

Assessing the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society in Light of Romani Subaltern Challenges

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Abstract

Contemporary scholarship in the fields of Romani Studies and antigypsyism (i.e., anti-Gypsyism or antiziganism), increasingly recognizes the centrality of location or “standpoint” in the discourse around representation and legitimacy. Deriving from a conceptual understanding of antigypsyism, this paper analyzes Gypsyism, in the sense of constructions of “the exotic Other within Europe” (Lee, 2000). The trajectory of knowledge production from the early days of “Gypsyology” to (critical) Romani Studies is analyzed: first, by means of a historiographical analysis of Nordic literature, which establishes the analytical dichotomy between subalternity and Gypsyism, and second, by a scrutiny of recent academic debates in the field. The paper argues that the emergence of authors from the Romani standpoint in fictional and academic literature has contributed to a change as well as provoked counter-reactions. The paper illuminates debates and trajectories by discussing the failed attempts to make the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) claim historical responsibility for its Gypsyism/Orientalism at its Istanbul conference in 2012 and the compromise resolution of GLS in Stockholm in 2016, which avoided an apology and maintained the unresolved antagonism.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Antiziganism
- Gypsyism
- Roma
- Gypsy Lore Society
- Historical responsibility

Introduction^[1]

This article primarily aims at pinpointing historiographical trends in the trajectory of developing knowledge from “Gypsyology” to Romani Studies and the relatively recent emergence of “Critical Romani Studies”,^[2] in the light of subaltern challenges, arguably since Hancock’s *The Pariah Syndrome* (1987; 1991). However, as the article is situated in the context of various debates regarding the role and responsibilities of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS), particularly in terms of contributing to a racist paradigm that led from the romantic “Gypsy” to the gas chambers of the Nazi racial state, I will begin with a discussion of the defeated proposal to the GLS Board of Directors in Istanbul in 2012, calling on the GLS to acknowledge and apologize for its racist past. Then, I will return to the original focus of my article, discussing examples primarily from the Nordic context. Finally, I conclude by discussing the GLS compromise resolution from the GLS Stockholm Annual General Meeting and Conference in 2016, which, in content and intention, was a defensive “memory” statement made to appease all parties.

At the GLS Board meeting in Istanbul in 2012, Thomas Acton, the Secretary of the GLS Board of Directors, supported by Colin Clark and Margaret Greenfields, both members of the Board, proposed the following motion:

That this Board [...of Directors...] recommends the General Meeting to acknowledge that, despite its undoubted scientific contribution, there was an historic complicity of the early Gypsy Lore Society with racist ideas and practices while it [was] still based in England, and that as the successors of those earlier members, we apologise for harm done, and resolve to build upon the positive elements of their work to build those inter-communal historical understandings which can transcend past conflicts.

Prior to the meeting, Acton had briefed the Board Members with facts and academic references, supporting the allegation of racism. The cited examples were published after 1945 and included the publication of racist content in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (JGLS), with Herman Arnold’s article “The Gypsy Gene” from 1961 being the most blatant example. Acton also cited the impact of the GLS on antigypsyist policies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The reactions of some Board Members to the proposal indicate both the principal complexity of historical responsibility and an unresolved antagonism within today’s GLS.^[3]

1. Acknowledgment: Dr. Adrian Marsh has provided valuable information and advice for this article.

2. I use these labels to indicate scholarly paradigms in the field: starting with the unanimously othering discourse formation of Gypsyology over the diversified field of Romani Studies to the hegemonic intervention of scholars inspired by critical theories in the field of Romani Studies.

3. The subsequent AGM (Annual General Meeting) of the GLS in Istanbul also revealed other antagonisms: the meager representation of Romani people in the organization, the uncritical acceptance of support from the Turkish authorities, and the setting of the conference at a place that was gentrified at the expense of local Romani communities, was criticized. Mariushakova responded that “[...] every single government in Europe can be accused of racist policies”, and that “[...] those who are dissatisfied with the policy [sic] of Turkey should find a country where there are no problems in this regard and organize a conference there” (GLS Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 2012).

Sheila Salo (Treasurer) opposed the resolution since it would be wrong “for contemporary scholars to apologize for actions in which they were not personally involved”. Board Member Anne Sutherland dismissed the motion as “silly”. President Elena Marushiakova distorted the perspective by saying that she “could not feel guilty for the British Empire’s racism in the 19th century”. Board Member Matt Salo did not want to “fix the blame for the past” and wished instead to concentrate on the future. Yaron Matras (Editor of the GLS journal, *Romani Studies*) opposed the resolution by arguing that “the facts had not been well enough established” and suggested instead to commission those who proposed the motion to submit a factual report to the 2013 conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Acton responded that the facts were already established, delivered by the information presented and available in his own book, *Gypsy Politics & Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology & Pressure Politics among British Gypsies* (Acton 1974). Neither the proposals to present the case in Glasgow nor the motion was accepted. During the discussion Matras claimed that Acton was “[...] not actually interested in discussing racism, but hypocritically pursuing a personal agenda, caused by a psychological need to feel influential” (GLS, 2012).

These defensive maneuvers missed the point in several ways. First, there are a number of states and organizations that have apologized for wrongs against Romani people in the past.^[4] In these kinds of apologia, the question is not about guilt but historical responsibility. This is always a collective endeavor, in the sense that one collective identity, which builds on tradition and continuity, through a historical apology invokes commitments for the future, thus opening negotiations with those who may identify with its legacy (Selling, 2007).^[5] This may mean a state, church, institution, or organization. In this particular case, one issue is the inclusion of Romani scholars and self-critical perspectives in the most prestigious body within the field of Romani Studies. Second, GLS Board Members missed the point that the proposed motion did not identify the discourses of the late 19th century, “when scientific racism was the norm”, but “[...] the post-1945 era, when people should have known better.”^[6] From an ethical and philosophical standpoint, this should have made it more acceptable to apologize, since the scholars of that period must be seen as “morally competent” (Schefczyk, 2012). (Scientific racism was under assault, for its associations with racial biology and the Nazi death-camps.) However, the personal connections to the actors and the practice of honoring long-standing members made the matter sensitive.^[7] The outcome was, primarily, an article by Acton (2016), where he again established the facts and defined the matter,

4. Amongst the small number of states to have apologized for the historical injustice of their treatment of Romani people are Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey, when, in 2010, then Prime Minister Erdogan, at a large “gathering” (*bulusmasi*) of 16,000 Romani people in Zeytinburnu Abdi Ipekci Sports Stadium on March 14, apologized on behalf of the Turkish state. The 2012 GLS AGM and Conference took place in the wake of this declaration but also during the continuing demolition of Romani neighborhoods and forcible displacement of communities (p.c. Adrian Marsh).

5. A prominent example is the declaration of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1998 that the Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe signifies “[...] the core of our self-understanding as a nation”, in the sense of a recognition that “[...] Germany carries a particular responsibility for maintaining the memory of the Holocaust” (cited in Selling, 2007: 252).

6. Justification letter for the motion, circulated to Board Members ahead of the GLS Board meeting (Anonymous source).

7. As a parallel, the story of Interpol shows that the tendency to one-sidedly defend the oeuvre of “the fathers” in elite organizations that build on tradition and personal networks can prohibit a break with a cultural codes, such as that of antigypsyism (Selling 2017a).

and second, a compromise resolution proposed and adopted at the GLS Annual General Meeting and Conference in Stockholm in 2016, and to which I will return.

1. Scientific Racism, Gypsyism, and Antigypsyism

The critical intervention at the GLS 2012 meeting was directed against “scientific racism”, which Acton defined as a “[...] view that there are originally distinct, and still clearly bounded categories of human being, to be called ‘races’, who are genealogically linked and whose distinct physical appearance and/or social characteristics, are passed on by biological descent” (Acton, 2016). This is a deliberately narrow definition. The notion of antigypsyism (frequently described in European Romani Studies as “antiziganism”) was neither used in the Istanbul proposed motion nor in Acton’s article from 2016. Reflecting on the evolution of research, I define antigypsyism (i.e., antiziganism) as excluding and discriminating discursive practices, which are centered around the constructed image of a “conceptual Gypsy” (Selling, 2015; cf. Selling et al., 2015; Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017). Further, I differentiate between different forms of antiziganism, each of which, in social reality, have resulted in different policies directed against Roma and other persons who historically have become associated with “the conceptual Gypsy”. Notably, a mixture of these forms is often the case. Nevertheless, such a distinction of these modes brings analytical clarity.

Table 1. Modes of Antigypsyism: A Tentative Model

	Basis	Historical consequences
The social	Social contempt, classism, Social Darwinism	“Sozialrassismus”, forced assimilation
The ethnographic	Culturalism, orientalism	“Deprogramming”
The racialist	Racial biology	“Apartheid”, sterilization, genocide
The structural	Structures which prolong of consequences of other kinds of antigypsyism	Social, cultural, and political disadvantages for Roma
Philoziganism	Orientalism; essentialist and excluding discourses on “the eternal Gypsy” as anti-modern counterpoint: not to be persecuted, but also not allowed to develop or integrate as equal.	Enclavization, cultural exploitation, appropriation.
Secondary antigypsyism	Discourses of disrespecting Romani voices and blaming the victim: “no smoke without fire”, and so on.	Rejections of Roma claims for rectification. Politicians’ fear of being labelled as pro-Roma.

In an earlier essay, I equated *philoziganism* and Gypsyism and defined this as non-hostile but nevertheless essentialist and excluding discourse built upon “the conceptual Gypsy” (Selling, 2015). However, in the context of the debate at the GLS Annual General Meeting (2012), the notion clearly has other meanings. To me, the most operational definition of Gypsyism as an analytical concept is

that developed by Ken Lee, “Whilst Orientalism is the construction of the exotic Other outside Europe, Gypsylorism is the construction of the exotic Other within Europe – Romanies are the “Orientals within” (Lee, 2000: 132).

In this sense, Gypsylorism is a discourse of othering, which historically has been – and still is – being performed in literature, arts, mass media, scholarship, and other arenas of culture. However, in the still ongoing antagonism, the meaning of this notion has also been reversely understood:

The term Gypsylorist (or: Gypsiologist) is used on a wholesale basis to refer to the Other – the other scholar who investigates Gypsies, but whose scholarship is rejected, because it does not lead to the same conclusions or engage in the same activism as that of the author him/herself. ‘Gypsylorist’ or ‘Gypsiologist’ is thus essentially a denunciatory term, rather than a descriptive or analytical one that refers to any particular point of view, methodology, affiliation, or era (Matras, 2005: 1).

In this article, I first argue that Gypsylorism, in the sense that Lee defines it, is a necessary but insufficient constituent of antigypsyism, including forms of antigypsyism that are not “scientifically racist” in the view of Acton. Obviously, this perspective places the GLS in an unfavorable light. Second, not only the notion of “Gypsy Lore” but that of “the Gypsy” becomes contested; this is an *exonym* which has been rejected as self-description by many Romani groups, because it is considered stereotypical and pejorative (Rodell, p.c.).^[8] It is possibly a reason for the fact that the journal and the conference changed names, in accordance with the changing self-denomination of scholarship from Gypsiology (*Ziganologie*, etc., in other languages) to Romani Studies. Third, the GLS definition of the field of enquiry as “[...] the study of Gypsy, Traveller, and analogous peripatetic cultures worldwide...” (Sheila Salo p.c.; Cf. Acton, 2016; Trehan, 2009; and Lee, 2000)^[9] must be questioned, since an essentialist ascription of nomadism is conflated with the concepts of Gypsylorism, and thus scientific racism (Cf. Acton, 2016; Trehan, 2009; Lee, 2000).

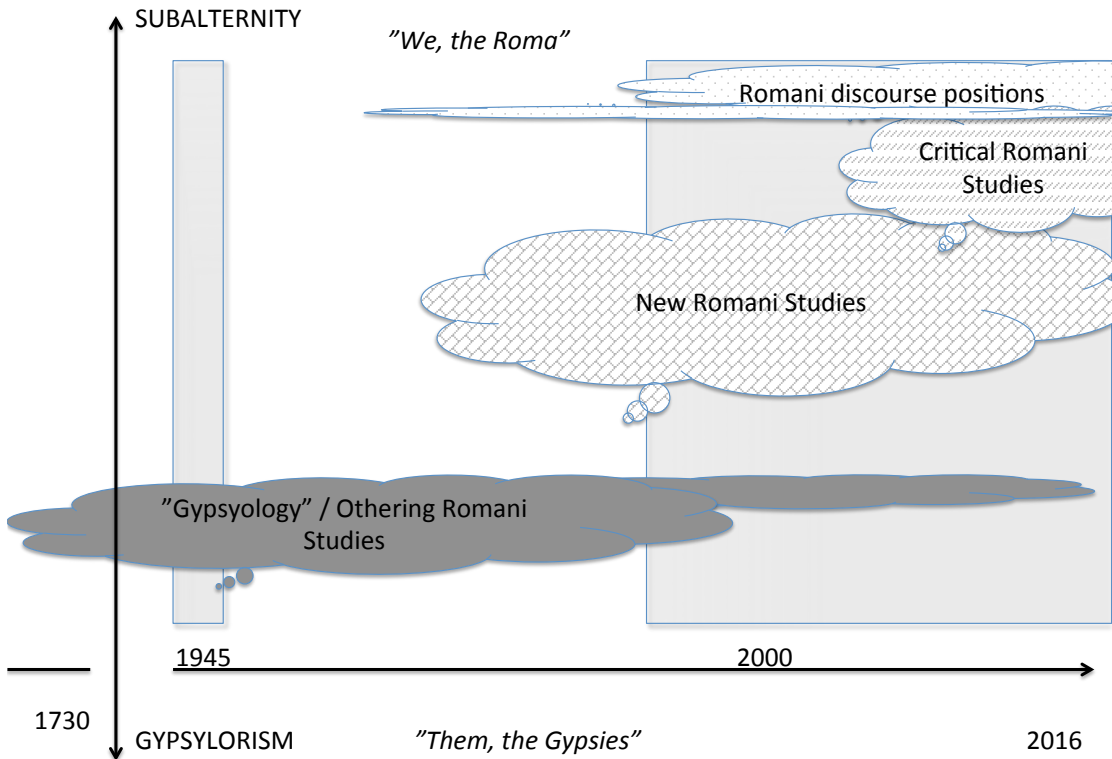
2. Contesting Antigypsyist Hegemony through Interventions

My topic is how narratives about Romani groups have changed from the early days of Gypsiology to a diversified field of Romani Studies, gradually including Romani voices and *gadjé* or *gorgio* (non-Romani or Traveller) self-reflections on antigypsyist hegemony, as expressed through this discipline.

8. Christina Rodell Olgaç p.c. Some groups accept or have consciously reclaimed the label “Gypsy”, as a political label (such as the UK Gypsy Council for Culture, Welfare, and Education), following models of ethnic activism from the United States, but we need to differentiate and respect the the rights of self-identification and self-ascription. This point was communicated to the GLS Board by Romani students of Södertörn University, who attended the conference in Stockholm in 2016.

9. Sheila Salo p.c.; Cf. Acton, Trehan, Lee. Compare also Romani Rose, “The nomadic has nothing to do with our cultural identity” (Digital recording from ODIHR/OSCE meeting, Berlin, September 6, 2016). Is Rose wrong or is the GLS definition the view of the outsider?

This trajectory corresponds with societal change and is indicated by Romani-related discursive events among the elites of majority society, such as political debates and policy documents.



This matrix tries to give an idea of the changes over time and the dimension of positionality (subalternity <-> Gypsyism) in selected works and policy documents. Breaking points: (a) post-war implosion of scientific racism; (b) post-millennium discourses on historical justice and Roma rights.

I mainly will refer to the Nordic context, with a few outstanding exceptions. On the bottom line, we see the perspective of *Othering*, which is indicated by a *we/them* juxtaposition, and the unreflective use of exonyms. On the top line, we see the evolving Romani voices in academic and cultural discourses about Romani people.

In between, there is a rapidly expanding field of what might be called New Romani Studies, mainly *gadje* scholars who, to a differing degree, strive to listen to Romani voices while deconstructing colonialist discourses (e.g., Acton, 1974 and 2008; Hazell, 2002; Lindholm, 1995; Lucassen, 1996; Martins Holmberg, 2014; Montesino, 2002; Pulma, 2015; Rodell Olgaç, 2005; Tervonen, 2010; Willems, 1997). There is also the field of critical research on antigypsyism and the Roma Holocaust, which mainly deals with majority society.^[10]

10. Zimmermann, Wippermann, 1997; Lewy, 2000; End, 2011 and 2013; Gress, Selling, 2013 and 2015; Bunescu, 2014; Rosvoll, 2015; Ericsson, 2015; Ohlsson Al Fakir, 2015; Fings, 2016; Kaveh, 2016.

Many intense debates are hidden in the matrix, to which I will return below. There is also societal change, indicated by acts of state's recognition of Roma rights and their historical responsibility for promoting antigypsyism. This process started around the millennium. The process was enhanced by transnational discourses on principles of universal human rights and historical responsibility. Examples of this can form a timeline that is presented below:

- 1982 German Chancellor recognition of the Nazi genocide of Sinti and Roma.
- 1995 Germany recognizes Sinti and Roma as national minorities.
- 1995 Finnish Church apologizes for its historical role in the discrimination against Roma.
- 1998 Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted on November 10, 1994, by the Committee of Ministers and it entered into force on February 1, 1998. It has 39 member states as signatories, to date.
- 1998 Norwegian government's and the Norwegian church's apologies to the Romani people of Norway (the *Reisende*).
- 1998 Finland recognizes Roma as a national minority.
- 1999 Sweden and Norway recognize Romani groups as national minorities.
- 2000 Swedish government apologizes to the *Resande* and the Swedish church apologizes to Romer (Roma).
- 2003 Finnish memorial for Romani soldiers who died during the Second World War, fighting for Finland.
- 2010 Prime Minister of Turkey apologizes to 16,000 *Romanlar* (Romani people) at a major government-sponsored event on March 14 in Istanbul.
- 2012 The Berlin "Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism".
- 2014 Swedish "White Paper on Abuses and Rights Violations of Roma during the 1900s".
- 2015 EU Parliament declaration to commemorate the "European Roma Holocaust Day" and vows to "[...] combat anti-Gypsyism" [sic].

These discursive events would not have happened without the pressure exerted by Romani activism. My hypothesis is that the emergence of Romani voices in different kinds of literature, especially since 2000, also challenges the self-understanding of academics working in Romani Studies and raises new questions around epistemology and the political responsibility of scholarship (Cf. Kawczynski 1997; Acton 2000; Kovats 2001). Obviously, these voices may or may not be included in policymaking. Yaron Matras, who over the years has been involved in debates with some of these challenges, suggests, "Hancock [...] and other activists view the historical discourse as an instrument toward changing the image of the Rom and their status in present-day society" (Matras, 2004). This is an important observation, but I would frame it otherwise; Hancock and other Romani intellectuals involved in these debates are part of a counter-hegemonic intervention that invites us to reconsider the understanding of Roma or "Gypsies", which has been produced for centuries by

gadjé scholars and in many cases provided a justification for racist and antigypsyist persecution. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve deeper into traditional and emerging critical narratives; my aim is solely to argue for this dimension of analysis, which invites further research.

My argument is not that everything written by *gadjé* scholars before 2000 was prejudiced, and even if it was, that this renders the work useless. On the contrary, the oldest Swedish dissertation on the subject by Bjöckmann (1730) was ignorant and based on proto-racist thinking of the time, but it provides some empirical material on the use of *Rromani-chib* (Romani language) spoken in Sweden in the early 18th century (Björckmann, 1730). Another Swedish dissertation about *zigenare* (Gypsies) was published by Laurentius Rabenius in 1791 and shows not only the first influence of scientific racism but also the establishment of an international intellectual arena. Rabenius refers to an early race classification system of Carolus Linnaeus (who published his *Systema Naturæ* in 1735), as described in the *English Magazine*, but also to the *magnum opus* of Heinrich Grellmann published only a few years before (Grellmann, 1787). Grellmann, in turn, was not the most original scholar but the most influential Gypsiologist of his time. He offered a fascinating picture of “the Gypsy” in tune with the political culture of the ruling classes. Even in the 20th century, he was frequently quoted and his concept of cultural de-programming as preferable to genocide influenced the Norwegian forced assimilation concept against “the Tater” (the Norwegian Romani group *Resande*) that lasted well into the 1970s (NOU, 1980: 42). As in many other parts of Europe, scientific racism was perceived as “common sense” by the educated public of Nordic countries up to 1945. However, in Sweden this was challenged when the then head of the Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala, Herman Lundborg, was replaced by a young Gunnar Dahlberg (1935). The latter was convinced that racism was a mistake in science, and in 1951 he was one of the scholars behind the UN “Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Differences” (UNESCO), which declared that there are “no scientific grounds whatever for the racialist position regarding purity of race and the hierarchy of inferior and superior races” and that “genetic differences are of little significance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of men.”^[11]

As racial biology became seriously questioned, this had an impact on real people: for example, the Swedish state was carrying out inventories and registrations of “Zigenare” and “Tattare”. Based on the research of the scientific racist Allan Etzler (1944), it appeared clear who and what was a “Zigenare”; it was roughly equated with the *Kelderash* minority, which was physically excluded from society and easy to spot. But who was a “Tattare”? As this group (mainly consisting of the Swedish Romani group *Resande*, who partly speak Scandoromani and consider themselves to be descendants of the earliest Roma immigration to Sweden in the 16th century) was hard to distinguish from the majority, there evolved an intense debate on the group’s origin and nature. Were “Tattare” people from a racially mixed group, as Etzler said, or a socially isolated, underclass, or outcast group, as his opponent Adam Heymowski claimed? Ultimately, the state’s 1945 “Tattare” report appeared confused and unconvincing, relying upon a circular definition of “a *tattare* is who is like a *tattare*” (Socialstyrelsen, 1945; see also Selling, 2013), becoming the last inventory

11. UNESCO statement at: http://www.honestthinking.org/en/unesco/UNESCO.1951.Statement_on_Race.htm

of “Tattare” carried out in Sweden. The registering of “Zigenare”, however, went on until recently,^[12] but the “Tattare” label continued to damage individual life opportunities, due to the discriminating practices of authorities – whether based on social or racial antigypsyism (Selling, 2013). Interestingly, as late as 1975 a regional morning newspaper stated that the debate was once and for all decided: the *Resande* were outcasts, but since the social structure which created the group was transformed into the modern *folkhemmet* (“People’s Home”), the group no longer existed. The *Resande* community was, until the Roma rights discourse of the 2000s, not in a position to speak up, since anonymity had become a strategy for survival (Selling, 2013). A backlash occurred in the 1990s when a widely discussed book by ethnologist Birgitta Svensson described the *Resande* in the tradition of Heymowski, i.e., as a social rather than an ethnic group, concluding that criminality is the core of *Resande* identity (Svensson, 1993).

In the 1960s another famous debate developed, novel in that a Romani woman was speaking, the Swedish Kelderash author, Katarina Taikon. The documentary author Lo-Johansson claimed that a “Gypsy” who integrated or who adapted, beyond his own exotic view of them, was no longer a “real Gypsy”. Katarina Taikon claimed equal social and civil rights and the right for Swedish Roma to be part of the modernization going on in Sweden (Lo-Johansson, 1963; Taikon, 1963, 1967). Lo-Johansson questioned Taikon’s position by claiming that she was only “half Gypsy”, having a *gadji* mother. At the same time, he claimed that “a Gypsy lived in him” (Arnstberg, 1998: 85). This debate influenced real people; the 1956 “Zigenare” report had laid the ground for a paradigmatic policy shift – from persecution to assimilation, but it also explicitly declared Lo-Johansson’s Gypsyologist perspective as a real threat, which might confuse the target group and therefore needed to be encountered through a campaign (Selling, 2013), the message of which being that only voluntary *assimilation* would make the Swedish Roma part of the socially equal *Folkhemmet* project. However, policymakers did not involve Roma representatives; instead it was designed and implemented by a growing caste of “Gypsy experts” (Montesino, 2001). This policy ultimately was deemed a complete failure and one of the main reasons for existing structural antigypsyism in 2010 (SOU, 2010: 55). Interestingly, both Taikon’s *Zigenerska* and Lo-Johansson’s *Zigenare* were reprinted in 2015 although the publisher Bonniers did not appear to know the story from the 1960s, as it advertised the Lo-Johansson book as “[...] a historical perspective on the debate around a people who, even today, are targeted by discrimination” (Taikon, 2015).

Also in 2015, the ethnologist Arnstberg published an extremely antigypsyist book called *Romer i Sverige*. Already in his widely quoted book *Svenskar och zigenare* from 1998, he echoed Grellman’s conclusion that “Zigenare” are people who are impossible to integrate into wider society, which is why their “Zigenare identity” must be removed through “strong assimilation”. This case illustrates a different kind of antigypsyism than that of Lo-Johansson, who found “Zigenare” so fascinating and argued that they *must not* integrate. In 2015 Arnstberg had radicalized and subscribed to the discourses of the Swedish far right, as illustrated by this textbook example of secondary antigypsyism:

12. Officially, the last “Zigenare” inventory was carried out 1962, but the social authorities kept registers well into the 1980s. In 2013 it was revealed that the police were still registering Roma without any legal justification (Selling, 2013; Westin et al., 2014; Ohlsson al Fakir, 2015; SOU, 2016: 44).

Their sense of purity is described and explained [...in this book...], as well how they preserve their form of life. The criminality of Roma is given a separate chapter. The beggar invasion, which Sweden is exposed to, through the EU-policy behind it, is discussed in detail. The book concludes with a scrutiny of the costly 'victim's industry', which one-sidedly investigates how racist, prejudiced and discriminating Swedish people are in their treatment of the Roma.

However, the fact that Arnstberg published this work privately indicates that he has become part of the academic fringe.

3. Romani Intellectuals Enter the Scene

A growing field of authentic or fictionalized life stories of Swedish Romani authors has started to contest Gypsyist images of Romani and Traveller people. Artists and authors such as Rosa Taikon and Hans Calderas have had an impact as respected individuals rather than representatives of a movement. Soraya Post, from the Swedish Romani community, was elected to the European Parliament as a representative of a Feminist party and she became a driving force behind the European Parliament resolution on Holocaust commemoration and antigypsyism from 2015. However, it is striking that, despite examples such as Rosa Taikon, Hans Calderas, and others – in comparison with the broader international picture – there exists little recognition of international Romani intellectuals in Sweden. The works of Ian Hancock are an exception, but he has been followed by only a few academic Romani voices in Nordic Romani studies.^[13] One reason is that structural antigypsyism is an obstacle to Romani educational success; another reason is that persisting prejudice in academia sometimes blocks and discourages Romani students.^[14] This is also an international phenomenon, and a major reason for some Romani education and cultural initiatives which explicitly challenge antigypsyist and Gypsyist hegemony through promoting emerging Romani scholarship.

One of these initiatives is the Digital Archive of the Roma (RomArchive), which I am personally involved in as a curator. The Archive is supported by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma as well as by the European Roma Cultural Foundation. It is, in its initial phase, financed through the German Federal Cultural Foundation. Its mission statement declares:

While 'hegemonic' archives have almost exclusively portrayed Roma in stereotypical ways, RomArchive focuses on their self-representation. New narratives will emerge, reflecting the heterogeneity of the Roma's diverse national and cultural identities.

Some of the scholars working with the RomArchive are involved in the much-discussed European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), supported by Roma leaders such as Dr. Nicoleta Bitu and Romani Rose, as well as Roma academics such as Tímea Junghaus and Ethel Brooks. The importance of this initiative was underlined at a high-level meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

13. See Kwiek, Brisenstam, Wallengren, Stenroos, Friman-Korpela, Lundqvist.

14. Compare Kyuchukov, 2015; SOU, 2016: 44; and ERRC, 2016.

Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in 2016 assessed by Thorbjörn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, in the following way:

ERIAC is extremely important, led by Roma people, it will educate and inspire and give Roma a sense of pride. We can look at other oppressed groups and their strategies to liberate themselves. We can look at the workers' movement, the Afro-American civil rights movement. It shows that when a critical mass of blacks entered the universities, then things changed. The same happen with Roma. This is why ERIAC is important and we hope it will open soon.^[15]

Jagland's statement attaches to an understanding of the field as a de-colonizing project, which learns from the African-American experience. As Angéla Kóczé puts it:

Romani scholars, in contrast to Black intellectuals, have only recently arrived to the stage when they have to confront and challenge the academic establishment. Right now Romani intellectuals are in a historical moment when they use their epistemic privilege to 'speak back' to the dominant cluster of scholars who created discourses and knowledge systems about Roma that objectify them (Kocze, 2015: 86).

Inevitably, this "speaking back", in turn, provoked a reaction in the field of Romani Studies. In a statement in April 2015, also quoted by Kóczé, Matras claimed:

The group seemed to come from nowhere. They had no track record of local leadership, no experience in cultural management, and no academic publications to their names. But they claimed a connection to Romani ancestry and appeared to have powerful friends (Matras, 2015).^[16]

The first part of the statement can be refuted instantly by reading the curriculum vitae of the persons to whom he referred. The second part hints at a widespread insecurity in academia, where the challenges from subaltern voices often result in existing groups closing ranks and avoiding self-reflection.

4. Epilogue: The Stockholm Compromise

Compared to the meeting in Istanbul in 2012, the setting of the Gypsy Lore Society's meeting and annual conference was different in Stockholm in 2016. The Swedish state had previously recognized the problem and challenges of antigypsyism and acknowledged Romani minority rights and the need for inclusion. Södertörn University was awarded the state commission to deliver programs for Roma university tertiary

15. Tape recording from ODIHR/OSCE meeting 2016 (Selling 2017b).

16. Matras, "Why plans for a European Roma Institute might be a setback for Europe's Roma" (LSE blog, April 16, 2015).

level education.^[17] More than 20 Swedish Roma students attended the 2016 conference. However – this must also be said – very few Romani scholars were found among the presenters. The Istanbul experience was not forgotten, and, in this context, the GLS Board adopted the following “compromise resolution” at its meeting, which had been agreed to previously by Thomas Acton and Yaron Matras:

The Board of Directors of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS)

1. Looks back with pride at more than a century of GLS scholarship that has contributed to raising international awareness of the history and culture of the Romani people, and which has set the foundations for what has become a thriving scholarly community devoted to Romani Studies;
2. Acknowledges that like other institutions, the Society and its publications have not been immune over the past century to occasional statements and attitudes that may be interpreted as overtly patronising, disenfranchising, or otherwise biased toward the people whose culture was at the centre of the Society’s attention;
3. Equally regrets that such statements made decades ago continue to be used by some to try to discredit the Society’s work and its efforts to promote engagement with Romani culture today. It considers the undifferentiated denunciatory use of the term ‘Gypsylore’ to be counterproductive to a fair and open discussion;
4. Recalls that at her opening speech at the GLS Annual Meeting in Istanbul in September 2012, the President of the GLS, Professor Elena Marushiakova, pointed out how negative stereotypes against Roma go hand in hand with a stigma that is directed at the study of Romani culture. She emphasised that this makes the Gypsy Lore Society an even more crucial space where academic knowledge can be maintained and encouraged. She said: “In the field of Romani Studies, the most important thing that should never be forgotten by all of us is that our research and its impact should not in any way harm the community that we are studying.” The GLS Board stands by this statement and remains committed to promoting knowledge of and engagement with Romani communities.

This was not an apology. It is questionable whether anyone will be proud of this resolution and whether it will be adhered to as a statement that invites a re-negotiation of the collective GLS identity. First, it appears strange to “look back with pride”, if this is not paired with remorse for the patronizing, disenfranchising, and biased statements of that past. Second, the critical content of the proposed Istanbul motion was diluted into the passive phrase, “have not been immune”, which denies the agency of the GLS as producer and distributor of racist ideology. Third, the resolution avoids reflecting upon self-criticism by denouncing “anti-Gypsylore”. Fourth, it appears odd to include one of the President’s Istanbul statements but to ignore those that might be more problematic. All in all, it is a resolution that aims at covering up an unresolved series of antagonisms, in the interests of the defense of the academic “ivory tower”.

17. It should be noted that Matras also has contributed to this development.

5. Concluding Remarks

Assessing a large body of scholarly, fictional, and political texts referring to Roma, “Gypsies,” and so on, primarily from the Nordic context, this article offers a model for a diachronic analysis of the dimension of positionality in the field of “Gypsyology”, Romani Studies, and Critical Romani Studies. At the one end of the scale is Gypsyologist othering: different variants of romantic, ethnographic, anthropological, and scientific racist discourses on actual Roma and the fictional “conceptual Gypsy”. Romani subaltern discourses are situated at the other end: scholarly, literary, and political texts and emancipatory praxis expressing Romani discourse positions. In between is a growing field of, in a wide sense, post-colonial and inter-culturally sensitive scholarship, still dominated by non-Roma.

This article observes that the complete domination of Gypsyologist discourse in the early days of “Gypsyology” has become questioned at different stages, particularly in connection with two breaking points: first, the implosion of scientific racism after the Second World War, and second, the turn of the millennium discourses around minority rights, Holocaust memory, and historical responsibility. As for the present, an expanding field of Romani scholars and activists are gaining momentum in political processes around Roma rights as well as in academic debates and Roma-lead cultural initiatives which contest antigypsyist hegemony. This subaltern challenge is fruitful ground for the development of future research in the field.

The debates and antagonisms that have evolved in the described field should be taken seriously, since they both reflect and influence social reality in each historical situation. This is the context in which this article interprets the recent debates of the Gypsy Lore Society, and whether or not it should apologize for its historical role in producing, distributing, and legitimizing racist discourses on Roma and other related or associated groups. As this was proposed at the 2012 Istanbul meeting, the GLS Board majority turned it down and refused to even acknowledge the problem. When measured against the model suggested above, this incident represents a failed hegemonic intervention, with the result that the Gypsyologist tradition was defended. Four years later, at the GLS meeting in Stockholm a compromise resolution was accepted. This compromise celebrated GLS tradition as something to be “proud of” and at the same time acknowledged in a diminishing way the problematic GLS discourses of the past as “occasional statements and attitudes” of “patronizing, disenfranchising” and “bias” to which the GLS “had not been immune”. Further, the critical understanding of Gypsyologism, which this article also represents, was denounced.

It would be a mistake to consider the GLS Board reactions to the critical interventions as atavism. As argued above, the retrospective loyalty of GLS traditionalists is one explanation. But a more powerful explanation is that the GLS Board actually represents the field and acts as a defender of cultural hegemony: structural antigypsyism lets only few Roma into academia, and the ones who succeed have to fight their way through the gates and speak back loudly to be heard at all. Further, to paraphrase Adorno (1963): as long as the conditions which engendered antigypsyism in its different forms continue to exist, approaches which aim at its deconstruction merely in the sense of working through the past will not be successful.

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