.hu/>

70 Kata Riskó, “Városi cigányzenekarok hangfelvételeia 20. század elejéről”, *Magyar Zene* 52, no. 1 (2014): 28–42.

71 Béla Bartók, “Observations on Rumanian Folk Music”, in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 198.

72 Ujfalussy, *Béla Bartók*, 274.

73 Emile Haraszti, “La Question Tzigane-Hongroise au point de vue de l’histoire de la musique”, *Report from International Society for Musical Research First Congress*, Liège (1–6 September 1930): 140–45 (here 144).

Not Only Violinists

It seems that regardless of what kind of music they were performing, for the Roma in Hungary being a musician has meant more than just a way of earning money. It has been a way of self-defining, of taking control of their fate: education, career development, selection of acquaintances and friends. It also often influenced the choice of spouses and familial relations, for Romani musicians have always tended to work together.

The life stories of the virtuosi presented in this chapter – different as they are – illustrate the diversity of roles assigned to Romani violinists and the multitude of career paths they have pursued since the late eighteenth century. Panna Cinka demonstrated Romani input into the development of European musical culture as one of the few women enjoying high status in a male-dominated field (only one other female violinist featured in Markó's dictionary, Rudiné Rác (1853–1901)).⁷⁴ Bihari's case clearly demonstrates Romani impact on the phenomenon of travelling virtuosi, so popular in the nineteenth century and critical for the development of European musical culture. Jancsi Rigó epitomizes the image of the adventurous "Gypsy lover" enthusiastically glorified in the literature, operas and operettas, and then later in films, showing how the Roma themselves played with that cliché. Most of the Romani musicians presented here, active as performers, composers and arrangers, continue to provoke reflection and debate on questions of the authorship and the issue of shared customs and values. Romani virtuosi contributed to the musical development of their own local communities and are remembered locally or recognized nationally, while quite a few function in the wider, pan-European context. At the same time, the names of hundreds of others have sunk into oblivion, rarely if ever remembered by scholars, historians or musicologists. By the time of the publication of Markó's dictionary in 1896, the list of recognized Romani musicians was already dominated by violinists, alongside only a few cimbalom players (among them Miska Purcsi and Károly Bátori Balogh), clarinet players (for example, Goda Orbán) and double bass players (including Bandi Dajna Balogh and Béla Munczy). While the symbolic status of the idealized "Gypsy musician" was predominantly reserved for Romani violinists, in the popular imagination and in scholarly works the *intrinsic* association between the Roma and music of every kind was so strongly consolidated that it became one of "the most prominent aspects of Gypsy fetish".⁷⁵ The Roma have been significant actors in the realm of musical culture, and their music-making deserves to be revisited and assigned a much more important role than just a "fetish".

74 Markó, *Cigányzenészek albuma*, 50–51.

75 Florentina C. Andreescu and Sean P. Quinn, "Gypsy Fetish: Music, Dirt, Magic, and Freedom", *Journal for Cultural Research* 18, no. 4 (2014): 275–90 (here 281).

Chapter 8

From the History of the *Lăutari* in Romania

Anna G. Piotrowska

The novel *La Tiganci* [With the Gipsy Girls, 1959] by Mircea Eliade (1907–86) presents Bucharest as a mythical space “full of melancholies and a suffocating atmosphere”, populated by the Roma who constitute an immanent element of the city’s landscape.¹ In *La Tiganci* – published when Eliade was already living in Paris where he had moved in 1945 – the author looks back with nostalgia at his native Bucharest known for its Romani inhabitants, including musicians. Although less publicized than their Hungarian colleagues, they were in fact very popular in Romanian lands as well. This chapter offers a concise insight into their past, presenting their position and role in Romanian society and culture. It draws on key source materials and authoritative secondary literature, much of it available only in the Romanian language, to present an account that focuses on the situation of Romani musicians from Bucharest. The chapter not only highlights their contribution to local musical practices but also elucidates the Romani musical presence in both rural and urban public spaces, drawing attention to the implications and importance of the shift from one milieu to another.

1 Annamaria Stan, “The Dream of Love: Mircea Eliade’s ‘With the Gypsy Girls’ and Knut Hamsun’s ‘Pan’”, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai – Philologia* 3, no. 4 (2007): 79–88 (here 80).

The Roma of Romania

While Romani musicians from the Hungarian territories were already being associated with romantic values in the nineteenth century, their Romanian colleagues remained obscure and considerably less recognized in international circles. One of the reasons for this may be Romania's complicated political history: the state we know today only came into existence in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was in 1859 that Romania was formed, predominantly as a result of the union between Wallachia and Moldavia. The widespread presence of the Roma in these regions is sometimes recognized as critical for the formation of the modern Romanian state – on the one hand, as prompting the growth of common anti-Gypsy prejudices which bonded non-Romani citizens, but also, on the other, as an important factor in the economic development of the region.² The first records attesting to Romani presence in the Danubian territories appeared in 1385.³ There is substantial documentation of the presence of Roma in Moldavia in the time of Prince Alexandru cel Bun (Alexander the Good, who reigned between 1400 and 1432) and in Transylvania.⁴ The Roma were described in these documents as pilgrims carrying letters of transit, although their lower social status was already clearly articulated: for example, even though the Roma adopted the Christian faith (dominant in the Carpathian basin) they were not supposed to be buried with non-Roma.⁵ By the sixteenth century some Romani groups were still wandering, and even in the late eighteenth century the Roma were still itinerants living in tents and speaking their own language, although able to communicate in the language of Wallachia.⁶ Roma who opted for a sedentary life ran the risk of enslavement.

The enslavement of Roma, already in practice in the Middle Ages, was originally based on the Ottoman model.⁷ The Roma were treated as prisoners of war (booty), for example when they were captured by Vlad the Impaler in 1445. In 1471 the prince of Moldavia, Stephen the Great, reportedly turned thousands of Gypsies into an unpaid labour force, having

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- 2 Sam Beck, "The Origins of Gypsy Slavery In Romania", *Dialectical Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (1989): 53–61 (here 54).
 - 3 Damaschin Mioc and Ioana Constantinescu, eds, *Documenta Romaniae Historica, B. Țara Românească* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1966), 19–22.
 - 4 Damaschin Mioc et al., eds, *Documenta Romaniae Historica, A. Moldova* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1975), 124–26; Nicolae Iorga, *Anciens documents de droit roumain* (Paris and Bucarest: n.p., 1930), 22–23.
 - 5 Martin Bottesch, Franz Grieshofer and Wilfried Schabus, eds, *Die siebenbürgischen Landler. Teil 1* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002), 382; Dimitrie Dan, *Țiganii din Bucovina* [Gypsies from Bukovina] (Cernăuți: Silvestru Morariu-Andrievici, 1892), 17.
 - 6 Friedrich Wilhelm Bauer, *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur la Valachie* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Broenner, 1778), 22 and 49.
 - 7 Beck, "The Origins of Gypsy Slavery in Romania", 53.

transferred them to Moldavia from the conquered Wallachia.⁸ It was not unusual for the Roma to become slaves as a result of relocation, or as a consequence of their wretched economic situation – they often sold themselves to boyars to pay off their debts, as both sedentary and travelling Roma had to pay taxes.⁹ Even the prince of Wallachia and Moldavia Constantin Mavrocordat (1711–69), well known for his benign taxation regulations and stance against the dehumanization of serfs, was reluctant to exempt them from the obligation to pay taxes.¹⁰

The slave status deprived the Roma of social rights and they were often treated as subhuman. In the Romanian language the words *țigani* [Gypsy] and *rób* [slave] came to function as equivalents.¹¹ Nevertheless, since medieval times the Roma have been an important part of the regional economy and constituted a source of considerable profit for their masters. Accordingly, Romanian boyars, dukes and princes (known there as *voivodes*) often owned thousands of Romani slaves, put to work as carpenters, bricklayers or blacksmiths.¹² They also excelled in metalwork, and played an important role in the production of alcohol, providing copper for the distilling equipment. They had a significant impact on the development of these crafts, traditionally passing their professions from father to son. Known as excellent cooks and embroiderers, the Roma were also employed in aristocratic residences as domestic servants “highly desired by feudal courts to symbolically demonstrate the high quality and hence high status of their families”.¹³ Romani slaves were also employed at monasteries, usually donated by rich boyars.

Romani Musicians in the Romanian Lands

While practically excluded from mainstream society, the Roma were valued as providers of music and came to be acknowledged in the Romanian principalities as specialists in music production. Arguably, then, music-making

8 George C. Soulis, “The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961): 141–65.

9 Margaret H. Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar: The Epic Tradition of Romania* (New York: Garland, 1991), 18.

10 Rudolf Lindau, *Walachei und Moldau, in Hinsicht auf Geschichte, Landesbeschaffenheit, Verfassung, gesellschaftlichen Zustand und Sitten der Bewohner* (Dresden and Leipzig: Arnoldi, 1849), 51.

11 Giovanni Picker, “Țiganu-i țigan”, *Civilizations* 62 (2013): 51–70.

12 Laurençon, *Nouvelles observations sur la Valachi*, 25; Ion Chelcea, *Țiganii din România. Monografie etnografică* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1944), 102.

13 Beck, “The Origins of Gypsy Slavery in Romania”, 60; Laurençon, *Nouvelles observations sur la Valachi*, 24.

cultivated by the Roma can be seen as a service they were obliged to provide, music treated as a commodity “manufactured” by the Roma. The recognition of their skills as music-makers may be related to the change in how Romani musicians were treated, for the appreciation of Romani musicians among European intellectual circles in the early nineteenth century coincided with reforms introduced in the 1830s by the Prince of Moldavia Grigore Alexandru Ghica (1804 or 1807–57), leading to an improvement of the situation of the Roma population.

Traditionally the Roma were providers of music throughout the region, for example at courts and in monasteries of Wallachia, Muntenia and Moldavia.¹⁴ They had high economic value, as is shown by the records that mention selling Romani (slave) musicians or bestowing them as prestigious gifts.¹⁵ The Roma excelled as providers of music in the service of the boyars by accompanying them during their hours of idleness.¹⁶ Landowners enjoyed Romani instrumental music offered by groups known as *tarafs*. The Romani musicians also organized small, often privately sponsored bands – orchestras which performed at balls and banquets, and at other private events, entertaining guests.¹⁷ That service was predominantly available to the rich, like the so-called Phanariotes who represented mighty families of Greek origin who ruled the Romanian provinces on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. As diplomats and patriarchs, but also merchants and civil clerks, members of these prominent dynasties advanced their influence in Wallachia and Moldavia, setting an example for the Romanian nobility, who eagerly imitated their etiquette and their propensity for Oriental luxury, and chose similar costumes and cuisine, even preferring the same type of amusements such as music.¹⁸ Enslaved Romani musicians quickly learned how to please such diverse listeners, continuously perfecting their musical skills to captivate different audiences and satisfy their expectations. The abilities of the Romani musicians were noted by foreign travellers who regularly saw them performing in public in the Romanian lands.¹⁹

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Romani musicians were still chiefly to be found in rural locations, but soon a number of them moved

14 Nicolae Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1999).

15 Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate*, 71; Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 18.

16 Cristian C. Ghenea, *Din trecutul culturii muzicale romanesti* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicala, 1965), 107.

17 Franz Metz, “Franz Liszt und seine lautari”, in *Von Hora, Doina und Lautaren: Einblicke in die rumänische Musik und Musikwissenschaft*, ed. Thede Kahl (Berlin: Frank and Timme, 2016), 301–11 (here 304).

18 Anthony L. Lloyd, “The Music of Rumanian Gypsies”, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association, 90th Session* (1963–64): 15–26 (here 18).

19 Petre Brâncuși, *Muzica românească și marile ei primeniri*, Part II (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1980), 115.

to the cities, following their masters. These migrations resulted from the increasing friction between boyars and Phanariotes, which even caused some skirmishes around 1711. Consequently several boyars relocated to towns, taking their Romani servants with them.²⁰ The Roma continued to provide their musical services in the urban settings. But the new situation considerably affected their repertoire: in the cities they were exposed more intensely to Turkish music and consequently introduced *alla turca* elements in their repertoire (including, among other things, the characteristic fanfare).²¹ In general, Turkish-style entertainment (including theatre) was very much appreciated by the eighteenth-century Romanian nobility.²²

At that time, the popularity of Romani musicians was taken for granted, while in the early nineteenth century they achieved a near-monopoly of the musical scene of most major Romanian cities.²³ Although both Turks and Roma served as musicians in the Wallachian region, the latter seemed to predominate.²⁴ Romani musicians often performed in the streets of major Romanian cities – playing without scores, often reproducing various compositions having listened to them only once. Their interpretations were always executed with “passion, precision, talent”, and sustained a high level of performative quality. The most typical line-up of bands playing in the streets comprised violin, *cobza* (a mandolin-like instrument with nine strings), Romanian *naïu* (a type of pan flute), tambourine and syrinx. In the Romanian lands the Roma not only performed instrumental music but also sang. The repertoire offered by the Roma in the nineteenth century usually included light music (e.g. dances) and extracts from French operas, as well as instrumental music by the popular Viennese composers, including sonatas by Mozart or symphonies by Beethoven. That type of repertoire was equally pleasing for the well-educated upper classes and for simple farmers who happened to be visiting the city. While the Romani musicians rarely performed their own compositions, they always tried to add a pinch of “Oriental sounds” to distinguish their interpretations. To enhance the attractiveness of their shows, their musical performances were sometimes accompanied by presentations of tame bears (tamed by the Roma themselves).²⁵ In the course of the nineteenth century Romani musicians became so popular that some were elevated by their contemporaries to the level of cult performers.²⁶

20 Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 18, 21.

21 Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate*, 75.

22 See Mădălina Diaconu and Lukas Marcel Vosicky, *Bukarest – Wien. Eine kulturhistorische Touristik an Europas Rändern* (Berlin: LIT, 2006), 68.

23 Bauer, *Mémoires historiques et géographiques*, 59.

24 Diaconu and Vosicky, *Bukarest – Wien*, 87.

25 For this account, see Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Skizze einer Geschichte der Zigeuner* (Stuttgart: Cast, 1840), 9, 22–24, 53.

26 Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate*, 92.

The Figure of a Gypsy *Lăutar*

The Romanian word for a musician – often a fiddler – is *lăutar*.²⁷ When used in the plural, *lăutari*, it not only denotes a group of musicians but can also refer to a social class of (predominantly Romani) musicians. Hence the term *lăutar* – especially in Wallachia – came to mean a Romani musician, either a freeman or, more likely, an enslaved Gypsy from a princely, boyar or monastery estate.²⁸ The word *lăutar* could also simply mean a Gypsy (especially in Romanian texts from the nineteenth century or earlier), and although there were non-Romani *lăutari*, “muzica lautareasca” [music of the *lăutari*], is most commonly identified with Romani performers.²⁹ Romani *lăutari* were so well known and respected that other musicians willingly collaborated with them. Furthermore, Romani *lăutari* played a significant role in the development of Romanian musical traditions, and as such came to be acknowledged in the early twentieth century by Romanian intellectuals engaged in the project of fostering a Romanian national artistic tradition.³⁰

Lăutari continued to be active in both towns and countryside. Those performing in villages tended to be slightly more conservative while accommodating local preferences, often providing dance tunes, ritual music or “lyrical and epic balladry”.³¹ Urban musicians offered a more diverse repertoire, including classical and popular tunes, and more compositions with international appeal, such as polkas, waltzes or polonaises.³² Those Romani *lăutari* who relocated to cities in the early eighteenth century in particular were exposed to a greater variety of styles, easily absorbing and mixing their various elements. They consequently became more and more popular, eventually organizing their own guilds (as in Craiova in 1723).³³ By the end of the century the prestige of urban *lăutari* was secure; they were no longer perceived as an enigmatic group of anonymous musicians, but were viewed as distinguished individual professionals, often recognized as celebrated virtuosi.³⁴

27 The term is derived from *lăută*, meaning “lute”.

28 Viorel Cosma, *Figura Lautara* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1965), 11; Nicolae Gheorghiiță, “Secular Music at the Romanian Princely Courts during the Phanariot Epoch (1711–1821)”, *New Europe College Yearbook 2008–2009* (2008–09): 121–70 (here 134).

29 Ghenea, *Din trecutul culturii muzicale romanesti*, 97, 104; Speranța Rădulescu, “Traditional Musics and Ethnomusicology: Under Political Pressure: The Romanian Case”, *Anthropology Today* 13, no. 6 (1997): 8–12 (here 10).

30 George Sterian, “Arta Românească”, *Arhitectura* 1, no. 2 (1906): 61–69 (here 67).

31 Lloyd, “The Music of Rumanian Gypsies”, 16.

32 Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 21.

33 Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 20.

34 Frans R. Spengler, *Dissertatio historico-iuridica de Cinganis sive Zigeunis* (Leiden: Hazenberg, 1839), 43–44.

Indeed, some of the most respected luminaries on the budding Romanian (national) cultural scene were either of Romani origin (at least partly) or closely associated with Roma. Even Anton Pann (c. 1796–1854), regarded as the first professional Romanian composer and writer, may have had a Romani background. Pann was born Antonie Pantaleon Petroveanu in Sliven (today Bulgaria), a town known at that time for its Gypsy community. It is sometimes claimed that Pann’s father, Pantoleon Petrov, was of uncertain ethnicity, but he earned his living as a copper-smith, which was a traditional occupation among the (Wallachian) Roma known as Kalderash.³⁵ From today’s perspective, it is often difficult to establish or refute the Romani ethnicity of renowned Romanian musicians of that time, since contemporaries simply referred to them as *lăutari*. Pann himself can be considered as a representative of a typical *homo balcanicus*, “an incarnation of the Balkan ethnic affinities” for his roots could have been Bulgarian, Romanian, Vlach or half-Greek, as well as Romani.³⁶ But the possibility that he had Romani roots is significant, since he continues to be an extremely important figure in Romanian cultural history. It signals the place of the Roma in Romanian culture, attesting to the multifarious transfigurations of the Romani element in the lives of Romanian elites.

Another illustrious Romanian intellectual of that time, Ion Budai-Deleanu (1760–1820), expressed his interest in the Romani culture when he chose the Roma as the heroes of his *Țiganiada sau Tabăra țiganilor* [The Gypsies or the Gypsy Camp, 1800–12], the first epic poem in the Romanian language. It tells the story of a Romani unit in the Wallachian army under the leadership of Vlad the Impaler. The unit takes part in battles with the Ottoman army and the Roma are just steps away from creating their own state, but unnecessary disputes and disagreements among their leaders result in a fight, in which most of the Romani soldiers are killed and the survivors are forced to flee to other countries around the world. The “Gypsy epic” was published posthumously in 1877. By that time not only were Roma as a group being immortalized in Romanian literature but a number of Romani musicians were being publicly celebrated and praised. In the course of the nineteenth century their legends – hinging on repeated stories and anecdotes – were constructed and the pantheon of Romani *lăutari* from the Romanian lands was established, although the names of Romani virtuosi from Hungary (e.g. János Bihari) were also well known in the region by the 1830s.³⁷ Among the most celebrated Romani

35 Mihaela Bucin, “Nemurirea unui mare poet. 130 de ani de la moartea lui Andrei Mureșanu”, *Foaia Românească*, 23 December 2003: n. pag.

36 Sorin Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology”, *Tr@nsit online* 21 (2002), <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/romania-and-the-balkans/> (accessed 28 August 2019).

37 Kogălniceanu, *Skizze einer Geschichte der Zigeuner*, 23.

musicians was Barbu Lăutaru (1780–1861).³⁸ His case can serve as a model example of social alleviation by means of music: as a young man, Lăutaru was most probably a slave, but he became so respected for his musical skills that he eventually served as head of the *lăutari* guild in the Moldavian city of Iași. The legend of Barbu Lăutaru is based on his recognition not only by his compatriots, but also by foreigners. It is said that he was admired by the composer Franz Liszt, who was impressed by the virtuosity of the *lăutari* from Moldavia and Wallachia, mentioning them in his *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* (1859).³⁹ By the second half of the nineteenth century a lively tradition had developed of recounting the story of Liszt's famous meeting with Barbu Lăutaru, exaggerating an elaborate exchange of compliments between the musicians on each other's musical capabilities.⁴⁰ Soon Lăutaru was treated as a symbol of Romani musicians outside Romania: in France *La vie Parisienne* recalled the story of Liszt's encounter with Barbu Lăutaru and his band in 1874, delving into such details as the attire of the Romani musicians (leather hats) and their physiognomy (long hair), while Barbu himself was described as a true bard – an old man with a white beard and sparkling eyes. It was always duly stressed that during the meeting, Lăutaru proved his exceptional abilities by reproducing on the violin improvisations performed on the piano by Liszt.⁴¹ That story circulated not only in Europe but also in the United States.⁴² International appreciation for Romani musicians was also confirmed during the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867, where they were considered one of main attractions and were warmly received and talked about by French commentators.⁴³

In the second half of the nineteenth century, following the establishment of Romania as a nation state, the situation of Romani musicians improved not only because of the new legal order (including the abolition of slavery), but also as a result of the romantic ideology that promoted the figure of the “idealized Gypsy”. Gheorghe Teodorescu (1849–1900), the author of *Poezii populare române* [Romanian Folk Poems, 1885], was fascinated by a certain Romani *lăutar* called Petrea “Crețul” Șolcan (1810–87) and spoke publicly about his mastery during a conference held at the Athenaeum in Bucharest

38 On Barbu Lăutaru, see Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate*, 88; Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 21, 29, 43; Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 21.

39 Franz Liszt, *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1859), 196.

40 Metz, “Franz Liszt und seine lautari”, 307.

41 Gheorghe Ciobanu, *Studii de etnomuzicologie și bizantinologie* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1979), 202.

42 “Weird Gypsy Music”, *The Deseret Weekly* 40 (1890): 597–98.

43 François Duquing, “Cronique”, *L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée* (1867): 272; Oscar Comettant, *La musique, les musiciens et les instruments de musique chez les différents peuples du monde* (Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1869), 282–84.

in 1884.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Romanian folklorist Atanasie Marian Marienescu (1830–1915) included the Romanian *lăutari* in his vision for Romanian unity based on the cultivation of a shared folk culture.⁴⁵ The figure of the *lăutar* was highly valued in the fierce polemics on the traditionally diverse nature of Romanian culture which followed the establishment of the Romanian state. At the same time, the work of the Romani *lăutari* influenced several Romanian composers. A Romani violinist from the Duchy of Bukovina, Nicolae Picu (1789–1864), was admired by Chernivtsi-born virtuoso and composer Karol Mikuli (1821–97). Picu was also remembered as the teacher of another renowned *lăutar* from Bukovina – Grigore Vindereu (1830–88). Born the son of a former slave on a monastery estate near Suceava, Vindereu performed in major Romanian cities, actively seeking job opportunities by travelling to popular resorts in the summer. But in 1871 Vindereu and his musicians performed at Putna monastery during the celebration of its consecration. A young and promising Romanian composer-to-be, Ciprian Porumbescu (1853–83), who had studied in nearby Suceava and Chernivtsi with Karol Mikuli, heard him there and remained inspired by this meeting for the rest of his short life.⁴⁶

That permeation of Romani musical traditions into the professional Romanian musical idiom, as well as the close collaboration of Romani *lăutari* and Romanian musicians, became characteristic for the Romanian musical scene from the 1840s. For example, Romani musicians were employed in popular non-Romani orchestras, among others in the Banat region in the orchestra led by Nică Iancu Iancovici (1821–1903) – a Romanian violinist of Jewish origin educated by a musician of Romani origin from Timisoara. At the turn of the twentieth century the close links binding Romani and non-Romani musicians were strengthened even further. For instance, Romanian *lăutari* like Nicolae Buică (1855–1932) was known for performing compositions alluding to Romani traditions, while musicians of Romani origin openly started branding their compositions as “Gypsy”, stressing the validity of the Romani input into Romanian musical culture.⁴⁷

44 Mihail Poslușnicu, *Istoria muzicii la Români, de la Renaștere până'n epoca de consolidare a culturii artistice* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1928), 600.

45 Marcel Cornis-Pope, “The Question of Folklore in Romanian Literary Culture”, in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Volume III: *The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2007), 314–22 (here 321).

46 Uwe Harten, “Porumbescu Ciprian”, in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, Vol. 8 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983), 214–15; Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga and Iosif Sava, *Eminescu și muzica* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1989), 61.

47 Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 65, 132, 171–87

The most renowned and celebrated composer from Romania – George Enescu (1881–1955) – was acquainted with Romani music from his childhood years. One of his first violin teachers was a *lăutar* of Romani origin, Nicolae Filip (known as Lae Chioru). Enescu's Third Violin Sonata in A minor "in the Romanian folk style", Op. 25 (1926) is sometimes viewed as a tribute to Romani fiddlers and described "as a fantasy on the life and soul of the Gypsy fiddler ... imitating not only the sounds of nature but also the techniques and stunts of other Gypsy players".⁴⁸ Enescu also alluded to the *lăutari* tradition in a number of other compositions: Sonata No. 2 for violin and piano in F minor, Op. 6 (1899) includes effects resembling the sound of the *cobza*, most probably inspired by the music performed by *lăutari*. Moreover, a dance episode incorporated into Enescu's Second Romanian Rhapsody in D major (1901), performed by a string quartet juxtaposed with a full orchestra, evokes comparisons with a Romani *taraf*, while Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, Op. 27 (the so-called Village Suite composed 1937–38) was based on original tunes from the *lăutari* repertoire.⁴⁹ In fact, popular tunes performed by *lăutari* also inspired other composers, including some who visited the Romanian lands even earlier. For example, while touring in Transylvania and Wallachia in 1847–48, Johann Strauss II (1825–99) collected sonic memories from the area, reflecting on them in his Marien-Quadrille, Op. 51 and Annika-Quadrille, Op. 53 (1848).⁵⁰

In the early twentieth century the fame of the *lăutari* – both urban and rural, but also "semi-rural" (predominantly active in the growing suburban areas) attracted the attention of ethnomusicologists such as the Romanian Constantin Brăiloiu (1893–1958) and the Hungarian Béla Bartók (1881–1945), both active as composers. They systematically documented the music of the *lăutari*, classifying their repertoire in terms of the stylistics observed in a given region.⁵¹ When writing on the subject of Romanian folk music in 1914 Bartók accused Romani musicians of performative mannerisms aimed at deforming pure Romanian folk music. Clearly still under the influence of the national chauvinism typical of the tumultuous Hungarian *fin de siècle*, he insisted that they "pervert melodies, change their rhythms to 'gypsy' rhythm, introduce among the people melodies heard in other regions and in the country seats of the gentry – in other words, they contaminate the style of genuine folk music".⁵² But despite Bartók's

48 Samuel and Sada Appelbaum, *The Way They Play*, Book 2 (Neptune City, NJ: Paganiniana, 1973), 74.

49 Boris J. Kotljarov, *Enesco* (Neptune City, NJ: Paganiniana, 1984), 222; Viorel Cosma, *București. Citadela seculară a lăutarilor români* (Bucharest: Fundația culturală Gheorghe Marin Sepeteanu, 2009), 255–74.

50 Cosma, *București*, 153–54.

51 Speranța Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale în România secolului XX* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2002), 23–25.

52 Béla Bartók, "Observations on Rumanian Folk Music" (1914), in *Béla Bartók Essays*,

reservations and the experience of two world wars, Romani musicians maintained their position in Romania even under communism and their impact on Romanian culture was acknowledged, at least to some extent, in the works of such renowned Romanian ethnomusicologists as Viorel Cosma (1923–2017) and later Speranța Rădulescu (born 1949).

The Lăutari of Bucharest

By the mid-nineteenth century Wallachia was attracting more and more Romani people from the neighbouring regions (for example from Banat).⁵³ They often chose as their base Bucharest, the major city of the region situated at the junction of the most powerful empires then dominating that part of Europe. Bucharest was thriving, and developed rapidly after becoming the capital of the newly established state in 1861 (a function it had previously shared with Iași – the main city of Moldavia, which was also home to a considerable number of Roma).⁵⁴ The population of Bucharest grew constantly due to successive waves of immigrants from Wallachia, but also from Moldavia and Transylvania. It was also very attractive for the newly emancipated Roma, who sought out urban areas, especially those which already had Romani settlements. The presence of Roma in most Romanian towns was already documented in the Middle Ages (for example in Târgovișteiu, 1424). Those urban Roma were predominantly beggars living on the margins of the community and often at the fringes of the city.⁵⁵ However, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, with the influx of the *lăutari* accompanying their boyars, a new, specific group of city-dwelling Romani musicians emerged.⁵⁶

In Bucharest the *lăutari* found excellent conditions as cultural life flourished in the course of the nineteenth century. The first public theatre offering German plays opened at Cișmeaua Roșie in 1818. The theatre employed German and Austrian musicians who, like Ludovic Wiest (born Ludwig Wiest, 1819–89) from Vienna, moved to Bucharest and acclimatized to the city, contributing to its musical advances.⁵⁷ Musical life also

ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 198. Cf. Judith Frigyesi, “Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and ‘Volk’ in Modern Hungary”, *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1994): 255–87 (here 256).

53 Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 69.

54 Kogălniceanu, *Skizze einer Geschichte der Zigeuner*, 24.

55 Crișan, *Tigani mit si realitate*, 34; Richard Johann Louis Eisenstein, *Reise nach Konstantinopel, Kleinasien, Rumänien, Bulgarien und Serbien* (Vienna: Gerold, 1912), 62.

56 Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 22.

57 Sabina Cismas, *Invocations of Europe: Music Theatre and the Romanian Principalities, 1775–1852* (Cologne, Vienna and Weimar: Böhlau, 2016), 211.

thrived in the city's numerous parks; before the rule of Count Pavel Kiseleff (1788–1872) these were predominantly in private possession, but nevertheless open to the public between certain hours. Eventually, in 1847, the renowned Cismigu Park was opened in Bucharest, attracting vendors, entertainers and musicians who predominantly performed a Viennese-style repertoire (Viennese waltzes and polkas but also polonaises and Romanian *horas*, alongside compositions by local musicians like Wiest). Light dances were also enjoyed in the cafés (the Fialkowski café, or the centrally located and highly acclaimed Manuc Inn). In all these places both non-Romani and Romani musicians performed. The streets of Bucharest (as well as other Romanian cities) were already full of Romani bands in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially visible in the summertime when they usually performed late into the night, offering arias, songs, etc. for the entertainment of passers-by.⁵⁸

In cities the Romani musicians tended to flock together, occupying locations in the same district and forming very active and close-knit communities.⁵⁹ But in Bucharest they did not constitute a homogeneous group. Some of them looked more like barefoot beggars, whose presence was deemed so aggravating to the public that police interventions were called for.⁶⁰ At the same time, some *lăutari* worked as businessmen, local entrepreneurs establishing their own (often very successful) orchestras, often enjoying lucrative careers and gaining recognition far beyond Romania. It was not unusual for *lăutari* from Bucharest to travel to the Russian Empire and perform in Saint Petersburg.

Several musical clans were established in Bucharest. Over the course of two generations these families raised their status from slaves (before 1856) to graduates of the conservatory (in the early twentieth century), almost monopolizing the local musical scene. Based on the initiatives of ambitious individuals, their system of mutual support was regulated by both external economic factors and internal competitiveness, resembling the organization of musical life in other principal cities of the region, notably Budapest or Vienna (a better-known example would be the rivalry between the Strausses). Among the well-established dynasties of Romani *lăutari* was the Ochialbi family. Dumitrache Ochialbi was born in 1807 in Bucharest, where he also died in 1880. Initially a slave, he gained considerable recognition as a violinist at a very young age, playing in several bands before establishing his own orchestra. As early as 1827 Dumitrache's band (known as Dumitrache Lăutaru) was performing at the most elegant aristocratic balls held in Bucharest.⁶¹ By paying off his master in 1843,

58 Kogălniceanu, *Skizze einer Geschichte der Zigeuner*, 24.

59 Ghenea, *Din trecutul culturii muzicale romanesti*, 103.

60 Ghenea, *Din trecutul culturii muzicale romanesti*, 117.

61 Ion Ghica, "Un bal la curte in 1827" [A Ball at the Court in 1827], *Cele Trei Crișuri: revistă de cultură* 11–12 (1932): 106.



Fig. 27 A typical nineteenth-century Romanian band (featuring *lăutari*).
(collection of Andrzej Grzymała-Kazłowski)

Dumitrache became a freeman and continued his career performing at a number of important events (including the celebration of the Romanian union and the end of the Romanian War of Independence).⁶² His repertoire was so popular that the director of the National Theatre in Bucharest, the playwright Matei Millo (1814–96), even used it in the “national melodrama” *Moartea Tunsului* (1858).⁶³

Another member of Ochialbi family, Năstase (1835–1906), was also born and died in Bucharest. Originally a slave-servant, he rose to be one of the most popular *lăutari*, performing not only in Bucharest but also in other Romanian towns (including Ploiești). In 1860 he was immortalized by the painter-photographer Carol Popp de Szathmáry (1812–97) in a water-colour depicting Năstase and his *taraf* (ensemble), the leader wearing a more elaborate costume to highlight his privileged position in the band. Năstase’s son, Gheorghe N. Ochialbi (1870–1916), although born in Ploiești, was also closely linked with Bucharest, where he studied at the conservatory. Playing both the piano and the violin, he began composing at an early age (his compositions were appearing in music magazines as early

62 Cosma, *Lăutarii de ieri și de azi*, 119.

63 Viorel Cosma, *Muzicienii din România: Ș-Z* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1989), 286.

as 1885). Gheorghe was praised locally, receiving very positive reviews especially in the late 1890s, when he shifted towards a more popular repertoire. To further acclaim he toured abroad with Nicolae Matache's band before forming his own orchestra in 1898, consisting of more than 30 instrumentalists of different nationalities, including Germans, Czechs and Austrians, and not exclusively Romani musicians. Particularly popular in Russia, Gheorghe continued his career as a violinist, often performing his own light compositions. He also tried his hand at larger forms, such as his orchestral suite *Patria mea* (1906). He died in Saint Petersburg.

Among other Bucharest *lăutari* to enjoy popularity in Saint Petersburg was Sava Pădureanu (1848–1918). But Pădureanu was also applauded in London, Monte Carlo and Berlin, and performed in Paris at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. At the 1900 Exposition Universelle it was Cristache Ciolac (1870–1927), well-known for his virtuosic style and a unique interpretive manner, who represented the Bucharest *lăutari*.⁶⁴ His career, too, seems to follow a typical pattern: born into a musical family, he initially played a number of gigs before forming his own band. Then he continued playing at private functions. Initially he performed on the outskirts of Bucharest, only gradually gravitating towards more prestigious locations in the city centre to become, by the turn of the century, responsible for musical entertainment in well-known restaurants in the heart of Bucharest. Together with Iordache N. Ionescu (1843–1901), from the renowned Bucharest restaurant La Iordache, Ciolac also toured abroad and gained the respect of such contemporaries as the musician Ignacy Paderewski and Emperor Franz Josef). As a composer Ciolac duly indicated his Romani affiliations, entitling his compositions, for example, “*Țigăneasca*” or “*Hora Țigăneasca* (Romneasca)”.

Another famous musical dynasty, the Dinicu family of Bucharest, also produced several well-known *lăutari*, the violinist Grigoraș Dinicu (1889–1949) probably being the most renowned (and still remembered as a composer of, among others, “*Orientale à la tzigane*”).⁶⁵ He graduated from the Bucharest Conservatory, where for the 1906 diploma he composed his showcase piece “*Hora staccato*” – a vibrant composition requiring exceptional performative technique (especially the command of upbow and downbow staccato). While “*Hora staccato*” serves as evidence of Dinicu's exceptional dexterity, it also reminds us of the mastery of the Romani *lăutari* in general. Dinicu was also instrumental in popularizing one of the most characteristic tunes associated with *musica lăutarească*, namely “*Ciocărlia*”, supposedly composed (or at least first played in public) by his grandfather Angheluș Dinicu (1838–1905), the pan pipes player. “*Ciocărlia*”, as popularized by urban Romani musicians in the late nineteenth century,

64 Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 105–26 and 151–70.

65 Cosma, *Figura Lautara*, 191.

was reportedly presented at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 and was also cited by Enescu in his Romanian Rhapsody no. 1 (1901).⁶⁶ Under local names (usually literal translations of the Romanian word *ciocârlia*, meaning the lark), the tune spread widely throughout the whole region in a number of different variants and is still very popular not only in the Balkans, but also in southern Poland and Ukraine, even reaching Georgia. It was also adapted into the modern Jewish Klezmer repertoire, demonstrating the vivacity and power of the *lăutari*'s role in the musical life of the whole region.

Lăutari as Fabricators of Emotions

In the second half of the twentieth century the *lăutari* continued to provide musical entertainment at private events, but the political regime had an impact on their position and in some cases their art became harnessed by the communist system. After the Second World War, the communist regime of the new Romanian People's Republic promoted communal music-making by sponsoring local musical ensembles. This presented new possibilities for a number of Romani musicians, for they could improve their financial situation and legitimize their social position playing in such bands. Consequently the *lăutari* were often genuinely attracted to these "big concert-style folk orchestras run by government ministries, trade unions or municipal councils".⁶⁷ The many Roma who found non-musical jobs at plants, factories or other state-owned enterprises still willingly joined musical bands established at their workplaces.⁶⁸ All these ensembles were subject to ideological control and were required to perform the repertoire fulfilling political goals; this meant promoting Romanian folk music while often denying the Romani input into its development. Despite some small gestures – such as naming an orchestra after Barbu Lăutaru in 1949 – in communist Romania the *lăutari* of Romani origin found themselves in an ambiguous position. They were often ignored by the system or only sporadically acknowledged.⁶⁹ In that situation the Romani *lăutari* took a pragmatic attitude to their musical occupation, striving to maintain the quality of their musicianship, focusing on music-making as the basic source of their income and performing in restaurants, cafés and especially at family events

66 Kotljarov, *Enescu*, 42.

67 Lloyd, "The Music of Rumanian Gypsies": 22.

68 Christoph Wagner and Oprica Ivancea, "Tisch, Tusch, Tanz: Die Rumänische Bläserformation Fanfare Ciocarlia", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 161, no. 1 (2000): 62–63.

69 Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale*, 83; Speranța Rădulescu, *Taraful și acompaniamentul armonic în muzica de joc* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1984).

such as funerals and weddings, where their music was still valued by other Romanians.⁷⁰

In the late twentieth and twenty-first century Romani *lăutari* often performed the pop genre known in Romania as *manele*. Typical of *manele* are synthetic and amplified sounds, dense instrumental and vocal textures, often multiplied by the introduction of the echo effect achieved electronically. Musicians cultivating *manele*, called *maneliști*, draw overtly on Turkish and Greek models. *Manele* is often performed live, either by Romani or by non-Romani musicians, and is enjoyed specially in pubs, nightclubs, etc. The genre is often criticized for its vulgarity and low aesthetic value as well as for the references to criminality, overt sexuality and violence in the lyrics. The way in which Romanian intellectuals have distanced themselves from or rejected *manele* can be seen as a “visceral reaction” rather than “a consciously motivated decision” and is closely linked to rejection of the legacy of a communism that promoted similar folkish, or even pseudo-folk, productions.⁷¹ Analogous reactions – the refusal “of educated people to accept a cultural product delivered in abundance under the label of ‘art’”⁷² – were observed in other post-communist countries where similar, essentially populist musical styles appeared (Serbian turbo-folk, Bulgarian *chalga*, Albanian *muzika popullore*, or (Gypsy) *disco polo*).⁷³

On the opposite side of the commercial carousel are situated such Romani bands as Taraf de Haidouks or Fanfare Ciocărlia, established in the early 1990s, when Romania was regaining its democratic status. These bands cultivate the myth of folk authenticity, igniting the feeling of nostalgia for a “real” rural life neglected under communism that is in fact long gone, and continue practices typical of the *lăutari*, like passing on their music orally to new performers in an autodidactic process. Often self-taught, or taught by relatives, twenty-first-century Romani *lăutari* still feel the peer pressure to compete with other musicians, constantly comparing each other’s achievements.⁷⁴ The chief instrument used by contemporary *lăutari* is the violin (known under different names in various parts of

70 Lloyd, “The Music of Rumanian Gypsies”, 23; Victor Alexandre Stoichita, *Fabricants d’émotion: musique et malice dans un village tsigane de Roumanie* (Nanterre: Société d’ethnologie, 2008), 48.

71 Rădulescu, “Traditional Musics and Ethnomusicology”, 9.

72 Rădulescu, “Traditional Musics and Ethnomusicology”, 9.

73 Anna G. Piotrowska, “The Romany Musical Versatility: The Case of Gypsy Disco-Polo”, *Heritage of Centuries* 3, no. 19 (2019): 91–97. In the Bulgarian case the association with Gypsy culture is also perceived ambivalently: Timothy Rice, “Bulgaria or Chalgaria: The Attenuation of Bulgarian Nationalism in a Mass-Mediated Popular Music”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 34 (2002): 25–46 (here 31).

74 Wagner and Ivancea, “Tisch, Tusch, Tanz”, 62–63; Anna G. Piotrowska, “The Vision of the Balkans in Musical Culture: Between Viennese Operetta and Eurovision”, *Journal of Religion & Society* 19 (2019): 124–35.



Fig. 28 The gravestone of contemporary Romani musician Ion Carai. (Paweł Lechowski)

Romania: *aslăută*, *scripcă*, etc.), usually accompanied by a second violin and a double-bass. Originally the *cobza* was also very popular, replaced by the dulcimer (*țambal* in Romanian) as the instrument enjoyed by the nobility, and eventually overtaken by the accordion in the twentieth century. A typical *taraf* also includes brass wind instruments (trumpets, flugelhorns, euphoniums, helicons, tubas, etc.)

Contemporary *lăutari* of Romani origin are continuously praised for their ability to affect the listeners' emotions. Their forebears mastered the technique of manipulating the reactions of their audiences in the long process of adapting to the extremely difficult conditions they experienced in the Romanian principalities: despised as slaves, they could improve their condition by being appreciated as musicians.⁷⁵ Romani music-making in Romania can be compared with “soft power”, for music has been the only resource at the immediate disposal of the *lăutari* in need of retaliation.⁷⁶

75 Beissinger, *The Art of Lautar*, 29.

76 The term “soft power” refers to the aptitude and preference to entice, stimulate and influence, etc., rather than to resort to force and coercion in order to achieve goals. The notion was popularized by Joseph Nye in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990) and *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

They could effectively control it by regulating the sonic parameters such as sheer volume (today observed in the over-exploitation of amplifiers in *manele* music). The *lăutari* perfected intermediation, comprehending the art of reading sub-signals to understand better when to play louder and when silence suffices, excelling at presenting dedications and inciting enthusiastic reactions from the audience.⁷⁷ Arguably, then, treating music as a tool to manipulate the emotions of their listeners, Romani musicians have perfected the “technology of enchantment”, deciding “what kind of emotion is needed for a given moment”.⁷⁸

Romani musicians from Bucharest were remembered by Eliade as mesmerizing artists of insinuation, surreptitious gestures and subliminal signs. In his description of early twentieth-century Bucharest in his novel *La Tiganci* it is the Roma who play a significant role in co-creating the city’s magical atmosphere, its quasi-mystical mood. The depiction of the city saturated with passions incited by close encounters with the Roma cannot be regarded simply as Eliade’s personal reminiscence, for by the mid-twentieth century the recollections of Romanian Romani musicians in Paris were also rekindled and reinforced by a series of musical compositions entitled “Tziganes de Craiova”, “La Gitane de Nikopoli” or “Les Bohémiennes de Tchernaiia”.⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, then, Eliade’s story seamlessly incorporates musical subplots. The story is set in the district occupied by Romani musicians (Eliade himself lived in that part of the city), where Romani and non-Romani worlds overlap. Professor Gavrilesco – the protagonist of the novel – is a mediocre piano teacher, and the piano serves as the ultimate symbol of the European middle class, introduced even in a brothel scene. When Gavrilesco is asked to perform there he feels obliged to explain his position, asserting his low status as a mere piano teacher and confessing his belief in the ideal of pure art. Gavrilesco can thus be compared with a Romani *lăutar*, as his situation seems comparable with that of a Romani musician, compelled to work to secure an income by music-making yet deep down always remaining a true artist of the highest rank.

77 Stoichita, *Fabricants d’émotion*, 67, 213. Stoichita analysed specific techniques used by the *lăutari* to achieve the desired effects, among them manipulation of the tempo, altering stylistics, reconceptualization and production of new versions (variants) of well-known tunes, performative tricks camouflaging technical shortcomings or memory gaps, etc.

78 Stoichita, *Fabricants d’émotion*, 214. Cf. Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology”, in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 40–63.

79 All waltzes, they were published by Éditions Fernand Grave.

Chapter 9

The Story of Corro, a Musical Genius from Kraków

Anna G. Piotrowska

in collaboration with Paweł Lechowski

Those who still remember Stefan Dymiter¹ (1938–2002) have heard through the grapevine that he may be honoured with his own statue erected in the centre of Kraków years after his death. He truly deserves it because, although he was buried in the Silesian town of Kowary alongside his family, he had performed in the streets of Kraków for many years, becoming almost a defining element of Kraków's urban landscape by the turn of the twenty-first century and a sign of the city's multicultural openness. An unforgettable violinist, he contributed to the genius loci of the city, finding his place in the pantheon of great personalities associated with Kraków. Stefan Dymiter became one of Kraków's many legends, while his life perfectly illustrates the fate of thousands of Romani musicians who made their careers in communist Poland and had to negotiate shifting political regimes and regulations.² Dymiter's story seems exceptional, however, because of the unusual combination of his personal traits, his talent and his status as an admired and celebrated Romani violinist. Although he was recognized during his lifetime, respected, even adored, his life has never been thoroughly documented to date; legends, anecdotes and half-truths

1 The surname is sometimes spelled Demeter.

2 Adam Bartosz, *Nie bój się Cygana = Na dara Romestar* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 1994), 183.



Fig. 29 Corro with his violin. (Adam Drogomirecki)

still circulate widely and create the image of an obscure genius. This chapter not only aims to draw a more comprehensive picture of Stefan Dymiter, but also tries to position his career within a wider political and cultural context.

Romani Musicians in Communist Kraków

Music as a “Gypsy Fetish” in Communist Countries

The lives of Romani musicians busking in the streets became quite difficult throughout the whole Eastern Bloc when post-war social changes impacted the lives and daily practices of both professional musicians and rural Romani populations living in smaller communities.³ Under the new Soviet-oriented regime, Romani musicians were virtually banned from urban spaces while in some communist countries even tipping their performances became illegal.⁴ In the Czechoslovakia of the early 1950s the so-called Gypsy bands were unwelcome in public spaces; in Bratislava, for example, they

3 Katalin Kovalcsik, “The Music of the Roma in Hungary”, *Rombase*, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 29 January 2020).

4 See “No More Tips for Bratislava Gypsy Musicians”, 1 December 1951, Open Society Archives at Central European University Budapest, Records of Radio Free Europe/

were officially required to disband.⁵ Although Romani musicians continued to play, they tried to keep a low profile in the street when carrying musical instruments to the venues where they performed.⁶ In Kraków they usually performed in restaurants, *knajpy* [bars] and other public places serving food and alcohol. In such communist countries as Hungary or Bulgaria, the so-called Gypsy ensembles were treated as folk attractions for foreign guests, and Romani musicians were widely deployed in the tourist industry, the Tsiganski Tabor restaurant in Sofia being one example.⁷ In communist Romania, Romani musicians “were instructed to perform exclusively native genres, conforming to the official attempts to control cultural expression by permitting only pure, traditional Romanian music”.⁸

The Roma in Nowa Huta

In most communist countries the Roma continued to be associated with the musical stereotype, but in Poland – where they were also well known for their musical traditions – Romani musicians were significantly less popular, and less visible, competing with non-Roma ensembles as providers of musical entertainment in the cities.⁹ In Kraków – a tourist destination

Radio Liberty Research Institute, General Records, Information Items (HU OSA) 300-1-2-11985.

- 5 See “Liquidation of Gypsy Music Bands”, 10 December 1951, HU OSA 300-1-2-12405; “Gypsy Band in Bratislava Banned”, 15 August 1951, HU OSA 300-1-2-4523.
- 6 Interview with Artur Wolanowski (Roma from Nowa Huta, retired, used to play the guitar, acquainted with several musicians who played with Dymiter) by Paweł Lechowski, 12 December 2019.
- 7 Lozanka Peycheva and Ventsislav Dimov, “The Gypsy Music and Gypsy Musicians’ Market in Bulgaria”, in *Segmentation und Komplementarität. Organisatorische, ökonomische und kulturelle Aspekte der Interaktion von Nomaden und Sesshaften*, ed. Bernhard Streck (Halle: Orientwissenschaftliche Abteilung der Martin-Luther-Universität, 2004), 189–204 (here 196).
- 8 Margaret H. Beissinger, “Romani (Gypsy) Music-Making at Weddings in Post-Communist Romania: Political Transitions and Cultural Adaptations”, *Folklorica* 10, no. 1 (2005): 39–51 (here 41).
- 9 For example, according to the official data from 1983, there were around 20,000 Roma living in Poland, in contrast to more than 400,000 living in Hungary by the year 1993. See Łukasz Sołtysik, “Sytuacja Romów w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej w świetle dokumentu Ministerstwa spraw Wewnętrznych z 1984 roku. Uwaga o skutkach trzydziestopięcioletniej polityki państwa polskiego wobec ludności romskiej”, in *Roma in Visegrad Countries: History, Culture, Social Integration, Social Work and Education*, ed. Jaroslav Balvin, Łukasz Kwadrans and Hristo Kyuchukov (Wrocław: Foundation of Social Integration Prom, 2013), 417–36 (here 427). See also Ernő Kállai, “Gypsy Musicians”, in *Roma Migration*, ed. András Kováts (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Minority Research – Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, 2002), 75–96 (here 77); Speranța Rădulescu, *Taifasuri despre muzica țigănească/Chats about Gypsy Music* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2004).

even under communism, then mainly Poles for whom Kraków was the cultural capital of the country and the seat of the former kings – musical groups were always in demand. After the Second World War several local Romani bands were formed, a result especially of the influx of Romani people who settled predominantly in Kraków’s satellite city Nowa Huta. Nowa Huta (literally “new ironworks”) housed a gigantic steel mill that was the main employer for its inhabitants.¹⁰ The district was created from scratch and officially opened in 1949. Nowa Huta was a pet project of the communist regime keen to foster a model socialist town situated next to Kraków; in the event it was incorporated into Kraków as yet another district of the growing city. During the construction phase, and also when it was completed and providing workplaces and flats for the working class, it attracted hundreds of peasants from all over Poland, including many Roma from the nearby region of Carpathia. The Carpathian Roma (or highland Roma, unofficially but commonly referred to as Bergitka Roma),¹¹ were descended from Roma from what is now Hungary who first appeared in Poland in the fifteenth century. By the eighteenth century, they had adopted a settled lifestyle in conformity with the regulations imposed on the Romani population in the Habsburg Empire (to which the region around Kraków belonged from the late eighteenth century until the end of the First World War). Thus the Bergitka Roma differed distinctively from other Romani groups in post-war Poland, notably the Polska Roma, who preserved their itinerant customs. Furthermore, the Bergitka Roma cultivated very characteristic musical traditions, inherited from their Hungarian past, which included a preference for such forms as the *czardas* and the formation of typical “Gypsy bands” known in the Habsburg Empire as *Zigeunerkapellen*.¹² As soon as the representatives of the Bergitka Roma found themselves in Nowa Huta, they transferred their musical practices to that new urban environment and soon founded several bands, ready to perform at social occasions.¹³

The Tradition of “Gypsy Bands” in Kraków

They quickly realized that they could perform not only in Nowa Huta but also in the older districts of Kraków, where there were a number of prosperous and popular gastronomic establishments. Romani musicians from Nowa Huta offered their musical services there. They were accepted, for the tradition of “Gypsy bands” in the streets of Kraków was by then well established. In fact, many “Gypsy musicians often travelled to the big

10 Monika Golonka-Czajkowska, *Nowe miasto nowych ludzi: mitologie nowohuckie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013).

11 Anna Lubecka, *Tożsamość kulturowa Bergitka Roma* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2005).

12 See also Chapter 8 in this volume.

13 Interview with Artur Wolanowski.

cities to seek employment ... Gradually, increasing numbers of Gypsies – musicians as well as those from other professions – came to settle in ... large cities”.¹⁴ The Roma had for centuries constituted an integral part of the urban diversity of the multicultural city of Kraków and “Gypsy bands” became specially popular at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁵ The line-up of these bands resembled the composition of the famous *Zigeunerkapellen* that had been popular since the late eighteenth century across the whole Habsburg Empire.¹⁶ But in the post-war period, when Bergitka Roma assumed the role of urban musicians in Kraków, the line-up – although rooted in this tradition – was slightly modified. In the 1960s and 1970s the bands usually consisted of between two and five male musicians, usually members of the same family.¹⁷ One of them played the violin, and sometimes there was a second violinist, while there always had to be a bass player. This basic set of instruments was enriched, however, by the presence of a guitarist. This may have reflected the growing popularity of rock’n’roll music, but it may also be connected to the influence of Polska Roma musical traditions, as the guitar was favoured among them. In addition, the accordion – a highly portable instrument – could appear in the line-up of Romani musical bands active in the Kraków of the 1960s and 1970s. Notably, there was no place in these bands for the dulcimer, which had been typical for traditional *Zigeunerkapellen* and still present in Kraków in the early twentieth century.¹⁸ Nor did post-war Romani bands from Kraków ever feature clarinets (as traditional bands had). In other words, their composition was a balance of the old (violins plus the bass section) and the new (the guitar) as well as a mixture of different musical traditions encountered among various Polish Romani groups.

The Routine of Kraków-Based “Gypsy Bands”

Adherence to tradition was also apparent in the dress code favoured by the musicians.¹⁹ Although they tried not to stand out in sartorial terms, they always looked rather smart, wearing baggy trousers and suits, preferably in

14 Robert Garfias, “Dance among the Urban Gypsies of Romania”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16 (1984): 84–96 (here 87).

15 Małgorzata Woźna-Stankiewicz, “Antypody muzycznych salonów w 2. połowie XIX wieku. Krakowskie parki wypełnione muzyką”, in *Władysław Żeleński i krakowski salon muzyczny: tożsamość kulturowa w czasach braku państwowości*, ed. Grzegorz Mania, Piotr Różański (Kraków: Skarbona, 2017), 83–94 (here 86).

16 Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni* (tom I *Wśród obcych*) (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1959), 305.

17 Interview with Artur Wolanowski.

18 Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 305.

19 The co-author of this chapter, Paweł Lechowski, who was born and raised in Kraków’s Kazimierz district, still vividly remembers the Romani musicians and their typical appearance back in the 1960s and 1970s.

dark colours, plus a waistcoat; a typical combination was a black waistcoat contrasting with a white shirt. Their style can be described as casual elegance. Interestingly, they did not differentiate between their everyday attire and clothes worn for performances.

The adherence to tradition was manifest also in the repertoire offered by the bands. Mostly they performed their own arrangements of popular tunes, as was typical for commercially oriented Romani music-making.²⁰ Indeed, the repertoire of Kraków-based Romani bands included current hits and well-known songs, be they Polish, Italian or other. The musicians immediately picked up the most popular tunes; for example, in the 1960s they performed the hit “Ta paidiatou Peiraia” [Children of Piraeus] from the film *Never on Sunday* (1960) directed by Jules Dassin. At that time it was sung with a great success by the all-female Polish band Filipinki, but even in Poland it was performed in Greek, so the lyrics were difficult to follow. Consequently, audiences were more interested in the catchy tune, and the Roma, who traditionally preferred instrumental music, did not have to perform the vocals of the song and could stick to the purely instrumental version. The repertoire on offer in Kraków diners, restaurants and cafeterias was not only for dancing, but also for listening, and accordingly it was very varied, encompassing fast and energetic as well as slower, melancholic pieces. Since the bands were obviously trying to please the audience, they were open to requests from listeners, who asked for particular songs (“Czerwone maki na Monte Cassino” [The Red Poppies of Monte Cassino] was one favourite)²¹ or wanted the Roma to present “something Gypsy”. When that was the request (as happened quite often), bands with Bergitka Roma musicians most likely referred to their musical memories, choosing *czardases*, which had been assimilated to their own musical tradition from the Hungarian legacy.

Before the 1970s Romani musicians normally played indoors – usually in restaurants and bars. They were often to be seen in the old town of Kraków but also in the working-class district of Podgórze as well as in Kazimierz, the city’s formerly Jewish district. While Kazimierz has thrived in post-communist times, before 1989 it was quite dilapidated and populated by casual labourers and people working in the grey economy, often occupying communal apartments and passing their time off work in popular local dives and honky-tonks. The clientele of those venues was exclusively non-Romani and male-dominated, and their atmosphere was often tense and saturated with alcohol while the music – provided by Romani performers – was treated as a commodity. But customers enjoyed

20 Julie Brown, “Bartók, the Gypsies and the Hybridity in Music”, in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 119–40 (here 130).

21 Paweł Lechowski recalls such situations in 1960s.

live entertainment and managers tolerated Romani bands as providers of *Tafelmusik*. The presence of the ensembles was not regulated by contract, but the work was quite lucrative, so that under conditions of intense competition members of different bands sometimes needed to settle misunderstandings and occasional conflicts. They did so quietly among themselves, especially avoiding direct confrontations in open spaces, and trying to solve their problems without the involvement of bystanders or the intervention of the police. Under communism, the Roma were often presented in daily press in negative terms.²² Hence Romani musicians did not want to provide any further pretexts for coverage that would consolidate the negative stereotypes.

Better Times for “Gypsy Bands”

Since the Roma performed in gastronomic locales, they could earn money all year round, not only in summer. They usually started playing at midday and continued till late evening. Before the 1970s they rarely performed in the street, although they could sometimes appear in the new suburban areas playing in front of blocks of flats. They counted on a few coins thrown by the residents as a form of gratuity. The situation changed in the 1970s, probably as the result of the efforts undertaken by Piotr Płatek (1928–2011), who founded Stowarzyszenie Folklorystyczne “Teatr Regionalny” [Folk Association “Regional Theatre”], an organization dedicated to the promotion of the local urban folklore, in 1968.²³ Płatek was a journalist (working for various media, press and radio alike), as well as an ethnographer. He was instrumental in promoting the Polish tradition of street music-making and advertising the activities of the so-called backyard orchestras (*orkiestry podwórkowe*). Their most popular practice involved going from one backyard to another and playing in front of houses. If listeners liked the music, they could show their appreciation by throwing some coins, usually wrapped in a piece of paper, from the windows. Alternatively, groups could also perform in the open air, for example in the streets of the city. The informal Romani bands who sometimes acted as such backyard orchestras immediately benefited from Płatek’s initiative as the attitude of the Kraków municipality towards busking musicians became more favourable. Consequently, “Gypsy bands” ventured to perform not only in restaurants, but also in the open spaces of the city and soon appeared in the streets. Some bands from Nowa Huta were authorized by the authorities as “proper” urban bands. As a result they upgraded, taking their performances into more prestigious places such as the new Hungarian

22 Anna G. Piotrowska, “Re-Negotiating the Public Image of Gypsy Musicians in the Polish Everyday Press of the Communist Period”, *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica* 23 (2019): 217–27.

23 “Piotr Płatek”, *Encyklopedia Krakowa*, <https://encyklopediaKrakowa.pl/slawni-i-zapomniani/103-p/925-platek-piotr.html>.

restaurant Balaton in the city centre. Another band from Nowa Huta took up residence in Kawiarnia Ratuszowa in the old city hall in the main square. In other well-known places, such as the night-club Cyganeria in Szpitalna Street, renowned for organizing dancing events, the Roma did not provide the music but appeared as visitors.

In the 1970s Romani musicians from Nowa Huta did not manage to monopolize the streets of Kraków musically, for the city was big enough to accommodate other guest performers, including Romani bands from the Silesian town of Kowary. In one of these bands a small man known as Cororo played the violin.²⁴ He soon became one of the most characteristic figures in Kraków and at the same time one of the most outstanding musicians the city could boast of.

The Incredible Cororo

Cororo Enters the Scene

Romani musicians from Kowary initially competed with bands from Nowa Huta, but soon the musicians started playing together and, with time, only a few original members of the Kowary bands performed in Kraków, joining local bands; Cororo was among them. The musicians from Kowary and Nowa Huta communicated well, also on the musical level, for they all represented the same highland Roma.

Cororo and most of his colleagues from the original Kowary bands came from the Carpathian region and relocated to Kowary only in the 1960s.²⁵ The Dymiter family originally lived in the village of Płonna (Połonna, Płonka – different names are given) near Sanok where, in addition to the highland Roma, the population included Ruthenian/Ukrainian Lemkos and Boykos, as well as Jews and Poles. The Roma from that region used to live in rural communes, but their fate was affected by the Second World War. Near the village of Płonna, where the Dymiter family resided, a special camp for the Jews from Sanok was established in 1942.²⁶ Then, after the war, Operation “Vistula” – initiated in 1946 and carried out in 1947 – led to the deportation of the populations of whole villages from the area. Residents were relocated to the so-called Recovered Territories in northern and western Poland, while their original houses were confiscated, often plundered or even demolished and their landholdings incorporated into collective farms. The displacement policies were not forced upon the

24 The name is also spelled Kororo, or Korroro, and in English versions sometimes also Cororo.

25 Interview with Irena Kawalek (social worker in Kowary) by Paweł Lechowski, 27 November 2019.

26 Ernestyna Podhorizer-Sandel, “O zagładzie Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim”, *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 30 (1959): 87–109.

Romani population but aimed at the Lemkos and the Poles; however, the Roma found it impossible to live in such depopulated and deserted, almost abandoned villages. The Roma from Płonna followed their neighbours to the Recovered Territories. The family of Stefan Dymiter moved to western Poland, via Zgorzelec and Słupsk, heading for Silesia (by then without Corroro's father, Jan). Corroro, his mother Anastazja and his older brother finally settled in Kowary. In fact, at the beginning the family had been even larger: Corroro had a twin brother who was lost during the Second World War while his older sister drowned while they were still in Płonna. In Kowary, Anastazja found a new partner – Władysław Huczko, also a Rom. Upon arrival in Kowary, Corroro was already a young man and he soon fell in love with Stefania Siwak (1936–78) and fathered a son, Ryszard Siwak (called Maniek).²⁷ Corroro's son did not become a musician, although – according to relatives and acquaintances – he was very musical, often whistling well-known tunes.²⁸ Apparently, Corroro wanted his son to play the guitar, and even presented him with one, but otherwise did not invest in his son's musical education.²⁹ In the 1960s the young family's standard of living was quite basic, with Corroro earning money by playing the violin in musical bands; Stefania later worked cleaning the streets. In Kowary, there were a number of local "Gypsy bands" that also included Roma from the eastern part of Poland, who actively cultivated their musical traditions.³⁰ These Kowary-based bands often travelled by train and bus to perform in Jelenia Góra or Wrocław. They also visited Kraków, even though it meant a round trip of some 400 kilometres. Because of that inconvenience, with time increasingly fewer musicians from Kowary went to Kraków. Finally, only Corroro found himself playing in Kraków, in a band made up mainly of Romani musicians from Nowa Huta.

Settling in Kraków

As noted above, the attitude towards such "Gypsy bands" was becoming more welcoming in Kraków in the 1970s, thanks to Piotr Płatek and his Teatr Regionalny. At that time Corroro could also afford longer stays there without having to return to Kowary. This was because Janusz Huczko, a relative of Corroro's mother's partner, owned a flat in one of the new districts. Corroro could always count on board and lodging at the Kraków flat, but his visits were not officially registered (as was obligatory even

27 Interview with Bronisław Suchy (Rom from Kowary, currently president of the local Roma association; as a young boy he knew Dymiter, and his father Jacek Suchy played the guitar with Dymiter in Kowary and Kraków) by Paweł Lechowski, 28 November 2019.

28 Interview with Irena Kawalek.

29 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

30 Jerzy Ficowski, *Cyganie na polskich drogach* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), 201.

for temporary stays under communism). Huczko persistently refused to acknowledge Corroro as a lawful resident of the flat, causing some minor problems with the authorities.³¹

Although living in Kraków, Corroro still had his permanent address in Kowary (actually he changed the addresses several times), and he still visited his relatives, bringing presents and presumably also money. His life was split between the family home in Kowary and Kraków, where his professional life was developing. By now he was a member of a band which consisted mainly of Nowa Huta Romani musicians who relied on Corroro as the first violinist. The ensemble usually comprised a bass player, a guitarist and an accordion player, although that line-up could vary, depending on the availability of musicians. In the 1970s, and especially in the following two decades, the band performed at the most prestigious and frequented spots in the heart of the city, Floriańska Street and the main square. In winter especially they preferred to keep closer to Sukiennice, whose Renaissance arcades offered some shelter. Corroro's band was sufficiently respected to be given priority by other street bands; no one else dared to occupy their favourite location at 28 Floriańska Street, opposite a shoe shop with large windows and comfortable sills on which listeners could sit. (The modernist building was demolished and later rebuilt in a similar style, and nowadays hosts a restaurant). While from the perspective of street buskers the choice of the spot to play is always of strategic importance, Floriańska Street, a high-footfall area, offers the best potential for attracting listeners. It provides good acoustics, with no sources of extraneous noise (there are no churches, schools or the like), and the place has never been stigmatized by a negative reputation. On the contrary, it marked the beginning of the so-called Royal Route leading to historic landmarks. Connecting the railway station to the city centre, it was a popular thoroughfare for tourists and locals alike.

Corroro's Musical Style

Performing in the very centre of the city, Corroro's band inserted itself into the urban sonic landscape, offering a repertoire which reflected the traditional preferences of *Zigeunerkapellen*, while at the same time demonstrating the predilections of individual musicians, including Corroro. Three main groups of the most commonly performed compositions can be distinguished. The first includes compositions associated with the sound of the "Gypsy violin" or, even more broadly, with the stereotype of "Gypsy music" or culture, such as Vittorio Monti's "Csárdás" (1904) and tunes taken from operettas featuring Romani heroes. Another group is made up of familiar tunes popularized by the radio and well-known performers, notably romantic Russian songs like "Óči čjórnye". The last group consists of compositions with jazz overtones, such as George Gershwin's standard

31 Hand-written declaration by Janusz Huczko dated 19 January 1996.



Fig. 30 The cover of a CD from 1992 featuring Corroro's music. (Paweł Lechowski)

"The Man I Love". Corroro must have enjoyed and been inspired by the music of Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli for he performed their hits, including "Sweet Georgia Brown".³²

He disliked being asked to play "Gypsy stuff" but nevertheless always accommodated the demands of the listeners. While he was still living in Kowary, he took part in the customary Christmas carolling; accompanied by a guitarist and an accordionist (or the tambourine), plus a person collecting money in a box or a hat, he would walk around Kowary and the surrounding villages playing traditional carols on his violin.³³ That was a Romani version of the popular ceremony, still customary in various regions of Poland in the period following Christmas, in which musicians and singers dress up – for example, as the devil or as a "Gypsy" (!) – put on animal masks and carry around a big star made of paper on a long stick while performing carols. Wandering from house to house, they not only sing but also improvise dramatic scenes in return for money. However, contemporaries remember that the Romani band from Kowary never wore costumes and never actually sang carols, but performed them as purely instrumental arrangements.

In Kraków, Corroro's repertoire included a variety of compositions, and in the early 1990s – with the band Romano Drom – he recorded two albums

32 Licencja poetycka (pseudonym), "Próba ze Stefanem skrzypkiem", *Licencja poetycka*, <https://licencjapoetycka.home.blog/2019/06/05/proba-ze-stefanem-skrzypkiem/> (accessed 29 January 2020). One of the witnesses claimed that Corroro played jazz as smoothly as *czardases*.

33 Interview with Jerzy Jakubow (Kowary dweller, a Polish artist who had memories of Kowary from the 1960s) by Paweł Lechowski, 29 November 2019.

entitled *Melodie i piosenki cygańskie* [Gypsy Songs and Melodies] 1 and 2.³⁴ With time, audiences learned to enjoy Corro's music without asking for specific compositions, mesmerized by his unique performance style rather than the repertoire itself. For Corro's style was unique; he even held the violin in a very unusual way, vertically, treating it almost like a cello. He held the bow in his left hand. Corro's technique was also unusual in that he often used his nails to scratch the strings, with the bow left oddly loose. The sound of his violin was not powerful, but intimate, especially when covered by the everyday noise of the street. Passers-by intrigued by the sound of the violin had to stop to listen, for the music, although audible, was far from being intrusive. Corro never tried to impose his musical presence on the street, avoiding the practice of literally drumming the tune into the ears of passers-by. The band never used amplifiers, which were rarely if ever encountered in the streets of communist cities (too expensive). What attracted attention was Corro's outstanding, truly virtuosic technique; he preferred solutions which demanded precision of performance even if they were rather quiet, and which were best heard and admired in silence. He often enriched the passages of well-known tunes with high notes – flageolets and two-note harmonies – but never applied embellishments in excess. On the contrary, Corro would often simplify certain parts in order to juxtapose them with more elaborate passages.

As a typical Romani musician, Corro played every stanza differently, improvising and often swiftly moving from one tune to another, creating thus a hotchpotch of various melodic, harmonic or rhythmic ideas. His performances featured several compositions presented in the form of a medley, a potpourri of the most popular tunes. Although he was never recognized as a composer, Corro's ingenuity was manifest in his ability to produce creative elaborations and idiosyncratic arrangements of the repertoire he chose to perform. To a certain degree he thus co-authored his own music, since – being blind from birth – he could never read scores and only played by ear. Furthermore, he needed to rely on his musical memory to reproduce compositions he had heard on the radio or from other sources. Perhaps that is the reason why Corro was happy to perform solo, as his creativity was then unconstrained by the accompanying band. Yet he also felt at ease playing with his *Zigeunerkapelle* as well as other bands, as attested by his concerts given with the Kraków-based jazz ensemble Old Metropolitan Band or with the renowned Polish jazz musician Tomasz Stańko.³⁵

34 These were actually cassettes produced by Gamma, numbers G-1-1 and G-102. The recordings took place in 1992 in the studio at the KTO theatre. The band comprised: Stefan Dymiter – violin, Mirosław Mirca – accordion, Zbigniew Mirca – accordion, Janusz Huczko – guitar, Zbigniew Dunka – guitar, Aleksander Gabor – double bass.

35 *Oddech*, TV programme about the music of Tomasz Stańko featuring Corro, 1984, video, length 17:23, unit number 197895, Archives of Polish Television.

When unleashing his musical imagination, Corroro did not shock for he did not break any rules; nor did he contest the instrument's limitations or fight against musical clichés. That was never his aim, since he was not judged as a concert hall performer striving for flawless execution of the written notes in the shape envisaged by a composer. Corroro did not aim to perform the most technically difficult masterpieces, but assumed the role of a street entertainer – an enchanter proffering a perfect musical performance.³⁶ Like most Romani performers, he was less interested in fidelity to the composer's intentions (of which he would have been unaware) than in the emotional message conveyed by the pieces he chose to play. Hence improvisation became crucial for his live performances, alongside the small gestures and other "actions involved in the total context of the performance" whose overall value resided in the creativity that gives "meaning to music in each moment" of the performance.³⁷ Corroro's engagement with the music – his immersion in it, and devotion to it – was visible during such performances: he always kept his eyes closed, but his face would brighten and he would genuinely beam when playing.

Corroro was not endowed with singular abilities beyond the comprehension of the audience.³⁸ Consequently, his performance hinged neither on prestidigital skills nor on physical agility³⁹ – his disability meant that he was not even able to hold the violin properly but leant it on his chest. He did not demonstrate virtuosic effects: vibrato, quick changes of position or spectacular use of the bow. Rather, the secret of the impression he made on the public was the very intimacy of his contact with the instrument: when he played, Corroro and his violin constituted a unity. Observing and listening to him play was thus a voyeuristic act: one was watching him sharing his life with his instrument. In an almost metaphysical sense, the violin was Corroro's best friend, virtually linking him with his family back in Kowary. The symbolic function which the violin played in his life was consolidated when his older brother died in prison, especially as it was he who had originally taught Corroro to play the instrument.⁴⁰

Corroro's Disability

Corroro was missing a part of his body (his left leg), and it could be said that the violin played the role of a substitute. While the violin was obviously not a prosthesis for the lost leg, it served as an extension of his existence as

36 Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 140.

37 Goehr, *The Quest for Voice*, 151.

38 Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 198.

39 Irving Pichel, "In Defense of Virtuosity", *The Quarterly of Film and Television* 6, no. 3 (1952): 228–34 (here 229).

40 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

a human being, even as an additional part of his tiny body. This hypothesis is borne out by Corroro's attitude towards his violin: he loathed to part with it, and when he was hospitalized in the early 1990s he argued fiercely with the medical personnel to be allowed to keep his violin by his side.⁴¹

Corroro was very small (no taller than 150 cm, and by some accounts only 140).⁴² He was born blind (*koro* means "blind" and *kororo* "a little blind person" in the Romani language). In his twenties he had his left leg amputated. Eyewitnesses remember that when he was still living in Kowary, and being probably a little tipsy, he fell down the stairs together with his companion-guide.⁴³ Although the other man did not suffer at all, Corroro broke his leg so badly that he needed hospital treatment. Due to severe complications, the doctors decided on the operation. Initially Corroro used a prosthesis and had crutches to move around; usually two companions helped him to walk. Later, he was usually seen in a wheelchair (even before that, he had preferred to play sitting down). His health proved to be so problematic that, according to gossip, he also had trouble with his hands, and was rumoured to have had polio as a child.⁴⁴ His condition – fragile bones prone to breaking, bow legs from an early age, short stature and other problems – may have been genetic (possibly connected with the disorder known as brittle bone disease, although that was never diagnosed). In fact, his twin brother was also born blind.

Because of his permanent health issues, Corroro required the constant care of the members of his band or of his (remote) family; it was not unusual to see him in the streets of Kraków being carried like a double bass, or pushed in his wheelchair. The image of Corroro as a runt in need of protection was reinforced by his shabby appearance; while he sported a black moustache in his youth, as he got older he grew a rather scruffy greyish beard. He usually wore a suit, and even in severe Polish winters he avoided warm coats – which made him look even more pitiful to passers-by. Corroro himself actually preferred lounge jackets because they helped him to hold the violin; he would stick the C rib of the violin onto a coat-tail so that the fabric supported the weight of the instrument. That unusual placement of the instrument – so close to the body – not only made Corroro distinctive, but also reinforced the idea that the violin was an integral part of him. His overall appearance, based on a "culturally stigmatized bodily difference",⁴⁵ clearly defied the popular image of the virtuosi, who usually

41 Interview with Grzegorz Kościński (music editor at Polish TV, Kraków branch in the years 1986–2001) by Anna G. Piotrowska, 10 February 2020.

42 Rom Kowarski, "W Kowarach zagrali Stefanowi ...", *Romano Atmo* 6, no. 48 (2013): 25.

43 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

44 Various accounts in private communication offered by witnesses to Paweł Lechowski.

45 Joseph Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (2006): 113–84 (here 120).

boasted exceptional manual dexterity, shocking audiences with their purely mechanical abilities.⁴⁶

The difference represented by Corroro was rooted in presumptions stemming from “a system predicated on able-bodied ideals of independence, strength, control, self-mastery, and struggle”.⁴⁷ Street musicians, especially those whose main job was to attract the audience, were expected to play “at the very edge of technique, at risk, what one scarcely imagined could be played”.⁴⁸ While virtuosity was understood as a demonstration of physical agility and fitness, the physical strength of performers would be almost taken for granted. As a visibly impaired instrumentalist, Corroro defied these expectations: he managed to establish a high position, achieving the status of virtuoso rather than being reduced to the role of a crippled beggar. The image of the beggar-musician was ossified and widespread in European culture, as for example in the 1855 one-act *bouffonerie musicale* by Jacques Offenbach *Les deux aveugles* [*The Two Blind Men*, alternatively *The Blind Beggars*], in which disabled musicians were shown as imposters and conmen. Bold as it was, the operetta only brought to the surface the common perception of street beggars and streets musicians, which had already featured in the 1728 hit *The Beggar's Opera*, adapted in 1928 as *Die Dreigroschenoper* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. The imperfect human body was often used in the realm of musical culture as a point of reference for the beauty and perfection of musical compositions (connected with the concept of the musical *opus perfectum*).

But Corroro's performances were far from immaculate: rather, they were spontaneous, often half-improvised, technically not perfect. Hence he could not serve as the model for the kind of account that might juxtapose the curse of his body with the perfection of his performance. His case seemed special as he combined the issue of disability as a very ambivalent category perceived in many different ways⁴⁹ with the problem of street music-making – associated with the pestering and begging which were particularly unwelcome in the public space under communism. As a result, Corroro was erased from public discussions; there were no press comments about his presence in the street and he was absent from musicological narratives, as if subject to a system that depended on “whether or not disability could be employed to strengthen the already accepted viewpoints”.⁵⁰

46 Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 199.

47 Catherine Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other’”, *American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 763–93 (here 764).

48 Joseph Kerman, *Concerto Conversation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 68.

49 See Straus, “Normalizing the Abnormal”, 119.

50 Anna G. Piotrowska, “Disabled Musicians and Musicology”, in *The Imperfect Historian: Disability Histories in Europe*, ed. Sebastian Barsch, Anne Klein and Pieter Verstraeteedman (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 2325–44 (here 237).

The Myth of a “Gypsy Fiddler”

In the light of musicological preoccupation with the concept of genius, the lack of interest in Corroro may nevertheless seem quite surprising. The fixation on geniuses which originated in the eighteenth century was only consolidated in the Romantic period, when the divine abilities of a few unruly, insubordinate individuals were glorified in many spheres, including the realm of music.⁵¹ Various mental defects vaguely described as madness, rather than physical weaknesses, came to be associated with that category.⁵² But the inclusion of references to a physical disability could also help create the image of genius by stressing heroism of character, despite bodily imperfections. Corroro’s bodily feebleness paradoxically only strengthened the idea of the unpredictable nature of human genius. His impairment could be compensated for, as his bodily difference was immediately transferred onto his musical activities as manifest, for example, in the way he held the instrument. Accordingly, it could be perceived as the stigma of genius. This was not a case of “the abnormal body” being “normalized”;⁵³ rather, Corroro’s abnormal body was in fact instrumental in building the legend of his exceptionality. Addressing the issue of Corroro’s looks and health, many non-Romani listeners who remembered his performances in Kraków emphasize his unusual appearance, calling him “Kadłubek” [little carcass].⁵⁴ At the same time, his blindness was often omitted from such comments as the failure of the sense of sight is often interpreted as an advantage in the case of musicians, prompting their sensitivity to the world of sounds.

Corroro was celebrated as a local genius because of the legend that already surrounded him during his lifetime – built by Romani and non-Romani alike. One of the elements of that growing myth was the recognition of Corroro as an autodidact. Being blind, he could not read a score, nor could he learn by observing other fiddlers perform. His only teacher was his older brother. He needed to memorize all the tunes and usually picked them up when listening to the radio, television or other bands. His musical predispositions were already recognized among the Roma in Kowary, where he often served as the first violinist. The Roma

51 Anna G. Piotrowska, “Modernist Composers and the Concept of Genius”, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 38 (2007): 229–46 (here 232–35).

52 See George Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978).

53 Straus, “Normalizing the Abnormal”, 118.

54 In a post by an anonymous user from 10 December 2013 the word ‘kadłubek’ (diminutive form of *kadłub*) was used. Capitalized and used as a proper name, it sounds rather odd in Polish, intimating some concern and incredulity about the state of the health of the person it is applied to, but it also carries an element of contempt. In the same post, Corroro is called a midget/dwarf: <https://www.opiekunki24.pl/forum/temat/1244/wzajemna-pomoc-na-wyjezdzie--4/page/87>.

claimed Corroro could play not only the violin, but also the guitar, the harp and even the piano, and enjoyed performing on these instruments whenever he had a chance.⁵⁵ It is difficult to confirm these stories, although they sound plausible; apparently Corroro was able to play all sorts of stringed instruments, but because of his physical condition he was never able to play wind instruments. Nevertheless, numerous accounts by Roma attest to how much Corroro was admired. Moreover, both Roma and non-Roma from his native Kowary remember him as a patient teacher, a mentor willing to share his musical knowledge with others.⁵⁶ Although Corroro did not leave any musical successors – pupils or imitators – he is remembered as a kind and generous person who enjoyed telling fairy tales to children when he visited Kowary.⁵⁷ When in Kraków, he was rather reserved and untalkative, but in the memory of his Kowary relatives and aficionados, he is transformed into the figure of a “good uncle”, outshining his physical impairment, if not his achievements as a violinist.

When Corroro was still active, most of the Romani musicians from Nowa Huta who had the privilege of knowing him wanted to perform with him. While in the 1990s it was already an honour to play in his band in Kraków, it was also a guarantee of earning money. It is difficult to say to what degree Corroro was interested in the financial aspect of busking. He could sense the nominal value of coins and banknotes with his fingertips, but was said to be (relatively) uninterested in money as long as he had his basic needs satisfied, especially when he was provided with his beloved cigarettes and some alcohol (he was not teetotal), and sometimes – for he was a widower from the 1980s – female visitors.⁵⁸ Unusually, despite being the first violinist of the band and its main pillar, he was not responsible for the finances of the ensemble.

Corroro wanted to be acknowledged as a musician, and he obviously enjoyed those moments when the public carefully listened, clapped enthusiastically and expressed their admiration, often by saying “well done, Stefan” or “Great, Stefan”. Many Roma from Nowa Huta insist that Corroro was said to have performed in the Philharmonic Hall in Kraków.⁵⁹ His name is not featured in the archives of the institution, because his performance was arranged by TV producers who wanted to shoot close-ups in the concert hall.⁶⁰

Corroro collaborated with various musicians and bands, like the Metropolitan Old Band, and he was admired and appreciated by professional musicians. One of the best-known anecdotes about him involves the

55 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

56 Interview with Irena Kawalek.

57 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

58 Interview with Bronisław Suchy.

59 Kowarski, “W Kowarach zagrali Stefanowi ...”.

60 Interview with Grzegorz Kościński.

famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin visiting Kraków. While walking in the old town, Menuhin stumbled upon Corroro and listened to him play. Stunned by his performance, Menuhin wanted to try Corroro's violin. Unfortunately, according to the story, he was unable to play it, because Corroro had adjusted the instrument to suit his needs only. Menuhin is said to have commented that even if "Stefan does not know Menuhin, Menuhin knows Stefan".⁶¹ The anecdote about Corroro's recognition by a world-famous violinist is still told today among the local Romani community, the details of the story constantly changing: for example, it is sometimes claimed that it was not Menuhin who wished to listen to him, and various other famous English-speaking violinists are named instead. In some versions of the story, it is Nigel Kennedy who, incidentally, had moved to Kraków before Corroro died.⁶² Corroro himself also bragged about playing in the street with renowned Polish musicians, like the excellent violinist Jan Konstanty Kulka.⁶³

In the many stories about Corroro there is a tendency to romanticize his life, whereas the reality was rather dull. In Kraków he lived in a flat with Janusz Huczko (who also played the guitar in the band) and Huczko's wife, who took care of Corroro's daily needs. His life was mythologized in his own time, his physical state being explained in several anecdotes touching on the loss of his leg. There was gossip, for example, that in Kowary the young Corroro was rejected by his beloved and in desperation he jumped out of the window, breaking his leg.⁶⁴ In another story (told by a Rom, Bazyli Demeter from Tarnów) even the police was involved.⁶⁵ According to Demeter, a militia officer (undercover agent) was informed that Corroro had been cruelly blinded by other Romani, who – having recognized his talent and ability to attract listeners – wanted to make him look even more miserable to increase his impact and to earn more money. The outraged officer decided to punish the wrongdoers, not only imprisoning them but also having them badly beaten to teach them a lesson. The incarcerated

61 Witold Korczyński says he was a witness. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv-vspKhPsoE>. See also Interview with Maciej Maleńczuk by Magda Wadowska, *Radio Kraków*, 12 September 2014, <http://www.radioKraków.pl/www/index.nsf/ID/KSZA-9NVC5Z>.

62 Jacek Kunikowski, "Cororo", in *Amare Roma. Nasi Romowie*, ed. Jacek Kunikowski (Kowary: Miejski Ośrodek Kultury w Kowarach, 2012), 69.

63 Interview with Grzegorz Kościński, confirmed also in private communication of the authors with other members of the Romani community from Nowa Huta. Jan Konstanty Kulka (born 1947) is one of the best-known violinists in Poland, and has released several albums. Younger Roma from Nowa Huta recall the older generation listening to these vinyl records and proudly declaring that they remembered Corroro playing with Kulka.

64 Interview with Jerzy Jakubow.

65 Private communication with Paweł Lechowski in the 1990s.

Roma blamed Corroro for their misfortune as – indirectly and involuntarily – he was the cause of their misery. When they were finally released from jail, in an act of barbaric revenge they played a cruel trick on him. One of them was staying in the same house, and asked Corroro to come downstairs, tricking him into walking out onto an unfenced balcony. The tragic story is pure fiction, but was stimulating the imagination of Corroro’s fans even during his lifetime.

Beyond these strategies of romanticizing Corroro and hailing him as a genius, he was also recognized for the authenticity of his music by other street musicians; these included Maciej Maleńczuk, who eventually broke into mainstream pop culture.⁶⁶ Corroro was asked to perform for the 1987 film *Sonata marymoncka* [Marymont Rhapsody] directed by Jerzy Ridan, with music by Józef Rychlik, and actually features in the film, performing in a musty, smoke-filled restaurant. The scene perfectly conveys the real situation of “Gypsy bands” active in communist Poland in the 1960s and 1970s. Another Romani band from Kowary was employed by Kraków-based director, Ryszard Czekala, to perform in his film *Zofia* (1976) – and although Corroro was not among the musicians, the film’s credits say that the band was led by the Dymiter brothers.

The legacy of Corroro is cherished in the twenty-first century; in 2012 a music festival was held in Kowary to commemorate him.⁶⁷ In Kraków many people still remember him, and the idea of having a sculpture of the violinist emerged in the late 2010s. There is a Facebook fan page offering unique pictures and recordings.⁶⁸ There are also some video recordings on YouTube. Corroro became an urban legend, an element of the collective memory of Kraków natives who not only welcomed him into the city, but also seemed to appropriate him and his music, often addressing him by his first name. While such manifestations of admiration and affection responded to the tactics employed by the violinist to communicate with his public (he never openly acknowledged comments, just smiling and continuing to play), they also attest that Stefan Dymiter – as a street musician – was perceived as an integral part of the city’s identity. Together with his band, Corroro continued the tradition of the *Zigeunerkapellen* as providers of music in the urban territories of Central Europe, often assuming the role of agents of cultural transfer, and urban music-making, as practised by Dymiter and his band, can thus be assessed in terms of the co-creation of communal life. In the public zone of the old town of Kraków, both citizens and tourists were exposed to the presence of the Roma and their music, becoming accustomed to their company, perhaps learning to appreciate that component of the city. Savouring the music, or actively

66 Interview with Maciej Maleńczuk by Magda Wadowska.

67 Kowarski, “W Kowarach zagrali Stefanowi ...”; Interview with Irena Kawalek.

68 <https://pl-pl.facebook.com/StefanDymiter/>.

participating in these performances (standing and admiring, applauding, clapping, commenting), the predominantly non-Romani public partook of a mutual musical experience. In communist times, when unorganized gatherings in public were discouraged by the authorities, Corro's concerts provided a unique opportunity for citizens to meet. Thanks to Corro, the renowned Floriańska Street thus gained another dimension as a civic platform enabling the exchange of opinions, facilitating the flow of information, influencing fashions, possibly impacting the aesthetic preferences of the listeners.

Enjoying Corro's performance provided a pretext for meetings and conversations enriching the urban "contact zone". The engagement of Roma and non-Roma in the urban musical practice which is one of the hallmarks of life in the city fostered cultural diversity and intercultural communication, often non-verbal, that influenced socio-spatial relations in the old heart of Kraków.⁶⁹ This was one way in which the city resisted the multifarious forces leading to the creation of "fragmented and divided"⁷⁰ urban space, in communist times and especially during the transition period following the fall of communism in 1989. Listeners coming from different walks of life had a chance to integrate around the talented violinist and to come together – even for a short, shared moment – as his admirers and protectors (Corro's visible disability made him look very vulnerable). Consequently, encounters with the most famous Romani band performing in the city centre could intrigue and prompt interest not only in the music performed by the Roma, but also in the Roma themselves. Of course, it could also be treated as a nuisance – an indispensable but unwelcome element of the city's life. Whatever the attitude of individual passers-by, Corro and his band became essential elements of the Floriańska Street scenery – a *pars pro toto* of Kraków's *couleur locale*, as an integral part of Kraków's urban folklore. Years after Corro's death, he is still remembered – not only by Kraków residents but also the numerous visitors to the city in the 1980s or 1990s who had a chance to see and/or hear him as they walked from the main railway station to the historical centre. The story of Stefan Dymiter is significant in many aspects: for the history of the city of Kraków, for Romani musicians, for non-Romani street musicians, for the disabled. It is a multidimensional and inspirational story of a tiny Romani man with a huge talent.

69 Cf. Mary J. Hickman, "Differences, Boundaries, Community: The Irish in Britain", in *The City Cultures Reader*, ed. Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall and Iain Borden (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 183–89 (here 188).

70 Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, "City Differences", in *A Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 251–60 (here 257).

Part Four

Circus People and Showmen

Introduction

Romani Groups in the Public Space of the Circus and Other Showgrounds

Malte Gasche

For centuries, the circus was an immensely popular form of entertainment. Featuring performers from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds, circuses and other showgrounds were cosmopolitan and mobile spaces able to cross many borders, not only those of cities, towns and villages but also national, ethnic and social boundaries. In this sense, they served as arenas for culture transfer and portals for the display, verification and acceptance of otherness. European circuses and related attractions have often been run by people from social and ethnic minorities. In particular, many circus artists and operators of mainly small circuses and similar shows have had a Romani – Sinti, Roma or Yenish – background. Moira Orfei, for example, a well-known circus and film star of Sinti origin, founded the famous Italian circus of the same name. The most important and wealthiest circus dynasty of Sinti origin, however, was and still is the French Bouglione family, who once featured bears and goats in their performances and today run the legendary Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, one of the most prestigious circus venues in the world.

But in order to grasp the role that circuses have played in cultural exchanges and the ways in which their members have engaged with their respective national societies, it is important to recognize not only the

internal cohesion of the circus milieu but also its ethnic variety and the multiplicity of its activities. These all developed in interaction with the expectations of audiences and shifting pressures of business, as well as with long-standing social codes that gave travelling performers a kind of outsider status. Ambulant entertainment enterprises were by no means ethnically closed. In fact, newcomers from the sedentary population were continually joining their operations, and thus came to be categorized as “Gypsies” and subject to the same prejudices, suspicions and legal restrictions with which majority societies responded to people of Romani ethnicity. It is in this sense that we refer to the world of the circus as a *milieu* whose members are exposed to similar conditions. The chapters in this fourth part of the volume offer examples of the sometimes complicated consequences of this for articulations of identity and forms of solidarity. At the same time, they keep a focus on ethnic Romani families within the milieu, the particular challenges they have faced and the contributions they have made.

As marginalized groups in society, members of the ambulant entertainment community are always compelled to cultivate and practice ingenuity: to earn a living and to ensure societal security. These aspects are crucial to an understanding of the operations and motivations of these people with their genuinely pan-European networks and places of work in the past and the present. One consequence of this is that the range of activities undertaken by circus families in Europe is broad and not limited to the classic circus arena. Circus families also used to earn their living, and continue to do so, with various fairground attractions, and a notable number of circus families were operating travelling cinemas at the beginning of the twentieth century. Another consequence is an ambivalent relationship with state authority – more often an instrument of popular hostility than a protector of the rights of minorities – which has both made them the object of persecution and provided them with skills of evasion, adaptability and improvisation that have enabled resistance.

Another consequence of the mobile nature of the milieu is a relative lack of documentation of circus and fairground families who, for generations, have often simply passed through and left behind no trace except for memories, posters and a few flyers. Paradoxically, the records of official harassment and persecution, climaxing in the arrest, internment and deportation of circus and fairground people by the Nazi authorities and their allies, taken alongside the compensation claims of the victims, often provide first insights into family networks and everyday lives. However, these materials represent a morally questionable collection of sources. At the same time, the security strategy of marginalized communities, based on cross-generational experience, may involve a conscious decision to share no knowledge about their internal history with a larger audience, and this also helps to explain the lack of information available to the public about the ambulant entertainment milieu. For the studies in Part Four it therefore proved crucial to involve community members with their narratives and reflections. A participatory

approach helped to give a voice to people who have had few such opportunities and who would have otherwise remained silent and anonymous. This was possible and successful because we were still able to meet first-hand witnesses for the periods covered by these chapters.

The following studies proceed in chronological order. Chapter 10 discusses travelling cinemas run by families of Romani origin from the circus and fairground milieu in the first half of the twentieth century as harbingers of the future. Chapter 11 explores the participation of members of the ambulant entertainment milieu and the Romani involvement in resistance activities against the National Socialist regime. Chapter 12 examines circus acts with a Wild West theme and other shows as narrow gateways to exotic otherness and rural suppliers of knowledge up to the present day, focusing on an extended circus family with perceivable bonds to the Romani culture and milieu.

History and Milieu

In Western Europe, members of the circus and fairground milieu with a Romani background are mostly Sinti, known as Manouche in France. Among the Sinti families, only a select few can trace an ancient line of tradition to the jugglers and animal tamers of the Middle Ages. In fact, members of this minority generally earned their living as traders and wageworkers, with many also serving as mercenary soldiers until the early modern period. Changes in military organizations and the return to citizen armies forced many Sinti families to look for new sources of income, for instance, in the field of entertainment.

Until the persecution of the Jewish people under National Socialism, Jewish itinerant entertainers shared not only the same milieu, but also married into Sinti circus families, forming a close and sustained relationship with them.¹ In the early modern period, particularly in the nineteenth century, a third group, the Yenische (a term used by both Yenische and others), became part of the travelling entertainment milieu.² Little is known

1 Ulrich F. Opfermann, “‘Fahrendes Volk’. Binnenmigration in und aus dem alemanischen Raum im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert”, in *Menschen in Bewegung. Lebenswelten im ländlichen Raum. Historische Erkundungen in Mittel- und Südbaden*, ed. Juliane Geike and Andreas Haasis-Berner (Heidelberg: Regionalkultur, 2019), 189–235 (here 230).

2 Wolfgang Feuerhelm, *Polizei und “Zigeuner”. Strategien, Handlungsmuster und Alltagstheorien im polizeilichen Umgang mit Sinti und Roma* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1987), 9; Andreas Hundsalz, *Soziale Situation der Sinti in der Bundesrepublik – Endbericht – Lebensverhältnisse Deutscher Sinti unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der eigenen Aussagen und Meinungen der Betroffenen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 139.

about the origins of this heterogeneous group, which emerged from the sedentary populations of Central and Western Europe, existed for generations on the social and economic fringes of the majority society and was forced into vagabond poverty. Under National Socialism, the Yenische often suffered persecution as “asocials”.³ As a result of these experiences, they remain cautious about revealing their identity, and still constitute an invisible, marginalized community, although Swiss Yenische and Sinti have formed a single umbrella association, the Radgenossenschaft der Schweizer Landstrasse [roughly: Rolling Confederation of the Swiss Highways], which is a member of the International Romani Union. However, they are still part of the entertainment space, as owners of smaller travelling circuses or fairground attractions. Finally, it has been possible for individuals from the sedentary population with a peasant or merchant family background to enter the milieu and then establish artistic or circus dynasties. Here, too, marriages with established Sinti families are documented, as are examples of conversion to Judaism.⁴

Members of the milieu also called “travelling people” (*fahrendes Volk* in German or *gens du voyage* in French), who often refer to themselves as “travellers” (*Fahrende, Reisende, voyageurs*), might have their own home and only be on the move from spring to autumn. It was also typical for these families to gather in one place. The German Alsenborn is one locality known for its concentration of residents from the circus and fairground business. A report published in the newsletter of a Romani organization mentions the circus families Althoff, Bügler, Endres, Frank, Schramm, Thys, Traber and Wimmer in Alsenborn, adding “among them there were also some relationships with Sinti”.⁵ The closeness of the travelling entertainment milieu, irrespective of the specific line of work, is expressed in a shared and centuries-old secret language, the *Komödiantensprache* [language of the comedians]. Its speakers also call the language *Yenisch* or *Zirkussprache* [circus language]. In addition to a French influence, the idiom contains words from Yiddish and Romanes, the language of the Sinti.⁶ However, since the 1980s studies have identified differentiations within the ambulant entertainment scene, including evidence that its members particularly maintain a distance from families marked with the stigma of being “Gypsies”.⁷ A

3 Andrew D’Arcangelis, *Die Jenischen – verfolgt im NS-Staat 1934–1944. Eine sozio-linguistische und historische Studie* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2006).

4 Opfermann, “Fahrendes Volk”, 204–05.

5 Rüdiger Benninghaus, “Von Elefanten und Löwen – Artisten in Alsenborn/ Pfalz”, *Nevepe – Rundbrief des Rom e.V.* 21 (2008): 5–8 (here 8).

6 Michael Faber, *Schausteller: Volkskundliche Untersuchungen einer reisenden Berufsgruppe im Kölner-Bonner Raum* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1982), 151–77.

7 Julia Grasmück, *Artisten in Alsenborn. Von Mitbürgern und Aussenseitern. Sozialhistorische Mikroanalyse einer mobilen Bevölkerungsgruppe* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Volkskunde in Rheinland-Pfalz e.V., 1993).

recent micro-study on the Bonameser Straße caravan site near Frankfurt am Main confirmed this, and also observed that the Yenische were at the bottom of this hierarchy on this site.⁸ The travelling entertainment milieu is thus anything but ethnically homogeneous and even shows aspects of hierarchical structures.

Position in Society

The Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933 brought major changes for the entertainment milieu in Europe. In Germany, Jewish-owned circuses were “Aryanized” and Jewish performers were no longer allowed to display their skills at cultural events. In addition, Nazi directives had an impact on the content of performances. Costumes, background music and stage names had to conform to certain “German-Aryan” standards. Under the extended terms of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, not only Jews but also “Gypsies, Negroes and their mongrel offspring” were identified as being of “alien blood” and ineligible for the rights of citizens. Until then, the German police and other state authorities had a broadly social concept of “Gypsies”. Policy was directed against them as part of the wider category of itinerant groups, including travelling entertainers easily suspected of vagrancy and a potential burden on the national community. The authorities were more concerned with prohibiting a peripatetic lifestyle than with ideas associated with racial thinking. With the Nuremberg Laws legal equality came to be restricted to a racially defined community.⁹

During the war, the Race Hygiene Research Unit, established in 1936 and led by Robert Ritter, began to collect material about show people and circus families; it started making notes in 1944.¹⁰ The original aim of Ritter’s institute was to identify and racially assess all German and Austrian “Gypsies”, and his pseudo-scientific research came to be formally integrated into the official policy which eventuated in genocide.¹¹ People from the circus milieu who had a Sinti background, including members of the Frank, Lagrin, Lemoine, Spindler and Traber families, faced persecution

8 Sonja Keil, *Soziale Wirklichkeit und Geschichte des Wohnwagenstandplatzes Bonameser Straße in Frankfurt am Main. Prozesse unkonventioneller Habitusbildung in einer besonderen Lebenswelt* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2018), 179–82.

9 Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

10 I would like to thank Martin Holler for the information about the Institute’s notes on artist and circus families, based on the records at Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 165-123.

11 Martin Luchterhandt, “Robert Ritter und sein Institut. Vom Nutzen und Benutzen der ‘Forschung’”, in *Zwischen Erziehung und Vernichtung. Zigeunerpolitik und Zigeunerforschung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 321–28.

ranging from forced sterilization to internment in concentration camps.¹² In occupied France, the Bouglione family were allowed to continue presenting their shows at the Cirque d'Hiver; somehow, the Nazi authorities never persecuted them. It may be that their Italian name helped camouflage their origins.¹³ Other French circus families with a Sinti background met a different fate. In October 1940, a decree of the German occupation authorities ordered the internment of all "Gypsies" in the northern occupied zone of France. The inmates were subjected to harsh conditions and suffered from malnutrition. Internments also occurred in Vichy France, in the southern part of the country, though to a much lesser extent.¹⁴ However, within Nazi-controlled Europe, circuses as cosmopolitan and mobile spheres could also offer refuge to those persecuted by the Nazi regime and its allies.

After 1945, suspicion and discrimination against members of the mobile entertainment milieu persisted. In West Germany, the physician Hermann Arnold came into possession of Ritter's material and conducted extensive research into the 1980s with travelling groups, especially circus families, unpopular outsiders to mainstream society whom he diagnosed as both itinerant by nature and congenitally work-shy. He defended not only the main ideological views of Ritter's Race Hygiene Research Unit but also its staff in court on several occasions. Arnold, who described himself as a specialist in social medicine, advised numerous West German public institutions on "Gypsy issues".¹⁵

In the early 1950s, the East German state authorities expropriated the small circus "Luxor" run by the Weisheit family, famous for their high-wire artistry, in which the Traber family also performed. Family head Lorenz Weisheit had collected coins in a marmalade jar to survive the winter season but was then charged with the offence of hoarding small change (which was in short supply at the time). Thereafter the family had to build a new existence out of nothing. But in 1963 they were accused of "dilettantism" (productions devoid of artistic merit) and banned from performing. In 1979, the East German police suspected the family of having stolen valuable paintings from Friedenstein Castle in Gotha. The investigators considered the theft an acrobatic break-in and accordingly suspected the Gotha-based

12 Pia Maria Medusa Lagrin, *Lebensreise Erinnerungen an ein Leben auf dem Drahtseil* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2011), 77–78, 83; Opfermann, "Fahrendes Volk", 208–32.

13 Rosa Bouglione, *Un mariage dans la cage aux lions: la grande saga du cirque Bouglione* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Michel Lafon, 2011), 158–71.

14 Shannon Fogg, "Assimilation and Persecution: An Overview of Attitudes towards Gypsies in France", in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration*, ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 27–43.

15 Julia von dem Knesebeck, *The Roma Struggle for Compensation in Post-War Germany* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011), 228–29.

Weisheits. However, under the direction of Lorenz's son Rudolf, the troupe began to receive cultural and entertainment awards, and in 1984 Rudolf Weisheit was awarded the prestigious Art Prize of the German Democratic Republic.¹⁶

The pattern of discrimination is similar across Europe. When the Danish government established the Ministry of Culture in 1961, all performing arts with the exception of the circus were transferred to this new ministry. Circus issues were left to the Ministry of Justice, and generally handled by the police, the courts and the prison service.¹⁷ In France, regulations imposing special identity cards on itinerants and people of no fixed address (including ambulant performers and tradesmen), first introduced in 1912 and reformed but not abolished in 1969, were finally lifted only in 2017.¹⁸

Given the cross-generational experience of stigmatization, oppression and persecution, it is unsurprising that circus and fairground families have tended to mistrust state institutions and maintain a safe distance from members of the majority population, whom they call *private*.¹⁹ Not every circus or fairground family subjected to persecution during the Nazi era wants to speak up about these experiences or has included experiences of persecution in their family histories. Different narratives can exist within the same family. Within the Spindler family, for example, one branch has been discussing their experiences during the Second World War, while other parts of the family prefer to remain silent on the subject.²⁰ Moreover, not every family is publicly committed to their minority background. The performance of the Johannes Traber family in the courtyard of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg in 2011 represents such a commitment. After completing her performance, the high-wire artist Anna Traber received a bouquet from Romani Rose, the chairperson of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. In the accompanying press interviews, family head Johannes Traber mentioned the family's Sinti origins and spoke about his grandmother

16 Katharina Beck, "Geschwister Weisheit – 120 Jahre Seiltanz aus Gotha", *MDR.DE*, 19 February 2020, <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/ddr-artistik-hochseil-weisheit-100.html> (accessed 10 April 2020); Dietmar and Gislea Winkler, *Menschen zwischen Himmel und Erde. Aus dem Leben berühmter Hochseilartisten* (Berlin: Henschel, 1988), 280.

17 Anders Enevig, *Cirkus I Danmark*, Vol. I (Lyngby: Dansk Historisk Håndbogsforlag, 1981), 14.

18 Andrea L. Smith, "Crisis France: Covert Racialization and the Gens du Voyage", in *Messy Europe: Crisis, Race and Nation-State in a Postcolonial World*, ed. Kristin Loftsdóttir, Andrea L. Smith and Brigitte Hipfl (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2018), 171–95.

19 Christian Efing, *Jenisch unter Schaustellern. Mit einem Glossar aus schriftlichen Quellen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 109.

20 Opfermann, "Fahrendes Volk", 210–11.

Mathilde Winterstein, whom he described as having come from a famous Sinti family of performers.²¹ Yet in 2015, a Sinto from Berlin Pankow, who grew up in a small family circus and later had his own fairground attractions, wanted to remain anonymous when he was interviewed by a student project group. Even in our own day, acknowledging Romani origins can be risky, not only for business. The Sinti interviewee told the students about racist attacks on him and his uncle, attacks which had ended fatally for the latter.²²

Harbingers of the Future

Circus and fairground people who operated travelling cinemas, many among them with a Romani background, played a major role in the dissemination and establishment of film as a new entertainment format when public film screening became technically possible in the late nineteenth century. The soon-to-be successful stationary cinema, which emerged around 1905, would have been impossible without the pioneering efforts of the ambulant entertainment branch.²³ The Biddall, Leroux, Loiseau and Maximoff families portrayed in Chapter 10, all of Romani origin, who ran travelling cinemas throughout France in the first half of the twentieth century, had verifiable family ties to the circus and fairground milieu.

Stationary variety shows, whose operators had also discovered the lucrative potential of film screenings, and ambulant cinemas divided the market between them. While stationary variety shows catered to the middle and upper classes in larger cities, travelling cinemas served all social classes in smaller towns and villages. For decades, these mobile cinema presentations formed an integral part of cultural life in the rural areas of many European countries. In addition to cinema, artistic acts, magic performances and even lotteries, as described for the French scene in Chapter 10, were included. Although comedies and dramas were popular, the short films included documentaries of educational and patriotic value.²⁴ Yet, despite their cultural contributions and achievements, even operators of

21 Marc Mudrak, "Die Artisten-Familie Traber gehörte der Minderheit der Sinti an", *Schwäbisches Tageblatt*, 12 October 2011, <https://www.tagblatt.de/Nachrichten/Die-Artisten-Familie-Traber-gehört-der-Minderheit-der-Sinti-an-174800.html> (accessed 10 April 2020).

22 Johanna Strunge, "Ein in Berlin lebender Sinto berichtet", <http://sinti-roma.public-history.net/ein-in-berlin-lebender-sinto-berichtet> (accessed 10 April 2020).

23 Joseph Garncarz, "The Origins of Film Exhibition in Germany", in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 115; Raymond Gurême with Isabelle Ligner, *Interdit aux nomades* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2011).

24 Garncarz, "The Origins of Film Exhibition in Germany", 114.

travelling cinemas who were not ethnic outsiders were considered a threat by the majority population and the authorities, because of their mobility and unconventional way of life.²⁵

The spread of stationary cinemas from metropolitan areas to medium-sized and smaller towns led to a decline in the allure of travelling cinemas, and also in circus and variety shows. From 1910 onwards, manufacturers no longer advertised cinema tents for sale.²⁶ Stationary cinemas had prevailed, and the owners of travelling film presentations had no choice but to react to this change in the market. Some operators redirected their business to the countryside: until their arrest in 1940, the Leroux family travelled with their cinema in rural areas throughout northern France. But others simply gave up.²⁷ Nevertheless, ambulant cinema shows have not entirely disappeared from the fairground. For instance, Friedrich Bügler, a descendant of the well-known German circus and fairground dynasty of the same name,²⁸ is presently travelling with a 3D “Action Cinema”, where viewers, seated in moving chairs, can experience the sensation of wind and rain.²⁹

Resistance to National Socialism

Among the abiding stereotypes associated with Romani and travelling people is that they have no sense of responsibility to the wider community. Perhaps the most significant of the historical examples that refute this view is the role played by circus and fairground people with a discernible Romani background in resisting National Socialism, in Germany and later in occupied countries, which is the subject of Chapter 11. First, and most obviously, members of the milieu supported each other when they came under pressure from the Nazi authorities. For instance, Dominik Lagrin, a performer from a Sinti circus family in Germany, was able to go undercover as an equestrian at the Circus Belly.³⁰ The Bouglione family was able to help the Jewish circus family Pauwels survive the Holocaust by offering them refuge at the Cirque d’Hiver.³¹ Second, the community also helped

25 Julia Pinter, “Kinogeschichte des Burgenlandes von 1921 bis 1955” (Master’s thesis, University of Vienna, 2010), 37.

26 Anne Paech, “Zirkuskinematographien. Marginalien zu einer Sonderform des ambulanten Kinos”, *Kintop* 9 (2000): 84–85 (here 85).

27 Garncarz, “The Origins of Film Exhibition in Germany”, 118.

28 Georg Mohler, “Hundert Jahre Artistendorf Alsenborn. Auf- und Niedergang weltberühmter Zirkus- und Artistenfamilien”, *Der Komet* 68 (1950–51): 5–7 (here 5–6).

29 <https://www.gd-cinema.de> (accessed 30 May 2020).

30 Lagrin, *Lebensreise*, 83.

31 Ilse About, “Rosa Bouglione (2010–2018), in a Parisian Circus under German Occupation”, *Diverging Fates – Travelling Circus People in Europe during National*

people from outside the milieu suffering from racial or political persecution. In Essen-Segeroth, for example, boys from a Sinti family joined the local Edelweisspiraten, a youth opposition group, after the Nazi takeover. Their family, fairground people, hid a wanted member of the banned organization who was not a Sinto. Although the family's neighbours on the caravan site knew about the boy, no one revealed the hiding place to the authorities.³² Third, during the German occupation of Europe, their members supported or joined local resistance groups. French circus man Baptiste Esther, owner of a small family circus classified as a *nomade* by the French authorities and banned from travelling in 1940, made contact with a resistance formation in his neighbourhood. He participated in its supply network, providing and distributing food to several hideouts around Jeu-Maloches.³³ Fiore Innocenti, a member of an Italian Sinti family who earned their living with a merry-go-round before their internment in Prignano sulla Secchia in 1940, joined the Italian partisan movement in 1943.³⁴ After the war, government agencies in France and Italy officially confirmed Esther's and Innocenti's participation in resistance activities. Fourth, the marginalized milieu helped galvanize the will to resist among the majority population in occupied countries. The Bougliones dared to outwit the Nazi authorities by allowing Geo Sandry to produce circus pantomimes such as *Robin Hood*, into which he slipped political allusions, mostly conveyed by the clowns Alex and Zavatta.³⁵ After the successful landing of the Allied troops in southern France in August 1944, the director of the Danish Circus Miehé Dora Miehé Pfänner – her family were described as “Gypsies” until the beginning of the twentieth century³⁶ – opened the circus show wearing a red-and-white sash, the colours of the Danish flag, and a brooch she had received from the Danish king. The venue, a place where the Danish resistance had carried out a key operation the previous year, was decorated with Danish flags and laurel wreaths.³⁷ The above cases demonstrate that there was no lack of social consciousness or political engagement within the

Socialism, 31 March 2017, <http://www.divergingfates.eu/index.php/2017/03/31/rosa-bouglione-1910-in-a-parisian-circus-under-german-occupation> (accessed 10 April 2020).

32 Alfons Kenkmann, “‘Fahrtenstenze’ und ‘Edelweisspiraten’ – Die Erfahrungswelt jugendlicher Segerother Arbeiter in der NS-Zeit”, in *Essens wilder Norden. Segeroth – Ein Viertel zwischen Mythos und Stigma*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Michael Gaiglat (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1991), 28–34 (here 34).

33 Laurence Prempain and Bruna lo Biundo, “The Esther Family and Its Strategy to Survive WWII”, *Forgotten Cosmopolitans – Diverging Fates of Europe’s Circus People in the Wake of WWII*, 29 March 2019, <http://www.forgottencosmopolitans.eu/?p=447> (accessed 10 April 2020).

34 I would like to thank Paola Trevisan for this information.

35 About, “Rosa Bouglione”.

36 Enevig, *Cirkus I Danmark*. 252–54.

37 Jon Vedel, *Miehernes Cirkus* (Copenhagen: Cirkusbyens forlag, 1998), 104–05.

community. Chapter 11 explores the place of Romani travelling entertainers in the history of resistance during the Second World War, with a particular focus on the French case.

Observation, Ingenuity, and Cultural and Knowledge Production

Previous studies have paid scant attention to the contributions to knowledge and culture made by members of the ambulant entertainment milieu. Before the age of television and rise of mass tourism, the circus and other showgrounds played a leading role in providing audiences with experiences of the exotic and the marvellous. However, the ambulant entertainment milieu did more than simply offer amusement. With exotic performers and performances, authentic or fabricated, the shows it produced could open a window onto other cultures, spark or enhance individual hunger for experience and act as broadcasters of knowledge. Chapter 12 focuses on members of the German Bossle circus family, who have links to the Romani culture and milieu, and discusses their Cowboys and Indians show as a gateway to exotic otherness and the wider world.

The cost of assuming this function is that these shows unwittingly served to substantiate existing prejudices in society. But the story is more complicated: exotic performance can also be a strategy for obtaining security while hiding one's real origins behind a more respected form of otherness. While one member of the Bossle family could tell audiences about a Brazilian grandmother, others traced their ancestry to Blackfoot Indians. Moreover, playing with identities is also bound up with promoting the "product". Former Finnish circus artist and animal trainer Kalle "Caru" Nyman, who has a Roma family background, stated: "I changed my identities the way some people change their shirts. I was a Greek lion tamer, an Indian acrobat, or the mysterious Tarzan – who would have come to see an ordinary Gypsy boy from Karelia?"³⁸

Members of the ambulant entertainment community have not only learned to carefully follow developments in majority society and adapt to the changing tastes of their audiences, they also are used to devising new product ideas to make their living. For example, the Bouglione brothers did not invent the above-mentioned Wild West show. The Buffalo Bill exhibit was brought to Europe in 1897 and the Wild West theme was already established in the circus in the early twentieth century. Since audiences hungered for more of the same, the Bougliones, like other circus people, satisfied the desire for adventure and fuelled the European vision of the

38 Ritva Prinz, "Karjalaiskylästä Euroopan estradille", *Rengas*, 4 April 2014: 15–19 (here 18).

United States as a land of unlimited opportunities. When interest in the Wild West theme and similar popular and exotic topics declined in Europe in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, a new repertoire was needed. This niche was filled by numerous car stunt shows managed by families who came from the circus and fairground milieu, many of them with a Romani background. With the recent trend for exhibitions of dinosaurs, insects and reptiles that provide visitors with some background information about natural history, circus and fairground people like the Bossles are following the tradition and strategies of the nineteenth-century menageries, which competed with zoological gardens and the press to offer knowledge to the public at a low price and in an accessible format.³⁹ These communities learned to fuse information, instruction and entertainment seamlessly into a single product – a business model that persists to the present day.

39 Alfred Lehmann, *Zwischen Schaubuden und Karussells. Ein Spaziergang über Jahrmärkte und Volksfest* (Frankfurt am Main: Dr. Paul Schöpes, 1952), 150–51; Gisela Winkler, *Von fliegenden Menschen und tanzenden Pferden* (Gransee: Edition Schwarzdruck, 2015), 270–71.

Chapter 10

Travelling Cinema: When Roma Put the World within One's Grasp

Laurence Prempain

“It’s not a long-term prospect ... It’s more like a fairground profession. It can last six months, a year, maybe more, maybe less”.¹ In 1895, Louis Lumière is said to have uttered this sentence while presenting his latest invention, the cinematograph, to a small circle of professionals including scholars, photographers and specialized journalists. Even though there is no evidence that he actually made this statement, scholars still refer to it, something which is not in itself contradictory.² Cinema was a fairground profession, a popular attraction, before evolving into an industry and transmuting into the seventh art. Throughout this span of time, Romani families in Europe, along with other travelling people, helped build the future of cinema. The aim of this chapter is to present the cultural exchanges between audiences and Romani families that took place in France when the latter were touring with their travelling cinema. It opens up questions about the overall motivations of the Roma: aside from seeing the operation of cinemas as a source of livelihood, did they perhaps enjoy screening visions of alternative worlds, like Westerns, because they recognized the attraction of a countercultural challenge to the stability of bourgeois life? Did they, as a mobile people,

1 Félix Mesguich, *Tours de manivelle. Souvenirs d'un chasseur d'images* (Paris: Grasset, 1933).

2 James Naremore, *An Invention without a Future: Essays on Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014).

embrace cinema as a metaphoric loop, a story moving just as their lives moved? It is difficult to answer these questions, but the sources can tell us something about what the cinema meant to their lives and what impact the cinematic experience they offered had on the lives of audiences.

Historians were initially interested in cinema as an art, and dismissed the early years when it was (merely) a popular “attraction”.³ More recently, though, scholars have demonstrated that travelling showpeople played a very significant role in cinema’s development.⁴ Nevertheless, scholars rarely refer to the contribution of fairground showpeople, who included a number of Roma. As early as 1975, however, French local journalist and enthusiast Charly Grenon, who cooperated for over 40 years with *Inter-forain*, a journal dedicated to fairs, wrote a book on travelling cinemas in France, which enables us to identify some of the Romani families who were active in the business.⁵

First Screenings: 1894–96

At the end of the nineteenth century, the technology for producing moving images was developing in several countries, including Germany, France and the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that first showings of the new medium took place all over Europe in the 1890s: in London in 1894, in Turin in April 1895 with a Kinetoscope, in Berlin in November 1895 with the Bioscop projector of the Skladanowsky brothers and in Paris with the Cinematograph Lumière on 28 December 1895. Only 33 spectators attended the first paid public screening in Paris, during which ten “views” were projected. From then on, the screening of films was a daily occurrence in Paris. Other French cities rapidly organized screenings of their own, and during the first year following its invention the cinematograph was presented in provinces and in numerous cities throughout the world. Then, a devastating event that attracted international press attention caused a pause in this development. On 4 May 1897, as the French Catholic aristocracy gathered at the Bazar de la Charité in Paris to attend a projection, the

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- 3 Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde”, in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62.
 - 4 See, for example, Vanessa Toulmin, “Bioscope Biographies”, in *In the Kingdom of Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. Colin Harding and Simon Popple (London: Cygnus, 1996), 249–61.
 - 5 Charly Grenon, *Les temps héroïques du cinéma dans le centre-ouest* (La Rochelle: Société d’Études Folkloriques du Centre-Ouest, 1975). Scholars who work on travelling cinema often identify families but never specify if they are Roma or other travelling people. In a letter to Pierre Peronneau dated 10 February 2020, and forwarded to me by Peronneau, Charly Grenon identified Roma families.



Fig. 31 A travelling cinema at Saint-Gengoux-le-National (Saône-et-Loire), April 1910. (collection of André Milcot)

projectionist's equipment caught fire and the blaze claimed the lives of 126 people, mostly women and children. This tragedy led to a temporary ban on projections in fixed theatres in France, and encouraged a shift towards fairs, where the requirements for public safety were easier to meet. In fact, fairground showmen were by this time keenly interested in cinema; in 1896, at least 37 different French cities hosted cinemas at local fairs.⁶ And Romani travelling showpeople were among the fairground entrepreneurs who spread the invention throughout France and Europe.

If we could immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the fairgrounds of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, we would hear barkers (*bonimenteurs*) on the steps of their booths boasting of their attractions. The term "attraction", which originally referred to feats of physical strength, underwent a transformation of meaning when showmen began to use it in their jargon to define a cultural phenomenon.⁷ Travelling entertainers knew that visitors to fairs and circuses were in search of exciting

6 Jean-Baptiste Hennion, "Éclairage sur l'année 1896. Éléments chronologiques relatifs à l'introduction du spectacle cinématographique sur les champs de foire français", 1895. *Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze* 54 (2008): 28–55.

7 Joseph Garnarcz, "The European Fairground Cinema: (Re)defining and (Re)contextualizing the 'Cinema of Attractions'", in *A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 315–33.

sensations, willing to surrender and regain control of their bodies and senses. The stimulation of the senses in a roller coaster ride, or by unusual spectacles like an anatomical wax museum, animal exhibitions, freak shows or spectacular circus acts, combines physical and emotional experiences. In the wake of the industrial revolution, audiences were eager for new forms of consumption, of the kind offered in different ways by fairs and metropolitan department stores. Travelling entertainers traded in illusion and novelty, offering the most incredible new show, the very latest song, the ultimate scientific discovery. Along the way, travelling showmen helped to promote many of the technological advances of the past 150 years, like ghost shows, the cinematograph, X-ray photography and automatons. Panoramas, dioramas, cosmoramas and phonograph sessions were also popular attractions. Matéo Maximoff, a Kalderash Rom from Russia on his father's side and a Manouche from France on his mother's side, was born in Spain in 1917, and his family came to France three years later. His family owned a travelling cinema, and he relates that:

Gypsies have always been travelling entertainers [*saltimbanques*]: one of their main sources of income was to perform as acrobats or jugglers in fairs and markets. On the lookout for new attractions, they soon appropriated modern inventions that could amuse and amaze the public. Thus, in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was the "Magic Lantern" with which the Gypsies, going from village to village, organized projections – most often they were simple little stories drawn by hand on glass plates. A little later, Travellers, always in fairs and even in the village café-buffet, popularized the phonograph before exploiting an invention that was going to upset the world of entertainment: the cinematograph.⁸

Roma, like other entertainers, cultivated the decisive skill of adapting to the taste of their clientele.⁹ Given what was identified at the time as the public demand for "violent nervous stimulation rather than intellectual exercises",¹⁰ for "losing and regaining control by being confronted with excitement, novelty and the incomprehensible without actually being in danger", and the way the films made by the three main French companies – Lumière, Méliès and Pathé – catered to that demand, the Cinematograph Lumière naturally attracted the attention of showmen. Moreover, the dominant aesthetics of this early cinema resonated with particular characteristics of fairs and circuses: fairground films were based on attractions

8 Alain Antonietto, "Le Cinéma forain et ... bohémien", *Études tsiganes* 3 (1985): 9–20 (here 20). Maximoff used the word *Tsigane*, translated here as "Gypsy".

9 Arnaud Le Marchand, *Enclaves nomades: habitat et travail mobiles* (Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Éditions du Croquant, 2011), 57.

10 *Ciné-Journal* 67 (1908).

and tricks already familiar to the audiences, but displayed in an even more spectacular manner. Illusions were also an important component, specifically in Georges Méliès's films, inasmuch as they showed viewers something they knew to be impossible, such as a "woman without a head". In general, a programme was composed of several short films presented in a discontinuous series, with constant reel changes interspersed with short circus performances. Overall, "early cinema drew on existing media that had proved popular, but it was even more attractive", and it is remarkable how the organization of a travelling cinema matched that of a circus show.¹¹

Travelling cinemas utilized a wide variety of equipment, from the railways on which travelling showpeople, known as *forains industriels*, moved from place to place, to the horse-drawn wagons used by Manouche (Romani) families for their more modest operations. The former made use of colourful and grandiose fronts to attract clients, the latter, at best a hand-painted wooden panel bearing the name of the cinema. Neither hesitated to choose attractive neologisms to impress the public and intrigue them with the air of science and mystery. The use of "scope" and "graph" blossomed: *biographe*, *vitoscope* and *bioscope* competed with *kinetographe*, *kosmographe* and so on. Intriguing names and highly decorated fronts were rarely sufficient to attract passers-by, especially for the modest circuses and travelling cinemas, so a lively parade was also an important component of the show. Clowns, musicians, barkers, children and adults in costume, including all the employees of the business, usually family members, found themselves on the stage cajoling people to enter. "Come here! Come here! Ladies and gentlemen, come to see the most surprising and exciting attraction, the cinematograph". The journalist Charly Grenon, whose grandparents owned a café in Saint-Gemme (Charente-Maritime) and frequently hosted travelling cinemas, remembered that, with drum or trumpet

The Manouche solemnly announced, in the manner of a Herald at Arms: "Notice to the people of the locality. This evening, at 8 o'clock, a major film of Mr Gaumont, an extraordinary show like you've never seen before and you will never see. Attention, this wonderful attraction will be followed by a tight-rope walking act".¹²

Each time Raymond Gurême's father decided to stop their travelling circus, a similar announcement was made to the whole village. Raymond was born in 1925 near Paris, into a French Manouche family who owned a small circus and a travelling cinema. They toured France and parts of

11 Garncarz, "The European Fairground Cinema", 325–27.

12 Letter from Charly Grenon to Pierre Peronneau, 10 February 2020; Grenon, *Les temps héroïques du cinéma*, 117.



Fig. 32 Cinema on offer among a range of entertainments (date and place unspecified). (collection of André Milcot)

Belgium and Switzerland. The whole family was involved: Raymond's father Hubert Leroux, a First World War veteran, was an acrobat, musician and film projectionist, while his mother Mélanie trained their nine children, who all mastered different circus activities. Raymond, for instance, was an acrobat, a clown and later a horse tamer. He recalled that he, his parents and eight siblings would all get on a cart and circulate around the village. His father and the older children, who were all musicians, advertised the evening's show by playing music.¹³ Raymond himself was proudly dressed in his blue silk clown costume with stars and sequins, made by his mother.¹⁴

Music and, more generally, sounds of different kinds were recurrent and important components of the show. At fairs, showmen used a big bell not only to cover other shouts and music, but also to invite the audience to enter, or to announce the beginning of a session. Numerous photographs show such a bell at the entrance to cinematographic booths.¹⁵ Long before

13 Video interview with Raymond Gurême, in Evelyne Pommerat, *La grande histoire du cinéma forain. Récit édifiant en deux parties* (Médiathèque Matéo Maximoff, 2019), <https://vimeo.com/369589386> (accessed 28 August 2020).

14 Raymond Gurême, *Interdit aux nomades* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2011), 18.

15 Freddy Buache and Jacques Rial, *Les débuts du cinématographe à Genève et à Lausanne, 1895-1914* (Lausanne: La Cinémathèque suisse, 1964), 22-23.

the First World War, Eugenia Reglin, whose family owned a circus, and her husband Raphaël Loiseau were running a small travelling cinema in the Poitou region of France.¹⁶ The couple, also dressed in vivid colourful costumes created by Eugenia, conducted their noisy parade in front of schools or in the village square. For the Loiseaus, a simple drum and a bugle were sufficient. Their playing resounded in the deep winter silence, and farmers came in large numbers to the village to be present at the show.

A statement of Louis Robillard, interviewed by Charly Grenon, helps us to better understand the means deployed by cinema operators to attract an audience. In the provinces, more so than in towns, the parade in exotic costumes and the accompanying sounds were essential. To catch hesitant onlookers' attention, recourse to tricks of sleight of hand in front of the tent was very useful.¹⁷ Once the spectator stepped inside, he or she entered another world. Most of the time a relative darkness surrounded the spectators, who were seated on uncomfortable wooden planks. Small Romani circuses often mixed circus acts with the screenings; Eugenia Reglin and her husband did so, as did Raymond Gurême's family. Taking into account the public and its desires, they also adapted their show to fit the local circumstances: sometimes just a circus show, or a screening or a combination of the two.¹⁸ While waiting for latecomers, barkers would announce a minor entertainment. It could be an acrobatic performance with a pyramid of ordinary chairs, a dance with scarves or a prestidigitation act. Then the screening started, and a sort of cacophony took over: the sound of the machine as the projectionist activated the handle; the voices of people commenting on images or reacting with astonishment, fear, emotion, excitement or laughter; but also sounds produced by various instruments to add effects to the film. A musician might also accompany a speaker, who himself had to speak over the noise while narrating the film. In fact, the barkers became speakers, sometimes introducing themselves as lecturers and offering comments on the moving pictures. Although illiterate, Raymond Gurême's father could comment on films he knew by heart. Indeed, Raymond Gurême believed that his father was a complete artist. As an acrobat, a discipline he had learnt from his own father, he performed with horses. As a travelling cinema performer giving voice to silent films, he acted, adapting his narrative to local preferences.

During the entr'acte, Raymond Gurême remembered that they would sell "Gagne-tout-coup" [a winner every time] which his mother had prepared. She would buy very cheap trinkets sold by the kilo on the rue Vieille-du-Temple in the Marais district of Paris: rings, pins and other

16 "Le cinéma ambulant à Saix, en Poitou, vers 1910", *Société d'Études Folkloriques du Centre-Ouest* (March–April 1972): 12–18.

17 Grenon, *Les temps héroïques du cinéma*, 33.

18 Gurême, *Interdit aux nomades*, 28.

such objects. Then she would take a sheet of newspaper, fold it to form a cornet, and put a surprise inside.¹⁹ In Eugenia Reglin's family they were called "belles-mères" [mothers-in-law]. Eugenia also sold sweets that she made herself. Children were able to watch her in front of her wagon boiling sugar and preparing "supettes" [sugar sticks] and "berlingots" [boiled sweets] for the entr'acte. After a short performance, one of the family members circulated through the crowd and asked for money. To conclude the show, the Loiseaus had created a magic act, the Chameleon Woman. Madam Eugenia would hold a large white triangle of canvas, attached to her shoulders and at her hips. She would open it like wings at the precise moment her husband inserted a glass slide painted with a colourful butterfly into the magic lantern that he had made himself. During her interview with Charly Grenon, Renée Fournier recalled the woman's transformation into a beautiful insect by the light show, which fascinated the young members of the audience. Decades later, Eugenia was remembered as the Butterfly Woman and others artists copied her act. A lottery would end the screening. The barker would have previously announced the prizes: a typewriter, a sewing machine and a barrel of wine. However, the winner left the booth with a goose quill, a sewing needle and a quarter gallon of cheap wine.²⁰

While the range and technical quality of individual programmes depended on the financial resources available, all the shows offered sensory stimulation in rapid succession, and did not call for the extended contemplation characteristic of the traditional arts.²¹ As mentioned above, fanciful "views" produced by Lumière constituted the first programmes. Soon afterwards, Pathé and Lumière hired operators to film newsreels, or simply reconstructed events. Then George Méliès produced trick films, or *féeries*, such as *Le voyage dans la lune* [A Trip to the Moon, 1902] which, in the words of Richard Abel, "characteristically mounted energetic, mildly subversive spectacles of 'otherness', often in various forms of the carnivalesque, and produced protean displays of metamorphoses".²² The satire on imperialism offered by *Le voyage dans la lune* qualifies it as political cinema, although *L'Affaire Dreyfus* [The Dreyfus Affair, 1899] explicitly launched the genre.²³ Drawing on the Pathé catalogue of 1902–04, Richard Abel lists nearly a dozen genres: "plein air films, comic films, trick films,

19 Raymond Gurême, interview with the author, 6 February 2020.

20 Grenon, *Les temps héroïques du cinéma*, 80, 117–18.

21 Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896–1914*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 59.

22 Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town*, 87.

23 See Matthew Solomon, "Introduction", in *Fantastic Voyages of the Cinematic Imagination: Georges Méliès's Trip to the Moon*, ed. Matthew Solomon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 1–24 (here 9–12). I am grateful to Janne Salminen for drawing my attention to this point.

sports films, historical films and actualités (newsreels), erotic films, dance films, dramatic and realist films, féeries, religious or biblical films, and synchronized phonograph films".²⁴ At the fair of Caen in 1910, a travelling cinema screened the following:

Pêcheurs de perles – grande féerie en couleur (*Pearl Fishermen* – great magical spectacle in color)

Va petit mousse – scène sentimentale (*Go little ship's boy* – sentimental scene)

La soupe et le bœuf – scène militaire (*The Soup and the Beef* – military scene)

Le fils du garde-chasse – scène tragique (*The son of the gamekeeper* – tragic scene)

Le nettoyeur de devantures – scène comique (*The window cleaner* – comic scene)

Monsieur a peur – scène de fou rire (*Sir is afraid* – the scene that cracks them up).²⁵

Since variety was obviously a strongly grounded tradition in circus shows, it is reasonable to suppose that the similar commitment of cinematic shows to diversity was inherited from their circus background. The travelling cinema continued this tradition. Cinema, as an attraction reproducing the illusion of movement, fit perfectly into the fairgrounds, either as a main attraction or as an additional attraction in the overall context of a circus show. As a result, travelling entertainers contributed their own skills, business habits, implicit knowledge and social connections to the development of moving pictures at the turn of the century. They combined their presentational skills with the lure of new devices to assemble and excite the audience. Deac Rossell stresses that they were also real entrepreneurs, and played a significant role in the development of early film exhibitions.²⁶ This is the key to their contribution to the wider culture. Thanks to the particular mobile character of Romani life and enterprise, they brought the world within one's grasp, spreading a central experience of modernity throughout Europe. At the same time, they became a subject of cinema themselves, and some of them even held the camera.

24 Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town*, 60.

25 Véronique Lesbaudits, "Les débuts du cinéma dans le Calvados (1895–1914)", *Annales de Normandie* 43, no. 3 (1993): 201–14 (here 208).

26 Deac Rossell, "A Slippery Job: Travelling Exhibitors in Early Cinema", in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century*, ed. Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), 50–60.

Cultural Contribution: Bringing the World within One's Grasp

In fact, the Romani families circulating throughout France and Europe with their cinema attractions belonged to different types of travelling entertainers. The Olympia Theatre-Cinematograph Bracco exemplified the first type of Romani families who adopted cinema. Eugénie Bracco belonged to a family with a long tradition of entertainment. Born in 1875 in Soissons, she was a performer-choreographer and the daughter of Pierre Bracco (born 1837), a French showman who worked as a performer and theatre director and whose brothers and sisters were also involved in travelling entertainment. Her uncle Roch Bracco was a travelling photographer and director of a troupe of acrobats. Her grandfather Jacques Bracco (born about 1790) was also the director of a theatre, and the family was connected to the Italian Braccos, whose reputation as theatre artists was long established. Eugénie married Benito Alonso, an acrobat born in Madrid in 1876, in Paris in 1897. The Braccos were among the nine show families who operated a cinema in France as early as 1896.²⁷ The Cinema Alonso Bracco developed a show that mixed equal parts of acts and projections alongside an X-ray demonstration.²⁸ A short glance at the local press demonstrates that they were well known at the fairs of Lagny, Romilly, Bar-sur-Aube and Nogent-sur-Seine, all towns situated in the north-east of France, where they featured regularly. Until at least 1913, press advertisements for fairs mentioned a Cinema Bracco and a Baile-Braco cinema.

In a second type of travelling cinema, Romani families travelled on their own through various villages and set up their tents for a few days; the Loiseau and Leroux cinemas are examples of this. Raymond Gurême reported that his family toured through the same villages every year. They came to meet their audience, who knew them from previous years and welcomed them, even helping to erect their three-masted tent on the central square of the village. In his memory, their arrival was an event for the villagers, helping them to forget their worries and difficult lives as long as the circus was in town. Gurême had the feeling they brought with them civilization, happiness and entertainment.²⁹ That said, the literary work of French Manouche Matéo Maximoff enables us to qualify the distinction between these opposite ends of the cinema spectrum. In one of his 11 novels, *Dîtes-le avec des pleurs* [Say it with Tears], characters modeled on his mother's family toured with fairs during winter, but as soon as the weather

27 Jacques Deslandes and Jacques Richard, *Histoire comparée du cinéma*, Vol. 2: *Du cinématographe au cinéma (1896–1906)* (Tournai: Casterman, 1968).

28 Jacques Garnier, *Forains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Orléans: Éditions Jacques Grenier, 1968), 336.

29 Gurême, *Interdit aux nomades*, 25.



Fig. 33 Raymond Gurême kept a copy of this postcard, which he identified as portraying his grandfather's cinema. (with the authorization of Marie-Rose Gurême)



Fig. 34 A travelling cinema, Fresnoy-le-Grand, 1907. (<http://cinemasdunord.blogspot.com/2017/10/document-exceptionnel-un-cinema-forain.html>; every effort has been made to identify the copyright holder)

improved, “the Manouches would leave the big cities to go to villages and the countryside. No more fairs for a while; we were changing jobs: the time had come for travelling cinema”.³⁰

Through their promotion of cinema, these Romani families helped to bring the world to people in all parts of the country and at all levels of society. The invention of cinema embodied a time when speed became an essential economic, political and military factor. However, people were not particularly surprised by spectacular cinematic experiences like the Lumières’ famous *L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* [A Train’s Arrival at La Ciotat Station, 1895], which showed a locomotive crashing through the wall of an elevated platform. They were already used to viewing sensational images and consuming the popular press in which publishers competed fiercely to capture their attention with stories of horrible accidents and hideous crimes.³¹ But the world of cinema had more to offer than excitement.

From the very beginning, the Lumière brothers offered films that effectively showcased the land and people of France, and the world perceived from a French point of view. The Lumières’ films were the first to be both shot and shown on locations all over the world, starting with Lyon and its surroundings, La Ciotat, Paris and other French regions, followed by Italy, Switzerland, Germany, England and Spain. The cameramen then travelled to Scandinavia, Russia and around the Mediterranean. Finally, they went to film in the French colonies in Indochina, and in Japan, as well as in North America and Australia. It was then possible for a French farmer from a remote village to attend the coronation of the Russian Tsar Nicolas II in Moscow (1896), to watch the French President Félix Faure travelling in rural France (1897) or to experience the expanding reach of urbanism (*Sortie d’usine* [Leaving the Factory, 1896]). Thanks to the travelling families who brought the cinema to towns and villages (and sometimes back to the locations where a film had been shot), Swiss or German farmers, Polish miners or Belgian workers could see themselves and each other and the world side by side.³²

While circulating throughout Europe and screening the films of the early cinema, Romani families, like all travelling people involved in cinema, brought a sense of modernity and speed everywhere they went, brought the city to the country, and enabled everyone to engage with the world through images. The films they screened encouraged a sense of belonging

30 Matéo Maximoff, *Dites-le avec des pleurs* (Romainville: self-published, 1990), 88.

31 Vanessa R. Schwartz, “Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris”, in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 297–319.

32 Kevin Riordan, “Itinerant Cinema and the Moving Image of Modernism’s Borders”, *Affirmations: of the modern* 5, no. 1 (2017): 106–25 (here 110).

to a certain humanity perceived as civilized. They displayed the colonial project in reassuringly exotic images. At the same time, short films like *Le Repas de bébé* [Baby's Meal, 1895], *Déjeuner du chat* [A Cat's Lunch, 1895] or *Sous les tilleuls* [Under the Linden Trees, 1896] helped to reinforce people's sense that their way of life was the best, consolidating a vision of a peaceful France and Europe safely distant from those primitive and barbarous spaces.

There is a second point of cultural exchange in the process of cultural translation that took the Romani presence in cinema from behind the scenes to the stage as subjects of cinema. Among the factors that facilitated the emergence of Romani people as a subject of cinema, the proximity of pioneer film-makers was of special importance. Charles Pathé and Léon Gaumont, who invented the first film projectors, developed their film studio on the edge of Paris, near the wastelands where circuses raised their tents and Romani people parked their caravans. In his novel *Matéo Maximoff* describes this "zone", the rough area that encircled Paris with its characteristic inhabitants, the Roma, its streets, passages and cafés where people came to dance on Saturday evenings: "There was a bit of everything in the zone, even the cinema, since the Manouches who screened films everywhere in France during the summer time always came back to the zone, where they showed the films in cafés".³³ Georges Méliès, whose studio in Montreuil was close to the zone, was inspired by Romani people with whom he daily rubbed shoulders, resulting in the film *Campement de bohémiens* [Gypsy Camp] in 1895. This geographical proximity of the pioneers of the early cinema with the Roma influenced their choice of subjects and gave birth to a specific genre, the bohemian cinema.³⁴

Alain Antonietto noted that "the confusion was almost total in the films of the time ... Circus people or Gypsies all had the same bohemian costume, the same fierce and shady aspect".³⁵ He further explained that a Spanish Romni could well end up with the clothes of a Romni from Ukraine, and a Hungarian Rom in the costume of a Calé from Andalusia. A film series launched in 1908 by Louis Feuillade portrayed a dark melodrama populated by Romani child snatchers, treacherous Zingaras with velvety eyes and knife-wielding Gypsies quick to anger. Everything was filmed in the sinister setting of the Parisian suburbs, or under the windy sky of the Camargue in the south of France.

Matéo Maximoff's relationship with cinema evolved in many different ways. As a child, when he had some coins left, he would attend screenings on Thursday afternoons, but he also toured with his family, who owned a

33 Maximoff, *Dites-le avec des pleurs*, 76.

34 Le Marchand, *Enclaves nomades*, 57.

35 Antonietto, "Le Cinéma forain et ... bohémien", 13. Cf. Caterina Pasqualino, "The Gypsies, Poor but Happy: A Cinematic Myth", *Third Text* 22, no. 3 (2008): 337-45.

travelling cinema, as well as acting in front of the camera. One day, when the then 14-year-old was playing with his cousins and friends in “the zone”, they saw a gathering of people: a film shoot was taking place and they were hired for the day. During this one afternoon in 1932, Matéo and his friends played the role of children discovering a dead body near the remains of the old city fortifications, which flanked the zone.³⁶ Director Anatol Litvak had been so impressed seeing them in action on what was their usual playground that he had chosen them for this scene in his new film, *Coeur de Lilas* [Heart of Lilacs]. A few days later, Matéo played in a second scene, which took all day and gave him the opportunity to spend more time in this milieu and forge connections. The French film-maker Germaine Dulac later contacted him to obtain his help in her project making newsreels about the Romani people for Pathé and Gaumont.

Manitas de Plata, a member of a Manouche family living in the Camargue, remembered another filming experience. He recalled that his father’s old traditional caravan (*verdine*) was used for Léon Joannon’s film shoot during the Second World War. *Le camion blanc* [The White Lorry, 1942] is the story of François, hired by a mysterious man, Monsieur Shabbas, to transport the embalmed body of the dead king of the Gypsies in a brand new white vehicle. The itinerary encompasses all the French roads the late monarch travelled on in his lifetime. Once again, the film-maker hired local Roma from the Camargue to act as extras and he also made use of their caravans. Manitas de Plata explained that his father’s wagon was supposed to be the coffin of the king.³⁷

There were at least two Romani women who performed as cinematic leading ladies. The singer Valia Dimitrievitch played in the *Les nuits moscovites* [Moscow Nights, 1934] by Alexis Granowski and in Léon Joannon’s *L’Émigrante* [The Emigrant, 1939]. The actress Pola Negri (Apolonia Chałupec), born in 1897 in Lipno in the Kingdom of Poland, has a better-documented life. She was the daughter of Juraj Chałupec, an itinerant Romani-Slovakian violinist from Nesluša. After his deportation to Siberia in 1905 for alleged revolutionary activities, from which he never returned, Pola Negri moved to Warsaw with her mother and lived in poverty. In 1914, after studying ballet, she appeared in her first film, *Niewolnica Zmysłów* [A Slave to Her Senses], directed by Jan Pawlowski. She played in seven other silent films in Poland before relocating to Germany in 1917, where she continued her career. Among the films she acted in was the German drama *Carmen* (1918), directed by Ernst Lubitsch and renamed *Gypsy Blood* in its American version (1921), which was based on Prosper Mérimée’s eponymous novel (1845). In 1922, thanks to Charlie Chaplin, whom she had met earlier in Germany, Pola Negri received an invitation to Hollywood. There, she

36 Maximoff, *Dites-le avec des pleurs*, 92.

37 Antonietto, “Le Cinéma forain et ... bohémien”, 18.

developed a worldwide reputation and she is now remembered as a classic *femme fatale* from the golden era of cinema.

There is another example of cultural exchange in the way in which both early cinema and circuses deployed a particular theme: the Western. It is acknowledged that as a performance genre the Western originated in travelling shows, often linked to circuses and fairs.³⁸ However, in the French context there is a specific link between Roma and Westerns, which is the result of a cliché. Jean Hamman, known under the stage name Joë Hamman, and the film-maker Jean Durand produced a film series in 1907 entitled *Arizona Bill*. They filmed on location in the Camargue and recruited their "Indians" from among the Manouches who lived in the region.³⁹ It is no surprise that Manouches played the role of dangerous, uncivilized and uncontrollable savages in these films aimed at a popular audience. The French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin explained that this audience, made up of urban workers and peasants, dreamt of a life free from the law, from restrictions on their instincts and desires, and from fear. Hence the world of films, popular novels and *faits divers* is one in which the law is ignored if not transgressed, instincts beget violence, fights and murders, and fear equates with suspense. This imagined life resonates with myths of lawlessness and freedom.⁴⁰ And the Western represents in epic form the beginnings of a new civilization, in which the law does not yet prevail. Romani actors might well have enjoyed embodying this counterculture that spurned the stability of bourgeois life.

Showmen not only screened films, but also filmed short views of daily life. The Lumière brothers initiated this practice. On 11 June 1895, they filmed their fellows at the Congress of French Photography Societies, and then screened it to them. Filming and screening of local scenes became more common for travelling projectionists, whose motives were purely financial. When they screened images in the evening show that they had filmed earlier the same day, spectators' exclamations at recognizing themselves on the screen were a very efficient means of advertising. The curiosity of the passers-by was also awakened when they heard the enthusiastic applause. The Théâtre Électrique Grenier, mounted at the Orléans fair in 1901, announced: "Mr Grenier, shooting the films himself, will at each performance present local scenes where visitors will be surprised to meet friends who have joined our show without knowing it".⁴¹ For instance, he filmed the marriage of his daughter to the clown Palisse in 1904. Mitch Miller, whose family was among the first six families to take films to

38 Le Marchand, *Enclaves nomades*, 57. See also Chapter 12 in this volume.

39 Antonietto, "Le Cinéma forain et ... bohémien", 14.

40 Edgar Morin, *L'esprit du temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1956), 148.

41 Deslandes and Richard, *Histoire comparée du cinéma*, 161, quoted by Martin Barnier, *Bruits, cris, musiques de films. Les projections avant 1914* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 68.

show at fairs in Scotland and northern England, describes the method: operators shot the “scene wide and long so that the maximum number of street amblers and spectators made it into the shot”, which meant more people would attend the fair in the hope of seeing themselves.⁴² While the development of fixed cinemas spelled the disappearance of this commercial practice, travelling cinemas kept it alive for a while in the countryside, where people continued to rush to the shows to recognize themselves, roaring with laughter and exchanging loud jokes.

Another practice that allows us to better understand the input of cinema in cultural exchanges between Romani people and their neighbours emerges from the combination of Raymond Gurême’s memories and the description of the walks by Romani showman and projectionist George Biddall, which Biddall filmed himself. Raymond Gurême remembered vividly that the only times his father, Hubert Leroux, wore a suit and a tie were when they arrived in a village and he was on his way to meet the mayor to obtain permission to set up their circus. In doing so, Leroux asserted his respectability. Mitch Mitchell, George Biddall’s great-grandson, has analysed the film *Biddall’s Funeral* (1909); the film was commissioned by the Gaumont Company, which probably provided many films for Biddall shows.⁴³ The Biddall family put on a variety of travelling exhibitions consisting of animal attractions, circus acts, freak shows and ghost illusions. This last was the most famous part of their show; it gave the impression of pictures moving. They next developed a bioscope show, and their descendants used the Biddall name simultaneously in different parts of Great Britain. George Biddall, born in 1848, made his life in travelling cinema. When he died in 1909, people flocked to his funeral in Cockermonth. The two-minute film shown there portrays him in life and death, and also his final journey to the cemetery. In the first scene, Biddall walks with his two large dogs in Maryport, wandering through a crowd of strolling people. The second scene is a long shot, showing his coffin being carried down the steps of a fairground booth, followed by richly dressed mourners who climb into waiting horse-drawn carriages. The film closes with the funeral procession on a crowd-lined street. *Biddall’s Funeral* recorded the pomp and circumstance around the burial, but it also demonstrated the great ability of showmen to meet spectators’ expectations. First, the camera had been positioned to capture the maximum number of spectators in the foreground, all of them potential customers for the later show. Second, as the Biddalls knew, funeral processions were popular with cinema audiences, along with dogfights, traffic accidents and scenes of masters beating exhausted horses. The film accordingly embedded all the characteristics of a newsreel. Third and most important, George Biddall’s

42 Mitch Miller, “Biddall’s Walk’: Travelling Life and the Imprint of Early Cinema”, *The Drouth* 38 (Winter 2010–11): 28–36 (here 33).

43 Mitchell, “Biddall’s Walk”.

walk in the first scene is quite distinctive, resembling that of the *flâneur* figure introduced by the French poet Charles Baudelaire – a model which Biddall might have encountered during his tours in France. Charles Rearick describes the figure of the *flâneur* this way: “Like a noble or dilettante, the *flâneur* enjoyed freedom from work or any utilitarian activity; he was free to enjoy experiences for their own sake, finding amusement and beauty in the unexpected as well as in everyday sights”.⁴⁴ Dressed in his best clothes, his dogs at hand, Georges Biddall knew that he would not be seen as a gentleman. But as a professional showman, visiting the same cities every year, much like the more modest Leroux family, he was advertising not only his show but also his respectability as a traveller, a Rom. Challenging the stereotype of exoticism and foreignness, he was appealing to the common ground between travellers and the settled population.

Why Did Travelling Families Stop Spreading Cinema?

The apogee of the travelling cinema was between the years 1895 and 1912. Matéo Maximoff reported that it continued to develop after the First World War: “From 1937 to 1939, I travelled a good part of the south of France myself with my uncles and their cinematograph. We even visited towns and villages that did not yet have electricity”.⁴⁵ And in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the film library of Toulouse was able to start its collection by acquiring films that had survived the war in Manouche caravans. But by the 1950s, it was almost over; what remained of travelling cinema at the beginning of the 1960s survived partly thanks to the Manouches, who were among the last to abandon the business. The connection between the Roma and cinema was thus a long-lasting one, but it succumbed to the nationalization of the uses of cinema on the one hand and shifting controls on the Roma on the other, with other factors such as the technical modernization of cinema spaces and changing popular taste in the mix.

By definition, popular taste – the attractiveness of any particular “attraction” – was never permanent; travelling people were constantly in search of novelties in order to draw audiences and hold their interest. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of the audiences of the first years declined and the phase of attraction was followed by one of rationalization and standardization. Towns developed their own cinemas in existing premises such as theatres or fixed circuses. As the travelling cinema became an activity that was less and less economically attractive, travelling families had to choose: settle down and enter the film business, or continue the way of life they

44 Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainments and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 173.

45 Cited by Antonietto, “Le Cinéma forain et ... bohémien”, 20.

knew, on the roadsides and village greens. As Mitch Miller admits, “this appears to have been more valuable to them than the potential rewards of opening up a La Scala or Playhouse”.⁴⁶ Yet, before the outbreak of the First World War, when men were mobilized and fairgrounds were closed for the duration, and booths and caravans were put away in barns, a rationalization process was developing. It is no coincidence that 1912 not only marked the end of the cinema of attractions, but also saw some decisive milestones in the rise of aggressive nationalism, including the decision at national level to use cinema in schools, the implementation of censorship and the introduction of brutal laws establishing control over travelling people.

The chronology of the development of cinema is intriguingly interwoven with the development of legislation around *nomades*, the term used by the French authorities to qualify Travellers.⁴⁷ In March 1895, while the Lumière brothers were organizing their first screening, the French government introduced the first census of all “nomads, Gypsies, and vagabonds”. The basic motive for keeping the “Gypsies” under surveillance stems from the fear of hidden spies that had been on the increase since the defeat of France in 1871. A long series of legal measures, and a press campaign hostile to the *nomades*, culminated in the Act of 16 July 1912 that introduced a compulsory identity booklet (*carnet forain*) for travellers and Roma, undermining the rights of itinerants on the presumption that they were by definition suspicious. This law stigmatizing itinerancy played a decisive role in the decline of travelling cinema. It is significant that the law, whose ostensible purpose was to control vagrancy and “nomadism”, also applied to all itinerant trades, and it has been suggested that travelling cinema had a special place in the thinking of the lawmakers (despite the fact that the preliminary debates over the law did not touch on the subject of cinema). The hypothesis is that because the French Minister of National Education had decided in April 1912 that films should be used throughout the country, including in the most remote rural schools, to present moral *leçons de choses* [object lessons], cinema could not remain in the “wrong” hands. And in fact in the 1920s, the Educational Cinema Offices created by teachers built a network of teaching, education and propaganda using cinema.⁴⁸

The 1912 Act placed travelling people in a separate category of individuals seen as a threat to “national security”. It is worth remembering that French law had previously created a scale of values that ranked the cinema below cabaret and the music hall, on a par with shows specializing in the bearded woman, the tattooed man or the five-legged sheep. Similarly, in Austria

46 Miller, “Biddall’s Walk”, 29.

47 Arnaud Le Marchand, “De 1895 à 1912: le cinéma forain français entre innovation et répression”, 1895. *Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze* 75 (2015): 48–63.

48 Pascal Laborderie, “Les Offices du cinéma scolaire et éducateur à l’épreuve des publics”, *Conserveries mémorielles* 12 (2012), <http://journals.openedition.org/cm/1230> (accessed 25 February 2020).

from 1899 to 1912 the travelling cinema was subject to the Vagabond Law of 1836.⁴⁹ Being equated with vagabonds devalued the work and reputation of cinema operators, giving them an air of untrustworthiness.⁵⁰ Moreover, the speakers, as the “voice of the attraction”, could be suspected of manipulating or deceiving the audience.⁵¹ More generally, the fairground cinema was suspicious because it was difficult to control, and the practice of filming local events worried the authorities, who feared a new form of espionage or subversive propaganda.⁵² During the Second World War, the Vichy regime imposed a strict control of all programmes before they could be shown.

Finally, attempts to legislate morality led to censorship. This officially began in 1909 with a ruling against newsreels of a quadruple execution in Béthune, northern France, although Georges Méliès’s political film *L’Affaire Dreyfus* (1899) had already been banned locally by prefectural order. Showmen and travelling people were increasingly associated with the concept of otherness and foreignness in an era when cinema tended to be more and more protectionist. Although cinema began as a fairground art, it was not long before considerations of morality replaced the focus on attractions. From 1909, cinema was required to abide by the 1884 Act on Disturbances to Public Order. In 1913, the Ministry of the Interior generalized prescreening censorship, and in 1916 created a national censorship commission. The interwar years gave no respite. Censorship boards watched everything, especially as domestic and international tensions grew. In April 1939, while the threat of war began to spread its shadow over the world, the French Ministry of the Interior enacted a decree denying travelling people the right to travel. In October 1940, the German authorities required that all Romani people be interned in camps. Raymond Gurême’s family was arrested near Rouen on 4 October. They left behind all their belongings – caravan, truck, projectors – which they would never recover, as happened to all travelling people. After the war, travelling families had to wait until 1946 to be released from internment camps. Nothing remained from the pre-war years, and it sometimes took several years to locate family members, as it did for Raymond Gurême, who was deported to Germany, survived deportation and reconnected with his brothers and sisters only in the 1950s. Very few families tried to relaunch travelling cinemas, and they could barely compete with the institutionalization of travelling cinemas by

49 Christian Kubo, “Institution Wanderkino. Die Etablierung von Film und Kino als Unterhaltungsinstitution im ländlichen Raum durch das organisierte Wanderkino in Österreich” (MA thesis, University of Vienna, 1993). I am grateful to Malte Gasche for this information.

50 Paul de la Borie, “Consécration”, *Cinémagazine*, 15 August 1924: 270.

51 Germain Lacasse, “The Lecturer and the Attraction”, in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 181–92 (here 185).

52 Le Marchand, *Enclaves nomades*, 67.

the French post-war National Centre for Cinematography. This put an end to travelling cinema as a living for Romani families.

Conclusion

Romani circus families based their way of life on a pursuit of and commitment to “the newer and the newest”. Thus, Gillian Arrighi is right in asserting that “When audiences sat in their vast tents or amphitheatres and witnessed the dazzling demonstrations of human mastery and skill, they were participating in a sense of modernity that did not exist in their daily lives”.⁵³ The same process occurred with the travelling cinema, when Romani families like the Maximoffs, the Leroux, the Loiseaus or the Biddalls circulated throughout Europe using a wide range of performance material depending on their financial means. From the Romani point of view, cinema was a complement to and a natural development of their traditional circus activities. It thus became part of the process whereby they developed a “self-consciousness ... of their unique nature based on the idea of themselves as travelling performers”,⁵⁴ an identity consolidated in the everyday practice of persuading passers-by to enter their tents, and offering them a calculated mix of circus, sleight of hand and cinema. But there was also an inherent *mise en abyme* between cinema and Romani travelling people, which meant that in appropriating and purveying the cinematic experience, they could express their own attachment to mobility while offering European societies an immersion into a new form of modernity. While attraction cinema evolved into the seventh art, a phenomenon manifested in particular by the development of the aesthetic value of immobility, and because there is an irreducible antinomy between moving images and fixed premises, Romani families chose their freedom of movement and continued to follow their own path. In the meantime, however, they had supported the construction of a common European culture based on cinema, where anyone anywhere could applaud Charlie Chaplin’s antics in a shared and familiar fashion.

53 Gillian Arrighi, “The Circus and Modernity: A Commitment to ‘the Newer’ and ‘the Newest’”, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10 (2012): 169–85 (here 182).

54 Miller, “Biddall’s Walk”, 34.

Chapter 11

From Where They Were:
Resistance by Romani Circus People
during the Second World War

Laurence Prempain

The man is poor. A violin in his hands, he sits and begins to play, hoping to earn a few coins (*The Vagabond*, 1916). In another instance, he is a circus artist and inspires the crowd with his mimicry (*The Circus*, 1928). Later, in 1940, he performs as the dictator Hynkel, shamelessly juggling with a large transparent globe to the music of Richard Wagner (*The Dictator*, 1940). Charlie Chaplin, whose children now claim his Roma origins, is behind these three characters.¹ The virtual image that emerges from Charlie Chaplin's two first characters is consistent with the reality of the small Romani circuses that travelled throughout France during the first half of the twentieth century.²

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- 1 His daughter Victoria Chaplin found a note from Jack Hill informing Chaplin that he had entered the world "in a caravan [that] belonged to the Gypsy Queen, who was my auntie. You were born on the Black Patch near Birmingham". His mother, Hannah, was descended from a travelling family. There is no certainty, since his birth certificate is missing: Matthew Sweet, "Was Charlie Chaplin a Gypsy?", *Guardian*, 17 February 2011.
 - 2 I use the noun Roma, and the adjective Romani, although not all groups accept it. For instance, the Sinti in Italy or the French Manouches do not employ it as a self-description. However, I utilize other terms throughout the chapter, depending on the circumstances. Where the French word *nomade* appears in the archives, I have occasionally kept the direct translation to respect the administrative vocabulary of

In most cases, they experienced poverty and daily struggles without giving up: their shows had to take place. Charlie Chaplin, the circus world and Roma families, too, are familiar to us, although they all remain mysterious and distant to a certain extent. For Michael Stewart, they are “part of our world and yet [they] are distinct from the rest of us. They live in the world we know, yet they seem to offer an alternative way to be in our world”.³ Rather than adopting the perspective of the anthropologist reflecting on the “other”, I prefer to think of the distance and distinction that Stewart invokes in terms of a continuity that blossoms in the realm of what Georges Perec calls the infra-ordinary: “what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual” that we simply never notice.⁴ In these terms, Romani circus people, who are at the intersection of two distinct groups of itinerants, both socially marginal, with some practices in common, have built an infra-ordinary living space in European societies based on entertainment. This is the result of an adaptive process that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu named *habitus*.⁵ Unlike habit, which is about repetition, *habitus* is associated with production. *Habitus* is produced by history and constitutes a capital, both evolutionary and permanent – the basis for the production of new practices and ways of life. Because of their way of life and the discriminations they endured, Romani people developed a permanent *habitus* of adaptation and a posture of defiance as well. Defiance involves both keeping a distance from boundaries – physical and social – and testing or stretching them. Although less visible than the extraordinary transgressive acts of resistance that occurred during the Second World War, defiance is nonetheless a constant form of resistance.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate through the lens of family histories how Romani circuses in France resisted the fate that was imposed on them. They resisted from where they were, taking advantage, when possible, of their way of life. The circus world is based on a particular system of familial interdependence built up through marriages between families of the same background. Although this community spirit did not prevent a fierce competition for survival during peacetime, it proved valuable during the war. This chapter focuses on the Bougliones, a successful Sinti family who have run the *Cirque d'Hiver* in Paris since 1934 and whose story is the

the time. In other cases, when a Romani background is not established, the word Traveller is applied. Lastly, the term Gypsy is maintained to describe the perceived racial discrimination pursued by the Nazis (*Zigeuner*).

- 3 Michael Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 12.
- 4 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces*, trans. Roger Sturrock (London: Penguin, 2008), 206.
- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–65.

best documented. But the narrative also takes account of less prominent Manouche families: the Esthers, the Gurêmes, the Sieglers and the Sénécas.

The lack of sources means that telling the story of Roma resistance during the Second World War calls for the use of our imagination to see the spaces in which resistance was possible and to fill in the gaps in the archives. The fact that their stories are little known prompts us to ask ourselves, on the one hand, why historians of the Resistance have neglected them and, on the other, what place this history has in the lives of the Roma. What emerges from closer scrutiny of the record is a typology of resistance, partly based on the social function of Romani entertainers in the public space, including their tools of diversion, humour and sleight of hand, and partly reflecting gender-specific practices – women’s defiance and men’s acts of resistance.

Romani Circus Resistance: The Historians’ View

There are several reasons why the resistance of Romani people in France remains – to say the least – the poor relation of the history of resistance. First, it is worth remembering that since the aftermath of the war, political and ideological stakes significantly affected the writing of the “perilous history” of the Resistance.⁶ Its emotional charge continues to influence the historiography, and the silencing of the Romani contribution to French resistance movements is clearly rooted in political motives. It is also the case that it is difficult to fit this unique and complex phenomenon into a strict (and familiar) conceptual framework.⁷ Nevertheless, it is crucial to define what resistance is. This chapter relies on a definition that includes the notion of subversion, a subset of which is defiance: to speak of resistance is to refer to “all subversive action aiming to prevent the accomplishment of the occupier’s goals”.⁸ Second, and linked to the previous argument, is the need to revisit the history of the persecution of Roma in France. Historians’ blindness to the fate of the Roma held in French internment camps during the Second World War persisted until the early 2010s, when studies started to multiply.⁹ However, research has focused almost exclusively on persecution

6 Laurent Douzou, “A Perilous History: A Historiographical Essay on the French Resistance”, *Contemporary European History* 28, no. 1 (2019): 96–106.

7 Pierre Laborie, *Les Français des années troubles, 1940–1944* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

8 Denis Peschanski and Laurent Douzou, “La Résistance française face à l’hypothèque Vichy”, *Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli* 31 (1995): 3–42 (here 4).

9 Emmanuel Filhol, *La Mémoire et l’oubli. L’internement des Tsiganes en France, 1940–1946* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004); Emmanuel Filhol, “L’indifférence collective au sort des Tsiganes internés dans les camps français, 1940–1946”, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 226, no. 2 (2007): 69–82.

and led to an essentially victim-centred representation. French anthropologist Lise Foisneau has provided a new perspective on the Roma in relation to the Holocaust, by encouraging a shift from their image as victims lacking agency to resistance fighters shaping history.¹⁰ Concomitantly, scholars have begun to emphasize the pan-European dimensions of Romani history, underlining the historical permanence of the Roma in European history.¹¹ We now have studies of Romani resistance during the Second World War in Transnistria, Croatia and Slovakia, for example.¹² Lastly, we must admit that the history of circuses during the Second World War is a blank page.¹³ Typically, books on circuses have tended to treat the war as a parenthesis, with phrases like ‘after the Second World War, the circus restarted’.

Not Yet at War, But Already Interned

In the spring of 1940, at the start of the travelling circus season, some circuses took to the road and set up their tents in towns and villages where artists performed in front of audiences eager for excitement. The Bougliones, a family of Circassians of Sinti origin, were performing in Belgium. The Bougliones had been living for five years at 110, rue Amelot in Paris, in the Cirque d’Hiver, previously known as the Cirque Napoléon and built in 1852. When the family moved into this historic space in 1934, they already had a long history of successes, setbacks and *coups de bluff*. Originating in Italy during the eighteenth century, they first earned their living touring with bears and goats, like numerous other Romani people. Crossing the French-Italian border during the nineteenth century with some of their animals was the first step that took them to the front row of the French circus scene. At first, they owned a menagerie and bred wild

10 Lise Foisneau and Valentin Merlin, “French Nomads’ Resistance (1939–1946)”, in *Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath: Collection of Working Papers*, ed. Angela Kóczé and Anna Lujza Szász (Budapest: Tom Lantos Institute, 2018), 57–101.

11 Ilse About and Marc Bordigoni, *Présences tsiganes: enquêtes et expériences dans les archives* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2020); Catherine Coquio, ed., *Roms, Tsiganes, Nomades. Un malentendu européen* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2014).

12 Bogdan Chiriac, “Between Survival and Noncompliance: Roma ‘Acts of Resistance’ in Transnistria during World War II”, in *Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath. Collection of Working Papers*, ed. Angela Kóczé and Anna Lujza Szász (Budapest: Tom Lantos Institute, 2018), 21–56; Danijel Vojak, “Roma also Fought: The History of Romani Participation in the Anti-Fascist Movement in Croatia during World War II”, *Roma Rights* 1 (2017): 9–16; Josef Serinec and Jan Tesař, *Česká cikánská rapsodie* (Bohemian Gypsy Rhapsody), Vol. 1-3 (Prague: Triáda 2016).

13 One exception is Alain Chevillard, “Le cirque sous l’Occupation – 1949/1944”, *Le Cirque dans l’Univers* 258 (September 2015): 33–37.

animals that they sold to European menageries, but the First World War brought hardship. In 1919, the Ménagerie Bouglione finally found success at fairgrounds¹⁴ and later earned the title of circus thanks to their Buffalo Bill show (1926–34), which made their fortune and reputation.

However, in 1940, the Bougliones were an exception in terms of the degree of agency they enjoyed. By a decree of 6 April 1940, the French Ministry of the Interior of the Third Republic suspended the free circulation of itinerant groups (*nomades*). President Albert Lebrun justified this order by declaring that “the *nomades*’ constant travelling could lead them to discover troop movements, the location of military units and defensive emplacements and other crucial information, which they could share with enemy agents”.¹⁵ This capped a history of official stigmatization and discrimination that had developed since the end of the nineteenth century and led to the 1912 Law on the Exercise of Itinerant Trades and the Regulation of the Movements of Nomads, which regulated travelling occupations in France. The law defined “Nomads” (*nomades*) as anyone without a home or fixed residence circulating in France, regardless of nationality and even if they had resources or claimed to exercise a profession.¹⁶

The spring of 1940 thus brought more than the applause of circus audiences and marked the beginning of intensified pressure on Romani families. Adolf Hitler had ordered the attack on Poland on 1 September 1939, following which France had declared war on Germany and men had been mobilized. Several months of waiting followed during the autumn and winter of 1939/40 until the fatal day of 10 May 1940, when Hitler ordered the launch of German tanks and armoured vehicles onto the roads of Holland, Belgium and France. Eight million people took to the roads to escape the advancing German armies. Amid scenes of unimaginable chaos created by the exodus, circuses on tour were stuck. Paris surrendered on 11 June, and German troops paraded through the city before the eyes of dazed Parisians. The signing of an armistice on 22 June divided France’s metropolitan territory. In the north lay the occupied zone administered by the Germans and in the south, the free zone with Vichy as the capital of this French rump state. In November 1942, the Germans invaded the free zone and all of France was then under German occupation. In the early days of October 1940, the Germans decreed the internment of all *nomades* in the occupied zone. Those living in the non-occupied zone were to be placed under house arrest or interned in one of several camps where they remained even after the war ended, until 1946. Although there

14 *Le Journal de Flers*, 27 August 1919: 2.

15 “Rapport et décret relatifs à l’interdiction de la circulation des nomades sur la totalité du territoire métropolitain”, *Journal officiel*, 8–9 April 1940: 2600.

16 Marie-Christine Hubert, “The Internment of Gypsies in France”, in *The Gypsies during the Second World War: In the Shadow of the Swastika*, ed. Karola Fings (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997), 59–88.

was no mass deportation of the Roma, there were individual incidents. On 13 January 1943, 70 men left the Poitiers internment camp for Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany. On the 26 June 1943, 25 men of the same camp left for Buchenwald. Moreover, it is known that 157 French Roma were deported to Auschwitz on 15 January 1944, in the Z transport leaving Malines (Belgium).¹⁷

In the light of these considerations, what forms of resistance did Romani circus people in France develop? In their relationship with the French state and the majority community, the war years were not a parenthesis but rather a continuity, and their survival and resistance strategies display the same continuities. The Roma continued to defy constraint and to fight for their survival from wherever they were – in internment camps, under house arrest, on the road or within prestigious or more modest circuses.

Diversion, an Art of Defiance

It makes sense to focus on the verb “divert”, which comes from the Latin *divertere* – meaning “to turn in different directions” – and *devertere* [turn aside]. The forms of escapism that Romani circus people developed in their acts worked by diverting the watchers’ gaze and/or distracting them from their momentary purposes and preoccupations. Rosa Bouglione wrote that the context of the occupation and the privations it generated did not erase the strong need for escape among the population. The four brothers Alexandre (1900–54), Joseph (1904–87), Firmin (1905–80) and Nicolas (alias Sampion II, 1910–67), and their father Joseph alias Sampion Bouglione (1875–1941), wanted to continue to offer shows, laughter and happiness as they always had. Back in Paris after the signing of the armistice, they had to await German authorization to reopen the Cirque d’Hiver, which did not come until March 1941. At the same time, they also toured France, where people welcomed them enthusiastically. But the territorial division of Nazi-occupied France presented an obstacle to circuses attempting to tour, as did obtaining the required traffic permits. And there were other challenges, such as the lack of artists, animals, supplies and fuel for the vehicles. Getting fuel proved especially difficult and expensive because of the devaluation of the French currency. Rosa Bouglione insisted that they nonetheless continued to “offer dreams and hope”. She remembered that the spectators were radiant, giving up their worries at the front door. Thus, for the Bougliones, there was no question of giving up.

17 Emmanuel Filhol, “Pouvoirs publics et Tsiganes après la Libération. L’exemple de la Gironde (1944–années 1950)”, in *Roms, Tsiganes, Nomades. Un malentendu européen*, ed. Catherine Coquio (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2014), 213–36 (here 217); Monica Heddebaut, *Des Tsiganes vers Auschwitz. Le convoi Z du 15 janvier 1944* (Paris: Tirésias-Michel Reynaud, 2018).



Fig. 35 *Robin Hood* pantomime, Cirque d'Hiver, Paris. From the Spanish news, 24 June 1943. (FilmotecaEspañola, NOT N 24 A 1:07)

In the harsh living conditions of internment camps, Romani performers tried to relieve the despair and suffering, not only of their own people but also of Jewish internees. Félicia Barnabel was a young Jewish internee in the Poitiers camp. When she arrived with her family in April 1941, the Roma were already there, interned on the other side of a barbed-wire fence since December 1940. Under conditions made inhumane by the muddy clay floor, lack of heating, inadequate and poor quality food, and lack of the most basic household equipment, interactions developed between the two outcast populations. She remembered that a cousin of Django Reinhardt was playing music, inviting the Jewish youth to dance. Félicia Barnabel recounted, “they were wonderful ... They saw us, we were like them, we ate the same thing as them: we had nothing, not much. Carrots, cabbages and swedes ... We made up a song about it. ... When we met again with some of them, we right away sang the song”.¹⁸ Despite the most terrible misery, the Roma managed to forget the exhausting feeling of hunger and decades later, the song remained a shared act of diversion, of defiance of

18 Interview Félicia Barbanel-Combaud, chapter 9, <https://entretiens.ina.fr/memoires-de-la-shoah/Barbanel/felicia-barbanel-combaud> (accessed 20 August 2020).



Fig. 36 Raymond Gurême on the left, with his parents and siblings. (with the authorization of Marie-Rose Gurême)

their miserable fate, and a sign of mutual recognition. When I met Raymond Gurême in his caravan, he told me about a song created by his sisters as a symbol of resistance after his second escape from the internment camp of Linas-Montlhéry in October 1941. He was 15 years old in October 1940 when he and his entire family were put under house arrest in Darnétal (Seine-Maritime) before being transferred to Linas-Montlhéry on 27 November 1940.¹⁹ His father, Hubert Leroux (born 1884), had lived until then in a wagon with his companion Mélanie Gurême (1902), born into a Yewish family in Alsace, and their nine children, aged between 2 and 18. He operated a small family circus as well as a travelling cinema with the help of the children, who started performing at an early age.

Upon their transfer to Linas-Montlhéry, Raymond and his family were forced to abandon everything they had: the wagons, the circus tent, the cinema and even their horses. The Major of Darnétal made them available to the farmers.²⁰ When they arrived at the internment camp for *nomades*, after long hours in railway cattle wagons without eating or drinking, and a

19 This paragraph is based on Raymond Gurême, interview with the author, 6 February 2020, and Raymond Gurême with Isabelle Ligner, *Interdit aux nomades* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2011).

20 *Journal de Rouen*, 2 December 1940: 3.

march from Brétigny-sur-Orge to the camp, they were shocked to discover its demeaning living conditions. Raymond and his brother René escaped a first time in July, only to be soon returned to the camp. In October 1941, Raymond broke out again. After this second escape, the guards continued to read his name at the roll call.²¹ When hearing their brother's name, the sisters retorted 'escaped', and they sang a song which they had written in honour of their brother:

What no man could do, a fifteen-year-old showed
 That it's no big deal to free all these people from their chains.
 It was for a trifle that they put him in the hole,
 But his anger was such that he was gone in the evening.
 Gone from Linas-Montlhéry.
 The *gendarmes* went after him, but they couldn't catch him.
 They all returned empty-handed, the chief looked like a dummy!
 And, God willing, it won't be today or tomorrow
 That we see our brother again!

This second song makes clear that despite the internment, the privations endured, the Romani were not devoid of humour, and they maintained their defiance. Humour served three main functions. First, it reinforced the cohesion among people by creating a social bond and strengthening solidarity among those who laughed or mocked their oppressors together. At best, humour had a critical function, drawing attention to what was wrong and encouraging defiant attitudes. Finally, humour was also the ultimate defence mechanism, a psychological support as well as a spiritual resistance; like religion, it helped internees to endure humiliations and suffering without losing their sanity.²²

Although Charlie Chaplin was residing in the United States when he filmed *The Dictator*, he too resorted to humour in his mockery of Adolf Hitler. And what about the Bougliones? They produced two shows in Paris during the war, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Robin Hood*, that invite us to consider whether they can be characterized as mocking or satirical. According to Rosa Bouglione, the first of these (January 1942) represented a rather obvious allegory, where France was left sleeping under the Nazi occupation and could only be freed by Prince Charming, in the person of the Allies. Nothing can confirm this hypothesis, and neither the German censors nor the collaborationist press at the time identified

21 Leny Mauduit, "Raymond Gurême, une vie de luttes", *Paris-luttes.info*, 14 June 2020, <https://paris-luttes.info/raymond-gureme-une-vie-de-luttes-14109> (accessed 20 August 2020).

22 Andréa Lauterwein, "Du rire anti-nazi au rire catastrophé. Cabaret, blagues et jargons dans les ghettos et les camps", in *Rire, Mémoire, Shoah*, ed. Andréa Lauterwein (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 2015), 79–106.

anything objectionable about the production. But Rosa Bouglione's interpretation nonetheless bespeaks a spirit of defiance. According to Rosa, *Robin Hood* (premiered 17 April 1943) got her husband Joseph into trouble. Once again, the collaborationist press did not detect any critical element. Hence, a journalist on *La France socialiste* summarized the show as follows: the famous Robin Hood leads a gang that escapes all the traps set by its pursuers. Thanks to the complicity of peasants and of women, he confronts his enemies, going so far as to provoke them.²³ Nowadays readers would see a clear analogy to the resistance against Nazism. Indeed, the traditional tale glorifies the righteous outlaw fighting against the oppressor, his victory and the liberation of his country. The fact that clowns were interfering in all the scenes may have blurred so literal a reading of this circus show. However, Rosa Bouglione stated that Joseph was summoned to the *Kommandantur* because of a scene in which Marianne – the symbol of the French Republic – descends the stairs, a tricolour bouquet in hand. Whatever the truth of the anecdote of the bouquet and the summons, the Bougliones surely enjoyed praising the king of England; in the Robin Hood story, while bad King John is in charge of the country, the people are yearning for King Richard to return from the crusades. This surrogate dream of liberation did not fit well with the German occupation.

A second major and literal form of diversion consists in the arts of escape and, to a lesser extent, a particular circus act: sleight of hand. Escape is the most common act of defiance catalogued in the archives.²⁴ Once again, Félicia Barnabel's oral testimony is of great value, not least because it emphasizes interaction and solidarity between Roma and Jewish people. She remembered that in the camp, "the Gypsies simulated fights in agreement with whoever wanted to escape, and during the fight while all the *gendarmes*, the civilian guards were around them, well, there was a little Jew who was running away ... That I saw with my own eyes".²⁵ Internees escaped as groups, as families, or alone, sometimes helped from the outside, and by any means necessary. They sneaked out, took advantage of leaves of absence or did not return from stays in the hospital.²⁶ While in Linas-Montlhéry, Henriette Gurême, Raymond's sister, tried to escape with two other young girls, but they were recaptured a month later, on 26 July 1941. The frequent active collaboration of the population, who denounced them to the police or even walked them back to the camp, led to the majority of the escapees being recaptured after only a few days.²⁷ But that was not the case with Raymond Gurême after his second attempt in October 1941.

23 A.D., "Au cirque d'hiver. Robin des Bois", *La France socialiste*, 3 May 1943: 3.

24 Foisneau and Merlin, "French Nomads' Resistance".

25 Interview with Barbanel-Combaud.

26 Filhol, "L'indifférence collective au sort des Tsiganes", 76.

27 Jacques Sigot, *Ces barbelés oubliés par l'Histoire. Un camp pour les Tsiganes ... et les*



Fig. 37 Memorial for the internment of Roma families in Linas-Montlhéry. R. Gurême's escape and hiding at the top of a tree symbolizes the Roma resistance. (L. Prempain)

He had been locked up for a month in solitary confinement in a small wooden barrack without windows: "They opened the door every three days to give me a little water and a piece of bread. It was total darkness".²⁸ Raymond managed to escape thanks to the circus skills he had acquired at a very young age: first, sleight of hand and his extraordinary flexibility allowed him to free himself of his handcuffs. Second, he made use of the handcuffs to unscrew parts of the door and open it. Then, thanks to his ability as an acrobat, he succeeded in reaching the top of a tree where he spent all night in the cold while the police and *gendarmes* were searching for him on the ground. In the early morning, he descended from his tree

autres: Montreuil-Bellay, 1940–1945 (Châteauneuf-les-Martigues: Éditions Wallada, 1994), 212.

28 Théophile Leroy, "Des 'nomades' derrière les barbelés. Étude du camp d'internement de Linas-Montlhéry en France occupée (novembre 1940–avril 1942)" (MA thesis, Sciences Po, Paris, 2016), 175.

and made his definitive escape from the camp. He then reached Brittany on foot and succeeded in being hired on farms.

The archival record of the S n ca circus family shows how they were able to use social networks to escape the camp of Montreuil-Bellay. On 30 April 1943, the *gendarmerie* of Fert -Bernard (Sarthe) arrested 18 members of the S n ca family, all circus performers.²⁹ Amongst the internees was Juliette Falck (born 1882), interned with her husband, D sir  Pierre S n ca, their son Albert (1907) and his partner Jos phine (born in Mouredon, 1907), who was also his cousin, and with whom he had eight children: Bertrand (1930), Andrea (1932), Nicolas (1932), Lucien (1936), Joseph (1937), Am lie (1938), Pierre (1940) and Victor (1941). Julien S n ca (1913), Juliette's son, was also interned with his companion Emilie, born in Mordon, and their children Jos phine (1937) and Henriette (1940), although Nadia (1939) was absent during their arrest.³⁰ Finally, Am lie S n ca (1921), daughter of Juliette and D sir  S n ca, was arrested with her own daughter, and her partner Robert S n ca (1922) was seized a few days later. These four families, whose patriarchs were a circus director, circus artist, equestrian, and fairground artist, were released on 26 June 1943, thanks to the intervention of two circus directors. Indeed, both the Zoo circus and the Bouglione circus committed themselves to hire them.³¹ The Bougliones cannot confirm that the S n cas were really hired, which would suggest that this arrangement was purely an escape strategy. Rosa Bouglione recalled that they sometimes "hired circus boys or workmen who they knew were at odds with the Germans, some of them were resistance fighters".³²

From Where They Were: Women's Art of Defiance

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".³³ With this formulation, Simone de Beauvoir distinguished sex, the invariant anatomical and factual aspects of the female body, from gender, the variable cultural meaning and form that that body acquires through its growth into a particular social context. Natural bodies diverge from constructed genders. This means that "female acts" do not exist as such; there is not a female feature that would

29 Extract from the register of decrees of the Sarthe prefecture, 28 October 1942, and *Proc s-verbal* of arrest 30 April 1943, both French Departmental Archives Maine-et-Loire, 12 W 65.

30 Roger (December 1941–March 1943) is on the list of arrests established on 28 October 1942, but he had died by the time the arrests were carried out at the end of April 1943.

31 Sigot, *Ces barbel s oubli s par l'Histoire*, 204.

32 Bouglione, *Un mariage dans la cage aux lions*, 165.

33 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

explain the resistance of certain women. Women did not resort to defiance because they were women, and men did not resort to active resistance because they were men. Rather, women's actions reflected their place in society; they resisted from where they stood, which was in most cases the domestic sphere assigned to their gender.

Jacques Sémelin's work on non-violence is useful in accounting for women's strategies. He explains that three principles characterize a non-violent action strategy: the subject asserts first her own resistance to subjection and then her refusal to obey, and in a third step she summons witnesses to her action, for example inviting media coverage of the conflict.³⁴ In the case of Angèle Siegler, self-awareness of her will to resist, combined with a refusal to cooperate and the high visibility of her acts within the camp, which served as a call to rebellion, were all initially non-violent acts, carried out by a woman refusing to accept her status. This, in turn, resulted from her intellectual commitment to defend fundamental rights and her respect for human rights. Angèle Siegler was born in 1921 and crossed paths with Charles Henri Rieffel (born 1910), the grandson of Charles Klising, a circus director, and Anne Winterstein, a Manouche rope-dancer and acrobat. Angèle and Charles Henri Rieffel married in October 1942 while interned in the Montreuil-Bellay camp, but it was in 1941, in the camp of Choisel (Loire-Inférieure), that the archives record her act of rebellion. On 21 March 1941, Angèle was queuing for the sugar ration to which she was entitled for her infant: "When her turn came and she saw the amount of sugar she was given, she preferred to throw it on the floor rather than accept such a paltry amount".³⁵ Her forceful action, and the riot that almost followed, brought her a month in prison. Her action was similar to the protests by Frenchwomen that had been multiplying outside the camp since July 1940, as housewives took to the streets to demand coal, potatoes and bread.³⁶ Inasmuch as street protests were strictly forbidden by Vichy, these events constitute a form of resistance, as does Angèle's protest inside the camp.

The following case demonstrates another way in which women resisted from the places that society assigned them – here, their nurturing role. The Traveller Marie Laroche (born 1909) already belonged to a circus family when, in 1934, she married the acrobat Charles Beautour (born 1904), who had a circus background that went back several generations. She continued to tour with the Beautour family. She reported that "before the war, [they] travelled from one town to another and presented circus shows and travelling cinema". She explained that her family owned a house near

34 Jacques Sémelin, "Résister sans armes: Du combat non violent et de la résistance civile", in *De la violence II*, ed. Françoise Héritier (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999), 245–68 (here 251).

35 Foisneau and Merlin, "French Nomads' Resistance", 77.

36 Danielle Tartakowsky, *Les Manifestations de rue en France (1918–1968)* (Paris: Presse de la Sorbonne, 1997).

Loudun (Indre-et-Loire), which was probably the reason why they were not interned in 1940. Marie remembered how every two weeks they would ride in a horse-drawn wagon along the fence of the camp of Montreuil-Bellay, where Roma families were interned. "The day before, I prepared boiled eggs and packed all sorts of food for these poor people ... but also cigarettes. [As it was forbidden to stop,] I threw these few provisions over the barbed wire".³⁷ Finally, we may return to the story of Raymond Gurême. After he managed to escape and reach Brittany in the autumn of 1941, he worked on different farms: "When I had a little money, I would go to Montreuil-Bellay and throw food over the wire fence to my family. I would tell my sister 'such-and-such a day and time' and she would wait next to the wire fence".³⁸ He was the only member of the family who was in a position to bring food to the family and he took on this role as long as he could, until a last visit when he was seen by an armed guard; he fought with him, hit him several times in the head and ran away. Bringing food to the camp was not without danger, a risk that both men and women took to sustain the internees.

A witness who chose to remain anonymous offered a last example of women's non-violent strategy of resistance. When he was a child and interned at Montreuil-Bellay, the camp authorities condemned his aunt and uncle for insulting a guard who refused to let him attend school in the camp. As a result, his uncle was sent to the "gnouf", a cellar used as the camp's prison. He was released after 15 days and his wife was then imprisoned in turn. The witness said that she "did not stay longer than half-an-hour because she made a scene. And once one woman was locked up, all the others and all the children screamed, yelled. So the guards let her out".³⁹ Diverting and defying are not strictly separate; in real life, they are intertwined. Diversion can lead to a fight for survival and make defiance an art of resistance.

Defiance, an Art of Resistance

Acts of nurturing are present not only in the forms of non-violent resistance characteristic of women, but also in the world of organized resistance by clandestine groups like the *maquis*. The Traveller Baptiste Esther and his wife Adrienne (Méli) Falck (niece of the Juliette Falck mentioned above) were both born to parents who worked in the circus and the dramatic arts. Both were born in France, Adrienne on 30 November 1896 in the Oise *département*, and Baptiste on 24 August 1893 in the Loire. They married during the First World War, and in 1922 they bought a plot of land near

37 Sigot, *Ces barbelés oubliés par l'Histoire*, 247.

38 Quoted by Théophile Leroy, "Des 'nomades' derrière les barbelés", 175.

39 Jacques Sigot, "Témoignages", *Études tsiganes* 6 (1995): 185–92 (here 192).

the municipality of Gièvres. That was obviously a calculated choice, since they settled in front of the house of Paul Michelet, a circus man whom Baptiste had met during his military mobilization in the north of France. Following the tradition, several other marriages were made between the two families, strengthening their relations. At that time, Baptiste and Méli owned a small circus, which they managed with their children.⁴⁰ Each family member had a particular responsibility in the circus, and these are clear in photographic documents: little Rita Esther trained ponies for her show, while her sister Zeli rode the ponies wearing shiny costumes and a golden headdress. Their mother was an acrobat. The couple also cared for Marius Suils, a young boy of Spanish descent whose mother had lost everything and sent him to the Esther family. Marius was taught to ride and to perform in equestrian shows.⁴¹ They were required to register as fairground operators (*forains*) and carry the corresponding identity papers (*cartes forains*), but the French authorities nevertheless assigned them to the category of *nomades*. As a result, during the Second World War, the Esther family was under house arrest following the decree of 6 April 1940. They decided to move to Jeu-Maloches (Indre), 30 kilometres from Gièvres, close to a family they knew who would help them while the law put their circus activities in abeyance. Every single member of the Esther family, men, women and children, benefited from their friends' solidarity, and were employed in different farms around Jeu-Maloches as seasonal workers, during the harvest or for other seasonal agricultural tasks. Baptiste, who managed to bring his circus horses with him during his family's house arrest, got in touch with active Resistance networks in the nearby *maquis*, and sent supplies to various caches around Jeu-Maloches. After the war, he managed to return to his circus activities, partly due to the appreciation and assistance of former Resistance members.⁴²

Franz Kopf, son of Joseph Kopf and Rosalie Kortés, was born in 1923 in Dvorce (Moravia-Silesia). When the war broke out, he was living in France, working in the Bureau Circus as a *Tchéco*.⁴³ Based in Bourges, the circus had obtained the authorization to travel in the free zone, crossing the demarcation line that strictly divided France into two territories. It is likely that Franz Kopf continued his work during that period and moved with the circus, working on its installations. In 1942, the circus was in Saint-Étienne, Roanne (Loire) and later Lyon. Franz Kopf joined the Resistance in

40 Baptiste's sister, Camille Esther, born in 1899, was registered as a motion picture operator in 1919: <https://gw.geneanet.org/rubensfabulet?n=esther&oc=&p=camille> (accessed 20 August 2020).

41 *L'Humanité*, 19 December 1935: 2.

42 Interview with Baptiste Caplot by Bruna Lo Biundo, 20 November 2018, in Gièvres. I am grateful to Bruna for this information.

43 *Tchéco* is the generic term used in Europe to designate tent fitters, who were often from Czechoslovakia.

the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur [FFI, the French Forces of the Interior] at an unknown date. He is said to have belonged to the Company Tardif, a part of the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance [MUR, United Movements of the Resistance]. He was killed in combat during the liberation of Montluçon (Allier) in August 1944. He does not have a file in the Service Historique de la Défense [Defence Historical Service, Ministry of the Army in Vincennes], but the civil register of the municipality where he died recorded that he had died for France.⁴⁴

Raymond Gurême was recaptured in June 1943 and placed in a reform school, the Villa des Roses, in Angers, where he asked to work. He was put in charge of the laundry from the hospital that adjoined the Villa. There, Raymond met a wounded Frenchman who would gradually incite him to take action. This man, whom Raymond would later identify as a member of the Resistance, urged him to seize one of the German vehicles coming to the hospital to bring food and supplies to injured German soldiers. Raymond described this as a minor incident. Nonetheless, while he was seizing the truck and handing it over to two accomplices dressed in German uniforms, the director of the hospital recognized him and denounced him. He was arrested in Paris, imprisoned in Angers in the German prison of Pré-Pigeon, judged and found guilty of acts of resistance and deported to Germany. Working as a forced labourer in a camp near Frankfurt, Raymond managed to escape on 15 June 1944. Thanks to the complicity of a French railwayman who drove regularly between Paris and Frankfurt, he was hidden in the coal bunker of the locomotive. He immediately resumed active service within the FFI, and carried out sabotage missions in Porte de la Chapelle, Saint-Denis, Enghien, Pontoise and Argenteuil. During the Liberation of Paris (19–25 August 1944), Raymond engaged in street fighting and was wounded when his unit was called up to support the fighting near the Place de la Bourse. After the war, Raymond received no recognition of his involvement in the French Resistance. His request to the French authorities for a card officially certifying his status as a political internee, which would qualify him for respect and social benefits, was only granted in 2007, 27 years after he had applied.

Romani people undeniably did resist, from where they were, and they risked and lost their lives in the process. These narratives have been forgotten, and this raises two questions: Why have historians reflected so little on this chapter of the Second World War? and What is the place of resistance in the life of the Roma?

“The gaze makes history, and at the heart of any historical narrative lies the desire to know”. With regard to the Roma, this aspiration towards

44 *Le Maitron. Dictionnaire Biographique. Fusillés, guillotins, exécutés, massacrés 1940–1944*, <https://fusilles-40-44.maitron.fr/spip.php?article211246> (accessed 20 August 2020).

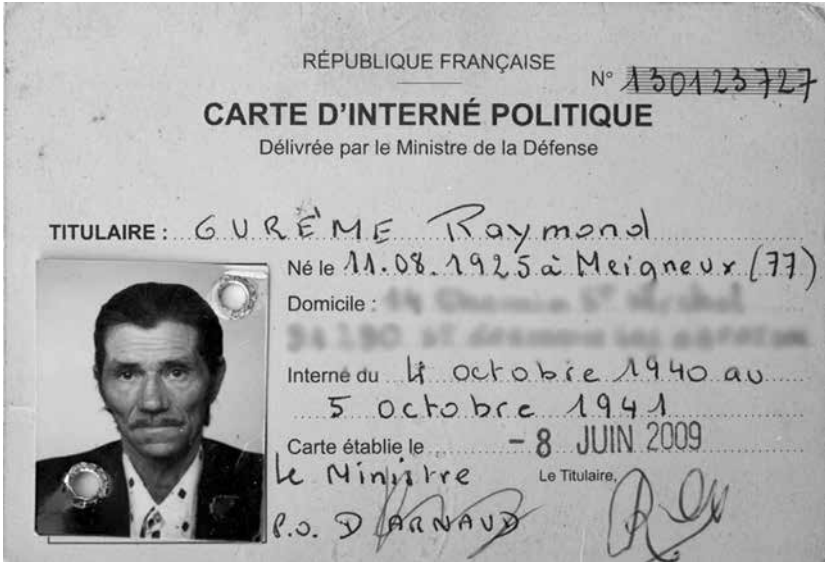


Fig. 38 Raymond Gurême's card identifying him as a political internee.
(with the authorization of Marie-Rose Gurême)

knowledge has long been lacking although sources are available. Consistent with Carlo Ginzburg's analysis of historians' preference for traditional and obviously safer ground, scholars who have studied the persecution of the Roma have deployed the administrative archives of the Vichy regime, thus reproducing the perpetrators' perspective.⁴⁵ They have unconsciously looked over the judges' shoulders, and unintentionally failed to go beyond the stereotypes that the French administration built through archives. At the same time, studies of the Liberation of France have shown that after four years of submission, fear and silence, each community collectively reclaimed its space. At the time of the Liberation, the literal reappropriation of the territory and its reintegration as a united nation induced shared sentiments and delight.⁴⁶ Yet the French political authorities did not consider that the Roma belonged to that nation, either then or in the preceding centuries. As James C. Scott wrote, "When whole peoples, such as pastoralists, gypsies, swidden, cultivators follow, by choice, an itinerant or semi-itinerant livelihood, they are seen as a collective threat and are collectively stigmatized".⁴⁷ Integrating them into the history of

45 Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 158.

46 François Rouquet and Fabrice Virgili, *Les Françaises, les Français de l'Épuration* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 2018), 114–15.

47 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland*

the Resistance is thus politically unthinkable. Lise Foisneau shares this point of view, arguing: “While the French Resistance contributed to bring people of different origins together, the participation of the *nomades* was not enough to transform in the long run their relationship with the rest of the French population”.⁴⁸

Yet, what conclusions can be drawn when, on the one hand, Foisneau confirms that “travellers ... in many cases participated in armed resistance”,⁴⁹ while on the other, a Romani witness interned during the Second World War asserts that “there were ... resistance fighters, but not too many”⁵⁰? Has this witness mentally internalized his own marginality to such an extent as to consider the existence of Roma resistance fighters insignificant, or is there an unspoken strategy behind his words? I would rather link this to the question of adaptive continuity by resorting to the fundamental concept of diverting.

Returning to the definition of the verb *divert* (i.e. to draw someone’s attention from a particular state of mind), I am reminded of an episode in my research. A member of the Bouglione family had invited me to attend the circus show before we met for an interview. My last visit to a circus had been several decades earlier and I enjoyed the show. One of the last acts was a demonstration of variations on the human pyramid. At a certain point, one of the men supporting another performer seemed to suffer from cramps and his partner knelt down next to him. They talked for few seconds, seemed to disagree, but finally clapped their hands to encourage the audience also to applaud their support. On the second try, they managed to carry off the act to admiring applause in which I enthusiastically participated. Later on, while thanking Mr Bouglione for his invitation, I commented on how dedicated the performers were and mentioned the two men who struggled with pain but still managed to complete their performance. At that point, Mr Bouglione was about to answer but stopped himself, and I understood: he did not want to divert me from what I thought. In fact, none of the performers had cramps; it was a trick to hold the attention of the audience.

What if the witness cited above did not want to divert his listeners from what they already believed, namely that Roma did not resist? As a purely theoretical exercise, what might have been the reason for such a strategy? First we need to take into account the reputation that circus people have for being untalkative. Dominique Denis, a former circus artist and a reputable circus scholar, writes that “circus people ... do not boast about their achievements and do not fully trust the ‘outside world’ in whom

Southeast Asia (Yale University Press, 2009), 101–02.

48 Foisneau and Merlin, “French Nomads’ Resistance”, 58.

49 Lise Foisneau, “Résistances voyageuses: un long combat”, *lundimatin* 213 (21 October 2019).

50 Sigot, “Témoignages”, 192.

they do not easily confide”.⁵¹ Similarly, Joseph Bouglione actually refused permission for stories about the family history to be published. This ban was breached by his wife Rosa after his death. However, her published memoir, *Un mariage dans la cage aux lions*, was based on a series of interviews that she gave, and the oral medium would have made it easier for her to let circus enthusiasts “imagine” what they wanted to. This hypothesis is all the more attractive in that in the current state of research we have no independent evidence to support Rosa Bouglione’s statements. This is not to say that these witnesses are lying; rather, it situates their statements in the approach expressed by a Parisian Rom: “If we continue to exist despite attempts to make us disappear, it’s because people can’t get to know us. Any process that leads to better knowledge of the Roma then appears to be dangerous”.⁵²

Those in power produced archives that reflected their determination to control. The French law of 1912 that imposed anthropometric identity cards on the so-called *nomades* was supplemented in 1917 with a law that required a compulsory identity card for all foreigners. Both *nomades* and foreigners were considered outsiders endangering the nation. Official texts that accompanied the 1917 decree clearly confirmed that it aimed to “ensure a permanent control of the foreigners in France”.⁵³ Every document, every piece of paper contributes to a coercive apparatus whose increase is directly proportional to the loss of liberty.⁵⁴ The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote, “The primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery”.⁵⁵ It is not going too far, then, to propose that the silence of Romani people about *all* of their actions during the Second World War is deliberate.

Conclusion

Romani circus people, like people from all the Romani populations in Europe, resisted. However, the forms of resilience and resistance that the Roma displayed during the Second World War are characteristic of a *habitus* that developed in response to their stigmatization by society and

51 Message from Dominique Denis to the author, 19 August 2019. I met Louis Sampion Bouglione and visited a part of the family museum in Cirque d’Hiver, but could not obtain more details nor meet direct witnesses of that time.

52 Patrick Williams, *Mariage tsigane. Une cérémonie de fiançailles chez les Roms de Paris* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1984), 19.

53 Rapport au président de la République Française du 31 mars 1917, *Journal officiel*, April 1917.

54 See Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

55 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 392.

the state, and it is in those terms that the narrative of the Roma must be understood: their ethic of resistance was a long-standing one, with which the temporary resistance of the average French citizen during the war coincided. Sometimes their paths would cross or run in parallel, and sometimes not, even though both were aspects of resistance. Thus, the resistance actions of the Roma must be seen as a continuation of the posture of defiance rooted in their identity. This has natural links to the characteristics of circus life, in which adaptability and an extraordinary capacity for resilience are essential, along with the key arts of diverting. For circuses, mobility too is of the essence. Adapting to the public space they did not create, since time immemorial they have sold their services to people who wanted them in the places where they were wanted. They thus “created their own niche in the fabric of urban space and quickly disappeared to ply their goods and services elsewhere”.⁵⁶

The Dictator, Charlie Chaplin’s first talking film, depicts the journey of a voiceless tramp of silent cinema and thus a wayless vagabond, who eventually shows the way in his closing six-minute speech. At once symbolic and paradoxical, this speech echoes in its contradictions the challenge of categorizing the defiant acts of the Roma during the Second World War. What *The Dictator* does show us is how the vagrant outsider is transformed into a rebellious historical actor and voices the interests of humanity in resisting Nazism.

56 Paul Bouissac, *The Meaning of the Circus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 187.

Chapter 12

Cowboys and Indians: Wild West Shows as Portals to Exotic Otherness and the Big, Wide World

Malte Gasche

Performances with a Wild West theme were and still are popular for circus acts and even for the composition of entire shows. The Bouglione circus dynasty, of Sinti origin and predominantly famous for running the *Cirque d'Hiver* in Paris, presented a show based on the legendary *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* exhibit that had toured Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The success of this show was instrumental in establishing the Bougliones' fortune. Yet they were not the only ones to see the potential of the Wild West; other individual performers and troupes also adopted the theme for their acts. This chapter focuses on the lesser-known circus family led by Erhard Bossle, whose members have earned their living by identifying as North American Indians since the mid-1950s. Although the Bossles have verifiable links to the Romani culture and milieu, they tend to say little about their family background in public.

Before the age of television and the rise of mass tourism, the circus and other showgrounds played a leading role in providing audiences with spectacular displays of the exotic and other marvels, especially in rural areas. Starting in spring 1958, a family claiming to be Plains Indians – father, mother, three children – travelled with the Finnish Sariola family's mobile amusement venues, also known as "Tivolis". In the following years, the troupe grew to seven members (three adults, four children). They performed in Sariola's Tivolis for several seasons in a row, wintering at a

caravan site in Hamburg-Entenwerder in Germany, though they said they were originally from Mexico. Erhard Bossle, the head of the troupe, told the Finnish newspaper *Länsi Savo* that his father, a member of the Bear clan, had arrived in Europe with the famous Wild West exhibit of Buffalo Bill.¹ In 2015, Peter Bossle, the youngest member of the group, recounted the legend of his father, a Blackfoot chief, coming with his family to the German circus Sarrasani in 1930.² An interview with Erhard's brother Leonhard, known for his stunt driver acts, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) in 1980, suggests that the family's origins were obfuscated not only for commercial reasons. The uncle of the alleged chief's son told the FAZ that the family's "dark skin colour" was inherited from their Brazilian grandmother. According to family lore, the grandfather, a musician, brought her to Germany.³ Identifying themselves with peoples known to have a darker complexion was apparently a strategy that members of the Bossle family deployed to justify their exotic appearance and camouflage their background.

The self-descriptions and the vocabulary used by stunt driver Monty Bossle, alias Bosselino, grandnephew of Erhard and Leonhard Bossle, serve to contextualize the social identity of the family and hint at a Sinti identity. Bosselino sings in the rap group Musty Basement. He and his fellow band members, who all hail from the ambulant entertainment milieu, among others from the Sinti high-wire artist Traber family, refer to themselves as *Nomaden* [nomads] and *Reisende* [travellers]; in 2009 they named their debut album *Nomaden Stylez*.⁴ Leonhard Bossle, who referred to a *Gaukler* [juggler] family history in his FAZ interview, reveals a strong sense of belonging to this milieu. In his music Bosselino uses vocabulary from the Sinti language. In addition, it is clear that, as well as pursuing working relationships with circus and fairground families from the Romani milieu, for generations the Bossles have also forged kinship ties with them through marriage.

Besides a general presentation of the history of the Wild West exhibits and their popularity, this chapter aims to chart the history of Erhard Bossle's family, to analyse the extraordinary ability of the ambulant entertainment milieu with its distinct Romani presence to quickly and ingeniously adapt new trends to earn a living, and to examine the way performing exotic otherness offered these performers a sense of security. The Bossles carefully followed social developments, using the Wild West shows not only to respond to a general interest in exotic exhibits but also to satisfy a contemporary desire for an alternative way of life, and concurrently combining

1 "Sariola Mikkelissä", *Länsi-Savo*, 19 September 1958: 2.

2 Kim Wengoborski, "Einsamer Häuptling", *Weser Kurier*, 12 October 2015, https://www.weser-kurier.de/region/osterholzer-kreisblatt_artikel,-Einsamer-Hauptling-_arid,1227838.html (accessed 10 April 2020).

3 Frank Gotta, "Helldriver", *Wochenendmagazin der FAZ* 10 (1980): 6–15, 43 (here 13).

4 <http://haanuk.de/pics/mustyBasement.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2020).

impressions and sensations with knowledge transfer. According to Edit Sandor Kleinbarth, a colleague of the Bossles in Finland, “People thought that they were real Indians, because their skin colour was a bit dark, just like Indians”.⁵ Although performing as Plains Indians constituted a means of earning their livelihood for the Erich Bossle troupe, concealing their background behind a seemingly more respectable exotic persona gave the Bossle family a feeling of security in the majority society.

Tracing the Lives of the Bossle Family

Although much has been written on the Sariola family and their cinema, circus and Tivoli activities,⁶ there are no portrayals of the dozens of foreign entertainers and their families who have performed in the Sariola companies and who contributed to their success. One recent publication on the Tivoli Sariola, however, does dedicate a few lines and a full-page illustration to Erhard Bossle and his family.⁷ The autobiography of Edit Sandor Kleinbarth, who comes from a German-Hungarian circus family and who worked in a number of Sariola companies, offers at least a glimpse of the foreign entertainers in the Sariolas’ Tivolis.⁸ And in their book on famous high-wire artists, the German circus historians Dietmar and Gisela Winkler also contextualize the Bossle family within the travelling entertainment milieu.⁹

The Art Museum in Kerava, the hometown of the Sariolas, has some material about the family’s various entertainment activities. Most of the Sariolas’ material has yet to be archived, however, and is in the hands of the many family members.¹⁰ The years the Bossles spent in Finland are documented in the museum’s picture collection, and the photos mainly show the family members dressed as North American Indians in parades advertising their performances. Another source preserved in the museum’s collection is the set of cards designed as souvenirs of the family’s Wild West show. From private collections, a programme sheet of the Tivoli presentation in Finland and a brochure advertising the Bossles’ performance from the 1970s provide information on the acts.

5 Edit Sandor Kleinbarth, *Balleriina hevosen selässä* (Valkeakoski: Gummerus, 2007), 99.

6 See, most recently, Päivi Pajula, Matti Rautiainen and Mikko Hiljainen, *Huvin Huipulla 130 vuotta. Tivoli Sariola 1888–2018* (Porvoo: Kirjakaari, 2018).

7 Pajula, Rautiainen and Hiljainen, *Huvin Huipulla 130 vuotta*, 58–59, 61.

8 Kleinbarth, *Balleriina hevosen selässä*, 102–04.

9 Dietmar and Gisela Winkler, *Menschen zwischen Himmel und Erde. Aus dem Leben berühmter Hochseilartisten* (Berlin: Henschel-Verlag Gesellschaft und Kunst, 1988), 398.

10 I would like to thank Antje Sariola, daughter of Kalevi Sariola, for this information.

Members of the travelling entertainment milieu are generally eager to be in contact with the press because they want to advertise and attract audiences to their performances. This was not the case, however, with Erhard Bossle's family and their Wild West act in Finland. The virtual absence of the family in press releases was probably due to their inability to speak Finnish, but their silence also preserved the air of mystery and strangeness around their presence in Finland. Using the German language would have most likely revealed the true origin of the Indians at the Sariolas' Tivolis. However, thanks to press reports on a 2018 exhibition held in Finland called the *Original Indian Expo*, a host of new information has come to light. The exhibition was based on the Bossle family's own collection. As a result, in addition to general insights into how the travelling entertainment milieu with its Romani members promoted their attractions to the public, we now have more precise knowledge about the costumes, props and equipment used in their acts.

In view of this challenging source situation, information and narratives from the entertainment milieu emerged as an important additional resource for the reconstruction of Erhard Bossle family's Wild West show. As the research progressed, interaction with Peter Bossle and other community members, several of whom had performed with the Bossles in one of the three Sariola Tivoli units, and some hobby circus historians who are highly respected within the community and also integrated into the milieu, evolved into a collaborative research effort.

The Wild West Comes to Europe

In general, the composition of acts with Cowboys, Indians, lasso and shooting performances combined with combat, hunting and other scenes is associated with the Wild West exhibitions brought to Europe in the late nineteenth century by William Frederick Cody alias Buffalo Bill. However, as early as 1644, several Iroquois were displayed in London, and in 1764 Mohawks were brought for exhibit in Amsterdam. The display of other Indian tribes at *Völkerschauen*, ethnographic exhibitions or human zoos which were particularly popular in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was to follow. The statue of the Native American Indian at the entrance to the Hagenbeck animal park in Hamburg still attests to the earlier business of park founder Carl Hagenbeck, who in 1910 showed a large group of Oglala Sioux, including warriors, women and children.¹¹

11 On *Völkerschauen*, see Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Eric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire, eds, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

Buffalo Bill's shows stood out thanks to their recreation of live action, such as a stagecoach attack or the Battle of Little Big Horn with the death of General Custer. In 1883 Cody founded *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*; the word *show* was not yet part of the title. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* toured Europe eight times, the first four tours between 1887 and 1892, and the last four from 1902 to 1906. Smaller-format shows like *Bud Atkinson's Wild West Show* with Brulé Sioux Indians from the Rosebud Reservation in North Dakota were already travelling in Europe when Buffalo Bill arrived.¹² The core of the travelling Wild West exhibitions was to demonstrate how the European settlers coped with the American wilderness, how they lived in the Wild West and how they had prevailed against the Native Americans. The "natives" were often displayed as an additional attraction in a camp that was open to the public, purportedly going about their real everyday lives. Thus, the Wild West shows brought an exotic foreign world to life for their European audiences.

Soon, the circus picked up on the Wild West theme. Inspired by Buffalo Bill, Hans Stosch, the director of the famous German circus Sarrasani, included shooting acts and Native American Indians in the programme. The first Native American under contract was Black Elk, a Sioux who died in the same year he arrived, 1907, and was buried in Munich. In 1913, when the first Sioux group arrived in Dresden, where Sarrasani owned and ran a stationary circus, even schools and factories were closed to welcome the new attractions. After their arrival, Stosch made films with members of the Sioux group in which cowboys and Indians chased each other through a birch forest in Dresden. The scenes were shown at the circus during breaks in the show. The Sioux group remained with the circus until the outbreak of war in 1914. From 1923 on, Native Americans appeared recurrently with Sarrasani.¹³

The Wild West and North American Indian theme also served as a poster motif for the circus. These posters were often designed and produced in Hamburg by the printing house of Adolph Friedländer, who worked globally with circuses and other companies from the entertainment world, and who also produced picture postcards starting in the mid-1890s. These illustrations of the North American Indians and their living environment reproduced existing stereotypes: Indians were depicted with long hair, moccasins, dyed leather clothing with fringes, magnificent feather headdresses, tomahawks and peace pipes. Horses, totem poles and teepees completed the description. Little concern was shown for tribal differences in language, custom or belief, and in the European mind the

12 Wolfgang Seifert, *Patty Frank. Der Zirkus. Die Indianer. Das Karl-May-Museum. Auf den Spuren eines ungewöhnlichen Lebens* (Bamberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 1998), 11.

13 Rudolf Conrad, "Mutual Fascination: Indians in Dresden and Leipzig", in *Indians and Europe*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 455–74.

Plains Indian came increasingly to represent the concept of the Indian.¹⁴ The *Völkerschauen* and Wild West shows thus transported their audiences into a dream world, largely of their own making, but hand in hand with the confirmation of stereotypes, the authenticity of the groups presented was emphasized. The audiences wanted to believe that the shows they saw were *real*. And the performances looked *real* to the audiences because they corresponded to their own preconceptions and the presenters assured them that everything was *original*. This was a rhetoric that would also be used by the Bossle family.

Not every circus had enough money to present authentic North American Indians in its show. If a circus wanted to hire a group of Native Americans, for instance, they had not only to pay them, but also to cover their travel expenses and subsistence, and to sign a letter of intent to pay repatriation costs if they died in Europe. Only the key players in the circus industry could afford such expenses. Masquerading represented a far cheaper option. Buffalo Bill himself had no Native American Indians in his show at first. Until 1877, their role was played by white cowboys in costume and make-up.¹⁵ In the mid-1920s, the French Bouglione family, of Sinti origin, who had previously run a menagerie, entered the circus business with a show entitled *Stade du Capitaine Buffalo Bill*, aiming to create the impression that the exhibition was of an authentic American Wild West outfit. *The Billboard*, the leading journal for the entertainment business, pointed out that the “Bouglione lithos were a marvelous facsimile of genuine Buffalo Bill posters, but the Bouglione Buffalo Bill resembles a Spanish Don and the show’s redskins were black”.¹⁶ Forty years later, Romani people were still trapped in racial clichés, but received salaries for acting as Indians and Mexicans in Wild West movies; they contributed, for example, to the success of the so-called Spaghetti Western between about 1960 and 1978.¹⁷ Matti Sariola, owner of the travelling fairground of the same name, where the Erhard Bossle’s family began its Finnish adventure as Plains Indians, said of the presentation of exotic people in his company: “The most important thing was mystery and strangeness: for the real facts you had to close your eyes ... The circus and fairgrounds are fairy tales that you need to approach with a head full of toys”.¹⁸

14 Robert F. Berkehofer, Jr, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 97.

15 Jeremy Agnew, *Entertainment in the Old West: Theater, Music, Circuses, Medicine Shows, Prizefighting and Other Popular Amusements* (Jefferson, MO: McFarland, 2011), 196.

16 “French Alter ‘Anni’ with Expo Feature”, *The Billboard*, 25 March 1950: 54.

17 Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 121.

18 “101 vuotta tivoliuveja Keravalla”, *Keravan Sanomat*, 20 January 1989: 8–10 (here 9).

For several reasons, the cowboy and Indian theme evolved into the most prominent and enduring exotic motif displayed in the circus and other showgrounds. Cowboys and Indians in combat, where the hero was often left alone to fight against his enemies, thrilled the audience.¹⁹ Wild West movies and television series reinforced the stereotypical roles and images of cowboys and Indians, including costumes, customs and scenery. One of the reasons for the great success of the Wild West theme was its confirmation of these stereotypes. Viewers were not overwhelmed by new material, but immediately found their way by comparing what they saw with what was familiar to them, seeing their expectations confirmed and being able to take note of and process minor variations.

The members of the Bossle family always displayed an American flag in their promotional activities and later also in their car stunt shows. But it was more than the desire for adventure or the fascination with America as a country of unlimited opportunities that made the Wild West theme enormously popular.²⁰ A further factor was the longing for untouched nature as an escape from the industrialized and civilized world, adroitly used by circus and other show advertisements displaying landscape dioramas of the Wild West on their billboards and souvenir cards.

For the performers it was possible to combine the Wild West theme with already existing horse-riding skills and to develop various circus disciplines from the motif. Even today, in most of the smaller family circuses, several of which have a Romani background, lasso, bullwhip and knife thrower acts in cowboy and Plains Indian costumes are fixed parts of the programme. Like *fakir* performances and presentations of snakes and camels, acts related to the Wild West theme embodied the exotic element in these shows; Wild West acts offered audiences entertainment and the chance to envisage adventures of faraway lands, but also enabled them to encounter otherness in a safe and controlled space.

The Bossle Family and Their Wild West Show

Erhard Bossle had five brothers – Alois, Eduard, Karl, Leonhard and Wilhelm. They came from an old family of circus artists who specialized in high-wire artistry. The parents of the six siblings were Peter and Toni Bossle, née Winter. Until the mid-1950s, Peter Bossle's brother Carl Stephan Bossle, married to Margarete Traber, travelled with a circus named Olympia in Germany. After the war ended, the family circus was trapped in the Soviet occupation zone. However, they managed to move to Bavaria during

19 Berkehofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 97–101.

20 Katja Iken, "Bayrische Wildwest Manie. Kom, hol das Lasso raus", *Der Spiegel*, 13 June 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/bayerische-wildwest-manie-isar-western-und-cowboy-club-a-1266535.html> (accessed 10 April 2020).

the winter of 1945/46. One of Carl Stephan Bossle's sons was missing in the war and another son, Alois, had a fatal accident during loading work in 1948. In 1954, he dissolved his circus.²¹

For an open-air tour through Belgium in 1955, Peter Bossle and Carl Stephan Bossle joined forces with several other circus people from Germany, including members of the Bügler, Traber and Sperlich families.²² In the same year, a troupe called Bosslé, in which Peter's son Leonhard performed as an aerialist under the name Captain Leonardo Bosslé, travelled in the Netherlands. The Dutch newspaper *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* informed its readers that Leonard had run up the Eiffel Tower on a steel wire in 1949 and had crossed the Thames on a rope in 1954.²³ Charles Bosslé's open-air show most probably started touring in Belgium, presenting high-wire artistry with the sons of Peter Bossle.²⁴ In the mid-1950s, some members of the Bossle family started spending their winters in Dinslaken, North Rhine-Westphalia. Although most of the people of Dinslaken warmly welcomed the family, when they arrived there were those who shouted: "Take in the laundry, the Gypsies are coming!" The family bought property and land in Dinslaken, and became citizens of the city, as the previously cited *FAZ* article noted.²⁵

The Bossles were also successful in the United States. Wilhelm Bossle, who was trained on the high wire, took the stage name Joe Williams and even found his way to Hollywood, where he worked as a stuntman in the 1964 film *Circus World*. Together with his nephews Jonny and Monti Bossle, the sons of Leonard Bossle, they performed car stunts in the 1971 James Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever*, Joe Williams doubling for Sean Connery. In California, the brothers Jonny and Monti Bossle met their wives Arlanda and Yolanda Bossle, the daughters of Frieda Daniels, née Lemoine, descended from a family of high-wire artists and survivors of the Nazi persecution of Romani people. Jonny and Monti and their families still have a second home in Temecula, California.²⁶ Starting in 1969, members of this branch of the family also performed motorcycle, car

21 Winkler and Winkler, *Menschen zwischen Himmel und Erde*, 398; Death notice for Alois Bossle, *Das Programm*, 24 May 1948: 2.

22 Julien De Vogelaere, "Vergunnings-Aanvraag tot tewerkstelling van fremde artisten", 21 January 1955, Zirkusarchiv Winkler, Berlin.

23 "Open een dunne draad 36m boven het Lorentzplein. Captain Bosslé vertoonde zijn stunts", *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 23 June 1955: 11.

24 Leaflet "De internationale Bosslé Show", Zirkusarchiv Winkler.

25 Gotta, "Helldriver", 43.

26 Cathy Redfern, "Wine Country: Local Woman Still Walks the High Wire", *San Diego Union Tribune*, 16 January 2009, https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-wine-country-local-woman-still-walks-the-high-wire-2009jan16-story.html?fbclid=IwAR2ZtCBLR3BWj41Jf9_RZcoMrhYXTHwo6FmF6IM33JtCfkjEcZ5-Dr4hZA (accessed 10 April 2020).

stunt and monster truck shows in Europe. They presented their *Original Hell Drivers Show* at the Munich Oktoberfest for over 40 years, until 2011.²⁷

The year 1958 turned out to be a devastating one for Peter Bossle and his family. Family members went their separate ways. His son Eduard Bossle fell from the high wire during a fast run in the dark in Wiescherhöfen near Hamm and died that same night in hospital.²⁸ His son Erhard Bossle and his wife Regina, née Bügler, went to Finland with their children Carola, Hermann and Leonhard, to perform as a family of Plains Indians. With an act on the ground, Erhard Bossle distinguished himself from the spectacular and dangerous acts of his brothers, who worked first on the high wire and then as *Hell Drivers*. Although relatively young children could join the Bossles' car stunt shows, Erhard Bossle's children were involved in the Wild West number from a much earlier age. The youngest son, Peter, joined the show as a baby in a cot decorated with putative North American Indian patterns. According to Kalle Nyman, the idea of performing as Plains Indians was developed within the family.²⁹ In addition, the mother-in-law could be integrated into the act, enabling Erhard Bossle and his family to stage themselves as a traditional three-generation North American Indian group in Finland.

Erhard Bossle's family performed as side shows at the Tivoli companies of Matti, Teuvo and Unto Sariola, which were a mix of travelling fairground and circus attractions. They were probably introduced to Sariola by Alfons Bohnstedt. Originating from a German circus family, Bohnstedt had come from Hamburg to join Matti Sariola as a zookeeper and clown. At that time, the Sariola family had a leading position in the entertainment scene, which it continues to hold today. The dynasty and enterprise go back to Johan Walfried Abraham Grönroos. His son Johan Adolf Frederik, known as Jaffu, who changed the Swedish name Grönroos into the Finnish name Sariola in 1918, continued to develop the Tivoli, and operated a circus under the name Sariola between 1949 and 1953. Jaffu Sariola had three sons, all of whom now run their own enterprises. At the end of the 1950s, a Tivoli Teuvo Sariola, a Tivoli Unto Sariola and a Tivoli Matti Sariola were all touring in Finland. Since 1961, Unto Sariola's company has been known as Suomen Tivoli.³⁰ Even after Erhard Bossle and his family returned to Germany, they remained in contact with the Sariolas. Teuvo Sariola's son Kalevi travelled with Leonhard Bossle's *Hell Driver Show* in the UK in 1974.

27 https://www.ganz-muenchen.de/oktoberfest/fahrgeschaefte/modern/bossles_helldrivers.html (accessed 30 May 2020).

28 "Nach drei Abstürzen ereilte ihn der Tod", *Das Organ* 10 (1958): 1.

29 In addition to the printed sources cited, the following account of the Bossle family history draws on information provided by Kalle Nyman, Björn Gammals, Peter Lindfors, Gisela Nyman, Antje and Tertu Sariola, Peter Bossle and Kari Nieminen, for whose help and support I am grateful.

30 Sven Hirn, *Kuvat kulkevat* (Helsinki: Suomen elokuvasäätiö, 1981), 158; Pajula, Rautiainen and Hiljainen, *Huvin Huipulla 130 vuotta*, 12–26, 45–69.

In every Sariola Tivoli, Erhard Bossle and his family performed in a separate tent. In front of the entrance there was a front stage, just like the show stalls at fairs, from where the performers advertised their show and tried to woo visitors. Especially on Sundays they could present their show up to ten times. A programme sheet from Matti Sariola's Tivoli of 1960 announced the Erhard Bossle family as 7 Broadnes. In that year, Erhard Bossle's mother-in-law Mitze Bügler joined the troupe. According to the programme and eyewitnesses, the show started with war and ritual dances, followed by lasso and bullwhip acts. One of the highlights of the performance was when Erhard Bossle lashed a newspaper, held in his wife's hand, into shreds with his whip. At the end of the show, he would shoot at targets from different positions with his air rifle. In addition, his wife Regina contributed to their 25- to 30-minute show with two acts. She walked a tightrope and presented paper artwork reminiscent of origami. A totem pole and a drum completed the performance area. Erhard and Regina Bossle also posed with horses to strengthen their image as Plains Indians. For this role, the parents left their children's dark hair uncut. Erhard Bossle, too, never wore a wig, but instead preferred to grow his black hair long. The show was also promoted by parades of the performers whenever the Tivoli arrived in a new town.

Considering that Finland has a small population and that the act remained largely the same, the life of the Bossles' Wild West show with the Sariola Tivoli enterprises – from 1958 to 1966, interrupted only by two years when the family performed in Sweden – was a relatively long one. This, and the fact that even before the arrival of the Erhard Bossle family a five-person group of alleged North American Indians called Terri-Melencia appeared a Sariola show, indicates that the Wild West theme met with great interest in Finland, particularly in the countryside. At the Tivoli Teuvo Sariola, the Bossles were in company with the Schumacher family from Germany. Dressed as cowboy and cowgirl, the father, Dominik Schumacher, and his daughter Mariechen performed a knife-throwing act. In previous years during a South American tour, this performance was also announced as The Dominic/s Cowboy-Show. The Bossles were friends with the Schumacher family; they promoted their shows together and spent winters together in Hamburg.³¹ Starting in the mid-1960s Leonhard Bossle, the eldest son of the family, took on the role of a cowboy in the Bossles' Wild West show.

Evidence of the popularity of the Wild West theme among the Finnish population can be seen in the audience's interest in acquiring souvenir cards to remember the Bossles' act. During their ten years performing at Sariola's Tivolis, the Bossle family offered various souvenir cards for sale. A postcard from 1959, for instance, shows a group of two adults and three children dressed as North American Indians. Such group images can also be found for the following years. A souvenir card from the early

31 Kleinbarth, *Balleriina hevosen selässä*, 102.



Fig. 39 Erhard and Regina Bossle posing with horses.
(Taide- ja museokeskus Sinkka, Kerava)



Fig. 40 Members of the Bossle family wooing visitors to their show.
(Taide- ja museokeskus Sinkka, Kerava)

1960s presents, in addition to a group portrait, an image of Erhard Bossle performing a dance with a spear and rattle, while another picture on the card shows Regina Bossle putting an arrow to her husband's bow and the last image shows her origami-like work with supposed North American Indian motifs. The people who bought such souvenir cards could feel inspired by the images to play Wild West games and immerse themselves in another world.

After their engagement in Finland, Erhard Bossle and his family returned to Germany. They continued to perform their Wild West act at the amusement parks Phantasialand in Brühl and Löwen Safari Tüddern, near Selfkant. In addition, members of the family performed under the name 5 Original Schwarzfuss-Indianer [5 Original Blackfoot Indians] in department stores, supermarkets and shopping streets, and also offered to present their show at corporate events and Christmas parties in Belgium and Germany. They were accompanied by Toni and Burda Schumann and their chimpanzees. The animal trainer was Dominik Schumacher's brother, who had changed his name for professional reasons.³²

In the early 1970s, Herbert Vigas, alias Carlo Sarini, alias Fuzzy, who starred in more than 200 western films as a comical cowboy figure, became a special attraction in Bossle's Wild West show. In February 1978, the German newspaper *Die Zeit* devoted an article to Fuzzy and the Wild West show, when the group staged a performance at a department store anniversary in Wunstorf near Hanover. The report illustrated the declining popularity of the Wild West theme in the late 1970s and expressed pity for the actors. According to the story, the stage was set in a draughty wooden shed behind the department store on a wet and cold February day. The article cited a 73-year-old female passer-by's moral outrage: "It's just inhumane to make people perform under such conditions".³³ Obviously, the show did not make much money: "Even a small business can afford a big show like this, because it's reasonably priced", its advertising leaflet promised.³⁴ The closure of the Löwen Safari Tüddern in 1989 put a final end to the Bossles' Wild West performances.

Original Indian Expo

In the 2018 season, an exhibition called *Original Indian Expo* toured Finland. The 80 objects displayed in the collection come from the Bossle family and were curated by Peter Bossle, once the youngest member of

32 Kleinbarth, *Balleriina hevosen selässä*, 94.

33 Raimund Hoghe, "Der Zwang Fuzzy zu sein", *Die Zeit*, 24 February 1978, <https://www.zeit.de/1978/09/der-zwang-fuzzy-zu-sein/komplettansicht> (accessed 10 April 2020).

34 Leaflet "Aktionen bringen Kunden", private collection of Edit Sandor Kleinbarth.

Fig. 41 (a and b) Souvenir card and advertisement card of the 7 Broadnes. (Taide- ja museokeskus Sinkka, Kerava)



the family's Wild West show. The *Original Indian Expo* was shown in combination with a dinosaur exhibition and a display on human anatomy. All three exhibitions operated under the title *Super Expo*, shown in a 40-meter red-and-green tent reminiscent of a circus animal tent, which travelled throughout Finland and was presented by Peter Daniels, alias Pekka Pekkonen. The arrival of *Super Expo* was advertised like a circus coming to town with colourful cardboard billboards on lamp posts.

The dinosaur and anatomical collections on display at *Super Expo* belonged to the German fairground family Lemoine from Selfkant in North-Rhine-Westphalia, where members of the Bossle family had also taken up residence. The ancestors of the Lemoines once travelled with a circus in France. They have kinship ties with the Lagrin, Nock and Traber circus families, who have a Sinti background, and Henry-Barber, likely of Yenish background. The Lemoine family ran a tent circus in Germany until the 1950s. Today, the members of the extended family mainly work with minor fairground attractions.³⁵ Hans-Rudolf Lemoine, nicknamed

35 Michael Faber, *Schausteller. Volkskundliche Untersuchungen einer reisenden Berufsgruppe im Kölner-Bonner Raum* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1982), 170–71.



Fig. 42 (a and b)
The *Super Expo*, posters and exhibition tents. (courtesy of Kari Nieminen)



Bubi, had previously performed as a stunt show driver, also in Finland. In the Finnish press, Bubi Lemoine's and Peter Bossle's families featured as *Komödianten* [comedians].³⁶ *Komödianten* form an independent subgroup within the travelling entertainment milieu. They often came from former performing and circus families, some with a Romani background, who had to reorient themselves professionally after the First World War and then again after the Second World War. In many cases they moved into operating smaller fairground attractions and ambulant food stands, though some were also able to return to the circus and show business.³⁷

36 Satu Lepistö, "Dinosauruksia, intiaaneja ja anatomiaa", *Hervannan Sanomat*, 9 May 2018: 2–3 (here 3).

37 Faber, *Schausteller*, 168–69.

Super Expo organizer Pekkonen successfully gained the trust of the *Komödianten* family Lemoine after Bubi got in touch with him in 2015 seeking a contact in Scandinavia.³⁸ Pekkonen had initially thrived as a magician in the Finnish entertainment world, but from the mid-1980s on he has worked as a manager and moderator of various car stunt shows. The first show that Pekkonen moderated was Leonhard Bossle's *Original Hell Drivers Show*, which toured in Finland from 1985 to 1987. From 2010 to 2012, he managed the *Traber Motor Stunt Show*. From 2016 to 2017, Pekkonen presented an interactive exhibit called *Dino World* with hourly live shows. This exhibition was owned by Bubi Lemoine.³⁹

According to Pekkonen, Bossle's North American Indian collection was shown alongside the anatomy exhibition within the *Super Expo* because a pure dinosaur show for the third year in a row would not have drawn new visitors in Finland. In a press release about the American Indian collection, it was said that the artefacts were collected by members of the Bossle family in the 1950s.⁴⁰ According to the leaflet of the *Super Expo*, the exhibition included many original artefacts and accessories of the North American Indians.⁴¹ Pekkonen stated that the exhibition had been on tour in Germany until recently. In fact, in autumn 2015, Peter Bossle visited a few towns in northern Germany with the family's collection entitled *Auf den Spuren der Indianer* [On the Indians' Trail]. The newspaper *Weser Kurier* was particularly impressed by a shrunken head among the exhibited objects.⁴² In addition, artefacts such as totems, clothes, weapons and other objects were presented, some reminiscent of the Bossle family's Wild West show. Cowboy vests in children's sizes with a sheriff star and garments with zips, however, may have left visitors somewhat disenchanted. Another item on display was an oil painting of a Plains Indian chief, featuring patriarch Erhard Bossle. The portrait was painted in 1974 with the signature "Caru". This was the nickname of Kalle Nyman, a former artist and animal trainer of Finnish Roma background; he performed at Matti Sariola's Tivoli with his German-Jewish wife Gisela Nyman at the same time as the Bossles. The painting was specially made for Bossle's Wild West show.

Although the presentation of the Bossle family collection was not comparable to a modern museum exhibition, it did claim to be informative. Pekkonen had equipped it with some illustrated information boards with Finnish captions to give visitors insights into the history and culture of the Indians. In a press release for the local newspaper *Östnyland* before

38 Helene Källi, "Sirkus Taiteilija Pekkonen ohjaa dinot kiertueelle", *Pohjalainen*, 27 April 2018: 26–27 (here 27).

39 Sami Koljonen, "Dinosaurukset heräsivät eloon Forssassa", *Forssanlehti*, 28 May 2017: 22.

40 Lepistö, "Dinosauruksia, intiaaneja ja anatomiaa", 3.

41 Leaflet "Super Expo", private collection of Kari Nieminen.

42 Wengoborski, "Einsamer Häuptling".

the exhibition's arrival in Porvoo in mid-July 2018, he made the following assertion: "First of all, it is all about entertainment, but if you are interested, there is also a lot to read about the different objects".⁴³ The manner in which the *Original Indian Expo* toured as part of the *Super Expo* certainly brings to mind traditional circus and fairground life. Yet Pekkonen also sought to describe a form of entertainment, practised for generations, where sensations and impressions are combined with the transfer of knowledge. Hence, Bubi Lemoine's appearance as a *dinosaurusprofessori* [dinosaur professor] in a *Super Expo* set up in shopping centre car parks on the outskirts of Finnish towns, falls nicely in line with tradition in circus and fairground history.⁴⁴ Over 100 years ago, self-proclaimed professors presented sensational mechanical, chemical, electrical and optical experiments in magic theatres, vending machines and other show booths; in these circus programmes and other showgrounds, visitors were also informed about foreign countries or past times.⁴⁵ Fairgrounds especially provided the population with a laboratory bubbling with samples from all over the world, in which entertainment and edification were combined.

According to French historian Zeev Gourariat, members of the ambulant entertainment milieu have played an active and modernizing role in popularizing science.⁴⁶ They knew how to communicate with a wide range of social classes, from the petty bourgeoisie to the working class and the rural population, all people for whom circuses and fairgrounds in the nearest town often offered a welcome interruption to a monotonous way of life. Even the performances of medieval jugglers displayed a combination of information, instruction and entertainment.⁴⁷ For the show *Auf den Spuren der Indianer*, which Peter Bossle, alias Pedro Bosslé, organized in the autumn of 2015, he chose to assume the authoritative role of a Blackfoot Indian chief Bärenkralle [Bear Claw]. As a Blackfoot Indian, he danced in front of his audience at the Hotel Tivoli in Osterholz-Scharmbeck, threw knives and showed children how to swing a lasso and to rope horses.⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, circuses and other showgrounds, including operators with

43 Jon Nyqvist, "Blandade attraktioner på Super expo", *Östnyland*, 10 July 2018: 10.

44 Henri Elo, "Uusi Dino World tuli Suomeen – Kiva Tekemistä tutustui", *Kiva Tekemistä*, 23 September 2016, <https://www.kivaatekemista.fi/blog/uusi-dino-world-tuli-suomeen-kivaa-tekemista-tutustui/> (accessed 10 April 2020).

45 Stefan Nagel, *Schaubuden: Geschichte und Erscheinungsformen* (Frankfurt am Main: Senckenberg, 2017), 15, 28.

46 Zeev Gourarier, "Jahrmarkt der Wissenschaften", in *Gesammeltes Vergnügen. Das Essener Markt- und Schaustellermuseum*, ed. Erich Knocke (Essen: Klartext, 2000), 43–47 (here 43).

47 Gisela Grasmück, *Artisten in Alsenborn. Von Mitbürgern und Aussenseitern. Sozialhistorische Mikroanalyse einer mobilen Bevölkerungsgruppe* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Volkskunde in Rheinland-Pfalz e.V., 1993), 173.

48 Wengoborski, "Einsamer Häuptling".

a Romani background, helped to give broad segments of the population a better sense of the vastness and diversity of the world than the familiar environment ever could.

Playing with New Trends

Peter Bossle, alias Bärenkralle, explained to the reporter who visited *Auf den Spuren der Indianer* that at a certain point bookings for his family's Wild West shows had dried up and they had had to rethink their offering in order to make a living.⁴⁹ Circus and fairground people with their distinctive Romani participation are subject to contemporary trends in a special way. Audiences do not want to see anything that seems too familiar. In addition to the quality of the entertainment, the product also needs to be trendy and innovative. The constantly changing topicality requires that people in the ambulant entertainment business display flexibility, a willingness to innovate and the ability to make rapid adjustments to their "product". Novelties presented in small towns and villages may be nothing new to those living in urban centres. Circus and fairground people have little to lose in adapting to new trends. In the worst-case scenario, if the audience is indifferent, they can try another innovation the following season or even at the next venue. The functions of circus and fairground people go beyond merely conveying innovations. They propagate trends, but they also present them in their own manner and style, at the same time encouraging others to emulate them and to further shape new developments. This involves risks, of course: there have been times when the performances were so bizarre that audiences were left in a state of bewilderment.⁵⁰

People in the travelling entertainment business, Romani and non-Romani, must always react quickly to new trends as early adapters or, even better, be ahead of the trend as innovators. This was much easier before the expansion of the media landscape. As mentioned before, several members of the Bossle family successfully developed car and motorcycle stunt shows when their circus acts were no longer in demand. For a while, Peter Bossle ran a monster truck show in Austria, too. Since the mid-1990s, he has focused on arranging exhibitions on various themes. Having made Bremen his home, he has shown his exhibitions primarily in northern Germany, in hotels, town halls, clubhouses and schools. The local press has called Peter Bossle an "exhibition inventor".⁵¹ The exhibition *Die Welt des Experimentierens* [The World of Experimentation], which revolved around physics and optical

49 Wengoborski, "Einsamer Häuptling".

50 Grasmück, *Artisten in Alsenborn*, 171–74.

51 "Mitmach-Experimente rund um die Physik", *Kreiszeitung: Nachrichten aus Bremen und Niedersachsen*, 4 March 2012, <https://www.kreiszeitung.de/lokales/oldenburg/mitmach-experimente-rund-physik-1668802.html> (accessed 10 April 2020).

illusions, had the motto *Sehen, Staunen und Verstehen* [Watch, Be Amazed and Understand].⁵² With his non-living exhibition *Insectopia*, displaying butterflies, spiders and snails, but also domestic forest animals as well as eagles and other birds of prey, Peter Bossle wanted to show visitors the many kinds of animals in this world. Not everyone can travel to distant countries to see these animals in their natural environment, as he stated in 2016.⁵³

In presenting his exhibitions Peter Bossle adopted an exotic persona. In his role as the son of a Blackfoot Indian, he wanted to teach respect and esteem for nature, especially to children, as he had been taught by his father.⁵⁴ At the same time, his pilot exhibition *Auf den Spuren der Indianer* made no concessions to changing media trends or public expectations. Bärenkralle made his personal motivation clear to the reporter: “I am now 60 years old and want to pass on knowledge about the history of my tribe”. But the poor turnout at his exhibition gave him pause for thought: “Apparently no one is interested in Indians any more”.⁵⁵

Conclusion

For some parts of this chapter, the research became an exploration *with* as opposed to research *on* the circus milieu.⁵⁶ Although the circus people whom I contacted showed some suspicion at the beginning, it soon became obvious that this is because they love and take care of each other and are always seeking to protect the community. Their ethical stance, which we researchers respect and share, was that recording the history of Erhard Bossle’s family represented a worthwhile cause, but that no one should be harmed or feel exploited by the process or the results.⁵⁷ At the same time,

52 Martin Thies, “Die Welt des Experimentierens”, *Das BLV – Wochenzeitung*, 15 February 2012: 9.

53 Anja Nosthoff, “Insekten aller Welt. Spinnen, Schmetterlinge, Flughunde und einheimische Waldtiere bei ‘Insectopia’”, *Kreiszeitung: Nachrichten aus Bremen und Niedersachsen*, 12 September 2016), <https://www.kreiszeitung.de/lokales/oldenburg/wildeshausen-ort49926/insekten-aller-welt-6741031.html> (accessed 10 April 2020).

54 Johanna Uminski: “Fliegende Hunde und Skorpione bestaunt”, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 31 January 2016, <https://www.maz-online.de/Lokales/Potsdam-Mittelmark/Fliegende-Hunde-und-Skorpione-bestaunt> (accessed 10 April 2020).

55 Wengoborski, “Einsamer Häuptling”.

56 Cf. Michael J. Kral and James Allen, “Community-Based Participatory Action Research”, in *Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods*, ed. Leonard A. Jason and David S. Glenwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 253–62 (here 254).

57 Mary Brydon-Miller, “Covenantal Ethics and Action Research: Exploring a Common Foundation for Social Research”, in *Handbook of Social Research Ethics*, ed. Donna M. Mertens and Pauline E. Ginsberg (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 243–58 (here 244).

illuminating and appreciating the performances of the Wild West show was as important for the informants who made this research possible as it is for historians.

The need to be aware of ethical concerns appears very clearly in the case of the Bossle family. Whenever circus historians discuss the successes of entertainment enterprises of Sinti origin, the Bouglione family is always mentioned first. Nonetheless, there are hundreds of other circus and fairground families with a Romani background who have been enriching and adding spark to European cultural spaces for many generations. Unlike the Bougliones, who enjoy high esteem in French cultural life, many of these circus and fairground families prefer to downplay or conceal their Romani origin. They fear for their livelihood, that they may be given inferior locations for their stands or lose customers, for instance, not to mention the risk of suffering racial discrimination in their daily lives. Yet they do exist and deserve our recognition. After all, they too have stories to tell.

For generations, the members of the performing, circus and fairground family Bossle have been engaged in the world of ambulant entertainment. In public, they call themselves “jugglers” and “travellers”. The members of the extended Bossle family feel a profound bond with Romani families in the circus and fairground milieu. There is ample evidence that this bond represents more than simply an elective affinity. Even though the members of the Bossle family clearly demonstrate their association with the wider community of travelling entertainers, they conduct business almost exclusively with a select few families, all of Romani origin. The same applies to the choice of spouses. This behaviour can be observed across several generations. Their use of the Sinti language also indicates a Romani identity.

At the same time, for the family headed by Erhard Bossle, performing otherness and assuming an exotic heritage served and continues to serve as a strategy to explain their darker complexion and to cover up their belonging to a discriminated ethnic minority. Hiding behind a character or persona of a more distant and admirable other has made it possible to gain security and acceptance in the majority society. Erhard Bossle completely took on the character of a North American Indian, and reinforced his claim to authenticity by wearing his show costume outside the Tivoli, even at his son Leonhard’s wedding.⁵⁸ Born into the family’s Wild West show, Erhard Bossle’s son Peter similarly identifies with the role of a Plains Indian to this day, as we have seen. After 15 years of organizing mobile exhibitions in the tradition of fairground attractions that combined the presentation

58 He wore his long hair tied in braids. He had thrown on a poncho and was wearing a Mexican sombrero. I would like to thank Gisela Nyman for providing me with this image.

of sensations with knowledge transfer, his attachment to that role seems to go beyond mere performance. It is reasonable to believe that Peter Bossle felt “half like an Indian and half like a German”, as he explained in his newspaper interview, regretting that 30 years had passed since he had last shared his culture with the public. It was in the persona of the son of a Blackfoot Indian that he informed visitors to *Auf den Spuren der Indianer* that he had never learned to read and write: “That was not usual in my culture”.⁵⁹

59 Wengoborski, “Einsamer Häuptling”.

Afterword

The valuable contribution of *European Roma: Lives beyond Stereotypes* represents the realization of two historical aspirations of the Roma people. María Sierra, Eve Rosenhaft and the team of the European BESTROM Project have produced a work that challenges the imposed identity of our people, the dominant discourse and the colonial gaze that has prevailed for centuries when it comes to explaining who we supposedly are.

The main challenge of the historical struggle that Roma civil society has been called on to fight, both in the past and today, is to overthrow anti-“Gypsyism”, understood as a form of structural discrimination that undermines the rights of Roma. The creation and maintenance of anti-“Gypsyism” has been made possible not only by the existence of a historical ideology that is both racist and, paradoxically, a denial of Roma reality, but also by the constant reinforcement of forms of hate speech fuelled by stereotypes, prejudice and a systematically negative account of our lives. These same elements continue to serve as a trump card for the anti-Roma racist apparatus today. This is why, in addition to denouncing anti-“Gypsyism” in public and social forums, the Romani-Gitano groups that I chair – AMURADI, the Association of Romani Women Students and Graduates for the Defence of the Roma People’s Rights, and FAKALI, the Federation of Romani Women’s Associations of Andalusia – have always worked to tell positive stories, making visible those Romani women and young people who break stereotypes and, at the same time, projecting a renewed and authentic image for the empowerment of our people. This is a necessary strategy to counteract anti-Roma images and discourses and stop them from circulating.

The research presented in this book is first of all a challenge to centuries of anti-“Gypsyism”, as it confronts, with historical data and biographies, the denial and extermination of our people – not only physical, but also social, epistemological, political and cultural. Our voice, once recovered, speaks and sings a forgotten history. Although Roma have always felt proud to be the protagonists of our own lives, external definitions have systematically

placed us in a space that is not so much a missing link as a non-place, defined by its invisibility. This is because, historically, the construction of European societies and the notion of “exemplary” citizenship have been based on the epistemological silence imposed on vulnerable groups such as the Roma. In our case, the repeated discourse that there is a lack of data on Roma origins, culture, history or language is nothing more than a justification for ignorance and ostracism, something that has weakened our people by taking away our right to be named, placing us in a *zone of non-being*.

Secondly, even the little previous research that has addressed the “Roma question” has usually adopted the reductive approach of focusing largely on a review of the punitive measures that have oppressed us, recounting the historical path of this persecution, studying the internalization of Roma difference or focusing analysis on the supposedly marginal and passive role in society of people conceived as “eternal minors”. In fact, among all the negative characteristics assigned to Roma, it is our imputed inactivity, lack of participation, intrinsic inability to promote ourselves socially and, in short, our adoption of a passive role, that have been invoked most powerfully (using erroneous cultural arguments) to justify a strategy of marginalizing us and excluding us from the construction of European societies and the world order. In the logic of this binary discourse which inscribes difference as inequality, *if the Roma did not exist, they would have to be invented*.

On 8 April 1971, the Roma people raised their voices in unison for the first time in history in defence of their culture, their language and their dignity when the first International Roma Conference was held in London. Half a century later, Roma citizenship is still at the bottom of the main human development indices of our society. As a Romani-Gitana activist, I feel that society has an obligation to repair so many centuries of injustice suffered by Roma and that we are only at the beginning of this journey. I am aware of the enormous potential that exists in our people and that democracy, as a system of government that pursues social justice and equality, has come late and still has debts outstanding to the Roma.

Roma women continue to show signs of being the great driving force behind the transformation of our reality. Our beginnings in Romani feminism were based on a silent revolution in the fight against sexism and racism, demanding that our voices become stronger and more visible every day, reflected in a struggle that today is unstoppable.

The research presented here supports our claims, provides examples, biographies and tangible cases that document the active and participatory role of our people in history and social life, and contributes to our struggle for the right of the Roma to be recognized as full European citizens. This work really represents a paradigm shift in the orientation of the narrative and in the creation of a literature about our history. The valuable data collected and discussed here directly challenges the prevailing discourse

that has self-interestedly defined how marginal we are and what an insignificant place we have in society. History cannot be changed, but the way we look at it and the way we tell it can. This publication, while highlighting Roma agency in past historical moments, demonstrating through individual and collective trajectories political activism and participation in different spaces of economic and cultural exchange, also tells us about the present and, even more, about the future: the future of a living and resilient people, to be taken as a model for their values and for their ability to live within a transnational identity, for their characteristic solidarity and for their community spirit, all of which are traits essential for the construction of a renewed Europe with less inequality.

This book and all the stories it contains show that Roma are exemplars of resistance. This is shown by the artists and politicians who fought for a fairer society, analysed in Part One; by the families of horse dealers whose work and culture are discussed in Part Two; by the men and women dedicated to music for centuries who populate Part Three; and by the circus entrepreneurs and artists who, as explained in Part Four, sheltered resistance fighters against Nazism while bringing new forms of entertainment to Europe. We are, in short, the future of a trace that history has not been able to erase.

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