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Imagining the Gypsy[1] Woman

Representations of Roma in Romanian Museum

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With their big, black, round eyes, the girls of the tribe have a dignified look and a slender bearing; they clap their hands against their bewitching hips with a clink of necklaces, earrings and bracelets.[2]

The seductiveness exercised by the figure of the Other often becomes encapsulated into a special concern with women. And, as a series of postcoloni alism theorists from Edward Said to Gayatri Spivak have emphasised, the Other is always gendered. The image of the Gypsy woman has historically occupied an important place in non-Roma works of fiction, such as novels and films – as the example above, from a mid-twentieth-century Romanian novel, clearly illustrates.

At the end of the nineteenth century the allure of 'Gypsies', 'Bohemians' or 'Tsiganes' emerged as a twin sister to the Orientalism and primitivism popular among the European aristocratic and educated elites. In Central Europe at that time the entertainment of the nobility and the military was invariably accompanied by choirs and troupes of 'passionate' Gypsy musicians.[3] The literature, operas and operettas of the same period evoke the enamoured fascination with Gypsy women on the part of men from non-Roma high society. The imagery of the 'warm-blooded' Gypsy, momentarily defying male domination by her personal choice of a partner (a non-Gypsy, or Gadjo, possibly) is the basis of a narrative structure found equally in Romantic writers like Prosper Mérimée or Alexander Pushkin and in realists such as Leo Tolstoy, and even much later in the work of contemporary filmmakers like Emir Kusturica and Tony Gatlif. The Gypsy woman is thus constantly presented as steeped in mystery and erotic passion thanks to sexual and psychological qualities that are presumed exceptional. This fiction of the Other, using the female image, is also present in the world-views of local residents, like the Gadje I encountered in my fieldwork on the three Romanian villages where Kaldarari Roma live near non-Roma.[4] There I was asked by a school principal, laughing, 'What else do you want to

1 *Rom* means in *Romani* 'man'. Romani-speaking Roma oppose *Rom* to *Gadjo* (pl *Gadje)*. I use in this article the term *Roma/ Gypsy* to express both self and hetero-attributed names of this particular ethnic group. I also use *Gypsy* in order to underline the *Gadje* representation of *Roma*.

2 Zaharia Stancu, *Şatra* [The tribe], Editura Militară, Bucureşti, first edition 1968, 1986, p 91. This and other textual translations are based on the author's French translations from the original Romanian.

3 As explained in Henriette Asséo, *Les tsiganes, une destinée européenne*, Gallimard, Paris, 1994.

4 The Kaldarari's traditional craft is the making of copper pots wedded to an itinerant lifestyle. In the three villages where I did fieldwork, this craft is slowly disappearing; instead, the collection and selling of aluminium and iron scrap is becoming the main source of income for Roma families.

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know, if Gypsy women are beautiful? Yes, they are beautiful, as long as you wash them properly.' And I was told by a local doctor that 'It is the law of survival, they have more than four or five children… But, on the other hand, it is true, they are very handsome, especially the women.'

In this article, I examine the particular form that the gendered image of the Gypsy Other takes in present-day Romania, as well as its political implications for the Roma. I focus on the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, an important ethnographic museum in Bucharest exhibiting primarily peasant arts and crafts. In 2002 and 2003, it dedicated a small space to an exhibition of Roma material and also organised a trade fair of so-called 'traditional' Roma goods. In order to understand how this gendered image of the Roma as Other is created and reproduced it is necessary first of all to understand the way in which the Museum is situated in a network of elite-legitimised discourses which excludes the Roma from the field of culture and civilisation.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PEASANT SELF AND OF THE GYPSY OTHER

The Museum was conceptualised by its creators, the avant-garde Horia Bernea and his team, as a distinct place, officially designed to house, produce and transmit 'culture' in line with a definition that links culture to civilisation and to modernity through a very specific reading of Romanian history.[5] The aim of the museum was to provide the public with legitimate guidance on 'collective identity' (*identitate*), first of all in a pan-national sense and then, in the case of the exhibition I am considering, concerning the Roma. The Museum ascribed to the notion of 'culture' (*cultura*) both a national and a peasant interpretation. This ascription was achieved through the use of a contemporary artistic discourse that is very modern in its form and greatly appreciated by the present-day intellectual elite of Bucharest as well as among European museologists.

The figure of the Peasant became in the Museum an emblem of Romanian identity which alone was credited as 'authentic'. The Museum's curators distanced it from the open-air ethnographic museums so common throughout Central and Eastern Europe by offering a sophisticated interpretation of peasant spirituality in an aesthetic vision. In addition, the Museum is explicitly presented as a metaphor of the Church offering the Peasant as a Christ-figure of the Romanian nation whose mission is to save Romanian identity, morally, culturally and politically. The Peasant appears as an undifferentiated abstraction, without history, individuality, age or gender. I read the Museum as a neo-nationalist product restaging older models of the local collective imagination for present-day stakes.

In short, the scenography of the Museum focused exclusively on the mythical figure of the Romanian Peasant, revealing that the Museum's creators, from the start of their project, did not in the slightest envisage an ethnographic presentation of Romania's different ethnic groups. Even less did they pretend that concepts like 'ethnic groups', 'ethnicity', 'minorities' could be problematised within the framework of their Museum discourse. In general, they focused their attention on a block totality to

5 As emphasised in Vintila Mihailescu, 'Nationalité et Nationalisme en Roumanie', available at: http://terrain.revues.org/document3015.html (website accessed 3 September 2005), article originally published in *Terrain*: *en Europe, les nations*, no 17, October 1991, online from 21 July 2005.

the detriment of ethnographic diversity (apart from that of the so-called 'historical' regions of Romania such as Transylvania or Moldova portrayed through traditional costumes). However, circumstances allowed them to reserve a small corner for an ethnographic discourse on the Other, even if this was marginal to the overall context of the institution. In 2001 it was conceived that a new strategy might be introduced to begin exhibiting ethnic minorities (in a permanent room with temporary exhibitions dedicated each year to a different ethnic group). And so, in collaboration with *Aven Amentza* (Roma Center for Public Policy, a state-endorsed Roma NGO), the Museum organised the first of this kind of project, an exhibition on the traditional Roma lifestyle. The project, called 'Laolalta' (Together), was financed by the United States Embassy, the Council of Europe and the Romanian Ministry of Culture.

The temporary Roma exhibition, housed in a room measuring some forty square metres, consisted primarily of a collection of tools and products representing the principal manufacturing trades practised by various Roma groups in Romania who work in wood, metal or clay, as well as fortune-telling materials (such as cards and mercury). The exhibition also included some black-and-white photographs from the 1950s depicting Roma as nomads. In the middle of the room a painted wooden cart was on show, while two walls (almost half of the exhibition's total space) were filled with female clothing, namely skirts and coloured smocks. A bed with large coloured cushions, a television set and video recorder bore witness to the lifestyle of modern Roma. No explanation was offered concerning this layout, no discussion of the ambiguity of the term 'Gypsy', of the multitude and diversity of communities, or of their relationship with non-Roma society, and no reference to the deportation of the Roma in Transnistria in 1943–1944. At the same time, the Museum's review, of high graphic quality and containing colour photos, brought out a number (*Martor* VI/2001) dedicated to all ethnic minorities but nevertheless bearing the title *Romanians and the Balkans*.[6] It featured the 'Together' project alongside extracts from Roma life stories contributed by researchers from *Aven Amentza*. In this issue, colour illustrations of typical objects are purported to reflect ethnic minorities living in Romania, although the accompanying articles do not touch on this question. Among the objects photographed (clothing, household objects, furniture), none relates to religion or to objects highly symbolic for the Peasant objects such as the cross. A 'traditional' skirt can be pictured without explanation. It is remarkable that in this portfolio of photographs the only picture of a human being, rather than of an object, shows an adolescent Gypsy girl reclining languorously on a bed. The underlying institutional thinking seems based on the notion that pictures speak for themselves, with all the more validity if they portray women.

The Roma exhibition was followed, in the autumn of 2003, by an open-air fair dedicated to the traditional Roma crafts, also hosted by the Museum. The atmosphere of a 'genuine' country feast prevailed at this three-day fair, during which the public could consume on-the-spot barbecues and warm wine, and listen to live Gypsy music in the Museum's courtyard.

When we compare the Roma exhibition room and the *Mahala şi Ţigănie* fair with the portrayal of non-Roma Romanians, it becomes clear that the two stand in opposition. The representation of the Roma/Gypsies

6 A summary can be found on the following internet site: http://martor.memoria.ro/?location=archive&action=details&id=6 (website accessed 26 October 2005).

acts as an aporetic mirror to that of the Romanians in general. This can be summarised by a series of semantic oppositions that emerge both out of the kinds of material chosen and of the modes of representation:

The Gypsy	**The Romanian**
Shopkeeper	Peasant
Object of the Nation	Subject of the Nation
Profane	Pious, saintly, sacred
Joyful, loving feasts	Serious
Ethnography as kitsch	Ethnography as art
Objects as goods and products (accent on material culture)	Objects as metaphors in a narrative of spirituality (accent on symbols)
Concrete	Abstract
Wild	Civilised
Vague	Definite
Disorder	Order

The Museum thus uncritically reproduces extremely entrenched and widespread pan-European representations which place peasants and Gypsies in opposition. On the whole, the representation of Gypsies constructed by the Museum reinforces the stereotypical idea that Gypsies belong to an orgiastic space–time out of line with normality. I argue, as Alaina Lemon does in her study of Russian Roma, that 'stereotypes continue to exist not only because they are embedded in intertextual webs, but because people iterate them from structured, shifting social positions'[7] and that the Museum occupies precisely such a structuring position, producing and reproducing dominant understandings and stereotypes.

There is something moreover particular and specific to the representation of the Gypsy Other produced in the Museum which separates it from museographic representations of other groups. The oneiric and irrational *mise-en-scène* appears to be a ritualisation of the distance between 'Us' and 'Them', rather than a unifying process overcoming logical, geographical and historical boundaries (as in universalist ethnographic projects like that, for example, of the Musée de l'Homme when it was first constituted). The Gypsy Other is neither a source of collections (as in the case of the ethnographical museums in general) nor an icon of the Self (as in the Peasant museography). Instead, this Other is always turned into a fantasy, like a provoking abyss, and held distant by festive ritualisation. This is similar not to early ethnographic museums but rather to the colonial exhibitions which took place between 1870 and 1930 in the great European capitals of Berlin, Paris and London. There the Other was portrayed as joyful and close to nature, amidst animals and exotic plants, and as concrete evidence supporting the theory of social Darwinism.[8] The Romanian country feast and the colonial exhibition have in common this diverting function attached to the Other seen as a living curiosity. But unlike the colonial museums and

7 Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2000, p 151

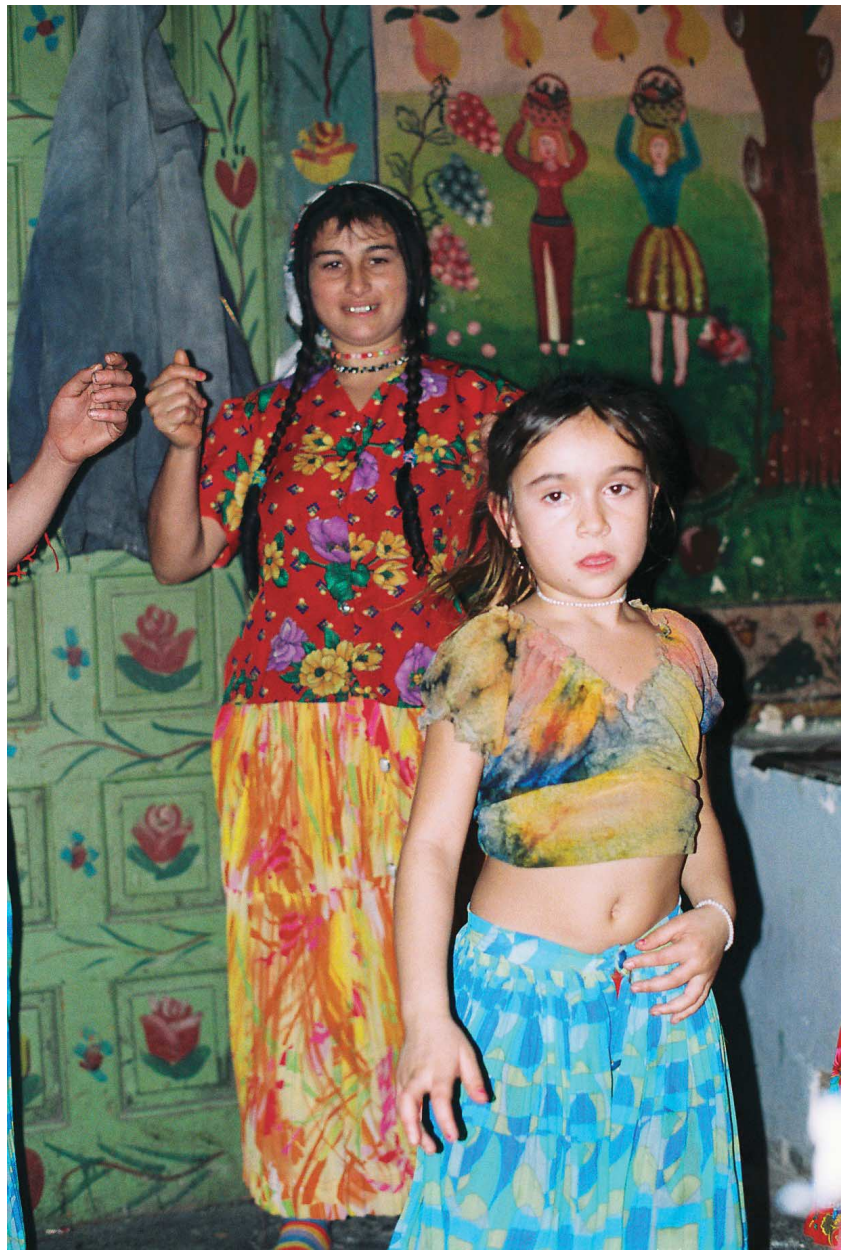
8 As argued in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Gilles Boëtsch, *Zoos humains, XIX et XX siècles: de la Vénus Hottentote aux reality shows*, La Découverte, Paris, 2002.

exhibitions, which establish continuity between the Primitive and the Civilised, there is no evolutionary link defined between the Gypsy and non-Gypsy.

DRESSING/UNDRESSING AS THE GYPSY WOMAN

How is the distance between Self and Other constructed through the use of a different device, that of conceptualising the Other through its female figures? When the fair was being organised, thanks to the good fortune of my friendly relationships with the Museum, I was able to get some of my Kaldarari informants from a village situated some forty kilometres north-west of Bucharest to come and sell the products of their craft. Thus, for three days they operated a stall that displayed and sold 'traditional women's clothing' and copper coffee-pots (Figure 1). This 'traditional' Roma women's dress proved very attractive to the non-Roma public: a fashionable woman journalist did her reporting dressed up as a Gypsy, and a young museographer gave her expert advice on the Roma for a television station also dressed in this costume (purchased from my informants). The stand run by the NGO *Aven Amentza* was managed by two Roma activists in the same type of dress. This costume consists of a skirt, an apron, a shirt and a scarf made of brightly coloured material, most of it with floral patterns in a strong contrast: purple, green on orange, yellow, white on red.

Iulia Hasdeu, Selling Skirts at the Museum Gypsy Fair



Iulia Hasdeu, Kaldarari Mother and Daughter

Gypsy women's clothing played an important role in the fair, notably in the form of carnival-like borrowings or cross-dressing. Such cross-dressing practice is widespread among non-Roma Romanians: in parties and masked feasts, and in school plays such as 'Puss in Boots', the character of the Gypsy woman fortune-teller is always present, clad in the most colourful of flounced skirts and bright flashy jewellery, with two plaits of improvised cloth tresses protruding from a scarf knotted at the base of the neck. On the other hand, my Roma informants have encouraged me to wear traditional Roma dress (Figure 2) on festive occasions.

In general, the small number of Gadje women who manage to become part of the Kaldarari community are warmly appreciated if they wear the long pleated skirts and typical headscarves. And, after my Kaldarari informants took part in Gatlif's film *Gadjo Dilo*, they expressed to me their admiration of the Romanian actress Rona Hartner's costume as Sabina, a young Roma woman in the film.

This preference on the part of both Gadje and Roma for dressing up the non-Roma as Roma underlines the importance of women's clothing. It provides a symbolic means of crossing the otherwise impassable boundaries between two registers that are imagined incompatible. For the Gadjo, the Gypsy – and especially the Gypsy woman – becomes a fantasised character and allows the imagining of the Other. The question is why the female Roma is considered the most appropriate for displaying this fiction of the Other. One might ask whether the practice of 'dressing up like the women of the Other', as performed by Gadje, does not represent the expression of a vision according to which, whatever they do, women cannot seriously endanger the foundations of the political order. One might say, in this case, that transgression does not threaten the inter-ethnic boundary. At the same time, we observe how cross-dressing, completely de-sacralised and de-ritualised, is transformed under certain conditions into a type of fashion, becoming the out-and-out instrument of the dominant Gadje ideals and ideology. It is in this way that 'Gypsy fashion', consisting of numerous clinking jewels, flounced skirts, brightly coloured cloth and so on, is presented in Western ready-to-wear catalogues as associated with a hypothetical nomadic lifestyle and 'the wind from the steppes'. So the Gypsy 'de luxe' featured by one of Jean-Paul Gautier's collections in 2005 is associated with a 'rekindling of passion in the warm-blooded Gypsy woman. Winking an eye to the hippy years, chic Gypsy style sets the latest trend.'[9]

Female clothing is indeed strongly highlighted throughout all kinds of non-Roma representations of Roma. To give one example: in Zaharia Stancu's novel (1986/1968) the only character privileged with being described in bright colours (all the others are dark, obscure, grey) is the young Lisandra, a Gypsy who defies her husband by loving his rival:

> The woman, knowing down to the last detail what lay in store for her (a public beating) had put on a yellow cotton skirt and a white silk blouse; her waist was narrowed by a belt and her hair fastened behind her neck by a blue ribbon.[10]

The same is visible in filmic representations of Roma, such as Emil Loteanu's,[11] where the main erotic scene centres on the interminable removal of her skirts by the main female character Rada – an act of undressing that never extends to nudity.

How does one explain this stress on women's clothing in non-Roma representations of the Roma, and in particular on skirts? A psycho-sexual mystery seems incarnated by skirts, and they are also extremely important to the Roma themselves. Among the Kaldarari with whom I worked, skirts (*rotkia*) constituted an object of prime importance. They are seen to protect the 'pure' environment from the pollution contained in the genitalia (*mij*). The ways in which they are worn, washed or destroyed trace the lines of demarcation between the pure and impure symbolic areas delimited on the body (the lower part is 'polluted', the upper part is 'pure').

9 See http://absolufeminin.nouvelobs.com/mode/mode2104_012.html (website accessed 20 February 2006).

10 Stancu, op cit, p 26

11 Emil Loteanu, *Tabor Ukhodit v Nebo 'The Gypsy Camp Vanishes into the Blue*,' USSR, 1975

Skirts evoke metonymically the boundary between Roma and Gadje and this is why they are such an important item in women's dowries.

This 'two in one' female body – the separation and yet unavoidable connection between the two halves evidenced by the compulsory use of the skirt – seems to be portrayed also by the mermaids which often figure in acrylic mural paintings inside Kaldarari houses throughout Romania and sometimes also on the façades of houses or on carts. These paintings are remarkable for their good sense of composition and symmetry, albeit without always respecting the rules of perspective. Bare-breasted mermaids – called *Pharaonnes* – more often than not with blonde hair, hybrid and fantastic, languish in larger-than-life grandeur in landscapes dotted with little lakes covered with water-lilies, or on seas with sailing ships floating on the horizon. The *Pharaonnes* are centrally positioned and immediately visible on the wall opposite the entrance of a house, or else on the outside, above the door (Figure 3). In the overall composition, they seem to reign over luxuriant and peaceful paradise worlds. The *Pharaonnes* were first painted by a Gadjo artist in a naive style some twenty years ago but have enjoyed a great representational upsurge and are currently portrayed in new styles. I interpret this upsurge in terms of a symbolic correspondence between the mermaid (initially a Gadje representation) and the Roma vision of the female body (and the body of society).

If it is true that Kaldarari see Roma women as mermaids in a broader and metaphoric sense, so do the Gadje. Although the Gadje have no knowledge of Roma ideas about the female body and the role of the skirt, they nonetheless erotically emphasise Roma women's breasts and their enigmatic, troubling, hidden lower body. In Loteanu's film, Rada is repeatedly shown bare-breasted and Lisandra and the other girls of the Gypsy tribe are said to 'have little breasts, like apples'.[12] Elsewhere in Stancu's novel the two halves of the body are reversed and the world is

12 Stancu, op cit, p 93

Yann Betant, *Pharaonnes* on the Wall of a Kaldarari House

turned upside down (signifying the war which overthrows the status quo). Thus Lisandra, after having been beaten by her husband in front of the whole tribe, appears as follows in the eyes of others (and of the author):

> Spread across her shoulders and back, her black, shiny hair, wet and mixed with mud and blood, covered like a piece of strange and barbaric clothing the whole of her upper body. The other part, with its curves, remained totally naked.[13]

One should note this allegory, so explicit for a patriarchal reading: the endangered world order is announced by a rebellious woman; an adulteress, beaten half to death, stands up, the two halves of her body interchanged from the viewpoint of the mermaid whose lower part of her body is 'normally' uncovered. Likewise the character of Sabina in the film *Gadjo Dilo*[14] shows complete nudity only as prelude to a catastrophe: the Romanians set fire to Roma houses after Sabina is seen washing her hair, her breasts naked and skirts covering her lower body. It is worth mentioning that the main characters in all these various representations are males, as are the authors.

Just as in large numbers of images depicting colonial situations (postcards or press pictures), in the media that I am discussing here the women of the 'Other' are fantasised and displayed as aesthetically attractive and hence sexually desirable. But representations of Roma women are very different from the colonial images that emphasise the domestication of women,[15] or display them nude for pornographic purposes.[16] Roma/Gypsy women by contrast are draped in coloured clothing that appears to come straight from the theatre, the carnival or bacchanalia. But this scenario contains the classic elements of sexual attraction vis-à-vis the Other. Depicting Gypsy women as mermaids, on the other hand, appears more a question of seduction than of rape (which, for the subjects of colonisation, takes the form of the pornographic image). This seduction, which opens the door to a kind of theatrical fiction-world, has a strong erotic dimension. Mircea Eliade's fantasy short story illustrates this stress on seduction very well.[17] Its protagonist is spiritually initiated by a mysterious encounter with Gypsy women: they appear as creatures of dream, attracting and bewitching, testing the hero and leading him like spiritual guides – or misleading as mermaids do! Out of the dream, the question arises of taming this woman of the Other: washing her, dressing or undressing her, while still observing her 'natural' beauty. These paternalistic views and practices toward the Other's women reveal a typical relation of domination. Despite this, I see no contrast between Gadje fantasies and Roma practices centred on femininity, but rather a continuity that needs to be emphasised. For Roma, as much as for Gadje, the lower part of the female Roma body remains hidden from sight as the taboo half. The particular eroticisation of the Gypsy woman by the Gadje meets the Roma image of femininity. One could state that skirts precisely institute Otherness in this figure of the mermaid.

This continuity between representations does not obliterate the interethnic boundary but, on the contrary, constantly works to reiterate it. The representations of Roma and Gadje women do not coincide but significantly overlap and help to reinforce a cultural politics that is

13 Ibid, p 31

14 Tony Gatlif, *Gadjo Dilo* (France/Romania), 1997

15 Eric Savaresse, 'Montrer la Féminité, Figurer l'Altérité. Le Corps des Femmes Indigènes dans l'Imaginaire Colonial Français à Partir de l'Illustration (1900–1940)', in *Le Corps dans tous ses états : regards anthropologiques*, Gilles Boëtsch and Dominique Chevé, CNRS, Paris, 2000, pp 39–52

16 Boris Wastiau, 'Les Plaques Sensibles de la Mémoire Ethnographique. Congo Belge 1890–1930', in *X-Spéculations sur l'imaginaire et l'interdit*, Marc-Olivier Gonseth, Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr, MEN, Neuchâtel, 2003, pp 239–65

17 Mircea Eliade, *La ţigănci. Pe strada Mântuleasa*, *At the Gypsy Women's Place. On Mantuleasa Street*, Humanitas, Bucuresti (first edition 1969), 2003

unfavourable to the aspirations of Roma to achieve the prerogatives of citizenship freely granted to other Romanians. These registers accord Roma both a ritually marginal place and the function of answering a bacchanalian need,[18] rather than considering them as part of an overarching and effectively shared culture. And the museum is only one example of the representation of the Gypsy Other at work in other cultural institutions, both formal and informal. Every cultural form that I have discussed (the fair and museum, fantastical or realist novels and feature films) ceaselessly proclaims a Roma/Gypsy femininity turned into a fantasy by the Gadje's coordinates of the unconscious: they emphasise a costumed, fictional Gypsy heroine, herself a disguised form of seduction in all its meanings. In modern times, in a more oblique way, as we have seen, romantic poetry and fashion all connive at a similar attitude towards Gypsies.

WHAT PLACE IS GIVEN TO THE ROMA: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the modes of expression are not the same in all the cultural products concerning Roma that have been mentioned here, it seems to me that it is a question each time of the same poetics of the Other, based on a semantic configuration in which the categories 'woman' and 'Gypsy' are closely related. The Gadje way of thinking about Roma through their womenfolk is also related to the absence of women in the museum-based discourse of Nation and Peasant. To de-poeticise, in order to politicise, as Anikó Imre puts it, does not seem part of the vision underlying institutional thinking for the immediate future, either in the Museum or in other Romanian institutions. In her words, 'poetry and irony function to distance ideal femininities from actual women and to silence the gender politics of representation'.[19] In this sense and more generally one might reflect that the way in which the female body is imagined is mirrored by the role that society accords to women in politics.[20] This also relates to more general paradigms: the control of the Other is achieved through the manipulation of the image of 'his' women.[21]

To return to the Museum: this institution exploits stereotypes of Gypsies to project an image that is oneiric, absurd and carnivalesque, and it does so at least in part through the utilisation of women and images of femininity. Beyond the continuities between representations of the Roma/Gypsy woman by both Roma and Gadje, what is at stake is the unquestioned creation of a depoliticised system of thought that works to ghettoise the Roma in the Romanian imagination and self-conceptualisation. To set up an irreconcilable difference which can join successfully other *mises-en-scène* of the difference experienced in the past (as for example in colonial exhibitions) is an unfailing recipe for the reification of boundaries. At the end of the day, one is refusing the Roma 'culture' in its Gadjo sense (in the Museum context, the term means 'national', 'peasant', 'spiritual'). Moreover, the Gypsies are enclosed in a sort of 'anti-culture' and the effect is to reinforce the central position of the Peasant in the language of the Museum and thus exclusively to confer on Gadje cultural, national and no less 'highly' aesthetic

18 The term 'bacchanalia', originally the feast of Bacchus in Roman antiquity, is a synonym for orgy. This term is used in Mattijs Van De Port, *Gypsies, Wars and other Instances of the Wild: Civilization and its Discontents in a Serbian Town*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 1998. Van de Port uses it to speak of the 'feasts of unreason' (*lumpovanjie*) celebrated by Serbs, who have Gypsy musicians play in bars.

19 Anikó Imre, 'Hungarian Poetic Nationalism or National Pornography? Eastern Europe and Feminism – With a Difference', in *Violence And The Body. Race, Gender and the State*, ed Arturo Aldama, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis–Bloomington, 2003, pp 39–58, p 57

20 As argued in Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies, Ethics, Power And Corporeality*, Routledge, London–New York, 1996

21 As argued in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed with Ranajit Guha, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988; and in Laura Nader, 'Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women', *Cultural Dynamics*, II:3, 1989, pp 323–55.

attributes as a means of reiterating 'our' cultural hegemony as opposed to 'their' function as providers of entertainment and surrealist flights of fancy.

At the heart of this representational system resides the female body and its appearance: the Gypsy costume is dislocated and instrumentalised in an elitist Gadjo world. In other words, the cultural use of the body in the context of dislocation appears to utilise to perfection the means offered by the system of Rom meanings translated into a pure objective: that of domination. This coherence as concerns the representation of the feminine is an efficient means of maintaining the status quo of gender in Gadje and Roma societies and of conserving the inter-ethnic boundary.

Impossible to classify among museums of popular traditions as well as museums of colonial society, the Museum nevertheless resembles other structures which portray the Roma/Gypsies in the form of an aporetic category. Mattijs Van de Port and Alaina Lemon show, respectively, how the Gypsy music bar in Novi-Sad (Serbia) and the Romany Theatre in Moscow conjure up symbolic ghettos and surrealist pan-utopian spaces.[22] The function of these spaces for the Gadje is to compensate for the flight from reality – whether the reality of 'civilisation' premised on the bourgeois criteria inherited from the Habsburg past of Central Europe (Novi-Sad) or the reality of socialist oppression (Moscow). Either way we find symbolic ghettos for real excluded persons – male and female.

22 Van De Port, op cit, and Lemon, op cit

Translated from the French by Malcolm Scott