

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filosofická fakulta

Filologie

Teorie a dějiny literatur zemí Asie a Afriky

Karolína Ryvolová

**Romany Letters in the Making:
Testing the Frontiers of Legitimate Literature.
A Comparative Analysis of Four Romany Life Stories**

Rodící se romské písemnictví. Ohledávání hranic oficiální literatury.

Komparační studie čtyř romských životních příběhů.

Disertační práce

Vedoucí práce - PhDr. Hana Ulmanová, Ph.D., M.A.

2014

Mé hluboké díky patří Haně Ulmanové za to, že se ujala mého projektu, i když byl v mnoha ohledech nestandardní, a mé mamince a Johnovi za bezpodmínečnou podporu během psaní.

Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci napsala samostatně s využitím pouze uvedených a řádně citovaných pramenů a literatury a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 8. října 2014

.....

Summary

The objective of this thesis is to do a comparative analysis of four Romany life-stories in prose from different parts of the world and identify features which may justly be called characteristic of Romany writing. The comparison of Victor Vishnevsky's *Memories of a Gypsy*, Mikey Walsh's *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run*, Andrej Giňa's *Pařiv. Jeřtě víme, co je ůcta* and Irena Eliášov's *Naře osada* yields valuable insights into how Romany writers construct their identity and to what extent their current work relates to the existing literary genres.

Because of Romany studies' multidisciplinary nature, the extensive introduction lays the theoretical foundations for the analysis. I proceed from the characteristics of Romany studies in general in part 1.2 to the way it was practised during my undergraduate years in Prague as opposed to the Western tradition (part 1.3). Using a case study of the schism Romany studies are currently facing in the Czech Republic, in part 1.4 I attempt to illustrate the more general epistemological challenges the field has been grappling with between essentialist/primordialist and radical constructivist views.

As there is a definite scarcity of theoretical literature conceptualising Romany writing, in part 1.5 of the introduction the existing body of work is assessed and found methodologically lacking. In the analytical chapters 2, 3 and 4, several theoretical frameworks are tried and tested, e.g. postcolonial theory, African-American literary theory, Walter Ong's notion of oral and chirographic/typographic cultures and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *misrecognition* and the genesis of the literary field. In the conclusion in part 5, they are found inspirational and partially useful, but never unreservedly and I suggest that a completely new theory of Romany literature may have to be devised in the future.

Each chapter is divided into two parts, one pertaining to identity construction and the other one to the extent to which the texts under scrutiny communicate with the existing literary field. My research into the underdeveloped field of Romany literary studies shows that a comprehensive comparison of Romany life-stories in different languages (English, Slovak, Czech and Romani) has not been done before, making my thesis a pioneering venture. By bringing the Czech Romany production into the picture, I have sought to gain it the international attention which I believe it deserves. By using methods and approaches from both the "Eastern" and the "Western" tradition of Romany studies, I seek to reconcile the two and combine them to a productive end.

Resumé

Cílem této práce je skrze srovnávací analýzu čtyř romských životních příběhů z různých částí světa identifikovat rysy psaní Romů, které by bylo možné považovat za univerzálně sdílené. Komparace děl V. Vishnevského *Memories of a Gypsy*, M. Walshe *Gypsy Boy* a *Gypsy Boy on the Run*, I. Eliášové *Naše osada* a A. Gini *Pa'iv. Ještě víme, co je úcta* přináší cenné informace o tom, jak romští autoři konstruují svou identitu a do jaké míry lze jejich práce zařadit do stávajících literárních kategorií.

Romistika je multidisciplinární obor, jehož teoretická východiska i úskalí jsou rozebrána v rozsáhlém úvodu. Na příkladu rozkolu mezi tzv. primordialisty a radikálními konstruktivisty v české romistice dokladují dvě obecnější tendence ve světových romských studiích a naznačují svou pozici v rámci této debaty. Současně vyhodnocují dosavadní teoretickou literaturu k tématu romského písemnictví a shledávám ji nedostatečnou.

K analýze jednotlivých textů jsou zkušebně použity zavedené teoretické rámce, konkrétně postkoloniální teorie, afroamerická literární teorie, koncept orálních a typografických kultur v pojetí Waltera Onga a pojmy *habitus*, *misrecognition* a geneze literárního pole, jak je zavedl Pierre Bourdieu. Považuji je za dílčím způsobem použitelné a inspirativní, ale nikdy ne bez výhrad. Domnívám se, že do budoucna bude potřeba vytvořit jedinečnou teorii romské slovesnosti, která by reflektovala její donedávna orální charakter.

Každá analytická kapitola má dvě části. V první je řešena identita v pojetí jednotlivých autorů, ve druhé jsou konkrétní texty přiřazeny ke konvenčním literárním žánrům, pokud je to možné, a tím i vtěleny do literárního pole.

Mé rešerše v oblasti literárního bádání o romském písemnictví mě vedou k domněnce, že podobná srovnávací analýza romských textů ve vícero jazycích (konkrétně angličtině, slovenštině, češtině a romštině) zatím nebyla napsána. V tomto ohledu je moje práce průkopnická. Mým cílem bylo kromě jiného seznámit zahraniční publikum s českou romskou literaturou a využít a propojit při tom poznatky a postoje „západní“ i „východní“ romistiky.

Klíčová slova:

Romistika, romská studia, identita, esencialismus, primordialismus, radikální konstruktivismus, etnicita, romské psaní, životní příběh, společně vytvořený životní příběh, postkoloniální teorie, kolonizované myšlení, bájně domovy, hybridita, subalterita, symbolické násilí, afroamerická literární teorie, podvratnost, mylné rozpoznání, habitus, literární pole, orální kultury a kultury písma/tisku.

Key words:

Romany/Gypsy studies, identity, essentialism, primordialism, radical constructivism, ethnicity, Romany writing, life-story, collaborative life-story, postcolonial theory, colonised mind, imaginary homelands, hybridity, subalterity, symbolic violence, African-American literary theory, subversiveness, misrecognition, habitus, literary field, oral and chirographic/typographic cultures.

Preface

In 2004, as a fresh postgraduate student, I went to a two-week summer course of Romany studies at the CEU in Budapest¹. My first contact with the concept of Romany studies abroad, outside of the familiar background of the Charles University department and removed from Milena Hübschmannová's decisive influence, I was first horrified, and later delighted to see that the discipline can be approached differently, if not necessarily better.

Over the two-week period, I had the pleasure of meeting, and hearing the lectures of, some of the celebrities of the discipline. Despite the fact that I more or less identified with the approach of e.g. Michael Stewart, Yaron Matras or Paloma Gay y Blasco, whereas I did not always agree with the words of Judith Okely or Leo Lucassen, it was generally an incredibly enriching and mind-blowing experience, which has ultimately landed me where I am now: straddling the Czech ethnocentric, language-oriented, fieldwork-based and strongly activist school of Romany studies, which has shaped me, and the sometimes radically post-modern, academically challenging and occasionally shocking western one, which continues to inspire me.

When I joined the department of Romany studies in 1996, Milena Hübschmannová, a pioneer of Romology in Czechoslovakia and the founder of the department, was, for reasons of funding, more or less our sole teacher. She taught Romani, the language of the Roma²; linguistics; folklore and literature; Romany history, ethnography and anthropology. Although later in the five-year programme, some courses were taught by e.g. Hana Šebková, Jan Červenka or Viktor Elšík, she was still the main driving force of the programme and a pivotal personality around which everything revolved. She was not just multitasking – she was highly educated, completely versatile and a supreme humanist. Nevertheless, the utmost respect in which she was held often meant that her views were not sufficiently challenged and our Romany studies training went largely uncontested.

As her student, one had to be patient, resilient and eager to learn. Her lectures, while colourful and rich in knowledge were often digressive and not easy to follow. They encompassed a lifetime of experience and constituted what Jan Červenka, one of her first

¹ CEU Summer University course entitled *A Critical Basis for 21st Century Romany Studies*, course directors Michael Stewart and Janos Ladányi.

² Throughout the thesis, I shall differentiate between “Romany” as an adjective, alternatively as a noun (as in “a Romany/Romanies” as individuals and representatives of the Roma), and “Romani”, their language.

students and later assistant, fondly called “integral Romology”. I often despaired, longing for order. I have since discovered that seemingly flawless intellectual systems may hide serious incongruities and even seek to serve underlying agendas, whereas an unkempt maze of parallel or even contradictory lines of thinking may reflect the complexity of reality much more fittingly. It still took the head-on collision with Romany studies as practised abroad, especially outside the former Eastern bloc, to come to this realization.

As an avid reader, I have always been drawn to Romany writing. In time, I realized that not everything labelled “Romany literature” was in fact written by Roma in Romani, just like all Czech literature was not necessarily written solely by ethnic Czechs in Czech. While in terms of Czech literature, the cases of Czech-German writers such as Franz Kafka or Max Brod writing in German, Milan Kundera writing in French, or the Czech-African Tomáš Zmeškal writing in Czech are considered marginal, in Romany writing complex identities are the norm, and it is the instances of clear-cut belonging that are rare sightings.

The aim of this thesis is to start the construction of a framework in which it would be potentially possible to unravel the complexity and capture the fluidity of Romany writing. Romany writing is dynamic and it is still changing, therefore any conclusions today will only work as the foundation of a further analysis in the future.

Literature is an aspect of Romany studies that has mostly been the stuff of footnotes and has not been paid serious attention. For its quiet potential to disclose something intrinsic about the Roma both as writers, and as people, I feel it deserves to be brought into the limelight. In my endeavour, I will be aided by Romany studies as practised both in the Czech Republic and abroad. Bringing these two approaches together and allowing the best of them to combine to an interesting end is a side-effect I personally value just as much as identifying what Romany writing actually is.

Obsah

1	Introduction	11
1.1	Searching for the Correct Questions	11
1.2	An Outline of Romany Studies	15
1.3	Western Romany Studies	17
1.4	Romany Studies in the Czech Republic: A Case Study	24
1.5	Previous Research: Problematizing Romany Literature	37
2	The Masculine Activist.....	53
2.1	Identity	54
2.1.1	Belonging (Citizenship, Nationality, Ethnicity)	54
2.1.2	Language.....	58
2.1.3	Elitism and Notions of Whiteness	61
2.1.3.1	We're more civilized	61
2.1.3.2	They have never seen white people in their lives.....	63
2.2	Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies	66
2.2.1	Bildungsroman.....	67
2.2.2	Slave Narratives	69
2.2.3	Imaginary Homelands.....	71
2.2.4	Construction – De-Construction	74
2.3	Conclusion.....	77
3	The Gay Man	81
3.1	Identity	82
3.1.1	Masculinity	82
3.1.2	Conceptualising Difference	88
3.1.3	Darkness of skin.....	91
3.1.4	Group Boundaries	92
3.1.5	Language.....	95
3.2	Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies	97
3.2.1	Coming-Out Narratives.....	97
3.2.2	The Barron Controversy	101
3.3	Conclusion.....	105
4	The Witness and the Writer	108
4.1	Identity	111
4.1.1	Language.....	111
4.1.2	The (Un)Importance of Skin-Colour	115
4.1.3	<i>Romipen/Pat'iv</i> as Habitus.....	118
4.1.3.1	Mutual Complementarity.....	120
4.1.3.2	Gender Roles	123
4.2	Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies	125
4.2.1	Narrative Voices	125
4.2.2	Vakeribena pal o dada.....	128
4.3	Conclusion.....	133
5	Conclusion.....	140

5.1	Ethnicity Contested But Undefeated	141
5.2	Current Theories, Future Options	147
6	Bibliography.....	152
6.1	Primary Sources	152
6.1.1	Primary Sources - Analysed	152
6.1.2	Primary Sources - Consulted	152
6.2	Secondary Sources	153
6.2.1	Secondary Sources - Cited.....	153
6.2.2	Secondary Sources - Consulted	158

1 Introduction

1.1 Searching for the Correct Questions

In March 2011, Judith Butler articulated the concerns of some quarters of the literary world over who should become the rightful custodian of the unread and as yet unknown works of Franz Kafka. They were originally left by the writer himself for his friend Max Brod to burn without reading and after many years ended up in the hands of his secretary's daughters, who, following her death in 2007, decided to sell them. When they attempted to ratify their mother's will, the State of Israel intervened, starting a keenly observed trial over Kafka's legacy.

In her essay aptly called "Who Owns Kafka?"³, Butler discusses several aspiring custodians and their claims to the manuscripts, asking some very important questions. The representatives of The National Library of Israel feel that Kafka belongs either to the public good (which it would ensure), or, by virtue of having been Jewish, to the Jewish people, arguably represented by Israel. Those responsible for the German Literature Archive in Marbach, another applicant, believe that not only should Kafka's estate be kept intact and they already have a part, but also by virtue of having been a German speaker, his work by rights constitutes part of the German-speaking literary canon. Not only do the two claims seem mutually exclusive – if Kafka was Jewish, then certainly Germany has no *moral* right to it; if on the other hand he was primarily a German, *the state of Israel* as a political body has no claim to it – but as Butler very correctly points out, they also entirely leave the Czech aspect of Kafka's identity out of the picture.

Using correspondence extracts, Butler illustrates Kafka's multilingualism (and by proxy, his multilayered identity) and shows that his German had the hypercorrectness of a second language (as pointed out to him by his lover Felice Bauer), he often could not spell or pronounce his Czech (as remarked by his other lover, Milena Jesenská) and although he could passively understand Yiddish, his active command of it was far from perfect. In terms of confession, he was born Jewish but did not practise Judaism. And in terms of nationality, although he was born in Prague when it was still in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it later became Czechoslovakia, and he eventually died in Austria. "The very question of where

³ Butler, Judith: "Who owns Kafka?" in *London Review of Books* vol.33, number 5, March 3 2011, pp. 3 – 8.

Kafka belongs is already something of a scandal,” Judith Butler sums up, “given the fact that the writing charts the vicissitudes of non-belonging, or belonging too much.”⁴

Butler’s essay, although essentially discussing a situation incompatible with that of the world’s Roma - and we have no intention of drawing an equation of Roma with Jews, however tempting it may be⁵ - nevertheless highlights some issues indispensable to the topic of this thesis. Just like Kafka was an amalgam of identities pertaining to the salad bowl of the then Prague, who did not feel fully comfortable as a Czech, German or Jew, so do the majority of Romany writers around the world represent crossroads of multiple and often conflicting identities. Just like Kafka’s belonging seems to depend on the set of criteria the interested parties choose to apply, that is language of production, nationality or place of residence, so can Romany literature be – at least in the majority of existing treatises – one of many things.

⁴ Ibid. The case has since been resolved, ruling Kafka estate part of Max Brod’s own literary estate, which had been intended by the author to be left in charge of an institution for the public good. This institution, unless Esther Hoffe’s daughters’ appeal comes to anything, shall become the National Library of Israel, a solution which Butler would most certainly disapprove of. As she points out, not only would it force the parties interested in Kafka’s legacy to “defy the (cultural and academic) boycott (of refusing to appear in Israel unless the host institutions voice a strong and sustained opposition to the Palestinian occupation) and implicitly to acknowledge the Israeli state’s right to appropriate cultural goods whose high value is assumed to convert contagiously into the high value of Israel itself”;⁴ it would also imply that “all Jews and Jewish cultural assets (...) outside Israel eventually and properly belong to Israel”⁴, making Jews in the Diaspora second-class Jews in the process.

⁵ Such an equation is common and appears especially, but not exclusively, in popular journalism. According to Gaby Glassman (1998), it is based on some, or all of the following common points: both Jews and Roma have a history of persecution; their loyalty lies exclusively with their own and it is of supranational, diasporic character; they were/are hated and feared as the ultimate representatives of Otherness; they were only able to engage in specific jobs and others were out of bounds for them; their persecution climaxed during WWII and is generally referred to as the Holocaust. My own master thesis (2002) explored the oral foundation of Jewish literature written in Yiddish and Romany literature, and used some striking parallels between the two peoples in the process. Many scholars, however, are cautious to make any such sweeping comparisons, and may resort to a remark on the margin concerning a partial resemblance, but nothing more. For example, Yaron Matras (2004), himself Jewish, points out that, both Jews and the Roma have sought for historical narratives which would emphasize their victim role and “change their socio-economic profile (...) as an ‘industrious’ and ‘productive’, territorial nation”. Despite this statement, far be it from the author to actually say [The Roma are like the Jews]. A major controversy has been taking place for the last twenty years concerning the degree of suffering during WWII, and the legitimacy of calling it a Holocaust, or genocide, by the respective peoples. To find out more about the various camps in this dispute, see the relevant work of e.g. Guenter Lewy, Elie Wiesel, Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, Sybil Milton and others.

As a primarily oral community, the Roma have taken to writing only in the 20th century and more extensively since the 1960s.⁶ It is therefore an extremely young literature in the making, which is exciting to follow while taking form and developing. Milena Hübschmannová often pointed out what a unique opportunity contemporary scholars have of being able to witness this process, which she called the “overlapping of decline and birth” (Hübschmannová 2000a: 142).

This thesis intends to do a comparative analysis of four Romany life-stories in prose and identify features which may justly be called characteristic of Romany writing, and which set it apart from other literatures. Because of the trans-national, diasporic nature of both the Romany people and their writing, I have chosen works from Brazil, the UK, and my homeland, the Czech Republic. I believe that such a comparison will reveal some important aspects of Romany identity shared in different parts of the world.

I will be looking at the following books: Victor Vishnevsky (Brazil): *Memories of a Gypsy*; Mikey Walsh (the United Kingdom): *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run*; Irena Eliášová (the Czech Republic): *Naše osada* and Andrej Giňa (the Czech Republic): *Pařiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta*. The language of production is English for Vishnevsky and Walsh, Czech/Slovak/Romani for Eliášová and Romani for Giňa.

I have focused on prosaic works because I am ultimately interested in narration. In all of the texts in question, their authors relate, to a smaller or lesser degree, the events of their lives, and in the process, they negotiate their identity. How this identity is constructed forms one area of my analysis, while the extent to which these life stories also communicate with established literary traditions forms a second one.⁷ I shall attempt to theorise Romany writing using several existing theoretical frameworks such as post-colonial theory, African-American literary theory, Walter Ong’s notion of oral and literate cultures and Pierre

⁶ See for example Hancock 1998: 10, Hübschmannová 1998: 61 or 2000: 138, Ryvolová 2002: 56 – 62, Scheinostová 2006: 12, and many others.

⁷ I have selected texts which to my knowledge have been least co-produced and shaped by their editors (verifiably regarding Vishnevsky, Giňa and Eliášová, less so in Mikey Walsh’s case) but the question to what extent any piece of writing can be considered the work of an individual will have to remain unanswered for the time being and I believe is ultimately irresolvable. Martin Shaw has devoted a whole thesis to it (*Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers: A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life Stories*, Umeå universitet 2006) and his valuable insights have been invaluable in shaping my own thesis. More about Shaw’s work in chapter 1.5 *Previous Research*.

Bourdieu's thoughts on the genesis of the literary field and it remains to be seen to what extent these are applicable.

The very process of selecting a well-balanced corpus has proven to be almost as difficult as the analysis proper, because a multitude of contrasting ideas and problems had to be resolved beforehand. The most pressing question was: **What is Romany literature?** What is a suitable criterion to apply, authorial (texts written *by Roma*) or thematic (the Roma as a subject of writing)⁸? Does oral tradition constitute a part of it and where is the line that marks the end of orality and the beginning of literacy?

If the identity of the writer should provide a key, the next crucial puzzle is **Who is a Romany writer?** Are they defined by subject matter, language, country of residence, ethnicity, anthropological type, lifestyle, self-ascription, or otherwise?

Finally, a completely new area of uncertainty emerges when the second part of the term – **literature** – comes into focus. Is literature a suitable word for a body of writing so relatively young and so specific? Can the individual literatures of the world - e.g. Czech, English and Romany - be assessed on the same grounds regardless of the duration of their tradition, and is there an objective hierarchy of world literatures that one should, or rather should not, as G. Ch. Spivak suggests⁹, relate himself to? If Romany writing is a literature under construction, where is it going?

In parts 1.2 to 1.4 of the Introduction, the broader framework of Romany studies is introduced and problematised. As there is a definite lack of theoretical literature dealing with Romany literature as a concept,¹⁰ part 1.5 is dedicated to the outline of previous projects.

⁸ This is not as absurd a question as it may seem. In chapter *1.5 Previous Research*, I am going to illustrate that problems of methodology i.e. applying a suitable framework of text selection are haunting Romany literary studies and often bring dubious results.

⁹ Spivak maintains that „we cannot NOT try to open up, from the inside, the colonialism of European national language-based Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area Studies, and infect history and anthropology with the 'other' as producer of knowledge (...) The most difficult thing here is to resist mere appropriation by the dominant". (*emphasis mine*, 2003:10 – 12) Although Spivak is discussing the future of two academic disciplines, her message of inclusiveness of "the other" into mainstream academic endeavour is directly relevant to Romany literature as a prime example of otherness - otherness defined by its authors, "Gypsies", and otherness of the literature which is small, marginal, eluding definition and in the making.

¹⁰ Romany literature has won academic attention only recently and at this point, a fully comprehensible conception of it is still missing. The individual commentators have often focused on a specific area or one aspect of "Rom Lit", rendering the field gapped and more than open to interpretation. Anyone writing on

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 constitute the analytical part proper. While both V. Vishnevsky and M. Walsh are discussed separately (chapters 2 and 3 respectively), I look at I. Eliášová and A. Giňa together in chapter 4 in view of their common geographical, biographical, and linguistic background. Chapter 5 assesses the results of the comparative analysis, weighs the pros and cons of the existing theoretical frameworks as applied to Romany writing and suggests ways of future development.

1.2 An Outline of Romany Studies

Romany (or Gypsy¹¹) studies as an academic discipline is an extremely diverse area that utilises the expertise of most humanities. Some of the tools and methods originate from such varied fields as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, demography, cultural studies, gender studies, history, law, literary theory, philology, linguistics or political science. As Elšík (2005: 6) has pointed out, it is absurd to ask Romany studies proponents to characterise Romany studies by a single method. By definition, this is an academic area that is constituted by the many methods of the many fields that contribute to it.

Romany studies' potential for multidisciplinary approach and the relative neglect, with which this field has been treated, has lately attracted scholars from the whole spectrum. The heightened interest of specialists with a certain renown and reputation has lent more of a credibility to the discipline, which has not always been perceived as worthy of serious academic attention. As David Mayall puts it:

this new field will have to piece their general idea from the essays and an occasional highly specific monograph by for instance Rajko Djuric (RS/DE), Beate Eder (AT), Jonathan Bernard Geidt (GB/ZA), Ian Hancock (USA), Milena Hübschmannová (CZ), Helena Sadílková (CZ), Alena Scheinostová (CZ), Martin Shaw (GB/SE) or David Vaughan (GB/CZ).

¹¹ As a label in Roma-related academic writing around the world, "Gypsy" studies are generally favoured over "Romany" studies, partly reflecting the fact that the vast majority of these authors are Non-Romany and can therefore only approach the group as outsiders. (An exception proving the rule is the very interesting and ideologically challenging academic work of Ian Hancock, Brian Belton and Ken Lee, all of them recognizing their Romany origin.) An important role is also played by the fact that the majority of these texts are written in English, in which "Gypsy" is generally considered neutral, unlike the different forms of "Cikáni" in the respective countries. "Gypsy" is the universally recognised exonym for the group, while "Roma" is what most Gypsy communities (including Vlah or Sinti and regardless of the particular dialect of Romany they speak, or do not speak) acknowledge as a unifying point of reference, especially when dichotomising the world into the realms of us, the Roma, and them, the *gadje* (Hübschmannová 1995: 21-22).

(...)in the last twenty or so years, the number and range of scholarly investigations has so increased that Gypsy studies now includes works by academics from a range of backgrounds who have incorporated Gypsies into their wider disciplinary and research interest. (...) The greater involvement of the broader academic community has given a diversity to Gypsy studies which was missing from its earliest incarnations and which, in turn, is part cause and part effect of its improved status. (Mayall 2004: 25)

Mayall has also observed (2004: 48) that each commentator will take a different approach based on their area of specialization and their target group, quoting Willy Guy who has written that “in an important sense the study of Roms is worthwhile not so much for its own sake but for what it reveals about the nature of the societies in which they lived and still live”¹².

Let us add that not only do monographs on Roma speak volumes about the times they were written in, they also often seem to serve as a playground for exercise in argumentation - what Matras (2004: 76) refers to as “intellectual mobilisation”. Some of the most brilliant theses published especially in the last two decades are characterized by a very high level of, admittedly much needed, criticism of previous Gypsyologist study, and a very low level of direct contact with, or genuine interest in, the Roma. While Romany/Gypsy studies commentators battle over their identity - whether as a group the Roma are defined racially, ethnically or socially, occasionally discounting their very existence - especially in Central and Eastern Europe the situation of the people known as Roma continues to deteriorate. They are facing increasing levels of hostility from the surrounding majority societies, a shocking degree of ostracization in the educational and employment areas, while freefalling to the very bottom of the social hierarchies they inhabit.

¹² Willy Guy: „Ways of looking at Roms: the case of Czechoslovakia“ in Rehfish, F. (ed.) *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*, London: Academic Press 1975. Alongside of “Roma” and “Romanies“, “Roms“ is another form of the label used for the group known as Gypsies. “Roma” has been adopted from the language of the Roma, Romani, and “a Romany/Romanies” is an Anglicised version which conforms to the English plural and allows for the use of singular; “Roms”, on the other hand, is quite rare in Romological writing. According to the linguist Viktor Elšík, however, it is the most systematic label as it combines authentic English grammar with effectiveness.

To haggle over the academic status of a group whose day-to-day existence is uneasy at the best of times may seem cynical. In the past twenty-five years, the advocates of the Roma have been particularly upset by the radical works of the constructivists among Romologists on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The debate has become extremely heated and personal, not the least because the message a published researcher sends out to the outside world will often be adopted – and adapted - by the authorities who are looking for easy answers and simplistic solutions.

In this chapter, I am going to show that a similar pattern is operating across the field of Romany studies in different parts of the world. It seems that the work of positively thinking supporters of affirmative action is eventually always met with radical opposition by scholars who find it ineffective, and therefore react by extreme deconstruction of the group's identity, following the simple maxim "no Roma, no problem"¹³. Whether such counteraction is ultimately more effective than long-term fieldwork and the boosting of the group's confidence, is partly a matter of personal preference, and partly remains to be seen.

1.3 Western Romany Studies

In Czechoslovakia, the first decade following the revolution of 1989 was marked by a distinct lack of secondary sources concerning Romany studies. Even though the department was founded as early as 1991, it was not until 1998 that the first major monograph by a foreign author was published in translation.¹⁴ In the meantime, the students were largely dependent on Milena Hübschmannová's lectures based on her fieldwork, research and reading¹⁵, and as for printed material, they were aided by a handful of publications of an

¹³ This was the bottom line of the assimilation policy launched in Czechoslovakia in 1958 (in effect, at least formally, until 1989). The Roma were relegated from an ethnic group to a social one, from Roma to gypsies (lower case intentional) and any display of ethnicity was strongly discouraged. I do not need to stress that the attempt to dissolve gypsies among the majority population failed absolutely.

¹⁴ Angus Fraser: *Cikáni (The Gypsies)*, Praha: NLN 1998.

¹⁵ For an insightful reminiscence of the early years of Hübschmannová's courses of Romany studies at the Charles University, see Jan Červenka's article "Milena Hübschmannová a romistika na vysoké škole" ("Milena Hübschmannová and the Romany studies department at the Charles University", translation mine) in *Romano džaniben ňilaj* 2006 pp. 243 – 250.

extremely diverse nature¹⁶. The majority of them revolved around the subethnic groups of Roma resident within former Czechoslovakia; they sprang from years of first-hand experience and they were mostly ethnographical and historical, emphasizing previously taboo topics such as the group's ethnic identity and their right for self-determination, persecution of the Gypsies during WWII and the consequences of the period of forced assimilation under the communist rule.

Being able to use the endonym *Roma* (Romové) rather than the exonym *Gypsies* (c/Cikáni) was still a novelty, which was sometimes reflected in the publications' exhilarated and celebratory tone and an air of didacticism concerning the Roma's language and origin. Some ideas in this early discourse were considered self-understood, given and unchallengeable, and they were not wholly dissimilar from what is in the literature referred to as the notion of the "true Romany"¹⁷. The mode was descriptive, rather than analytical, and an international perspective was mostly absent.

Angus Fraser's *The Gypsies* from 1992, released as part of the Lidové noviny publishing house's series The History of Nations, was fully in agreement with Hübschmannová's views and line of instruction. This rather traditional treatise, in a space of some 300 pages and based on linguistic evidence and contemporary documents, relates the journey of the Roma from India to Europe via Persia, Armenia, the Byzantine Empire and

¹⁶ Some of these were e.g. *Cesty Romů* (The Roads of the Roma; Olomouc: UP 1995) by Eva Davidová, *Romové v České republice včera a dnes* (The Roma in The Czech Republic; Olomouc: UP 1995) by Ctibor Nečas, *Žalující píseň* (The Plaintive Song; Brno: Ústav lidové kultury ve Strážnici 1993) by Dušan Holý and Ctibor Nečas, *Nemůžeme zapomenout* (We Cannot Forget; Olomouc: UP 1994) by Ctibor Nečas, *Dějiny Romů* (The History of the Roma; Olomouc: UP 1994) by Bartoloměj Daniel, *Můžeme se domluvit* (We Can Understand Each Other; Olomouc: UP 1995), *Neznámi Rómovia* (The Unknown Roma; Bratislava: Ister Science Press 1992) and most importantly *Romsko-český a česko-romský slovník* (The Romani-Czech/Czech-Romani Pocket Dictionary; Praha: SPN 1991) by Milena Hübschmannová, Hana Šebková and Anna Žigová. One irreplaceable platform for the publication of articles and treatises by academics from outside of the country was, and has remained, *Romano džaniben*, the journal of Romany studies co-published by the department.

¹⁷ This notion is typically associated with the so-called Lorists, a group of British Gypsiologists loosely connected with *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (Founded in 1888; as "Romani Studies", the journal is still in print today in the USA.). Only a Roma who is dark-skinned, speaks Angloromani, has an itinerant lifestyle and/or displays oriental/Indian features, is worthy of academic attention as the "true Romany". In Czechoslovakia, the set of characteristics would be slightly different but the idea that the Roma are a homogenous group with an unchangeable set of characteristics, and any deviations from the ideal are disqualifying, was definitely present, if in a subtle and subdued form.

the Balkans. Although Fraser recognizes the extreme heterogeneity of the many groups known as Roma, he promotes their status as an ethnic group, “once bounded but now fractured (...) with common historic roots and common patterns of migration” (Vermeersch 2006: 13).

For a long time – and internationally - this was the generally accepted paradigm, which was gradually cemented by an ever-growing body of evidence from the time Johann Rüdiger, in 1782, proved the Indian origin of Romani.¹⁸ In his classification of the different attitudes to identity in Romany studies literature, Peter Vermeersch calls this trend “Roma as a historical diaspora” and he names David Crowe, Ian Hancock and Donald Kenrick as its other proponents. We might add Thomas Acton, Yaron Matras and Vania de Gila Kochanowski to the list, to name just a few, and say that for the dominant part of the 20th century, this was the prevailing view. One part of this view is a perception of the group as a mosaic, a fragmented whole, which would explain the vast differences amongst the different communities across Europe in terms of labelling, language, customs, religion, traditional jobs and others.

This traditional mainstream view has been challenged in the last 20 years by the constantly growing number of supporters of the so-called Dutch school of deconstructivists, represented primarily by Wim Willems and Leo Lucassen. The bottom-line of their extremely influential, and might I say fashionable, production, is the problematization of any pre-conceived ideas, popularly perceived as given, in relation to the Roma. In their monographs *In Search of the True Gypsy* (W. Willems 1997) and *Gypsies and Other Itinerants* (L. Lucassen, W. Willems and A. Cotaar 1998) and numerous articles¹⁹, they

¹⁸ It was first postulated in writing by Samuel Augustini ab Hortis in a series of articles published between 1775 and 1776. Ab Hortis related a story of how one Stefan Vali met three Indians from Malabar at the Leiden University in Holland and how he noticed a striking similarity between their language and the language of the Gypsies where he came from (today's Slovakia). He then noted some one thousand words of “the Malabari”, the story says, and on his return home consulted them with the Gypsies. They had no trouble understanding them. For a detailed analysis of the historical anecdote, and its relation to Heinrich Grellmann's famous work of plagiarism, which nearly obliterated Rüdiger's crucial contribution to the discipline from textbooks, see Milena Hübschmannová's article “Stefan Vali a “malabárská řeč” tří indických mladíků” *Romano džaniben* jevend 2003, 93 – 106.

¹⁹ E.g. “‘Harmful Tramps’: Police Professionalization and Gypsies in Germany, 1700 – 1945.” (Lucassen 1997); “The weakness of well ordered societies. Gypsies in Europe, the Ottoman empire and India 1400-

contest the Indian origin of the Roma, do away with ethnicity as a dated, racist²⁰ concept which in the past may have contributed to the persecution of the Gypsies (Willems 1997), and suggest that the identity of the various groups known as Roma is socially constructed.

Over the years, their stance has won a lot of attention and praise, and has been reiterated or elaborated on, in the works of e.g. David Mayall, Brian Belton, Martin Shaw or Peter Vermeersch. In the Czech Republic, the names which surface most commonly are Marek Jakoubek, Lenka Budilová and Tomáš Hirt, although they choose not to acknowledge this source of inspiration. Interestingly, Leo Lucassen considers this stage of his academic career as “less prominent in the last decade”²¹, having moved on to issues of migration, integration, state formation and urban history. Still, Lucassen’s and Willems’s joint production on the topic has literally worked as a nuclear bomb in the discipline.

A thorough and well-argued analysis of the origins of the Dutch school’s teachings and their possible misconceptions has been provided by Yaron Matras in his paper “The Role of Language in Mystifying and De-Mystifying Gypsy Identity” (2004), and it is a position which I, and possibly the majority of Milena Hübschmannová’s former students, find appealing. Since Yaron Matras is primarily a linguist, his stance is naturally language-based. Unlike many Romologists, he has read and analyzed the founding works of Romany studies by Johann Rüdiger, Heinrich Grellman, August Pott and others. He has also written

1914.” (Lucassen, Willems 2001) or „Gypsies in the Diaspora? The pitfalls of a Biblical concept.“ (Lucassen, Willems 2001).

²⁰ “Racist” is primarily a synonym for “racist”. Nevertheless, on another level it has now become popular in academic writing to signify views and doctrines of commentators who are not necessarily racist but believe in “heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race” (quoted from Kwame Anthony Appiah: *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, London: Methuen 1992). Their conviction that differences among races exist but are in no way basis for their inequality or hierarchy set them aside from true racists, who believe in some or all of the following dogmas: 1) There are both visible and hidden physical differences between races. 2) Particular physical features are linked to a predetermined type of behaviour and intellectual faculties. 3) One’s physical and other differences place one on a superior/inferior scale. 4) The differences among races are fixed and cannot be changed. (Mayall 2004: 86 – 90) Many commentators are of the opinion that as long as physical differences motivate discrimination and are not considered value-neutral, the term “race” cannot be dispensed with. (Paraphrased from the entry “Race” by Ruth Mayer in Ansgar Nünning (ed.) *Lexikon teorie literatury a kultury*, Brno: Host 2006.)

²¹ <http://www.hum.leiden.edu/history/staff/lucassen.html>

the most comprehensive monograph on Romani, its dialects and its extreme forms, the so-called Para-Romanies, up to date (Matras 2002, my edition 2005).

In his paper, he identifies the British anthropologist Judith Okely (1983) as the supreme inspiration force behind many of the Dutch school's assertions. One of her central arguments linked to the social construction of Gypsies was that the Indian origin of the Gypsies cannot be proven by means of language, because Gypsies only use a vocabulary of Indic origin, rather like a jargon, which is partly shared by other travelling peoples of Europe, from whom they may have adopted it.

Here it needs to be stressed that Okely conducted research amongst the English *Romanichal*, who have lost full-fledged Romani and are using so-called Para-Romani, that is "a Romani-derived special vocabulary (...) inserted into discourse in the respective majority language" (Matras 2005: 242). Apart from Angloromani in the UK, Para-Romanies are also spoken e.g. in Spain (Caló), The Basque Country (Basque Romani) or Scandinavia (Scandoromani) (Matras 2005: 243); elsewhere in Europe, however, Romani is spoken in its full inflective form, and apart from the occasional loan word, it is largely unintelligible to the majority populations.

From the fact that her respondents spoke what to her seemed like English, Okely inferred that "the Roma" are only one group of the various peripatetics of Europe. In her understanding shared by the Dutch school, there are no ethnic Roma, there are only Gypsies, who use different degrees of Romani vocabulary. Matras effectively tears this line of argumentation to shreds by showing that Willems, Lucassen and Okely before them, "fail to understand that (...) there is a difference between Romani as a language, and use of Romani-derived vocabulary in the grammatical framework of other languages" (Matras 2004: 64). He explains that "it has never been argued in the linguistic literature that the use of individual words of Romani origin constitutes proof of Indian descent" (Ibid. 63) but also points out that "languages are usually not invented by populations, and populations do not simply adopt foreign languages" (Ibid. 58) – in other words, the fact that the majority of the Roma across the world speak Romani, a language of Indian descent, can only be explained by the people's origin in India and their consequent migration.

Similarly to me, Matras perceives a schism in the international Romology, but the outlines of the breach do not necessarily agree with mine. He places the Dutch school on one end of the spectrum, but in his interpretation, the other extreme is formed by a similarly

obstinate group of scholars-activists represented by Ian Hancock, Vania de Gila Kochanowski, Ronald Lee or Thomas Acton. He maintains that they refuse to admit that inevitably, an interface between ethnic Roma speaking (vestiges of) Romani (what he calls Gypsy 2) and all the other peripatetics such as The Irish Travellers or The Jenische (Gypsy 1) must have occurred over the centuries. Matras identifies shared characteristics of the two camps: a) they are driven by an ideological agenda, b) in an attempt to argue using linguistics, they confuse language and lexicon, and c) their struggle is highly personal.

It has now become customary to preface any Romany studies monograph by an attempt to divide and categorize research in the field so far (Vermeersch 2006: 13 – 17; Clark & Greenfields 2006: 22; Mayall 2004: 23 – 25; Belton 2005: scattered across 13 – 37; Lee 2000). The categories inevitably differ slightly from author to author; they sometimes overlap, omit a name or add a new one to the list. I do not think this disqualifies them as genuine attempts to grasp the bulk of literature in the field; rather they reflect the diversity of the discipline.

Looking outside from the stronghold of Czech Romany studies, the two overwhelming trends seem to be as follows: on the one hand, viewing the Roma as an ethnic group living in a diaspora radically removed from their Indian homeland both physically and in time, and on the other hand, considering “the Roma” a socially constructed category, sharing random points of reference with other peripatetic groups in Europe. Between them lie the numerous gray zones, spheres of overlapping and the occasional oddity, which occur in every discipline²². The question is, of course, the motivation of the promoters of the respective theories, and what they are trying to achieve.

²² One line of thinking, which has had hardly any support in the academia but has enjoyed a lot of attention among primarily Romany activists, is that the Roma may have formed one of the high castes in India before leaving it, rather than a low one, which is the traditional view. It is colloquially referred to as the Rajput theory based on Ian Hancock’s surmise that the Roma were one of the warrior castes of North India, possibly the Rajput, the Kshatriya or the Jats. Even otherwise stalwart supporters of the Indian origin and Romany ethnicity have rejected it, among them Matras (2004), Fraser (1998) and Hübschmannová (2000). Hübschmannová’s remark on this is rather enlightening: “Every nation in-making needs to rest on the glory of, and positive examples from, their history. Especially if this is a dominated, oppressed and persecuted people. (...) It is in no way surprising that Romologists of Romany origin derive the descent of their people from the Brahmins or the Kshatriya Rajputs, the sons of kings, from Rajasthan.” (Hübschmannová 2000 b, translation mine)

This is Mayall's commentary on the traditional understanding of the Roma as the scattered population of a once unified people, or caste, leaving India around the 9th century A.D.:

This use of the mosaic imagery is entirely deliberate, and is intended to convey the diversity of the group of Gypsies and Travellers while still allowing for all the parts to come together, in the manner of a kaleidoscope, to form a coherent and unified whole. (Mayall 2004: 9)

Even though his tone is respectful, he makes it clear that he considers such attempts to move all Roma under one umbrella term dubious, to say the least. This comment was in fact intended for the many texts of Jean-Pierre Liégeois, who David Mayall criticizes for the way “the concept of the ethnic Gypsy remains elusive in his writings” (Mayall 2004: 8-9). Simultaneously, Mayall gives him credit for at least acknowledging that the issue of Gypsy/Romany ethnicity is difficult to resolve, and likes Liégeois's “notion of the ‘shifting universe’ of the Gypsy, which (...) points to the dynamisms of group identities’ (Mayall 2004: 10). “The shifting universe of the Gypsy” is a notion which should never be lost sight of in Romany studies.

David Mayall does not believe in what Matras refers to as Gypsy 2; he is a Gypsy 1 supporter. He does not think ethnic Roma, he thinks Gypsies; and he considers their identity a sphere of social construction. However appealing, intelligent and fresh his monograph is, and although I find his deconstruction of “the Roma” useful and inspiring in the way it problematizes the often self-understood homogeneity of the group, one has to bear in mind that as a historian he relies on contemporary documents. These were written by people who were literate at the time, when literacy was not automatic, and therefore will reflect the dominant class's worldviews and prejudices.

Matras, on the other hand, has written extensively on Romani as a language as mentioned above. His convictions are of course just as firm as those of the other camp, and his points are well-argued – but so are Mayall's. When dared by Gypsy 1 supporters to explain why some groups of Roma speak Romani, others do not and still others may be using an occasional word or phrase, he says:

These are the so-called ‘test cases’ where one might argue that being Romani or claiming to speak Romani is a ‘representation’ or ‘construction’, rather than a verifiable descriptive account. The fact that there are margins, however, does not in any way suggest that there is a void in between those margins. (Matras 2004: 55)

This brings me back to my opening notion of “academic straddling”. In my analysis of Romany fiction, it will become clear that I view the use of Romani as a language of production, or conversely the esteem the writers hold Romani in, consciously or unconsciously, as a decisive factor of Romany writing providing an important angle of interpretation. I believe it ultimately shapes not only the style but even the content of the works. In that sense, I belong to the Hübschmannová/Matras/activist camp, which works around language as being crucial to identity formation.

On the other hand, I recognize that language is not, and cannot be, the only marker of identity. Speakers of Para-Romanies, or those who come from language-assimilated backgrounds, cannot be disqualified from the discourse because of their “incorrect” language of production. The area of “test cases”, to borrow Matras’s linguistic term, is vast. These issues will be addressed in greater detail in the chapters discussing individual literary works (chapters 2 to 5 of this thesis).

1.4 Romany Studies in the Czech Republic: A Case Study²³

In a seminar following a series of field-work projects in Slovak Romany settlements²⁴, conducted at the department of cultural studies at The Charles University

²³ My university training in Anglo-American and Romany studies was largely philological and it has not equipped me sufficiently for anthropological analysis. I intend this chapter as a survey of the *status quo* of Romany studies in the Czech Republic, as I would like to show how there has emerged a certain pattern comparable to the situation in Romany studies abroad. My goal is to describe the current schism in Czech Romany studies, not to provide a critique of Marek Jakoubek’s application of particular methods of anthropology, although inevitably I will also do that in the process.

²⁴ These were primarily „The Svinia Project“ (from 1998 to 2003), funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and run on location by David Z. Scheffel, and „Monitoring the Situation in ‘Romani Settlements’ in Slovakia“ (from 1999 to 2000) , developed by Stanislav Kužel, Karel A. Novák and Alexander Mušinka and co-ordinated on location by Marek Jakoubek and/or Tomáš Hirt.

between 2001 and 2002 by Marek Jakoubek²⁵, a heated debate on the nature of these settlements suggested that a new take on Romany studies was being born – one radically different from the school of Milena Hübschmannová, possibly even disparate. As a result, Marek Jakoubek and Ondřej Poduška invited the seminar’s participants to try to redefine Roma outside of the customary ethnocentric context. The basis for their re-interpretation was Oscar Lewis’s revolutionary, but also widely criticized, concept from the 1960s of understanding certain extremely pauperised urban ghetto- and slum-communities as examples of the culture of poverty²⁶.

The release of the compilation *Romské osady v kulturologické perspektivě (Romany Settlements from Cultural Studies’ Perspective*, Brno: Doplněk; hereinafter referred to as *Romany Settlements*²⁷) in 2003 shattered the widely accepted consensus regarding the Roma in the Czech Republic and, needless to say, upset many people, most of all Milena Hübschmannová²⁸. Methodologically, her main objection was that the editors did not speak Romani and therefore were missing a constitutive element of Romany culture. Karel Holomek²⁹ objects to the way “they (‘Marek Jakoubek’s team’) promote some facts while

²⁵ Marek Jakoubek (*1975), a cultural anthropologist, hermeneutist of Romany settlements and epistemologist.

²⁶ A detailed analysis of the concept of the culture of poverty, defined by Oscar Lewis in his article “The Culture of Poverty” (*Scientific American*, Volume 215, No. 4, 1966, pg. 19 – 25), is not the aim of this chapter. It has never been accepted unreservedly in the international anthropological community, not even at the time of its publication, and its usability for, or applicability to Czech and Slovak Romany communities is problematic to say the least. In *Romany Settlements*, Marek Jakoubek suggests it as one of two complementary explanatory models for the conception of Romany Settlements, the other one being the settlements as enclaves of traditional (as opposed to modern) society (Jakoubek 2003: 15). It is a useful concept for him who wants to disprove the relation between (a Romany) culture and ethnicity. For the main points of criticism of the concept, see Ladislav Toušek “Kultura chudoby, underclass a sociální vyloučení” in Hirt, Tomáš a Jakoubek, Marek (eds.) “*Romové*” v osidlech sociálního vyloučení, Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk 2006, pg. 288 – 321.

²⁷ Unless stated otherwise, all the translations in this chapter are mine.

²⁸ To my knowledge, Milena Hübschmannová did not publish on the topic, and any statements presented here come from the classes taught by her at the department of Romany studies, Charles University, at the time of the release of the book.

²⁹ Karel Holomek (*1937), a renowned Romany activist and journalist and the head of *The Roma of Moravia Association*. He comes from a long line of Moravian Holomeks who are traditionally well-integrated, university-educated and actively seeking to promote the rights of The Roma.

ignoring others which do not suit their constructs. Jakoubek and his colleagues know nothing about Romani and therefore have no idea what clear and conclusive evidence of identity Romani is”³⁰. On a political level, Hübschmannová was outraged by Jakoubek’s claim that the Roma cannot be regarded as a nation and their emancipation struggle is generated and fuelled by Romany studies proponents³¹.

Romany Settlements was the first of a substantial series of collections of articles, monographs and readers³² to appear in the next eight years, ascribable to the emerging anthropologists Marek Jakoubek, Tomáš Hirt and Lenka Budilová. Because all three of them are associated with the anthropology department of The University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, they are sometimes referred to as “the Pilsner school”³³. To avoid misunderstanding, when I use this label I generally mean Marek Jakoubek (unless stated otherwise) as he seems to be the most noticeable and publicly outspoken figure of the three. Pavel Barša³⁴, who has written extensively on Hirt’s and Jakoubek’s work, maintains that although they constantly

³⁰ Karel Holomek „Romové existují, dokonce nejen v ČR“ (“The Roma do exist, even outside of the Czech Republic”) in *Romano hangos* volume 9, No. 7/2007.

³¹ Marek Jakoubek: „Romské osady - enklávy tradiční společnosti“ (“Romany Settlements – Traditional Enclaves”) pg. 29 – 30 and Marek Jakoubek, Tomáš Hirt: „Konstruktivistická analýza romské nacionální mýtovotvorby“ (“Constructivist Analysis of National Mythology of the Roma”) pg. 61 – 62, 66 in *Romské osady v kulturologické perspektivě*, Brno: Doplněk 2003.

³² Spread out over nearly a decade, their production works out roughly as a book a year, sometimes two. See: *Romské osady v kulturologické perspektivě* (eds. Marek Jakoubek, Ondřej Poduška, Brno: Doplněk 2003), *Romové: Kulturologické etudy* (eds. Tomáš Hirt, Marek Jakoubek, Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk 2004), *Romové – konec (ne)jednoho mýtu* (Marek Jakoubek, Praha: Socioklub 2004), *Soudobé spory o multikulturalismus a politiku identit : (antropologická perspektiva)* (eds. Tomáš Hirt, Marek Jakoubek, Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk 2005), „*Romové*“ v *osidlech sociálního vyloučení* (Eds. Marek Jakoubek, Tomáš Hirt, Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk 2006), *Cikánská rodina a příbuzenství* (Plzeň: Dryáda 2007), *Romové a Cikáni neznámí i známí – interdisciplinární pohled* (Eds. Marek Jakoubek, Lenka Budilová, Voznice: LEDA 2008), *Etnicita a Cikáni* (Ed. Marek Jakoubek, Praha: Triton 2008), *Cikánské skupiny a jejich sociální organizace* (Eds. Marek Jakoubek, Lenka Budilová, Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury 2009).

³³ David Z Scheffel: „Česká antropologická romistika a vědecká poctivost: Kritické poznámky k textu ‚Příbuzenství, manželství a sňatkové vzorce‘ Lenky Budilové a Marka Jakoubka“ in *Český lid* volume 95, No.3/2008, pg. 306; Alexander Mušínska: “Niekoľko poznámok na margo diskusie o českej antropologickej romistike a vedeckej poctivosti” in *Český lid* volume 96, No 2/2009, pg. 191.

³⁴ Pavel Barša (*1960), a political scientist, promoter and supporter of multiculturalism and researcher at The Institute of International Relations Prague.

refer to each other's articles implying that their views are identical, their concepts of social constructivism and meta-theoretical (epistemological) constructivism respectively “merely overlap, but do not agree completely” (Barša 2008: 209).

Although *Romany Settlements* created a small whirlwind amongst Romologists, in comparison to the following books it still seemed a genuine attempt to offer an acceptable alternative to the unquestioned primordial³⁵ line of teaching at the Romany studies department. All the crucial controversial arguments were already present in Marek Jakoubek and Tomáš Hirt's contributions (see below) but the general tone was respectful, if slightly overzealous and provocative in places.

In his opening paper “Romské osady – enklávy tradiční společnosti” (“*Romany Settlements – Enclaves of Traditional Society*”), Marek Jakoubek challenges the established notion of who the Roma are (“the black ones, with dark eyes, dark hair and dark complexion” Jakoubek & Poduška 2003: 12) and suggests that the notion of the Romany anthropological type must be abandoned because it does not exist as a biological fact and has encouraged racial persecution in the past³⁶. He goes on to explain how the group which is perceived as homogenous by the majority population is in fact extremely heterogeneous based on subethnic division and social barriers imposed by the notion of ritual (im)purity and social hierarchy mirroring the Indian cast system.

In itself, such group deconstruction had been missing from the Czech Romany studies discourse, although the claim of the Pilsner school's representatives of being the first writers to explore this in the Czech Republic is frankly wrong.³⁷

³⁵ Primordialism is the argument which contends that nations are ancient, natural phenomena and as such are a value specific to the human race. Miroslav Hroch, the editor of an anthology of texts discussing nations and nationalism (Miroslav Hroch (ed.) *Pohledy na národ a nacionalismus. Čítanka textů*. Praha: Slon 2003), suggests primordialist approach to nationhood and ethnicity was a predominant tendency in all the relevant writing between mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. He further explains that since the Holocaust a tacit agreement has been in effect whereby 1) primordialism based on blood and race relations is considered antiquated, 2) a nation cannot be defined solely by language and ethnicity and 3) individual sentiments of the subjects in question are becoming increasingly relevant.

³⁶ This is the gist of Wim Willems's monograph *In Search of the True Gypsy* (1997), mentioned earlier, which suggests that it was ethnicization of itinerant groups recognised as Gypsies which ultimately led as far as gas chambers. It would seem suitable if Marek Jakoubek either credited his sources, or referenced other researchers working in a similar line of argument.

³⁷ The constant stressing of their research being groundbreaking and unique has become somewhat symptomatic of the Pilsner school and has often been noted by other social studies researchers. In Tomáš

Commentators usually write about 'The Roma' in general and they do not stress the fact that the differences between the two main subgroups in the Czech and Slovak Republics, the Slovak Roma and the Vlah Roma, are gigantic. (...) Most of the Czech and Slovak researchers make the same mistake as Michael Stewart when, immersed in their ethnocentric attitudes, they emphasize the differences between 'them' (The Roma) and 'us' (The Non-Roma). (Budilová & Jakoubek 2007: 20)

Contrary to this assertion, Milena Hübschmannová never ceased to explain the inner stratification of Romany groups in her texts, but she chose to emphasise *the unity* of the many subethnic groups rather than their *diversity*³⁸.

Most Roma across the world identify with the autonym, or ethnic label Rom. There are groups which proudly call themselves Sinti (so-called German Roma), Manush (in France), Kale (in Spain and Finland) or Romanichal (in England) but no-one distances themselves from Roma (emphasis mine), especially when dichotomising the world into us the Roma as opposed to them the gadje. (Hübschmannová 1993: 21)

I do not believe one can overemphasize the both imagined and real barrier running between the Roma and everyone who is not the Roma. This wall dividing the powerless subjects of discrimination from the privileged oppressors not only does never truly disappear; it is also a constitutive element of Romany identity, regardless of subethnic group.

Hirt's words (Jakoubek 2004a: 8 – 9), Marek Jakoubek's book *The Roma: The End of the (Many) Myth(s)* is "grand (...) in that it disperses the dangerous conceptual mist (of past research)", it "represents a coherent system, a discursive alternative (...) completely absent from Romany and multicultural studies", "indeed, a paradigmatic work which offers a solution to a lengthy crisis". "Anthropological research of kinship in the Czech Republic is in its infancy or has not even been born yet", claim Jakoubek and Budilová (Budilová 2007: 12) and their book *Gypsy Family and Kinship* "by combining the key area of Romany studies with the royal discipline of social/cultural anthropology may well contribute to the completion of two grey areas of social studies in the Czech Republic".

³⁸ For example, *Šaj pes dovakeras* (Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého 1993), pg. 20 – 22, „Několik poznámek k hodnotám Romů“ in *Romové v České republice* (Praha: Socioklub 1999), pg. 17 – 18, „Od etnické kasty ke strukturovanému etnickému společenství“ in *Romové v České republice* (Praha: Socioklub 1999), pg. 115 – 136, and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, revealing the full extent to which the subethnic Romany groups really differ was both daring and laudable, since group identities are fluid, changeable and negotiable, unlike the fixed idea cemented in the Czech popular discourse at the time.

The disconcerting part, nevertheless, which Marek Jakoubek has kept developing in his writing since, was the conclusion at which he had arrived based on his thorough deconstruction of who the Roma are:

(...)The 'Romany population' category as viewed by the subjects themselves is an empty vessel because the individual subethnic groups (...) are essentially not equal (...) and it is in no way possible to view them as such and thus to envelop them in one collectivity. (Jakoubek & Poduška 2003: 20)

In other words, Marek Jakoubek is saying that the Roma do not exist. What does exist, he maintains, is a specific culture of the Romany settlements. "One is not born a Romany, one becomes a Romany in the process of socialisation." (Jakoubek & Poduška 2003: 13) Anyone who is willing to subject himself to acculturation can principally join in and become a Roma, he says. The culture of Romany settlements, which is a relic of a traditional society as opposed to modern society, directly excludes the pursuance of national interests, he concludes.

The names of Leo Lucassen and Wim Willems from the Dutch school are never referred to in this or any other original texts by Jakoubek et al.; nevertheless, the common basis of their (deconstructionist) discourse is striking, to say the least. David Z. Scheffel points this out in his critique of Jakoubek and Budilová's 2007 book *Cikánská rodina a příbuzenství (Gypsy Family and Kinship*, hereinafter referred to as *Gypsy Family*) when he approves the authors' warning against perceiving the Roma as a homogenous group, "a warning," he says, "which in Western Romany studies is mostly associated with the so-called Amsterdam school of Lucassen – Willems – Cottaar (1998), *here unmentioned* (emphasis mine)" (Scheffel 2008: 305).

In Lenka Budilová's response to Scheffel's critique (Budilová 2008), the argumentation that problematizing the homogeneity of the Roma does not constitute the key line of the Amsterdam school's hypothesis seems to be slightly misleading (*Ibid.* 401). Matras (2004) sufficiently demonstrates that Wim Willems's frequently quoted monograph

In Search of the True Gypsy largely echoes and/or develops ideas expressed by Judith Okely (1983) in *The Traveller-Gypsies*. They both criticize the ideal of the so-called “true Gypsy” as an invention which does not match reality, they dismiss Romani language, by which they mean Romani vocabulary in Para-Romanies, as a sufficient marker of the identity and Indian origin of the Roma, and suggest that this jargon or secret language may have been picked up and shared by the various groups of peripatetics roaming Europe at the same time, completely independently of India. Their conclusion is that a separate Romany ethnicity is a social construct promoted by “ethnologists and folklorists”³⁹, “academics and amateur researchers”⁴⁰ or “Gypsy folklorists”⁴¹ and the only category one can safely rely on is that of “Gypsy groups” (Okely 1983, 2002: 9).

As I have pointed out earlier, the Pilsner school also claim that the Romany nation project is the invention of quasi-academics sympathetic to the Romany cause. Moreover, “Gypsy groups” - “cikánské skupiny” in Czech – is the label which the Pilsner school replaces “the Roma” with when dealing with ethnicity; this is illustrated by many of the titles of their books and articles: *“The Roma” Trapped in the Snares of Social Exclusion; Gypsy Groups and Their Social Organisation* or *Gypsy Family and Kinship*. All of the different points Judith Okely and Wim Willems respectively make combine to cancel “Roma” and introduce “Gypsy groups” – heterogeneity of the Roma is one of the pillars of the argument. The article Budilová refers the readers to in order to show that they do not mean to hide the existence of the Dutch school from the Czech audience (Willems 1998) is a summary of the monograph published a year earlier (Willems 1997) and as such repeats the whole system of argumentation in support of de-ethnicization of the Roma.

If *Romany Settlements* disrupted the hitherto mostly compact understanding of the Czech Roma and brought some proverbial fresh air into the discourse, it was Marek Jakoubek’s doctoral thesis published as *Romové: Konec (ne)jednoho mýtu* (*The Roma: The End of the (Many) Myth(s)*, hereinafter referred to as *The Myth*) which really shook the ground. It was not so much the content of the book, which in greater detail and with a bold

³⁹ Wim Willems: „Smrtelná past etnicity: Historie studia Cikánů“ in *Etnicita a Cikáni* (Ed. Marek Jakoubek, Praha: Triton 2008), pg. 49.

⁴⁰ Ibid pg. 65.

⁴¹ Ibid pg. 69.

sweep of the pen essentially reiterated what had already been stated in *Romany Settlements*: Namely, that the Roma as a people or an ethnic group do not exist (Jakoubek 2004: 60), who we choose to call “Roma” are people defined and formed by the culture of Romany settlements and it would be more accurate to identify them as “cultureroma” (“kulturomové”, Jakoubek 2004: 76) , and integration into the open society of the majority is only possible on an individual basis accompanied by the abandonment of the traditional culture (Jakoubek 2004: 39 – 47, 148 – 149 and especially 280 - 281).

Rather, it was the striking lack of modesty, the rejection to credit researchers breaking the ground before him, the distortion of facts and the bending of methods, which many commentators found insulting and objectionable⁴².

One line of criticism was specifically aimed at the way Marek Jakoubek quotes sources. Červenka (2009b: 175) observes how “by manipulating his sources, Jakoubek creates a sense of the imperfect ‘prior-to-Jakoubek’ discourse which he then sets in order”. Elšík (2005: 5) praises Jakoubek for being an avid reader of Romany studies literature but notes the extreme frequency of his citing, the way “his text sometimes consists entirely of quotations linked by expressions for logical operations” and warns against his indiscriminate choice of sources. “He should be able to reflect on the diverse scientific quality of his sources,” he suggests. Červenka agrees (2009b: 175) and he adds that not only do his quotes originate in sources of dubious *quality*, they also come from very different *periods* – hence they have often lost relevance. “Quotation alchemy is too cheap a way of discrediting the artificially undifferentiated enemy,” concludes Elšík.

My own research shows that Jakoubek’s handling of sources is not always to be trusted. I have found several examples of misquotation and/or omission in his 2006 review of the Czech edition of Michael Stewart’s classic *The Time of the Gypsies* (*Čas Cikánů*, Brno: Barrister&Principal 2005). Since these instances of misquotation are used to develop

⁴² Amongst others, Viktor Elšík “Romové, etnicita a radikální konstruktivisté” (“The Roma, Ethnicity and Radical Constructivists” in *Literární noviny* 21/2005), Pavel Barša “Konec Romů v Česku? Kacířské eseje plzeňských antropologů” (The End of Roma in the Czech Republic? Heretical Essays of Anthropologists from Pilsen” in *Lidové noviny* 2005.) or Jan Červenka “Konec konce (Ne)jednoho mýtu” (“The Final End of the (Many) Myth(s)” in *Český lid* volume 96, No 2/2009).

a line of argument critical of Stewart's book, I am led to believe that they are not an oversight, but rather a deliberate manipulation of facts to undermine Stewart's authority.⁴³

These are the reasons for frequent quoting which Marek Jakoubek gives in *The Myth*:

I quote extensively throughout my work (...) because I have often been called an extremist by Romany studies proponents when presenting my ideas. Frequent quotations should demonstrate that my views are far from unusual and they are shared by a large basis of Romologists and other social scientists. (...) Nonetheless, I often reject their original context so that in my outline these thoughts bear a different meaning (not uncommonly directly contrary to the original). (Jakoubek 2004: 36)

Marek Jakoubek openly admits that he is regularly guilty of scientific misconduct when he quotes outside of the original context, (mis)using the quote to his own end. In Elšík's (2005: 5) commentary: "It is a well-known fact that quotations several words long outside of their original context do not necessarily comply with the meaning of the original." According to respectable literary dictionaries, a quotation is supposed to correspond to the source, while adopting new meanings and functions; it usually confirms what has been said, or questions it by means of irony or parody.⁴⁴ It is not, however, meant to subvert the original

⁴³ Jakoubek implies that the author does not sufficiently explain the origin of the name of the town where he conducted his research by saying "this name along with others are apparently pseudonyms". On page XVI of the original (*The Time of the Gypsies*, Oxford: Westview Press 1997), nevertheless, Stewart clearly announces: "I have protected the identities of everyone I know by altering names, conflating and separating persons, and disguising the town." In the same review, Jakoubek claims that Stewart has failed to provide a complete picture of the world of the Roma. He objects to Stewart's lack of reporting from the Romany female perspective, suggests that "it would seem that women are not considered Roma" and asks himself the following rhetorical question: "What do Romany women have to say about this?" Again, he would have the reader believe that a major methodological oversight on Stewart's part has taken place, and yet, on page 12 of the original, Stewart confesses that "there are (...) serious gaps in my knowledge; I know much less about how women talked with each other and behaved when there were no men present (...) I am particularly aware that I give no sense of a critical, alternative, or even subversive discourse, however fragmentary, among Gypsy women".

⁴⁴ Libor Pavera, František Všetická: *Lexikon literárních pojmů*, Olomouc: Nakladatelství Olomouc 2002, pg. 61.

by misquoting it. For someone who likes to shield themselves with science at all times, this kind of conduct is surprisingly unprofessional.

The Myth lost Marek Jakoubek many a supporter, including some of the contributors to *Romany Settlements*⁴⁵. Here it must be stressed that the project *Monitoring the Situation in 'Romani Settlements' in North-Eastern Slovakia*, which provided him with the initial bulk of field data, was a joint project of various individual experts, institutions and university departments, which together created a wide basis of relevant and mutually complementary fields. The majority of fieldwork was conducted by students. Apart from the students of social and cultural anthropology at University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, students of anthropology at Masaryk University in Brno and students of social work at Komenský University in Bratislava and the University of Nitra, there were also students of general anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies and Romany studies from Charles University in Prague.

In other words, some of the contributors to *Romany Settlements* (Karel A. Novák) and many of the fieldworkers (Máša Bořkovcová, Jana Kramářová, Adéla Lábusová, Saša Uhlová and Milada Závodská) had had Milena Hübschmannová's training prior to embarking on the project. Moreover, one of the experts on the expert committee was Jan Červenka, who has since become the head of the Romany studies department in Prague, following Milena Hübschmannová's demise. This goes to show, I conclude, that initially all the participants must have been in general agreement as regards the foundations of the project, which deviated from "the gathering of oral histories of the holocaust, folklore, traditions and language material"⁴⁶, associated with fieldtrips by Milena Hübschmannová. Everyone, *including* the (ex)students of Romany studies, must have felt the need for a shift of paradigm in the approach to Romany studies; the question was *the extent* to which it should have disassociated itself from the previous discourse.

⁴⁵ Markéta Hajsá, whose paper „Fenomén Zoči“ (“The Zoči Phenomenon”) was published on pages 107 – 119 of *Romany Settlements* and who had originally enjoyed being part of a young movement challenging Milena Hübschmannová's primordialism, distanced herself from *The Myth*. In an interview conducted by me on February 22, 2013, she said: “Reading the earliest draft of *The Myth* was like reading the work of a renegade teenager violently opposing his parents. Although he consequently toned it down, I still found it very personal and on the whole unacceptable.”

⁴⁶ Stanislav Kužel (Ed.) “Foreword” in *Monitoring the Situation in 'Romani Settlements' in North-Eastern Slovakia*, Plzeň: Cargo Publishers 2000, pg. 12.

I believe Marek Jakoubek has taken his cause to an extreme and in his radical re-thinking of the Roma, he has defeated his own purpose; so do Jan Červenka, Stanislav Kužel, Jaroslav Skupnik and Alexander Mušinka from the original project team, or such renowned social scientists as David Z. Scheffel (anthropologist), Viktor Elšík (linguist), Pavel Barša (political scientist) or Jiří Woitsch (ethnographer)⁴⁷. Others such as Saša Uhlová have retained friendly professional relationships with Marek Jakoubek while remaining sceptical of some of his claims.

There are also commentators who welcome the change in the Romany discourse. Unsurprisingly, some of them are directly linked to the anthropology department of the University of West Bohemia. Pilsner anthropology graduates Petr Vašát and Ladislav Toušek have both written in support of their teachers' line of instruction and/or have positively reviewed some of their books⁴⁸. Helena Koubková, the author of a favourable review of *Gypsy Family*⁴⁹, is listed on the anthropological website of The University of West Bohemia as a part-time instructor. Ivo Budil⁵⁰, Marek Jakoubek's long-term patron and supporter, installed him as the head of the anthropology department at the University of West

⁴⁷ Jiří Woitsch in his paper "Odpověď nevědce vědci, aneb obrana etnografie proti kritice Marka Jakoubka" ("The Response of the Amateur to the Scientist: A Defence of Ethnography Against Marek Jakoubek's Critique" in *Lidé města* volume 13, No 3, 2011, pg. 505 - 509) does not reflect on Jakoubek's treatment of the Roma but he defies his general attitude to scholarly debate, namely his assertion that ethnography is not science. He calls on Jakoubek to stop stirring up conflicts in the humanities and show some respect, especially since his critique of ethnography in his article "Synopsis materiálů k vojvodovskému svatebnímu folkloru" (in *Lidé města* volume 13, No 1, 2011, pg. 105-144) is based on a single ethnographic monograph and the superiority of anthropology is presented as a natural assumption without any critical argument or academic support.

⁴⁸ See Vašát, Petr. "Review of *Cikáni a etnicita. Ed. Jakoubek, Marek, Praha: Triton 2008.*" in *Antropowebzin* 2009/1 pp. 47 – 53 or Toušek, Ladislav. „Kultura chudoby, underclass a sociální vyloučení.“ in *Romové v osidlech sociálního vyloučení*. Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk 2006, pp. 288 – 321.

⁴⁹ In *Lidé města* vol. 10, No. 1/2008.

⁵⁰ Ivo Budil (*1965) a sociologist and cultural anthropologist, the former head of the anthropological department in Pilsen.

Bohemia from the position of the vice-rector of the university. (Budil later resigned from the post following a plagiarism controversy.⁵¹)⁵²

Marek Jakoubek in particular deserves recognition for the opening up of Czech Romany studies to Western influence by his (co)editing of several anthologies of Romany-studies-related texts. The majority of them were inaccessible at the time of my studies; they show the sheer volume of Romological research abroad and also the variety of approaches. By doing this, he has initiated a debate which has problematized the automatic understanding of who the Roma are. Nevertheless, his claim that “the goal (of replacing the Hübschmannová-school primordial discourse with Jakoubek/Hirt’s social constructivism) has been achieved”⁵³ seems a little premature and certainly badly informed.

Based on detailed reading of many of the Pilsner school’s articles, I am drawn to the conclusion that Marek Jakoubek, Lenka Budilová and Tomáš Hirt are their own best audience and that they have raised, rather than won their supporters. The fact that they never cease to reference each other’s papers contributes to the feeling that despite all their effort to establish an alternative discourse regarding the Roma, they have remained somewhat isolated in the specialist anti-Romany niche which they have created for themselves. The most substantial objection one can hear considering their work is paradoxically not to do with the content of their (often extreme) texts but with their form⁵⁴.

When I approached Marek Jakoubek concerning the feud between the departments in Prague and Pilsen and asked him for his comment, amongst other things he said: “I have

⁵¹ The case from 2007 has basically remained unresolved. Ivo Budil did not lose his job over the plagiarism allegation but he resigned shortly after his name had been semi-cleared by a committee of experts (“An Ethical Panel”) who had examined his various articles and monographs and finally ruled that Budil had made “serious mistakes but is not guilty of plagiarism”. A whole website dedicated to this controversy, amassing evidence both in favour and against Ivo Budil, is to be found at <http://www.biograf.org/budil/wikka.php?wakka=KauzaBudil>

⁵² On a different note, the long-term research in the Bulgarian community of Vojvodovo of the Jakoubek-Budilová team has won academic recognition and is considered thorough and noteworthy.

⁵³ *Romové a Cikáni neznámí i známí* (Eds. Jakoubek, Budilová), LEDA 2008, pg. 8.

⁵⁴ David Z. Scheffel in a personal interview from May 5, 2013 expressed his dissatisfaction with the way Jakoubek had used the empirical data from his research in the Romany settlement in Chminianské Jakubovany, Slovakia, to apply generally to all the Slovakian Roma. In other words, Scheffel finds fault with the conclusions, not the research itself.

hardly ever written about Roma as Roma; that is one thing I have always guarded myself against. If I am going to be mentioned (in this work, *my note*) as one of the people who are interested in ‘Roma’, I will be mentioned by mistake.”⁵⁵ This response is characteristic of the majority of Marek Jakoubek’s production concerning the people also-known-as Roma. Similarly to Leo Lucassen, he has moved on to a new field of interest in recent years⁵⁶ but for at least eight years the Roma towered in the midst of his academic attention – while not being there at all.

To sum up, even though Marek Jakoubek and the Pilsner school distance themselves from the Dutch school, their conclusions draw on the same assumption, namely, that the vast heterogeneity of the different groups of Roma must be explained by their lack of common ethnic grounds. While I do not share Leo Lucassen’s and Wim Willems’s understanding of the Roma, I respect their historical background and their expertise and believe they were driven by a genuine quest for answers. As far as the Pilsner school is concerned, the ambition to become the talk of the day overshadows any real results of their vast body of work. Generally, however, the very fact of the emergence of these schools shows a clear pattern in Romany studies internationally whereby departments which work on the basis of largely unquestioned Romany identity and concentrate on the Romany language(s) and culture(s) get challenged by radical constructivists outside of the philological tradition.

If I were to discuss Romany writing within the ethnically essentialist framework, I would soon be out my depth. “RomLit”⁵⁷ has a diverse basis of national, ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities which do selectively overlap, but never in all the features assumed to be specific to the Roma. Romany writing cannot be described without considering fundamental questions of identity, and that in turn cannot be done without deconstructing. Nevertheless, even though none of the writers is only Romany but invariably they have a hyphenated identity – Russian-Romany, English-Romany, Slovak-Romany, Czech-Romany – ultimately

⁵⁵ Email from Marek Jakoubek from March 19, 2013.

⁵⁶ The communities of Czech expatriates in Bulgaria see above.

⁵⁷ I shall occasionally use this blend in inverted commas throughout my thesis, to indicate the use of “Romany Literature” whereby the commentators see it as something given, fixed and unproblematic, rather like students may playfully refer to e.g. Eng Lit (English Literature) or French Lit (French Literature).

they themselves and their surrounding view them as different from the national literatures, a category all by itself.

1.5 Previous Research: Problematizing Romany Literature

Anyone seriously interested in Romany writing will eventually reach a methodological dead end, as many of the volumes, which often come from obscure sources⁵⁸ and which are boldly promoted as having been written by Romany writers, are in fact recordings of interviews conducted and transcribed, sometimes with vested interests, by editors.⁵⁹ The subject matter is the narrator's own, but to what extent this has been organised, edited and retold, using revised sentence structure and vocabulary, by the editors is a question impossible to resolve and one which is habitually ignored in relevant Romany-studies literature.⁶⁰ Moreover, commentators who are in favour of Romany empowerment often demonstrate a motivated effort to lend the writing by Roma more prestige by

⁵⁸ One of the problems Romany writing worldwide is facing is dissemination (compare Scheinostová 2006: 14). Renowned publishing houses are often unwilling to release literature by Roma, which is as much caused by financial concerns and their distrust in their marketability, as it is by underlying prejudice. In the early 1990s in the Czech Republic, works written by Roma tended to be slim paperbacks usually released by NGOs, Romany associations and cultural bodies; they were not for sale and could be obtained from the organization itself or from various educational institutions. Alternately, they were released by small low-profile publishing houses (Apeiron, Signeta). This situation was more or less mirrored abroad. In the Czech Republic, however, this is gradually changing and more mainstream publishing houses such as Argo, G+G or Triáda have started releasing works by Roma (e.g. Matéo Maximoff, Ceija Stojka, Elena Lacková, Gejza Horváth, Gejza Demeter, Erika Oláhová, Andrej Giňa etc.). By far the most proactive publishing house in English is University of Hertfordshire Press, which has a unique "Romani Studies" section see <http://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/our-structure/subsidiary-companies/uh-press/romani-studies>.

⁵⁹ See for example *Winter Time* by Walter Winter (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press 2004; the original German edition from 1999 was recorded and edited by Thomas W. Neumann and Michael Zimmermann), *On the Cobbles: The Life of a Bare-Knuckle Gypsy Warrior* by Jimmy Stockins (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing 2000, recorded and edited by Martin King and Martin Knight) or *From Coppersmith to Nurse: Alyosha, the Son of a Gypsy Chief* by Alyosha Taikon (Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes/University of Hertfordshire Press 2003, the original Swedish edition from 1999 was recorded and edited by Gunilla Lundgren).

⁶⁰ It does seem to be a regular feature of works dealing with autobiography, autoethnicity and life stories in general. William G. Tierney (2000) maintains that "we must disavow the notion that any text is singularly created" (Tierney 2000: 543) and A. Robert Lee (2003), when discussing Native American autobiographies as acts of imagination, praises them for being "free of the custodianship of any interlocutors" and sets them apart from "past transcriptions, not to say mistranscriptions, whether by missionary or anthropologist, folklore-collector or language-interpreter" (Lee: 2003: 38 – 39).

associating it with universally recognised personalities, or contributing to its volume by including problematic cases. And last but not least, many of the texts which claim to define Romany writing, rather than clarify who its authors are, obscure their identity.

The following entry from Donald Kenrick's *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies)* is in many ways emblematic of the majority of academic texts dealing with "RomLit":

Literature, Gypsy. Until the 20th century, Romani literature was almost entirely oral – songs and folktales. The temporary encouragement of the Romani language in the newly founded Soviet Union led to a flourishing of literature in the period between the world wars. Since 1945 much poetry, short stories and drama has been written. Many Gypsy writers, such as Matéo Maximoff and Veijo Baltzar, have written novels in the majority languages of the country where they live. (Kenrick 1998: 97)

The entry is entitled "Gypsy" literature. "Gypsy", a label which in itself is considered neutral by some, is a malformation of "Egyptian" and as such refers to an incorrectly supposed origin of the Roma. Even if in English it does not have negative connotations like "Cikán" does in Czech⁶¹, it is still an exonym, which seems unsuitable in a book which would like to contribute to the people's sense of ethnic awareness. Moreover, in English-speaking countries, "Gypsy" has come to mean any group of peripatetic (travelling) people, regardless of their subethnic origin⁶², and is often used as a generic term for Non-Romany persons who travel a lot, frequently change address and/or fancy themselves free agents; in other words, who tap into the romantic stereotype of the Gypsy. To confuse matters further, in the extract under scrutiny "Gypsy" is alternately replaced by "Romani", making the issue of whose literature this is open to speculation.

⁶¹ Derived from the Greek word *Athinganoi*, originally used for a heretic sect in the Byzantine Empire, which shared some professional and lifestyle characteristics with the new immigrants from India. Coined as an exonym for the Roma as early as the eleventh century. From the very start, this label signified a dangerous Other versed in black magic, performing strange rites and speaking an incomprehensible language, and all its later forms – c/Cikán (CZ), c/Cigán (SK), ciganyi (HU), Zigeuner (DE), Tsigane (FR) or Gitano (ES) – have clear and undisputable negative connotations. (See George C. Soulis "The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* No 15/1961, pp. 141+143 – 165.)

⁶² For a classification of British travelling groups, see Clark & Greenfields 2006: 15 – 17.

In the same sentence, the author misleads the reader into believing that Romany literature has a much longer tradition than it actually does, when he says *until the 20th century, Romani literature was almost entirely oral*. There is an irreconcilable difference between “oral tradition” and “literature” in ways of production, dissemination and thinking in general. This is why Walter Ong discouraged the use of “oral literature”, which he thought absurdly suggested that writing is speaking, only in written form (Ong 2002: 10 - 15). While Kenrick is right to point out that contemporary Romany writing has not materialized out of a void and is nourished by centuries of orally sustained folklore, the two most certainly do not form a perfect continuum.⁶³

Finally, let us briefly discuss Kenrick’s statement that many Gypsy writers, such as Matéo Maximoff and Veijo Baltzar, have written novels in the majority languages of the country where they live. Matéo Maximoff, a Kalderash by birth, did indeed publish mostly in French, and Veijo Baltzar, a Finnish Kalo, in Finnish. There are other writers of Romany origin who have gained renown by writing in majority languages e.g. Menyhért Lakatos in Hungarian, Philomena Franz in German or Gejza Horváth in Czech.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Kenrick should have clarified why these two speakers of Romani – and others like them - have not written their work in their respective dialects of Romani.

First, in few countries there was, or is to this date, a standardised form of written Romani easily accessible to the publisher⁶⁵. Second, a mainstream publishing house, which *Flammarion* and *Tammi* respectively certainly are, would struggle to find readership and therefore market for a novel published in Romani, as few Non-Roma – the majority of buyers

⁶³ Compare Jan Červenka’s untitled paper delivered on the occasion of The International Khamoro Festival in Prague in 2009 in which he contests the idea that Romany literature is born into a canon-less vacuum. He argues that “Romany writing’s point of departure is the traditional art (i.e.folklore) and its point of arrival is the majority literature, or the world literatures”.

⁶⁴ Lakatos Menyhért: *Füstös képek* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó 1979), Philomena Franz: *Zwischen Liebe und Hass: Ein Zigeunerleben* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag GMBH 1985), Gejza Horváth: *Trispras* (Praha: G+G 2006)

⁶⁵ Because of Romani’s short tradition of literacy and the fact that it is a contact language with considerable dialectal variation, attempts to establish one international standard have failed so far and local norms do not exist, or only selectively. Current use of Romani for printed text is often emblematic in that “its purpose is to serve as a symbol and to trigger emotional identification” (Matras 2002: 254). According to Matras, the most successful models of language planning for Romani to date have taken place in Macedonia, Austria and the Czech Republic (for detailed information see Yaron Matras 2002: pp. 251 – 259).

- speak the language⁶⁶. Third, even if there were enough Romani *speakers* in the country to create sufficient demand, there would most likely not be enough of them who could *read* it, as Romani does not usually form part of school curriculums and the majority of Roma's literacy is in the state language. To say that "many Gypsy writers (...) have written novels in majority languages" gives the impression that writing in Romani is impossible, which is wrong, as many Romany writers have in fact published in Romani, but it has worked against their broader recognition.

Even if "research concerning Gypsy and Traveller life-stories is quite rare" (Shaw 2006: 45), one can still locate several attempts to discuss writing by the Roma in a systematic way. Sadly, these are often characterised by confusing inconsistencies.

Perhaps the most comprehensive survey to date has been compiled by the Serbian Rom resident in Germany, Rajko Djuric; a journalist, poet, and between 1990 and 2000 the head of the International Romani Union. His *Die Literatur der Roma und Sinti* (Berlin: Edition Parabolis 2002) is an ambitious work, which presents a broad scope of material, while mixing fiction and non-fiction, including authors of ambiguous origin and listing others who have written about Roma, but are members of the majority populations.

For instance, his list of Austrian and Swiss Romany writers feature the Yenish Romedius Mungenst (Djuric 2002: 114) and Mariella Mehr (Djuric 2002: 123) respectively, even though it is universally recognised that the Yenish are an indigenous European peripatetic community of show-people, who may have to some extent mixed with the Roma in the past and have a similar lifestyle, but their "speech (...) is characterised by the insertion of a special vocabulary into local and regional dialects of German"⁶⁷ and they constitute a group of their own.

⁶⁶ One should also consider the stigma which certain literature appears to carry for its readers – some people would not be caught reading a book by a Romany writer, even if they found it of interest, because it might compromise their taste in literature. Alberto Manguel sums this up rather nicely when he says "To venture into the literature society sets aside, condescendingly, for a 'less privileged' or 'less accepted' group is to risk being tainted by association (...)" (Alberto Manguel: *A History of Reading*, London: HarperCollins 1996, p. 228).

⁶⁷ Yaron Matras: *Archive of Endangered and Smaller Languages – Yenisch/Yenish* <http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/ELA/languages/Jenisch.html>. See also Yaron Matras: The Romani element in German secret languages: Jenisch and Rotwelsch in: Matras, Y. ed. *The Romani element in non-standard speech*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1998: 193-230.

More problematically, Djuric claims John Bunyan (1628 – 1688) to have been “der Begründer der Roma-Literatur in Grossbritannien”⁶⁸ (Djuric 2002: 146); and his qualifying remark that this claim is based on “den Hypothesen einiger Literaturwissenschaftler”⁶⁹ cannot conceal an element of wishful thinking. Admittedly, the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress* had come from an impoverished background, he had had limited access to education, the family had often changed address and his father had been a tinker⁷⁰ but most of these characteristics would have easily fitted a large proportion of seventeenth century country people in Britain, and Bunyan’s writing has certainly never been identified as that of a Romany by canonical surveys of English literature.

Out of the five pages devoted to Romany writing in Great Britain, to dedicate three to John Bunyan’s life and work seems extravagant and perhaps ill-advised. Nevertheless, Djuric may have been misled into believing John Bunyan to have been a Roma by a passage in George Borrow’s novel *Lavengro* (see below) in which the narrator (George Borrow’s alter ego) and a preacher discuss the narrator’s Romany friend and then the narrator’s own descent and the fact that John Bunyan also came from “a family of travelling artisans” (Borrow 1982 (1851): 407). This is done in such a condensed way and the conversation takes place in such antiquated English, that to the reader all three pedigrees may easily converge into one, a Romany one. This may have been intentional on George Borrow’s part as “like some modern ryes, [he] was not above giving others the impression that he was himself a Gypsy” (Hancock 1998b). Not that Borrow actually claims that John Bunyan was a Romany.

Martin Shaw also mentions John Bunyan in a passage in which he is looking at two conversion narratives by Romany narrators as examples of the practise of telling unusual lives. Both Cornelius Smith⁷¹ and his son Gipsy (Rodney) Smith⁷² relate deeply to the story

⁶⁸ “the founder of Romany literature in Great Britain“

⁶⁹ „some literary historians“

⁷⁰ “Tinker“ – a travelling salesman and fixer of small metal household items - as a frequent profession among travelling people of The British Isles has come to mean, in some contexts, the same as Gypsy; compare Irish Tinkers, Scottish Tinkers. However, it generally does not refer to the Roma.

⁷¹ Cornelius Smith: *The Life Story of Gipsy Cornelius Smith*. 1890; Romany and Traveller Family History Society 2000.

⁷² Gipsy Smith: *Gipsy Smith, His Life and Work by Himself*, ed. W. Grinton Berry. 1901; London: National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches 1902.

of John Bunyan's conversion, perhaps partly because of his impoverished background, and set out to create model conversion narratives for others. "As Gypsies are conceptualised as in particular need and difficult to convert, the propagandist effect is to relay a message that anyone can be morally reformed or civilised." (Shaw 2006: 34) There is no reference to Bunyan and the Smiths sharing the same ethnicity, and I dare say that this choice of Djuric's is marked by overzealousness.

In the same chapter, Rajko Djuric discusses the importance of George Borrow's works for the development of Romany literature in Great Britain by inspiring the foundation in 1888 of Gypsy Lore Society (Djuric 2002: 148). This eccentric novelist and evangelist, the author of, amongst others, *The Zincali* (1841), *Lavengro* (1851), *The Romany Rye* (1857) or the dictionary of Romani *Romano Lavo-Lil* (1874), has had tremendous influence in English-speaking countries by introducing his readership to a rather fictionalised pastoral version of the Roma. He has also been a highly controversial character, not the least for the way he bent and mutated Angloromani⁷³, who many a commentator has dedicated a paper, a chapter or a whole monograph to.⁷⁴ He coined the term "Romany Rye", meaning a Non-Roma with a privileged access to the Roma while retaining their largely aloof academic position; created the myth of "the true Romany" (see note 17) and fantasised about sexual relations with Romany women in his semi-autobiographical works, which set an example for his followers, the Lorists, who practised what Deborah Epstein Nord calls "sexual adventurism" (Nord 2006: 126).

While the members of Gypsy Lore Society "were Borrow's heirs as lovers, learners, and recorders of Gypsy speech" (Nord 2006: 128), they recognized his shortcomings and "strove for an accuracy in their work that they associated with professional philologists

⁷³ Hancock calls it "Borromani, a concocted dialect not actually spoken by anyone" ("George Borrow's Romani" in ed. Peter Bakker 1998: *The Typology and Dialectology of Romani*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 65 - 89).

⁷⁴ For instance Ian Hancock ("George Borrow's Romani" in ed. Peter Bakker 1998: *The Typology and Dialectology of Romani*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 65 - 89), Deborah Epstein Nord ("In the Beginning Was the Word: George Borrow's Romany Picaresque" in D. E. Nord 2006: *Gypsies and the British Imagination*. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press), Ann M. Ridler (*George Borrow as a Linguist: Images and Contexts*. A doctoral thesis from 1983 published for private circulation in 1996.) or Michael Collie and Angus Fraser (*George Borrow: A Bibliographical Study*. Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies 1984). There is now a *George Borrow Society*, founded in 1991, which releases two *George Borrow Bulletins* a year, the last one from spring 2013; and also a *George Borrow Trust*.

rather than with the amateur efforts of the ‘word master’” (Nord 2006: 130). Nevertheless, neither the members of the Gypsy Lore Society, nor George Borrow himself were of Romany origin. The inclusion of the Yenish writers Romedius Mungenst and Mariella Mehr, the English reformer John Bunyan and the cosmopolitan linguist George Borrow in the list of Romany writers is misplaced on the part of Rajko Djuric, and rather than lend glory to the Roma and their growing body of authentic literary work, it demeans it.

Rajko Djuric has co-edited another undertaking in the area of Romany letters, a PEN anthology of Gypsy writers *The Roads of the Roma*⁷⁵. The introduction was written by Ian Hancock, another Romany academic, who was clearly aware of some of the pitfalls of attempting to define what Romany literature is. He tackles the problem at hand by first stating that the language of the Roma is crucial to their identity, thereby implying that ideally a Romany writer should write in Romani; he goes on to say that only about one half of the works included in the anthology were originally written in Romani, thus contradicting his own implications, and he concludes by specifying that for the purposes of this book, “Romani literature means that both the writer and the topic are Romani even if, in the latter instance, the associations are sometimes opaque” (Hancock 1998a: 11).

As an overview of Romany writing, *The Roads of the Roma* demonstrate similar breaches of methodology as Djuric’s monograph with one important difference – the author of the introduction realizes that the phenomenon of “RomLit” is much more complex than meets the eye. His partly intuitive assessment of what brings Romany writers together under one umbrella is worth quoting in its entirety:

Everything that separates Romani populations from each other has been acquired from the outside, while everything that links them shares a common origin outside of Europe. When Roma meet, it is our common heritage that binds us and that we seek out, not the variously acquired, non-Romani aspects of our culture and speech. It is our speech which is the greatest part of that heritage, and even among those populations whose Romani has been reduced to only a vocabulary, as in England or Spain or Scandinavia, it remains a powerful ingredient in Romani ethnic identity. (Hancock 1998a: 18)

⁷⁵ *The Roads of the Roma*. Ian Hancock, Siobhan Dowd & Rajko Djuric (Eds.) Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press 2004 (1998).

The following anecdote from the *Roma Positive* conference at the American Centre in Prague in 2012 could illustrate this point⁷⁶. When Jake Bowers, a British Romany journalist and broadcaster, took the floor, he welcomed the audience in Angloromani. He used it as a signal for the numerous “anthropological” Roma in the audience (i.e. the ones which met the usual dark-skinned dark-eyed dark-haired stereotype) who might otherwise have mistaken him for an Englishman, with his fair hair and freckled skin. This was received by the Roma in the audience with Romani words of recognition and greetings and a sense of community was immediately established, even though the rest of Jake Bowers’ speech was delivered in perfect R.P., as he does not feel completely comfortable speaking his people’s language.⁷⁷

Beate Eder, an Austrian comparatist, has been writing about Romany literature since 1991, when she defended her master thesis *Analogien und Bilder in der Literatur der Roma. Ausgewählte Werke des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Her general attitude resembles mine at the beginning of my research, when anything *signed* by a Roma automatically constituted part of Romany literature. She does not differentiate between modes of delivery, whether the original discourse was spoken into a recording device, or written; she does not pay much heed to the essential role of the editor in the processing of a recorded interview, or only selectively (and in a positive sense)⁷⁸; and in the majority of her articles and monographs, she only considers books published in majority languages.

⁷⁶ *Roma Positive/Romské vzory a obraz Romů v médiích*, November 5, 2012, under the auspices of Monika Šimůnková, the human rights commissioner, and the British Embassy in Prague.

⁷⁷ “Kushti divvus pens and pals. Mandes a tatcho Romani chal katar Anglia. Me sem jekh lavengro ande BBC tai but gazetta. Me sim but parno, si chi kam ande Anglia Thai but breshin.” – Hello, brothers and sisters. I'm a Romani man from England. I am a journalist on the BBC and many newspapers. I'm very pale. There's not much sun in England and it rains a lot.” In his own words, he said this in “bad inflected Romani”. Quoted from an email from Jake Bowers from October 31st, 2013.

⁷⁸ Beate Eder emphasises mutually beneficial cooperation of the editor and the narrator, based on friendship, trust and privileged access of the editor to the Roma, which enables the narrator to (finally) speak their mind. As prime examples of such successful relationships she mentions and analyses the collaboration of Ceija Stojka and Karin Berger (*Wir leben im Verborgenen. Erringerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin*. Edited by Karin Berger, Wien: Picus Verlag 1988) and Elena Lacková and Milena Hübschmannová (*Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou*. Editor Milena Hübschmannová. Praha: Triáda 1997). In her paper “Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou Ilony Lackové” (a Czech translation of chapter 3.2 of Beate Eder’s dissertation *Mensch sein. Identitätskonstruktionen in der Literatur der Roma und Sinti*. Innsbruck 2005. In

In her paper “Roma schreiben. Anmerkungen zur Literatur einer ethnischen Minderheit”⁷⁹, she claims that “Die Sprache der Roma (...) ist aber noch keine Schriftsprache.” And as an afterthought, she adds in a footnote: “Es existieren jedoch auch literarische Zeugnisse von Roma auf Romanes.”⁸⁰ I hope to demonstrate in my thesis that not only is Romani used for the production of literature quite frequently - at least in some parts of the world - it can also be a device more expressive and better fitting the unique Romany experience than the languages of the majorities.

Beate Eder’s research has naturally moved on since 1991. In 2008, she correctly observed that by Romany literature, Milena Hübschmannová meant *primarily* literature written in Romani, whereas in her understanding of it, she *also* includes literature which was produced in the language of the majority (Eder 2008: 118, both emphases mine). The conclusion of her dissertation that in their literature and fairy-tale canon, the Roma and Sinti construct their humanity to compensate for the habitual dehumanising presentation of their people on the part of the Non-Gypsies, is valuable and inspiring.⁸¹

Considering Milena Hübschmannová was effectively a catalyst in the birth of Romany writing in the Czech Republic in the late 1960s and she was often inextricably bound with the production process from the idea stage to the book stage⁸², she did not

Romano džaniben ňilaj 2006 pp. 287 – 295), Eder acknowledges the fact that the latter life story was recorded over a period of eight years and then transcribed, edited and structured by Milena Hübschmannová (Eder 2006: 290), but it does not stop her from repeatedly calling it a novel. As much as I like some of Beate Eder’s observations and conclusions, I consider a collaborative life story in Martin Shaw’s sense and a novel in the traditional sense mutually exclusive.

⁷⁹ Published in Mozes Heinschink, Ursula Hemetek (Eds.): *Roma. Das unbekanntes Volk. Schicksal und Kultur*. Wien: Verein Romano Centro 1994, pp. 129 – 149. This article was based upon Beate Eder’s master thesis *Analogien und Bilder in der Literatur der Roma. Ausgewählte Werke des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Innsbruck 1991. She has since developed her initial thesis in a follow-up dissertation *Mensch sein. Identitätskonstruktionen in der Literatur der Roma und Sinti*. Innsbruck 2005.

⁸⁰ “But the language of the Roma is not a literary language yet.”; “However, there also exist narratives in Romani.”

⁸¹ This is sufficiently summarised by the title of her dissertation: *Mensch sein*. – To be a man.

⁸² I am using Martin Shaw’s terminology from *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers* (2006: 53 – 55). Shaw divides the production process of life stories as told to editors into four stages: the idea stage (“motivation that led to the production”; “who ‘chose’ who and why?” p. 54), the speaking stage (i.e. the interviews; looking for “the textual evidence of the collaborative and communicative exchange” p. 55), the writing stage (“which involves transcription, additional writing [...] and includes a general aim of producing a

develop a cohesive system of thinking about it. One could say that her papers on Romany folklore and literature⁸³ were founding documents of literary theory of Romany writing in the Czech Republic, in which she accumulated a large amount of data and sketched a rough outline of a theory, but these are currently being critically assessed, revised and developed by her former students and followers.

While Hübschmannová acknowledged that some Roma write in the languages of the majority, her understanding of what “RomLit” is was exclusively “literature written by Roma in Romani”, especially in the Czech context. This is sufficiently clear from the following extract:

Under the supervision of the talented Romany locksmith Andrej Pešta, a column written in Romani soon came into being [in the journal of Gypsy-Roma Union Románo l'il]. In each consequent issue, Romani was gaining more and more space. The linguistic council of the Gypsy-Roma Union soon developed grammatical and spelling rules for the serviko romaňi dialect of Slovak Romani. Románo l'il became the soil from which first offshoot of Romany literature sprang. (Hübschmannová 2006: 40)⁸⁴

She recognised two mutually inseparable reasons for the emergence of Romany writing: the first is the search for one’s identity, which is immediately caused by the second, the loss of specific situations in the community when one communicated certain specific contents to hierarchically and contextually suitable addressees (Hübschmannová 1998: 65). She speaks of the “need to establish new routes of communication along which to send a

manuscript for publication” p. 54) and the book stage (“the editing and marketing of the transcribed and self-written manuscripts” p. 55). I find these labels useful and shall use them occasionally.

⁸³ Hübschmannová’s insights and observations on the topic of Romany writing are scattered across a number of academic papers. The gist of her literary thinking can be found in “Počátky romské literatury” in *Žijeme spolu, nebo vedle sebe? Sborník z konference o literatuře národnostních menšin v České republice*. (Praha: Obec spisovatelů 1998, pp. 59 – 66), “Slovesnost a literatura v romské kultuře” in *Černobílý život*, ed. Zdeňka Jařabová, Eva Davidová (Praha: Gallery 2000, pp. 123 – 148) and most importantly “Moje setkání s romano šukar laviben”, published posthumously in *Romano džaniben ňilaj 2006*, pp. 27 – 60.

⁸⁴ Although this article was originally written in English as “My Encounters with Romano Šukar Laviben” for a collection of literature-oriented texts edited by Beate Eder, Moses Heinschink and Fridrun Rinner, so far it has not been published. I draw on the Czech translation by Helena Sadílková and I have re-translated this extract back into English for the purposes of this thesis.

message to the Roma outside of reach” (Hübschmannová 2000a: 139) and she refers to this process in which the oral tradition is gradually being lost and replaced by writing as “the overlapping of decline and birth” (Hübschmannová 2000a: 142).

It is not without interest that in her commentaries Milena Hübschmannová never questions the identity of her colleagues and collaborators, authors and various renowned professionals she is talking about – she refers to all of them as Roma with an easiness which is nowadays hard to find and defend. But she found herself in a unique situation when she not only dealt with anthropological Roma, that is members of a visible minority, who also openly identified themselves as such; also, their communication took place exclusively in Romani.⁸⁵

Should we consider this state of unfaltering certainty about the identity of an author of “RomLit” as one extreme, the other could be represented by the transitional cases of the writers Yvonne Slee (AUS), Dominic Reeve (GBR) and Louise Doughty (GBR), all of whom work in English. I will limit my comment here to the observation that none of these authors have immediate Romany kin, and the Romany predecessors they do have are at least three to four generations removed, yet the authors choose to call themselves Romanies or Travellers. Such instances of assumed identity are perhaps a little bizarre; nonetheless, it would be unfair to only attribute them to the authors’ attempt to capitalise on their distant oriental pedigree. A genuine pride and admiration for the Roma seem to play a much more important role.⁸⁶ This phenomenon certainly deserves future research.

⁸⁵ Milena Hübschmannová never missed an opportunity to conduct an interview, or simply communicate in Romani, and she always encouraged her Romany guests in our classes to do the same, regardless of how much, or how little Romani we as her students knew at the time.

⁸⁶ Yvonne Slee’s great-grandmother was a German Sinti. Her story is described in *Torn Away, Forever*, Aspley: Amber 2005. Otherwise Yvonne Slee specialises in Mills and Boon style of romance: *Sharon’s Sins*, *Sharon Sins...Again*, *Sharon Sins...Down Under*, Aspley: Amber, all three 2004. Louise Doughty’s great-great-grandmother was an English Romanichal. Her two novels based around her Romany family roots are *Fires in the Dark*, London: Simon and Schuster 2003, and *Stone Cradle*, London: Simon and Schuster 2006. She talks about her Romany pedigree at length at <http://5x15stories.com/presenter/louise-doughty/>. Dominic Reeve, as it turns out in the last of his five popular travelling narratives (*Smoke in the Lanes* 1958, *No Place Like Home* 1961, *Whichever Way We Turn* 1965, *Beneath the Blue Sky* 2007 and *Green Lanes and Kettle Cranes* 2010), is an Englishman with no Romany ancestry at all. Martin Shaw has been working on a paper about Dominic Reeve’s writings in which he is “reading Reeves as an insider/outsider in relation to the Romanies that he admires” (quoted from an email from Martin Shaw from November 1, 2012).

In *Romipen, literaturou k moderní identitě*, Alena Scheinostová regretted the fact that “even Romany studies experts (...) mention Romany literature as if only in passing” (Scheinostová 2006: 11). This is now changing, partly thanks to Scheinostová’s own production⁸⁷. For the purposes of *Romipen*, she defines Romany literature as “Romany writing written in the Czech Republic”, referring to Helena Sadílková’s use of the label in her master thesis.⁸⁸ Despite the apparent ease with which this matter is dealt with, never to be brought up again (at least in this work), Scheinostová recognizes the potential complexity of the label (Scheinostová 2006: 11, 13, 14). After *Romipen*, a thematic analysis of Ilona Ferková’s short-stories, she researched more specific aspects of Romany writing in several papers.⁸⁹

Two monographs which focus on Romany and Traveller life stories abroad have been particularly relevant to my work: Jonathan Bernard Geidt’s MA thesis *The Oral Context of Gypsy Identity*⁹⁰ (hereinafter referred to as *The Oral Context*) and Martin Shaw’s doctoral

⁸⁷ Other commentators who have consistently been involved with Romany writing in the Czech Republic are in alphabetical order Lukáš Houdek, Karolína Ryvolová and Helena Sadílková, whose various papers are quoted throughout this thesis.

⁸⁸ Helena Sadílková: *Tématická analýza romské povídkové tvorby v ČR*. MA thesis at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University 2002. Sadílková identifies three generations of Romany writers in the short history of Romany writing in the Czech Republic: the oldest one revolving around the *Románo lil* journal between 1969 – 1973 (e.g. Tera Fabiánová, Andrej Pešta, Andrej Giňa or Elena Lacková), the second one linked to the activities of Romany folklore groups in the 1980s (e.g. Margita Reiznerová, Helena Demeterová, Jan Horváth, Vlado Oláh) and the most recent one which emerged after the Velvet Revolution (e.g. Ilona Ferková, Emil Cina, Magda Hoffmanová). This may have been accurate at the time of Sadílková’s graduation but the situation has changed since. Significantly, some Roma have started writing and publishing spontaneously (Roman Erös, Irena Eliášová), unassisted by Non-Romany editors from the Romany Studies department, and many aspiring writers now use the www.kher.cz website which specializes in promoting Romany writing (Lucie Kováčová, Iveta Kokyová, Eva Danišová, Lenka Čenčová and others).

⁸⁹ The crucial position of magazines in the dissemination of Romany writing is developed in Alena Scheinostová: “Význam časopisectví v romské literatuře” (Svět literatury 31/2005, pp. 50 – 55); the multilingualism of Romany writers in the Czech Republic and the switching of codes in Alena Scheinostová: “Jazyk jako kód a jako emblém v autorské tvorbě Romů v ČR” in Česká literatura 2/2012, pp. 203 – 224) and the reasons for the Romany women writers’ dominance over male writers in “Ženská romská próza jako zápas o sebevyjádření” in Matonoha, Jan (ed.): Česká literatura v perspektivách gender, Praha: Academia 2010, pp. 253 – 263.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Bernard Geidt: *The Oral Context of Gypsy Identity*. London: The City of London Polytechnic 1990.

thesis *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers*⁹¹ (hereinafter referred to as *Narrating Gypsies*). Together, they have helped me to assess the canon of works I have accumulated over the years and choose a particular angle of analysis.

In *The Oral Context*, J. B. Geidt is looking at four narratives, three of which are transcripts of recorded interviews. He does not differentiate between Roma and Travellers, probably because all of his source material comes from the British Isles, where these categories traditionally overlap. Although Geidt states that Gypsy⁹² life stories have never been considered as texts but only as source of anthropological/ethnographical data, he does not perform a literary analysis. Using Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, he puts forward a hypothesis that "Gypsies belong to an oral culture similar to those of traditional societies" (Geidt 1990: 16) and proceeds to prove it by using the stories in question as evidence. I am going to use his useful phrase "an oral mind-set" (Geidt 1990: 45).

Even Martin Shaw's corpus of material mostly comes from recorded interviews (again three out of four books).⁹³ Like Geidt, he does not differentiate between Roma and Travellers but he supports his decision by referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities.

Unlike J. B. Geidt, who appears to be a little naïve in his understanding of an editor's role in the production of Gypsy life stories⁹⁴, Shaw is deeply aware of the effect of an editor's conscious or subconscious input. He coins the term "collaborative life stories" (Shaw 2006: 16) to express the fact that even "after the transcriber has erased his or her own voice (and others) from the transcribed text, the resultant life story is [still] a coproduced, collaborative

⁹¹ Martin Shaw: *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers. A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life Stories*. Umeå: Umeå Universitet 2006.

⁹² I am using "Gypsy" here in Geidt's and Shaw's sense, as a kind of informal umbrella term for Roma and Travellers combined.

⁹³ These two theses in fact partly overlap: both authors look at Silvester Gordon Boswell: *The Book of Boswell* (1970) and Nan Joyce: *Traveller. An Autobiography* (1985).

⁹⁴ "The books, if genuine and undistorted by editors, are written or dictated direct, and constitute data that is just as valid as reports of Gypsy conversations selected by literate investigators." (Geidt 1990: 5) The whole concept of a disinterested non-meddling editor is in itself an oxymoron.

text that is double-voiced” (Shaw 2006: 51)⁹⁵. He takes no printed version of a recorded interview at face value but digs deep every time to unearth even the smallest vestige of the editor trying to manipulate the recorded material, or the narrator trying to fulfil the editor’s expectations.

Shaw perceives the genre of Gypsy life stories as related to the tradition of telling unusual lives of e.g. convicts or converts (Shaw 2006: 13, 28). Depending substantially on a scope of works by Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002)⁹⁶, his main arsenal of methodological tools consists of “habitus”, “misrecognition” and “symbolic violence”. Pierre Bourdieu’s works on ethnography but primarily the sociology of culture have particularly in the past two decades become vastly influential and virtually inescapable where social sciences are concerned⁹⁷. I am going to use these terms in Martin Shaw’s reading of them: *misrecognition* as “the failure to see the arbitrariness of taken-for-granted structures and discourses that are instrumental in re-producing the agent’s ‘feel for the game’ and internalised social positions” (Shaw 2006: 174), *symbolic violence* as “a subtle form of violence committed by the agents on themselves (without conscious knowledge of its source, and with their consent) within the dominated space(s) in which they produce and re-produce habitus” (Shaw 2006: 175) and *habitus* as “a simultaneously individual and collective inexact and incorporated code that guides interrelations with people, objects and environments within the taken-for-granted everyday activities that agents participate in” (Shaw 2006: 23).

For *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* combined, Milena Hübschmannová used the term *colonised mind* borrowing from post-colonial theory, and so will I on occasion. *Habitus* in my reading could in certain contexts stand for *romipen*, the art of being a Rom, a

⁹⁵ Nina Bosničová, who analysed Afro-American autobiography in her dissertation, calls this phenomenon “collective authorship of black autobiographies” and she especially refers to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X and Alex Haley*, one of Martin Shaw’s sources of inspiration (Bosničová 2007: 16 – 17).

⁹⁶ Amongst others, in English translations: *Outline of a Theory of Practise* (1972), *The Logic of Practise* (1980), *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (with Loïc J. D. Wacquant 1992), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1992), or *Pascalian Meditations* (2000).

⁹⁷ I find James F. English’s *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge: Harvard UP 2005, Czech translation *Ekonomie prestiže. Ceny, vyznamenání a oběh kulturních hodnot*, Brno: Host 2011) to be a good example of the all-pervasiveness and great applicability of Bourdieu’s flexible notions. This is an in-depth analysis of the market of symbolic value and its connotations as represented by cultural awards, which without Bourdieu’s terms “cultural field”, “symbolic capital”, “strategy of condescension” or “consecration” (not to mention “habitus”) would be frankly impossible.

code of behaviour regulating all forms of human contact both within the Romany society amongst its different members, and without, in contact with the *gadje* (in detail chapter 4.1.3).

Because I am concerned with literature, an area for which Bourdieu has coined the term *field of cultural production* (Bourdieu 1983, 2010), I will also be drawing on a score of related terms such as *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 1992: 119), *consecration* (English 2011: 38), *reflexivity* (Bourdieu 2010: 140) or (*feel for, sense of, rules of*) *the game* (Bourdieu 1992: 98). Pierre Bourdieu's thinking about art and literature forms a systematic whole and it makes sense to apply it comprehensively.

In this chapter, I have illustrated some of the common misconceptions in the existing literature offering a systematic periodisation of Romany writing. These are in no specific order: collaborative life-stories presented as original creative writing; incorporating renowned Non-Romany personalities into the canon to glorify it; mixing indiscriminately different types of peripatetic communities (e.g. New Age Travellers, Scottish/Irish Travellers, travelling salesmen and/or craftsmen, the Yenish and show people) with the Roma; understanding "RomLit" as literature written by Roma solely in majority languages; understanding "RomLit" as literature written by Roma solely in Romani and finally, understanding "RomLit" as literature written by Non-Roma with Roma as the subject.

In my analysis, I will be looking at four pieces of writing by Romany, *not* Traveller narrators. All four of them have been verifiably *written* by the narrators, *not recorded* in the form of an interview *or dictated* to a second party (see note 59). During the preparation stage, I had assembled what seemed a sizeable quantity of Romany works from the whole world, but only a certain number of them were able to meet these criteria, once I had decided on them, leaving my corpus perceptibly diminished.

My choice of *Memories of a Gypsy* (V. Vishnevsky), *Gypsy Boy* and its sequel *Gypsy Boy on the Run* (M. Walsh), *Naše osada* (I. Eliášová) and *Pařiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta* (A. Giňa) was guided by a desire to show Romany writing in its geographical and linguistic variety: two of the life-stories originate in the Western world (Great Britain, Brazil), two come from the former Eastern bloc (both Andrej Giňa and Irena Eliášová were born in

Slovakia, but live and work in the Czech Republic)⁹⁸. Two of them were written in English, one in Czech/Slovak/Romani in an equal mix and one solely in Romani. The titles of the respective chapters – *The Masculine Activist*, *The Gay Man* and *The Witness and the Writer* – reflect the part of each writer’s Romany identity which I view as the most prominent. The sex/gender and age aspect of these works – two heterosexual men in their eighties (Vishnevsky, Giňa), one gay man in his twenties (Walsh) and one heterosexual woman in her sixties (Eliášová) should lend the sample further depth and scope.

My analysis will follow a centripetal path, starting from countries of secondary to tertiary Romany migration with reference to India, written solely in contact languages, and moving towards Central and Eastern Europe, where the Roma have nearly five hundred years of history and more often than not write in Romani. Even though I recognise that Romani as a language of cultural production may be ultimately doomed, I believe that no other language encapsulates the unique Romany experience quite as accurately.

⁹⁸ To my knowledge, a comparative analysis of literary works of the Roma from different parts of the world has not been done yet; in this respect, this thesis is potentially groundbreaking.

2 The Masculine Activist

“Generally people look upon us as a mysterious race, as a matter of fact we are a mysterious race.”

(Victor Vishnevsky: Memories of a Gypsy p. 12)⁹⁹

Victor Vishnevsky (*1931), a Shanghai-born entrepreneur of Romany descent, with Iranian citizenship, currently residing in São Paulo, Brazil, wrote his life story for “(his) beloved wife, (his) sons and daughters, and especially (his) grandchildren, so that they may give this book to their children” (*Memories*: dedication). In an email from December 12, 2013, he adds “to remember me by”. Hence, regardless of the interpretation key applied – whether we view *Memories* as a kind of Bildungsroman, a subgenre of slave narratives (i.e. Vishnevsky’s great escape from the communist threat) or a search for the twice-removed imaginary homeland as suggested by Salman Rushdie and postcolonial theorists – the most important purpose of the text is to leave a (bigger-than-life) image of Victor Vishnevsky, the Rom, the lover, the husband and father, the musician, the businessman, the patriarch and ultimately the author, for his descendants. It would be tempting to say that the protagonist of *Memories* is the product of autofiction, “less the life than the *vraisemblance* of a life, a theatre of self whose reflexive manoeuvres and play of mirrors help to give the more multi-aspected portrait” (Lee 2003: 38, original emphasis) but that is not the case. Whatever hyperbole and departure from facts takes place, it is the spontaneous and unreflected side-effect of Vishnevsky’s amateur writing, as this book was his premiere.

Simultaneously, while actively striving to debunk myths about the Roma and produce a piece of ethnic autobiography – to deconstruct the objectified Gypsies of the mainstream discourse while constructing an authentic Romany self – Victor Vishnevsky falls into the trap of the colonised mind and he adds to, rather than disrupts, the popular image. His direct complicity in the act of symbolic violence upon himself shows one pitfall of the effort of a

⁹⁹ All of the extracts from Victor Vishnevsky’s book are quoted verbatim, including spelling and grammar mistakes.

formerly oral community to communicate with the dominant majority in writing, on the dominant's own terms.

2.1 Identity

2.1.1 Belonging (Citizenship, Nationality, Ethnicity)

Nowadays, Victor Vishnevsky would probably be described as a cosmopolitan as his pedigree resembles an intricate multi-coloured quilt. The Lovara Romany subgroup to which he belongs originally came from Hungary but “for some reason or another they immigrated to Iran” (*Memories*: 143). His paternal grandfather, O Baro Gurano, was born in Iran, and so was his father, who, nevertheless, married both his first and his second wife in Chelyabinsk, Russia.¹⁰⁰ When Civil War broke out in Russia and starvation hit Siberia, his father was arrested by the Red Army soldiers while trading horses for food with the White Army. “A Gypsy commie official” (*Memories*: 25, 145) assisted his escape and this set the whole extended family on the run. In a wonderfully laconic summary, Vishnevsky concludes: “So we had to run, the nearest boarder was China, that’s how we got there, and that’s where I was born.” (*Memories*: 145)

In a second bout of flight from “the threat of the communists” (*Memories*: 11), Vishnevsky describes how they left Shanghai in 1949, beginning their journey in Hong Kong and continuing via Burma, India and Iran into the USA, to finally settle in São Paulo, Brazil ten years later. Initially, they paid their travel expenses as entrepreneurs, putting on shows, occasionally getting jobs at night clubs (in Bombay, Calcutta and Tehran) or alternately running them, but later, in India and Iran, they developed new ways of earning a living, and sometimes not entirely within the law. One enterprise was buying cheap alcohol in Goa, then still a Portuguese colony, and selling it at a good price in Indian Bombay, and another one was the smuggling of precious stones.

The way in which V. Vishnevsky wishes to pose as a criminal mastermind reminds one of a strategy which Michael Stewart (1997) recognizes among the Roma of Harangos (a fictional name for the Hungarian village where he undertook his research in 1984) and calls *romani butji*, Gypsy work. In sync with the popular belief of the *gadje*, the Roma of

¹⁰⁰ His family's clan was still fully itinerant at the time; compare “They travelled from town to town, country to country, they lived in tents.” *Memories*: 143.

Harangos liked to boast about the way that they managed to make ends meet by cheating on or stealing from, white Hungarians. This at first perplexed the young anthropologist whose mission was among others to prove that the negative stereotypes about the Roma were false, until he realised that *romani butji* was “a concoction of fantasy and genuine cunning” (Stewart 1997: 23), participation on which “was what any self-respecting Gypsy man or woman aspired to” (Stewart 1997: 19). In other words, being or pretending to be involved in fraudulent activity harming the *gadje* was a matter of status, even if the overwhelming majority of income for each household originated in banal menial work.

Amongst the actual examples of *romani butji*, Stewart rated buying something cheaply in a different town or country and then selling it with profit locally.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Victor Vishnevsky demonstrates undisclosed pride in the way he managed to make a lot of money by buying jewellery at half-price from Tibetan refugees in India, bringing Goan alcohol to dry Bombay or low-tax American precious stones to Brazil. “We made a lot of money, we bought houses, cars (...) about ten men worked for us,” he brags (*Memories*: 93). He would have the reader believe that his wealth came easy and at the expense of the dim-witted Non-Roma. What he quietly skips – because it does not match the representation of himself and the Roma he would like to offer to the outside world – is the laborious practise every member of the extended family must have put into their show from early childhood in learning to play musical instruments, to sing in many different languages and to perfect dance/acrobatics numbers, nor does he elaborate on the actual workload relevant to the management of a lapidary shop, a petrol station and a restaurant in Brazil.

The favoured self-image as a successful trickster is something Martin Shaw has remarked upon in reading another Romany life story, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy* (1970), as recorded by John Seymour. He notices how a particular conman story from *Boswell* communicates with a long tradition of rogue literature, while holding back from the reader one of its key elements – that of penitence and conversion (Shaw 2006: 149). In fact, “Boswell transforms victim into victimiser and victimiser into victim in order to legitimise (...) his philosophy of life” (Shaw 2006: 143). The suppression of remorse and the inversion of the guilty and the innocent parties is a feature of Romany autobiography I

¹⁰¹ Amongst the various enterprises of the Harangos Romany men, Stewart mentions buying cheap gold in Bulgaria, leather jackets and denims in Turkey and pornographic videos in Austria, all for resale with profit at their workplace (Stewart 1997: 21).

have discussed elsewhere (Ryvolová 2011) and one which I suggest taps directly into the ethics of *romani butji*. I also suggest that it is an aspect of Romany autoethnography which keeps resurfacing and might constitute one of its invariables.

Victor Vishnevsky writes that he wants to spend the rest of his life in Brazil because “God must be Brazilian” (*Memories*: 103) and of all the countries he has ever been to, or lived in, he likes Brazil the best because he considers himself “very lucky to live in a country where the future is just starting” (*Memories*: 147). On the other hand, he expresses an emotional detachment from all the countries he has ever lived in, assessing them primarily in terms of business conditions and life-style possibilities, and never singling out one nationality to identify with. Even the choice of Brazil as his family’s final destination was nothing if not pragmatic:

Because we had some relatives there, and the country was full of opportunity, and that it was a free country for all races without discrimination, and was receiving immigrants from all countries, and it was very easy to receive permanent visas. I wanted to immigrate to the States but I had to wait for at least five years. (Memories: 74)

The selected country being free of communist rule is one condition which must be met, but otherwise it follows from Vishnevsky’s narrative that one country can as easily be replaced with another if business is good. Therefore, in spite of all his proclamations of loyalty to Brazil, and precisely because of his extremely mixed background, I view his *romipen* as the only stable element of his identity. In this respect his statement ‘If I was born in a stable that does not mean that I am a horse!’ (*Memories*: 41), although uttered somewhat ironically to comment on the Vishnevskys’ reception at the hands of Burmese authorities as Iranian citizens, seems to be an apt comment.

V. Vishnevsky constitutes his Lovara identity as an elite amongst the Roma (“My people are taller in size [than other Roma], and European like, we’re more civilized” *Memories*: 81) and never misses an opportunity to point out the heterogeneity of the Roma (“Now in this modern world the differences [amongst the different subethnic groups] are great.” *Memories*: 141). Nonetheless, the umbrella formation of the world Roma is still one that he most readily relates to. He refers to the Roma as *my people* throughout his memoir, frequently applies the inclusive plural (*we Gypsies*), expresses his anxiety over the excessive

mixing of the Roma with members of the majority (“I sometimes think whether our race will survive.” *Memories: 77*) and genuine pride in who he is (“The pure-blooded Gypsies are becoming rare, I am proud to be one of them.” *Memories: 77*).

He also believes that only a couple where both parents have a pure Romany pedigree can successfully conceive. His first wife came from a mixed Chinese-Russian background and in seven years of marriage, they failed to procreate; but with his second, Romany wife, “a month had passed and she was already pregnant (...) this is what I call destiny” (*Memories: 57*). The author himself stresses the importance of children to the Roma (*Memories: 77*) but Irena Reichová goes as far as to call it “the cult of a child” (2001: 85). She finds that Romany parents’ life is validated through their offspring who also help socialize their elementary household into the wider society of the Romany community. Conversely, a childless couple is missing this unique channel. The readiness with which the protagonist leaves his Non-Romany common-law wife in favour of a Romany girl from his own clan (because the *gadji* provides inferior genetic material in the narrator’s eyes) suggests extreme views on the importance of pure blood bordering on inverted racism.¹⁰²

If V. Vishnevsky’s primary motivation in penning his life story was in leaving it for his family “to remember me by”, then the secondary objective – indivisible from the first one – was to pen the life of a Gypsy as told by the Gypsy himself, which he accurately expects to be something of a sensation. Moreover, the private aspect of the memoir is ultimately overshadowed by its public existence, embodied by the title of his book – *Memories of a Gypsy*. Although titles of books are as much products of marketing as they are summaries of the content thereof¹⁰³, in this particular case the *Gypsy* in the title is

¹⁰² While biologically the idea that only pure-blooded Romany parents can produce (quality) offspring must be dismissed, the fact that mixed marriages often fare worse than Romany ones is psychologically relevant. In a film mapping out the last sixteen years of his life, the musician and activist Vojtěch Lavička says on the subject of mixed relationships: “I don’t want to lose my Růženka because she’s a Roma. I don’t have to explain much. She simply knows. Romany women stick it out through thick and thin. Even if they’re not exactly happy, the people stick by one another. I never seriously used to date Romany girls, she’s the first one. I’ve checked her pedigree and she’s full-blooded. Only Roma in her line.” (*Nahoru a dolů/Up and Down*, d. Helena Třeštíková 2013)

¹⁰³ Martin Shaw has brought to my attention how of late, there has been a wave of Romany/Gypsy autobiography with titles communicating with the romantic stereotype expected to titillate the interest of the readers such as *A Field Full of Butterflies: Memories of a Romany*; *Rabbit Stew and a Penny or Two: A Gypsy Family’s Hard Times and Happy Times on the Road in the 1950s*; *Gypsy Boy: My Life in the Secret*

significant. Incidentally, Victor Vishnevsky is also an active presence on the online Romany discussion forums e.g. Romsktnet (Sweden), Romani Roots (The UK), Journey Folki (The UK) and others ¹⁰⁴, and he has repeatedly described himself as an activist for the Romany cause in our online communication ¹⁰⁵. His other book, *The Magic Power of Life: Spiritual and Supernatural Stories of the Lovara Gypsies* (Chaverly, Maryland: Salo Press 2008), is, apparently, “all about our old supernatural Powers, which now in our clan today does not exist, and many other things about Roma”.¹⁰⁶ The intention to speak on behalf of the world’s Roma is undisputable. But parallel to the public image of the Roma which he presents to his readership, a second identity becomes apparent: that of Lovara Roma as a close-knitted community with low tolerance for outsiders and racist tendencies.

2.1.2 Language

On the imprint of the 1999/2006 edition, the reader is informed that “the original manuscript (...) was written in English (...; and) a translation into Portuguese was published in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1999” (*Memories: Imprint*). This is an interesting choice of language on the part of the author since - because of his diverse roots - he had had an array of languages

World of the Romany Gypsies; Gypsy Girl --- A life on the road. A Journey to Freedom; Lola's Luck: My Life Among the California Gypsies.

¹⁰⁴ Recently, the world wide web has become a unique platform where the Roma – both within one country and across the world – are meeting, sharing experiences, speaking/writing Romany and fighting for their common cause i.e. the recognition of their equality with the majority populations and simultaneously the acceptance of their right to the maintenance of their culturally specific way of life. In the Czech Republic, this has been especially true about Facebook communication, where even speakers who are only partly-competent in Romani are finding confidence to develop their Romani language skills, and also about the emergence of, and dissemination, of new Romany writing, compare Houdek, Lukáš: “Je budoucnost romské literární tvorby na internetu?” (“Is the future of Romany writing online?”) in *Romano džaniben* 1/2012, pp. 104 – 124 or Ryvolová, Karolína: “‘RomLit’ na síti” (“‘RomLit’ online”) in *Host* 6/2013, pp. 47 – 49.

¹⁰⁵ “I am or was an activist for my people (...) the international community does nothing to help those ignorant poor Gypsies I fight these unholy countries with my P.C. for over a decade and nothing solid has been done for my people, (...) I want to know what will you say about my people! we have been humiliated enough.” Facebook message from the author to myself from December 7, 2013; I have retained the idiosyncrasies of the English original.

¹⁰⁶ Facebook message to myself from December 3, 2013.

to select from prior to setting his pen to paper. His mother tongue is Romani, his parents' immediate second language was Russian, he went to an English school in Shanghai, and he also speaks Chinese and Spanish alongside the Portuguese of his current country of residence.

That English is not V. Vishnevsky's mother tongue transpires within the first few paragraphs. Apart from aberrations from formal grammar ("*Have* my readers ever *went* to a church (...)?" *Memories* 12, "Imagine, who would not be *afraid from* such a regime?" *Memories* 15, "then *slowly by slowly* they began to return" *Memories* 35; all emphases mine), the text is rendered stylistically clumsy by a limited corpus of idiomatic expressions and turns of phrase which point to a speaker with oral fluency but lack of additional passive command of the language, which would enable him a greater flexibility of idiom. Thus, the characters "paint the town red" every time they have a party (*Memories* 43, 108); they fall in love "like a ton of bricks" (*Memories* 44, 53); however hard they try to succeed, it is "to no avail" (*Memories* 10, 20, 26, 105, 146); they "dress to kill", "nature takes its course", "good sense prevails" or they "face the music". Considering the brevity of the life story – a total of 148 pages – such repetition becomes immediately apparent and may negatively affect a mainstream critic's reading.¹⁰⁷ By choosing to write in English, the lingua franca of the world, Vishnevsky put himself in an *a priori* disadvantageous position. His willing collaboration in doing so can be interpreted as an act of symbolic violence.

But would writing in Romani be an option? On multiple occasions (*Memories*: 81, 84, 86, 121, 143), Vishnevsky thematizes Romani as a secret communication code of all the Roma across the globe, which opens the doors both literally and metaphorically speaking, enables him to orientate himself in a foreign country by immediately locating kindred spirits, assists business, entertainment and is invaluable on the marriage market. In fact, Romani is such an emblem of *romipen* in Vishnevsky's memoir that characters feel they have to

¹⁰⁷ The reception of Romany writing by mainstream critique is an area worth a separate study. For the purposes of the present analysis suffice it to say that the main reason behind the harsh criticism of "RomLit" on the part of critics, journalists and editors does not seem to be, as would be expected, latent racism, but rather the clash of the norm/habitus/the way things are in the publishing industry with the unschooled and idiosyncratic way of saying/writing things by the Roma. It would seem useful to look at this phenomenon in the context of new censorship as developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, see Bourdieu, Pierre: "Cenzura a užití formy", Butler, Judith: "Zavrženo: jazyk cenzury" in Pavlíček, Tomáš, Píša, Petr a Wögerbauer, Michael (Eds.): Nebezpečná literatura? Antologie z myšlení o literární cenzuře. Brno: Host 2012.

apologize for not speaking it (*Memories*: 84). It is also implied that of his four children, the ones who have an active command of it and use it to communicate with their father are his favourite:

(My son Latsi) and my youngest daughter usually speak to me in Gypsy, the rest prefer to speak in Brazilian, but I have learned to respect their preference. (Memories: 134, emphasis mine)

The fact that the narrator has had to make a conscious effort to overcome his displeasure stemming from not being able to use his mother tongue with his own children indicates that the children who are willing to speak it also do not place any obstacles in the way of the father-child relationship. One's mother tongue has a distinct emotional value and not being able to use it can be a traumatising experience - it deprives one of an essential segment of one's identity (Šatava 2001: 41 – 46).

As explained in chapter 1.5, an international standard of written Romani does not exist and local standards of particular dialects are extremely rare. Therefore, when Vishnevsky stated in an email to me “we Gypsies have no alphabet, written that I know off, that is we dont write or read in Gypsy simple because it does not exists”, he was essentially correct.¹⁰⁸ The amount of trouble he would have had to go to, to find a creative editor who would help him develop a transposition key to the sounds of the words in his head, would probably have not been worth it. Hübschmannová frequently remarked (e.g. 2006: 49) upon the technical and emotional difficulties speakers of Romani experienced when confronted for the first time with Romani in writing, due to their lack of institutional instruction pertaining to the language. Walter Ong points out that not having a written form of one's language is not a sign of intellectual deficiency, on the contrary, and he argues (2002: 8) that orality has always been able to exist without literacy, but literacy without orality cannot.

I suggest that behind Vishnevsky's choice of language was necessity first and foremost, as he does not believe it is possible to write in Romani; secondly, English was the language of his most consistent institutional education; and thirdly, it is a language via which

¹⁰⁸ Facebook message to myself from December 10, 2013.

he may reach the largest possible audience¹⁰⁹. Should we look to postcolonial theory for clarification, since India's gaining independence in 1947, English has become the weapon by which "the empire writes back", to use Salman Rushdie's useful phrase¹¹⁰. By employing the processes of abrogation and appropriation (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 37), postcolonial writers adopt the dominant language and adapt it, no longer observing the language's grammar and vocabulary but bending it to serve their own purpose. The idiosyncrasies of Vishnevsky's English may seem to conform to the second phase of this process, but an intention to liberate himself from the power-language is undoubtedly missing.

Regardless of the language of production Victor Vishnevsky ultimately selected, we must always bear in mind the incredible gap between a borrowed system of signs which has an orthography and one's own which does not and is thus – in a typographical culture – rendered mute. Trying to deliver the lifelong experience of Otherness through someone else's mode of communication is a frustrating activity, the success of which can only ever be partially satisfactory.

2.1.3 Elitism and Notions of Whiteness

2.1.3.1 We're more civilized

In the course of the narrative, the author makes numerous comments on food, clothes, accommodation and cleanliness which his family encounter on their travels. Food is often found "horrible", "inedible" and "its stench unbearable" (*Memories*: 44, 29, 89 respectively), hotels are below their usual standard ("it was a middle-class hotel but very comfortable", *Memories*: 83) and countries are "a hundred years behind our time (...) all our lives we lived in a big city, no wonder we were so upset [by Iran's backwardness]" (*Memories*: 49). Among the many examples of what to a casual reader may appear as snobbery, the following statement is particularly telling:

¹⁰⁹ Compare: "The motivation of getting published has pressed many authors to address English speakers and readers rather than traditional indigenous audiences. The English educated audience provides much more secure literary market than the traditional readership could ever offer." (Musilová 2012: 55 – 56)

¹¹⁰ Salman Rushdie "The Empire Writes Back, with a Vengeance", *The Times* 1982: 8.

That night I shall never forget, my morale fell to such an extent that I silently cried. From Shanghai's luxury to a village in the middle of nowhere, sleeping on an old truck. I felt ashamed of myself and of my wife, thinking, "To what degree I have descended". (Memories: 26)

Multiple ideas of status are at work in this extract. Firstly, the author clearly believes village to be inferior to city. As club owners in Shanghai during the Second World War, his family would have mostly mingled with the rich and the foreign and would have had a matching life style, which the author feels they have thus betrayed. He feels he deserves a pampered life and is clearly attracted to the glamour of money and influence, which the episode from Las Vegas ("I wanted with all my soul to be part of it, to go from one casino to the other and see all the shows." *Memories*: 83) and from the ocean liner ("I and my wife's father found ourselves between the highest society of the US." *Memories*: 97) clearly illustrate.

Secondly, as Lovara Vlax Roma, they were likely to observe strict rules of ritual purity, as implied by the otherwise elusive quote "They even brought us soap, which we did not use because we always carried our own, and besides their soap was of a very bad quality" (*Memories*: 117). Rules of ritual purity are to some extent observed by all Romany groups and they cover a large area of hygiene norms to do with the human body, clothes and food, but also metaphorically with matters of individual/group ethics and status. The Lovara, along with the Kalderara or the Gurbeti and Jambazi, rank among the most rigid of followers.¹¹¹ In extreme cases, in particularly ritual-purity conscious Vlax families, each member of the family uses his/her own bar of soap, or alternatively, one bar of soap is used for the upper and one for the lower body. Sleeping on an old truck is both dirty in the traditional sense, as opposed to hygienic (earlier on the same page, V. Vishnevsky points out that the people unfortunate enough not to have beds "*of course* used some sheets to spread on the ground", emphasis mine); it is also *dirtying* in the ritual sense because in his eyes it jeopardizes the family's perceived status.

¹¹¹ For more detailed information about the mutual relationships among the different hypernyms and subethnic labels within the sphere of Romany group names see <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/index.html>, especially Milena Hübschmannová's contributions in the section Ethnology and Groups.

Finally, what is also operating here is what Hübschmannová refers to as “compensatory pseudovalues” (Hübschmannová 1999: 44). She explicates the Roma’s hypersensitivity to the latest fashion, their love of overpriced gadgets and consumerism in general but also their excessive eating habits, often resulting in obesity and alcohol/drug abuse, as ways to compensate for the stereotypes and racism that dark skin is associated with and match the white majority on its own terms.¹¹² She maintains that this is a strategy much more straightforward and less time-consuming than trying to prove one’s worth to one’s antagonists (the *gadje*) through education, manners and class, which take time to obtain and are not immediately apparent (Hübschmannová 1999: 23).

In view of the fact that “anything was better than falling in the hands of the commies” (*Memories*: 25), one would expect the Vishnevskys to make do with available services and accommodation and resign themselves to temporary inconvenience. By dwelling on the degree of discomfort and humiliation this was causing them, Vishnevsky disassociates himself from the stereotype of “the dirty Gypsy”, not the least because “our tribe (is) completely different from those of Kelderasa or Machvaya, our way of living is very similar to those of Gaje” (*Memories*: 139). The author constructs the Lovara as nobility amongst the Roma, simultaneously celebrating their traditional conservative Lovara values and emphasizing their lack of Gypsiness.

2.1.3.2 They have never seen white people in their lives

As a concept and methodological tool, “whiteness” was coined by black American feminists in the 1990s as part of third-wave feminism¹¹³. Its emergence was directly linked

¹¹² This tendency is particularly striking in impoverished ghetto enclaves: although nearly one hundred percent of their inhabitants are on social benefits, most households have a TV and a DVD player, often a satellite dish and young men and women skilfully avoid the mud and sewer of the streets in their shiny white Adidas trainers. Such perceived extravagance in the face of debt and poverty is found inexplicable by the members of the majority populations and lays base for one of the many misunderstandings between the two communities.

¹¹³ I am drawing here on two articles, which have been recommended to me by Iveta Jusová, the associate professor of Women’s Studies at Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio. They are Griffin, Gabrielle & Braidotti, Rosi (2002). “Whiteness and European Situatedness”. in Griffin, Gabrielle & Braidotti, Rosi (eds.) *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women’s Studies*. London/New York: Zed Books, and Imre, Anikó (2005). “Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: the Time of the Gypsies, The End of Race” in López, Alfred J. (ed.) *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Reader on Race and Empire*. Albany: State University of New York.

to the differently-coloured feminists' ongoing struggle to be properly recognized by, and relate to the agenda of, white/Caucasian women, who found themselves in a naturally privileged position. Also, in post-colonial literary studies, a lot of attention had been paid to the perception of blackness by white colonists, but very little to the way colonized peoples perceived whiteness.

When adopted by European gender studies, “whiteness” became particularly important in understanding the rise of anti-Gypsyism after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Griffin and Braidotti (2002) and Imre (2005) make an interesting point whereby they recognize that whiteness is an important point of departure for post-communist countries in their struggle for clear-cut nationhood in a world which has moved past nation states towards a greater European integration. “The myth of cultural homogeneity is crucial to the tale of European nationalism,” notes Griffin; and in this context, the Roma seem an anachronism.

Among the Roma, the shade of skin they are born with directly affects their future. Particularly swarthy people are often dubbed *Kal'i/Kalo*¹¹⁴ and they are not considered prospective marriage partners. Fair or pale skin, on the other hand, equals beauty, and Romany writers working in Romani often use the comparison *parňi sar papiňori*¹¹⁵ or *parňi sar gadži*¹¹⁶ to describe their heroines. By the same token, certain subethnic groups enjoy a higher status because they are generally lighter-skinned – that is handsomer and more easily passing for white - than others; e.g. the East Slovak Roma are famously dark and therefore deemed inferior in certain contexts, whereas all the different groups encompassed by the hypernym Vlach Roma “are appreciated also for being ‘beautiful’, i.e. for having a fair complexion”¹¹⁷. Hübschmannová notes an interesting semantic shift whereby it has become

¹¹⁴ *Black*, fem., masc. – in East Slovak Romani.

¹¹⁵ *White as a little goose* - East Slovak Romani.

¹¹⁶ *White as a gadji, a Non-Romany woman* – East Slovak Romani.

¹¹⁷ Milena Hübschmannová at <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/index.html>: Ethnology and groups: Roma in Czechia and Slovakia: Vlach Roma (Rombase 2003).

common to say *jov šukar sar Vlaxos*¹¹⁸ among the (generally darker-skinned) Slovak Roma.¹¹⁹

But Victor Vishnevsky takes the notion of whiteness as a prestigious quality of the Lovara one step further. On two occasions in his memoir, he differentiates between himself and others by directly calling himself white. In the first instance, his family have arrived to Kweilin, China, en route to Iran, and have put on a show to cover travel costs. This is his comment:

To our surprise it was a complete success, it paid our food, hotel, and even a little bit over for our minor expenses. (...) The simple country people were astonished just to see white women and men singing and dancing, it was amazing to see their faces. (Memories: 22)

The author evidently identifies country people with ignorance and dark skin, even though the audience of their show must have been Asian in appearance, and conversely, he identifies city people with culture and fair skin.

In a similar situation thirteen pages later, he again relates the family's progress across China towards the Burmese boarder saying:

The peasants were completely changing their form, I mean physically. They looked not like Chinese but some what darker, the further we went the darker they got. (...) [The inhabitants of a particular village] began to return, but more for curiosity, some of them have never seen white people in their lives. (Memories: 36)

¹¹⁸ *He is as handsome as a Vlax Roma* – East Slovak Romani.

¹¹⁹ This is analogous to the Indian subcontinent, where fair complexion is considered an undisputed and sought-for value and is often one of the requirements in arranged marriages, especially in women. The prestigiousness of fair skin is usually explained by the historical divide between the Brahmans (the descendants of the ruling classes of fair-skinned Aryans) and the Shudras, or dark-skinned natives of Dravidian origin (Krása, Miloslav, Marková, Dagmar, Zbavitel, Dušan: *Indie a Indové od dávnověku k dnešku*, Praha: Vyšehrad 1997, p. 324). Markéta Musilová's off-the-cuff remark (Musilová 2012: 163) that "only a (n Indian) girl who mastered English was marriable, apart from having the fairest complexion possible" is also telling.

As discussed in chapter 1.4, ideologically the world for the Roma is divided along the lines of *us, the Roma* and *them, the Non-Roma/the gadje*. In this power relation, the Roma have always been the disempowered, oppressed and objectified party, whereas the Non-Roma are automatically the dominant. But in the two situations quoted above, this relationship is reversed and it is Victor Vishnevsky's family who dominate and objectify "the simple country people", who are also represented as black. Furthermore, this is not done merely in action – by enlightening the simple villagers with their city folk's bravado and skills – but also symbolically, by relating the events in writing, which is supposedly denied the Chinese country men. Such a seizure of power is final, because it is beyond the objectified villagers' sphere of influence.

Although V. Vishnevsky's declared aim is to leave an image of himself to his loved ones and to speak on behalf of all Roma, he ultimately speaks from the position of the "white" Lovara elite, which he constructs with his narrative. "The Roma" which he is talking about cannot speak. They represent the subaltern who cannot read and write and/or are living in subhuman conditions in the various socially excluded communities across the world. In Spivak's words "the Third World can enter the resistance program of an alliance politics directed against a 'unified repression' only when it is confined to the third-world groups that are directly accessible to the First World" (Spivak 1998: 84, original emphasis). The image of "the Roma" as successful white entrepreneurs and businessmen, which the author offers for the majority readers' inspection, only applies to himself and his extended family; the subaltern as Roma remain mute.

2.2 Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies

Memories of a Gypsy is first and foremost a life story. It is a story of a man who would like to relate the events of his unusual life because he believes the readers might be interested in his extensive travels and his life as a Gypsy. In doing so, he "names a silenced life" in Tierney's sense.

A handful of years ago, the challenge might have been to "name silenced lives" as a way to provide voice for those who had been left out of history's picture. If one were to read only formalized histories, one might mistakenly presume, for example, that African Americans,

American Indians, gay and lesbian people, and other marginalized groups did not exist prior to a generation ago. (Tierney 2000: 545, emphasis mine).

Tierney further suggests that life history should not be viewed “as an entryway through which the author and reader might understand a culture different from their own” but rather as a process “whereby the researcher and reader come to understand the semiotic means by which someone else makes sense of the world” (Tierney 2000: 545). In this chapter I will attempt to do exactly that.

Although naturally Victor Vishnevsky had had no clear plan to fit in with literary history before he wrote his life story and he understands writing in the broadest sense of the word, it can still be read in a number of ways. In her analysis of Afro-American autobiographies, Nina Bosničová has noted that they often pose as different genres e.g. Bildungsroman, success story, sentimental novel or conversion narrative in order to imitate forms the white readers are familiar with and that way to secure their attention (Bosničová 2007: 25). Often, though, they conform to the genre merely formally while pursuing a hidden racial or sexual agenda. Whether the same can be said about V. Vishnevsky’s book is another question I will try to answer.

I will be looking at several interpretative frameworks of *Memories of a Gypsy*, each of which highlights a different characteristic of the text.

2.2.1 Bildungsroman

One part of any man’s or woman’s life history is personal growth. Not only is the author of the memoir making sense of his life; in the process he also intends to instruct or motivate his reader by learning from his mistakes. As an autobiographical chronological narrative containing the chronotope of a journey, *Memories* appear to reflect this tradition.

Thus Vishnevsky is seemingly sorry for his unfaithfulness to his wife Maita in his younger years and praises her for her loyalty:

I must confess that in my youth I was no saint, I gave my wife a lot of trouble throughout our marriage, and some how we went through it for forty-two years and thanks God we are still going strong. (Memories: 136)

In-between the lines it becomes evident that rather than feeling remorse, womanizing is part of his patriarchal image. Apart from his wife Maita, numerous lovers and “flames” are mentioned by name (numbers relate to pages in *Memories*: Tamara 15, Aza 16, Cynthia 44, Rita White 52, wealthy widow 97 etc.). The quote above does not try to diminish their number; on the contrary, it adds to it and lends Vishnevsky an aura of an irresistible heartbreaker. As Hübschmannová points out (1999: 54), the Romany husband is traditionally expected to do as he chooses and when it comes to cheating on his wife, unfaithfulness is not considered a big enough breach of marital life to seek divorce. In a novella by Irena Eliášová (*O kham zadžal imar tosarla/ The sun sets already in the morning*; unpublished), a wife is reprimanding her husband for open unfaithfulness and the husband responds: “Já můžu, já jsem chlap, ale ty ne!”¹²⁰ Vishnevsky does not wish to conceal his misconduct; he wants it to be known.

In another attempt to demonstrate aging and learning, the author says:

I don't like to be radical on sports, or politics, but very rarely, where my family is concerned. You have to be radical on some issues, may be it is my age. I admit that in time I have changed, as a matter of fact everything changes in the long run, all you have to do is look at yourself in the mirror in the morning and you have your answer. Finally the time was set for them to get married. (Memories: 125 – 126)

The build-up of expectations towards the big rethinking of Victor Vishnevsky's life is suddenly aborted and ends in a radical change of the subject. I suggest that the narrator's extremely conservative male standpoint, which is characterized by rigid ideas (e.g. on the nonexistence of homosexual men among Roma, *Memories*: 16), is marked by an unwillingness to show any kind of weakness by changing his mind or opinions.

This would explain why the narrator constructs the protagonist as an infallible authority obeyed and looked up to by everyone, including his parents and the clan's elders, at the non-authoritative age of eighteen:

¹²⁰ “I'm allowed to (be seeing other women), I'm a man, but you can't!”

I knew that this was it, we were captured. I told everybody to keep as quiet as possible, not to panic under any circumstances. I told everyone to sit in their places (...). (Memories: 27)

The hierarchy of a Romany community, especially one so conservative as the Lovara, would not allow the protagonist to be the leader at his age; decisions would be made by his father or another older experienced male. The narrator is projecting his older self, one deemed respectable and influential by his community, onto his younger one:

Here among our Gypsies I have a certain respect, and being a godfather, to a Gypsy is a very serious thing (...). (Memories: 136)

Vishnevsky tries to communicate with the tradition of demonstrating wisdom in the autumn of his life but his Romany male self inhibits this effort. Judging from the numerous references in the text, he is a phenomenal musician (*Memories: 22, 57, 60*), a natural-born leader (*Memories: 27, 44*), a popular man who throws the best parties (*Memories: 104, 116*), a cunning businessman (*Memories: 51, 93*) and also sexually irresistible (*Memories: 44, 52, 97, 136*). There is no hint of irony and no perceived distancing of the author from his written self.

The patriarchal milieu from which V. Vishnevsky's narrative stems allows for statements such as "The consul, amazingly, was a woman," (*Memories: 78*) or "I saw a lot of pure Negroes (...) the stench of their sweat was unbearable, the whole wharf was invaded by it," (*Memories: 90*). They show extreme conservatism, patriarchy and racism, and simultaneously the self-assuredness of an individual whose opinions have rarely been challenged.

The protagonist shows very little development in terms of maturity or sensibility because from the very start, he has constructed himself to already have all the answers. Even if the author would like his life story to also thematize personal development, it only repeats the conservative ideas of a Lovara Romany man.

2.2.2 Slave Narratives

H. L. Gates, Jr. places the black slave and his narrative in which he "railed against the arbitrary and inhumane learning (...) foisted upon slaves to reinforce a perverse fiction

of the ‘natural’ order of things” (Gates 1989: 128) at the beginning of Afro-American literary tradition. In these *slave* or *great-escape narratives*, the formerly silenced members of the oppressed minority tell the story of their dangerous flight and their final deliverance from the ultimate evil of slavery, and in doing so, they find their own voice in writing (Gates 1989: 21).

The slave, by definition, possessed at most a liminal status within the human community. To read and to write was to transgress this nebulous realm of liminality. (Gates 1989: 128)

There can be no doubt that Victor Vishnevsky wishes to cross exactly this threshold of anonymity and inconsequence with his writing. More interestingly, his narrative also has a very clear great-escape plan. Both of the Vishnevskys’ prolonged journeys were initially motivated by their unwillingness to live under communist rule.

The communist is a totalitarian country. (...) Lenin saw to it that the royal family of Russia was liquidated, he abolished all types of religion, confiscated all private property, and prohibited freedom of speech and the freedom of the press and movement. (...) Imagine, who would not be afraid from such a regime? And the Gypsies love freedom above all things, this type of government meant hell to us. (Memories: 14 - 15)

With a certain degree of naïvety, the author identifies communists with all things negative and dangerous, for example a cruel man must automatically be “a commie spy” (*Memories*: 24) and being captured by communists is the worst kind of captivity (“On the way up, a lot of horrible things passed through my mind. After all, this was the first time we were captured by the commies.” *Memories*: 28)

In opposition to the threat of totality, Vishnevsky poses freedom – and not just any kind of freedom, but *Gypsy* freedom. “*To a Gypsy freedom is everything in life, we are said to be born free.*” (*Memories*: 73) While this may be true about the cosmopolitan Vishnevskys, the staggering majority of Roma across the globe are in fact sedentary, and

have been for generations¹²¹. Vishnevsky's promotion of the love of freedom amongst the Roma is a good example of misrecognition, whereby the dominated object unconsciously supports the schematic idea of Gypsyhood held by the dominating Non-Roma and internalises it, even if it only applies to himself and his family.

The Vishnevskys left Russia and later China in order to preserve their unique source of livelihood - the entertainment business - which would have been ruled bourgeois and exploitative by the people's regime and as such banned:

Now we were off to the unknown, to Iran (...). What I found in the books [about Iran] I did not like, the country was small, very poor and Islamic. Christians were not respected too much, and for us to find jobs was difficult, particularly musicians. But there was one hope, there were a lot of different nationalities (...) which I thought will be some help to do business with. (Memories: 47)

It is also noteworthy that once the Vishnevskys found satisfactory living conditions and a good alternative source of livelihood, they settled down. Their finding a safe harbour in South America has a parallel in ex-slaves finding liberty in the American North in great escape narratives.

2.2.3 Imaginary Homelands

As discussed in some detail in chapter 2.1.1, Victor Vishnevsky does not recognize any one country to be his original home and his relationship to Brazil is merely a matter of convenience. Nevertheless, he does feel a mild affiliation to India.

In the two years that I lived in India I learned to believe that we Gypsies are from there and nowhere else. (...) For example their language is very similar to ours (...). They count from one to ten exactly like we do (...). There are hundred of words they use as we do, like eyes, hair, lips, ears, mouth, far, old etc. etc. (...) The women were dressed the same way like our women were dressed in Russia a century ago. (Memories: 47)

¹²¹ This will become much clearer once I move on to analyse the works of semi-itinerant Mikey Walsh and fully sedentarised Irena Eliášová and Andrej Giňa.

Leaving aside the fact that the Indian origin of the Roma has been known for over two hundred years¹²² and it is unlikely the author would have been completely in the dark concerning this, his colloquially-worded fieldwork confirmation of this discovery is valuable, even if he does not specify which Indic language he has compared Romani to.

It has become fashionable for the Romany intellectual elite to express their longing for the long-lost homeland¹²³ and to look for further support of this relation. For the ordinary Roma, on the other hand, though they might be aware of their origin, India has no real bearing. It is a distant inconsequential place whose authorities will not give them jobs or pay their benefits, and placing one's hopes on India must be seen as the intellectual's slightly unrealistic pastime¹²⁴. In this respect, Vishnevsky proves his activist motivation; for him, India stands as the twice-removed "imaginary homeland".

Rushdie explains in his famous essay:

(...) writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim (...). Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means

¹²² Johann Rüdiger identified the Indic origin of Romani in 1782.

¹²³ For instance Vlado Oláh in his epic poem "Ko sam, khatar sam, kaj džas?"/"Who are we, where are we from, where are we going?" (1996, for private circulation only) maintains "Pharo hin Romes dživipen, phare jiloreha phirel. E phuv leskeri Indija, Than Baro leskero;" – "The Roma have a hard lot, they live their lives with sadness in their hearts. Their country is India, their great homeland." Emil Cina in his fairy-tale "Pal baro kamiben"/"About great love" (in *Devla, devla! Básně a povídky po Romech*, Praha: Dauphin 2008, pp. 60 – 63) talks about a place "far away from us, where the Sun and people with good hearts live, children are raised with song, dance and work and their houses are clad in gold and flowers" ("Dur amendar, kaj o kham džal peskero drom, dživenas manuša lačheha jileha. O čhave bararenas avri giľaha, kheľibnaha the buľaha. Lengere khera esas obthode somnakajeha the kvitkenca."). This distant place which is the location of a falling-out between two lovers which ultimately leads to their people's travelling lifestyle is of course meant to be India.

¹²⁴ For example, during a meeting with the Indian Minister of Culture in 2001, the IRU leadership asked for the statute of "people of Indian origin" for the Roma and the issuance of Indian passports. The leadership's vote on this was not unanimous and the Indian authorities quietly ignored the request. It may have been a spontaneous act inspired by the unique opportunity of speaking to the Indian minister, nevertheless, it was out of step with the IRU's official stance on the Romany people's nationhood, which at the time was "nation-without-a-state" It was also unclear in which way the granting of Indian passports would have been profitable to the Roma across the world. (Marushiakova, Popov 2004: 83)

that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short create fictions (...) imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 2010: 10)

Even Vishnevsky is haunted by a vague sensation of loss or absence but it differs from the one described by Salman Rushdie as pertaining to postcolonial writers who try to recreate “an India of the mind”. India has never been his home, despite the temporary residence. Not only is he subject to “a physical fact of discontinuity, (...) being in a different place from his past” (Rushdie 2010: 12); it was not his or his family’s past in the first place – only by proxy and a thousand years ago.

When Salman Rushdie identifies the creation of “imaginary homelands” as one of the founding characteristics of postcolonial literature, he naturally refers to writers who have not only had direct or indirect experience of colonization and cultural subordination, but who have also received English education and are well-versed in the English literary canon. This knowledge is then used subversively, the classic works are re-written to reflect the colonised peoples’ experience – the empire writes back. Victor Vishnevsky, on the other hand, even if as a Roma he shares the experience of the marginalised and dominated with postcolonial writers, lacks their formal educational background.

The first half of the 20th century was marked by the search for “Romanestan” by the Romany elites, the promised land of the Roma. Attempts took place to gain territory in e.g. South Africa, India, Ethiopia, Austria and France (Marushiakova, Popov 2004: 75 - 78). They never had unanimous support, partly because of the vast differences between Roma in different European countries, but also because communication on the international level was far more difficult than it is today. In the second half of the century, Romanestan increasingly turned into a metaphor for the universal Romany brotherhood rather than the actual search for a country. In 1971, at the first World Romani Congress in London, where the Romany anthem and flag were accepted to serve as universally recognised symbols of the Romany people, the rallying cry became: “We must create Romanestan – in our hearts.”¹²⁵

To view *Memories of a Gypsy* as a literary search for the imaginary homeland is only partially satisfactory, as V. Vishnevsky as an author lacks the intentionally postmodern

¹²⁵ Quoted from Kabachnik, Peter: *The Place of the Nomad: Situating Gypsy and Traveller Mobility in Contemporary England*, a dissertation at the University of California, Los Angeles 2007: 178.

approach to writing found amongst postcolonial writers. Neither is it homeland as India he seeks to establish through his narrative because his link to it is tentative, intellectual rather than emotional. His book thematises a sense of belonging more immediate, personal and one that he has always carried with him – it is his *romipen*, his Romany way of being. It is “the Romanestan in his heart”.

2.2.4 Construction – De-Construction

It has been hinted more than once that Victor Vishnevsky often declares one thing, while implying another in-between the lines. While officially trying to deconstruct the dominant’s stereotypical thinking about Gypsies, he confirms it or creates new dogmas. He seems to be unable to disassociate himself from the forceful images popularly held by members of the majority, but likewise he is unwilling to speak plainly about himself and his people. Opaqueness and contradiction are highly characteristic of his style. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin identify this tendency as typical of the writing of oppressed peoples:

A characteristic of dominated literatures is an inevitable tendency towards subversion, and a study of the subversive strategies employed by post-colonial writers would reveal both the configurations of domination and the imaginative responses to this condition. (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 32)

Of the different concepts that Vishnevsky addresses in his double-edged way, I am going to discuss his ideas about Gypsy politics, Gypsy sentimentality and Gypsy solidarity.

Vishnevsky operates within a doctrine which is popular amongst the Roma and which conforms to the largely shared mythology of the Roma as a peaceful people who do not wage wars on others¹²⁶: “The whole world knows that Gypsies do not get involved in politics

¹²⁶ This is well illustrated in Gejza Demeter’s fairy-tale “O princezně Jolance” (“Jolana the Princess”). The Romany king has plundered his kingdom by constantly waging wars on neighbouring kingdoms. Increasing debts make him swap his daughter Jolana for a magic pouch, which never runs out of money. Not only does he lose Jolana to the evil magician, he is also captured by the other kings and put in prison, where he eventually dies. The young Romany hero, who rescues Jolana, marries her and becomes the new king, “ruled well and justly. He never waged any wars on anyone” (in Demeter, Gejza: *Ráj na zemi*, Praha: Triáda 2011, p. 70). Similarly in another text from the same collection, the Romany leader says to the Indian king: “Our people have never waged wars on other peoples and never will.” (“*Ráj na zemi*” in Demeter, Gejza: *Ráj na zemi*, p. 20). Emil Cina in his modern myth “*Pal o manuša so mariben na kerenas*” (“The People Who Did

(*Memories*: 5).” On the face of things, where politics is used in the original Greek meaning of “the affairs of the cities”, i.e. matters of governments and governing, this observation may seem correct. Romany politicians (e.g. as MPs in majority parliaments) are a rare and usually temporary sight. It would be easy to blame such lack of representation on the insufficient number of adequately educated Roma or the ingrained racism of the electorate who do not support Romany representatives, but reality is even more complex.

As noted by political scientists (Marek Kašpar in Reichová 2001: 199; Vermeersch 2006: 164 - 166), the Roma in general have three choices – to establish their own ethnic party, whose agenda fails to attract majority voters; to join hands with other minorities, whose interests and needs may be of different nature, or to try to enlist as members of a major political party, for whom the ethnic minority programme will never be predominant. “Gypsies do not get involved in politics” not because they lack interest, but because they find it difficult to negotiate their own space in it from which to operate.

But politics as the practise of influencing other people in order to achieve something deemed useful or profitable for oneself is in fact crucial to the Romany way of life and more so for the Vishnevskys’ line of business. Inadvertently, the author reveals how, along their travels, the family became involved in a lot of politics, conversing with local authorities in order to get permission for their show, dining with ambassadors in order to gain visas or negotiating with policemen in order to get someone arrested or released. Especially the establishment of bars, restaurants and jewellery shops during the tumultuous war times would have needed a lot of red tape, and that in turn required skilful communication with individuals in power.

More importantly, the whole book is intended as a piece of political activism. Salman Rushdie (2010: 13 – 16) defies the idea that fiction does not do enough to contribute to public affairs and calls the very act of writing political, because it captures a version of reality rivalling the one moulded by politicians. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. expresses the same idea with more attention being paid to the meaning of typography for formally oral cultures:

Not Make Wars” in *Devla, devla! Básně a povídky o Romech*, Praha: Dauphin 2008, pp. 64 - 67) explains the Roma’s itinerant lifestyle by running from wars, which are punished by natural disasters: “O Roma lenge phenen, kaj o mariben te na keren, bo e phuv chala pre savore cholí jagali.” (“The Roma told them [the warring people] not to make wars because the Earth will consume them with fire.”)

Precisely because successive Western cultures have privileged written art over oral or musical forms, the writing of black people in Western languages has, at all points, remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject. (Gates 1989: 132)

As the first literary undertakings written in Romani by Romany subjects come from the 1920s in Russia, and they have become more frequent across the globe only since the Second World War, it is evident that as a body of writing, “RomLit” must be political, both for its appropriation of the dominating majorities’ tools of expression and for the description of the world according to them.

“We Gypsies are very sentimental (...).” (*Memories*: 44) On numerous occasions, the author relates moments of parting or celebrating when a large group of Roma cry for unhappiness or joy. He presents this as a virtue specific to the Roma; he would like to tap into the stereotype of the passionate Gypsy who feels rather than thinks, acts on impulse rather than plans.¹²⁷ But this stands in stark contrast to his (and others’) utter lack of sentimentality where members of the majority are concerned. In Calcutta, the protagonist has an extramarital relationship with a girl called Cynthia. “Poor girl took me for granted, and wanted to marry me under any circumstances,” he maintains (*Memories*: 45). But when the wife finds out and his lover attempts suicide, he demonstrates an emotional detachment which is hard to reconcile with “Gypsy sentimentality”. “Her father called the police, and I had to accompany them to the police station (*Ibid.*),” is the protagonist’s only comment on this episode. A Non-Romany does not deserve sympathy (see 2.1.1).

“One thing is good among all Gypsies throughout the world, a Gypsy in distress will always be helped by other Gypsies.” (*Memories*: 82) The idea of the universal Romany brotherhood is constantly being disrupted by Vishnevsky’s strong sense of the Lovara Roma’s superiority and unwillingness to mingle with the others. “As far as my sons and daughters are concerned, they try to avoid the local Gypsies as much as possible. I don’t blame them, because I am to blame in a way,” he states on page 139, seemingly unaware of his earlier insinuations. I believe two impulses are at work here, and they are both too strong

¹²⁷ Similarly, this quality of Black writing was allegedly promoted by the Négritude movement, compare: “Black culture, it claimed, was emotional rather than rational; it stressed integration and wholeness over analysis and dissection; it operated by distinctive rhythmic and temporal principles, and so forth.” (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 20).

to resist: firstly, the Indian-based need to keep distance from lower, ritually impure castes, following the strict rules of commensality (i.e. rules of partaking of food from the same table) and secondly, a real sense of the brotherhood of all Roma regardless of their different status, strengthened by the Roma's position in the world as the ultimate Other.

2.3 Conclusion

It has been firmly established by social scientists that the Roma's ongoing struggle for recognition on equal basis both within their respective nation states and on an international level nowadays takes the form of nationalism¹²⁸ (Reichová 2001, Vermeersch 2006, Mayall 2004, Marushiakova, Popov 2004, Acton 2001). Although the danger of the extreme form of nationalism has been fully recognized since the Second World War at the latest, many scholars have pointed out that, as a phenomenon, the nation has an unrivalled position in today's world (Anthony Smith quoted in Šatava 2001: 25) and that we are in fact living in an age of nationalism (Reichová 2001: 17). Others have noted the colonial tendencies informing radical constructivism as an act of exogenous analysis (Elšík 2005, discussed at length in chapter 1.4).

Radical constructivists fail to find common grounds for the highly heterogeneous Romany groups and consider the idea of a unified Romany nation far-fetched (Marushiakova, Popov 2004: 88 – 89), while the more traditionally thinking scholars of the essentialist kind not only recognize the Roma as an ethnic minority, but based on their fieldwork sometimes believe they fulfil all the requirements of a nation, with the whole world as their territory (Reichová 2001: 27, 29). Between the two extremes spans a whole area of various transitional cases.

The project of the Roma as a non-territorial nation has been around since at least the first World Romani Congress in 1971 (see 2.2.3); it was developed in 1994 by Paolo Pietrosanti, a Non-Romany member of the IRU leadership, in a widely circulated essay called *Project for a Non-Territorial Republic of the Romany Nation*¹²⁹ but as a predominant

¹²⁸ By nationalism I mean the neutrally defined term descriptive of “an ideological system serving to support the creation, mobilisation and integration of a larger solidarity union – a nation” (Hans-Ulrich Wehler quoted in Hroch 2005: 19) and not the sociopathological phenomenon of extreme patriotism characterised by lack of tolerance and violence towards other groups.

¹²⁹ Pietrosanti maintains in his article that following the end of Cold War, the world has lost its – albeit tragic – point of balance, followed by the increase of nationalism. He views states as territories as outdated and

strategy of the international Romany movement it was passed at the Vth IRU congress in Prague in 2000. Available literature suggests that while most Romany activists¹³⁰ relate to the nation-without-a-state doctrine on a symbolic level, there exists a schism regarding the notion of practicability of the project between the “Western” and the “Eastern” Roma (Marushiakova, Popov 2004: 94 - 95.) The “Western” Roma often represented by members of some of the Vlax groups (including Lovara) who change their residence every few generations, demonstrate lower integration into their nation states than their “Eastern” counterparts, and they are readier to relate to a supranational non-territorial Romany community. They constitute their identity as close to indigenous populations such as Native Americans.

The “Eastern” Roma from Central and Eastern Europe, on the other hand, have not embraced the non-territorial nation project very willingly because they are relatively better integrated into their nation states and feel loyalty to the country whose citizenship they hold. They would like to be accepted as an ethnic minority and the promotion of the Roma as a non-territorial state makes them suspicious, lest their respective states want to shed their responsibility for the Romany communities’ problems (Vermeersch 2006: 163 - 164). Loosely, the “Eastern” pattern of framing Romany identity corresponds to the Eastern model of nationalism according to Anthony Smith, whereby given, primordial ethnicity based on common roots combined with a shared mother tongue (Romani) form the most important aspect of one’s identity (Reichová 2001: 25). As a result, one can be an ethnic Roma AND the citizen of his country of residence and the two concepts are not mutually exclusive.¹³¹

suggests the Roma declare “the Romany Republic” without claiming territory, that way serving as role models for other ethnic groups involved in ethnic conflicts. Although as such his proposition is far from flawless (e.g. he suggests Romany Republic passport holders do military service only in the UN’s peacekeeping forces, not in their respective countries) and would have needed elaboration, it lay the basis for future negotiations.

¹³⁰ Such as they are, i.e. the members of the Romany elites of the respective countries who go public to express what they consider to be opinions shared by the silent majority of their community. Their post is often equally based on tradition and chance, not the actual support of their Romany voters in the democratic sense.

¹³¹ The Eastern model of nationalism will become much more prominent when I analyse the works of Irena Eliášová and Andrej Giňa.

Victor Vishnevsky as a representative of “Western”¹³² Roma clearly advocates the right of the Roma to a supranational identity with no claims to territory. He proclaims himself both in his book and in his correspondence a political activist for the Gypsy cause, and as such *Memories* must be viewed as a vehicle of Romany nationalism.

He thinks in binary oppositions: us, the Roma, are all brothers, while them, the *gadje* (Non-Roma), are our adversaries who can be advantageous to us in various respects (business, erotic) but can never be treated on equal measures. Despite his pretences to *gadjo* ways and whiteness, he demonstrates features of inverted racism.

Nonetheless, he also demonstrates class distancing from his fellow Roma one does not usually associate with marginalised groups. We expect Roma to be discriminated against by the dominating powers rather than to discriminate others, let alone their own. Evidently, Vishnevsky negotiates his identity between two positions, choosing between them according to context: that of a proud Roma, one of a non-territorial nation of homogenous Romanies, aimed centripetally and displaying emancipatory and nationalist tendencies; and that of a *better Gypsy*, emphasizing the extreme heterogeneousness of the people, aimed centrifugally and motivated by the wish to merge with the surrounding *gadjo* majority. These versions of his identity coexist and are utilised strategically.

As to Vishnevsky’s memoir displaying familiarity with existing literary genres and narrative techniques, I have found very little evidence thereof. The only exception is Bildungsroman, where Vishnevsky’s writing demonstrates a willingness to instruct and motivate but does not fulfil it.

Likewise, there are no hidden agendas parading as established literary genres in the sense that Bosničová recognizes amongst Afro-American authors of life-stories; the author’s two aims are out in the open: *Memories* should serve his family to remember him by and they are an act of political activism to support the idea of Roma as a non-territorial nation.

Salman Rushdie concludes *Imaginary Homelands* by suggesting that “Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition (...) the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group” (2010: 20). While I recognize that the starting point of postcolonial and Romany writing differs dramatically in

¹³² Inverted commas here are obligatory because the Vishnevsky’s clan’s origin is in Hungary, an Eastern-European country, but their originally itinerant and later cosmopolitan lifestyle has shaped their sense of global belonging and livelihood self-sufficiency.

terms of the author's educational background, I can see a parallel between the postcolonial authors' being formerly subject to the epistemic violence of representation by others in writing, rather than representing themselves, and the Roma's former lack of even the most basic way of responding to the majority's (un)romantic image of the Gypsy. The notion of "a second tradition", what in Jewish American literary studies is usually referred to as "usable past", I find to be a determining factor of both sets of writing. For the time being and perhaps for a long time into the future, the Roma's *romipen* is the single most important motivation for, and topic and theme of, their writing.

3 The Gay Man

“Almost all Gypsy men are violent, it’s ingrained in the culture and the life they lead and impossible to avoid.”

(Mikey Walsh: Gypsy Boy p. 42)

The man hiding under the pseudonym Mikey Walsh was born into a family of legendary bare-knuckle Gypsy-Romany fighters. Bare-knuckle boxing or prize-fighting has a long tradition among British Travellers in general but the English *Romanichal*¹³³ in particular, as brought witness to by Jimmy Stockins’ collaborative life-story *On the Cobbles: The Life of a Bare-Knuckle Gypsy Warrior* (2000)¹³⁴. As his father’s first son, Mikey Walsh had been destined to cement the family’s position as the undefeated champions of the sport for three successive generations. The great paradox of the expectations placed on him was that in the highly masculine and patriarchal milieu of the English Roma, he grew up with an acute dislike of violence, and he was gay. His already precarious situation was further exacerbated by the fact that he was sexually abused by his Uncle Joseph but no one believed him and he was severely punished for the insinuations.

Unable to withstand his father’s violence and the community’s disdain any longer, at the age of 15 Mikey Walsh eloped. *Gypsy Boy* (2009) and *Gypsy Boy on the Run* (2011) tell the story of a ritually impure “freak among Gypsies” (*Gypsy Boy*: 175), who had to take

¹³³ Mikey Walsh never uses this ethnonym, choosing instead to refer to his community as Romany Gypsies (e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 158). However, in relevant literature and especially in older accounts by English Roma, the preferred label of this sub-ethnic group is *The Romanichal*, sometimes spelt as *Romany Chals* (see e.g. Colin & Greenfields 2006: 15 or Sandford 2000: 29).

¹³⁴ The anthropologist Judith Okely, whose monograph on the English Roma, *The Traveller Gypsies*, still stands uncontested in the British context, remarks on the symbolic value of being able to fight (e.g. Okely 1983/2002: 171, 180, 188) but does not actually refer to the sport as bare-knuckle boxing or prize-fighting. The editors of Jimmy Stockins’ life-story, Martin King and Martin Knight, maintain in their introduction that in the 18th century “one of the names who fought in Broughton’s amphitheatre was Gypsy ‘Prince’ Boswell, which suggests that Gypsy bare-knuckle fighters were very much part of the prize-fighting scene even in those formative years” (Stockins 2000: 21). Apparently, bare-knuckle boxing has always been favoured by the British working classes and the travelling people, as shown in popular culture, e.g. the film *Snatch* (d. Guy Ritchie 2000).

leave of the familiar environment of the travellers' sites where schooling was no asset, to face the education-oriented hostile *gadjo* world on his own. The story of his abuse, as emotionally charged as it is, serves as but a backdrop to the larger drama of his conflicting identities.

Being Romany and being gay are viewed as mutually exclusive in his culture and it lands the narrator in a painful in-betweenness¹³⁵. He is acutely aware of his difference both among the *gadje* and the gays,¹³⁶ while being paralysed by a deep sense of loss for his original community.

To protect those he has left behind, both books are provided with an identical publisher's note: "Mikey Walsh is a pseudonym. All names and other identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of Mikey's family. Some characters are not based on any one person but are composite characters." He has been charged by part of the media and some individuals with having had his story ghost-written. I address a particular case of such an accusation in some detail in chapter 3.2.2 and argue to the contrary. Formally, the story conforms to the genre of coming-out narrative, but transcends it in the complexity of the issues of belonging addressed in it.

3.1 Identity

3.1.1 Masculinity

The sweeping majority of Romany communities across the world do not recognize homosexuality as a legitimate form of sexuality. It is considered a disease, often perceived as contracted by the individual by exposing him- or herself to immediate contact with the *gadjo* world¹³⁷, and is believed to be curable by heterosexual marriage¹³⁸. A differently

¹³⁵ Homi K. Bhabha developed the notion of in-betweenness, or liminality, in his innovative study *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge 1994). Its implications for *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run* shall be discussed in Chapter 3.3.

¹³⁶ David Tišer, a Romany gay-rights activist in the Czech Republic, has been using the term "triple discrimination" to describe this predicament: discriminated against as a Roma, as a gay person and as a gay person among Roma.

¹³⁷ See Houdek 2009: 9 and compare: "I had become everything Gypsies despise. I was gay. I had caught a disease that could only be found in the world outside (...)." (*Gypsy Boy*: 200)

¹³⁸ This is portrayed in a semi-documentary way in the film *Roma Boys: A Love Story* (directed by Rozálie Kohoutová 2009). David Tišer's Vlach Romany boyfriend is on coming out to his family brutally beaten and

oriented Romany individual is perceived as a threat to the community's integrity; they are ritually unclean, contact with them is besmearing and the disease potentially catching. This is best demonstrated by the rules of commensality: gay and lesbian Roma may not be served any food or drink in a home, or only with a separate set of crockery which is later discarded or kept for the same person's future use¹³⁹. In the meantime no one else touches it. The existence of homosexuality amongst the Roma is generally ignored or denied:

[The Traveller - Gypsies] believed that men who abused children – just like gay men – simply didn't exist in the Gypsy community. (Gypsy Boy II: 248)

Although in accordance with the secretive attitude the communities adopt it is barely discussed in Romany writing as a topic, references to views on homosexuality can still be traced. Victor Vishnevsky in his *Memories of a Gypsy* bluntly states that “we have a very few homosexuals among our race” (2006: 16, see Chapter 2.2.1), believing this is caused by an early start in male sexual activity. Jan Herák-Arpy in his account of his prison sentence emphasises he would never share a drink or cigarette with an otherwise likeable gay convict Flek (*Za mřížemi*, Společenství Romů na Moravě 2003, p. 73). Emil Cina's short-story “Džas ko papus” (“Visiting Grandpa”, *Romano vod'i* 10/2011, p. 28) suggests that transsexuals, or members of the community who fully adapt to the role of the opposite sex, are received more

then forced to marry a Vlax woman who has been divorced by her husband i.e. also carries a social stigma among the Roma.

¹³⁹ Data based on multiple interviews with Roma, but especially David Tišer and Michal Miko, two Romany gay activists based in Prague. The sociologist Tomáš Kobes testifies to this effect among the Slovak rural Roma where, he maintains, “the practise of discarding objects which have been in contact with homosexuals is extremely widespread” (Kobes 2013: 24). Kobes has observed two parallel trends in the East-Slovak Romany settlements: on the one hand, there operates a strong heteronormative pattern, on the other hand, strategies are developed by the differently-sexually-oriented subjects to re-integrate themselves into the standing social order (Kobes 2013: 7). Helena Krobotová, a Czech-born Romany lesbian resident in Canada, said about her first relationship with a Romany girlfriend: “In Jesenicko region, we kept our relationship secret. My girlfriend worked in education and I in social services and [coming out] would have caused trouble. Romany parents would have come to the headmistress and told her that they do not want a ‘dyke’ to be touching their kids.” (Ondřej Nezbeda: “Jsem kokos. S truckerkou Helenou Krobotovou o životě v Kanadě, homosexualitě mezi Romy a hořícím kamionu.”/“I’m a coconut. An interview with the truck-driver Helena Krobotová about her life in Canada, homosexuality among the Roma and the burning truck. *Respekt* No. 6/2010, p. 41).

favourably than gay people¹⁴⁰. The greatest parallel to Mikey Walsh's openness about his sexual identity and the ensuing conflict with his community can be found in the work of the Finnish-Romany lesbian Kiba Lumberg. In the *Memesa* trilogy (*Memesa-trilogia*, Turku: Sammako 2011¹⁴¹), K. Lumberg is if anything even more critical of the rigidity of traditional Romany values than Walsh. She left the community at thirteen, refusing to don the traditional ten-kilo ankle-long skirt which signifies the woman's coming-of-age. To her, the skirt represented a prison uniform, sealing her inferior and dominated place in the Romany patriarchal society once and for all.¹⁴² She has since become an independent visual artist who enjoys general renown in Finland, but who is recognised for her art as much as for the controversies which seem to accompany all her activities.

Following the release of their books, both Lumberg and Walsh received hate mail from the midst of their communities, threatening them with bodily-harm and even death.

¹⁴⁰ A female musician in a male band is dressed as a man and addressed with a male name, Puci. The others joke around with "him" about his girlfriend because outwardly, she does not threaten the established heteronormative gender roles. The easier position transsexuals enjoy compared to homosexuals is confirmed by David Berna, an anthropologist who has been doing research among Spanish gay- and transsexual Roma: "The families unreservedly accept their children's new sexual identity [after sex change]. Originally it was a man, now it is a woman. (...) Transsexuals fully participate in the family's life. (...) The homosexuals' situation, on the contrary, is extremely precarious." (Houdek 2009: 9, translation mine). Kobes also finds the way in which transsexuals re-insert themselves into the society in their new role relatively easier than the gays' after coming-out (Kobes 2013: 21).

¹⁴¹ Kiba Lumberg's life-story has so far not been translated into any world language. I have acquired the Finnish original and asked Maria Teresa Ciesla, a graduate of Finnish studies from Charles University, to read it for me with specific focus on the distribution of gender roles, conservatism and issues of (non)acceptance of homosexuality among the Finnish Kale. The references to parallels between Lumberg's and Walsh's coming-out narratives are based on Ciesla's relation of Lumberg's story and her translation of quotes and they are only provisional. A more detailed comparison is in order once the *Memesa* trilogy has been translated for a wider readership.

¹⁴² See Esko Nummelin: "Otherness and Nostalgia Dressed in Stories" in Timea Junghaus & Katalin Székely: *Paradise Lost* 2007, pp. 120 – 121.

Both are situated at an intersection of multiple roles which they wish to retain in their complexity. Their communities exercise distinct, if covert, pressure on them to select only one identity and that way to choose acceptance, or social death.

In *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run*,¹⁴³ Mikey Walsh describes Gypsy males as tough and unrelenting. Their masculinity is emblemized both on physical and symbolic levels and is often vented through acts of speech: “Hit’em so they’ll never get back up. One. Good. Hit. Put out your man like a candle,” was Mikey’s grandfather’s motto, a maxim which became the Walsh men’s founding myth and driving force (*Gypsy Boy*: 5).

In terms of physical appearance, Gypsy men are expected to work out from an early age¹⁴⁴ and be physically fit; fighting constitutes one of the set features of male conversation.¹⁴⁵ Men are dressed simply and neatly, “a good pair of smart jeans, a nice shirt and at least four digits, neck and a wrist adorned in weighty pieces of jewellery” (*Gypsy Boy II*: 43). Rings are carefully selected so that in a fight, they may inflict further injuries (*Ibid.* 43). Dressing in women’s clothes, even as part of a children’s game (*Gypsy Boy*: 10), is deemed inappropriate and is worthy of punishment (*Ibid.* 70) and so is “mollycoddling” of young boys by affectionate female relatives (*Ibid.* 21).

In terms of activities, these are closely related to gender roles. Men go out to work, often in scrap-yards or providing services for the Non-Roma such as tarmac-ing their driveways (see chapter 3.1.3). After work, they are not expected to participate in any jobs around the trailer, on the contrary; men who do help out are looked down upon by other males: “Her husband Uncle Matthew was the only Gypsy man ever to wash dishes (...)

¹⁴³ On one level, the sequel to *Gypsy Boy* (2009), *Gypsy Boy on the Run* (released in 2011), is merely an expansion of a part of the story which in the first book was rendered in broad strokes at the very end (chapters “Today” and “Epilogue”, *Gypsy Boy* pp. 253 – 278). It provides details of the flight and the consequent feud, and reconciliation, with the family. On another level, despite its nature of a story once-heard, it shows a greater understanding of the dynamics of his break with his original community and in its grave overtones suggests a truly painful coming-of-age.

¹⁴⁴ Mikey’s training started at the age of four, as described in chapter “Taking a Punch” (*Gypsy Boy*: 40 – 54). His youngest brother, Jimmy, also started working out and jogging at the age of four and he began sparring with his father regularly at the age of five (*Ibid.* 218). At five, he “was already running a self-made training circuit and weightlifting daily with bean cans in pillowslips” (*Ibid.* 188 – 189).

¹⁴⁵ “On the long drive down, we talked about all the usual Gypsy boy things: girls, marriage and of course fighting – who had beaten who, where and how badly. I wasn’t really interested, but I knew the drill.” *Gypsy Boy*: 215

(*Gypsy Boy*: 154 – 155).¹⁴⁶ The men go out drinking together (*Ibid.* 176), they spend time at the boxing club sparring and chatting (*Ibid.* 87) or arrange cock-fighting tournaments (*Ibid.* 30 – 32).

Both Mikey Walsh and Kiba Lumberg portray their communities as pointlessly violent. “Fistfights are a daily occurrence. When Gypsies drink, they lose it and start taking everyone on. Many a Gypsy has died after a knife-fight,” says Lumberg¹⁴⁷. Similarly, Mikey Walsh states that “[a]lmost all Gypsy men are violent, it’s ingrained in the culture and the life they lead and impossible to avoid” (*Gypsy Boy*: 42). Both authors express equal resentment regarding violence. This is how Kiba Lumberg characterises her childhood-self: “I go out fearfully and cautiously, I’m afraid of the other Gypsy kids. They attack me and beat me, but I don’t defend myself, I hate fighting.”¹⁴⁸ And this is Walsh’s reflection of his role as a boy in the community: “I would be called on to step in and defend [the girls’] honour. It was my duty as the boy. I hated violence; I couldn’t stand it. But I could never seem to escape it.” (*Gypsy Boy*: 118)

The physical aspect of being part of their respective Romany communities is exaggerated almost to a point of travesty. Kiba Lumberg’s protagonist pokes her violent suitor’s and would-be-rapist’s eyes out (*Memesa*: 128), Walsh’s protagonist after a blood-curdling fistfight with his father ends up with his front teeth embedded in his bottom lip, fastening his mouth shut (*Gypsy Boy*: 171). This hyperbole is juxtaposed against the commendable otherness of the narrators/authors, who enjoy solitude, prefer not speaking and have a sensitive, dreamy side to them which cannot be found in the other Gypsies (*Memesa*: 17, 251; *Gypsy Boy*: 100, 140).

The male and the female realms hardly overlap (*Gypsy Boy*: 10 – 11). As documented by Okely (2002: 203, 205), women are subordinate to their husband’s orders. Mikey’s mother was often physically assaulted by her husband but she would neither complain nor consider leaving because “she was a Gypsy wife, and to leave would have meant becoming

¹⁴⁶ “[Women] are (...) responsible for the bulk of domestic (unpaid) labour. The Gypsy men by contrast have invested earnings in capital like horses, hunting and racing dogs, waggons, trailers and motor vehicles.” (Okely 2002: 204)

¹⁴⁷ Extract from the 1st part of the *Memesa* trilogy, published in *Kulturní čtrnáctideník A2*, Volume X, No. 9/2014, p. 22, translated from Finnish into Czech by Maria Teresa Ciesla, from Czech into English by myself.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

an outcast” (*Gypsy Boy*: 47). Marriage is ideally for life (Okely 2002: 159). Separation and divorce do take place but they have far-reaching consequences for the woman.¹⁴⁹

The two realms are also represented in household decorations, the nature of which seems to be prescriptive and symbolically loaded. According to Walsh, men demonstrate their achievements by decorating the trailer with boxing gloves and prize-fighting trophies, whereas women display their collections of Royal Crown Derby china (*Gypsy Boy*: 33). As a boy, Mikey liked playing with He-Man action figures, which were found too effeminate by his father, perhaps because of their resemblance to dolls. To guarantee Mikey’s career as a boxing champion, his father had given him his prize-fighting grandfather’s name and had placed a gold chain with small boxing gloves on it around his neck at birth. On a symbolic level, Mikey’s doom in terms of his life choices is thus sealed early on.

In the light of the extreme gender-role division and glorification of masculinity amongst the Romany-Gypsies, the word *gay* (and all of its colloquial and slang alternatives) is only ever used in offence:

If you really want to infuriate a Gypsy man, and land yourself in a major fight, call him gay. The term is often used as an insult in the Non-Gypsy world, but to Gypsy men, who pride themselves on being red-blooded males, there can be no bigger put-down. (Gypsy Boy: 174)

Mikey’s parents resent even Mikey’s proximity to the cot with baby Jimmy, the youngest brother who according to Walsh most resembles Mikey’s father both in appearance and character (*Gypsy Boy*: 130). Although the community and family are in denial as to Mikey’s sexuality, Walsh suggests that what are perceived as his “poofy” ways are still understood to be dangerously contagious.

In spite of all the rationalization, the narrator for the most part wishes he had been born like the other masculine Gypsies (*Gypsy Boy*: 170, 175, 200) and he does not start accepting his sexuality until his stay in Manchester amidst the Non-Romany gay community (*Gypsy Boy II*: 192). Whereas being gay is according to Walsh almost always shameful, even if impossible to change (*Ibid.* 89), being Gypsy becomes increasingly a source of pride as

¹⁴⁹ “At just eighteen, Frankie was divorced and condemned to live with her parents (...). According to Gypsy custom, no man would ever look at her again.” *Gypsy Boy*: 261

the story develops (*Gypsy Boy*: 200; *Gypsy Boy II*: 110, 243). The closest Mikey Walsh comes to the reconciliation of his two conflicting identities is the following quote from the last page of book two:

I am a Gypsy. I am a gay man. I am a nightmare of insecurities. (Gypsy Boy II: 306)

By means of punctuation, he demonstrates that the two modes of being – being a Gypsy and being gay – can never exist in one space continuum. He is a nightmare of insecurities because he has not become “a gay Gypsy man” yet.

3.1.2 Conceptualising Difference

Walsh emphasises his community’s otherness by placing it in close proximity to other social drop-outs: for example, the Warren Woods campsite, buried deep in the woods, is located between “a rotting piece of land” inhabited by “a woman whom we were convinced was a witch (...) with ten black hellhounds” (*Gypsy Boy*: 132) and the Oak Place mental institution. But the social distancing operates both ways:

[Gypsies] live, breath, sleep, grieve, love and care for only their own people. They don’t like or trust the ways of others and don’t have contact or friendships with other races (...). (Gypsy Boy: 66)

The Gypsies’ isolation is therefore absolute. Mikey knows his people’s treatment of sexual minorities – he secretly admires the overtly camp boy Sadie for not hiding his nature, even though his family keep him permanently locked away inside their trailer (*Gypsy Boy*: 127) – and he is fully aware that in the secluded travelling world, he represents a threat which must be eliminated. He understands he might not physically survive his coming-out and therefore keeps himself carefully in the closet.

But his difference is marked in other ways, too. He was born big, fat and ugly (*Gypsy Boy*: 2). According to his female relatives, the bottom fell out of the wicker basket in which his mother carried him out of the hospital; he bounced down the steps but did not cry (*Ibid.* 6). The family lore has it he had not made a sound until he was six months old (*Ibid.* 8). His muteness at birth is thus interpreted by his family as an early sign of his difference. Likewise,

in keeping with the genre of coming-out narratives, Walsh rationalizes events in hindsight, looking for clues of his otherness, nourishing a sense of determinism (Plummer 1995: 83).

In the book, silence works as a metaphor for the coerced secrecy and the obligation to comply with the heteronormative expectations of the community. Metatextually, silence also prevails on the book's cover¹⁵⁰ concerning homosexuality as the subject of the book. Stephen Fry's quotation used on the front is a cryptic clue for the informed audience, as the actor is also a gay rights activist, but we may speculate about the author's possible wish to keep his sexual orientation from the readers' plain view.

Silence, and the need to break it, represents classic traits of modern sexual stories (Plummer 1995: 50). But Walsh constructs his difference on an even more sophisticated level. He suggests that he was different like his mother, who enjoyed time alone (*Gypsy Boy*: 14, 33). She was also an uninspired cook (*Ibid.* 17), a terrible doctor (*Ibid.* 22 – 23) and she disliked “the traditional Gypsy women's ‘home and garden’ look, all Crown Derby, with an abundance of brass Shire-horse ornaments and masses of garish china everywhere” (*Ibid.* 55). She was everything that the other Gypsy women were not. She in turn took after her father, who detested violence, and unlike the majority of Gypsy men, hated horses and dogs (*Ibid.* 15).

Mikey finds himself to be more like his mother's side of the family i.e. more sensitive and more sensible than the Walsh family, “once well respected (...) [but now] feared” whose men “were always bristling for a fight” (*Ibid.* 13). The motif of heredity, which in the first book is only roughly sketched, is further developed in the second book, where Mikey's mother says “she never spoke to anyone” when she was little and “me and you, we're the same” (*Gypsy Boy II*: 37). She also encourages Mikey to be proud of being different (*Ibid.* 37).

Kiba Lumberg opens her trilogy by stressing the physical resemblance to her mother¹⁵¹ and their deep emotional connection, which manifests itself in the way the narrator

¹⁵⁰ Hodder & Stoughton paperback from 2010.

¹⁵¹ “I have inherited my mother's strong arms. (...) I also have the same build. Round and full.” Extract from the 1st part of the *Memesa* trilogy, published in *Kulturní čtrnáctideník A2*, Volume X, No. 9/2014, p. 22, translated from Finnish into Czech by Maria Teresa Ciesla, from Czech into English by myself.

experiences her mother's death.¹⁵² Memesa has always felt different partly because her mother was different from the other Gypsy women¹⁵³. Unlike them, she stays clear of loud arguments¹⁵⁴ and she enjoys solitude. So does Memesa: "Haluan vain huoneeseeni. Siellä saa olla rauhassa. Muiden tyttöjen seura ei kiinnosta pätäkääkään. Nukun yön aika rauhallisesti. Oma huone, johon saa mennä ja jossa saa olla rauhassa, luo tunteen siitä, että olen turvassa." (*Memesa*: 251)¹⁵⁵

Both Mikey Walsh and Kiba Lumberg associate their attraction to the same sex with heightened sensibility and a penchant for loneliness inherited from their mothers. Among ghettoised Roma, loneliness is viewed as a breach of the social code of togetherness, which is partly a necessity due to cramped conditions, and partly a protective mechanism. A person seeking private time is automatically labelled ill, or worse, odd or different.¹⁵⁶ Walsh and Lumberg have made peace with their sexuality and they have accepted their plight of a minority within a minority but on a deeper level, they are fundamentally affected by the Roma's view of homosexuality which they construct as unnatural and genetically induced.

¹⁵² "Suddenly, I drop the wooden spoon. A strong feeling grips my entire body, a hunch that my mother has died. (...) The phone rings. My sister's voice sounds as if it is coming out of a paper bag: 'Mum has passed away.'" (*Ibid.*)

¹⁵³ She observed some rules of the Romany code (*Memesa*: 18) while defying others, e.g. she wore short sleeves in the summer, she used to work outside the home in *gadjo* jobs such as a call-centre operator or a waitress, and her mother, Memesa's grandmother, had come from a mixed marriage between a Romany woman and a Swedish fisherman.

¹⁵⁴ See *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ "All I want is to go to my room. That's where I find peace. I have no interest in the company of the other girls. At night I sleep quite peacefully. A room of my own, where I can find refuge and where no one bothers me, gives me a sense of security."

¹⁵⁶ Jan Grill discusses this concept in his unpublished PhD thesis *On the Margins of States: Contesting Gypsiness and Belonging in the Slovak-Ukrainian-Hungarian Borderlands and in Selected Migration Contexts* (University of St. Andrew's, Scotland). He suggests that "the soft Romany heart" (*kovlo jilo*), characterised by e.g. a strong sense of solidarity, is an essential characteristic of the Roma's social being and a trait which sets them apart from the *gadje*. It follows that he who seeks solitude does not have *kovlo Romano jilo* and is therefore dangerously close to being called a *gadjo* – which in turn suggests social death.

3.1.3 Darkness of skin

While continental Roma with their generally darker skin, hair and eyes represent the most readily visible ethnic minority of Europe¹⁵⁷, in the British Isles, the Roma may easily pass for white Brits, should they choose to. “The physiognomy of most British Travellers does not differ from most local housedwellers”, maintains Judith Okely (Okely 2002: 68)¹⁵⁸. This may have been caused by the frequent contact and high degree of intermarriage between members of *the Romanichal* and the other British travellers and semi-itinerant groups, who are generally white.

By the time the first “Egyptians” arrived in England in the 16th century, a heterogeneous class of travelling people had already been present for some time. These were masterless men looking for seasonal jobs, ex-soldiers discharged from the army and Irish Travellers and Scottish Travellers, representing groups in their own right. Increasingly, as the industrial revolution progressed, there were also skilled workers building canals and railway tracks following work, show people, travelling craftsmen, and since the 1960s, also the so-called New Age Travellers (Evans 2004: 6 – 10).

Although there has always been a degree of antagonism, pride or self-determination separating these loosely definable groups of Gypsies, Travellers, showmen, itinerant workers and other ‘outsiders’, it is also true that they share a lot of cultural common ground. (Ibid. p. 11)

As illustrated by Mikey Walsh’s life-story, the Roma stand out by their way of life and manner of dress and adornment. Chapter 4 of the second book (pp. 39 – 47) describes in detail a makeover of “the Gypsy boy” into an ordinary working-class male. After Mikey had eloped with Caleb, they decided Mikey needed to change his appearance in order to escape their Romany pursuers’ radar more easily. Without discussing it, they agreed his clothes

¹⁵⁷ Milena Hübschmannová refers to “the Romany anthropological type” (Hübschmannová 1999: 19 - 21), a notion which would nowadays be criticized for its essentialist and racist overtones.

¹⁵⁸ Judith Okely is referring to the Roma in this particular quote, despite her rather unfortunate use of the more generic term “traveller”. In general, she does seem to blur the ethnic divisions between the Roma and other travellers somewhat, perhaps in keeping with her theory that the Traveller – Gypsies, as she calls them, did not originate in India but are one of a large family of travelling groups of Europe.

formed a suit of group belonging. “I was suddenly very aware of my Gypsy look,” the narrator comments (*Gypsy Boy II*: 43). And later (*Ibid.* 45): “Without my hair and jewellery, and in different clothes, my whole identity had changed. I was a Gypsy boy no longer.” This is clearly an estranging experience which overshadows the earlier fear for safety and brings out a more serious anxiety over the very core of his identity (“Who was I? Who would I be from now on?” *Ibid.* 46).

Although “[t]he majority [of Traveller-Gypsies] have physical features hardly distinct from the sedentary population” (Okely 2002: 72) and a simple change of hair-style and clothes can help them to blend in, Mikey Walsh still constructs his family and the Romanies in general as dark-skinned. His maternal grandmother was “a typical, dark-skinned Gypsy girl, with tar black hair” (*Gypsy Boy*: 14), his father “very dark” (*Ibid.* 18) and his people “a dark-skinned race” (*Ibid.* 82). Conversely, the milkiness of his mother’s skin, and her red hair, serves to highlight her otherness (see 3.1.2).

Walsh’s consistency of depiction of his people as dark-skinned, as opposed to the general agreement that English Roma are much paler than their continental counterparts, may be a projection of the stereotypical myth of the “true Romany” (see chapter 1.3), in itself an example of the colonised mind, or misrecognition. But perhaps he can see what the dominant researchers cannot: a shade of skin undistinguishable by outsiders, a *value* of the colour of skin, which confirms him as a Gypsy, rather than an actual tint. Undoubtedly, it is also a conscious effort on the narrator’s part to enhance the ethnic borderlines dividing *the Romanichal* from the other Non-Gypsy travelling groups, especially the Irish Travellers, who are perceived as particularly threatening, as discussed in the following chapter.

3.1.4 Group Boundaries

For the sake of political representation, the different semi-itinerant groups of the United Kingdom stand united as “Gypsies and Travellers”. The nationally released *Travellers’ Times*¹⁵⁹ are designed to cater for all the different travelling communities, i.e. Romany Gypsies (*The Romanichal*), Welsh Gypsies¹⁶⁰, Irish Travellers, Welsh Travellers,

¹⁵⁹ Also The HUB, the Gypsy Council’s newsletter.

¹⁶⁰ Welsh Gypsies are increasingly believed to have died out. In 2006 Margaret Greenfields pointed out that “there is much debate regarding the actual existence, or otherwise, of this group” (Clark & Greenfields 2006: 15), whereas in her co-authored *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A*

Scottish Travellers, New Travellers and Occupational Travellers¹⁶¹. Barring the last two, all of these groups are currently recognised as ethnic minorities in England and protected by the 2010 *Equality Act*. There have been several overlapping attempts by the diverse groups to organise themselves under one leadership (Cemlyn 2009: 185) but never with universal support, and rarely lasting.

Unlike in continental Europe, where in formal discourse all the derivations of the original Byzantine exonym *Athinganoi* are viewed as pejorative, *Gypsy* in Britain can be accepted as neutral and used as a generic label by the majority of travelling groups, regardless of their origin. *Traveller* is then preferred over *Gypsy* as a less stigmatised, more politically correct term (compare Okely 2002: 71). The use of labels is often intuitive and largely contextual. The degree of intermarriage among the different travelling communities and the confusion of both external and internal labels are such that these titles “are often artificial and are about establishing cultural, economic, and political boundaries rather than presenting a clear statement on mythologised ‘racial blood-lines’” (Clark & Greenfields 2006: 13).

Walsh portrays Irish Travellers as part of the daily reality of his childhood. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers share sites (*Gypsy Boy*: 82); his father and Mr Donoghue, an Irish Traveller, become close friends (*Ibid.* 83); Romany and Irish Travellers’ children go to school together and fare equally badly (*Ibid.* 82); and Mrs Donoghue “refused to have [their *dossa*¹⁶²] eat off her own plates and gave him one of the dogs’ dishes” (*Ibid.* 124), suggesting she would not have her dishes touched by a ritually unclean person the same way the Romany

review from 2009 (Equality and Human Rights Commission), she fails to mention the group at all, which suggests that a revision had taken place in the British Romany Studies of the number of existing subethnic groups.

¹⁶¹ This is a politically correct term which mostly applies to Show people or Circus people, but also includes e.g. Boat Dwellers.

¹⁶² According to Walsh’s description, *dossas* are Non-Romany social outcasts such as homeless people, former drug addicts or persons discharged from prison who are deliberately taken from the street and brought into the community as exploitable work force. Okely (2002: 70) also noted their presence in the Traveller communities in the 1970s: “In addition to the Gorgio couples there were single male Gorgio “dossers”; vagrants or individuals on the run who were exploited as cheap labour and never fully incorporated.”

gypsies would not. They seem to inhabit the same space as self-employed and self-induced outcasts and observe identical rules of ritual (im)purity¹⁶³.

But Walsh also uses Irish Travellers to lend a more favourable image to Romany Gypsies. The two communities “are worlds apart” (*Ibid.* 82). Irish Travellers “had given [Romany Gypsies] the worst public image, creating litter and chaos and taking everything that wasn’t nailed to the ground” (*Ibid.* 158). They are *Hedgemumpers*, “a Gypsy term for people who are not fussy about their living conditions” (*Ibid.* 158). The Donoghues are depicted as an unattractive family with “skin like lard, strawberry-blond hair and (...) smothered in freckles” (*Ibid.* 82). They abuse their *dossa* Kevin and paradoxically, it is the narrator’s father who adopts Kevin and shows him kindness. According to the narrator, Irish Travellers “had arrived in a tidal wave” and “within a few weeks (...) our site had begun to show the scars of their invading culture” (*Ibid.* 149).

The negative portrayal of Irish Travellers reflects so well on Romany Gypsies that it becomes problematic to reconcile this image with another one Walsh offers, namely that of Romany Gypsies as dishonest conmen.

Some were much more professional than others, but it was a rarity for a Gypsy man to do a good job for anyone. Especially if money were to change hands before a job was done; in that case the customer would almost certainly get nothing at all. And in some cases, given the state of the building work I’ve witnessed, they’d probably have been better off. (Gypsy Boy: 163)

Mikey’s father is captured as a particularly ruthless manipulator who sponges off the elderly and helpless by quoting a price for tarmacking their whole driveway and then changing it to a price per metre, while using low-quality material which will not last (*Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Okely’s research in the 1970s did not indicate the observance of pollution taboos, or what she refers to as “the inner” and “the outer” body, among Irish Travellers (2002:235). Walsh specifically says that “as time passed, [the Irish Travellers] went their own way, mimicking the values and way of life of the Romanies” (*Gypsy Boy*: 82). Skočovská (2010: 82 – 82) in her recent research among the show people of the Czech Republic also points out the absence of ritual purity taboos, or their partial observation when a cultural interface with Roma or especially Sinti has taken place. The existing evidence suggests that ritual purity rules are unique to the Roma.

12 – 13). For his illegal activities such as re-selling stolen cars, he ends up in prison (*Ibid.* 54).

To apply Michael Stewart's concept of *romani butji* (see chapter 2.1.1) is tempting but probably wrong. Firstly, in terms of the division of labour, a certain amount of fraudulence seems to be an inherent part of completing a task for a commissioner – both generally and pertaining to Roma (compare Ronald Lee: *Goddam Gypsy* pp. 26 – 27). The asymmetry of power invites subversiveness and the *gadje* are invariably viewed as advantaged oppressors. Secondly, the narrator does have reasons to create an unfavourable picture of both the father and the community based on his extreme suffering¹⁶⁴. His misery can be measured by the fact he was on the verge of giving his father up to the police once (*Gypsy Boy*: 54). He also tried to kill himself once (*Gypsy Boy II*: 24). Although no autobiography is ever truthful and it is a system of signs suggestive of the way in which the narrator makes sense of his life (Tierney 2000: 545), Walsh makes it extremely difficult for the reader not to judge his father's behaviour.¹⁶⁵

3.1.5 Language

In a chapter entitled "Self-ascription", Judith Okely defines Gypsy identity as comprising descent (although the ethnic boundary is semipermeable), perceived difference from the *gadje* (dichotomisation of the world), pollution taboos and a way of life. The use of a specific language is mentioned as quoted by her reference group but it is not developed and generally it is downplayed in the whole book. According to Okely, Romani is not a language but a secret vocabulary or a creole¹⁶⁶ (Okely 2002: 9) which the different vagrant

¹⁶⁴ This negative image of Romany Gypsies initiated a series of death-threats from the midst of his community, see *Gypsy Boy on the Run* p. 302.

¹⁶⁵ One of the main "scams" Mikey's father uses to make a living is tarmacking Non-Roma's driveways. He charges ridiculous amounts for doing the job with diluted asphalt. Walsh associates this activity with hard work, shame and fear. Martin Shaw (2006: 108 – 109), on the other hand, has noticed the way in which the same job (and the ability to find a customer) can be a part of Traveller education which represents positive values and symbolic capital in Jimmy Stockins' *On the Cobbles*. It is indeed hard but honest work which helps establish positive relationship between Romanies and *the gadje*.

¹⁶⁶ A *creole*, a new language which in colonial context would be based on the dominant language's vocabulary, less so the grammar, with highly specific pronunciation and meanings, comes into being once a *pidgin* – the same but adopted and used as a second language for the communication with the colonial establishment – has become the mother tongue of native children. Based on the parent language, we

individuals of Europe, who had “banded together for survival” (*Ibid.* 15), used as a secret code. The use of Romani words in other “dialects” of British Travellers testifies to this (*Ibid.* 18).

I have discussed Okely’s view on language at length in chapter 1.3. Her highly-specific reference group of the English Roma who are for the most part language-assimilated led her to the wrong conclusions. Here is Walsh’s amateur take on Romani:

Romany, an ancient language, is still used by Gypsies, but only in combination with English. Romany makes up about 60 per cent of Gypsy dialect, because many words have been forgotten over time. So a Gypsy’s English vocabulary is often at the same level as a five-year old child’s. (Gypsy Boy: 85)

In comparison with Stockins’ or Prince Nathaniel Petulengro Lee’s accounts of their lives¹⁶⁷, Walsh uses hardly any Romany vocabulary. His semi-competency in Anglo-Romani, itself a Para-Romani, gets obliterated by his active interaction with the Non-Romany world and its educational outlets¹⁶⁸. His family find his new vocabulary, presumably accompanied by a different accent, absurd (*Gypsy Boy II*: 217). He attempts to use Anglo-Romani when under attack by Irish Travellers in London but “[he is] very rusty and must have sounded ridiculous” (*Ibid.* 278). The “rustiness” in itself does not disqualify Walsh from his Romany identity – George Borrow famously used a lot of Romani in his novels but incorrectly and without a justifiable claim to the identity¹⁶⁹. Nor does it show disrespect of Romani’s status within the Romany Gypsy community, on the contrary.

differentiate among e.g. English, French or Portuguese creoles. Judith Okely uses the term “creole” without providing the readers with a credible genesis of the language which she claims was born in the heart of Europe. In other words, the linguistic background for her argument is missing.

¹⁶⁷ Both accounts had been related orally, recorded and then transcribed by editors. The second life-story is to be found in *Rokkering to the Gorjios* (Ed. Jeremy Sandford, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press 1973/2000).

¹⁶⁸ His father and both of his grandparents were illiterate, his mother could print phonetically (*Gypsy Boy*: 67). His own schooling had been only temporary and insufficient prior to leaving the community.

¹⁶⁹ Compare Ian Hancock: “George Borrow’s Romani” in ed. Peter Bakker 1998: *The Typology and Dialectology of Romani*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 65 - 89.

For instance, teaching Mrs McAndrew “our language” (*Gypsy Boy*: 85) has a clear symbolic value because the roles between the dominated and the dominant are reversed and the pupil becomes the teacher owing to his epistemic advantage. The language being mostly unknown to outsiders is a prestigious state desirable of retaining (*Ibid.*).

Walsh’s high esteem for his Romany identity in general is shown in language, but not in switching between English and Romani and not systematically. Although for the most part *Gypsy* is used as a neutral denominator in the book, when he enters a phase in his narrative where he wishes to celebrate what he refers to as his race, he assumes a different register and *Romany* becomes the denominator, see “the other races (...) never get to see the more human, generous, side of the Romanies” (*Gypsy Boy*: 66; also *Ibid.* 82).

As we shall see in the case of Irena Eliášová and especially Andrej Giňa, the more to the East of Europe we move, the bigger the marker of identity language becomes. Its absence in Mikey Walsh’s narrative is historically conditioned; nevertheless Walsh considers it a value to be striving for, an imperfection which – leaving the taboo sexual identity aside – mars one’s ethnic integrity.

3.2 Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies

3.2.1 Coming-Out Narratives

Since the battle of Stonewall in 1969, the founding event of modern gay and lesbian history (Putna 2011: 9 – 13), stories of coming-out in all of their different forms (homosexual, transsexual, rape, dysfunctional etc.) have become increasingly common. From a sociological point of view, Ken Plummer suggests the existence of a continuity between the stories and their audience, which keep feeding upon and into, and thereby reinforcing, each other (1995: 87). He also perceives capitalism, with its move away from home into the marketplace, the weakening of the family’s former function, the dropping of birth rates and the birth of possessive individualism, as essential influence on the boom (*Ibid.* 91 – 92). There can be no doubt that what was shockingly honest thirty years ago has now become widely accepted as part of the world’s diverse identities and coming-out stories now “constitute a recognisable pattern, form or genre” (Plummer 1995: 50).

This genre is by definition autobiographical, following a linear development which serves to explicate in retrospect what at the time seemed strange and confusing. It is related to Bildungsroman in its progress from birth, accompanied by ill omens, to a stage in life of relative peace and contentment. The rules of the genre dictate the structure of the plot, which develops along the following signposts: a) silence and suffering, b) need for action, c) coming-out and d) coming-to-terms (Plummer 1995: 50).

Mikey Walsh's life story rates among the more accomplished coming-out narratives, as opposed to the popular body of literature for mass consumption whose main aim is to keep providing points of reference for the growing queer audience.¹⁷⁰ There is a marked lack of pathos and sentimentality concerning the suffering stage;¹⁷¹ Walsh's style is measured, realistic, occasionally bordering on naturalism. Gay activism in its political form is missing altogether. The multiple references to the popular culture of the nineteen-eighties and earlier, seen as iconographic in Walsh's gay peer group, suggest a familiarity with intertextuality, if on a visual rather than textual level.¹⁷² The text is scattered with them in an open declaration of being gay and, far from sounding camp¹⁷³, they serve as dots on the map, carefully positioned for the reader not to lose track of the objective – the coming out narrative.

¹⁷⁰ Compare Michal Čuřín: "Dvacet let bojů za populární homosexuální literaturu" („Twenty Years of Battles for Popular Homosexual Literature“) in Martin C. Putna (Ed.) *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*, Praha: Academia 2011, pp. 281 – 296.

¹⁷¹ Compare Mike Perry: *Klec pro majáky (A Lighthouse Cage)*, Zlín: Kniha Zlín 2011. Mike Perry is the male pseudonym of Ivana P., a trans man born 1958, who underwent sex change at the age of fifty. His story demonstrates a high level of emotionality and pathos, which seem to be symptomatic of gay- and transmen- coming-out stories.

¹⁷² The narrator and his siblings had had very little schooling and used to spend a lot of time watching television and videos. Popular culture, including advertisement, had given the narrator his initial framework of the Non-Romany world. Amongst the multiple references in the book there are (in no specific order, classification or categorization): Samantha Fox, Madonna, My Little Pony, Goofy, He-Man figures, Dynasty, Beaches, A Star is Born, Death Becomes Her, Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?, The Wizard of Oz, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Rocky Horror Picture Show, Coronation Street, Jaws and countless others.

¹⁷³ Susan Sontag in her "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964, <http://www.book.tubefun4.com/downloads/Sontag.pdf>, visited May 6th 2014) celebrates "campness", the particular sensibility and aesthetics practised by gay men, which is usually perceived as unnatural and affected by heterosexual audience, as a creative, playful principle developed by the gay subculture, fully in keeping with postmodernism. She later revised her views but "camp" is still a concept which some queer theoreticians strive to postulate as a form of poetics typical of homosexual pieces of art (Putna 2011: 33 – 34).

Although *Gypsy Boy* ends on a cheerful note with the narrator getting married to his Australian boyfriend Dillan, wearing a pair of red Converse trainers in place of ruby slippers, the obligatory happy-end – the coming-to-terms – is revisited and fundamentally redefined in *Gypsy Boy On the Run*. His marriage fails, and although there is a strong sense of empowerment stemming from getting an education and a career, he is ultimately very lonely, leading a solitary life in his small basement flat in London (*Gypsy Boy II*: 305 – 306).

This is in striking discord with Plummer's optimistic "'coming-out' now becomes the central narrative of positive gay experience" (Plummer 1995: 84). This may well be the case for privileged young men from developed Western countries, but less so for gays from the various socially disadvantaged and culturally or ethnically specific backgrounds who deal with fundamental issues of belonging *on top of their sexuality*. Walsh's ethnic identity has stranded him in a no-man's land, neither fish, nor fowl, free but isolated. Simultaneously, it is precisely the dynamics of his in-betweenness which has turned a conventional coming-out narrative into an intricate story of universal human misery.

Michal Čuřín¹⁷⁴ suggests that popular gay and lesbian literature refrains from explicit descriptions of sex, hiding it in a thirteenth chamber. He believes this is motivated by the authors' desire to show same-sex love as equal to heterosexual love - emotionally rewarding and fundamentally based on soulmatedom rather than lust. Stressing the normality of same-sex relations rather than their socially induced abnormality is considered an activist trait of homosexual literature by Čuřín.

Mikey Walsh has also ousted gay sex to the realm of unspeakability. In his relations with other men, especially in the second book, he relates their cohabitation, their shared interests, their arguments and their breakups, but never what happens in between the sheets. This is in stark contrast to the very explicit descriptions of sexual abuse he used to receive at the hands of Uncle Joseph (e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 108, 111, 144). Multiple aspects operate here; but let us firstly clarify that Walsh's reasons not to disclose any details of consensual sex between two men is different from the one implied by gay authors from dominant cultures.

Accounts of English Romany Gypsies' lifestyle indicate that speaking of sex is deemed inappropriate or directly offensive especially in front of children and women (Okely

¹⁷⁴ Michal Čuřín: "Dvacet let bojů za populární homosexuální literaturu" ("Twenty Years of Battles for Popular Homosexual Literature") in Martin C. Putna (Ed.) *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*, Praha: Academia 2011, p. 284.

2002: 167; Cemlyn 2009: 248). Information gets circulated between respective peer groups but never across a generation gap, therefore a lot concerning sex remained a mystery in the author's childhood¹⁷⁵. Romany boys are expected to gain sexual experience before marriage with *gadje* women (*Gypsy Boy*: 221), Romany girls on the other hand are supposed to be virgins and they can never approach men, while also being obliged to marry before the age of eighteen (*Ibid.* 190, 16, 190). Walsh demonstrates just how strictly the division between the male and female realm is observed and what happens when it is transgressed. He gets a clip round the ear from Granny Bettie for wanting to attend sex education classes at school, without knowing what they are (*Gypsy Boy*: 151); his mother gets "taken to hospital" every time a new baby is born and children are not supposed to ask where babies come from (*Ibid.* 72, 130); when Gypsy families go to the seaside, the men and children swim, while the women sit around fully clothed because it is deemed improper for them to strip off (*Ibid.* 36)¹⁷⁶. The narrator himself dislikes getting undressed (*Gypsy Boy II*: 45). In short, his Gypsy upbringing stops Mikey Walsh from revealing any details of intimacy. He is always a Gypsy first, a gay man second.

On the other hand, his unsought for contacts with Uncle Joseph, who is in various contexts described as fat, weak, dependent, partial to despised animals and generally a failure (e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 35, 146), do not fall into the same category as romantic love. It is a power relationship in which the narrator is on the losing end, as he is extremely young (about six when the abuse started) and dependent on Uncle Joseph's positive reports on his behaviour to his easily maddened father. Likewise, at the time he does not know what sex is and does not "associate it with what Uncle Joseph was doing to [him] every week" (*Ibid.* 151). The two concepts - Walsh's prudishness regarding sex in relationships and his relative openness

¹⁷⁵ Apparently, many Gypsy girls believed they can lose their virginity to a tampon (*Gypsy Boy*: 212).

¹⁷⁶ Kiba Lumberg made a photo-shoot of herself in the nude and in the related article she explains the utter unacceptability of nudity amongst the Finnish Kale in contrast to her understanding of it as neither shameful nor sinful but an aesthetic means. <http://www.hs.fi/kuukausiliite/a1305728717191> visited on May 14 2014.

regarding his Uncle Joseph's abuse – do not clash with one another. Rather, they are pieces in the puzzle of how Romany Gypsies view their sexuality¹⁷⁷.

3.2.2 The Barron Controversy

By definition, any treatise on Romany writing must be concerned with authorship. Whether the author identifies him- or herself as a Romany, whether they relate to their ethnic background and whether they have written their story down themselves are crucial issues for the delimitation of the (sub)field, which could otherwise disappear under the respective umbrellas of national canons (in detail chapter 1.5). Thus the allegation that Mikey Walsh's memoir may have been ghost-written, combined with an attack on its factual accuracy, could not be ignored as dismissible extraliterary reality, but had to be carefully scrutinised to reveal the network of relations behind these in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu 1992: 97). At stake here is the very legitimacy of treating Mikey Walsh as a representative of Romany letters.

To protect the identity of his family members, the author of *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run* has been using a pseudonym, Mikey Walsh. Between September 16th and October 31st 2011, a former lover, David V. Barron, came forward and in a series of blogs¹⁷⁸ revealed the author's true name¹⁷⁹ “and the fallacy that is the gypsy boy and his story of life on the run” (*Gypsy Blogs Introduction*). Barron recounts his love affair with *the Gypsy*, as he keeps referring to Walsh, in much detail, declaring therapeutic purposes when he offers “a personal account of the time I fell in love for the first time” (*GB I*).

Nevertheless, a clear intent to slander and even demonise Mikey Walsh soon becomes apparent: “Unfortunately for me, falling under the spell of a travelling Romany Gypsy boy could not have been a more unsuitable canvas to project all of my hopes and desires onto” (*GB I*). He goes on to portray Walsh as a manipulative psychopath (“Machiavellian” *GB I*, “cunning and calculating” *GB II*, “ambition-fuelled” *GB IV* and “a seasoned charlatan” *GB VII*) and himself as an innocent victim “with an open and trusting

¹⁷⁷ In the same vein, despite the strict ban on all vocabulary related to sex and sexuality, swearing is not perceived as anything unusual or inappropriate. In Walsh's own words (*Gypsy Boy*: 151): “The exceptions were the words fuck and cunt which, despite their vulgarity, had slipped through the net of taboo words.”

¹⁷⁸ The blog was published in seven instalments. I shall refer to individual parts by number; I visited the blog repeatedly between April and May 2014. <http://davidvbarron.wordpress.com/category/the-gypsy-blogs/>

¹⁷⁹ I shall comply with the author's wishes and refer to him by his pseudonym.

heart“ (*GB I*), “protective, doting and serious about our relationship“ (*GB IV*) who “just wanted to love and to be loved in return“ (*GB III*).

He betrays an unabated emotional involvement, still rabid after more than a decade; moreover, he compromises his views of the Gypsy by constructing him as the ultimate Other, an enigma, “exotic, exciting, beautiful and intimidating“ (*GB I*), “ unique, interesting and at times, totally arresting” (*GB IV*). He inadvertently testifies to the insurmountable cultural gap between the gay *gadjo* and the gay Romany by wondering why Walsh’s life story had meant so much to him¹⁸⁰. While Barron came from a liberal background with supportive parents and his only worry was to find romance¹⁸¹, Walsh had had to “cross the ethnic boundary” in order to “consummate an illicit way of life“ (Okely 2002: 213)¹⁸². Outside of his familiar environment, surrounded by former untouchables (see e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 226, 230, 232¹⁸³), whose very existence in a dichotomised world co-defines who the Romany Gypsies are, he was doomed to being isolated and misunderstood. His story transcends the space between the two otherwise irreconcilable worlds and legitimises a move which in itself, at least to some, signifies social death.

David V. Barron also creates suspense about Walsh’s authorship. Apparently, Walsh “never wrote a thing” and “never read his Bible because he couldn’t read” (*GB IV*), elsewhere “he could hardly read and definitely didn’t write“ (*Ibid.*) and “[the book was an outstanding achievement] for somebody that had never read a book, who was so frustrated with their limited ability to read, or to write” (*GB VII*). Barron allows the suspicion to linger and take hold for the greater part of his blogs. By the time he finally concludes that “whether

¹⁸⁰ “It was the most important thing to him above all else. His story. It was why he breathed and at times it seemed like an illness. He would get angry and deeply indignant that I could not understand this.“ (*Gypsy Blog IV*)

¹⁸¹ “My mother was horrified [about Barron’s intention to move in with Walsh] but up to a point, she had always let me make my own mistakes. I would never have listened to anyone that said it was a bad idea. The basement flat below my older sister’s flat had become vacant and she arranged with the landlady and my mother, for us to move in.” (*Gypsy Blog II*)

¹⁸² Walsh would call it a racial boundary as he conceives of the Roma (and other groups) as races.

¹⁸³ The idea of a boy losing his virginity to a Non-Romany girl (e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 205, 223) is based on the same elementary prerequisite that the Others are less worthy than us, also operating on the assumption that Non-Romany women have loose morals. It is perceived as a mechanism of protecting the Gypsy girls’ chastity.

[Walsh] actually wrote the book (...) is irrelevant (...) because his imagination leaps from its pages” and “it was indeed his story” (*GB VII*), the reader had already crafted a mental image of Walsh as the ultimate conman, an illiterate Mefisto. Barron’s accusation first rings out, later it wavers and finally it quietly dies down, leaving the undecided audience to go on the blogger’s earlier insinuations.

Here is Mikey Walsh’s reflection of the first book’s reception: “I spent much of 2010 being afraid, insecure, angry, and so very lonely. There were those who felt the book was an attack on my people. Others who tried to kill my story by making me out to be some kind of vindictive nutcase. Then there were the literary types who insisted that I wasn’t even a real person and was just some creation of a publisher.” (*Gypsy Boy II: 300 – 301*).

Barron’s final objection remains the *truthfulness* of Walsh’s account.

What I know about publishing could be written on the head of a pin but as a consumer of books, I’m pretty sure that there is an unspoken trust between author and reader. That in a non-fiction book, the author will depict, relay and portray events, people and noteworthy occurrence, as best and as close to the truth as is possible to the author’s recollection. (Gypsy Blog VII)

Of the many faults Barron found with the accuracy of Walsh’s life story, I will look at only three. He is shocked because “[f]amily members and neighbouring travellers were brought to life with such flair that they were actually an admixture of fictional imaginings and stolen elements, taken from other people”. He feels especially hurt by Walsh’s depiction of himself, and tries to rectify the unfavourable impression one gets of Glyn (Barron’s character) from the second book by posting photos of his youthful self. And he has publicised a letter from “family spokesperson” which allegedly disproves Walsh’s allegations concerning the abuse he suffered from Uncle Joseph (*all related passages in GB VII*).

As for the fictionalisation of characters, it is as much an act of protection of the people concerned as it is a sign of the ability to move away from trivial description of events and facts towards metonymy, metaphor and ultimately, literature. A general reader does not need a perfectly validatable story; they need a sample story which broadens their mind and they can relate to on a universally human level. Particulars, even if perturbing to individuals, do not decrease the piece’s general impact.

Walsh describes “Glyn”, the young Barron, as a “6’3” (...) giant of a man, a ginger Terminator, with hands as large as dinner plates (...) with thick Welsh accent”. That he took special care to disguise David V. Barron is undeniable. I daresay the travesty is intentionally obvious, putting a shielding distance between the real man and his literary stand-in but also creating a bumper between the narrator and past events which have, in retrospect, lost a lot of their urgency and painfulness. Walsh’s portrayal of Barron has a lot of humour to it and conveys a sense of playfulness rather than malice.

Part seven of the blog includes a letter from Philip Stuart who speaks on behalf of the “Walsh” family. As an attachment, it contains scans of a Polygraph test (lie-detector) which Walsh’s Uncle apparently underwent after the book’s release, when the sexual abuse allegation became public, with the result “No deception indicated”. Philip Stuart insists Uncle Joseph is innocent.

There are at least two aspects of this statement to consider: firstly, the test is dated April 19th 2010, while Joseph’s death of a heart-attack apparently took place *before* the first book’s publication in 2009 (*Gypsy Boy II*: 287). Secondly, Stuart speaks on behalf of the whole Gypsy community when he says: “Paedophiles in a travellers Community is unheard of, this just would not be acceptable and the likely hood is, anyone in such a community would simple disappear!” (*Gypsy Blog VII*). I suggest the person signed as Philip Stuart is concerned about the public image Mikey Walsh’s books may have given to Traveller Gypsies, and tries to dissuade the public opinion from thinking there are “freaks” in their ranks; not realising the absence of people from the LGBT spectrum is more striking than otherwise¹⁸⁴.

The idea that a life-story must also be truthful shows Barron’s naïvety and echoes traditional, pre-deconstructivist understandings of referentiality (Bosničová 2007). As a genre, life-story straddles the space between fact and fiction and is perhaps more interesting as a process of subject-creation than a source of reliable information.

¹⁸⁴ This thesis is not concerned with the way in which the man calling himself Philip Stuart had forged the documents. However, even the author himself suggests in *Gypsy Boy II* (p. 211) that Romany Gypsies have “ways” to deal with representatives of the establishment, when he has a friendly lawyer suggest: “There’s only one way to deal with [Frankie’s ex-husband demanding visitation rights of their son], Frank, and that’s to do what you lot always do. Find your own way to get shot of him.”

By “naming a silenced life”, Mikey Walsh has transgressed on his social field, leaving the safe area of familiar Romany-Gypsy habitus, and entering completely new social circumstances, where every step of the new habitus has to be learnt. By simultaneously reaching for the symbolic capital of consecration within the literary field, an area particularly recognised by the Non-Roma, he has virtually catapulted himself beyond any semblance of his former milieu. The blogger David V. Barron is being confronted with the staggering social trajectory his former lover has followed and finds himself unable to deal with it on any other but personal level.

3.3 Conclusion

Gender studies recognise two elementary lines of argument regarding homosexuality. In the politically activist USA, it is constructed and promoted as a national identity with a unique flag (rainbow flag), a politically-correct autonym (gay) and a day to celebrate (June 28). In Europe, it is rather viewed as only one aspect of one’s identity and it is broached on a personal, rather than group level. While in the US the predominant sentiment of the gay movement is autonomy, in Europe it is integration (Putna 2011: 19, 55).

Were we to employ the American model, Mikey Walsh is truly trapped between two national and cultural identities, which qualifies his writing for current, or future hybridity, an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications (...) that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 1994: 4). Homi K. Bhabha in his theoretical work and Salman Rushdie in the practise of writing fiction conceive of hybridity in a productive sense, dismissing previous post-colonial research which depended on binary oppositions such as centre/periphery, the Same/the Other, the local/the immigrant (Musilová 2012: 77 – 78). Post-colonial writers have managed to turn hybridity and syncreticity to their advantage, making it the source of their empowerment:

In writing out of the condition of ‘Otherness’ postcolonial texts assert the complex of intersecting ‘peripheries’ as the actual substance of experience. (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 77).

Hybridisation as a creative principle is closely linked to postmodernism. For its simultaneously liberal/democratic and subversive connotations, it seems to represent an ideal framework for Romany writing worth striving for.

But Mikey Walsh's embeddedness in his culture and its habitus has an absolute power which overrides all else. He struggles to reconcile an identity he was born and raised with (his Gypsiness), which is highly homophobic, with the one he was cursed with (his homosexuality). In his primordial understanding of identity, they are both given and unchangeable:

[M]oving into a house did not mean that you were no longer a Gypsy. That is something, that, like skin colour, you can never erase. (Gypsy Boy II: 243)

He believes his different sexuality is a genetic aberration and he tries, and fails, to accept it. As the dominant framework of his identity, his Gypsiness gives him the only feel for the game he can relate to (Bourdieu 1992: 223). Hybridity, which occurs in the Third Space where the meaning of culture is available for exploration (Bhabha 1994: 38), is for the time being inaccessible to him. His memoir depicts the *status quo*: whatever niche he has managed to create for himself, both in terms of his position in life and his ambitions in writing, is only temporary and provisional and it does not offer any solutions to the dilemma of the two extreme identities because on principle, they are irreconcilable.

Mikey Walsh's life story operates within a hierarchical framework whereby Romany Gypsies are on the top rung and the Irish Travellers, the Non-Roma and finally the *dossas* follow respectively. Imagined darkness of skin is constructed and perceived as a value which distinguishes the Roma from the inferior groups and classes. As a representative of a minority within a minority he can sympathise with fellow sufferers but he can never shake off the belief in his people's relative supremacy.

When Romany Gypsies insist that there are no homosexuals among them, it is not a lie but rather a cultural metaphor. There is a tacit understanding in the community that the parties from the LGBT spectrum will have to make a choice: either remain in the closet as well as in the bosom of the extended family, or leave. In terms of a declared sexuality, there are indeed no homosexuals amongst the English Roma. The similarities between Mikey Walsh's and Kiba Lumberg's life-stories are practicable only insofar as they are both Roma

who engage in sexual practise which is taboo for their ethnic group. But while Walsh is a masculine gay who, more or less, condones to the gender divisions adhered to by his community and ultimately regrets his sexuality does not allow him to play the game he has been fashioned for, Lumberg is of a radically feminist make, who can offer nothing but extreme criticism of the Roma's treatment of both sexuality and gender roles.¹⁸⁵

Mikey Walsh's life story in two parts communicates with the (relatively recent) genre of coming-out stories¹⁸⁶ by relating in chronological order the process of an individual's coming to terms with his sexuality. The homosexual literary canon will no doubt have appropriated it by now, although "queer studies", which register "sexual identities [which are] intersected by race, class and gender identities that complicate them" (Pustianaz 2000: 151) will inevitably prove to be a more suitable interpretative framework than the previous "gay studies", which saw homosexuality as an uncomplicated homogenous trait.¹⁸⁷

By nature of bringing out into the open a long-harboured secret, coming-out narratives often remain their authors' single literary achievement. It remains to be seen whether Mikey Walsh's interest in the power of the written word has been satisfied by publishing his story in two parts, or whether he will attempt to pursue a literary career. Nonetheless, by attempting to undermine his achievement, David V. Barron has inadvertently stressed the literary pretences of Walsh's text: by referring to popular culture and making use of classic gay clichés, the author demonstrates a familiarity with postmodern intertextuality; by merging several real persons into one fictional character with extreme traits verging on travesty, he proves to be a keen observer who practises the art of moving from particulars to universalities. All this combined with intentional humour in language and situations and/or pathos in emotionally charged moments mark a definite move from *writing*, as represented by Victor Vishnevsky, towards *literature*.

¹⁸⁵ At least since the Battle of Stonewall, the founding event of modern homosexual history, lesbians have left the homogenous homosexual movement and joined powers with feminists. "Gays and lesbians do not share the same desire, culture or aestheticism," sums up Martin C. Putna (2011: 47).

¹⁸⁶ They have become prominent since the 1970s, compare Putna 2011, Plummer 1995, Pustianaz 2000.

¹⁸⁷ Compare also Putna (2011: 50): "'Queer' [as a new fashionable umbrella term for gay studies] is supposed to represent not only the sum of all the 'problematic' homo-, bi- and trans-identities, but primarily it should serve as an appeal to dissolve all identities, which have until now seemed unshakable."

4 The Witness and the Writer

“If anyone ever claims the settlement he used to live in was the prettiest, don’t believe him, as it is our settlement that is the most beautiful and also the biggest of all. It is situated directly in the centre of a Southern Slovak village called Novésa (...) and all around there are the big houses of our neighbours the gadje.”

(Irena Eliášová: Naše osada, p. 7)¹⁸⁸

“I was six years old. We lived in Tolčemeš not far from Sabinov in Eastern Slovakia. In Tolčemeš, the Roma lived together with the gadje at the upper end of the village. Our house was just like the Non-Romany houses.”

(Andrej Giňa: “Sar mušind’am te rozčhivel amare khera in Pat’iv. Ještě víme, co je úcta, p. 123)¹⁸⁹

Andrej Giňa (*1936) and Irena Eliášová (nee Balážová, *1953) come from Eastern and South-Western Slovakia respectively but both of their families moved to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia pursuing work and a bettering of social circumstances when their children were ten years old. The majority of the roughly 200.000 Roma in the Czech Republic nowadays are of Slovak origin¹⁹⁰. Their parents and grandparents came as cheap labour to

¹⁸⁸ “Jestli vám někdo bude tvrdit, že osada, ve které žil, byla nejhezčí – nevěřte! Protože tahle naše osada je ze všech nejhezčí, a dokonce i největší. Stojí přímo uprostřed jedné vesnice (...), která se jmenuje Novésa, a leží na jihu Slovenska. (...) [K]olem dokola stojí velké domy našich sousedů gádžů (...)”

¹⁸⁹ “Mange has akor šov berš. Bešahas Tolčemešiste, paš o Sibiňis, pre vigeli Slovensko. O Roma Tolčemešiste bešenas jekhetanes le gadženca pro upro agor gaveske. Amaro kher has maj kajso sar the le gadžengero.”

¹⁹⁰ The figure comprises up to 75% of *Servika Roma* (Slovak Roma of Serbian origin), 15 % of *Ungrika Roma* (Roma from south-western Slovakia who speak a Hungarian dialect of Romani) and 10% of *Vlachika Roma* (earlier referred to as *Vlax Roma*, the most conservative and closed-off subethnic group maintaining the least contact with the surrounding majority; Czech Vlax Roma usually identify with the *Lovara* subethnic Vlax group).

man the industry and to re-settle Czech borderlands, the so-called Sudetenland, after the violent expulsion of Germans following Beneš Decrees in 1945 (Pavelčíková 2004: 30). Of the 6000-strong community of Czech and Moravian Roma present in the Czech lands prior to the second world war, only less than 600 returned from labour- and concentration camps (Pavelčíková 2004: 22).

Although the Giňa and the Baláž families' respective arrivals occurred within a twenty-year period¹⁹¹, they experienced a similar structural change to their social existence. They left a familiar position of relative integration into the Slovak rural society to face novel and challenging circumstances in their new home regarding language, employment and accommodation and to be met with a hostile reaction of the local population¹⁹². The radical break with their original environment and the fact that neither Romany settlement has survived until today¹⁹³ have contributed to the writers' sense of loss of an idyllic pre-modern Slovak Arcadia.

¹⁹¹ The Giňas left Tolčemeš/Šarišské Sokolovce in 1946, the Balážes finally settled in North Bohemia at the end of the 1960s, having done regular seasonal work in different parts of the Czech Republic for the better part of the decade, returning to Nová Dedina only for the winters.

¹⁹² Contradictory tendencies can be traced in contemporary records. While the authorities acknowledged the need of large numbers of unskilled labourers for the reconstruction of the post-war state, the disorganised and random way in which the first Romany families came to the country in the mid-forties instigated moral panic and attempts to intern Roma in labour camps (Pavelčíková 2004: 30 – 36).

¹⁹³ A. Giňa testifies to the disappearance of his original settlement in "Sar mušind'am te rozčhivel amare khera" (*Patív*: 147): "Pal o mariben pes phundraďa e luma a sako šaj geľa, kaj kamelas. Tolčemešiste le Romendar na ačhiľa aňi jekh. Paš miri buťi avľom vajkecivar kij'amende andro gav tel e Hineška. Odoj le kherendar na ačhiľa nič, sa rozpele. Arakhľom odj ča e luka, ča e žuži phuv." ("After the war, the world opened up and everyone could go where they liked. Not a single Roma stayed in Tolčemeš. On a few occasions my work brought me back to our village under the Hineška. Nothing was left of our houses, everything had fallen apart. All I found there was a field, just barren ground.") I. Eliášová relates how the local council in Nová Dedina bought the plot of land on which the Romany settlement had been situated and how some of the Roma bought flats in Levice, a bigger town in the area, but the majority moved to the Czech Republic. She says: "Amare khera zburinde, akanik pe pažiťa hin baro stredisko zdravotno. (...) Le perovostar na ačhiľa nič." ("Our houses got knocked down and these days there is a large health centre in the field [where we used to live]. (...) Nothing is left of our settlement." Sadílková 2012: 106).

Andrej Giňa waited for his book *Paťiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta/Paťiv. We still know what honour is*¹⁹⁴ for more than fifty years¹⁹⁵. When it was finally released in 2014, he was seventy-eight years old and it showcased the best of the short-stories, fairy-tales and columns he had written and scattered across a large number of periodicals (or put away in his folder) up until then. The collection contains four short-stories dedicated to his father, Andrej Giňa sr., which together form a loose autobiographical cycle mapping out the life of Roma in Eastern Slovakia approximately between the beginning of the first and the end of the Second World War.

Although the stories were written over a period of twenty years and they had not been consciously intended to create a chronological narrative whole, they show a remarkable unity of time, place, character and authorial treatment¹⁹⁶. As book-length life stories are still a rare occurrence in the former Czechoslovak region, I am going to discuss Andrej Giňa's cycle of four stories within the framework of autobiography.

Irena Eliášová always dreamt of becoming a writer but her family circumstances combined with state censorship suppressing all activities reflective of Romany ethnic heritage¹⁹⁷ prevented her from seeing her work published until the age of fifty-five. She

¹⁹⁴ Andrej Giňa: *Paťiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta*. Praha: Triáda 2013. Eds. Karolína Ryvolová and Helena Sadílková.

¹⁹⁵ For a detailed description of the genesis of the book see Karolína Ryvolová: "Samas čore, aľe jekh avres dahas paťiv", ("We were poor, but we had respect for each other", Preface to *Paťiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta*, pp. 7 – 19).

¹⁹⁶ "Bijav"/"The Wedding" (1991), "O Rusi kij'amende"/"The Russians Are Here" (1993), "Pal o manuša, so amenge keren paťiv"/"The People Who Bring Us Honour" (1995), "Sar mušindam te rozčhivel amare khera"/"How We Had to Knock Down Our Houses" (2012). These are the years of the stories' earliest recorded publication; they often got reprinted, even on several occasions, in later years. In terms of chronology, they are situated as follows: "Pal o manuša, so amenge kernas paťiv" in 1940, "Sar mušindam te rozčhivel amare khera" in 1942, "Bijav" in 1943 and "O Rusi kij'amende" in 1945.

¹⁹⁷ In April 1958, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) held a groundbreaking meeting in which they approved the instalment of the so-called assimilation policy. It was soon followed by the passing of law No. 74/1958 ruling the immediate settlement of all travelling people, which became a crucial tool in the enforcement of assimilation policy. Its chief aim was to strip Czechoslovak Gypsies (*cikáni*, lower case intentional) of all vestiges of their ethnic identity and to forcefully assimilate them into the majority population as part of the lowest social stratum. The use of Romani was perceived as a particular threat to this project and as such it was publicly denounced and punished especially in education. The effect of assimilation policy ceased with the fall of the communist regime in November 1989. For a detailed relation of contemporary ideology and jargon pertaining to Gypsies ("Gypsy question", "Gypsy problem", "asocial, parasitic and primitive", "need for re-education", "a dying ethnicity", "need for

started writing *Naše osada/Our Settlement*¹⁹⁸ while working three shifts at a Liberec factory sometime in 1997. She tried reading a few pages of her intended autobiography to her Non-Romany colleagues during lunch-breaks and their positive response encouraged her to finish it in eight months (Sadílková 2012: 112). After various rigmaroles, it was finally released in 2008. In four parts, each covering one season of the year, her child narrator Gužka (Elišková's childhood nickname) relates the events of her last full year spent at her settlement in Nová Dedina before moving to the Czech Republic.

As both writers grew up speaking Romani (mutually intelligible dialects with minor variations) and in terms of ethnicity, they belong to the same subgroup of Servika Roma, I am going to discuss their work in one chapter. They share a largely comparable cultural heritage, and despite the age difference, both reminisce their childhood surrounded by friendly Slovak peasants with fondness and a longing for a lost utopian world. Nevertheless, despite their common background, as individuals they represent different tendencies in Romany writing, which enables me to draw more general conclusions about the development of "RomLit" in the Czech Republic.

4.1 Identity

4.1.1 Language

Bilingualism, or even multilingualism is characteristic for all speakers of Romani (compare Matras 2002: 238). Both A. Giňa and I. Eliášová command three languages – the Romani of their parental home, the Slovak of their birthplace's dominant community and Czech as the official language of their current country of residence, although their respective competencies in Romani differ¹⁹⁹. Eliášová had also been exposed to Hungarian in her youth,

the merging with the superior culture of their surroundings" etc.) see Jaroslav Sus: *Cikánská otázka v ČSSR*, Praha: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury 1961.

¹⁹⁸ Irena Eliášová: *Naše osada*, Liberec: Krajská technická knihovna v Liberci 2008.

¹⁹⁹ Giňa has never stopped using Romani at home and with all the members of his extended family, including his grand- and great-grandchildren. It is the chief language of communication between him and his wife, Helena Giňová. (Data based on participant observation in the Giňa home in Rokycany.) Eliášová, on the other hand, in fear of not preparing her three children suitably for dominant educational institutions, instilled by the assimilationist propaganda, never used Romani in her own home. Also, her husband does not speak Romani. She regrets her decision in retrospect: "Nowadays I feel sorry because I have no one to

as she grew up in a part of Slovakia with a considerable Hungarian minority, but although her parents spoke it, she does not.

Despite their shared trilinguism, the two writers employ radically different strategies of language use. Eliášová applies an intricate mix of Czech, Slovak and Romani, with Czech for the basic narrative voice, Slovak in dialogues and Romani in emotionally charged or emblematic situations (compare Scheinostová 2012: 219). Due to her schooling taking place first in Slovak and later in Czech, there are occasional loanwords in both.²⁰⁰ Scheinostová suggests that the writer “clearly anticipates a readership of not only Romany origin” (*Ibid.*). I dare say that the writer was aiming *primarily* at Non-Romany audience, considering the way in which she first tested her writing on a sample of *gadje* listeners. In a recent interview (Sadílková 2012: 113), Eliášová further explains: “When democracy started, in 1995, 1996, that’s when skinheads appeared. (...) I said to myself, ‘Irena, you’ve got to do something! You write, so write something, fight back!’ I wanted to demonstrate we’re not as thick as people have us for, we can actually do something.”

Eliášová indicates that the language of everyday communication in the settlement is Romani (*Osada*: 53). The reader is expected to join in the illusion, although the majority of dialogue in fact takes place in Slovak. When Romani is actually spoken, there is a clear paradigm to the contexts in which it is used, although individual functions sometimes overlap: a) in set phrases to do with folk customs, oaths, curses, or rites of passage (e.g. *Osada*: 76, 90, 109, 158); b) in emotionally charged situations (e.g. *Osada*: 73, 138, 159, 161); c) in traditional songs illustrating the plot (e.g. *Osada*: 42, 91, 134 - 135) and d) as a private ethnic code, or argot, when Roma do not want to be understood by the surrounding majority, or parents do not want to be understood by their young children (*Osada*: 57, 76).

The editors declare to have interfered with the manuscript as little as possible in order to retain its quality of local colour. They found “the switching of codes more or less regular, [although] the different languages often inadvertently merge” (Editors’ note in *Osada*:

talk to [in Romani]. My children don’t know Romani so well.” (“Akana phare mange po jilo, hoj nane kaha te vakerel. Mire čhave avka lačhe na džanen romanes.” Sadílková 2012: 102).

²⁰⁰ “Konečně už jsme doma, nejhezčí a nejlepší ze všeho je na tom to, že **mamička** je doma a je navařeno a teplo” (*Osada*: 11) The word in bold is a Slovak endearing term for **mother** in an otherwise Czech statement. And vice versa, in the following sentence, the word in bold is a Czech adjective meaning **potato** in an otherwise Slovak question : “Čo chceš nabrat, rezně alebo fašírku a **bramborový** šalát?” (*Osada*: 84)

167²⁰¹). Scheinostová commends Eliášová's contextual code-switching, which she finds more deliberate and intentionally creative than in other Romany writers' works, and finds it a pertinent image of the multilingual multicultural world of the then Southern Slovakia (Scheinostová 2012: 220). Eliášová's treatment of language is realistic in keeping with her goal i.e. to revive an era and a location. Nevertheless, it is also showing the first signs of hybridity which is only partly inadvertent: she switches, and mixes, codes in a creative blend which is one step away from intentional hybridisation.

Andrej Giňa, on the other hand, is a purist. His single code in use is Romani, which he does not abandon even for situations which automatically invite code-switching for Eliášová, when two or more ethnicities/nationalities have to communicate in a neutral zone (Scheinostová 2012: 219). Like Eliášová, who encourages the reader to accept the illusion that her Romany characters speak Romani, Giňa signals his readers they should mentally replace the Romani of inter-ethnic communication with a suitable language code. Thus members of the Hlinka guards speak Romani to a Jewish shop-owner who they have come to arrest (*Paťiv*: 129)²⁰²; Giňa's father and the local mayor hold meetings in Romani (*Paťiv*: 137)²⁰³ and a Russian officer addresses two local Romany boys in Romani (*Paťiv*: 151)²⁰⁴. Especially the last example proves what obligation the author has placed his Romani-

²⁰¹ "Přestože lze tedy v užívání jazykových vrstev v zásadě sledovat pravidelnost, nezřídka mimoděk dochází k jejich prolínání."

²⁰² "'Tu sal e Chanuša?' phučľa latar. E gori čak dikhelas. Dičholas pre late, sar igen daral. 'A so kamen?' phučľa lestar." ("You are Chanuša?' he asked her. The woman just stared. You could tell she was terrified. 'And what do you want?' she asked him.")

²⁰³ "'Ta so aso ajso nevo, hoj vaš mange bičhaďal? Talam mange kames te phenel vareso lačho, či na?' phučľa o dad. 'Mamo!' phenďa la gorake o čhibalo. 'An amenge čepo thard'i the balevas a maro!'" ("What kind of news has made you send for me? Surely you want to tell me some good news, don't you," asked my dad. 'Mother!' the mayor said to his wife. 'Get us some drink and some bread and bacon!')

²⁰⁴ "Sar imar džanas het, zaačhiľa o predešis paš o duj romane čhave, o Dežis the o Bugošis. Zaasand'iľa pre lende a pricirdľa len kija peste. 'A so tumen, čhavale? Sar dživen?' Ňiko na odphend'a leske, bo na achaľile, so vakarel (...)." (As they were leaving, the officer stopped by two Romany boys, Dežis and Bugošis. He smiled at them and pulled them towards himself: 'And what about you, boys? How are you?' No one answered because they could not understand what he was saying."

competent readership under, because he would have them accept they cannot understand what a Russian officer is saying, even though they can.²⁰⁵

Giňa has gone a long way since he first started writing. His first literary project, a collection of his mother's traditional Romany fairy-tales, was narrated in Czech; the earliest version of "*Bijav*" was written in Czech with dialogues in Romani²⁰⁶ because by that time Giňa had realised that to try and recreate the unique world of *gadjo*-Romany Slovak countryside in Czech was futile, "it was just a shadow [of the way people used to talk], it lacked spice" (Preface to *Paťiv*: 9). Since 1989, he has been writing solely in Romani²⁰⁷. His consistency in using Romani as the language of literary production has helped to alter the small literary sub-field by positioning Romani at the top of the symbolic hierarchy as a prestigious value to be striving for.

Eliášová's next venture after *Osada*, a Mills and Boon romance between a white Slovak farmer and a married Romany woman, entitled *O kham zadžal tosarla/The Sun Sets First Thing in the Morning*²⁰⁸, was written in Romani. Eliášová had visited a reading of Romany writers in Prague and had felt intimidated by the fact that even the *gadjo* host of the

²⁰⁵ There is plenty of evidence in oral histories and Romany literary works that Slovak farmers, shop-keepers or artisans sometimes spoke Romani. Such Non-Romany person was held in great respect and he was often friendly and helpful with his Romany neighbours or customers. In "Phuro"/"The Old Man", the friendly butcher Kantas, who gives the protagonists of the short-story work, "knew Romani better than the Roma themselves and spoke with them only in Romani" ("O mesarosiš, o Kantas, has igen lačho, pherasuno manuš. Romanes džanelas feder sar Rom. Romenca delas дума ča romanec." *Paťiv*: 33). However, that is not the kind of situation in which Slovak guards are speaking to a Jewish woman, a Romany patriarch is speaking to the Slovak mayor or a Russian officer is speaking to Romany boys. The signals to indicate that the characters are indeed speaking Romani – that the illusion of them speaking Slovak or Russian should be temporarily lifted – are missing.

²⁰⁶ The earliest version of "*Bijav*"/"The Wedding", entitled "Na veselce", was written sometime in the 1970s. A radio programme featuring extracts from it, entitled "Povím ti to krásným slovem" ("I'll Tell You With a Beautiful Word"), was first aired in Český rozhlas on 3rd March 1979.

²⁰⁷ For a detailed study of Giňa's authorial development, see Karolína Ryvolová: "Samas čore, aľe jekh avres dahas paťiv", Preface to *Paťiv*: 7–19.

²⁰⁸ To be released by *Václav Havel Library* in Prague in September 2014 as part of a collection of Romany women's prose of the same title (in Czech): *Slunce zapadá už ráno, sborník současné ženské romské prózy*, eds. Karolína Ryvolová and Lukáš Houdek.

event spoke Romani: “My heart ached, how come I am a Romany woman, so was my mother and these days I can neither write nor speak Romani?” (Sadílková 2012: 102)²⁰⁹

Even though Eliášová situates her new interest in her mother tongue after the release of *Naše osada*, at the time she had already accessed the literary sub-field from a previously unrecognised outpost, her earlier book carries clear signs of the importance of Romani for the Roma. The Fryda family “are different from [the other Roma] in that they only speak Slovak to each other and perhaps they can’t even speak *our* language” (*Osada*: 53, emphasis mine), the eldest Fryda, worldly Albin, “is quite handsome but listen to him speak his Czechoslovak, ridiculous!” (*Osada*: 61) and a prestigious fair-skinned Romany bride “can’t be much good ‘cos she only speaks Slovak, I haven’t heard a single Romany word out of her, I bet she’s stuck-up” (*Osada*: 96).

Both Andrej Giňa and Irena Eliášová place vital importance on Romani. But while Eliášová wrote her first book with a Non-Romany audience in mind and adjusted her writing accordingly, Giňa has fortified himself in his knowledge and use of Romani and he subjects his fictional world to its doctrine as the only communicative and interpretative code. Giňa expects the general public, both Romany and Non-Romany, to accept his writing *an sich*, or read translations. His works demonstrate a healthy confidence and an indifference to other cultural producers, which Pierre Bourdieu associates with naïve cultural production (Bourdieu 2010: 292). Despite the fact Andrej Giňa personally aided the birth of Romany literature in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, structurally he has never left its sub-field dominated by mainstream cultural production. Irena Eliášová, on the other hand, via her use of reflexivity and her sophisticated system of code-switching is showing signs of straddling the dominated and the dominating fields.

4.1.2 The (Un)Importance of Skin-Colour

There is no doubt that skin-colour as a feature which immediately identifies the members of the two differently socially-mobile groups in the then Slovakia holds a central position in the respective narratives.

²⁰⁹ “U man dukhaďa o jilo, sar oda, hoj me Romňi, miri daj romaňi u me adaďive na džanav te pisinel romane, aňi te vakerel?”

In *Naše osada*, it is thematised in the culturally frowned-upon friendship between the Romany narrator, Gužka, and her Slovak classmate, Čiko. All action depicted in the book pivots around it; it embodies the boundaries between the two communities, which are constantly being crossed, erased and then re-defined in keeping with the social dynamics of the Slovak countryside. Along the same line, the importance of having the right complexion is ceaselessly being stressed, both within, and across the barriers of, respective groups, only to be downplayed, ridiculed, dissolved and then re-established.

In terms of looks, the two protagonists epitomize a stereotypical image of *gadje* and Roma. Čiko has fair skin, blond hair, green eyes and freckles (*Osada*: 18); Gužka is exceptionally dark (*Osada*: 33). According to I. Eliášová, all particularly dark girls were called “Gužka” in Nová Dedina, despite their given name,²¹⁰ thus the name itself embodies difference, not only from the white neighbours but even within the Romany settlement. In a telling episode, Gužka and Čiko dye Gužka’s hair blond and draw freckles on her nose “to make them look similar and to stop people from giving [them] names and shouting: ‘Čiko hangs around with a Gyppo!’”²¹¹. Gužka has attempted to integrate herself into the Slovak majority by annulling her visible difference; the writer conversely shares in her grandfather’s essentialist view of identity whereby one is born as a Romany, it is a fixed property but can be improved by being a good Roma and a decent human being (*Osada*: 20).

Gužka’s and Čiko’s mismatched friendship is mirrored in the traditional love-story of the Hungarian boy Fery and the Romany girl Sulika as related by Gužka’s grandfather (*Osada*: 55 – 59) and the contemporary love-affair between the Slovak farmer Pa’o and the Romany girl Maryška (*Osada*: 104 – 142) and all three relationships are likened to the story of Romeo and Juliette (more about reflexivity of the literary field in Eliášová’s work in chapter 4.3). Unlike Shakespeare’s tragic lovers, the mixed couples of Eliášová’s book find understanding (Gužka’s and Čiko’s parents agree to let them play with each other in a revisited scene of Juliette’s faked poisoning, *Osada*: 121) or satisfaction in the form of a successful elopement (Fery and Sulika) or universal approval in marriage (Pa’o and

²¹⁰ Email from I. Eliášová from July 2, 2014. As a little girl, Eliášová hated her nickname. Apparently, calling her character Gužka was intended both to create a distance between herself and the fictional character, but also to give all the Gužkas in the Romany village an alternative existence by making the name famous.

²¹¹ „[J]á mu budu podobná a nikdo nám už nebude nadávať a pokřikovať na nás: ‚Čiko sa ťahá s cigánkou!‘“ (*Osada*: 16).

Maryška). The happy-endings are not only dictated by the general tone of the book which, by virtue of its child narrator, is partly intended for young readers, but they are also reflective of the writer's genuine belief in the practicability of a peaceful co-existence of Roma and *gadje* in the utopian world of Slovakia of yore. The essential unchangeability and self-understood need for the maintenance of inter-ethnic boundaries can be traced in Gužka's belief that a child born of a mixed marriage will be black-and-white (*Osada*: 108) or the fact that after the wedding of Paľo and Maryška, the new wife stays at her husband's home whereas the rest of the Roma return to their settlement.

Eliášová also regularly refers to the symbolic value of light skin among the Roma, when she calls beautiful Roma women "fair as a *gadji*" (*Osada*: 33, 77, 96). Females with fair skin are traditionally favoured on the marriage market, hence no one is surprised when Jožko Parko, the most handsome single man in the settlement, has brought himself a blonde for a bride, even if her natural dispositions are artificially enhanced (her hair is dyed). With her elegant clothing, eye-glasses, education, fair skin and blond hair, people feel she is a suitable match for Jožko and *almost* the real thing (*Osada*: 93, 94, 95, 96).

The darkness of skin is also a good excuse for poking fun at each other inside the Romany community, where such humour is permissible (but never outside and across ethnic boundaries). Eliášová engages in satire aimed inwardly when she says "[O]ur Roma are sunbathing as if the pigment they were born with was not enough for them, some are so black their skin is shining".²¹² But the openness of admitting to a shared characteristic of all Roma, the highly-targeted *blackness*, is immediately moderated by putting a prestigious slant on it, when Gužka's grandfather declares: "Never mind we're black, black soil nurtures bread."²¹³

In Giňa's cycle, barring a single reference to "a swarthy soldier"²¹⁴, the crucial position of the colour of the skin is marked by its absence. It has been replaced by the physical boundaries of respective villages, homes and events, where the local Slovaks and Romanies mix, or do not mix, according to custom. The protagonist, Andrej Giňa senior, is in different places characterised as level-headed (*Pativ*: 61), intelligent, wise and respected

²¹² "[N]aši Romové se sluní, jako kdyby jim nestačily pigmenty, které mají od narození, někteří jsou tak černí, až se lesknou." (*Osada*: 104).

²¹³ „To nič, že jsme čierni, šak na čiernej zemi sa rodí chlebík." (*Osada*: 104)

²¹⁴ "kalosegno slugad'is" (*Pativ*: 155)

(*Pat'iv*: 121), magnanimous (*Pat'iv*: 147), sought-after as a great artisan (*Pat'iv*: 111) and a great musician (*Pat'iv*: 65) etc. His character shows some of the niches where the *gadjo* and Romany worlds traditionally overlapped in the Slovak countryside, allowing for a mutually advantageous economic network in which everyone knew their role and no one was left to his own devices (in detail chapter 4.1.3.1). Not once is the protagonist referred to in terms of the colour of the skin.

A. Giňa does not draw unnecessary attention to the differences in skin-colour²¹⁵ because in his mind's eye, the then rural society showed largely egalitarian tendencies (compared to the post-war years in the Czech Republic and especially the extremism-prone modern period since 1989) and as such was as good as unicoloured. The feeling of equality is further aided by the way the Non-Roma do not form a homogenous crowd but fall into groups of Roma-friendly country people and/or villains (members of the Hlinka guards, Germans). White people in Giňa's stories are assessed on the basis of their deeds and individual qualities rather than the sets of virtues and vices mechanically ascribed to *gadje* as a whole.

Both writers' intention is to show a largely peaceful co-existence of the two communities in which individual human relationships are superior to stereotypical generalisations and racial bias. Ultimately, the colour of the skin is only secondary.

4.1.3 *Romipen/Pat'iv* as *Habitus*

One of the recurring motives in Romany writing of the Czechoslovak region is *romipen*, the art of being a Rom. Short-stories and poems are either directly entitled "Romipen"²¹⁶, or they describe it in the oblique way which is characteristic of all of its definitions. The editors of Vlado Oláh's book of poems maintain that "this term has many different meanings, it does not only represent Romany culture, tradition and mentality, it also depicts the observance of certain unwritten rules of hospitality, assistance to the ones in

²¹⁵ In the other texts included in *Pat'iv*, Giňa occasionally refers to women being "parňi sar gadži/white as a Non-Romany woman" or "šukar sar gadži/beautiful as a Non-Romany woman" in keeping with the traditional Romany belief that white skin, particularly in women, is attractive. See also footnote 259.

²¹⁶ For instance Vlado Oláh: "Romipen" in *Le khameskere čhave/Děti slunce*, Praha: Matice romská 2003, pp. 48 – 49; Helena Červeňáková – Laliková: "Romipen" in *Romano džaniben ňilaj* 2003, pp. 163 – 168; Patrik Čonka: "Romipen" in *Čalo vodi*, Brno: Muzeum romské kultury 2007, p. 246.

need, solidarity with other Roma etc.“.²¹⁷ “Romipen,” muddies the waters Hübschmannová (1993: 44), “is the beautiful, consolidated, free-of-acculturation, morally and aesthetically rich traditional art of being a Rom.”²¹⁸ The Romany poet Margita Reiznerová identifies *romipen* with “the purifying power of the wise Romany word”, i.e. Romani, and she believes Romany fairy-tales used to represent the sum of all models of proper Romany/human behaviour (Hübschmannová 1993: 46 – 48). For Patrik Čonka, a prime example of *romipen* was when, on his cousin’s death, his uncle decided to walk to the cemetery behind the coffin, despite his frailty. One of his sons put him on his shoulders and carried him. “He walked with him proudly and honourably straight to the grave, no one was surprised, no one laughed. Then I realised I finally knew what *romipen* was.”²¹⁹ Červeňáková-Láliková makes an inventory of all the animals that are traditionally considered good or bad omen among her Roma, complete with the ways to undo the consequences of black magic, because “[the Roma] believe in their ancient *romipen*”; thus defining *romipen* as a set of traditional folk beliefs and customs.²²⁰

Interestingly, the term itself is scarcely recorded among *servika Roma* prior to 1989. The head of Romany Studies at Charles University, Jan Červenka, believes *romipen* has been adopted from Vlach Romani (*romimo*) and it was coined and disseminated during the intense phase of Romany nation-building in the 1990s.²²¹ In oral histories and older Romany writing the concept was either never labelled, or *pařiv* (honour, respect, morality etc.) was used to the same effect. A. Giňa’s short-story “Nabisterďam pre peskeri pařiv/We still know what honour is” (*Pařiv*: 218 – 225) is about a decent Romany man, who, on finding a miserable

²¹⁷ “Romipen – tento pojem má mnoho významů, ono romství nepředstavuje jen romskou kulturu, tradici a mentalitu, ale i dodržování určitých nepsaných zákonů, jako je pohostinnost, pomoc potřebným, soudržnost mezi Romy aj.” Vlado Oláh: *Le khameskere čhave* p. 49.

²¹⁸ “[A přesto v mnoha ‘hrozných’ i nehrozných osadách se uchovalo něco] krásného z konsolidovaného, nedekulturizovaného, eticky i esteticky bohatého tradičního *romipen*, romství.”

²¹⁹ “Barikanes the pařivales leha džalas maj paš o mochto, ňiko pes na čudařinelas, ňiko na asalas. Me imar avľom pr’oda, hoj džanav, s’oda romipen.” (*Čalo vodi* p. 246)

²²⁰ “Andro pumáro phurikáno romipen pačan.” in Helena Červeňáková-Láliková: “Romipen” in *Romano džaniben ňilaj* 2003, p. 163.

²²¹ To Červenka’s knowledge, no one has researched the phenomenon and it would be very difficult to provide dependable data to support the argument. Email from Jan Červenka from July 12, 2014.

Romany mother with three children on his doorstep after a long day at work, feeds them and then drives them to a remote town where they reunite with their husband and father. Similar examples of selfless solidarity are related in Oláh's "Romipen": the grandfather takes in the poor and suffering, regardless of their ethnic origin, feeds them, puts a roof over their heads and even lets them sleep in his own bed.

The extreme fluidity of the term *romipen*, which encompasses the socially-determined ways in which the Roma differ from their surroundings - their uniqueness as perceived by insiders - demonstrates striking similarities with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu introduced it "to account for the actual logic of practise (...) as the product of a *practical sense*, of a socially constituted 'sense of the game'" (Bourdieu 1992: 120 – 121, original emphasis). M. Shaw used a different definition of *habitus* by Bourdieu as "an inexact and incorporated code that guides interrelations with people, objects and environments within the taken-for-granted everyday activities that agents participate in" (see chapter 1.5). Both definitions feature vagueness and the mundane. Likewise, *romipen* is an inexact umbrella term for a vast variety of human relations and unpremeditated reactions to typical situations in the every day lives of the Roma.

4.1.3.1 Mutual Complementarity

The life-stories of I. Eliášová and A. Giňa are without exaggeration a celebration of *romipen*. Both writers depict largely idyllic worlds in which the Roma abide by its unwritten rules in a symbiotic coexistence with their Slovak neighbours. In the highly structured rural society, the Roma represented one of the estates (Hübschmannová 1993: 35). They provided services and performed menial jobs which were reserved solely for them. Their reward was usually material in the form of food or clothes but in return for their services, they received a form of patronage from "their *gadje*". This paternalistic protection was institutionalised in the guise of godparenthood i.e. the Slovak farmers adopted semi-official responsibility for newborn Romany children.

Importantly – and Giňa's and Eliášová's prose bears ample witness to this – the boundaries between Slovak farmers and "their Roma" were clearly outlined but not impermeable. "The channels for the maintenance of economic links between the Roma and the *gadje* were delineated with precision and the exchange of goods and services followed specific rules," Hübschmannová sums up (1993: 35).

The Non-Romany villagers are indispensable to the sense of harmony the writers evoke and they are partly enveloped in the Romany *habitus*. In “Bijav”, Andriš, the narrator’s father, welcomes the Slovak groom Janko in his house with the obligatory phrase ‘I’d show you respect [*paťiv*], but there’s nothing to give’²²², normally reserved for other Roma. Janko has crossed the ethnic boundary both symbolically, by not keeping Andriš’s violin to stop him from playing at a different wedding (*Paťiv*: 69) and also physically, by walking into the despised and removed Romany settlement to require a service (*Paťiv*: 61)²²³. His human qualities qualify him for a near-Roma who deserves to be shown *paťiv*.²²⁴ Similarly, the best man regrets not being able to sit by the same table as the Romany musicians because “where there are Roma, there is good fun”²²⁵. The differentiation between good *gadje* and bad *gadje* underpins the extraordinarily good relations between “our *gadje*” and “our Roma”.

Eliášová dedicates her book “to ordinary people, simple, uneducated but also wise (...) who had to beg for work, toil in the fields in exchange for food, but still they managed to be optimistic, give us love and live to the full with a cheerful mind”²²⁶. The extract highlights some of the values typically associated with *romipen*: modesty, hard work, selflessness, unconditional love for one’s family and a cheerful mind in the face of adversity; simultaneously, it is a portrait of the state of affairs in pre-war and immediately post-war Slovakia.

²²² “Dás tut paťiv, aľe nane man so te del.” (*Paťiv*: 65)

²²³ By 1943, the local *gadje* had joined the Slovak anti-Gypsy laws of 1941 and 1943 and had driven “their” Roma outside of Šarišské Sokolovce into a wild field with no infrastructure beyond the limits of the village, where they survived the remaining years of the war in extreme poverty in makeshift huts (Karolína Ryvolová: “Samas čore, aľe jekh avres dahas paťiv”/“We were poor, but we had respect for each other”, Preface to *Paťiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta*, p. 12).

²²⁴ The same transfer of the Romany *habitus* onto the good Non-Roma can be traced in the way the ruffian Luka provokes a fight at the wedding reception. “Won’t you show me respect [*paťiv*]? Won’t you get me a drink?” he teases the best man. “We show respect [*paťiv*] to everyone, who is decent [*paťivalo*, adj. from *paťiv*].” A mutual hustle ensues, followed by the narrator’s warning: “But Andriš knew what weddings were like! He knew what a ruffian like Luka would do when his pride had been hurt [te leske vareko činel paťiv]!” (*Paťiv*: 87 – 93)

²²⁵ “Kaj Roma, odoj pherasa.” (*Paťiv*: 77)

²²⁶ “[Právě toto bezpráví mě donutilo napsat knihu o lidech,] o obyčejných lidech, prostých, nevzdělaných, ale zároveň moudrých (...) Kteří se se museli prosit o práci, pracovali těžce na poli za potravinovou odměnu, a přesto dokázali žít optimisticky, dokázali nám dávat lásku a žili naplno s veselou myslí.” (*Osada*: 5 – 6)

In the summer, Gužka's mother works for "her" Non-Romany farmer as a farm hand (*Osada*: 11, 104); the farmers' wives present their Romany neighbours with hand-me-down children's clothes (*Osada*: 15); Gužka's father is a musician and plays in the local Romany band who provide music at all the weddings, funerals and christenings in the village (*Osada*: 15); Gužka's brother Lajko assists the local priest as a ministrant (*Osada*: 30).

Andriš from Andrej Giňa's cycle is a blacksmith with considerable Non-Romany clientele (*Paťiv*: 111), he is the local Roma's spokesperson who is on first-name basis with the Slovak mayor (*Paťiv*: 137.) and also the leader of the Romany band who play at all the major events (*Paťiv*: 61, 75). Before the anti-Gypsy laws were enforced, the whole Romany community had lived at the upper end of the Slovak village in brick-and-mortar houses (*Paťiv*: 122) and their integration into the rural society had nearly been completed. When they are being ousted from the Non-Roma's midst in "Sar mušind'am (...)", Andriš delivers the following defence speech, presenting in a nutshell both the tradition and the irreplaceability of the Romany community in Slovak countryside:

We have lived here for at least two hundred years. We mean no harm to anyone. We don't steal, we don't fight, we don't argue, we live peacefully as do you. We work in your fields, we play music for you, we fetch your firewood from the forest and generally we do everything that you need. (Paťiv: 139)

A humorous episode from *Naše osada* in which the local Roma steal a white farmer's pig, but the pig turns out to have been sick, reveals the extent to which the two communities know each other (*Osada*: 42 – 46). Although Eliášová does not state it directly, it transpires that the pig's sickness may have been invented by the farmer to terrify the ritually-clean-oriented Roma, when he was getting nowhere with his investigation. Thus an instance of *romani butji* (outsmarting the local farmer) is immediately evened out by a subversive act of the *gadjo* (a pig-short but morally avenged).

Both I. Eliášová and A. Giňa frame their idyllic narrative by their families' departure for the Czech Republic (*Osada*: 161 – 164; *Paťiv*: 147). It marks the end of an era; the contemporary conflicts are downplayed and laughed at (e.g. the episode with the mean priest who is served laxatives in his milk by Gužka, *Osada*: 10) or minimised (the betrayal of the *gadje* from A. Giňa's village who drove them out, *Paťiv*: 147). Their new home will provide

fulltime jobs and relative comfort, but they will be taken for strangers by the surrounding dominant society. Because the change of their childhood *habitus*, of which their Slovak neighbours were an indivisible component, was so dramatic, they have retained a petrified image of an Arcadian wonderland.

4.1.3.2 Gender Roles

Gender roles as a particularly perseverant aspect of *romipen/Romany habitus* are treated with a marked difference by the two writers. While A. Giňa relates the then status quo without questioning it, Eliášová via the comments of her child-narrator Gužka shows considerable dissatisfaction with gender patterns observed by the patriarchal community.

The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, there is a generational gap between A. Giňa, born in 1936, and I. Eliášová, born in 1953. Increased contact with the Non-Roma brought about social change, which is well-captured in the revolution brought on by the introduction of the first TV set into the settlement in *Naše osada*. Secondly, Tolčemeš/Šarišské Sokolovce is located in Eastern Slovakia, whereas Nová Dedina is in the South-West where the integration and democratisation processes moved along faster (Hübschmannová 2005: 89). Thirdly and most importantly, by virtue of being a woman, I. Eliášová inadvertently speaks on behalf of the oppressed Romany womankind.²²⁷

Romany female characters are more or less missing from Giňa's cycle. There is not a single one in "Pal o manuša (...)" ; in "Sar mušind'am (...)" there is an objectified rape-victim who does not speak, a supportive wife and an anonymous choir of angry Romany women who get pacified by the wise Romany leader; in "Bijav", Andriš's wife quietly serves food and drink and once stops her husband from being spendthrift, and in "O Rusi (...)", there is a group of silly Romany wives who want to go shopping but the Romany mayor stops them in time before they put themselves in harm's way. The sweeping majority of action and dialogues take place in the homosocial continuum of men, to which women pose as a passive backdrop, as collaborative guardians of the home or alternately, as undependable agents with lesser intelligence.

²²⁷ The fact that women writers subject traditional *romipen*, particularly with its gender connotations, to criticism has been noticed and addressed by several commentators e.g. Scheinostová 2010, Ryvolová 2014 or in a more popular vein Renáta Berkyová: "E bacht ke mande avel. O svobodnej mysli rómskych spisovateľiek" in A2 biweekly No. 9/2014, p. 6.

Far from calling Andrej Giňa a chauvinist, I see his unproblematic way of portraying male-female relationships as conditioned historically and sexually. Some of his other prose e.g. “Trin jandre/Three Eggs” (*Pařiv*: 192 – 195) or “Pal o leřivo rom/The Lazy Husband”²²⁸ demonstrate a stronger awareness of gender issues and take a more critical stance to inequality. Their virtual absence from the cycle based in Slovakia proves the writer found the original *habitus* of the Slovak countryside natural. It is the head-on collision with the world of the urban *gadje* in the Czech Republic which inspired doubt.

Eliášová’s alter-ego Guřka is only nine years old but her observations and gendered comments disguised as nařvety show a grown-up’s mind behind them with a clear concept of the injustice shown women in the name of *romipen* (Scheinostová 2012: 218 – 219). The men are extremely possessive of their women, who they view alternately as an ornament or a disgrace, once the woman transgresses on the strict rules of *pařiv*. “If my Ilona disgraced me [the way the Non-Romany woman did] by getting undressed in front of men, I’d kill her and then give myself up,” one of the characters expressed the general sentiment²²⁹. The tone is humorous but the threat is real. The double standards of sexuality are shown in the way a man can do as he pleases, even pay a quiet visit to Julka, the local *lubňi*²³⁰, but ‘A wife needs to sleep with her husband every night! If not, she’s a bitch. Then she thinks of other men.’²³¹ Women have no say in how often they get pregnant and generally the men’s prestige increases with every conceived child (*Osada*: 7, 140). Love is expressed by possessiveness, jealousy and beating (*Osada*: 80, 141). While the (usually pregnant) wife works in “their” farmer’s fields, the eldest daughter runs the entire household. “One day, she’ll throw it to the winds and elope with some handsome man,²³²” Guřka predicts.

²²⁸ Giňa, Andrej (2011). “Pal o leřivo rom/O líném manželovi”. In Romano vod’i vol. IX, No. 11, pp. 28 – 29.

²²⁹ “Moja Ilona keby mi zpravila takú hanbu, že by sa vyzliekala před chlapami, tak ju zabijem a idem sa udat.” (*Osada*: 34)

²³⁰ Literally “whore”. In Romani, this is not the same as “a prostitute”. A woman does not have to sell her body in order to be called a whore. It is usually enough if she is a flirt or changes partners often, although Julka, whose partner is in jail, grants sexual favours quite freely.

²³¹ “Žena musí každý deň s mužom spáť! Ak nie, je to potvora. Potom myslí na druhých chlapov.” (*Osada*: 35)

²³² “Jednoho dne se na to všechno určitě vykašle a uteče s nějakým pěkným mládencem do světa.” (*Osada*: 22)

The introduction of a TV set into the settlement as a broadcasting channel of potentially subversive information about the outside world brought about a structural change. Women shortened their skirts after the fashion of Sofia Loren, started wearing bras and got their hair permed (*Osada*: 79 – 80). Gužka's father chastised her mother for shortening her skirt but "in the end he let her do it"²³³. The strict rules of *pa'iv/romipen* are starting to deteriorate, a change is about to occur.

A preview of the future alterations of gender roles can be spotted in Gužka's and Čiko's relationship, in which the Romany girl demonstrates masculine and the white boy feminine traits. They are each other's counterparts: Gužka refuses to tow the line, she is mischievous and daring, whereas Čiko is quite unadventurous and "he will never be a soldier"²³⁴, the way he is always afraid. She is rash and outgoing; he is level-headed and introverted. By way of paradox, their relationship also reflects on the values upheld in the respective communities: Gužka pities Čiko for being an only child, even though he is much richer than her; Čiko runs away from his nice home to spend time with Romany children, who are poor but sustain a strong sense of togetherness (*Osada*: 39).

While Andrej Giňa was still living in Eastern Slovakia, the radio, let alone a TV set, was rare even amongst the Non-Roma in the village. Besides, there was no infrastructure in the barren field where they had been driven following the anti-Gypsy laws. Giňa's treatment of gender roles as part of the Romany *habitus/romipen* creates a continuum with the pre-modern times he depicts. The settlement Eliášová has portrayed is already undergoing social change and moving towards modernity.

4.2 Established Literary Traditions, Narrative Strategies

4.2.1 Narrative Voices

Andrej Giňa's key narrative strategy is to lend his father maximum symbolic capital by withdrawing himself from the picture and employing the feature of an omniscient narrator. This is done more or less consistently in "Pal o manuša (...)" and "Bijav", in which

²³³ "[Naše mamička má také kratší sukni, tatko se s ní moc pohádal,] ale nakonec jí to dovolil." (*Osada*: 80)

²³⁴ "[Ty sa všetkého neboj,] takto z teba nikdy vojak nebude." (*Osada*: 54, also 33 - 34, 84, 85 etc.)

his father Andriš is introduced as a universally respected Romany *vajda*²³⁵, a sought-after blacksmith and a band leader of considerable renown. The writer reveals his relation to the protagonist of “Pal o manuša (...)” only in the final paragraph:

*Once in a while, in god knows how many years, a person is born who possesses something that the others never will. It only takes one look at such a person to realise he is going to be respected and followed; to see everyone is going to show him respect (pařiv) and he won't even have to open his mouth. Such a man was my father Andriš, a great musician, blacksmith and human being. May he rest in peace. (Pařiv: 121, emphasis mine)*²³⁶

Withholding his relation to the protagonist from the reader for the greater part of the story enables the author to shape the narrative as an ode to a remarkable person without compromising him or himself.

In “Sar muřind'am (...) and “O Rusi (...)”, the narrator's presence is made subtly known by inserting the sentence “I was six years old at the time”²³⁷ and by using different forms of the noun phrase “my father”²³⁸ respectively. As the author was born in 1936, he may have witnessed some of the related events, but more likely these have been countlessly told and retold in the family. To separate retrospectively his own memories from the versions

²³⁵ *Vajda* (in Hungarian *duke*) is a term traditionally used for the head of the local Romany community. A. Giňa prefers *romano ĉhibalo*, literally “Romany spokesperson” (*Pařiv*: 111). *Vajda*'s role in pre-war rural Slovakia had been to negotiate relations with the local Non-Romany majority as the Roma's chief representative. He moderated inter-ethnic dialogue, smoothed over conflicts, bridged differences. The loss of the natural *vajda* role following the introduction of assimilation policy in 1958 and the coerced dispersion of Romany settlements in 1965 has contributed substantially to the deterioration of majority-minority relationships (Reichová 2001: 58 – 61).

²³⁶ “Jekhvar, na džanav tel keci berša, u'lon ajse manuša, so len ehin vareso, so avren šoha na ela. Pre kajso manuš ĉak dikheha a imar džanes, hoj les sako udžanel the šunel. Hoj les ehin mařkar manuša pařiv. A aňi na musaj te phundravel o muj. Mařkar kale manuša perlas miro dad, o Andriřis, baro lavutaris, ĉarřas the manuš. Mi el leske e phuv loki.”

²³⁷ “Mange has akor řov berř.” (*Pařiv*: 123)

²³⁸ For instance “Zageľa pal miro dad, pal o Andriřis.”/“He went to see my father, Andriř.” (*Pařiv*: 153) or “Sar dokhelde, cirdle sako avri pandž řel koruni, thode le dadeske andre řeba. Kajĉa o dad pal o love aňi te řunel na kamľa.”/“When they finished dancing, each of them pulled out a five-hundred-crown note and they put it in my father's pocket. But my father wanted nothing to do with the money.” (*Pařiv*: 155)

of events as formalised by his father's reiteration is virtually impossible: in tacit recognition of this fact, the author is keeping himself in the background, a passive witness to his father's greatness.

The outspokenness of Gužka, Irena Eliášová's childhood-self narrator, allows her to express critical views of the community. The sought-after effect is achieved by maintaining a gaping discrepancy between the affected naïvety, and even humour, of the comments and the harshness of the facts (see also 4.1.3.2).

In a supposedly comic episode, the husband is beating his wife over the head with a dead chicken until she is covered in blood, shouting: "What a bitch! She won't cook meat, she'll save the chicken for holiday, and me, I'm supposed to eat nothing but *halušky*²³⁹! What am I, a stinking beggar?"²⁴⁰ When the onlookers realise some of the blood comes from the chicken's entrails, they leave the beaten-up woman lying in the snow in tacit recognition of the fact that a husband can do with his wife as he pleases – barring killing her. The fact that this was not an isolated incident and Nemák abuses Eča regularly is shown in the episode from Maryška and Paľo's wedding (see 4.1.2). Under a false pretext, Nemák accuses Eča of flirting with Non-Romany men, and although she "turns to him meekly and shuddering"²⁴¹, he proceeds to beat her up (*Osada*: 138 - 140). The narrator explains that "once Nemák has knitted his brow, all hell breaks loose"²⁴².

In an episode featuring the local witch doctor Zágika curing an allegedly bewitched girl, the author implies her reservations about faith healing among Roma by having Gužka explain matters to Čiko in third, instead of first person plural: "**They** trust her more than they trust a doctor. What can you do, you can't talk **them** out of it, Zágika is everything to **them**." (*Osada*: 146, emphasis mine)²⁴³. Čiko's dismissal of faith healing and the avowal to become a doctor one day highlights the dichotomy between the Roma's magical thinking and the

²³⁹ Traditional Slovak dish. Small scraps of dough made of ground potatoes and flour are cooked in boiling water and served with sauerkraut or sheep cheese. It is considered a cheap meal for poor people.

²⁴⁰ "(...) Veď je to potvora, mäso nechce variť, sliepku necháva na sviatky, a ja mám jesť samé halušky, čo som žobrák?" (*Osada*: 24)

²⁴¹ "(...) obrací se třesoucí se Eča pokorně na muže (...)" (*Osada*: 139)

²⁴² "Jakmile svraští Nemák obočí – je zle!" (*Osada*: 139)

²⁴³ "Jej veria viac ako doktorovi. Čo narobíš, oni si to nedajú vysvetliť, pre nich Zágika je všetko."

gadje's rationality. Gužka's response ("One day I'd like to become a student."²⁴⁴) has been shaped by an adult's experience and worldview, and in retrospect it marks the resolve to follow an upward-mobile social trajectory and succeed in the eyes of the Non-Romany majority.

Andrej Giňa's unproblematic er-form narrative aims at the effect of maximum objectivity. In true spirit of his life-long involvement with Romany emancipation movement, he bears witness to a historical period which in hindsight seems to emblematises all the virtues of *romipen*, the Romany *habitus*, while simultaneously paying homage to his highly esteemed father. It is done in what seems to be a mostly selfless fashion, in order to uphold a certain ideal which the post-war generations of Roma born in the Czech Republic have had no access to, and any pretence to stardom associated with his own person seems to be only incidental.

Irena Eliášová, on the other hand, treats her narration with much more sophistication. She combines two different modes of narrative: an elaborate system of language code-switching, which lends the milieu of her childhood a believable depth, and the subversively critical voice of her child narrator Gužka, which allows her to keep a safe distance from allegations of undermining her own community. Leaving the matter of the degree of intention aside for the time being, Eliášová displays a much deeper awareness of the possibilities granted to the writer by narrative devices, an awareness which is closely linked to reflexivity, or familiarity with the existent literary field.

4.2.2 **Vakeribena pal o dada**

For the greater part of its existence, Romany writing in the Czech Republic has been shaped by oral tradition, both of the highly formalised kind such as fairy-tales and songs, and the non-formalised kind labelled simply *vakeribena*, or narratives (Hübschmannová 2000a: 128). As an umbrella term, *vakeribena* comprises stories about the ghosts of the dead (*vakeribena pal o mule*)²⁴⁵, descriptions of traditional folk customs and way of life (*sar pes*

²⁴⁴ "Ale chcela by som byť študentka." (*Osada*: 146)

²⁴⁵ Tales of the dead.

čirla dživelas)²⁴⁶, tales about notable personages and events (*vakeribena pal o dada*)²⁴⁷ or stories about persecution during the Second World War. Particularly the last two types of narrative have in written form been moving from personalised genealogies to more general depictions of (recent) Romany history, whose function is to sustain collective memory and highlight events of historic import conducive to the process of Romany nation-building (Scheinostová 2014).

For the two writers in question, story-telling is both the method of production and its genre (Scheinostová 2014). Both writers wish to preserve the memories of their childhood, not only for the sake of their respective families but also to boost their people's confidence and give them a history of their own. Giňa focuses on the celebration of his father as an exceptional personality, while Eliášová is more interested in the recollection of traditional customs linked to the four seasons of the year. Both pay extreme attention to the contemporary topography of the lost world of their settlements and the detailed recreation of the network of *gadje*-Roma relations, thus positing environment as a crucial character in their stories.

Even if *vakeribena pal o dada* is the writers' shared elementary framework, in terms of sub-genre each takes it in a different direction. A. Giňa taps into war narrative; whereas I. Eliášová contributes to the wealth of children's literature. As elaborated upon in previous sections, the narrator/protagonist Gužka is a cheeky nine-year-old who betrays an adult mind behind her funny, naïve and/or ironic comments. Her mischievousness combined with a kind heart and keen observations make her join ranks with some of the classic characters of children's literature such as Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstockin or Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

As far as the latter protagonist is concerned, Gužka shares with him not only an extreme aversion to (particularly racial) injustice but also the life in an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous area remote from, and backward in comparison to, the centre.

In the USA roughly between the end of Civil War and the close of the 19th century, the literature featuring specific parts of the country, local manners, folklore, landscape and particularly dialect is usually referred to as *local colour*. Initially revolving around the

²⁴⁶ How we used to live.

²⁴⁷ Tales about forefathers.

shifting frontier, using its own specific language (*tall talk*) and a characteristic set of figures of speech (bizarre similes and metaphors, eccentric quantifiers, crazy hyperbole and violent understatement²⁴⁸), it mostly served for entertainment; only later in the works of e.g. Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Kate Chopin or William Faulkner did it gain gravity and a deeper level of social criticism. Regional literature in Europe is often linked to areas transgressing state borders, where momentous history has moulded a particularly rich blend of population,²⁴⁹ and it usually poses an alternative to the centre, offering a fresh perspective on e.g. the national history. It seems viable to argue that Eliášová's minute re-creation of South-Western Slovakia's peculiarities belongs to the Euro-American tradition of local colour/regionalism, although her exact position within this complex genre would require a separate study²⁵⁰. Through her life-story, Eliášová has put her birthplace and its Roma on the map, thus proving their importance and claim to a degree of autonomy²⁵¹.

As noted above, Giňa's cycle displays features of the diverse area of war reminiscences²⁵². While for the majority of Romany authors, the ultimate wrongdoers

²⁴⁸ Martin Procházka: "Mark Twain, the Tall Tale, & Local Colour" in (Procházka et al.) *Lectures on American Literature*, Praha: Karolinum 2002, pp. 106 – 113.

²⁴⁹ E.g. *Prekmurje*, the key region for the Slovenian author Feri Lainšček, has a long history of Slovene, Hungarian and German presence combined with large Jewish and Romany ethnic minorities. *Želary*, Květa Legátová's fictitious village, is based upon her intimate knowledge of the Moravské Slovácko region located at the Czech-Slovak boarder with an extensive Moravian, Slovakian and Romany population.

²⁵⁰ Most American commentators recognise a difference between *local colour* and *regional* literature in the US, whereby regional literature is a more general term applicable not only to the specific historic milieu of post-Civil-War America but universally to all literature concerned with specifics of a certain area. Some commentators seem to differentiate between 19th century regional/local colour literature (here the two terms overlap) and 20th century *regionalist* literature, which has been erected upon the foundations of the earlier genre to convey more important messages about the state of humankind, replacing the Centre as a sphere of influence. "[R]egionalism in twentieth century literature can be understood as a manifestation of a specific value pattern and an expression of a distinct creative attitude which, instead of being absorbed in the details of provincial, suburban or village life, aims to recreate the region in the form of a myth, and as an autonomous, aesthetic reality," sums up Zdeněk Hrbata (English summaries in Hrbata, Zdeněk, Housková, Anna (Eds.) *Román a „genius loci“*. *Regionalismus jako pojetí světa v evropské a americké literatuře*, Praha: Ústav pro českou a světovou literaturu ČAV, p. 179, original emphasis.)

²⁵¹ This thought has been inspired by Pavel Janoušek's article "Sněhurka a sedm trpaslíků. Region jako problém při psaní dějin literatury/Snow White and the Seven Dwarves: Region as a Challenge in Writing the History of a Literature" in *Tvar* No. 17/2011, pp. 6 – 7.

²⁵² The struggle for the recognition of Romany holocaust ranked topmost on the agenda of the founding conference of the International Romani Union (IRU) in Orpington in 1971 and perhaps in an attempt to

against the Roma between 1939 and 1945 are the Nazis (of German, Austrian or French extraction), they are virtually missing from the picture of war as depicted by A. Giňa. In keeping with producing a small local history perceived from below, Giňa's resentment is aimed at the members of the Hlinka Guards, Slovakia's own paramilitary organisation run by the clerofascist *Hlinka's Slovak People's Party* (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana). As a satellite state of Nazi Germany, the Slovak Republic maintained a high degree of autonomy, rendering the Roma's Slovak neighbours a much more immediate threat than the super-ordinate but remote Germans. Thus members of the Hlinka party are portrayed as half-witted and ridiculous (Drábek and Koňárik, the two guards who get drunk and wreck their car instead of arresting the local Jewish shop-keeper Chanuša, *Paťiv*: 133 – 135) or mean and pathetic (Čarný, the local head of the Hlinka party, directly responsible for the Roma's expulsion, is shown as visibly frightened when confronted with his crimes after the liberation, *Paťiv*: 147).

If Giňa perceives the Hlinka party members as the ultimate villains, then the Russian liberators stand as uncontested heroes, or so it seems. They are polite, friendly, responsible and kind to both children and the elderly (*Paťiv*: 151 – 153). Only at a second glance is it noticeable that Giňa has left a signal of latent discord between the liberators and the locals for the reader who is aware of the Soviet army's reputation. The Russian officer asks Giňa's father about girls because "[the soldiers] would like to dance"²⁵³. Giňa's father responds by saying that there are no young women in the Romany settlement - a fact which would be very hard to account for - and the ones in the Non-Romany village are too frightened to come out because of the ongoing German attacks. The officer accepts the explanation and the potential crisis is apparently resolved without acrimony.

contribute to the same, stories of holocaust persecution and survival have been surfacing regularly in Romany writing across the world (see also Scheinostová 2014, Eder 1994). Some of the earliest and/or most influential literary works of the Roma are in fact war-related, e.g. the play *Horiaci cigánski tábor* by Elena Lacková (Czechoslovakia 1946)²⁵², the highly-acclaimed autobiographies *Zwischen Liebe und Haß* by Philomena Franz (Germany 1985), *Wir Leben im Verborgenen* by Ceija Stojka (Austria 1988) or *Winter Zeit* by Walter Winter (Germany 1999), the novel set in an internment camp *La septième fille* by Matéo Maximoff (France 1982) or perhaps most recently Sofia Taikon's story edited by Gunilla Lundgren and pencilled by Amanda Eriksson in the form of the comic book *Žofi Z-4515* (Sweden 2006).

²⁵³ "Kamahas amenge te zakhelel." (*Paťiv*: 155)

However, Zlatica Rusová in her harrowing autobiographical story “Romane romňa/Romany Women”²⁵⁴ offers a different, much more frequently documented scenario of a similar situation. The Russian soldiers on discovering a whole Romany community hiding in a cave in the woods drag all the young women into the village and rape them, including the mentally retarded Maňa who dies of grievous bodily harm received in the process. In my opinion, Giňa senior’s little lie in “O Rusi (...)” suggests his son may not be wholly ignorant of the mass rapes often attributed to the Soviets, but he chose to give the liberators an overall positive report in order to enhance the difference between them and the bad Germans and even worse Slovaks.

An interesting pattern emerges from the majority of holocaust testimonies as recorded by Czech and Slovak Roma. Although the pre-war rural Slovakia, which Romany writing has transformed into a fictitious place of harmony and understanding²⁵⁵, was lost through the actions of the very neighbours who had helped create it, as a rule, the surviving Roma do not seek revenge. Thus Giňa’s father confronts Čarný only to tell him none of the Roma would avenge themselves²⁵⁶; Lacková explains why Pačaj, a half-Romany captain of secret police renowned for his anti-Roma attitude, died of natural causes; and Pášová’s bereaved families find solace in collecting money for the funerals and looking ahead, because “live you must”²⁵⁷. Lacková’s summary requires no further comment:

²⁵⁴ <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/zlatica-rusova-romske-zeny> accessed on August 17th 2014.

²⁵⁵ An idyllic day-to-day co-existence of multiple ethnic and national groups in Slovakia (Roma, Jews, Slovaks and Hungarians) can be found in e.g. Hilda Pášová’s “Te dživen musaj” (*Romano džaniben* No. 4/ 2000, pp. 25 - 38), Elena Lacková’s *Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou* (Tráda, Praha 1997) or Andrej Giňa’s “Bijav” (*Paťiv*: 60 – 97) and “Pal o manuša so amenge kernas paťiv” (*Paťiv*: 110 – 121).

²⁵⁶ *No dikh, sar visal’ila e karta! Akana sal imar ajso cinoro. T’avás ajso sar tu a džáš te phenel le Rusenge, so amenca kerđal, sar amen vitradl’al andal o hera a sar len mušinám te rozčhivel, so gondol’ines, hoj tuha kernas? (...) Kajčak me na som ajso sar tu. Dikhav, hoj hin tut famel’ija. Na domukas, hoj o čhave the e romňi te ačhen korkore. Vašoda na phenava nič, aňi ňiko le Romedar. Na lavas peske tut pro sumeňis.* – See how the tide has turned? Now you are nothing. If I were like you and went to tell the Russians what you’d done with us, how you’d driven us out of our homes and how we’d had to pull them down, what do you think they would do to you? (...) But I’m not like you. I can see you have a family. I wouldn’t allow your children and your wife to stay alone. That’s why neither I nor any of the Roma will speak. I won’t have you on my conscience. (*Paťiv*: 145 – 147)

²⁵⁷ “Te dživen musaj.” (The title of the story and the last sentence; in *Romano džaniben* No. 4/2000, pp. 25 and 38.) The dead from “Te dživen musaj” fell victim to the shell dropped by an unspecified force directly

*Fear alone is a sufficient form of punishment, and that's why merciful Roma forgive their culprits before they die. It is not a human's place to take revenge because he would smear himself in the process. Revenge belongs to God.*²⁵⁸

Forgiving the ones who trespass against us is indisputably a Christian virtue, encoded in The Lord's Prayer, but as a form of unclingingness and magnanimousness, it has also been enveloped by the Roma as specifically theirs, one of the virtues of *romipen*, or *pařiv*.

4.3 Conclusion

My analysis has shown that despite their largely shared geographical and cultural background, Andrej Giňa and Irena Eliášová occupy different positions in the literary field in the Czech Republic. Eliášová's work is currently viewed as guided by the autonomous, indifferent-to-profit and unprofitable principle of art, although I suspect she is ultimately aiming for the heteronomous one, ruled by external economy (Bourdieu 1983: 321). Giňa, on the other hand, stands outside of the literary field, oblivious to its rules and consequently free to write as he pleases.

His writing displays strong affinity to oral thinking in Walter Ong's sense. By relating events in a linear sequence, using additive rather than subordinative sentence structure, resorting to the same schematic repertoire of metaphor, simile and phrase²⁵⁹, adopting a highly polarised tone of both antagonism and praise or demonstrating strong emotional involvement with his characters, his writing supports Ong's hypothesis that

on their shelter. Here, it is the sentiment of non-violence, peaceful resignation and mildly optimistic resilience which I am referring to more than direct anti-Slovakism.

²⁵⁸ Strach je sám o sobě dostatečným trestem, a proto milosrdní Romové odpouštějí svým viníkům před jejich smrtí. Člověku nepřísluší se mstít, protože by tím pošpinil sám sebe. Odplůata je záležitostí Boha. E. Lacková: narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou, Triáda: Praha 1997, p. 114)

²⁵⁹ For instance: *O kham labarlas/tařarlas, sar te kamelas/kaml'ahas sa te zlabarel*. – The sun was shining as if it wanted to burn everything down. (*Pařiv*: 99, 219 and in a number of short-stories not included in the collection); *parři sar gadži/řukar/řtaltovno* – white as a Non-Romany woman, pretty, handsome (*Pařiv*: 23, 99, 125, 229); *jov, joj řa dihelas/jon řa dikhenas* – he/she/ they just stared [in surprise, in awe, in fear etc.] (*Pařiv*: 35, 39, 65, 195, 247/ 187, 247, 273); *na likerďa but* – shortly, in no time (105, 133, 163, 165, 205, 215, 243, 247, 271).

“many of the contrasts often made between ‘western’ and other views seem reducible to contrasts between deeply interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness” (Ong 2002: 29).

His lack of concern with the form is also striking. The only semblance of a premeditated structure to his narrative can be seen in the way his father’s extensive travels as a Russian POW, described in detail in the story “Pal o manuša, so amenge keren pa’iv” (*Pa’iv*: 110 – 121), are reiterated in one paragraph as part of “O Rusi kij’amende” (*Pa’iv*: 153). It supports the sense of a narrative whole in which one story complements another, but their cohesiveness has been shaped by the natural unity of time, place and action and not by A. Giňa’s intention (see introduction to chapter 4.). Frequent repetition and thinking in thematic clusters (certain images and phrases trigger off a set sequence of description or narrative) are also typical features of an oral mindset (Ong 2002: 34).

Eliášová, on the other hand, demonstrates a conscious effort to enter the literary field by actively seeking to sustain and co-produce the belief in the game, *illusio* (Bourdieu 2010: 299). In other words, she complies, if partially and naïvely, with the conventions of literature. Firstly, she subjected her structure to her intended goal, which was “to show, describe our customs, traditions and how we lived”²⁶⁰ in a year-round cycle. The four parts entitled by the seasons of the year enabled her to relate the particular activities the Roma engaged in.

Secondly, she has a keen eye for balance and sufficient reading experience to cater for her readership’s needs and expectations, which is something A. Giňa is indifferent to. Unlike a lot of Romany writers²⁶¹, she equips her (sub)plots with satisfactory closures/endings, which may seem schematic but prove Eliášová has the makings of a writer,

²⁶⁰ “Na čtyři roční období jsem to psala proto, abych tam mohla vyjádřit, popsat naše zvyky, tradice a jak jsme žili.” (Facebook message from I. Eliášová from July 2nd 2014.)

²⁶¹ The absence of a point or ending is perhaps a residuum of orality, in which – when a story is being delivered - the ad hoc atmosphere, the narrator’s gestures and facial expression and conversely his audience’s reactions to it, co-produce the piece (Ong 2002: 46). This is a phenomenon noticed by me or Lukáš Houdek in the public readings of Romany literature, where the Non-Romany audience are often at a loss, while the present Roma are always perfectly oriented and more often than not cheer the reader/narrator on with loud expressions of appreciation (a quality of traditional fairy-tale sessions remarked upon endlessly by M. Hübschmannová e.g. in Hübschmannová 2000: 128). Thus a story embedded in the writer’s oral mindset can be typically ended abruptly mid-narrative, or the point can be missing altogether, or a(n) (auto)biographical note or a ready-made formula (*Te na mule, dživen dži doadađives./They lived happily ever after.*) may serve its purpose.

while Giňa is a witness and reporter who would not bend facts in order to meet the formal requirements of literature.

For example, the last year of Gužka's life in Slovakia is concluded by the family's decision to move to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia; in the final scene, they are travelling on the train which is carrying them towards their future, leaving their past behind. The symbolic turning-point is accompanied with physical action; an old life is neatly wrapped-up and stored away, while a new one is waiting ahead. Similarly, Julka, the local *lubňi*, who is portrayed as granting sexual favours freely and indiscriminately, finally meets her first lover who has returned from jail and settles down with him as a decent wife (*Osada*: 153 – 154). Order has been restored, *pařiv* has ruled over chaos.

Eliášová demonstrates further affiliation to, and interest in, the literary field. Several examples of intertextuality/reflexivity are scattered in her story, never mind how rudimentary. She likens Maryška and Pa'lo, Sulika and Fery and even her narrator Gužka and Čiko to Romeo and Juliette from Shakespeare's tragedy (e.g. *Osada*: 106). Based on Jožo Nižnánsky's novel *Čachtická pani/The Bathory Legend* (1932), Gužka describes Čiko's hair splattered with goose blood "red as if we've paid a visit to the duchess of Čachtice"²⁶². Uncle Suchy after a fist-fight with his wife looks like a Quasimodo, the character from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Victor Hugo 1831; *Osada*: 80²⁶³).

Although some of these examples of reflexivity are in fact evidence of high-brow literature as appropriated by folklore (*Čachtická pani*, Quasimodo), others show a clear intent to use a classic piece of world literature (*Romeo and Juliette*) to lend her own writing a semantic depth and weight. That, as Pierre Bourdieu has sufficiently proven, is a sign of playing a part in the literary field, whose high autonomy is co-produced by an ever-higher degree of reflexivity (Bourdieu 2010: 319).

Bourdieu's sociological analysis may help us to understand the two writers' specific position within contemporary Czech literature further. While A. Giňa ranks among the

²⁶² "Sme celí od krvi, jako keby sme boli na návšteve u Čachtickej pani, však ty máš i aj vlasy červené." (*Osada*: 90)

²⁶³ "Druhý den je strejda samá boule, vypadá jako Quasimodo, jemu to vůbec nevádí, on tvrdí: „To nič, to z lásky.“"

pioneers of Romany writing in Czechoslovakia²⁶⁴ whose efforts are inextricably linked with the Romany emancipation struggle as represented by, and with the undying support of, Milena Hübschmannová, I. Eliášová had completed her book in seclusion and managed to get it published using her own original channels independent of the department of Roma Studies. The two writers represent two unique ways of approaching the literary field, two projects removed from each other in time but bound in the continuum of a young but quickly progressing body of literature. The situation of Romany writing in the Czech Republic is unparalleled in the context of countries with a large Romany population. Its history spans more than forty years of mostly uninterrupted development²⁶⁵ and especially since 1989, it has enjoyed considerable, if patronising, recognition from the dominant literary field.

They are both naïve writers in the way we understand naïve or primitive art: with no previous training or indeed very little schooling as such (Bourdieu 2010: 292). This grants them a freedom to completely disregard the cultural production produced so far, and A. Giña does exactly that.²⁶⁶ Bourdieu has identified structural homologies between the field of cultural production, the field of intermediaries such as editors and publishers, and the categories of audience (Bourdieu 1983: 325; 2010: 285). For my purposes, this means that the work of a writer with a high degree of symbolic capital (an *a priori* disadvantaged member of an ethnic minority, struggling against the monopoly of the majority population over cultural production, interested in disinterestedness) is frequently edited by an editor,

²⁶⁴ His first short-story written in Romani, “Kajse pheras pes na kerel” (“Such jokes are unacceptable”), was published in *Románo lil* 3/1972, pp. 28 – 29.

²⁶⁵ The most severe break in the development occurred directly after the forceful disbandment of the Gypsy-Roma Union (1969 – 1973). With it finished its journal *Románo lil*, which represented a unique platform for the publication of Romany texts (both journalistic and literary in kind). Although officially the state rekindled its ardour for assimilation policy, underground/covert activities soon took hold, e.g. a bilingual collection of Romany poetry entitled *Romane gifa*, edited by Milena Hübschmannová and her former colleagues from the Union, was published by Prague 8 local council as not-for-sale methodological resource material to be used for the re-education of Gypsies. Especially in the latter part of the 1980s following the wind of change coming from the Soviet Union in the form of Perestroika, Romany intellectuals were able to work again for their cause, write and e.g. stage Romany plays mostly under the auspices of legitimate folklore groups.

²⁶⁶ Conversely, a knowledgeable cultural producer familiar with the *habitus* of the literary field realises his erudition is both his entrance fee, and his ticket to discover a structural gap, a position of potential, which he will try to occupy (Bourdieu 2010: 309).

represented by a publishing house, or reviewed by a critic whose position among the intermediaries is comparable to the writer's position among the writers.

That this is the case regarding Eliášová and Giňa and their publishers becomes apparent when we look at the respective book launches of *Naše osada*²⁶⁷ and *Pařiv: Jeřtě víme, co je úcta*²⁶⁸. The host of the first one introduces the event by welcoming the guests “at a very special occasion” where “something remarkable is going to take place, namely a Romany writer's book is going to be officially launched”. The writer Eva Kantůrková, one of the book's patrons, lifts Eliášová to her level by calling her a colleague and concludes by saying that “even if the book made no profit, never mind, the main thing is it has been released”. Giňa's publisher, the editor-in-chief of *Triáda Publishing* Robert Krumphanzl, commends the author's conscientiousness, his craft and his urgency. The host of the event, the writer Jáchym Topol, who had been appointed program director of the library by Václav Havel himself, emphasises how privileged he feels by being able to launch the book at Václav Havel Library.

In both cases, both the institutions providing the venues (libraries in public service connotative of philanthropy) and the teams of editors and publishers (non-profit, low-profile, quality-oriented) consecrate the authors (i.e. lend them symbolic value) while simultaneously gaining it from them. It is a closed system, demonstrating lack of interest in profit as a virtue, aimed at like readership. A. Giňa has not quite identified with the rules of the game and has remained external to it; I. Eliášová accepts her current position in the autonomous sector of the field as a temporary condition. By veering towards genre literature (romance) in *Listopad* and *O kham zadřal tosarla*, she seems to follow a trajectory into the heteronomous area for popular readership.

Both life-stories unfold in an idyllic chronotope²⁶⁹ of the Slovak countryside, which by virtue of having been shaped by the system of estates in pre-war Slovakia and the consequent mutual complementarity between the farmers and the Roma, represented an

²⁶⁷ April 17th 2008 at *The Regional Research Library in Liberec*. I watched a DVD recording of the event from I. Eliášová's personal archive.

²⁶⁸ March 5th 2014 at Václav Havel Library. Available for viewing at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KjunvSBoA

²⁶⁹ The system of chronotopes was coined and devised by Michael Bakhtin. *Idyllic chronotope* referenced in M. M. Bachtin: *Román jako dialog*. Translated by Daniela Hodrová. Praha: Odeon 1980, p. 352.

unparalleled ideal in the recent history of the Roma. The line between a topographically precise depiction of one's birthplace associated with regional literature and an imagined version of the same serving as a mythical ur-vision of the World is thin, often vague and negotiable.²⁷⁰ Idyllic chronotope automatically lays basis for the interpretative framework of symbolic metaphor, whereby the Slovakia of the writers' youth serves as a commendable, desirable state worth returning to, if on a different level of development (compare Procházka 1993: 79). Simultaneously, it serves as a point of departure for a contemporary social critique, thus turning what seems to be a simple gesture of reminiscence into a political act²⁷¹. Giňa's cycle of four short-stories from *Pařiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta* and Eliášová's *Naše osada* can therefore be viewed as a particular type of political subversiveness disguised as nostalgia.

The position of Romani in the very centre of (Czechoslovak) Roma's identity is undisputable, even if for the youngest generation nowadays its role is often emblematic; signalling, rather than encompassing the Romany experience (compare Matras 2002: 254 – 255, Červenka & Sadílková & Kubaník 2010: 30 - 31). In “Amari romaňi čhib”/“Our Romany Language”²⁷², the poet Vlado Oláh (1947 – 2012) describes Romani as the intimate language of the mother and child, the receptacle of all Romany tradition, the cure to hardships, the bond among all Roma which uplifts and sustains the community. Elsewhere V. Oláh identifies speaking Romani with being a Rom when he says: “I think in Romani, I act like a Roma and I have Romany manners.”²⁷³ Karel Holomek, who comes from a

²⁷⁰ Zdeněk Hrbata: “Úvodem” in Hrbata, Zdeněk, Housková, Anna (Eds.) *Román a „genius loci“*. *Regionalismus jako pojetí světa v evropské a americké literatuře*, Praha: Ústav pro českou a světovou literaturu ČAV, pp. 5 - 6.

²⁷¹ M. Procházka identifies three characteristics of regionalist literature produced by small nation- and ethnic groups: 1) The struggle between the centre and the periphery is transformed into the opposition of the oppressive state and the oppressed people. 2) If the centre/establishment is spatially removed, everyday habitual activities of the periphery are elevated to represent culture and consequently political opposition. 3) The liveliness and peculiarity of the region is juxtaposed against the dryness of the estranged centre. (Procházka 1993: 75 – 76)

²⁷² Vlado Oláh: *Le khameskere čhave/Děti slunce*, Praha: Maticе romská 2003, quoted poem on p. 108.

²⁷³ Vlado Oláh: “Proč píšu romsky?”/“Why do I write in Romani?” in *Jekhetanard'a čhibaha/Sjednoceným jazykem, Sborník z 2. Semináře o romském jazyce Luhačovice 2005*, Ed. Jan Červenka, Brno/Praha: Signeta 2006, pp. 81 – 82.

distinguished family of language-assimilated Moravian Roma, has been learning Romani in his old age. In a paper entitled “Romský jazyk”/“The Romany Language”²⁷⁴, he admits the language is in immediate danger of experiencing language shift and in Oláh’s vein, he declares Roma who do not speak Romani as “having ceased to be Roma, even if their appearance proves otherwise²⁷⁵”. He argues for Romani as an imaginary homeland of the Roma because “the Roma do not have their own state, where Romani would be the official language”²⁷⁶.

Being able to write in Romani has particularly gained momentum since the project *Šukar laviben le Romendar/The Writing of the Roma* was run online by Romea news outlet (in detail Houdek 2012). Every week between October 2010 and January 2011, a previously unpublished piece of writing by a Romany author was posted on the website www.romea.cz. Not only did the project occasion the writing of many new Romany fairy-tales, short-stories and poems, an activity which had been dying down following the death of Milena Hübschmannová in 2005; it also inspired a lively online debate among the writers about their respective Romani competencies and the importance of safeguarding it as their cultural heritage but also as a feature which sets it apart from mainstream production. Younger writers whose competency in Romani was partial or passive have since experimented with Romani and some, such as Irena Eliášová, have internalised it. Discussions with writers whose competency in Romani is insufficient show that “they feel their lack of Romani, and their consequent inability to contribute to its development, is a handicap“ (Houdek 2012: 110). M. Hübschmannová’s notion of “RomLit” as a body of writing written by Roma in Romani has been resuscitated as the often unattainable, but nevertheless ideal state of matters in Romany writing in the Czech Republic.

²⁷⁴ Karel Holomek: “Romský jazyk”/“The Romany Language” in *Jekhetanard’a čhibaha/Sjednoceným jazykem, Sborník z 2. Semináře o romském jazyce Luhačovice 2005*, Ed. Jan Červenka, Brno/Praha: Signeta 2006, pp. 17 - 23.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 19.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18.

5 Conclusion

This thesis has set out to identify features of identity shared by Romany writers in different parts of the world. The choice of primary sources was substantially affected by the criterion of authenticity, although many commentators nowadays consider it a misleading essentialist concept. In my use, authenticity connotes the actual writing act performed by the Romany narrator as opposed to collaborative life-stories, recorded and edited by the interested Non-Romany parties (Shaw 2006). Separating these from the existing canon of Romany letters has been crucial to my conception.

The two dominant areas of interest have been identity – how it is formed and presented by the bearers of Romany culture, as embodied in their writing – and its relation to the established literary forms and theoretical frameworks.

The comparative analysis of two works from the West and two works from Central Europe has revealed a strong sense of independence, indigenouslyness and trans-national nationhood combined with antagonistic relations with the dominant majorities amongst the western Roma. The Roma from the post-communist countries, on the other hand, tend to perceive the surrounding majority as partners, with whom they seek reconciliation and mutual understanding, and rather than striving for their own independent Romanestan, they feel content with their double ethnic/state identity.

In terms of theorising Romany literature, I have tested a number of frameworks and/or partial concepts, namely post-colonial theory, African-American literary theory, Walter Ong's concept of oral versus chirographic/typographic cultures and Pierre Bourdieu's sociological take on the genesis and dynamics of the literary field. Partially and in combination, they have been useful in shedding some light on this fairly novel body of writing. Nonetheless, in future it may prove necessary to invent a new, possibly revolutionary theory of Romany writing that would take into account the Roma's specific position as a colonised, primarily oral community, whose writing is substantially informed by their oral tradition. This thesis would like to contribute to the debate thereof.

Last but not least, I have sought to bring the Czech production to the attention of the international audience, which mostly remains uninformed of the dynamic development Romany writing is currently experiencing in ex-Czechoslovakia.

5.1 Ethnicity Contested But Undefeated

The current trend in social sciences is to view ethnicity with its primordial and essentialist overtones with utmost wariness, as yet another form of human categorisation and as such an outdated and even dangerous concept (Mayall 2004: 238, Belton 2005: 36 and 171, Marushiakova & Popov 2004: 89, Willems 2008). Indeed, it seems that the consensus now, encompassing the breadth of all humanities, is that all groups, variously referred to as “cultures”, “traditions”, “ethnicities” and/or “nations”, are in fact imagined and socially constructed. Richard Handler even argues that “we need a language other than the discourse of *identity* in order to be able to comment creatively [upon nationalist discourse]” (1994: 30, my emphasis). The concept of ethnicity, coined in 1935 and disseminated in the 1950s to replace the historically compromised race (Mayall 2004: 189), appears to have lived its course and to have nothing new to offer.

Should we understand Romany ethnicity as something permanent, comprising a flawless Romany pedigree, static traditional culture and fluent Romani, I would be the first to point out its unserviceability. However, the self-written Romany life-stories show a much more varied picture, whereby Roma speak a multitude of languages, are geographically disseminated and practise varying habits and customs, while never losing sight of their Gypsiness as a distinct quality differentiating them from the surrounding dominant majorities, who also perceive them as the Other. To show the complexity of the ethnic label is not necessarily to compromise it. In Viktor Elšík’s words (Elšík 2005: 1): “The notion of ethnicity is multilayered and complex but far from useless.”

The removal of the category (of race, ethnicity, and identity) will not remove the social reality. Analogically to the so-called euphemism treadmill²⁷⁷, replacing an old discredited label with a fresh one would not alter the facts, as “[the old term] becomes tainted by association and the new one that must be found acquires its own negative connotations”²⁷⁸. Ethnicity, even if it is a socially constructed category, is a concept so far undefeated. Mayall’s claim (e.g. 2004: 234, 238) that the supporters of Romany ethnicity are as bad as the Lorists in using racial categorisation, is extreme. While racist theories

²⁷⁷ Coined by Stephen Pinker in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, Penguin 2002).

²⁷⁸ Stephen Pinker: “The Game of the Name” in *The New York Times* April 5th 1994.

presuppose the given inequality of races, ethnicity recognises difference while accepting it as equal.²⁷⁹

My understanding of ethnicity, as used throughout my thesis, is perhaps closest to the circumstantialist or situationalist perspective which represents “a shift in emphasis from the primordial criteria for ethnic group membership and its emotional function to the processes of group formation and boundary-making stimulated by self-interest and practical needs” (Mayall 2004: 194).

Interestingly, all four writers believe ethnicity to be inherited and fixed. Only Romany parents can successfully procreate (Vishnevsky); moving into a house does not make one lose his Gypsiness (Walsh); one cannot change one’s identity but one can be a good or a bad Rom (Eliášová); a Romany person is a Rom by virtue of language, practised endogamy and abiding by the rules of *pařiv* (Giňa).

Although there seem to be different qualities of Gypsiness in terms of class (Vishnevsky presents the Lovara as an elite superior to other Roma; Walsh feels Romany Gypsies are better people than the Irish Travellers; and Eliášová and Giňa portray the communities of *žuže Roma*/ritually pure Roma as opposed to *degeša*/Roma not observing the rules of ritual purity), a strong sense of all-Romany solidarity and superordinate homogeneity pervades the texts. Vishnevsky maintains that “[the Roma] are scattered all around the globe” (*Memories*: 73) and “a Gypsy in distress will always be helped by other Gypsies” (*Memories*: 82). Walsh emphasises persecution as a factor feeding into the character of the world’s Roma, defining them as extremely closed-off, insular, “old-fashioned and (...) very bitter” (*Gypsy Boy*: 66). Eliášová uses the telling maxim recognised by the vast majority of Roma around the world: “This is the way of the world: the Roma with the Roma, the *gadje* with the *gadje* (...)”²⁸⁰ She also states that to help each other, never

²⁷⁹ Let us not forget that David Mayall writes from the highly specific perspective of the British Isles which is not mirrored in Central and Eastern Europe.

²⁸⁰ “Tak už to v životě chodí, Rom Romeha, gadžo gadžeha (...)” (*Osada*: 109)

to let one another down, is “an unwritten Romany law” (*Osada*: 99)²⁸¹. Giňa declares: “Wherever your turn, anywhere in the world, you will find Roma.”²⁸²

Quite contrary to the (de)constructivist discourse, V. Vishnevsky and M. Walsh conceive of the Roma as a race, both implicitly and explicitly (for examples of the latter see *Memories*: 77, 81 and *Gypsy Boy*: 66, 82). They stress their relative independence on the structures of their host countries: their endogamy, unwillingness to mix with the *gadje*, self-employment and sanctions for the transgression of the symbolic boundaries of their communities. M. Walsh negotiates his identity between that of a Romany Gypsy and that of a homosexual but he seems reluctant to refer to himself as British, let alone English. Vishnevsky’s uppermost loyalty seems to be with his family, then with his Lovara subethnic group and finally with the Roma in general, but his residency in Brazil is merely incidental.

Eliášová and Giňa, on the other hand, clearly cannot imagine their future *outside* of their country of residence and they conciliate their Romany ethnicity with their Slovak/Czech citizenship with remarkable ease. Based on the history of the Roma of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, cherishing the memory of mutual complementarity practised in pre-war Slovakia, they enjoy “a dual identity and a dual nationalism” (Mayall 2004: 240).

A schism seems to be running between the Western and the Eastern/Central European Roma, whereby the former are readier to embrace the trans-national non-territorial status of the Roma, whereas the latter support it symbolically but their more immediate loyalty is with their host state. Marushiakova and Popov (2004: 81) suggest the relative integration of post-communist Roma into their countries of residence as a possible cause, to which I would add long-term sedentary status, at least in former Czechoslovakia; conversely, both Vishnevsky and Walsh have spent a considerable part of their lives on the move.

The Roma from post-communist countries may not be looking to find their own state, but according to Reichová from the Czech Republic, at least the Czech and Slovak ones answer to the criteria of nationhood (2001: 27 – 31), with their own actively produced nationalism. She supports her view by claiming that the disintegration of the traditional

²⁸¹ “Není možné, aby jeden druhého nechal bez prostředků. (...) [J]ednoduše je to takový nepsaný romský zákon.”

²⁸² “Kajča džaha, visafoha, odoj Romen arakheha! Pal calo svetos.” (*Pativ*: 157)

structure of rural Romany communities followed by the loss of natural leadership has resulted in the displaced Roma relating to each other on another level, namely that of a shared *romipen* (2001: 61). A new ethnic solidarity replacing the old one based on kinship is a relevant point, which sheds light on the dynamics of post-communist Romany nation-building.

This is in stark contrast to Brian A. Belton's view, who, despite his Romany ancestry²⁸³, battles against the Indian origin of the Roma and their ethnic identity in general. Bringing the constructivist approach to a new form of radical, he calls the Roma and all the other (semi)itinerant groups of the Western world an underclass. He indiscriminately mixes professional, social and ethnic groups in the process. While I find this type of constructivist iconoclasm counterproductive, I find his idea of ethnicity as narrative rather helpful.

My sample of writers has shown the irreplaceable position Romani enjoys as a marker of Romany ethnicity. There appears to be a connection between the degree of symbolic violence and misrecognition in a particular text and the language of production, i.e. a writer working in a second language displays signs of it shaping his utterances and it reflects on the content; the writers working in their mother tongue and/or a mix of Romani and contact languages demonstrate greater freedom from preconceived Non-Romany ideas infiltrating their discourse.

Despite the fact M. Walsh's competence in the Para-Romani of the British Isles is poor, the importance he places on it is made clear in the way it makes him feel inadequate. He feels as a misfit among Romany Gypsies not just because of his "wrong" sexuality but also by not speaking their tongue.

Romani is the mother tongue for V. Vishnevsky but he does not believe it possible to write in it, therefore he has become complicit in the act of symbolic violence upon himself in choosing English as his language of production. More so than I. Eliášová, whose blend of mother tongue and contact languages suggests an early form of hybridisation, Vishnevsky's choice has left a blank area between the semantic potential of his strictly oral mother tongue and the constraints of the acquired second language.

Eliášová's solution to her multifaceted identity (Slovak-Czech-Romany-female) in using a creative context-based mix resembles Gloria Anzaldúa's treatment of language and

²⁸³ According to his book, he is one-quarter Romany. (Belton 2005: 1 – 3)

genre in her 1987 essay *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Kynčlová 2005). Anzaldúa has re-invented herself in a hybrid new self, which bridges her Chicano (Mexican-American), mestiza (Aztec-Spanish) and female/lesbian identity. Kynčlová (*Ibid.* 46) sums up: “A different situation requests employing a different language because each language is burdened with a different personal and/or collective context.” What to Eliášová has come of its own accord - subjecting herself to the code which feels the most natural in a given context - Anzaldúa employs deliberately, as a program and a manifesto. It is a conscious effort to escape the limitations of symbolic violence exercised through language (*Ibid.* 43).

The most complete escape from the shackles of symbolic/epistemic violence has been performed by A. Giňa. He uses Romani consistently, never switching codes; it co-creates a framework which is entirely self-sufficient and self-absorbed. While Giňa’s use of Romani as a language of production may well be establishing the basis of a new literature, for the time being it positions it on the outskirts of the existing literary field.

Another area where Romany ethnicity is defined and negotiated are gender roles as prescribed and maintained by Romany *habitus* (*romipen/pat’iv*). The researched sample of texts depicts Romany communities as deeply conservative and patriarchal, with very little permissible alternative. V. Vishnevsky’s memoir, with its homophobia, lack of respect for women in general and Non-Romany women in particular and the aversion to showing the narrator in any position of weakness, features open machismo. A. Giňa’s absence of female characters, with the majority of action taking place in the homosocial continuum of men, also proves a conservative frame of mind. However, although they are peers both in age and conservatism, Vishnevsky’s radical outlook occasionally borders on misogyny, whereas Giňa is generally more open to accept women as partners.

Despite his homosexuality, M. Walsh’s world-view has been shaped by the extremely masculine milieu of Romany Gypsies. While in the Non-Romany world to which he has eloped he compensates for his inbred masculinity by overt campness, his two books show him at a stage in life where he would still prefer to be a straight Gypsy to being a banished gay. His books serve as an alternative to the conservative Romany values not so much out of choice, but as a matter of necessity.

The biggest challenge to the traditional gender-role division among the Roma is unsurprisingly detectable in Eliášová’s life-story. As a woman, she is naturally more apt to

identify and debunk myths about a woman's place. Her narrator Gužka, by virtue of being more of a rascal than her male friend Čiko and her interest in self-improvement, erodes some of the foundations of the Romany *habitus*. For the time being, she merely implies dissatisfaction and room for social change. More radical criticism and derision can be expected to find voice in Romany women's writing in the future, whereby more intimate and habitually unaccepted issues will get thematised.

Dark skin is another ethnic marker, whose status is made precarious by its racist connotations. It is viewed as a crucial element of Romany ethnicity by all four writers, but on a deeper, less obvious level than language, and their relationship to it is often problematic. Starting from the writer embodying the Romany ethnic ideal, I view A. Giňa's complete lack of reflections on Romany darkness as a sign of its essentialist givenness. Giňa does not discuss the Roma's complexion because his understanding of the world is shaped by the dichotomy of "dark Gypsies" and "white *gadje*". That this is the case is well-reflected by the simile "as pretty/white as a *gadji*". It follows that all those Romany women and men who lack this qualifying attribute must be dark.

I. Eliášová's life-story supports the dark Gypsies/white *gadje* paradigm whereby fair complexion is a prestigious feature in the settlement's inhabitants. However, she also employs a distancing technique, subjecting the stigmatising quality to irony, and/or conversely, identifying it with positive values.

M. Walsh constructs Romany Gypsies as dark-skinned despite the generally agreed fact that the British *Romanichal* do not represent a visible minority in the UK, and are more clearly defined by their lifestyle than their appearance. I believe two types of dynamics are at play here: first, he taps into the Lorient "true Romany" stereotype, which stipulates that a real Gypsy must be dark; second, he sees what he wants to see, to him the *Romanichal* appear dark.

V. Vishnevsky portrays his subethnic group, the Lovara, as white. In keeping with the high degree of misrecognition, or colonised mind, that his writing displays, the Roma in his life-story love freedom, suffer from Wanderlust, adore children, excel in music and dancing, everybody speaks Romani and has dark skin. By constructing the Lovara as white, Vishnevsky distances himself and his family from the stereotypical Roma, whose inferior, dominated existence he thus seals.

All four life-stories are related from the position of commendable difference. Vishnevsky's clan are "taller in size [than the Kelderasa tribe], more European-like (...) more civilised" (*Memories*: 81). M. Walsh's homosexuality is partly explicated, and excused, by the legacy of his sensitive, sensible and reclusive mother and maternal grandfather (see chapter 3.1.2). I. Eliášová's protagonist Gužka wishes to become a student one day (*Osada*: 146, 150 – 151), while the general consensus among the Roma in her village is that "studying is only good for the *gadje*"²⁸⁴ and those who study adopt *gadjo* ways (*Osada*: 151). A. Giňa's father is constructed as "different from the other Roma"²⁸⁵ in every conceivable way: he has seen the world (*Paťiv*: 115), he was the only Rom in the army (*Ibid.* 119), he is a popular blacksmith (*Ibid.* 111), an outstanding musician (*Ibid.* 121), the best maker of adobe bricks (*Ibid.* 145) and his wisdom attracts both Roma and the *gadje* (*Ibid.* 121).

Belton (2005: 140, original brackets) paraphrases Frantz Fanon when he says: "[T]he urge to become like the oppressor, (white) and cultured, leads the acculturated colonial subject to despise those less fortunate in his society." While I do not believe that the authors of the four life-stories necessarily "despise those less fortunate" among the Roma, I suggest that conceptualising themselves or their narrators as different is as much an apology for stepping forward and speaking on behalf of a stigmatised minority, as it is a symptom of the colonisation of their minds.

5.2 Current Theories, Future Options

The suitability of post-colonial theory for the theorising of the Roma and their literature has long been suspected. A strong argument for the parallels in orientalising the Other, running between the colonists at the time of the Empire and the Gypsy Lorists in late 19th and early 20th century, has been made by Ken Lee (2002). In her famous essay *Death of a Discipline*, G. Ch. Spivak argues for a new planetary comparative literature, which would take the old post-colonial theory beyond Asia and Africa to envelop all the small indigenous and/or formerly dominated literatures of the world (2003: 85). Post-colonial theory is a very good departure point; the dynamics of the Same and the Other, the centre versus periphery,

²⁸⁴ "Študovanie je dobré pre gádzov, dievka moja, a nie pre Rómov (...)." (*Osada*: 151)

²⁸⁵ "O Andrišis hino aver sar okla Roma." (*Paťiv*: 111)

the dominant power versus the oppressed minority can provide commentators with the most readily accessible terminological bank to start accessing the problem.

More specifically, I have found useful the notion of the colonised mind and epistemic violence, which, as my sample has shown, often work hand-in-hand, i.e. epistemic violence (the use of a language which is not one's mother tongue and the use of writing as opposed to oral deliverance) co-produces instances of the colonised mind. V. Vishnevsky's book is the best example, although selectively colonised mind surfaces in all of the studied texts.

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridisation has a potential for the future, but does not reflect much on Romany writing at the moment. Internationally, due to language assimilation and/or technical difficulties with the spelling of Romani, the majority of Romany writers use contact languages. In the Czech Republic, two approaches dominate: the use of unadulterated Czech, and the consistent use of Romani as in A. Giňa's case. Writers who produce in Romani basically fulfil G. Ch. Spivak's call for a comparative literature in indigenous languages; it is an extreme form of abrogation, which nevertheless reiterates the same paradigm of assumed privilege only in a reversed form (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 37). The appropriation of a colonial/power language to suit the needs of the colonised/dominated peoples, linked directly to the rejection of epistemic violence, is more or less missing. Eliášová's use of multilingualism is more a matter of convenience than an intentional creative gesture.

Nevertheless, even glossing (the insertion of foreign words into the second-language discourse with translations), untranslated glossing and code-switching constitute strategies commonly employed by post-colonial writers in the act of appropriation ((Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 58 – 76). Potentially, the purposeful application of the Romany ethnolect of Czech (Bořkovcová 2006) could serve as a hybrid language specific to "RomLit" in the Czech Republic. Regarding language-assimilated Romany writers from the West, a more radical approach to language appropriation would have to be employed.

Salman Rushdie's notion of imaginary homelands has been useful to make sense of the way in which the world's Roma relate both symbolically and otherwise, to India as their original home. While the absolute majority of Romany commentators concede the fruitlessness of trying to found a Romany state in India, it is not an unheard of notion. Following the schism between the Western and the Eastern Roma, I can see a tendency among the former to look to a future political body of all the Roma, or at least to a trans-

national identity, whereas the latter see their imaginary homeland in their mother tongue, Romani, without actively striving to be recognised as citizens of a non-territorial nation.

Spivak's above-mentioned call for a new comparative literature that would assess literatures from the centre and the margins on equal footing, making space for other than European languages, is equally important. Her idea of subalterity (Spivak 1988) postulating that any spokesperson of the oppressed, be they women or Roma, is ultimately NOT wording the experience of the masses, is highly relevant and potentially explosive. The Roma who have expressed themselves in writing, by virtue of communicating with, and in the mode of the oppressors, cannot represent the anonymous others in impoverished ghettos. They have already passed into the ranks of the privileged few and the underprivileged majority may feel angered and betrayed.

Despite the overall effectiveness of post-colonial theory as applied to Romany writing, it contains one major methodological discrepancy. Prior to employing abrogation and appropriation, the mind of the writers from post-colonial countries had been indoctrinated and shaped by the hegemony of English literature, "an ally [of the British colonial administration] (...) to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education" (Gauri Viswanathan quoted in Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 3). Hence, their literary work displays an extremely high degree of reflexivity. It was the thorough knowledge of the English canon which has enabled them to first reject it and later to use it to their own creative and subversive ends.

There had been no identification with the dominant canons on the part of the Roma prior to their becoming writers, simply because they had emerged from an oral (read: illiterate) background. Their struggle is therefore not to escape the paradigms of a dominant literature; rather, it is to transform the patterns of an oral mindset into a vibrant new mode of expression, reflective of contemporary problems, but retaining the specifics of the oral legacy. To understand how an oral mindset may affect writing, I have depended on Walter Ong's influential work *Orality and Literacy*.

African-American literary theory as designed by Henry Louis Gates jr. has helped me to recognise that inherently, all Romany writing is political, regardless of genre or theme (1989: 132). The idea of finding a voice in writing (*Ibid.* 21) reveals how Romany writers not only try to communicate a particular content to their (often imagined white) audience; more importantly, they want to communicate *as such*. Gates points out (*Ibid.* 129) how the

early African-American writers struggled to become speaking subjects (annulling thus their objectified status), thus rendering literature the very battlefield on which African-American equality was being negotiated. Moreover, by making the white written text speak with a black voice – what Gates refers to as “the speakerly text” - they introduced a crucial subversive strategy.

The notion of subversiveness at least partly overlaps with M. Stewart’s term *romani butji*, instances of which can be detected e.g. in Vishnevsky’s praise of his illegal methods of making a living (see chapter 2.1.1) or Eliášová’s episode about the stolen pig (see chapter 4.1.3.1). Subversive strategies in Romany writing operate on multiple levels and their research deserves a more focused attention in the future²⁸⁶.

Apart from the metaphor of the speakerly text, Gates also introduces the trope of the talking book, “of double-voiced texts that talk to other texts” (Gates 1989: XXV). This is where the parallel between African-American and Romany writing falls short. While according to Gates, black writers create “a web of filiation”, or in Bourdieu’s words, display a high degree of reflexivity of all existing black writing, Romany writers do no such thing. If they have knowledge of other Roma’s works, they do not feel obliged to reflect it in their own work. On the other hand, Romany writing is also double-voiced in the other sense Gates uses, whereby it departs from the Romany cultural tradition, while being informed by Non-Romany methods and canons (Gates 1989: 152, 165).

Pierre Bourdieu’s work has provided me with the all-important *habitus*, which I have used to refer to *romipen*, a set of values and every-day practise apparently related to by the majority of the world’s Roma. From M. Shaw’s dissertation *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers* I have also borrowed *symbolic violence* and *misrecognition*. One way of utilising Bourdieu’s thinking has been to posit Romany writing within the existing literary field(s). At present, the sweeping majority of Romany writers stand outside of it/them, by virtue of their naïve production and insufficient reflexivity. This is not to say that some writers will

²⁸⁶ While my project was already well-underway, M. Shaw brought to my attention the dissertation of Tamas Demeny *Hungarian Roma and African-American Autobiographies in Comparative Perspective: Lakatos, Peline Nyiari, Wright and Hurston* (University of New Jersey 2011). While I am sure that this thesis uncovers more parallels between Romany and African-American writing, for reasons of time constraints and a slightly different perspective of my own dissertation, I could not include its findings in the current work.

not enter the field at some point in the future, or indeed, that they have not taken their first step towards it already, as is the case of M. Walsh and I. Eliášová.

Finally, a word on the future prospects of Romany writing. As demonstrated on American Jewish literature, stock characters from Yiddish folk tales, laden with association but transferred into modern urban contexts, carry a wealth of new meaning. Similar stock characters can be found in Romany folklore (Ryvolová 2002). The deliberate work with these cultural signs may yield interesting results, enriching the dominant literatures in the process.

Unlike a lot of the writing produced by the Roma in the West, the tone of Central/Eastern European Romany writing is mostly conciliatory and one of its aims is to “contribute to the mutual understanding and the reconciliation of two worlds at war with each other” (Houdek 2012: 113). A similar longing for acceptance by the white majority was characteristic of African-American letters in the 1940s and early 1950s, when it was believed that “the aim of the black writer should be full integration into the mainstream of American literature” (Procházka et al: 269). The radical 1960s with its mostly peaceful civil rights movement and not at all peaceful Malcolm X and Black Power movement proved the supporters of integration wrong. Before becoming middle-class, the oppressed minority first had to process and live down their fury. It is not impossible that a similar radicalisation of sentiment is yet in store for the Eastern Roma.

Methodologically speaking, it has been a challenge to draw more general conclusions about Romany writing, simply because it has been shaped by varied historical and social circumstances in the respective countries and parts of the world. Cécile Kovacshazy (2011: 5) poses the question whether Romany literature as a homogenous whole is an intellectual construct, a performative act or reality. Although I am convinced that life-stories written by Roma in different countries share an essential worldview as embodied in the Romany *habitus*, I also agree with Kovacshazy that it is more applicable to use the plural form of Romany literatures because “while they contain common points, [they also contain] irreducible differences” (*Ibid.*). The future project of a unique Romany literary theory may well require the fashioning of not one but several frameworks to cater for these differences.

6 Bibliography

6.1 Primary Sources

6.1.1 Primary Sources - Analysed

Giňa, Andrej. Pařiv. Jeřtě víme, co je úcta. Praha: Triáda 2013.

Eliášová, Irena. Naše osada. Liberec: Krajská vědecká knihovna v Liberci 2008.

Vishnevsky, Victor. Memories of a Gypsy. Maryland: Salo Press 2006.

Walsh, Mikey. Gypsy Boy. London: Hodder & Stoughton 2009.

Walsh, Mikey. Gypsy Boy on the Run. London: Hodder & Stoughton 2011.

6.1.2 Primary Sources - Consulted

Binns, Dennis (Ed). Gavvered all Around: A collection of Gypsy Poetry. Manchester: Travellers Education Service 1987.

Borrow, George. Lavengro. Oxford: Oxford University 1982.

Boswell, Sylvester Gordon. The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gipsy. Edited by John Seymour. London: Gollancz 1970.

Doughty, Louise. Fires in the Dark. London: Simon and Schuster 2003.

Doughty, Louise. Stone Cradle. London: Simon and Schuster 2007.

Hancock, Ian et al. (Eds.) The Roads of the Roma. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire 1998.

Lacková, Elena. Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou. Triáda: Praha 1997.

Lakatos, Menyhért. Krajina zahalená dýmem. Praha: Dauphin 2006.

Lee, William. Dark Blood: A Romany Story. London: Minerva 1999.

Lee, Ronald. Goddam Gipsy. Montreal: Tundra Books 1971.

Loveridge, Guy (Ed.). Romany Returns. Location of publishing unspecified. Douglas Loveridge 1995.

Lumberg, Kiba. Memesa-trilogia. Turku: Sammakko 2011.

Reeve, Dominic. No Place Like Home. London: Phoenix 1960.

Reeve, Dominic. Smoke in the Lanes. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire 2003.

Reeve, Dominic. Beneath the Blue Sky: Four decades of a travelling life in Britain. Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications 2007.

- Reeve, Dominc. Green Lanes and Kettle Cranes. Marshwood: Lamorna Publications 2010.
- Slee, Yvonne. Torn Away, Forever. Aspley, Australia: Amber 2005.
- Stockins, Jimmy. On the Cobbles: The Life of a Bare-Knuckle Gipsy Warrior. Edinburgh: Mainstream 2000.
- Stojka, Ceija. Wir Leben im Verborgenen. Wien: Picus 1988.
- Taikon, Alyosha & Lundgren, Gunilla. From Coppersmith to Nurse: Alyosha, the son of a Gypsy chief. Translation Donald Kenrick. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press 2003.
- Walter, Winter. Winter Time, Memoirs of a German Sinto Who Survived Auschwitz. Translation Struan Robertson. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire 2004.

6.2 Secondary Sources

6.2.1 Secondary Sources - Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill & Griffiths, Gareth & Tiffin, Helen (2002). The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practise in Post-Colonial Literature. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barša, Pavel (2008). “Konstruktivismus a politika identity. Odpověď Tomáši Hiršovi a Marku Jakoubkovi” in Jakoubek, Marek & Budilová, Lenka (Eds.) Romové a cikáni neznámí i známí. Interdisciplinární pohled. Voznice: LEDA, pp. 208 - 243.
- Belton, Brian A. (2005). Questioning Gypsy Identity: Ethnic Narratives in Britain and America. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Budilová, Lenka & Jakoubek, Marek (2007). “Příbuzenství, manželství a sňatkové vzorce: Cigánská příbuzenská síť“ in Budilová, Lenka & Jakoubek, Marek (Eds.): Cikánská rodina a příbuzenství. Ústí nad Labem: Dryada pp. 19 – 68.
- Budilová, Lenka (2008). “Kritické poznámky Lenky Budilové k textu Davida Scheffela, Česká antropologická romistika a vědecká poctivost“ in Český lid volume 95, No.4/2008, pp. 401 – 409.
- Bosničová, Nina (2007). A Dream Deferred. Continuities in African American Autobiographies. Doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, Prague.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1983). “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed” in Poetics 12, pp. 311 – 356.
- Bourdieu, Pierre & Wacquant, J. D. Loïc (1992). An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1992, in Czech 2010). Pravidla umění. Vznik a struktura literárního pole. Brno: Host.
- Butler, Judith (2011). “Who owns Kafka?” in London Review of Books vol.33, number 5, pp. 3 – 8.

Cemlyn, Sarah & Greenfields, Margaret & Burnett, Sally & Matthews, Zoe & Whitwell, Chris (2009): Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review. Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Clark, Colin & Greenfields, Margaret (2006). Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Červenka, Jan (2006). "Autorská osobnost Eriky Oláhové a otázky nad romskou literaturou" in Host 4/2006, pp. 50 – 52.

Červenka, Jan (2009a). Untitled paper presented at The International Khamoro Festival in Prague in 2009.

Červenka, Jan (2009b). "Konec konce (ne)jednoho mýtu" in Český lid volume 96, No. 2/2009, pp. 175 – 178.

Červenka, Jan & Sadílková, Helena & Kubaník, Pavel (2010). "Romština v České republice - předávání jazyka a jazyková směna" in Romano džaniben 2/2010, s. 11 – 40.

Červenka, Jan (2011). Review of Oláhová-Lakatošová, Erika: Matné zrcadlo in Romano džaniben 1/2011, pp. 132 – 134.

Djuric, Rajko (2002). Die Literatur der Roma und Sinti. Berlin: Parabolis.

Eder, Beate (1994). "Analogien und Bilder in der Literatur der Roma. Ausgewählte Werke des 20. Jahrhunderts." in Heinschink, Mozes & Hemetek, Ursula (Eds.): Roma. Das unbekannte Volk. Schicksal und Kultur. Wien: Verein Romano Centro pp. 129 – 149.

Eder, Beate (2006). "Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou Ilony Lackové". In Romano džaniben říjen 2006, pp. 287 – 295.

Eder, Beate (2008). "Celistvost uměleckého díla Ceiji Stojky". An afterword to Stojka, Ceija: Žijeme ve skrytu. Vyprávění rakouské Romky. Praha: Argo, pp. 113 – 125.

Elšík, Viktor (2005). "Romové, etnicita a radikální konstruktivisté" in Literární noviny 21 or http://www.demografie.info/?cz_detail_clanku&artclID=115.

English, James F. (2005; in Czech 2011). The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Evans, Simon (2004). Stopping Places: A Gypsy History of South London and Kent. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. (1989). The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism. New York: Oxford University Press.

Geidt, Jonathan Bernard (1990). The Oral Context of Gypsy Identity (a dissertation). London: The City of London Polytechnic.

Glassman, Gaby. "Židovské a romské dědictví - několik srovnání". Paper presented on November 27, 1998, at a seminar organised by The Tolerance Foundation in Prague. Reprinted in Romano džaniben jevend 2002, pp. 26 – 29.

- Griffin, Gabrielle & Braidotti, Rosi (2002). "Whiteness and European Situatedness" in Griffin, Gabrielle & Braidotti, Rosi (Eds.) Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies. London/New York: Zed Books.
- Hancock, Ian (1998a). "Introduction" in The Roads of the Roma. (Eds. Hancock, Ian, Dowd, Siobhan, Djuric, Rajko), Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Hancock, Ian (1998b). "George Borrow's Romani" in Bakker, Peter (Ed.): The Typology and Dialectology of Romani. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 65 – 89.
- Handler, Richard (1994). "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" in Gillis, J.R. (Ed.) Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Houdek, Lukáš (2009). "Homosexualita je mezi Romy stále tabu". O homosexualitě u Romů ve Španělsku s antropologem Davidem Bernou." In Romano vod'i 9/2009, pp. 8 – 9.
- Houdek, Lukáš (2012). "Je budoucnost romské literární tvorby na internetu?" in Romano džaniben 1/2012, pp. 104 – 105.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (1993). Šaj pes dovakeras/Můžeme se domluvit. Olomouc: VUP.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (1998). "Počátky romské literatury" in Žijeme spolu nebo vedle sebe? Sborník z konference o literatuře a kultuře národnostních menšin v České republice. Praha: Obec spisovatelů.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (2000a). "Slovesnost a literatura v romské kultuře" in Černobílý život. Praha: Gallery, pp. 123 - 148.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (2000b). "K počátkům romských dějin." in Černobílý život. Praha: Gallery, pp. 17 - 29.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (2003). "Stefan Vali a 'malabárská řeč' tří indických mladíků" Romano džaniben jevend 2003, pp. 93 – 106.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (2005). "Po židoch cigáni". Svědectví Romů ze Slovenska 1939 – 1945. Praha: Triáda.
- Hübschmannová, Milena (2006). "Moje setkání s romano šukar laviben" in Romano džaniben ňilaj 2006, pp. 27 – 60.
- Imre, Anikó (2005). "Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: the Time of the Gypsies, The End of Race" in López, Alfred J. (Ed.) Postcolonial Whiteness: A Reader on Race and Empire. Albany: State University of New York.
- Jakoubek, Marek & Poduška, Ondřej (2003). Romské osady v kulturologické perspektivě. Brno: Doplněk.
- Jakoubek, Marek (2004). Romové: Konec (ne)jednoho mýtu. Praha: Socioklub.
- Junghaus, Timea & Székely, Katalin: Paradise Lost. Catalogue for The First Roma Pavillion. La biennale di Venezia 2007.

- Kenrick, Donald (1998). Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies). London: Scarecrow.
- Kobes, Tomáš (2013). "Identifikace a praxe homosexualů a transsexualů ve vychodoslovenských romských osadach" ("The Identification and Social Practices of Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Eastern Slovakian Roma Settlements"). In Sociologický časopis 2013, vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 3 – 27.
- Kovacshazy, Cécile (2011). "Une ou des littératures romani/tsiganes? Littératures d'Europe centrale et orientale" in Etudes Tsiganes No. 43, pp. 5 – 7.
- Kynčlová, Tereza (2005). Mestiza Consciousness and Literary Techniques in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera — The New Mestiza. Master Thesis at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University.
- Lee, Robert A. (2003). Multicultural American Literature. Comparative Black, Native, Latino/a and Asian American Fictions. Edingurgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lee, Ken (2002). "Orientalism and Gypsyism" in SocialAnalysis 44, pp. 129 – 156.
- Lewy, Guenter (2000). "Conclusion: The Course of Persecution Assessed" in The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies, Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 218 – 228.
- Marushiakova, Elena & Popov, Vesselin (2004). "The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies." in Segmentation und Komplementarität Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 71 - 100.
- Mayall, David (2004). Gypsy Identities 1500-2000: From Egyptians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany. London: Routledge.
- Matras, Yaron (2002). Romani: A Linguistic Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matras, Yaron (2004). "The Role of Language in Mystifying and De-Mystifying Gypsy Identity" in Saul, Nicholas & Tebutt, Susan (Eds.) The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of „Gypsies“/Romanies in European Cultures. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 50 - 78.
- Musilová, Markéta (2012). Identity and Displacement in Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction. Doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University, Prague.
- Nezbeda, Ondřej: "Jsem kokos. S truckerkou Helenou Krobotovou o životě v Kanadě, homosexualitě mezi Romy a hořícím kamionu." "I'm a coconut. An interview with the truck-driver Helena Krobotová about her life in Canada, homosexuality among Roma and the burning truck. Respekt No. 6/2010, pp. 38 – 41.
- Nord, Deborah Epstein (2006). Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930. New York: Columbia University.
- Nünning, Ansgar (Ed.) (2006). Lexikon teorie literatury a kultury, Brno: Host.

- Okely, Judith (1983, my edition 2002). The Traveller-Gypsies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ong, Walter (1982, my edition 2002). Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word. London, New York: Routledge.
- Pavelčíková, Nina (2004). Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945 – 1989. Praha: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu.
- Plummer, Ken (1995). Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds. London and New York: Routledge.
- Procházka, Martin (1993). “Regionalistický a modernistický román. Hodnotová struktura a život společenství ve skotské próze a v dílech Jamese Joyce.“ in Hrbata, Zdeněk, Housková, Anna (Eds.) Román a „genius loci“. Regionalismus jako pojetí světa v evropské a americké literatuře. Praha: Ústav pro českou a světovou literaturu ČAV.
- Procházka, Martin & Quinn, Justin & Ulmanová, Hana & Roraback, Erik S. (2002). Lectures on American Literature. Praha: Karolinum.
- Pustianaz, Marco (2000). “Gay Male Literary Studies.“ in Lesbian and Gay Studies. An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach. (Eds. T. Sandfort, J. Schuyf, J. W. Duyvendak & J. Weeks), London: SAGE Publications (pp. 146 – 153).
- Putna, Martin C. (Ed. 2011). Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury. Praha: Academia.
- Reichová, Irena (2001). Romové a nacionalismus. Brno: Muzeum romské kultury.
- Rushdie, Salman (2010). Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981 – 1991. London: Vintage.
- Ryvolová, Karolína (2002). Kulturní a literární paralely mezi tradiční romskou komunitou na Slovensku a židovskou komunitou ve východní Evropě. Master Thesis at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University.
- Ryvolová, Karolína (2011). “Darebáci, paďoši a intrikáři, aneb Kramářské písně z Valdic. Nad memoáry Ladislava Heráka-Arpyho a Zdeňka Perského.“ in Host 2, pp. 19 – 23.
- Ryvolová, Karolína (2014). “A Hat and a Scarf. Aspects of Sex and Gender in Romany Communities in the Czech Republic.“ in Czech Feminism(s) (Eds. Iveta Jusová, Jiřina Šiklová), at review stage, to be published by Indiana University Press.
- Sadílková, Helena (2012). “Studovat a psát, to byl můj sen/Pak už mi neříkali ‚Menšino‘. Rozhovor s Irenou Eliášovou a ukázky z její tvorby.“ in Romano džaniben 2/2012, pp. 100 – 135.
- Sandford, Jeremy (Ed. 2000). Rokkering to the Gorjios. In the early seventies British Romany Gypsies speak of their hopes, fears and aspirations. Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes/University of Hertfordshire Press.

Scheffel, David Z. (2008). "Česká antropologická romistika a vědecká poctivost: Kritické poznámky k textu 'Přibuzenství, manželství a sňatkové vzorce' Lenky Budilové a Marka Jakoubka" in Český lid volume 95, No. 3/2008, pp. 305 – 310.

Scheinostová, Alena (2006). Romipen: Literaturou k moderní identitě. Praha: Athinganoi.

Scheinostová, Alena (2010). "Ženská romská próza jako zápas o sebevyjádření." In Česká literatura v perspektivách genderu (Ed. Jan Matonoha). Praha: Akropolis.

Scheinostová, Alena (2012). "Jazyk jako kód a jako emblém v autorské tvorbě Romů v České republice" in Česká literatura 2/2012, pp. 203 – 224.

Scheinostová, Alena (2014). "Romská válečná vyprávění mezi realitou a fikcí." Unpublished paper presented at the Institute for Czech Literature AS CR workshop entitled "Paměť a trauma v literatuře a ve filmu", June 11, 2014.

Shaw, Martin (2006). Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers: A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life-Stories. Umeå: Umeå universitet.

Skočovská, Markéta (2010). Světští: Identita a základní kulturní rysy. Master Thesis at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Nelson, Cary, Grossberg, Lawrence: Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. London: Macmillan.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (2003). Death of a Discipline. New York: Columbia University Press.

Stewart, Michael (1997). The Time of the Gypsies. Oxford: WestviewPress.

Šatava, Leoš (2001). Jazyk a identita etnických menšin – možnosti zachování a revitalizace. Praha: Cargo.

George C. Soulis. "The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages" in Dumbarton Oaks Papers 15 (1961). 141+143 – 165.

Tierney, William G. (2000). "Undaunted Courage: Life History and the Postmodern Challenge." in N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.): Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 537–554.

Vermeersch, Petr (2006). The Romani Movement. New York: Berghahn.

Willems, Wim (2008). "Smrtná past etnicity: historie studia Cikánů" in Jakoubek, Marek (Ed.) Cikáni a etnicita. Praha: Triton, pp. 48 - 72.

6.2.2 Secondary Sources - Consulted

Acton, Thomas (Ed. 1999). Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity. Hatfield: Hertfordshire Press.

Bořkovcová, Máša (2006). Romský etnolekt češtiny. Praha: Signeta, 2006.

- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). The Location of Culture. London: Routledge.
- Budilová, Lenka & Jakoubek, Marek (2007). "Několik (tisíc) slov úvodem" in Budilová, Lenka & Jakoubek, Marek (Eds.): Cikánská rodina a příbuzenství. (Ústí nad Labem: Dryada pp. 11 – 18.
- Fanon, Frantz (1965). The Wretched People of the Earth. Translation by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin Books.
- Fraser, Angus (1998). Cikáni. Translation by Marta Miklušáková. Praha: NLN.
- Gay y Blasco, Paloma (1997). "A 'different' body? Desire and virginity among Gitanos." Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute. Vol 3, no.3, pp. 517- 535.
- Goode, Judith a Eames, Edwin (1996). "An Anthropological Critique of the Culture of Poverty" in Gmelch, George a Zenner, Walter P. Urban Life: Reading in Urban Anthropology. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland.
- Goldston, Robert (1968). The Negro Revolution. New York: Signet Books.
- Hancock, Ian (2001). Země utrpení: Dějiny otroctví a pronásledování Romů. Přeložila Karolína Ryvolová, Helena Sadílková, Praha: Signeta.
- Hroch, Miroslav (2005). Pohledy na národ a nacionalismus: Čítanka textů. Brno: Matice moravská.
- Jařabová, Zdeňka & Davidová, Eva (Eds. 2002). Černobílý život. Praha: Gallery.
- Kaminsky, Ignacy-Marek (1980). The State of Ambiguity: Studies of Gypsy Refugees. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
- Lewis, Oscar (1996). "The Culture of Poverty." in Gmelch, George and Zenner, Walter P. Urban Life. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland.
- Lewy, Guenter (2000). The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lucassen, Leo (1997). "Harmful tramps'. Police professionalization and gypsies in Germany, 1700-1945" in Crime, History & Societies, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 27-50.
- Lucassen, Leo & Willems, Wim (2001). "Gypsies in the Diaspora? The pitfalls of a Biblical concept." in Social History vol. XXXIII, no.6, pp. 251-269.
- Lucassen, Leo & Willems, Wim (2003). "The weakness of well ordered societies. Gypsies in Europe, the Ottoman empire and India 1400-1914." in Review. A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the study of economics, historical systems and civilizations, volume 26 no. 3, pp. 283-313.
- Pape, Markus (1997). A nikdo vám nebude věřit. Překlad David Čaněk. Praha: GplusG.
- Said, Edward (1978). Orientalism. New York: Vintage.

Said, Edward (2001). “Přemítání o Exilu” (Translation Martina Pachmanová) in Revue Labyrint, No. 9-10, pp. 53-57.

Scheffel, David Z. (2008). “Věda a pseudověda: odpověď Lence Budilové” in Český lid volume 95, No. 4/2008, pp. 411 – 412.

Sutherland, Anne (1986). Gypsies: The Hidden Americans. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland.

Tebutt, Susan (Ed. 1998). Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-speaking Society and Literature. New York: Berghahn.

Willems, Wim. In Search of the True Gypsy. From Enlightenment to Final Solution. London: Frank Cass 1997.