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**abstract:**

Antiroma prejudice is among the most persistent and intense kinds of racial hatred in Europe. While criminal or demonic depictions of the Roma were created, their "blackness" was considered abhorrent, described as, for instance, yellowish and dirty, while their hair was always "shaggy" or curling "like vipers." The "blackness" was believed to be an outcome of an uncivilized lifestyle, dirt, smoke from bonfires, or conscious creation – a picaresque camouflage. Romophobia or antiziganism have continue to rely on colour, visuality and visibility of the body to exclude people by reason of race. The article discusses the strategy of passing which enables the Roma to survive in a racist environment, or has been at times the only way to survive, as well as other subversive strategies of performing skin colour observed in the creative output of contemporary visual artists of Roma origin: Delaine Le Bas, Tamara Moyzes, Emilia Rigová and Kálmán Várady as well as creators and performers of Roma Armee and slammer Kristóf Horváth.

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## The Passing of the Romani Body

Anti-Romani sentiment is one of the most enduring and vicious forms of racial prejudice in Europe. As shrewdly noted by Arjun Appadurai, it might be somewhat surprising that such small and politically weak communities are the most frequent targets of scapegoating, stereotyping, and othering.<sup>1</sup> Romaphobia or antiziganism have always been closely linked with the color and visibility of the Romani body as a premise for racial exclusion. The coloring and somatization of prejudice, however, has been subject to some ambiguity, which, in turn, has given rise to the argument below. Here, I am interested primarily in the issue of racial passing<sup>2</sup> and its attendant strategies, which have helped the Roma endure racist environments and, in some cases, even facilitated their survival. This essay interrogates those and other subversive strategies of performing skin color which appear in the works of contemporary visual artists of Romani descent.

In their taxonomy of Romani representations, Jerzy Ficowski and Adam Bartosz identify three canonical portrayals: criminal, demonic, and operatic. While the first two became prevalent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the third only emerged during the Romantic period.<sup>3</sup> Anna Sobieska examines these changes through an imagological lens, pointing out how the characterological profile of the Roma people as a separate ethnotype arose from the long accretion of individual textual instances.<sup>4</sup> At their core, each example of such a stereotype was ultimately rooted not in empirical reality, but an external gaze. This colonial view of the Romani projected onto them the suppressed desires and prejudices of the Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Roma otherness was repeatedly portrayed as primitive and anti-civilizational. In the interwar period, drawing on ethnographic records, Jan Stanisław Bystron described the flaws and defects commonly ascribed to the other, including those that could be

categorized as demonic in origin: blackness, low or common birth, an unpleasant scent or filthy appearance, and witchcraft.<sup>6</sup> The blackness of the “black” is a stark antithesis of the whiteness of the “whites”; and should the other be insufficiently black, they could always be hiding a “blackened roof of the mouth.”<sup>7</sup> These connotations between dark skin and filth, promiscuity, and impurity, all of which were presumed to be typical of the Romani, have plagued the Roma people since at least the Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup> Marcin Bielski’s 1551 chronicle describes the Roma as a “lazy, cunning, vile, feral, and black people.”<sup>9</sup> Some constructs of the Other replaced “blackness” with “filth,” fueling prejudice with the belief that squalor was an anomaly and, as such, a threat that must be purged or at least subordinated – and even interaction with filth could defile. As Mary Douglas argues, “Our idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions.”<sup>10</sup> Filth is the obverse of purity (whiteness), the latter here tainted by Otherness.

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, Romani skin color was described as a stain, abject, and branded dirty and abhorrent: a filthy yellow. The contemporary racist idiolect adopts a similar interpretation of the Roma skin tone. Examples include the entry for “*mores*” published in the online dictionary of Polish urban slang: “[derogatory] a Romani person, or someone who looks like a Romani; [...] With skin the color of shit, often very creased. [...] In other words, a gypsy, a Roma, a slob.”<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon argued that to the oppressed, the severity of racism is determined by how the differences separating people are

defined, that is to say whether they are brought about by a particular conceptual framework or whether they are just there, visible to all, indelibly inscribed into the body of the other.<sup>13</sup> From the eighteenth century on, skin color would be inextricably bound to race. Hence, the Romani were seen as “a people entirely alien, with black hair and faces,” clad in a “combination of misery and dirt, adorned with glimmering trinkets and faded vestiges of Eastern opulence.”<sup>14</sup> Roma women, meanwhile, were often described using *femme orientale* tropes; their bodies were sexualized, recasting them as objects of erotic fantasy, all the while making them incapable of eliciting genuine emotion.<sup>15</sup> Sobie writes that the record of how Romani women have been portrayed through time could be considered “xenological discourse,” reflecting our relationship with the other or, more precisely, our separation from the other. At the same time, these representations of Roma women “stand as [... an] excellent illustration of a specific mental framework widespread in European discourses on peoples, races, and non-European communities, that typically entails the sexualization of the other.”<sup>16</sup>

Their “different” skin tone was a common element of supranational depictions of the Roma featured in literary testimonies. In trying to take a closer look at the individual skin tone-related elements of Roma representations, I draw primarily on Polish examples; this choice, however, is an expression of a broader tendency present across Europe; for example, Lenora from Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s *Czarna perła* (“Black Pearl”) is the twin sister of Prosper Mérimée’s eponymous Carmen – thus, the transnational Roma community has found itself the target of surprisingly consistent stereotyping.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of the Roma, recognition is both possible at first glance and utterly impossible. Their skin color is really not as ambiguous as the stereotype would have it and exists in a spectrum from light to dark. In even the earliest descriptions of the Romani, skin tone is occasionally brought up as something

mutable, a pretense, bordering on makeup. Such a reading is evident in Benedykt Chmielowski's writings: "They blacken their bodies or slather it with goose fat, even in the crib, in order to darken their color and so render themselves outcasts. [...]; even without trickery, their complexions would naturally turn darker from their walking around naked, sitting in the sun, amidst fires and smoke."<sup>18</sup> Dishonesty and cunning were also believed to be innate characteristics of the Roma, purportedly facilitating thievery (similarly, the Romani language was commonly believed to be a thieves' cant). Thus, there emerged the presumption of Roma skin being performative. In the song *Gelem, gelem* (adopted as a national anthem at the First World Romani Congress held on April 8, 1971, in Orpington, near London), we hear the words: "Kalo muy ta e kale yakha," which translates as "black brothers, black-eyed sisters,"<sup>19</sup> implying that this "blackness" was a source of ethnic pride. A handful of Romani artists even sought to draw on the efforts of the American Black Panthers in their work, often using their symbols and imagery (examples include the groups Romane Kale Panthera<sup>20</sup> or Mindj Panther<sup>21</sup>). Prior to that and after World War II, however, when the horror of the Romani genocide was still fresh and the Roma community was hit by a wave of severe repressions (including forced sterilization, abductions of children, forced labor, etc.), many Romanis resorted to adopting a range of passing strategies. Some changed their names to better blend with their surroundings and survive the persecution. Lighter-skinned Roma, meanwhile, could pass as "white" and live in "white" communities. Romani Rose recounts:<sup>22</sup>

Thirteen of my relatives perished in the Nazi concentration camps. [...] I grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. We, both the Holocaust survivors and their offspring, had to hide our Romani identities, because it led others to see us as criminals and allowed them to strip us of any opportunity to make it in

society. I also avoided speaking publicly about my roots for years.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, contemporary artists of Roma descent are more prone to interrogating issues like the performativity of skin color and fluid identity read as consequences of particular historical circumstances. For example, in *Roma Armee*<sup>24</sup> ("Roma Army"), the problem becomes the object of a variety of textual games. The cast includes Romani men, women, and Travellers from Austria, Serbia, Germany, Kosovo, Romania, England, and Sweden. Amongst them are Hamze Bytyci, Mihaela Dragan, Riah May Knight, Lindy Larsson, Sandra Selimovic, Simonida Selimovic, Orit Nahmias (of Jewish descent), and Mehmet Atesci (of Turkish descent), meaning that some of the actors have Israeli-German-Turkish-Berlin identities; the Roma Army is transnational, diverse, feminist, and queer. As Europe drifts ever closer toward neofascism, a band of actors calls for self-defense. The Roma Army sees itself combating structural discrimination, homophobia, racism, and antiziganism, and looks to critique the internalized role of victim of perpetual violence.<sup>25</sup> The play walks a fine line between documentary theatre<sup>26</sup> and mockumentary<sup>27</sup> in its reenactment of the "recorded behavior" of the social drama, which can itself serve as a subversive instrument with which to unpack and critique prevalent myths and perceptions of "Romanipen." Using a joint inquiry process, the actors-cum-characters examine their own personal experiences, historical ramifications, and contemporary outbreaks of antiziganist sentiment. In one *Roma Armee* scene, interrogating the question of skin color as stigma, the characters list slurs and invective they have had hurled at them: Mihaela reveals she was called a "Negressa," Simonida heard people call her "Negro Lips," while Sandra said no one would touch her out of fear of getting dirty ("They thought the color would rub off on them"). And so, the cast carries out what could be considered self-ethnography – sharing

with the audience their own biographies, inflected with camp humor and irony. Scenes in which they introduce and talk about themselves, with each one bringing up a different category or social role, appear again and again, like a refrain, demonstrating how identity is the accrued ability to integrate a variety of self-identifications encompassing shifting libidos, skills, and capacities emerging from specific social roles, and that “Romanipen” is just one of the many factors that ultimately shape who these people are to themselves and to others. A passage from one such scene reads as follows:

This is Mihaela  
 She’s alive [living]  
 She’s a woman  
 She’s Romani  
 She’s queer  
 She’s a feminist  
 She loves her pussy!  
 She’s white  
 She’s black  
 She’s brown  
 She’s European  
 Although, uhh, a Romani  
 She’s aggressive, strong, superstitious  
 She’s wild  
 And she likes to call her period the vampire gates

Skin color is invariably brought up in the character introductions: “This is Hamze [...] / He’s brown / [...]; This is Riah [...] She’s a blonde white woman.” And just as this richly diverse Roma army (clad in outfits inspired by Jae Jarrell’s<sup>28</sup> 1968 *Revolutionary Suit* and roused to righteous anger by speeches drawing on similar addresses by Malcolm X or Frederick Douglass<sup>29</sup>) is about to rise up in a revolt that would drown Europe in blood and finally elevate the Roma cause to its rightful prominence and meaning, it splinters. The Romanian

revolutionary does not speak Romani and the Travellers from Sweden and Great Britain prove to be "too white." "So it was all about skin color after all?" Riah cries as she succumbs to fratricidal infighting. As the revolutionaries murder each other, the set decorations behind them, once making up the proud words "Gypsyland Europe," disintegrate. As it were, the scene illustrates this passage from Delaine Le Bas:

We are a very diverse community and have internalized a great many stereotypical representations. And so, inevitably, the question emerged of who is more authentic, and that is a very destructive proposition. I also call it the "divide and rule" method: you divide people and deprive them of the power they could have had had they stuck together. So it is very important to us to engage in other types of dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

The ties between passing strategies and self-hatred are a key part of the problem in question. This is best illustrated by the passage below:

I am Lindy  
 I am a man  
 I am a Swede  
 I am gay  
 I'm gay because I like men  
 I like fucking them  
 It's a sexual experience  
 I'm a practicing gay man  
 An unwaveringly practicing gay men  
 I'm proud of being a gay man  
 ...but it's complicated  
 Being gay often brings self-hatred  
 I'm out of the closet  
 But not always  
 I never show affection to my boyfriend (publicly), but I believe myself to be an open-minded man  
 I don't want to keep protesting, don't want to keep coming out

But if I don't start a conversation by saying I'm gay, it quickly gets awkward  
because when people inevitably find out (not from me), they feel as if I betrayed them  
I don't want to be gay openly, because I fear rejection  
I want to be loved  
I want to be accepted  
I want to belong  
Sometimes, I don't want to be openly gay, because I fear for my safety  
Sometimes, I hesitate to be openly gay: in the café, in the restaurant, when I'm fixing my car  
It would be simpler to be straight then  
I don't have a problem with being gay on stage  
But I'm happy when people think I'm straight  
and gays tell me that I'm good at passing for straight  
But there's something about that feeling I'm ashamed of.

I am a Romani Traveller  
I am a practicing Romani Traveller  
An unwaveringly practicing Romani Traveller  
I'm proud of being a Romani Traveller  
...but it's complicated  
Being a Romani Traveller often brings self-hatred  
I'm out of the Romani Traveller closet, but not always  
I never show affection to other Romani Travellers in public,  
but I believe myself to be an open-minded man  
I don't want to keep protesting, don't want to keep coming out  
But if I don't start a conversation by saying I'm a Romani Traveller, it quickly gets awkward, because when people inevitably find out (not from me), they feel as if I betrayed them  
I don't want to be a Romani Traveller openly, because I fear rejection  
I want to be loved  
I want to be accepted

I want to belong  
 Sometimes, I don't want to openly be a Romani Traveller  
 Because I fear for my safety  
 Sometimes, I hesitate to openly be a Romani Traveller: in the  
 café, in the restaurant, when I'm fixing my car  
 It would be simpler to be non-Romani  
 To be a gadjo

[...]

I don't have a problem with being a Romani Traveller on stage  
 But I'm happy when people think I'm a gadjo  
 and gays tell me that I'm good at passing for a gadjo  
 But there's something about that feeling I'm ashamed of.<sup>31</sup>

Similar themes are explored by the Hungarian-born slam poet, Kristóf Horvath, in two performances.<sup>32</sup> One of his projects interrogates the consequences of using passing strategies or mimicry in the form of self-hatred. The Horvath family, passing for non-Romani, became "more Hungarian than Hungarians themselves," even toward their close relatives, and began loathing everything that was stereotypically Romani, for example the family profession of the traditional Roma musician (an occupation considered part and parcel of the stereotype). The scene, as outlined by Kristóf Horvath, resembles a coming out: "Mom, Dad, I have to tell you something – I'm Romani." The trope, however, is to some extent subverted as Horvath is divulging an ethnic background that the family is well aware of. Horvath, however, is no longer willing to hide it or be ashamed of it, and, in doing so, exposes and rejects the



Kristóf Horváth, *Long Night Of Coming Out*, 2018, photo Nihad Nino Pušija, courtesy of the organizers of the First Roma Biennial in Berlin

framework of self-hatred. To quote Laura Corradi:

In Gypsy and Queer social life, similar passing strategies are enacted: both Gays and Gypsies have historically been well placed to employ strategic 'passing' with self-protection or ease of passage determining when and where to pass as straight or non-Gypsy.<sup>33</sup>

Later on, citing Daniel Baker, Corradi asserts that in the long run, such a strategy would lead to a "sort of identity dislocation that implies camouflage."<sup>34</sup> Thus there is healing power to be found in entering a state of greater visibility.

Some, however, did not have the luxury of choosing between outing themselves as Romani or embracing invisibility within the broader public. The darker skin tone could always give them away, opening them up to being branded "strangers." In another performance, Horvath delivers the following monologue:

Bravo  
 Meine Damen und Herren, Mesdames et Messieurs,  
 Bravo  
 Meine Damen und Herren, Mesdames et Messieurs, Ladies  
 and Gentlemen  
 Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome  
 Fremde, étranger, stranger,  
 Hello, stranger  
 It must be unpleasant – being a stranger  
 What is the biggest problem of human existence? [...]  
 What makes you a man or a woman?  
 Kleider machen leute ["The coat maketh the man" – author's  
 translation]  
 Kleider machen leute  
 Kleider machen leute

Clothes. If you seek acceptance, wear what those whose acceptance you seek would wear. I had an eventful ride back home on the subway yesterday.

As I was walking down the station stairs, I noticed blues taking on greens. At first I thought it was the creatures from *Avatar* against green aliens, but it turned out they were just fans of Herta BSC and Werder Bremen.

The scuffle, and the possibility of a beating, gave me quite a fright, but luckily I was wearing enough blue to pass for a fan of the local team.

I was part of the majority, I was on the winning side.

Ladies and gentlemen, have you ever dreamed of becoming someone else in the space of a second? Have you ever wanted to blend in with your environment in the blink of an eye? Well, let me introduce you to an extraordinary man who, without much effort, can transform into someone completely ordinary.

Let's hear it for this one of a kind master chameleon, a human chameleon capable of changing the tone of his skin. Take a bow, human chameleon!

Bravo

(applause)

[...]

Go on, change, change like you always do, change! I beg of you, change!

Would you [skin color – author's note] please change? One, two, three, change! Change! Change! Go on, change!<sup>35</sup>

Horvath's skin color, however, is incapable of doing so at the drop of a hat. The color of one's own skin thus becomes the source of a perpetual sense of danger. To cite Krzysztof Gil: "This is not about that dread that paralyzes and strikes fear into the heart, but altogether another sort of terror, one which is always there, its presence so natural as to become imperceptible."<sup>36</sup> Homi K. Bhabha likened it to a kind of muscular tension, which was also the description used by Frantz Fanon: "The symbols of social order [...] are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message 'Don't dare to budge'; rather, they cry out 'Get ready to attack.'"<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, this fear is consistently sustained by external repression. In her 2007 video *Miss Roma*, Tamara Moyzes focused on discrimination on basis of appearance, typically revolving around skin color and ethnicity. The short film, starring Jana Bluchová, the eponymous Miss Roma,<sup>38</sup> tackles the question of whitewashing: the "whitening" of characters originally envisioned as non-white, usually driven by profit-related considerations. The practice is widespread in the movie industry, where characters that were written as people of color are played by white actors in adaptations, like Laurence Olivier wearing blackface to play Othello or Alec Guinness playing a Japanese tourist. Moyzes inverts the procedure and "decolors" Bluchová's Roma body using whitening make-up, a blonde wig, and blue-tinted contact lenses. It turns out that people of Romani descent still need this "whiteface" to elude the racially-motivated hatred of their environment. Identification is instantaneous. The piece shows that a young, beautiful Romani woman still needs to transform her appearance in order to be accepted by Czech society – and must necessarily comply with preferred beauty standards and the normative criteria of



Tamara Moyzes, *Miss Roma* 2007, courtesy of Tamara Moyzes

whiteness. The film also lists clubs, stores, and restaurants where Bluchová was refused entry on account of her Romani background, with much of the selection based solely on physical attributes, primarily her dark complexion and “incorrect” wardrobe. Racial segregation, ostensibly relegated to the trash heap of history with its “Germans only” or “Whites only” signs, is still part and parcel of everyday life for many Romanis in our part of the world.

As demonstrated by artists Emilia Rigova and Delaine Le Bas, Romani bodies are always suspect – even when their skin seems too light, and maybe especially when that is the case. Rigova points out that it was her lighter complexion that helped her assimilate into the majority and evade harassment. In her investigations of this particular subject, an effort she began in 2012, the artist uses the alias Bári Raklóri, where “Bári” means “great” and “Raklóri” is a sort of backhanded compliment. In Rigova’s telling, when her parents wanted to express their satisfaction with their children’s neat appearance, they called them *raklóri/raklóro*, meaning “beautiful like a non-Romani girl/boy.”<sup>39</sup> Years later, Rigova recognized it as a consequence of specific strategies of passing or mimicry – a manifestation of Romani self-hatred and preference for idealized whiteness. As Bári Raklóri, Rigova treats the color of her skin as an accident, a stroke of fate which helped safeguard her in Slovak society. At her core, however, she still identifies with those of her family and friends who cannot hide themselves under the “white mask.” She recalls a moment of enlightenment and transgression, when she was reproached by a teacher for mocking Romani girls. “Aren’t you Roma yourself?” Rigova



Emilia Rigová, *Portrait of the artist*, 2017, courtesy of the artist

remembers the teacher chiding. The subordinated other seeks to identify with what they can pass as; meanwhile, those characteristics that the other deems undesirable are projected onto the rest of the group, otherizing them internally.<sup>40</sup> At best, living like that suspends the other between two cultures, leading to feelings of no longer being Romani or else not being read as Romani, on the one hand, and still not being fully “white” to either oneself or others, on the other. Homi K. Bhabha argues that while tension does indeed derive from the chafing presence of the white mask on black skin that Fanon described,

the strategy of colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point at which the black man *slips* to reveal the white skin. At the edge, in-between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire [...]. It is from such tensions – both psychic and political – that a strategy of subversion emerges.<sup>41</sup>

Currently, the artist does not believe dark skin to be something to be ashamed of, or something that could reduce her social standing. She resorts to using blackface, the reviled practice derived from nineteenth-century minstrelsy, in a deliberate manner, recasting it as an instrument of resistance. By explicitly outing herself as Roma, she paints her entire body black. In one picture from Rigova’s 2017 series, *Crossing B(l)ack*,<sup>42</sup> the artist depicts herself as the Black Madonna, clad in a traditional scarf; in another, she reveals her naked body, painted black but with patches of her natural skin tone peeking through here and there from under a dark veneer. As for Le Bas, in her performances she brings up the topic of



Emília Rigová, *A Self-Portrait*, 2017, courtesy of the artist

Maria, a little girl who made international headlines in 2013 after Italian authorities took her from a camp of Romani refugees hailing from Bulgaria, because she seemed too white. Her birth parents, Sasha Ruseva and Anatas Rusev, are parents to eleven light-skinned, blond, blue-eyed children. Maria was given to a Greek Romani couple, Eleftheria Dimopoulou and Christos Sali Sali, outside the legal adoption process. After Maria's appearance drew law enforcement's suspicion, the girl was taken from the camp and placed with child services, but not before the authorities ran a check against missing persons databases. Soon, even Interpol officials got involved in the case. The entire affair was ultimately premised upon the girl's (excessively) light skin tone and the offensive stereotype that paints the Roma as child abductors.<sup>43</sup> Although in the end Maria's Romani descent was confirmed by DNA tests, she was not returned either to her guardians, with whom she had spent her entire life, or her biological parents. Commenting on the affair, Le Bas says:

When I learned about it, I was horrified and reminded of the Nazi *Lebensborn* program, and the abductions of children with purportedly Aryan traits – they had to be “pureblooded,” that is to say demonstrate physical and character traits that the Nazis believed typical of Aryans. I thought about my son, James, who is light-skinned, light-eyed, and light-haired. How would I have felt if anyone ever came to forcibly take him away from me and the law allowed it?<sup>44</sup>

Terror and horror are both natural responses to the realization that Romani are never treated like the rest of society: their civil liberties might be suspended at any moment on any kind of suspicion. Their color is suspect, and their bodies are never safe from harm. This, in turn, breeds a need for effective self-defense gestures, like raising a Roma army (like in the aforementioned *Roma Armee*) or at least finding one Romani superhero who might stem the rising tide of violence. A figure like that can be found in Kálmán Várady's sculpture series *Gypsy Warriors* (2012–2013). Várady explained the idea behind the series thusly:



Delaine Le Bas, *Romani Embassy* 2018, performance during the *Come Out Now! First Roma Biennale* 2018, photo Monika Weychert

I discussed a variety of [possible—author's note] aggressive forms of addressing the public with Damian and Delaine Le Bas. Then came the title, or the figure of the gypsy warrior, at first conceived as a name for a loose gathering of artists, but later adopted by me as a concept and exhibition title. In the course of our lively exchanges of ideas, we came up with one more iteration of the basic concept [that is] the gypsy werewolf: an indomitable beast or a warrior, who, when cornered, turns into a feral animal laying waste to everything in its way. It is a warning to everyone who thinks they can push discrimination and oppression ever further.<sup>45</sup>

In his explorations of magic, ritual, sacrifice, and death, Várady invokes the power of amulets and totems supposed to protect and safeguard the Roma. The figures of the warriors are literally glued together from a variety of elements that the audience can read as either familiar or foreign. The artist blends hybrid identities, along with exoticized and historic elements,

with anthropomorphic figures, demonstrating along the way the processual nature of the colonial relationship, wherein colonial identities have to be perpetually negotiated and constructed. Non-human elements, bones, horns, beads, shells, and leather are fused with brushed metal, ornate textiles, and sculpted wood. Várady considers nomadism to not necessarily be driven by economic necessity, but to be an opportunity to broaden one's horizons and seek out new experiences. Like Delaine Le Bas, Várady collects elements drawn from different cultures, assimilating and transforming them within his works. His sculptures and installations often resemble temples, altars, or totemic figures, inspired by symbolic objects from other cults and religions (e.g. voodoo, Mexican Catholicism, and Buddhism).

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As a result of the geographical reach of the Romani diaspora and its centuries-long interactions with local peoples, the modern Roma community is made up of a large number of subethnic groups. Communities living far away from one another share no common Romani identity: they use different dialects and languages (dialects of Romanian, for example), adhere to different faiths, and have historically specialized in different professions (bear tamers, crucible makers, etc.), and followed different codes of conduct (called "Romanipen"). Romani communities have also long been under the influence of majority societies, shaped by their policies and caught up in their history. Roma groups do not only differ, they can be openly hostile toward one another. It could be argued that, today, all Roma are bicultural, while most are bilingual, although many no longer even speak Romani. Local Roma cultures cannot be examined in isolation from majority cultures, while the transnational Roma political project rarely has any considerable overlap with local citizen projects. This is just one of many reasons why the Roma people do not make up a homogenous community.<sup>46</sup> They also

exhibit a range of skin tones, evident in the introductions of the individual soldiers who make up the Roma army in Yael Ronen's play.

Drawing on terms first formulated by Martin Jay, we could say that viewing the Roma through the lens of ethnostereotypes is, in itself, a scopic regime – a form of hegemonic cultural gaze that emerges when one group wields power over another.<sup>47</sup> And the practice of passing only serves to confirm the hegemony. Thus, it could be argued that strategies of passing, which some Roma have used as a sort of aegis or an invisibility cloak, have finally been exhausted. Likewise, the pursuit of a one-dimensional, common, legitimizing identity underpinned by self-coloring has come to an end. This explains perfectly the phenomenon of the “invented traditions of Romani nationalism” and its rhetorical discourses. An expert on the issue, Sławomir Kapralski,<sup>48</sup> writes:

Romani nationalism emerged as a critique of fundamentally racist beliefs about who the Roma actually are, beliefs which were prevalent even among intellectuals. As such, it bears some resemblance to anticolonial movements and their struggle against European imperialist ideologies. [...] However, in order to be a unifying force, culture must first be developed [...]. The concept of invented tradition is particularly useful in the case of the Roma, as they are currently facing the need to discursively organize a variety of aspects of their past, lent authenticity by the elites [...] in the first phase, some elements of history are interrogated by the elites, while in the second stage, these same elements are then used by the elites to curry support for their vision of the nation; in the the third stage, the concept is enshrined as a political objective by a mass movement, whose members identify with those elements of tradition that were selected in the first phase.<sup>49</sup>

However, to quote Gayatri Spivak, “Essentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be

effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive.”<sup>50</sup> Coming out as Romani, the pursuit of greater visibility, and the rebellion of subaltern others all bring about the need to devise countervisualities that might bypass the abovementioned conflicting tendencies: disappearance and assimilation into majority societies on the one hand (passing), and Romani nationalism on the other. Should we take a closer look at the strategies used by Romani artists to craft new representations, unaffected by centuries-old stereotypical, external depictions of the Roma, we might just see some similarities between these artistic expressions and the artistic strategies employed by halfies: individuals who are neither entirely black nor entirely white.<sup>51</sup> In such cases, ethnic pride is rooted in pliant hybridity and diversity, devoid of sharp contours.

- 1 Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
- 2 When the term first emerged, it was applied to people who, despite having black-skinned ancestors, could pass for white and inhabit “white” spaces. Currently, the term is also used to denote transsexual individuals whose true sexual identity is either concealed or goes unnoticed by the public. The concept also encompasses issues related to self-disdain and self-hatred. See: Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” *Transition*, vol. 58 (1992), 4–32. Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge–Massachusetts–London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4.

- 3 Monika Weychert, "Postać Cygana w kulturze polskiej – mit czy stereotyp?," (unpublished manuscript, 1998); see: Jerzy Ficowski, *Demony cudzego strachu* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1986); Bronisław Geremek, *Problem skalania w wyobraźni społecznej średniowiecza* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1989); Andrzej Mirga and Lech Mróz, *Cyganie. Odmienność i nietolerancja* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994); Adam Bartosz, *Nie bój się Cygana* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 1994); Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- 4 Anna Sobieska, "Dzieci Hagar. Literackie wizerunki Romów / Cyganów. Studia imagologiczne," *Officyna* vol. 21 (2015).
- 5 See: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010); *Maternities and Modernities. Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, eds. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kalpana Ram, "Gender, Colonialism, and the Colonial Gaze," in: *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).
- 6 See: Jan S. Bystron, *Megalomanja narodowa*, (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "RÓJ," 1935); idem, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce – XVI–XVIII wiek* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1960).
- 7 See: Bronisław Geremek, "Cyganie w Europie średniowiecznej i nowożytnej," *Przegląd Historyczny* vol. 75, no. 3 (1984), 569–596; Andrzej Mirga, "Stereotyp Cyganów a mity o ich genezie," *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ* vol. 20 (1985), 63; Bronisław Geremek, *Świat "oper y zebraczej". Obraz włóczęgów i nędzarzy w literaturach europejskich XV–XVII wieku* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989); idem, *Problem skalania w wyobraźni społecznej średniowiecza* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1989); Andrzej Mirga and Lech Mróz, *Cyganie. Odmienność i nietolerancja* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994); Norbert Mappes-Niediek, *Biedni Romowie, źli Cyganie. Stereotypy i rzeczywistość* (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Mundus, 2014); Sobieska, "Dzieci Hagar"; Grażyna Pawlak and Anna Sobieska, eds., *Wielka wędrówka – Wielki postój. Wizerunki Romów w literaturze, historii, sztuce*, (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2017).
- 8 Many of the publications cited above include exhaustive analyses of this motif.

- 9 Marcin Bielski, *Kronika, to jest historyja świata* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1976), 261.
- 10 See: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London–New York: Routledge, 2010), 8.
- 11 Ibid., 44.
- 12 The entry for “Mores” in the online urban slang dictionary, [www.miejski.pl/slowo-Mores](http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Mores) (accessed January 1, 2017).
- 13 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- 14 “Rassy wydziedziczone wśród europejskich społeczeństw,” *Kronika Rodzinna*, vol. 7, no. 17 (1875), 525–528.
- 15 Examples include the infatuation (an exception to the rule, as it were) of the protagonist (of a short story by Jan Maria Gisges) with a beautiful Romani woman who reads his palm before the Second World War and whom he meets again in a concentration camp on the eve of her death in the gas chambers. See: Jan M. Gisges, “Stacja płonącej nocy,” in: *Brudne śniegi* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964), 5–48.
- 16 Sobieska, “Dzieci Hagar,” 267–268.
- 17 Cf. Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination 1807–1930* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2006); *Die vergessenen Europäer – Kunst der Roma – Roma in der Kunst* (Köln: Verlag ROM, 2009), exhibition catalogue; Klaus-Michael Bogdal, *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner. Eine Geschichte von Faszination und Verachtung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011); *Romane Thana. Orte der Roma und Sinti* (Vienna: Museum Wien, 2015); Pawlak and Sobieska, *Wielka wędrówka – Wielki postój*.
- 18 Benedykt Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny, albo akademija wszelkiej sciencyj pełna*, vol. 2 (Lviv: Drukarnia Jezuitów, 1746), 686.
- 19 In literal translation; in Adam Bartosz’s translation, the passage reads: “Dark brothers, black-eyed sisters,” <http://romopedia.pl/index.php?title=Hymn> (accessed September 9, 2019).
- 20 Organized by Tamara Moyzes.

- 21 "Mindji" means "vagina" or "pussy." The founders of the rap group, Simonida and Sandra Selimović, wanted the name to bring up connotations of Pussy Riot on the one hand, and the Black Panthers on the other. The name was lent further ambiguity by the phonetic similarity of the words "mindji" and "ninja."
- 22 Romani Rose – born 1946 in Heidelberg, a Romani activist. His father, Oskar Rose, along with his uncle, Vincenzo, tried to set up the Union and Society for Racially Persecuted German Citizens of Non-Jewish Belief as early as in the 1950s, but their efforts ultimately failed. In the 1970s, the two men founded the Union of German Sinti, renamed the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma after Romani Rose took over as head in 1982. In 1991, he became the manager of Documentation and the Culture Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg; he also serves as the head of the Minority Council, established on September 9, 2004. Like his father and uncle before him, Rose has been a leading advocate for the commemoration of the Romani Holocaust. Rose pioneered the idea of memorial ceremonies on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in the 1990s and later argued for an exhibition exploring the Romani Holocaust to be installed at Block 13 of the Auschwitz camp (the exhibition opened in 2001). He was also one of the driving forces behind the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism in Berlin.
- 23 Sławomir Kaprański, Małgorzata Kołaczek, and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Kierunek: przyszłość 25 lat wolności a Romowie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017), 185.
- 24 *Roma Armee* is a play conceived by sisters Simonida and Sandra Selimović, directed by Yael Ronen, and which premiered September 14, 2017. The sets were put together by Delaine and Damian Le Bas.
- 25 Curator's Statement, [www.roma-biennale.eu/en/1-roma-biennale/performances/roma-armee](http://www.roma-biennale.eu/en/1-roma-biennale/performances/roma-armee) (accessed February 3, 2019).
- 26 Individual episodes indeed drew on real-life biographies of the cast.
- 27 When the play veers toward the latter, fictional events, such as the actions of the imaginary "Roma army," are transmuted into a record of reality, deepening the irony of the position of the Roma among majority societies.
- 28 Jae Jarrell, born in 1935 in Greenville, Cleveland, is best known as a leading representative of the 1960s Black Aesthetics Movement; she was also a member of AfriCOBRA.

- 29 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* ed. William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Dover Publications, 1995). See also: Katarzyna Pabijanek, "From Gypsyland With Love," *Critical Romani Studies* no. 1–2 (2018), 168–175.
- 30 Delaine Le Bas in discussion with the author, August 2016.
- 31 Transcribed from a recording of the performance, translated by the author.
- 32 Kristóf Horvath, also known as Színész Bob (Actor Bob), was born in Budapest. As a child, he was not allowed to play instruments. Because of this, he says he uses words to create an illusion of being a musician. Involved in theater and film circles, Horvath is a winner of the "it's free" Hungarian Slam Poetry Championship (2014) and the National Team Slam Poetry Championship (2015). He practices politically and socially engaged art. Horvath is also an educator. The text of the performance was transcribed by the author from a recording made at the Long Night of Coming Out.
- 33 Laura Corradi, *Gypsy Feminism: Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism* (New York City: Routledge, 2017), 48.
- 34 Ibid., 48–49; see: Daniel Baker, "The Queer Gypsy," *Nothing About Us Without Us? Roma Participation In Policy Making And Knowledge Production*, vol. 2 (2015), 88.
- 35 Transcribed personally from a recording.
- 36 Quoted from Krzysztof Gil's doctoral thesis; idem, *Tajsa* (doctoral thesis, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. Jana Matejki w Krakowie, 2018), unpublished, n.p.
- 37 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89.
- 38 The "Czech-Slovak Miss Roma" beauty contest was established in 2001 under the name "Miss Roma" by the Association of Roma and National Minorities in Hodonin. Gabriela Vašková was the inaugural winner. The 2006 pageant and Jana Bluchová's coronation can be seen at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_7QKnjK0bLk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7QKnjK0bLk) (accessed September 9, 2019).
- 39 Emilia Rigova in discussion with the author, August 2016.
- 40 See: Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
- 41 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89.
- 42 The title is deliberately ambiguous, and multiple meanings can be inferred from its Polish translation. It is also a direct reference to Siki Dagbovie-Mullins' book on halfie

- identities: idem, *Crossing B(l)ack: Mixed-Race Identity in Modern American Fiction and Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013); cf. Harry J. Elam Jr, "Change Clothes and Go: A Postscript to Postblackness" in: *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, eds. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 379–389.
- 43 The girl's legal situation proved immensely difficult, because her Bulgarian family handed her over to her Greek Romani carers, Eleftheria Dimopoulou and Christos Sali Sali, without a court order and outside the established system; however, it was not the illegality of the act that prompted the police to act. See: "Dziewczynka znaleziona u Romów. Mała Maria nie wróci już do rodziców!" *Fakt*, [www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/swiat/mala-maria-nie-wroci-do-rodzicow-wychowywac-ja-beda-zawodowcy/x5blbg8#slajd-5](http://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/swiat/mala-maria-nie-wroci-do-rodzicow-wychowywac-ja-beda-zawodowcy/x5blbg8#slajd-5) (accessed August 10, 2019).
- 44 Delaine Le Bas in discussion with the author, August 2016.
- 45 "Press Kit for the *Gypsy Warriors* Exhibition" (Kai Dhikas Gallery, 2013), [https://www.kaidikhas.de/ro/exhibitions/gypsy\\_warriors/text](https://www.kaidikhas.de/ro/exhibitions/gypsy_warriors/text) (accessed September 19, 2019).
- 46 See: Tadeusz Paleczny, *Interpersonalne stosunki międzykulturowe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007), 152–156; Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, "Europejscy Romowie. Monolit czy różnorodność?" in: *W krainie metarefleksji. Księga poświęcona Profesorowi Czesławowi Robotyckiemu*, eds. Janusz Barański, Monika Golonka-Czajkowska, and Anna Niedźwiedz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015).
- 47 Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in: *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1988).
- 48 Sławomir Kaprański, *Naród z popiołów. Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2012), 293–316.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 295–296.
- 50 Sara Danus and Stefan Jonsson, "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 24–50.
- 51 Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack*. See: Elam Jr, "Change Clothes and Go," 379–389; Natasha Pravaz, "Performing Mulata-ness: The Politics of Cultural Authenticity and Sexuality among Carioca Samba Dancers," *Latin American Perspectives* vol. 39, no. 2 (2012), 113–133.

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