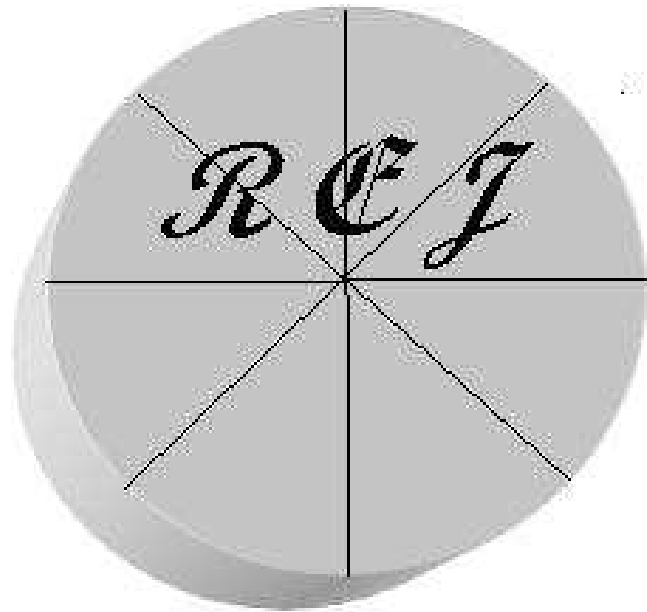


# *Romani E Journal*

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## Identity Related Issues

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## Editorial and Summary of Contributions

When speaking about matters relating to the Romani people one touches upon issues related to identity. In many areas – research, minority policies, legislation, cultural activities, media coverage – one comes across ideas, statements, discussions and regulations concerning integration, human rights, mother tongue instruction, history, language research and representation. It would not be correct to say that a Romani individual is affected more of his or her own identity than an individual belonging to another ethnic group. However, issues relating to the identity of minority groups often tend to be less known than those relating to the identity of the majority. Furthermore, not all information on the identity of various minorities is of good quality or even reliable. This is especially true when it comes to matters connected to Romani identity. Romani E Journal tries to change this by publishing articles and essays on various Romani related topics. As indicated above, the theme of this issue of Romani E Journal is quite broad and each contribution to the present issue is an evidence of this. All three contributions treat topics being of great importance to the Romani community on all levels and their relevance to Romani identity cannot be described as anything else as being of a very high degree. Unfortunately the importance and relevance of the topics treated below is often underestimated.

The first contribution, *The Roots of Inequity: Romani Cultural Rights in their Historical and Social Context*, is written by Dr. Ian Hancock. In the article, Dr. Hancock touches upon a number of interrelated topics and shows how human rights due to antiziganist ideas and prejudice have been put out of reach for Romanies up until now. In the article there is a focus especially on cultural human rights, an area just as important to Romani identity as civil human rights.

Professor emeritus Thomas Acton has written the next contribution, carrying the title *Visual Politics of identity and Visual Politics of interaction: the new turn in Romani art*. Professor Acton tries to present a model for understanding the social dynamics of cultural development through the interaction of the different functional contexts of cultural production. The article is very important as it treats the cultural production of Romani artists, a topic seldom treated in materials concerning Romanies.

M. A. in ethnology Gregor Dufunia Kwiek has written the third contribution, *Should Romani be Standardized in Sweden?* Kwiek treats the issue of standardizing the Romani language, a language with many dialects and a high degree of internal heterogeneity. he brings up various issues and problems connected to standardization of the language and

through interviews he shows what various educated Romanies in Sweden think of the idea of standardization. The article of Gregor Dufunia Kwiek touches upon a vital issue in Romani related matters. Language has a strong connection to identity and the existence or non-existence can affect how the Romani language will be used and taught by Romanies themselves and how it will be seen by both Romanies and non-Romanies.

We are very happy and proud to be able to publish the articles of Ian Hancock and Thomas Acton. As far as known, the first Romanies who came to Sweden arrived in 1512. To celebrate the five hundred years of Romani presence in the country, the Swedish government has announced 2012 as a Romani cultural year. In this setting the articles of Ian Hancock and Thomas Acton are very interesting and highly relevant, not only in the context of Romani identity in general, but especially when it comes to Sweden and its Romani minority.

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*Immigrants and Minorities*, 11(1):3-20 (1992).

***The Roots of Inequity:  
Romani Cultural Rights in their Historical and Social  
Context (reprint)***

Ian Hancock

*My premise in this article is a simple one: first, that the liberty to maintain one's cultural behaviour is dependent upon one's civil liberties; and second, while not all legal rights are civil, all civil rights are nevertheless legal. Furthermore, if we are to deal with the situation effectively, we must address it not only as a cultural or civil or legal issue, but as one having far-reaching political ramifications as well.*

*The Struggle for the Control of Identity*

**The Chinese say** that the beginning of wisdom is to call things by the right name. At the root of at least part of the problem Romanies face within non-Gypsy societies is the existence of a persistent and pervasive Gypsy image which has been forced upon them from outside.

To define a thing is to replace it with its definition, and this has nowhere been shown to be so true as in the case of the Romani people. Those who are in a position to define others are in a position of domination over those others - a point I have stressed a number of times in the past. It was Amiri Baraka who said that "when you have named a man, you have tamed him." And as long as Gypsies are defined not according to their own self perception but by outsiders,

then they will continue to be manipulated by laws designed not for their own well-being, but for what is thought to be best for them by administrators entirely unassociated with the group and who, as a general rule, have little or no real knowledge of the culture and history of the group and who are invariably unsympathetic to it. The fate of many an individual brought before the bench has depended solely upon whether the court allowed him to be a 'Gypsy' or not, regardless of what he, or his family or peers have always believed him to be.<sup>1</sup> Advice to the King of Spain in 1619 was that since there was no such country as 'Gypsy', then that word, and those who used it to define themselves, should no longer be acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> In the following century, Empress Maria Teresa determined that there were no longer to be any such thing as Gypsies, and the word Gypsy and the Romani language were to be banished from use.

### *Rights: Cultural and Civil*

When we consider the cultural rights of the Romani people, it would seem evident that it should be in the context of the cultural rights of all people. However, the Gypsy situation has always warranted separate treatment from the various host establishments, and the rights of our people, civil, cultural or otherwise, have scarcely been acknowledged justly since our ancestors first arrived in Europe eight centuries ago. That designation 'host' with its associations of hospitality and welcome, has really not proven to be the most appropriate where Romanies are concerned.

Issues involving the cultural rights of Romanies are dependent upon the civil rights of the same population; for the freedom to maintain one's cultural values is contingent upon one's civil liberties. This is upheld in the statement issued by the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities:

The protection of minorities is the protection of non-dominant groups which, while wishing, in general, for equality of treatment with the majority, also wish for a measure of differential treatment, in order to preserve basic characteristics which they possess<sup>3</sup>.

Civil is the root of the word civilized; in a civilized society, civil rights are based in the codification of one's human rights. These have been summarized in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the text of which is included as an appendix to this article. But we must also consider a closely-related interpretation of what we as a species have a right to: our natural rights.

## *Rights: Natural*

By nature man is a social, orderly being and our freedoms, ideally, rest upon the perceived order of our society and way of life. This notion of natural rights is at the very foundation of what is built upon it: civil rights, legal rights and cultural rights. When a population is deemed not to fit this pattern, that is, not to lead a ‘naturally social and orderly’ way of life, then they become disenfranchised, namely separated from the establishment and, as a result, placed outside the protection of its laws. In the course of time, this disenfranchised state becomes absorbed into the popular stereotype of the group thus affected, and becomes further reinforced in the folklore and literature of the larger society. Eventually it will acquire legislation directed specifically at it and designed to maintain the disenfranchised state.

In extreme cases, the perception of such a group as not being by nature social and orderly is interpreted as a genetic condition. The famous criminal anthropologist Professor Cesare Lombroso wrote in his seminal dissertation on crime that Gypsies were a ‘living example of a whole race of criminals’. This appeared in a work, subsequently published by the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology<sup>4</sup>, which served as a basis for American legal attitudes and was relied upon as a source by lawyers, magistrates and others for many years. In 1981 the one-time head of the Illinois State Police Gypsy Activity Project, Terry Getsay, published a three-part article entitled ‘*GYP*-sies: the people and their criminal propensity’.<sup>5</sup> This differs little from the association of Gypsies with the ‘criminal tribes of India’ in nineteenth century romanological studies. During the preparation of this article, I learnt of yet another ‘Gypsy expert’, a Sergeant Thomas House, who has recently given a series of talks on Radio Station KPRC in Houston in which he repeatedly claimed that Gypsies were criminal by nature. Sergeant House is being promoted on the radio as ‘The Gypsies’ worst nightmare’. One need only replace the word ‘Gypsies’ with the name of any other ethnic minority to realize how frighteningly oppressive such wording is coming from a representative of the law, and how reminiscent it is of similar statements made in Hitler’s Germany.

Voltaire said that the belief in absurdities must inevitably lead to atrocities. This perceived inherited, genetic condition has on occasion been interpreted as a biological flaw, and therefore as one warranting biological control. Thus in Germany in 1920 Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche promoted the hypothesis that certain kinds of human life—Romani lives among them—were unworthy of existence because they were simply ‘ballast’ or dead weight, and should be phased out of the human race.<sup>6</sup> Sterilization was the technique proposed, and their notion of ‘lives not worthy of life’ came eventually to form the basis of Hitler’s racial policies against Gypsies, Afro-Europeans, Jews, Slavs and others<sup>7</sup>. In 1930 the sociologist

Scharfenberg published a series of articles recommending that Gypsies throughout Norway be eradicated as a people by means of a programme of sterilization.<sup>8</sup> In 1943 the same sentiment was echoed by Erik Bartels and Gudrun Brun in Denmark, motivated by exactly the same rationale, though by now refined by German theories of race contamination:

The pure gipsies present no great problem, *if only we realize that their mentality does not allow of their admittance to the well-ordered general society . . . the mixed gipsies cause considerably greater difficulties ( . . . nothing good has) come from a crossing between a gipsy and a white person . . . Germany is at present contemplating the introduction of provisions of sterilization in the case of such families.*<sup>9</sup> (emphasis added).

German sterilization of Gypsies had, in fact, already been in effect for a decade before this work was published.<sup>10</sup> The point, however, is that Gypsies have been defined from the outside as asocial, and have been legislated against as a result of this. And since Gypsies have not been given a place as part of the establishment, access to its means of legal redress has not been at their disposal.

### *The Other Gypsy*

In addition to the legal concept of the Gypsy, there is also the popular concept, kept alive by writers of fiction and non-fiction alike, who have by their own admission sometimes sought information on Gypsies in the police records, just as those in the legal and law-enforcement professions have sought out the works of the journalists and Gypsy specialists. Almost every single bit of information available to the general public is in the form of observations made about Gypsies by non-Gypsies. The amount of material by Gypsies themselves which deals with Romani culture, while growing steadily, is still small and not easily accessible. Thus we have a circular situation, each group using the other as a resource, and each keeping Gypsies firmly locked into a symbolic role. I would like now to address this role more closely, and offer a proposed explanation for its origin and its perpetuation.

Willems & Lucassen have dealt with the notion of the 'real Gypsy' as a fiction created by the gypsiorist.<sup>11</sup> They comment upon Kirsten Martins-Heuss' demonstration that 'the Gypsy' does not actually exist, but instead is a representation'constructed by dominating society'.<sup>12</sup>



This is of course something we have been aware of for a long time. A century ago, Pischel stated that ‘the Gypsy ceases to be a Gypsy as soon as he is domiciled and follows some trade’.<sup>13</sup> Some years ago, after I approached my daughter’s headmistress in connection with some racist Gypsy literature that she had brought home from her school library, I subsequently received the response that ‘Personally, I feel that the terms “gypsy” and “Romani” conjure up completely different mental images in the minds of most people, the “gypsy” being the person of fabled stories, and the “Romani” being that of an actual ethnic group.’<sup>14</sup>

In this teacher’s mind, *gypsies*, with the lower-case initial of a common noun,<sup>15</sup> were not real people, and there could therefore be no offence in portraying a population which existed only in fairytales. This kind of imposed division of the population down the middle, into good and bad, real and fabled, has become very well entrenched in the popular conception of Gypsies, even in the minds of administrators and educators. In response to a complaint lodged by The International Romani Union with the producers of the *Geraldo Rivera Show* on CBS Television, broadcast in April 1990, which dealt with Gypsy confidence crimes, one ‘Gypsy expert’ who appeared on that programme, Professor John Dowling of Marquette University in Wisconsin, asserted that

Eventually the Rom are going to be forced to do what the Sicilians did many years ago, i.e. terminologically distinguish between the broader population (Sicilians) and the smaller, criminal element (the Mafia). Using the ancient term ‘Rom’ for all those descendants of the exodus from India, and the much more recent term ‘Gypsy’ for the criminal element, makes sense and would permit the honest Rom to take pride in their ethnicity and their achievements by distancing themselves from the Gypsies.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, another of the programme’s ‘experts’, Detective Dennis M. Marlock, President of Professionals Against Confidence Crime, referred to ‘. . . those who once embraced the *Gypsy* life-style. In fact, the Gypsies who came to Milwaukee are now, quite by choice and on their own terms, abandoning their destructive life-style and becoming Romani citizens.’<sup>17</sup>

These are arbitrary divisions produced in the probably well-meaning minds of Professor Dowling and Detective Marlock, intended to allow Gypsies and gypsilorists alike to maintain a sense of acceptability and order, to separate the sheep from the goats, the manageable from the unmanageable. One cannot help but wonder how these gentlemen would react to the suggestion that their own, say, Irish-American, or Anglo-American or even their entire *gajikano* society be divided in the same way, with different labels subjectively

distinguishing the good from the bad and applied from outside - and into which category these individuals would themselves fall. In a letter to Detective Marlock, addressing some of the issues raised in that programme, Thomas Acton made the point that

Compared with the massive record of murder, theft, kidnapping and other crimes by non-Gypsies against Gypsies (throughout history), Gypsy crime against non-Gypsies pales almost into insignificance, so that to prioritize the study of the latter over the former shows a twisted sense of values.<sup>18</sup>

When we see the studio audience cheer wildly at Geraldo Rivera's news that a fortune-teller and her daughter received between them jail sentences totalling over two hundred years for defrauding clients out of several thousand dollars, and compare this with the forty years Jim Bakker received for defrauding the public out of millions of dollars using remarkably similar techniques of confidence trickery, we can only wonder at the extent to which this twisted sense of values, this blatant double standard separating the rich and white from the poor and non-white, has become a part of the American legal process.

Generally, Romanies are liked for their colourful and harmless ways, and (what is more important) for their social function in non-Romani culture.<sup>19</sup> Gypsies, on the other hand, are a pest, but the terminological choices -- applied by outsiders - are not clear-cut, and certainly have no currency or validity within the Romani population. For a Mr Landon, it was *gipsies* who were (barely) legitimate, and those he calls tinkers who were beyond redemption, as his letter to the editor of the *Surrey Advertiser* made clear:

. . . gipsies are by definition a race of Hindu origin speaking a sort of Hindi. A few may still exist but they must be very scarce. The present travelling people are probably more akin to tinkers, many of whom come from the Republic of Ireland, where they are very much detested and feared as light-fingered, quarrelsome and a general nuisance. Even the true gipsy glamorised by George Borrow was never liked ... I am convinced that the majority of decent British citizens resent the gipsies very deeply and would like to be rid of them.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Origin and Function of Anti-Gypsyism*

Anti-Gypsyism can be traced to a number of causes, which I have dealt with to some extent in my book *The Pariah Syndrome*. First, the Europeans' initial association of the newly-arrived

Romanies with the invading Islamic forces, and second, with their deeply-ingrained association between darkness of complexion and inherent wickedness. Kenrick and Puxon have dealt with this in the Gypsy context,<sup>21</sup> and we can quote from R.F. Hobson, who noted that the person of colour,

. . . associated with darkness and dirt, is a convenient hook on which to hang certain projections, especially if he is a relatively unknown visitor from a far-off country with a strange culture, or if he threatens important economic, and other social, vested interests. He is also clearly 'not me'<sup>22</sup>

This association is a metaphorical one, yet its effects have been devastating. Philip Mason emphasizes that "hardly any white man has overcome the confusion between biological accident and symbolic metaphor".<sup>23</sup>

Everywhere in the West, Romanies were 'unknown visitors from a far off country with a strange culture', and threatened not only the economic stability of the European lands through which they moved, but also the traditional cultural, moral and religious values of those conservative societies. The notion of 'not me' has been best expounded upon by Kai Erikson, who says that ". . . one of the surest ways to confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is *not*."<sup>24</sup>

The function of the Gypsy and his supposed way of life as a cultural boundary marker is an important one in non-Gypsy societies, perhaps increasingly so in this present age, when cultural homogenization is bringing with it a crisis of identity for members of the already culturally-levelled mainstream society, recently the topic of an investigative report in the Texas press.<sup>25</sup> This 'special role' of deviant groups has been discussed by Goffman.<sup>26</sup> Lest the extent to which this really is important be doubted, consider the vast amount of world literature - running into tens of thousands of titles - dealing with the Gypsy as romantic or criminal outsider, compared with the number of titles which deal with the population in an accurate and scholarly way. Consider the determination with which novelists and journalists persist in maintaining the romantic image, even when provided with factual resources. But 'trying to argue with scientifically-supported evidence is a loser's game . . . people's perceptual defenses will lead them to accept information they are already predisposed to believe'.<sup>27</sup>

Over the course of time, the created, mythical Gypsy has assumed a life of his own. The great tragedy is, as David Sibley has so lucidly observed, that the

possibility that the characterization of social groups like Gypsies may be based on myth is rarely considered, particularly in government circles, probably because these myths are functional - they serve to define the boundaries of the dominant system.<sup>28</sup>

This 'function' is at the heart of the problem: the possibility that the characterization of the Romani people may be founded in the mythical Gypsy image *is rarely considered, particularly in government circles*. And we must include here legislative and law-enforcement circles as well. It is *precisely* those representatives of non-Gypsy society who have the power to provide fair legislation and fair civil treatment, and yet it is precisely those too who have the most distorted and mythically-based view of the Gypsy, and who are most directly responsible for maintaining anti-Romani attitudes and treatment and for ensuring that the efforts to achieve equality in the law, and as a consequence, the freedom to enjoy one's cultural rights, will be very hard won.

### *Maintaining the Stereotype*

Even those who have an academic investment in studying the Romani population have created their own definitions of what a Gypsy is and what Romani concerns are. Marlene Sway for example perpetuates the mistaken historical speculation that Gypsies are essentially 'middlemen' and retain this identity specifically because they are "illiterate, and lack educated professionals among them".<sup>29</sup> For Beverley Lauwagie, Gypsies are neither 'numerous nor politically active'.<sup>30</sup> For Mette Holm, Gypsies 'have no geographic demands . . . are a peaceful people with no leadership'.<sup>31</sup> A doctorate was awarded for a 'taxonomic and theoretical treatise' on nomadic Gypsies,<sup>32</sup> yet the only population dealt with were those only a few generations out of slavery and whose migrations out of post-abolition Romania were for the purpose of finding new, permanent homes. None of the actually nomadic Romani groups living in western Europe were examined - thus 'available' Gypsies were made to fit a generalized and predetermined image. For Erdmann Beynon, anybody at all who adopts certain means of livelihood can become a Gypsy, since one's 'membership in the pariah (*i.e.* Gypsy) group has tended to become identical with participation in their characteristic function',<sup>33</sup> a notion repeated by Detective Jaye Schroeder, who maintained that 'the label "Gypsy" refers to *any* family-oriented band of nomads'.<sup>34</sup> Raymond Pearson has no hope for us at all, concluding a review of my book with the words 'it is difficult not to see the long-term future of the Gypsies in terms of deliberate or adventitious ethnocide . . . the crusade which Hancock represents so determinedly may have come too late to rescue *a cause which is already lost*'.<sup>35</sup>

Following the work of Willems & Lucassen, I am in the process of compiling a study of entries for ‘Gypsy’ found in a wide selection of encyclopaedias, dictionaries and desktop reference books – sources which researchers also consult for their information on the Romani population, and which also contribute to the perpetuation of the stereotyped Gypsy.

Because (at any time) the most recent writings about Gypsies rest in large part upon what has already been said before, certain aspects of the mythical identity are reinforced through repetition. Elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> I have documented the amazing peregrination of Colocci’s century-old statement that there were no words for ‘duty’ or ‘possession’ in the Romani language through the works of six different authors between 1889 and 1983, each one claiming it as their original observation. The following descriptive passages, from three different nineteenth-century sources, which appeared within a decade of each other around the time of emancipation from slavery in the Balkans, also illustrate the ease with which writers borrow their stereotype from each other and help reinforce the image:

The children wear no clothes until the age of ten or twelve years and resemble imps rather than human beings as they run beside the carriage of the traveller shrieking for alms, with their long matted hair flying in the wind, and their black limbs shining in the light.<sup>37</sup>

The children go naked up to the age of ten or twelve, and whole swarms of girls and boys may sometimes be seen rolling about together in the dust or mud in summer, in the water or snow in winter, like so many black worms.<sup>38</sup>

The children to the age of ten or twelve, are in a complete state of nudity, but the men and women, the latter offering frequently the most symmetrical form and feminine beauty, have a rude clothing.<sup>39</sup>

It is hard to believe that the similarity of these observations on the nudity of Gypsy children, and their ages, is entirely coincidental; they have been drawn from the common pool, the conventional wisdom of Gypsy Lore.

### *Stereotype as Justification*

When a stereotypical attribute serves as justification for discriminatory action with official sanction, the tenacity with which it persists becomes a more urgent cause for concern. Thus

once the idea that Gypsies, by virtue of their movement from place to place and lack of allegiance to any nation, must be spies, that assumption serves to rationalize discriminatory action against them.

In Germany in 1496, Gypsies were publicly accused for the first time of being spies in the employ of the Turks, charges which were to be repeated many times in the following centuries,<sup>40</sup> and which were to levy a terrible price in terms of racial persecution. During the Trials of Major War Criminals following the Second World War, Ohiendorf maintained that one reason the Third Reich viewed Gypsies as such a threat to its security was because they ‘participated in espionage organizations’,<sup>41</sup> although there was absolutely no evidence to support this claim. Ioannis Vrissakis, relating his experience in wartime Greece, remembers being incarcerated by the Nazis, whose principal reason was that they ‘must be spies, because they move about’.<sup>42</sup> And most recently, plans to build a Gypsy site next to a Ministry of Defence establishment in Surrey, England, were abandoned because it ‘could pose a risk to the security’ of the Ministry and ‘allow terrorists near the top-secret site for reconnaissance work’.<sup>43</sup>

To enjoy one’s cultural rights, one must have freedom in other areas. The Romani populations throughout the world do not have these freedoms and, as a consequence, pay a high price in maintaining their cultural heritage. In the United States we hear of Romani Americans being refused business by undertakers, the usual reason given being that Gypsy behaviour at funerals is not ‘solemn’ or ‘respectful’ enough. The veiled implication is that it is pagan, un-Christian behaviour; behaviour not ‘like ours.’ Sometimes Gypsies have taken cases to court in which they have been banned from fortune-telling, maintaining that it is part of the Romani spiritual heritage, and therefore protected as ‘freedom of religion’ by the American constitution. In some places, this claim is upheld; more frequently, it is not. In the United States as well as in Europe, the question of whether *theft* is a cultural right is one which plagues police departments, whose spokesmen frustratedly repeat that Gypsies believe they have a cultural right to steal from non-Gypsies. This is one of those notions which have become carved in stone; Romani Americans in custody do not use it in their defence, although some might admit it privately, having internalized the stereotype. Theft is wrong; it is not a part of original Romani culture but came to be a means of survival when other options were closed to the Gypsy population after arrival in Europe. To the police, Gypsy life is synonymous with confidence crime. It has been defined by them as our very culture, our sole means of gauging our self worth: ‘The only measure of respect a Gypsy woman can get is based on her abilities as a thief, according to law officer Jaye Schroeder,<sup>44</sup> who evidently

believes that the role of mother or homemaker or wife or businesswoman carries no dignity at all in Gypsy culture.

### *Conclusions*

In this article I have touched on a number of topics which I believe to be interrelated. To summarize, the cultural rights of the Romani populations are dependent upon our civil and legal rights, which in turn are rooted in our human rights.

Human rights are made available to people who are considered human. Gypsies have not generally been regarded as such, on occasion even having been likened to animals. In 1936, Nazi scientist Dr Robert Ritter established the Racial Hygiene and Population Biology and Research Unit expressly to determine whether Gypsies were human or sub-human (*Untermenschen*).<sup>45</sup> Marginalized by non-Gypsy societies, insulated from them to some extent by strict internal restrictions on socializing, Gypsies have made no effort (until this century) to stall Attitudes towards Gypsies at the administrative and legislative levels have a long history of being rooted in prejudice. They are fed by the ‘experts’ to whom the administrators go for their information, and who have also helped keep the myth alive. Writers of novels, film-scripts, tabloid columns<sup>46</sup> and so on - the most readily accessible sources of all to the general public - have also ensured that the true details about the Romani people remain hidden. To paraphrase Richard Wright,<sup>47</sup> we are not dealing merely with institutionalized racial prejudice, but with a phenomenon which has become part of the Euro-American’s cultural heritage. What we have is a cyclic situation. If it is to be broken, a leap of faith is required from those most adamantly locked into the Gypsy myth and all of the prejudice that accompanies it. Until that happens, the Romani population will continue to regard the white populations with suspicion and skepticism, and the administrators of the societies within which Romanies move will continue to place Gypsies in a neatly-defined category of unwelcome outsiders, the way it has been since the *aresipe*.<sup>48</sup>

### *NOTES*

1. A British county council decision determined that a Traveller in England was not in fact a Gypsy, and as a result not eligible for legal process which would have been to his advantage. “. . . he has not been a man of nomadic habits. . . in my judgment he is not a gipsy; therefore the Act does not apply.” (*The Essex Courier*, 15 Feb. 1974, p. 21). Just the opposite of this is reflected in a statement issued by spokesman Officer Craig Gunkel of the Palm Beach Police

Department, namely that “The Gypsy type crime is a technique. Every time you hear about a Gypsy crime, that doesn’t mean that it was committed by Gypsies.” (*The Palm Beach Post*, 29 Feb. 1988, p.2). Many more (and more current) examples of judicial definition can be found in D. Kenrick and S. Bakewell, *On the Verge: The Gypsies in England* (London, 1990).

2. J.-P. Liégeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History* (London, 1986), p.105.

3. See the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in English and Romani as an appendix to this paper.

4. C. Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies* (Boston, MA, 1918), p.40.

5. T. Getsay, ‘GYP-sies: The People and Their Criminal Propensity’, *Spotlight*, Vol.1, No. 1(1981), pp. 12-17; Vol.1, No.2(1981), pp. 14-19; Vol.2, No. 1(1982), pp. 10-20.

6. K. Binding and A. Hoche, *Die freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (Leipzig, 1920).

7. I. Hancock, ‘Gypsy History in Germany and Neighbouring Lands: A Chronology Leading to the Holocaust and Beyond’, in D. Crowe and J. Kolsti (eds.), *The Gypsies in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1991), pp. 11-30.

8. J. Scharfenberg, “Omstreiferondet,” *Arbeiderbladet*, 31 Oct.; 11, 19, 24 and 25 Nov. 1930.

9. E. Bartels and B.G. Brun, *The Gypsies in Denmark* (Copenhagen, 1943).

10. I. Hancock, ‘Gypsy History . . .’, in Crowe and Kolsti, op. cit., entries for 1933 and 1934.

11. W. Willems and L. Lucassen, ‘The Church of Knowledge: Representations of Gypsies in Dutch encyclopaedias and their sources’, in M. Salo (ed.), *100 Years of Gypsy Studies* (Cheverly, 1990), pp.31-50.

12. K. Martins-Heuss, *Zur mythischen Figur des Zigeuners in der deutschen Zigeunerforschung*, Forum für Sinti und Roma, No. 1 (Frankfurt, 1983). .



13. R. Pischel, 'Die Heimat der Zigeuner', *Deutsche Rundschau*, Vol.36 (1883), pp.353-75.

14. Letter dated 25 April 1983.

15. I believe that the non-capitalization of the word Gypsy has much to do with the popular perception of our people as a socially or behaviourally defined population rather than as a distinct ethnic one. Efforts to have editorial policy changed meet with limited success; the *New York Times* seems especially adamant in this respect. A letter published in that paper on 20 Aug. 1990 pointing this out in the final paragraph (Hancock, 1990), had that paragraph deleted by the editor, and the word Gypsy spelt as though it were a common noun throughout with a small g. A reprint of the article by Marlis Simons referred to in that letter, and published in *The New York Times* on 7 Aug. 1990, was also published in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* (9 Aug. 1990), but with Gypsy spelt with an upper-case G throughout once again.

16. Letter dated 17 May 1990.

17. Letter dated 16 July 1990.

18. Letter dated 2 Aug. 1990, p. 7.

19. Discussed at length in, for example, D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society* (Cambridge, 1988); M. Brown, *Gypsies and other Bohemians: The Myth of the Artist in Nineteenth Century France* (Ann Arbor, 1985); K. Martins-Heuss, *Zur mythischen Figur des Zigeuners in der deutschen Zigeuner-forschung* (Frankfurt, 1983); K. Trumpener, *Goddam Gypsy; Peoples without History and the Narratives of Nationalism*, unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Chicago, 1990.

20. Letter dated 19 April 1977.

21. D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (London, 1972).

22. In G.R. Dunstan, 'A Note on an Early Ingredient of Racial Prejudice in western Europe', *Race*, Vol.6, No.4 (1965) pp.334-9. Hobson's commentary is on page 338.

23. P. Mason, "... but O! My soul is white". *Encounter*, April 1968, pp. 57-61.

24. K. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York, 1979), p. 126.
25. C. Greth, an untitled article in *The American Statesman*, Aug. 1990.
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29. M. Sway, I (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), pp.111, 124; M. Sway, 'Gypsies as a Perpetual Minority: A Case Study', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, Vol.3, No.1 (1975), pp.48-55; M. Sway, 'Simmel's Concept of the Stranger and the Gypsies', *Social Science Journal*, Vol.18, No.1 (1980), pp. 41-50; M. Sway, 'Economic Adaptability: The Case of the Gypsies', *Urban Life*, Vol.13, No. 1 (1984), pp.83-98.
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31. Report on the International Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Denmark in July 1990, at which Europe's ten million Romanies were included for the first time in a declaration guaranteeing human rights to Europe's ethnic minorities. Broadcast on Cable News Network, 1 Aug. 1990.
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35. R. Pearson, Review of I. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1987), in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.16, No.2 (1988), pp.332-4.
36. I. Hancock, 'Non-Gypsy Attitudes towards Rom: The Gypsy Stereotype', *Roma*, Vol.9, No.1 (1985), pp.57-8.
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39. S. Gardner, 'Notes on the Condition of the Gypsy Population of Moldavia', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 1 (1857), p. 38.
40. J.-P. Liegeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History* (London, 1986), p.90.
41. *Trials*, Vol.4, pp.286-7. Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1949-52.
42. I. Vrissakis, "Nazis and the Greek Roma: A Personal Testimonial", *Roma*, Vol.30 (1989), p.18.
43. *The Surrey Advertiser*, 25 May 1990.
44. J. Schroeder, "Gypsy Crime in America", *Centurion; A Police Lifestyle Magazine*, Vol.1, No.6 (1983), p.63.
45. D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (London, 1972), p.61.

46. Not only tabloids; while the British press has run major articles on the oppression of Romanies in the new Europe, references to the same situation in the American press have been non-existent or buried in throw-away lines in articles dealing with other aspects of European politics. The two biggest articles to have appeared in the United States press in recent times are Paul Hoffmann's 'By request, Gypsy violins' (*New York Times*, 22 July 1990, p.9), and John Borrell's 'Lanes into the past' (*Time*, 25 June 1990, pp. 78-9), which refers to Gypsies in Romania only in the context of sleepy Gypsy waggon drivers presenting a 'bucolic tableau'. The fact that three-quarters of the children suffering in the Romanian orphanages are actually Gypsy children is mentioned only in one line on the third page of an article on the subject by James Nachtwey entitled 'Romania's lost children' (*New York Times Magazine*, 24 June 1990, pp.29-33).

47. R.Wright, *Black Boy* (New York, 1937), p.71.

48. The arrival in Europe in the thirteenth century.

## ***APPENDIX***

### THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

#### ***Preamble***

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

*Now, Therefore,*

*THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims*

*THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS*

as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the people of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14. (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15. (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16. (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17. (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21. (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23. (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.



Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29. (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Adopted by the General Assembly,  
on 10th December 1948.

# *Visual Politics of identity and Visual Politics of interaction: the new turn in Romani art*

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The Second Site exhibition by four Roma/ Gypsy/Traveller<sup>1</sup> artists at the University of Greenwich in 2006 was a turning point in the representation of these populations, in which revisionist Romani Studies scholarship joined forces with innovative artists to put a shape to the new kind of relationship between Roma/Gypsies/Travellers and other ethnicities in contemporary Europe. Revisionist Romani history (Marsh 2009) suggests that the origins and destinies of the Roma/Gypsy/Traveller populations are not mysterious and unfathomable, but a readily understandable consequences of the economic and social general history of Europe of the last millennium, masked by a series of ideologies generated by the rise of European nation states and empires during the last five hundred years. Both the construction and deconstruction of these ideologies shapes visual art. This paper examines how a Romani art

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<sup>1</sup> Who are Roma/Gypsies/Travellers? And why does the ontological and epistemological uncertainty besetting the identity of this range of groups lead to such a cumbersome 3-part label to bridge the political contestation of other simpler labels? The classical historical synthesis suggested by Fraser (1992) suggests a population of Indian origin started moving towards Europe from the ninth century onward, bringing with them an Indian language. They become fragmented because of persecution in the 15th and 16th centuries, so that populations of different sizes are more or less acculturated in different European countries. Where the Romani population is very small it has either been absorbed by, or failed to displace, a local commercial nomadic or “Traveller” minority. Some groups, such as the English Romanichal Gypsies, maintain both a Romani and a Traveller identity. The word “Gypsy” (from “Egyptian”) is theorized as a simple mistake about origins made by Europeans, and tolerated or accepted by Roma.

This synthesis has been challenged, both by Romani-speaking groups who do not call themselves Roma, such as the German Sinte, and by radical social constructionist academics such as Willems (1997) who argue that the whole of this synthesis is an ideology created from the work of Grellmann (1787) in order to racialise a disparate range of marginalized social groups to make them fit new state policies. This in turn is being challenged both by conservative linguists, emphasizing the core Romani language, and another less radical form of historical revisionism suggested by Hancock (2006) and Marsh and Strand (2006) suggesting the core bearers of the Romani language were descendants of a multicultural 11th century Indian-led militia originally recruited by the Ghaznavids, who, when they arrived in Anatolia and the Balkans walked into Gypsy stereotypes already established by the Byzantines around earlier Indian immigrants, the Dom. Complexity, variety and difference of perspective are thus inherent in Roma/Gypsy/Traveller self-definition from the beginning, and any simplification of the above would simply mislead.

which can capture the deconstruction of anti-Gypsyism has sprung into being during the last decade.

The ideologies of racisms, imperialisms and orientalisms are the ways in which living together, the co-existence of different cultural communities, that is community social interaction, used to be constructed and represented. The twentieth century saw the most unprecedented falling apart and deconstruction of these ideologies as they failed to prevent unprecedented horror and terror in genocide. And yet we still need ideologies and myths. To attempt to live together (or simply to kill the other) on the basis of the rejection and refusal of the project of understanding, and giving up the attempt to learn from the past, is an even more terrible prospect than the danger of living together, or at least in some way rubbing along, on the basis of misunderstandings (which might be only partially false.)

Therefore the first project of almost any ideology is to situate itself in relation to adjacent ideologies. To live together we need to understand each others' point of view and at least to act as though the other's point of view may bear a determinate relation to some common reality. Philosophers tell us that rejecting solipsism is an act of faith; but only a psychopath actually acts as though the rest of the world is an illusion that can be re-dreamt to their own convenience. We assume that what *I* see in front of my eyes is what *you* see in front of my eyes, and when I speak of an object, or refer to a landscape, to a family, a home, you will know what I mean, provided we are speaking the same language, and even if we speak different languages, there is always a translator. We may say that beauty, (and duty, and honour) lie in the eye of the beholder, but the vast volumes of translated moral and aesthetic theory bear witness to our conviction that we can develop a common language to debate them.

Yet the wars and genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century give the lie to this easy assumption of common understanding, as the tortured reassessments of Bonhoeffer's *Prison Writings*, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, and Shusaku Endo's *Silence* bear witness in a way that makes us willingly forgive their earlier arrogance. T.S.Eliot put it most simply when in the last of the *Four Quartets* he implicitly recants his pre-war sympathy for fascism as "things ill-done and done to others' harm which once you took for exercise of virtue."

The collective realisation of how human groups have devalued each other's humanity through prejudices such as racism, have impelled us in the last half-century to deconstruct the

stereotypes we find in earlier representations, and to seek new representations which embody the fruits, the understandings gained from that deconstruction.

Up until 1800 all, and till 1900 most, of the writing and pictures and music we have of Roma are by Gaje (non-Roma), who represent Romani art as folk art. Only in the 20th century do we find the individual creative Romani writer and artist - making representations, but often criticised by Gaje as “unrepresentative”. The work of modern Romani intellectuals and artists is often contrasted negatively with something collective, traditional and repetitive called “folklore” or “naive art” as though anything produced outside of tradition must necessarily lack authenticity.

It is obviously beyond the scope of this paper to give a general history of art; but to examine the social meaning of innovatory art we need a general theory of art and culture. This paper is an exercise in sociology, not in art criticism. I seek neither to evaluate, and still less in a Leavis-ite fashion to prescribe what should be regarded as classic or authentic. Rather I simply seek to use the recognition by large numbers of people of the meaningfulness of particular bodies of work to help us understand how those people pursue conflicts and co-operations in the business of living together.

It is indisputably the case that some ethnic groups at certain times seem to make a “classic” contribution to world culture, overleaping boundaries of time, place and culture? The Parthenon, medieval plainsong, the German romantics, the Benin bronzes – their appeal is not absolutely universal, nor do classics always remain classics, and everyone will make different lists – but some works of art, some representations work not just within the context of their own production, but somehow successfully illuminate a narrative about those who produced them for people of other times and cultures.

If we want to see how this happens, how some artistic productions, as systems, or bundles of interconnected meaningful symbols, catch on more than others, then we need to take account of both (a) the history of the development of any symbol system and (b) social context of current uses of the symbol system.

The discussion of Romani visual art is very much less well-established than the discussion of either Romani music, which has been theorised by Europeans since the time of Liszt (c.f Boros 2007), or Romani literature, which though less discussed than music has begun to attract

critical analysis over the past 50 years (c.f.Djuric 2002). It is my hope that a brief discussion of how we can deconstruct European analyses of Romani music as reflecting a primordial ethnic essence, and replace it with an critical social model which relates musical agency to social function can provide a model for understanding the sudden flowering of Roma/Gypsy/Traveller visual artists.

There are three primary social contexts for musical performance: the domestic, the commercial and the religious. All human beings have domestic music of some kind: when you whistle while you work, or hum while you shower, you are making domestic music. Most human beings share this music with their families; the lullaby is a primal cultural experience. We recognise that some of us perform better than others; we will even pay to hear others, and thus professional music is born. Professional music and domestic music constantly interact; what we whistle while washing the dishes is as often as not a pop song we just heard on the radio. And professional composers are notorious for raiding folksong for inspiration. But besides these two motivations, to please oneself and to please others there is a third, which is to please God (or if her existence be denied, shall we say, to serve some transcendent cause.) This last motivation can lead to syncretic fusions and startling innovations, as we can see when Romani musicians from different traditions jam together at the great international Pentecostal Romani conventions to produce a human confrontation of the deity that is every bit as arresting as medieval plainsong or Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* .

There are three broad geographically linked traditions of Romani performance music. We may classify these as

- 1) Middle Eastern and Balkan Romani and Domari music
- 2) Northern including: "Hungarian Gypsy" music. "Russian Gypsy" music and "Manouche Jazz"
- 3) Flamenco, both classical and "pop".

All three reflect continuous traditions of professional musicianship passed from parent to child (usually father to son or nephew within the professional sphere, but sometimes mother to daughter) for some centuries. All tend to use instruments similar to local non-Gypsy musicians, though they may continue the use of these after they have fallen out of general use, and all have to find a paying audience among Gaje, or non-Gypsies.

Only the latter two of these excited European musical critical attention during the period of classical Romani Studies<sup>2</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the explanation of the radical difference between them was that they were essentially re-presenting local non-Gypsy tastes to that paying audience. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century these professional musics were then contrasted unfavourably with the primarily non-instrumental folksong of poor “Vlach” Romani migrants who left Romania for the West after the ending of slavery. Traditional Romani Studies, up to the work of Kovalcsik (1985) tended to conclude that these represented the ur-spring of genuine Romani music in contrast to the artificial and commercial confections of professional Romani musicians.

This view is a category mistake, which neglects both history and sociology. The “Vlach” Roma do not present the original culture of the Hungarian Romungre Roma, and still less that of the Spanish Gitanos. In each case their cultural trajectories separated centuries ago (Fraser, 1992). The Vlach Roma’s musical traditions are domestic variants of the middle Eastern music of the Ottoman Empire, not the classically influenced style of Hungarian Romungre and Russian Roma musicians. There are many vernacular correlates of the latter, not least the Manouche Gypsy Jazz of which Django Reinhardt is the enduring inspiration.

Of course all of these musical styles are in constant interaction with those of the non-Gypsies surrounding them. They use the same instruments as are available generally (as well as those they have kept from other places and other times); they learn the styles that will let them earn from their non-Gypsy audiences. Does this mean there is no authentic Romani/Gypsy music, but only some kind of bastardisation of original national styles, as the nationalist cultural analysts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century averred? (Boros, 2007). By no means! There are no primordial national musics. Music is paradigmatically capable of appealing across national and ethnic boundaries. All creative musicians take motifs and techniques from wherever they find them. If you wish to respond to or represent the situation you are actually in, you will take whatever tools, whatever motifs work best, rather than stick to traditions, those motifs which be definition represent the past rather than the present.

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<sup>2</sup> Often referred to as “Gypsylorism” by this writer and others within the parochial world of Romani Studies, after the name of the Gypsy Lore Society (founded 1888), the scholarly body which this writer has spent half a lifetime criticising for its failure to recognise its racist heritage, and of which he ironically finds himself currently the Secretary.

This principle of creative re-assembly applies to literature as well as to music. Do we condemn Shakespeare because he coins into English words from a dozen other languages<sup>3</sup> rather than sticking to the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary of Chaucer? Or because he lifts his plots from the chronicles of the ancients and the historians? No! Shakespeare is the magpie who takes the shattered mirrors from all the civilisations within his ken to build a glimmering collage which reflects our fragmented and inconsistent human nature back to us in a way that reconstructs our very souls. And this, the most eclectic of writers, is the one we chose to regard as the most English!<sup>4</sup>

Originality does not reside in newness of technique or material. Originality lies in the use of well-known methods and motifs to *say* something new, to give us something which we recognise as meaningful, but did not know before that we knew or would recognize. Roma/Gypsy/Traveller music, story and song are original and authentic because they address Roma/Gypsy/Traveller life, (and history forgotten by non-Gypsies) not because they stick to any purity of tradition, as Willie Reid (1997) and Donald Braid (1997) have pointed out against the Scottish folklorists who wished to reduce Scottish Traveller culture to a subset of their own. And if we look carefully enough, we can see the other chap's point of view.

I do not, therefore, claim any originality for the analysis of the contemporary Romani art movement which follows. I merely seek to apply the kind of sociologically informed analysis which has contested the meaning of Romani music for 150 years, and addressed Romani writing since 1945. And perhaps at the same time to celebrate my own good fortune, as a Gajo and an utter amateur in visual aesthetics, in having been in the right place at the right time for one crystallisation of that movement and its social vision in Greenwich in 2005- 2006.

If we look at the Roma/Gypsy/Traveller art from across Europe which was collected at the end of 2006 in the Open Society Institute's virtual on-line exhibition (c.f. Junghaus and Szekely 2006) and even more at the selection of those artists for the Roma Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007, then we can see, and not be surprised that the dominant traditions of the last half-millennium of European visual art provide the semiotic material for contemporary Romani art, rather than some archaic folk-craft related to tent-life of past centuries,. The neo-classicism liberated by the renaissance in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe exercises a continuing figurative influence

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<sup>3</sup> Including Romani.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, for the Germans, he is "Unser Shakespeare". It is no accident the man translates so well, or that he is the first English dramatist to be translated into Romani.



through its embodiment in the tradition of socialist realism which dominated in the former communist bloc and has shaped many of the artists of Eastern Europe. The modernist reaction of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe produced a broad range of genres and styles which nonetheless are seen as an entity called “Modern Art”, which is seen as opposed to classicism, and is still sometimes pilloried as inaccessible, degenerate or ugly not only by Communists and the more philistine Social Democrats, but also by Fascists and right-wing populists.

The distinction between the two traditions has been blurred since the fall of communism in Europe in 1989, and a contemporary *public* art has emerged within which a cautious rapprochement may be seen between them. Anthony Gormley and Tracey Emin can be accessible and still count as high art. The mutual engagement of Eastern and Western European Romani/Gypsy/Traveller artists can be seen as part of this process, and the creative tension between them as part of the way in which the method of the art is transcended in a common message – an emergent common gaze – which addresses the situation of Roma/Gypsy/Traveller groups in Europe today.

Although there were only four artists in the 2006 *Second Site* exhibition at the University of Greenwich, they illustrated many of these tendencies, not least in the contrast between the figurative realism of the one East European Rom, and the modernism of the other artists. This exhibition grew out of planning for the 2006 London International Gypsy Film Festival (Acton 2006). Right from the beginning, the question of how far representations of the Roma/Gypsies/Travellers are controlled by non-Gypsies, even when Gypsies are behind the camera, was an issue in planning for that festival. The audience, the industry and the conventions of film all mean that unless a film at least deals with the stereotypes of Gypsies, it isn't recognisably a Gypsy film at all.

I suggested that individual visual artists who happen to be Roma/Gypsies/Travellers are not bound in the same way. They may address the stereotypes – but they do not have to. From this grew the idea of an exhibition by established artists who just happen to be a Roma/Gypsy/Traveller origin: not an exhibition of Gypsy art, but an exhibition addressing whatever issues and ideas the artists themselves wished to address. The artists selected were the Albanian Rom, Ferdinand Koci, two English Romanichal Gypsies, Daniel Baker and Delaine Le Bas, and an Irish Traveller also has some Huguenot heritage, Damien Le Bas, all of whose work I had long admired.

I first introduced my self to the LeBas, husband and wife, at an exhibition of “Outsider Art” in the early 1990s, drawn by a brief press mention of Delaine’s Romani descent. Both glamorous recent art college graduates, surrounded by a crowd of young and flamboyantly dressed artists, they seemed at first sight far removed from the Traveller world I knew. Much in awe, I wrote to beg to be allowed to interview Delaine for a children’s book I was writing (Acton 1997), and visited her at home with the photographer David Gallant. There and later I discovered that Delaine and Damien were creatures of two worlds, wild bohemians among the artists, sober Travellers among the Gypsies. Delaine had grown up among the large Ayres family from the New Forest Gypsies, with an implacable ambition to go to Art School. Every day she went to the Art School, her father, a busy scrap-dealer, drove her to college, and was waiting outside for her after her last lecture, anxious that she form no unsuitable relationships with non-Gypsy boys. The family was pleased therefore to learn that she had met another Art School student who was a Traveller, Damien LeBas. They were less pleased when they found out his mother was an Irish Traveller, since like many English Romanies they were traditionally prejudiced against them. Damien, however, won them over, not only by his considerable charm, but by showing he could work the scrap business as well as any English Gypsy<sup>5</sup>.

After I had been interviewing Delaine for about an hour, she disappeared into a back room, saying she wanted to show me something. She emerged with a tattered A4 picture-book *Mo Romano Lil* which I had written in 1971, its cover missing, the line drawings coloured in. She had been given it when she was nine years old and attending a Gypsy Council caravan summer school in 1971. She said it had been one of the things that inspired her to become an artist. After that, as far as I was concerned, she could do no wrong.

When I met other Romani artists I always suggested they look at the work of the LeBas, and the way in with through a variety of paintings, drawing and soft sculptures it made an ironic commentary not only on the modern world, but on the forms of modern art itself, spearheading the “outsider art” movement to find art outside the traditional gallery.

I met Daniel Baker when he came to take my Romani Studies course at the University of Greenwich, and went on to take an MA in Gender and Ethnic studies, doing his MA thesis on

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<sup>5</sup> Both he, and his son Damien LeBas Jr. who gained first class honours at Oxford in Theology, and is also an artist and writer, continue to keep their hands in at scrap collecting. Multiple sources of income continue to represent security.

the possibility of a gay Gypsy identity (Baker 2002). A quiet, reserved, profoundly unflamboyant man, he had made for himself through his art and his studies an alternative way of being a Gypsy; he went on to become Chair of the Gypsy Council for three years. Steely in his determination to face down homophobia, never reacting to provocations, he almost single-handedly made being gay respectable among at least educated Travellers and then returned to focus on art. He recently acted as assistant curator of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Roma Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and completed his PhD at the Royal College of Art. Although much of his work then was rather austere and abstract in comparison to the narrative richness of the LeBas' work, both he and they show the influence of a century of the avant-garde in western art mediated to them by the training they all experienced in English art schools.

Ferdinand Koci, was the first Romani student at Tirana University. Born into a Romani family living in a village in communist Albania, he escaped into art from the everyday contradictions between socialist equality and age-old marginalisation. Whatever he was supposed to be doing, in the fields or at home or at school, he would start drawing on scraps of paper with pencils or charcoal, or on the ground with a stick if nothing else was available, and become absorbed, forgetting even to eat.

In the university, as in the village, he had to face the constant surprise of non-Gypsies that a dark-skinned Rom should be where no Roma had been before, but as his overwhelming talent allowed him to sidestep prejudice and create his own world, a detailed, painstaking but transformed reflection of the real world around him full of the beauty and sometimes the cruelty and pathos that we do not notice until an artist draws them to our attention. His work is profoundly realist, and although, especially after he became involved with the work of the Romani Baht foundation, it was put to the service of the Romani people, illustrating children's books and political pamphlets, it continued to use the visual language common in the ex-socialist countries.

Koci's subject matter came first from the life of the Albanian countryside, with peasants and Roma who recall the stereotypes, but are in this instance, the real thing seen from inside their own culture, but marked by his training as an artist. First the formal academicism, inherited from the communist years of socialist realism, gave a kind of gloss from the stereotypes. This has since been gradually deconstructed as life became more difficult after university. His work was taken up for use in as variety of causes, as he became that most desirable object of political exploitation, the token minority member with genuine ability. A bursary to study

further in France was lost because of visa problems. The realism became marked by irony, and sometimes even, in caricature, a genuine Gillray-like savagery where Koci perceives arrogance or hypocrisy. I met him when he came to London after marrying an Australian Romani teacher who had done voluntary work in Albania.

When I invited these artists to create an exhibition<sup>6</sup> at the University of Greenwich I was determined that it would not be an exhibition *about* Gypsy/Roma/Traveller subjects. It would be an exhibition about whatever they saw as significant about the world in general. They were all professional artists who had made their way in the world despite the prejudice against Gypsies. Some of those who had bought their pictures did not know their backgrounds. They were *not* the beneficiaries of any positive discrimination; they had not jumped on a Gypsy bandwagon; they were no more “Gypsy artists” than David Essex, say, is a “Gypsy musician”. They were just artists who happened to be Gypsies.

Once they were together, however, it was evident there was a common experience which created a synergy between them. Daniel Baker came up with the title of the exhibition, *Second Site*, a play on words with connotations of stereotypes of fortune-telling, physical dislocation, and altered perception. The Romani title was *Avere Yakha* – or *Wavver Yoks* in the English Romani dialect - literally “Other Eyes”.

It was a condition of the funding that the artists carry out workshops with parties of local school children who visited, including Gypsy/Roma/Traveller pupils who were amazed to see Gypsies/Roma/Travellers like them as professional artists. The Roma Support Group in London also brought refugee Roma. Pressure from Traveller and educational organisations in other parts of the country led us to get an Arts Council grant to take the exhibition and repeat the experience in Leeds at the headquarters of the Traveller Education Service, at Appleby during the largest English Gypsy horse fair, and at the Museum of East Anglian Life in Stowmarket, Suffolk.

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<sup>6</sup> I should say that it was only possible to put on this exhibition because (a) the technical expertise of Kelly O’Reilly, then curator of the Stephen Lawrence Gallery at the University of Greenwich, and of Grace Acton (my daughter), later an arts project manager with Metal Ltd. and visual arts director of the Greenbelt festival, and of Nathaniel Helpburn, curator of the gallery at Mascalls School in Kent, and (b) of the initial support of the Advisory Council for the Education of Romani and Other Travellers, on which I sit, to the tune of £935, followed by grants of £2,500 from the South Greenwich Cultural Opportunities Fund, and £4,900 from the Arts Council.

The whole thing was a runaway success, the catalogues a collectors' item and almost immediately an international influence. Notes that I and others had written were anthologised as key texts to the catalogues of the OSI virtual international exhibition of Romani art (Junghaus and Szekely 2006), the catalogue of the Roma Pavilion of the 2007 Venice Biennale (Junghaus 2007) and the catalogue of the 2007 Prague Biennale (Acton 2007). What we had done on a small scale, the OSI did at a European level. Three of the artists from the Second Site Exhibition were among the seventeen at the Venice Biennale Roma Pavilion. They became part of the visual grammar of art in support of multiculturalism (Acton 2009).

The exhibition also had an effect at national level. The co-ordinator of the Leeds Traveller Education Service, Peter Saunders,(who had hosted the *Second Site* visit to Leeds) put forward a proposal for a national Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM), modelled partly on the successful Black History Month, which had an art competition and art workshops built around themes from Gypsy/Roma/Traveller history. The artwork of children who attended the workshops became the foundational activity of GRTHM. This ran with support from the UK government Department of Schools Children and Families, with an English Gypsy graduate, Patricia Knight (the heroine of Firle)<sup>7</sup> as the national co-ordinator, ably supported by the English Romani journalist Jake Bowers, and many others. After its first run in 2008, it was funded for 2009 and 2010. All the artists from the *Second Site* exhibition were deeply involved.

How can we understand the formation of this art movement in terms of the model of domestic, profession and transcendent contexts of artistic production that was presented at the beginning of this paper? We have to understand it as a new stage in the cycle of interaction between domestic and professional contexts. The new Romani artists are consummately professional; they have paid their dues in terms of art school, laborious exhibitions attended by fewer people than hoped for, wrangles with agents and gallery-owners, competitions and residencies; but they are also, especially as they influence each other, drawing deeply on motif and crafts from their own people. But as they put on a good show, they have drawn an inspired response from ordinary people, a sense of new possibilities. A security officer of Welsh Romani heritage at

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<sup>7</sup> Firle was a small village in Sussex whose villagers, led by the local nobleman, burnt an effigy of a caravan with Travellers in it on "Bonfire Night", not knowing one of the villagers watching with her children was a house-dwelling Romani woman. Patricia Knight complained to the police under the Race Relations Act, and eventually 12 villagers were arrested. She braved the subsequent furore, and after finding support and making the villagers understand what was wrong, continues to live peacefully in the village. In consequence she brings enormous moral capital to the role of GRTHM co-ordinator.

the University of Greenwich, who was on duty during the exhibition immediately went to enrol on an art course at a local Adult Education College. At the Appleby Fair exhibition, no less than 4 visitors told us that they were themselves Gypsies/Travellers and artists, and were given contact information, and one group of visitors told us they were themselves planning to seek Arts Council support for an International Gypsy Art Festival.

The boost to amateur art among Gypsies/Roma/Travellers led to an exhibition *No Gorgios* in 2007 organised by Daniel Baker. (“Gorgios” is the English Romani word for *Gaje*, non Gypsies.) It took place in the gallery maintained by Novas, a large housing association which runs a number of Gypsy caravan sites (not without some complaints, which further made the art relevant to social controversy). “No Gorgios” says the catalogue (Baker and Ryan, 2007) “refers to the “No Travellers” signs that used to be commonplace .... in pubs,.....intended to dissuade any passing Gypsy or Traveller from entering.” Explicitly setting itself the task of replacing myth by reality and seeking culturally visibility, it mobilised both professional and amateur artists, including several of Daniel Baker’s relatives. In a way, Baker has moved from defining himself as the queer outsider to becoming the heroic insider, regarded by his kin and acquaintance network not any more as an eccentric to be tolerated, but as a remarkable and admirable achiever, and as one of his nieces told me, an educational role model. But he can do this partly because he has a vibrant artistic peer group, at an international and not just a national level.

Let us make the analogy with music a little clearer. Django Reinhardt was not only a universal genius who laid down tracks that people of all culture will listen to as long as audio-technology endures; he was also the person who inspired hundred of teenage Manouche and Sinte Rom to take up the guitar in their own caravans, and to bring them to the tents of the Pentecostal revival where I heard Django’s widow declare “If my husband were still alive he would be with us today.”

At Appleby Fair there was a steady stream of visitors off the street, some 40 – 50 of all ages per afternoon. Probably about half were Roma/Gypsy/Travellers staying at the fair, and half tourists , of whom one or two also turned out to be of Romani origin, and who, as well as being inspired by the exhibition, were grateful for information about Traveller Education and the Romani and Traveller Family History Society.

Among important Gypsy elders who came to look at the exhibition when it visited Appleby Fair were leaders of the Gypsy Evangelical “Light and Life” mission David Jones and Hubert Clee, and with them some other very well-known men in late middle age who are not members of their church (as well as several who were). Clearly even before attending they had been debating with some passion what the relevance of art might be to English Gypsies, especially modern art where their reaction was sometimes the not uncommon one “my kids could draw better than that!”.

When I showed them round, the realist work of Ferdinand Koci was the most immediately accessible – it was beautiful, it showed “real Gypsies” – but they were foreigners. The internationalist evangelicals felt that it was good they were learning about foreign Gypsies; the unconverted wanted to know what it had to do with them. It was at this point that the work of Daniel Baker (and the explanation he gave in the catalogue) came into play. His mirror paintings of fractured and defaced cultural motifs from Gypsy decorative styles, are an ironic commentary on the absence of any contemporary representation of English Gypsies as they are today (as opposed to stereotypes of how they were in a supposed Golden Age) in the decorative art with which they surround themselves. If you are a Gypsy and you look at one of Baker’s mirror paintings, then there is a Gypsy in the picture, and that Gypsy is you. You can’t take a photograph of one of them without putting yourself in the picture.

This simple piece of visual rhetoric, and the important social point behind it, immediately caught their attention, and made them re-examine the pieces. From there it was easy to move to showing how both Baker and Delaine Le Bas are holding up visual motifs of Gypsy culture for re-examination (in Delaine’s case with found objects from the Fair added to an installation) and how the work of both Delaine and Damian Le Bas have implicit stories built into them – which not surprisingly are very similar to the stories built into some of the Koci paintings (and even more so, the drawings and monotypes). After the explanations, about half of this group of men, some 6 or 7, bought catalogues, a sign perhaps that those who had come either from scepticism, or else from mere good will, had indeed had their imaginations stirred. It helps also, in presenting the work to Travellers, that the Le Bas and Baker evidently are Travellers. Among Travellers they behave “Travellerified”. They can *rokker* (speak the English dialect of Romani) and their families are locatable in a Traveller context. They are living refutations of the atavistic notion that a Traveller couldn’t be a modern artist.

As it became apparent that the story and social situation represented in the works of art were bound up with understandings of Romani history, a discussion began about the origins of the Romani people. One man challenged the present writer as to his beliefs, and when I presented the conventional wisdom that the Romani language at least is clearly of Indian origin, almost immediately contradicted this asserting his belief that Romanies are of Egyptian origin. His primary grounds for this were Boswell family tradition, (c.f. Boswell, 1970) but he was able to draw support from the fact that in Albania (which Koci's painting represent) there are also Gypsies who claim fiercely that they are Egyptians, not Roma (and didn't the characters in Koci's paintings look curiously Egyptian?).

Debate over this raged for more than half an hour. Some of the evangelicals felt there was theological and biblical support for the idea of an Egyptian origin. Other more widely-read evangelicals supported the academic consensus that Romanies are of Indian origin, and adduced their practical experience of sharing vocabulary with Punjabi and Hindi speakers as evidence. In between attending to other visitors I tried occasionally to refer to various writers who had expounded positions relevant to their arguments, but found it difficult to get a word in edgeways. Although the participants were evidently repeating a debate that they had had many times before, I think it was prolonged partly because they were able to use some of the paintings to make points, and partly because the different styles of the paintings showed how human beings can take control of their own representation, so that the issue about history is not only what it was, but how people came to know and say what it was. In short, both positions in the debate were problematised by the awareness of the subjectivity of representations brought about by the exhibition. The debate burnt itself out only just before closing time, and a number lingered to take another look until we locked up, when they left with warm invitations to bring similar work to the huge Gypsy evangelical conventions they organise every year.

This paper has tried to present a model for understanding the social dynamics of cultural development through the interaction of the different functional contexts of cultural production: domestic, professional and religious, which seem to present a less arbitrary set of explanations for cultural change than the value-laden typologies of high, low and 'folk' culture, with their *a priori* judgments of quality. Whether this is a legitimate intellectual enterprise is of course open to doubt. At a seminar of the Roma Educational Fund held in Venice during the 2007 Biennale, one distinguished Austrian linguist frowned at me, remarking that some so-called scholars carry out political projects, and then pass off their reports on the success - or more



usually failure – of the projects, as academic research. If this cap fits anyone, it fits me; and yet, political relevance does not in itself disprove an argument or invalidate a project. To me the artists with whom I have worked seem like rock stars; that they should accord me respect just because I once beavered myself into a professorship, was an unexpected grace. Is what I have just written a rigorous piece of academic critical scholarship? Or is it perhaps a piece of star-struck hagiography spiced with more than a dash of celebratory self-promotion? Or is it possible that a text may be a manifesto and still contain serious analysis?

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# Should Romani be Standardized in Sweden?

by

**Gregor Dufunia Kwiek**

## *Purpose*

Without a normalized written form in a dialect, each piece of literature that has been written in a single dialect is written according to the idiom of its author, this makes it difficult for readers of the dialect to follow as written forms change for the same vocabulary depending on who the author is. This in itself causes problems within mother tongue instruction, literature, and teaching materials in Romani. My experience as a writer, translator, and instructor in Romani has led me to notice a number of problems stemming from the fact that there is no written standard for the Romani language. Often research on the Romani language has been concentrated on origins and how contact between Romani and other languages have affected one another. By this my point is to point out that the subject area is limited in research. Research in the past conducted by non-Romani speakers has led to false conclusions on behalf of some researchers. This often was caused by using a single or very few sources to draw these conclusions on. As an example, Isabel Fonseca wrote that the Romani language is limited in vocabulary because in Romani one says “I drink cigarette” rather than “I smoke cigarette”. This may have had her assuming that Romani does not have a word for smoke, when in fact it does. One of the reasons for the conclusion she draws may be her limited knowledge in how language functions. As an example, in Turkish, the term for “I smoke” is “I drink” because the smoking is done through a water pipe, according to some Turkish speaking resources.<sup>8</sup> Bearing this in mind, this study has been limited to twelve sources and is not intended to be a representation of how Roma feel about standardization but rather to present some of the discussions and opinions some Roma have about standardization.

In order to gain a broad perspective of opinions on the subject, I have chosen to interview four individuals who either are in mother tongue instruction courses or have children in mother

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.turkishlanguage.co.uk/infinite.htm>

tongue instruction, four person who work with the Romani language either as mother tongue instructors, translators and writers in Romani, and the final group consisted of four persons who have studied or are studying at University level. The two last groups were divided because rarely had mother tongue instructors, translators and writers in Romani any university studies, although some did.

### ***Method & Analytical Approach***

The material was recorded through a dictaphone and the questions consisted of what standardization means for the source, what they see can either be negative or positive with standardization, if they believe that standardization is possible, if so what process they think is required to lead to it, and what alternatives there are to standardization. The presentation of the responses to the questions in this report are summarized and at times generalized when responses resembled one another.

A personality can be described as something unique to an individual. That uniqueness can shape out of experience and environment being then passed onto offspring eventually developing into a tradition or a part of a group's identity. Because the Romani people have a long history of stigmatization, I will be using the theoretical approach of Anthropologist Margaret Mead's (*Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1928) and Ruth Fulton Benedict's Culture and Personality-theory (*Patterns of Culture* 1934), to examine and present the gathered empirical data.

### ***The History that is Me***

I was born a Romani to a family whose grandmother had great uncles who worked in a bank, and another who studied at university prior to the turn of the century in Russia, while she herself knew not how to read. My grandmother explained to us that sometime during the First World War and the Russian revolution, the family began leaving the cities of the gadzhe (Non-Romani people) and began seeking refuge in the forests. She refused to discuss the reasons for seeking refuge, but as she would tell us stories from the past, some of them would come to life of Roma being shot and blamed for things such as poverty, as well as being shot by either the white army or the army for being seen as deserters and finally, ever so often she would mention how someone was taken away and sent to Siberia never to return. One day she even explained that the Roma bankers were shot and that more Roma began returning to traditional occupations such as fortune telling, copper and masonry work. Sometime during the Second World War, the occupations were changed from the traditional and carpet selling replaced this. The carpet selling was done by peddling them door to door allowing easy mobility and

movement, while at the same time helped conceal identity as they were targets during the war. Years later, communist began arresting Roma who sold carpets and imprisoned them.

When I was a child, I could not understand why my grandmother told me to hide my identity and my grandfather taught me that I should concentrate on learning to sell carpets rather than dreaming of being an engineer. It was not until I became an adult and began understanding that my grandmother's stories were recollections of things that happened and were the reasons for her not being able to read, and in my grandfather not having an interest in his offspring gaining nothing beyond the capability of reading from education. After all, the Jews had a written language unlike us, and yet still were targeted for extermination by Nazi Germany.

As a young man, I started school knowing only a few words in English. My teachers assumed me to have speech problems and were placed in a special class. After a few months, to their surprise I did not only speak without a problem, they learned that I spoke other languages and had learned how to read and write in English. Throughout my life I felt odd writing in English. Hans Åhl, a Tornedahl speaker explains how he felt odd writing and reading in a language (Swedish) that he did not speak with his father or family at home (Westergren & Åhl 2007:13). It was not until the mid 1990's when I came into contact with Dr. Ian Hancock that I was first introduced to writing in Romani consequently, and my history. I now was given pride and a new goal life to discover that which was not yet discovered of my history and people.

In 1997 a Romani child was to be removed from his family by social services because his education was "hindered" by his "environment ". In a discussion with authorities, we had managed to arrange extra lessons for the child during the weekend as an alternative to his removal from his family. His family and I agreed that his interests would be limited if he was to study alone. It was at this point that I started Romani study group. I requested books from Stefano Kuzhiov in Romani to use for our Saturday Romani classes. At times the children had difficulty as the text that the books were written in was different to their own, and we had to re-type the stories with alphabet we used for the course. As we ordered books from other parts of the world in Romani for our course, I decided not use them at all as this would have only confused the children. Eventually, the students in the Saturday class began doing better and advanced in their school work. The project was a success. In an article entitled *Invisible No More*, there I explain that the reason for the success is that I remove what I was raised with,

one that my identity and language is to be hidden and the other was to motivate the children into believing they can achieve whatever they want as Roma.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Historical Background***

The Romani people began migrating westwards out of India some 1000 years ago, passing through Persia, Armenia and the Byzantine Empire, until reaching Europe sometime during the 1300-1400's.<sup>10</sup> In India today there are 22 scheduled official languages.<sup>11</sup> Language and communication is a complex matter that is neither limited to borders nor is it limited to vocal communication. Migration of people is not a simple matter of since people move can move into when region, only to leave it and return to the region once came from. Contact through mobility can affect one's language by borrowing words used local to the region as well as affecting the speakers of the region with the language used by the immigrant. I make this evident as too often some scholars tend to present Romani as a language that had a clear line from India into Europe, and that dialects began developing differently from one another because of contact language. Often it is forgotten as well that a single family need not share the same knowledge of vocabulary. Take for example a son who has a massive vocabulary of words in computer knowledge and a mother who may know nothing of computers. Keeping this in mind, I will try to elaborate on the further variations that were caused by history.

The Romani language is made up of some 62 dialects, and hundreds of sub-dialects. Rather than numbering the dialects, I will give an overview of the dialects by territorializing them. The Vlax Romani is a cluster of various Romani dialects that have developed in Romania under slavery for a period of some 500 years (Hyltenstam, 1999:260). The largest and most internationally spread of these Vlax dialects are the Lovari and Kelderash dialects. Lovari as an example is said to originally come from the word *Lóv* meaning horse in Hungarian and was used to identify the Romani group that worked with horses as Lovara.<sup>12</sup> Many of the Vlax Romani group are named after occupation such as the Kelderash being coppersmiths, but are not limited this. Because the Vlax dialectal group spent so many years together under slavery, the Romanian influence integrated their dialects although they may differ from one another because of influence that occurred after these groups left Romania, before they entered or during the time they were there. But this we cannot be certain of it at this time, and remains an

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tolerance.org/teach/magazine/features.jsp?cid=135>

<sup>10</sup> [www.geocities.com/~patrin/history.htm](http://www.geocities.com/~patrin/history.htm)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=in](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=in)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.kultur.stockholm.se/Stod\\_Bidrag/PDF/Minoriteter\\_070108\\_lores.pdf](http://www.kultur.stockholm.se/Stod_Bidrag/PDF/Minoriteter_070108_lores.pdf)

area of study. However what is interesting is that Kelderash dialects as far apart as the Houston, Texas and Moscow, Russia share a similar accent, vocabulary, even though there may have been a separation between the two for more than a century. The Lovari dialect function in the same manner, and a Lovari speaker from Russia still can distinguish between a Kelderash speaker and Lovari speaker in Sweden. I chose to begin with these dialects in order to use them as a starting point to identify other dialects. The Vlax Romani dialects can also be called the “E” dialects, in contrast to the “O” the dialects. This distinction exists because an “e” is inserted in place of an “o” amongst “E” dialects in the verb past tense form of the pronoun “me” (Courtiade 2003). Hyltenstam and Fraurud divide the 60 Romani dialects according to Kaufman’s method, as Balkan, Vlax and Northern (1999:261). This may simplify things but can confuse someone new to the subject when a Balkan Kelderash is also Balkan but does not belong to the Arli dialectal group commonly spoken in the Balkans. To separate dialects in this regional manner, is wise in itself as it can show that dialects that have a historical connection to the Balkan region will have a larger influence of Balkan vocabulary as would Vlax dialects from Romania, but does not account for the fact that the so-called northern dialects such as Finnish Kalo and Balkan Arli have more in common in Romani vocabulary with one another than with Vlax dialects. The commonality can be found in words such as *Lav* (word) *pan(j)I* (water) that can be found in all “O” dialects and hardly ever in “E” dialects regardless of regionalization. For even further confusion to be cast into this scenario, Roma have given names to generalize each other such as calling all groups that speak different to their as *Romungri*, *Sinti* or *Austriake*. These applications are constructed and are based on assumption. If one group was met by another and happened to come from Austria, then all who seemed to speak like this group from Austria would be called *Austriake*. Hyltenstam and Fraurud point out that the some Finnish Kale believe they and the Spanish Kale are of the same group, but Hyltenstam and Fraurud state that this not necessarily mean that they are closer related to one another than to any other non-Vlax group (1999:274). Here I feel that this area again may need further study as in Hungary there are groups that identify themselves as *Kalore*, and share some vocabulary with Spanish and Finnish Kale that they do not share with some other Hungarian Roma or Polish non-Vlax groups for example.

### ***Dialectal Problems***

According to a statement made by Mai Beijer of The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement, the educational authorities of Sweden during 1970’s decided to use an orthographic system for Romani that was developed by working with Roma from other countries.



När romani chib skrevs ner i Sverige på 1970-talet kom utbildningsmyndigheterna överens om att använda en viss uppsättning bokstavstecken för de olika ljuden (ortografi). Denna utarbetades i kontakt med romer i andra länder (Contribution à la Discussion sur l'Ortographe de la Langue Tsigane, SÖ 1977).<sup>13</sup> <Rough translation: When Romani chib was written down in Sweden during the 1970's state educational institutions came to an agreement to use certain letters for the representation of those sounds. This was created in close contact with Roma from other countries.>

Authorities changed their position on this after Roma in Sweden felt uncomfortable about using this system and it was then decided that each Romani person write in Romani according to choice. In one of the interviews I conducted with a Romani man who had written a book in Romani during the 80's, I had questioned how he viewed standardization and his response brought up a model of standardization he did not like. As he presented this opinion, I asked him if there was an attempt to look to any other models, and his response was that this did not occur. In fact, all those that work with the Romani language who were interviewed pointed out that no other attempt has been made to seek out another model for standardization of Romani in Sweden.

In a group interview with four Romani women about mother tongue instruction one Romani woman who attends a mother tongue instruction class in Romani as a part of a program, complained that the mother tongue instructor taught Polish words as Romani. The woman herself is a Polish Lovari and stated that her mother tongue instructor belongs to a west European group. Indeed, Romani do borrow words from other languages, but at times they become synonyms and do not always replace a word. A western Romani whose forefather may have loaned a Polish word many generations ago may not have explained to coming generations from where the word originated and if it is Romani or not. This Polish Romani expressed that she felt silly having to attend a class where an instructor does not know the difference between Polish and Romani. At that point I had asked her if she knew that some of the words that she was using were in fact of Hungarian origin, to which she responded by saying that Hungarian is more like Romani.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.tatere.no/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=223>

Another two Romani women wanted to remove their children from mother tongue instruction because they felt that their children were being taught a dialect that was not their own, and that the teacher was not qualified to teach and could not understand why this person was chosen to be the instructor. One of them women paused for a moment and stated that she does however understand that it is difficult because the classroom does comprise of several dialects and expressed how difficult it must be for the instructor to deal with all the varieties in the class room. One woman complained about the children's books all being written according to the author's own alphabetical system and how this confuses her daughter. These reactions were prompted by my questions on standardization and caused a discussion among them, when I turned them and asked what can be done about this, they had more questions than suggestions and were directed to me. At that point I asked why they ask me, and they responded by saying that it is I who should work on solutions to these problems and those who develop these materials. At that point I showed them the article *Satsa på förebilder* (4/98-1/99), to which they had a general response of stating that the comments in the article were not representative of their own views on things. It seemed that they agreed with the need for role models among Roma, but that there is little motivation and help for Roma to attend school.

What is the point in going to school, or to study half your life, only to be discriminated against? Where can role models come from? And what is the point! The article sais that a university educated Rom's job was to pick up the children and act as someone between Roma and authorities. Is that what university is needed for? I would imagine it is needed to solve these problems we discuss today. (Marita Kaliska)

Interestingly, none of the women in the interview opposed the idea of standardization, but when I asked them to present an idea of how they think it should be reached they all joked and said that the standard should be based on their dialect.

### ***Steps of Standardization***

Sandra Kadi is a woman who has worked with the Romani language for the past 30 years. Sandra felt that standardization of Romani would create greater status for Romani. She expressed that the process must under-go stages starting with agreement on how to standardize the language, that is of more than one standard should exist, then a discussion on phonetics, grammar, and finally language planning and care. Her attitude towards the ups and downs

resembled the interview Mako Klak, who felt that standardization can only prove positive results, by using the Swedish as an example for comparison.

A Swedish speaker in Luleå reads the same text as does the Swedish speaker in Skåne, but certainly when they speak they will sound different. Evidently, the Swedish standard has not killed the various pronunciations, and it should not do this to us either. (Mako Klak)

Looking at one of the other National Minority languages of Sweden, Meänkieli, one of its greatest contributions towards standardization was dictionary composing of 10000 words inclusive of old words on the way to disappearance from the language (1999:125). At a conference in January 2007, *A Language without borders*, a question raised by someone in the audience to the panel was if a standard was to be found how material that is in the process of development and has been developed be dealt with. The response to the question was that the material should be converted to the new system. This prompted a second discussion on resources and how this could be done with limited resources. In an interview with Basil Janka, a Romani writer, this issue was readdressed when I asked him how standardization should be organized and what process should be involved. Basil believed that the government would not approve this. In fact, mother tongue instructor Laslo Bak went so far as to say that the state would never allow this. When I pointed out that this matter is up to us, his response was that without state support it will be just Roma meeting and philosophizing. His point became more evident when I interviewed Ljala Kris, a graduate from university who also said that if the state or an institution does not stand behind this work then whoever will disagree with this work will always be able to undermine it. When I asked Ljlala if she would use a standard had it been developed, she answered yes if it was developed by people who work with the language, it received status and was accepted by a broad consensus. But at the same time she said she would not if it did not have such status. We then began discussing implementation, and I brought up the issue of how media and writers are the implementers of a standard. She argued again that there will always be someone who disagrees and that one single disagreement will be used to say that we do not agree and therefore there is no standard.

Pavel Jac is in his last year in university studying law, he felt that because there is no formal standardization that does not mean that one is not being introduced. He picked up a number of books in Romani and pointed out that although there is no standard being used at this time, many of the writers use a Slovak alphabet. Indeed, on Tema Modersmål website, one can find

the Slovak alphabet in use by some of the varieties of Romani in Sweden.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Ian Hancock points out that some speakers' pronunciation has been effected by contact with other languages.

Serbian messes with R. phonology in Machvanska -- they affricate like crazy, cher for kher, djelem for gelem, so mandjes for so manges, etc. English Romani has lost the aspiration/unaspiration distinction because English doesn't have it.

Because the Slovak alphabet is being used to develop materials in Romani, Č - Š - Ž, are being used to represent entire dialects. The bigger problem with this is that in a single region pronunciation can vary because of contact influence. And when one uses the Slavic system for Romani one forces everyone within the dialect group to read a word as its author pronounces it. This is a far cry from the Swedish standard where a speaker from Luleå pronounces a word differently from a speaker in Skåne while reading and writing that same word with the same alphabet.

Ronaldo Ler is in his second year of studying at University. Ronaldo stated that he feels that Kelderash should be chosen as the foundation for a Romani standard. He pointed out that Kelderash is taught in Bulgaria as a standard, even though it is a minority there. He believes the reason for this is because Kelderash so widely spread and is commonly used by other dialects in communication. Ronaldo is a non-Vlax Romani and believes that his own dialect can be maintained and spoken while at the same time using a standard.

I and another Romani study law, and are able to communicate in legal language, at the same time, I am a religious person and communicate then in another style, I then speak with friends in a different manner, and finally I speak with my family in a different style. I do not see a problem in learning a standard and practicing one's own home dialect.

Most interesting about what Ronaldo had to say was not on standardization itself but the process leading to it. Ronaldo believed that Roma need to first know their own history, and

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<sup>14</sup> <http://modersmal.skolutveckling.se/romska/>

that this cannot occur unless we have Roma with higher education to conduct further research and establish a means of spreading this knowledge to the Roma themselves.

The Finnish minority living in Sweden has free schooling, and its own academics. Two initiatives have been taken by the Finnish minority for development at University level, namely the Finnish-Swedish cultural centre at the Mälardalen's College and NAMIS at Centre for Multi-Ethnic Studies in Uppsala (Huss 2002:54). The Jewish minority is historically a written language (1999:305), and although Meänkieli does not, it is a variant of Finnish that developed outside of Finland shaping and forming into a new language (1999:119-129). While the Romani language itself has within it a large variety of dialects resembling Meänkieli in this respect, with dialects such as Finnish Kalo and English Romanichal that developed separately from other dialects for hundreds of years. The national minority of Sami closest resembles the situation of Romani with at least 9 varieties (1999:43). The Sami language is divided into three standardizations, Luleå Sami, North Sami and South Sami (1999:72). The process in some cases was recognized by both Sami institutions as well as Swedish ones. Ronaldo explained that it was vital that Romani linguists discuss this matter further. There are many models to examine of standardization, and one needs to study how language functions in order to grasp how the models function. Ljala believed that standardization was not a matter of having everyone agree on a standard but of it having status and recognition. Ronaldo is in agreement but feels that its audience needs to know its own history to understand the concept and easier accept a standard. While all of those that work with the language expressed that those that work with the language pragmatically should sit at the table with theorists in order to implement a standard. Out of all of those interviewed only one source suggested an alternative to standardization, and another opposed it. Mako Klak said the alternative to standardization will lead to it. He felt that regardless of what will happen, a language committee is needed in Romani and it may be best for dialects closest to one another should form separate committees in order to work more efficiently. Worth noting is that Sami has three standardized dialects which were not standardized all at the same time (1999:72).

### ***Conclusion***

Deborah Kish holds a master's degree in sociology and disagreed with standardization, she felt that this would lead to hybrid and destroy the varieties. Deborah knew no other dialect but her own, and disagreed with the idea of a standard. She felt that Romani would never gain any status equal to that of other languages as we are viewed as less than human, and have no say so in our affairs. Later Deborah explained that her experience and the experience of her forefathers tell her that this is pointless and a waste of time. Earlier I had mentioned how Laslo

and Basil both were for a standard but felt the state would never accept it. Throughout Romani history, the Roma have been excluded from participation in society, they have been targets of prejudice and scapegoats for the problems of European society. In many cases they were not permitted to practice their language and culture. This has led to low expectation and an internalized acceptance of essentialism and the belief that certain things like higher education are beyond our ability. Even those that do not believe this and study at university hide their identity believing others may see them in this light and bring discrimination against them. Ronaldo and other Roma studying at university are working on forming a proposal of setting up special research for Roma studying at university in order to encourage and motivate Romani pride. The conclusion of this report is that studies must be initiated by Roma with knowledge, experience and access to the community so that problems such as those presented in this study come more to light, so that solutions can then be sought out with community leaders.

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1.Name: Marita Kaliska

Age: 35

Occupation: Housewife

Interview Length: 45 min.

Interview Date: 071003 18:45-19:30

2.Name: Sandra Kadi

Age: 52

Occupation: Romani writer

Interview Length: 40 min.

Interview Date: 071004 15:00-15:40

3.Name: Ronaldo Ler

Age: 23

Occupation: Student

Interview Length: 120 min.

Interview Date: 071005 13:00-15:00

4.Name: Mako Klak

Age: 50

Occupation: Translator & Consultant

Interview Length: 120 min.

Interview Date: 071007 18:30-20:30

5.Name: Laslo Bak

Age:42

Occupation: Mother tongue instructor

Interview Length: 30 min.

Interview Date: 071008 12:00-12.30

6.Name: Ljala Kris

Age: 43

Occupation: Media

Interview Length: 45 min.

Interview Date: 071008 14:00-14.45

7.Name: Deborah Kish

Age: 48

Occupation: Instructor

Interview Length: 25 min.

Interview Date: 071009

8.Name: Dr. Ian F. Hancock

Age:

Occupation: University Professor

Interview Length: 15 min.

Interview Date: 071009 12:00-12:25

9.Name: Pavel Jac

Age: 25

Occupation: Student

Interview Length: 30 min.

Interview Date: 071009 19:00-19:30

10.Name: Janka Polak

Age: 35

Occupation: Student

Interview Length: 90 min.

Interview Date: 071009 21:00-22:30

11.Name: Danka Tipski

Age: 32

Occupation: Housewife

Interview Length: 90 min.

Interview Date: 071009 21:00-22:30

12.Name: Marika

Age: 30

Occupation: Housewife

Interview Length: 90 min.

Interview Date: 071009 21:00-22:30

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