Absence and Presence of Rromani Voices in *Acta Comparationis*: Early Roma Comparatists

Maria Luiza Medeleanu
Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca
Corresponding author email: maria.medeleanu@ubbcluj.ro

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Abstract: This essay examines the status of Rromani language and literature in *Acta Comparationis* Litterarum Universarum, the world's first journal of comparative literature. Specifically, I discuss how the presence of Rromani folk songs and translations in this nineteenth century Transylvanian academic publication can be understood within broader linguistic, political, and colonial frameworks. Does this presence show genuine appreciation for Rromani culture, or is it part of a European colonial epistemology that racialized the Roma as the "inner Orientals" of Europe? The essay contextualizes Acta's publication of Rromani texts in light of the broader European academic discourse on Roma, paying special attention to the influence of "Gypsylorism," an intellectual tradition that exoticizes and racializes Roma communities. My analysis highlights the agency of nineteenth-century Roma intellectuals, their efforts to standardize Rromani lannguage, and their struggles for cultural and political recognition within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The essay concludes by assessing the journal's contribution to the field of Romani Studies and the development of Rromani literature.

Keywords: Rromani language, comparative literature, *Acta Comparationis*, Romani Studies

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Kado lil del duma pal-o than e Rromane ćhibăqoro thaj literaturaqoro and-i *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, o jekhto komparime literaturaqo pustik andar-o sundal. Vov rodel sar o analipen e Rromane gilĕnqo thaj Rromane amboldimatenqo and-e kadaja deśuenăto śeliberśesqi Transilvanăqi akademikani publikacia aśti avel xakărdo and-jekh maj baro lingvistikano, politikano thaj kolonialo kontexto. Sas adajkha prezencia jekh ćaćo vazdipen pal-i Rromani kultura vaj sas maj sigo kotor andar-o Evropako kolonialo źanlipen kaj dikhelas le Romen sar le Evropaqe "andrune Orientalură", zorărindoj o rasismo mamuj lenqe? O rodipen vakărel pal-i publikacia le Rromane texturenqi and-i *Acta Comparationis*, and-o maj buxlo euvropako akademikano divano pal-e Roma. Sikavel i zor le Gypsylorismosqi - jekh godikano xakaj kaj prasavdăs thaj buxlărdăs o rasismo opral k-o Roma. O lil anel angle i zor thaj i pakiv le Romane xaranenqe and-o deśuenăto śeliberś, lenqo zumavipen te vazden e Rromani ćhib, thaj lenqe marimata karing kulturano thaj politikano prinʒaripen and-o Austro-Ungrikano Imperiumo. Dikhindoj sar phiravdăs pes i *Acta Comparationis* e Rromani ćhibăça thaj avere maj tikne ćhibĕnça, o rodipen sikavel sar o pustik, kaj delas pes so kamel te vazdel savorre ćhibă, zorărdăs o bibararipen maśkar e ćhibă thaj o kolonialo divano. Mirro lil agorisarel pes soça andăs i *Acta Comparationis* vaś e Romane ʒanglimata thaj o buxlăripen e Rromane literaturaqo.

In June 1877, two Rromani folk songs appeared in the world's first comparative literature journal, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, under the title *Volkslieder der Zigeuner*. They were in "select" company: a commentary on *Don Quixote* in Spanish, an English review of the *History, Art and Paleography of the Utrecht Psalter*, an article on Latvian folk poetry written in German, translations of Petöfi Sandor into Romanian, Italian and German, French poetry, and Italian romances. What should one make of the presence of the Rromani language – a politically invisible language – in an international academic journal run by Hugo Meltzl, a Transylvanian Saxon professor at the University of Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris, in a Transylvania dominated by linguistic-political struggles?[1] This essay asks if and how the Rromani publications contributed to a recognition of the language and helped situating it in the literary and linguistic landscape of the world. Did *Volkslieder der Zigeuner* simply facilitate the production of Roma knowledge in

1. Kusvaris is the Rromani version of Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár, used in the collected folklore pieces in *Acta Comparationis*.

collaboration with Roma translators, or did it simultaneously reproduce the colonial European epistemology of the "racialized other"? If *Acta Comparationis* marked the beginning of comparative literature, and if the Rromani language and literature were part of this initiative, then what role did the journal play in the evolution of Rromani language and literature? Did the publication place the Rromani language in equitable dialogue with other languages within the concept of world literature, or did *Acta Comparationis* engage in colonial discourse about the Roma?

To answer such questions, I analyze the status of Rromani in *Acta Comparationis,* considering the following aspects: the place of the journal in the broader context of studies about Roma in Europe; the relationship between the struggle of Roma intellectuals to be recognized and treated as equals in Transylvania and the way in which the Rromani language and literature are represented in the journal. I pay special attention to the space afforded to Rromani in relation to Angus Nicholls's discussion of the colonial dimensions of *Acta Comparationis*. In closing, I address the extent to which *Acta Comparationis* participated in the construction of an academic discourse that positioned Roma as subalterns.

Becoming the Oriental Intra-European: Roma as Research Subjects

By the mid-nineteenth century, Roma had become an object of research for white European scholars. In 1783, Heinrich Grellmann published *Die Zigeuner*. The book had a wide circulation, being translated into English as *Dissertation on the Gypsies* in 1787, into French in 1788 and 1810, and Dutch in 1791. *Die Zigeuner* laid the foundation for a tradition of Roma studies in Europe that continues to resonate today. Grellmann's work has three principal dimensions: sociological, anthropological, and linguistic. From a sociological perspective, the Roma are portrayed as a social problem, with Grellman emphasizing the necessity of a civilizing project in which the Habsburg policies of Roma assimilation serve as a solution.[2] The anthropological aspect presents Roma as exotics/primitives and therefore suitable subjects for scientific study in language, music, and dance. To remain subjects for this type of research, they had to be kept separate from the societies they came into contact with. Linguistically, the Roma could be studied for their dialects and connections to Oriental tongues.[3] Like the anthropological perspective, the linguistic approach exoticizes Roma by referencing the presence of their Indian-derived language in European countries. The linguistic evidence that borne out the Indian origin of the Roma could concomitantly be used to show that, as Orientals, the Roma were "the foreigners of Europe" and therefore unable to adapt to European societies. Ken Lee describes studies following in the direction opened by Grellman, as "Gypsylorist," defining *Gypsylorism* as a particular variant of Saidian Orientalism.[4] In 1888, the first academic society in the world dedicated to the production of scientific knowledge about the Roma was founded in Europe. This scientific discourse, initially exotic, gradually became racialized, constructing the Roma in opposition to white, Christian, and "civilized" Europeans.[5]

In Romanian provinces, the first major literary work that addresses the theme of the Roma is *Țiganiada* [*The Gypsiad*], which was written at the end of the eighteenth century by a representative of the so-called *Transylvanian School* [Școala ardeleană], Ioan Budai-Deleanu.[6] To highlight Romanians' inability to rise up against Hungarian rule in Transylvania, Budai-Deleanu allegorically employs Roma slaves from Wallachia, drawing on some of the most widespread stereotypes of the time such as cowardice and political and military disorganization. As Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică points out, "There is a well-known satire about the Gypsies who built their church of cheese [...] but ate it when they got hungry. In Budai, the Gypsies build a state, argue about how to build it, and eat it, as it were, by destroying it."[7] Although the allegory that Budai-Deleanu creates through satire is obvious, even to this day, literary historians in Romania do not openly discuss the racialization of the Roma in *Țiganiada*. It was unacceptable for the Romanians' struggle for emancipation to be represented through a comparison to "Gypsies," who occupied the lowest rung in the Romanian collective imaginary.[8]

Later, the publication of Mihail Kogălniceanu's *Esquisse sur l'histoire: les mœurs et la langue des cigains, connus en France sous le nom de Bohémiens, suivie d'un recueil de sept cents mots cigain* placed the history of the Roma in Moldova and Wallachia in relation both to Western Europe and its enslaved black populations. Kogălniceanu's

2. Grellmann's ideas were later taken up and processed by anthropologists within a complex epistemological and ideological laboratory, which created the category of "asocial," reaching its maximum resonance in Nazi policies.

3. Heinrich Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gypsies*, trans. Matthew Raper (London, 1787).

4. Ken Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 44, no. 2 (2000): 129–156.

5. Margareta Matache, "Word, Image and Thought: Creating the Romani Other," FXB Center for Health & Human Rights at Harvard University, October 5, 2016, https://fxb.harvard.edu/2016/10/05/word-image-and-thought-creating-the-romani-other/. Dezso Mate, "Paradigms of History: Academic Antigypsyism, and Resistance," *KWI-Blog*, January 17, 2024, https://blog.kulturwissenschaften.de/paradigms-of-history/.

6. A group of scholars united by their common aspirations with regards to the civil, social, political and cultural rights of the Romanians in Austro-Hungarian Transylvania. About this work writes in this issue Mihaela Pop. One of the issues that Mihaela Pop raises in her article is the Roma racialization in *Țiganiada* [The Gypsiad].

7. G. Bogdan-Duică, "Comment to Ioan Budai Deleanu," in *Țiganiada* [Gypsiad], ed. Ion Pilat (Bucharest: Carte Românească), 10.

8. Delia Grigore, Mihai Neacșu, and Adrian Nicolae Furtună, *Rromii ... în căutarea stimei de sine* (Bucharest: Amare Rromentza, 2013), 18–30.

doctoral thesis, *Esquisse* was written under the supervision of Alexander von Humboldt. It was initially published in French (1837), then in German (1840) and Romanian (1900). Kogălniceanu's text draws on Alfred Graffunder's *Ueber die Sprache der Zigeuner* (1835), as the author himself notes, while the lexical issues presented in the French-Gypsy vocabulary section are influenced by Grellmann's work.[9] This intertextuality raises several questions regarding the originality of Kogălniceanu's work. *Esquisse* directed the attention of European intellectuals toward an "authentic" supply of subjects that could be researched, the Roma of the two Romanian principalities. In this regard, it is particularly significant how Kogălniceanu, whose family owned slaves at the time, chose to present the Roma in the preface to his work:[10]

> "In recent years, many readers have learned detailed news about their wandering life, their customs, and their habits, and some scholars have shown a special interest in the Roma's language, which is derived from the dialects of Hindustan. Born and raised in Moldova, where there are almost 100,000 Gypsies, who have preserved their primitive customs to this day and from whom I was able to study better than others the customs of this nomadic people, I wanted to give some precise and interesting details about this tribe originating in India."[11]

Kogălniceanu's work did not make a significant contribution to linguistics, but its political resonance was consequential, the Romanian politician being deeply invested in the emancipation of the Roma in the two Romanian Principalities. Like Budai-Deleanu, Kogălniceanu used the condition of Roma enslavement to draw Europe's attention to the political situation in the Principalities, especially in light of their desire for unification. The unionist ideal, he argued, could not be implemented as long as the institution of slavery persisted on the territory of Moldova and Wallachia: "For lack of any other merit, this work will serve for the moment those voices that have been raised for the Gypsies, although, unfortunately, this interest will be only fleeting, for that is how Europeans are. They form philanthropic societies for the abolition of slavery in America while forgetting that in Europe there are 400,000 Gypsies enslaved, and 200,000 are mired in the greatest ignorance and barbarity. And no one cares to civilize a people."[12] The Gyspylorist register included abolitionist literature in the Principalities, with Vasile Alecsandri, Radu Rossetti, Gheorghe Sion, and Costache Negruzzi as main representatives of this trend. As their own works testify, these authors were former slave owners who, in an attempt to support the rights and freedoms of slaves, retained a romanticized approach to slavery, positioning themselves in the superior position of the merciful master.[13]

The first author who answered Kogălniceanu's call was Orientalist Paul Bataillard. In 1844, he published *Sur l'apparition des Bohemiens en Europe*. Between 1875 and 1878, he published two more works, *Sur les origines de Bohemiens au Tsiganes* and *Les Zlatars, tsiganes fondeurs en bronze et en laiton, dans la Galicia Orientale et la Bukovine*, which secured his place among the eleven founding members of the Gypsy Lore Society. Another French author who responded to Kogălniceanu's "invitation" and focused on this "malheureuse race" was Jean Alexandre Vaillant. In 1857, one year after the abolition of slavery in the Principalities, he published *Les Romes, histoire vraie des vrais Bohémiens*, which dealt with the Roma language in the two Romanian territories of the time.

Another contribution to studies on the Roma in Romania came from Barbu Constantinescu. Encouraged by Franz Miklosich, who had a strong interest in the subject, he published the collection *Probe de limba și literatura Țiganilor din Romania* (Samples of the language and literature of the Gypsies in Romania) in 1878. The volume contains 75 Roma folk songs and 15 fairy tales in bilingual text, Rromani and Romanian, collected from different regions. As Constantinescu states in the introduction, "the texts have no aesthetic value, but they are relevant from a linguistic and psychological perspective."[14] This statement suggests that Constantinescu's aim was to uncover the mental model according to which the Roma "functioned," and to do so by understanding the structure of the Rromani language and the psychological traits of the Roma, which would have emerged from the collected

9. Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Schiță despre țigani*, trans. GH. Ghibănescu (Iași: Dacia, 1900), 2.

10. Dumitru Ivanescu, "Mihail Kogalniceanu in documente publice si private," Anuarul Institutului de istorie A.D. Xenopol, t. XLIII-XLIV (2006-2007), 685..

11. "În ultimii ani ştirile amănunţite despre viaţa lor vagabondă, de moravurile lor, de obiceiurile lor au aflat mulţi cititori, iar unii savanţi au arătat un deosebit interes despre limba lor, născută din dialectele Indostanului. Născut şi crescut în Moldova, unde sunt aproape 100.000 de ţigani, care au conservat obiceiurile lor primitive până azi şi la cari am putut studia mai bine ca alţii moravurile acestui popor nomad; am voit dar să dau şi eu câteva amănunte precise şi interesante asupra acestui trib originar din India," Kogălniceanu, *Schiță*, 2.

12. "În lipsă de alt merit, scrierea aceasta va sluji pentru moment la acele voci care s-au ridicat pentru Țigani, deși, din nenorocire, acest interes nu va fi decât trecător, căci așa sunt Europenii. Ei formează societăți filantropice pentru abolirea sclavajului în America, în timp ce uită că în Europa sunt 400.000 de Țigani robi, iar 200.000 sunt înfundați în cea mai mare ignoranță și barbarie. Și nimeni nu-și dă grijă de a civiliza un popor," Kogălniceanu, Schiță, 3.

13. In this sense, see the short story "Vasile Porojan," by Vasile Alecsandri, or "Țigăncușa de ietac" [The Gypsy Girl at the Alcove] by Radu Rosetti.

14. Barbu Constantinescu, *Cântece Țigăneşti/ Romane Ghilea/ Gypsy Songs*, ed. Julieta Rotaru (Bucharest: Museum of Romanian literature, 2016), XXXV.

"samples."Constantinescu's work enjoyed a wide circulation. Some of the songs had been published a year earlier in the magazine *Columna lui Traian,* a journal of history, linguistics and folk psychology coordinated by B.P. Hașdeu. In September 1878, the volume was presented at the World Congress of Oriental Studies in Florence, where it was praised by scholars with an interest in studies about Roma. In 1889, Francis Hindes Groom, another founder of the Gypsy Lore Society, translated into English several Roma fairytales collected by Constantinescu.[15]

Further evidence that the Rromani language had become an important research topic for Western scholars in the middle of the nineteenth century is the comparative grammar of German linguist August Friedrich Pott, *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien: Ethnographisch-linguistische Untersuchung, vornehmlich ihrer Herkunft und Sprache, nach gedruckten und ungedruckten quellen*, published in Leipzig in 1844–1845. Pott's contribution was expanded by the Viennese Slavist Franz Miklosich. He published, in Vienna, between 1872 and 1881, the series of works *Über die Mundarten und die Wanderungen der Zigeuner Europa's,* in which he compared the dialects spoken in the Romanian and Austro-Hungarian areas and reconstructed the migration routes of the Roma across Europe.[16]

The study of Roma life, customs, and language in the mid-nineteenth century did not bypass the English-speaking world. A key figure in the development of studies about Roma in England—and, by extension, of Gypsylorism—was George Borrow. His work *The Zincali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain,* dedicated to Orientalist George Villiers, was the result of five years spent among the Roma in Spain.[17] In his writings on the "Gypsy race," Barrow introduced and popularized two concepts that were central to the development and perpetuation of Gypsylorism. The first was the notion of the "true Romany." In his attempt to define "the authentic Roma," Barrow employed eugenic classifications, dividing the Roma into two categories: the "true Roma" (of Indian origin, culturally pure, uncontaminated, and ahistorical, living in tents, etc.) and those of "mixed blood," viewed as hybridized, degenerate, and culturally assimilated. The second term introduced by Barrow was that of the "scholar who studies the Roma" (Romani Rye), a concept formalized in his 1857 publication of the same name. The phrase, which translates into Rromani as "Mr. Rom," has the idiomatic meaning of a "patron (always gadjo) whose familiarity and generosity towards the 'gypsies' has earned him an honored status among them."[18] This became an honorific title that was more often self-assigned than granted by Roma. The concept of "Romani Rye" privileges a particular power/knowledge relationship in which the "Rai" is positioned as the favored outsider and "real Romany" as the source of authentic knowledge within the Roma community. Since Borrow's time, what "Romany Rai" has often meant in practice is that qadje "experts" and "scholars" have created and projected discourses, narratives, and representations of Roma that have served their own purposes.[19] This portrayal of Roma from the outside, through the authority of academic discourse, has echoes to this day in the "Romani studies" vs. "critical Romani studies" debate. At the heart of this debate lies the belief that only "white" scholarship can be free from prejudice, while Roma researchers are often dismissed as mere activists incapable of producing "scientific" knowledge.[20]

In the Austro-Hungarian space, studies about Roma similarly gained traction, particularly with Gypsylorists Heinrich von Wlislocki, Antal Herrmann, and Archduke Joseph. The latter was one of the founding members of the Gypsy Lore Society and the author of the section on the Roma in Hungary in *Kronprinzenwerkand,* a work edited by Antal Herrman. In this volume, the Archduke presents the Roma as "foreign guests" in Hungary, marked by a frivolous and exotic nature, whose non-European origins prevented them from integrating into civilized society.[21] He is also the author of the work *Czigány nyelvtan/Romano Csibakero Sziklaribe* [*Roma Grammar*], translated into German by Herrman under the title *Zigeunergrammatik.* What united the work of the three was their use of participatory observation method, through which they particularly characterized nomadic Roma as resistant to social obligations and reluctant to become part of broader society. The trio's work was underpinned by a desire to "civilize" the Roma.[22] Both Herrmann and Wlislocki were close to Meltzl and were supported in their academic endeavors by him, having been his students at the University of

15. Gheorghe Sarău, *Rromii, India și Limba rromani*. Bucharest: Kriterion, 1997, 64.

16. Sarău, *Rromii*, 52.

17. George Borrow, *The Zincali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain* (London, 1907).

18. Ken Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 138–139. .

19. Ken Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 138–139.

20. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, "Challenging Anti-gypsyism in Academia: The Role of Romani Scholars," *Critical Romani Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 8–28. Jan Selling, "Assessing the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society in Light of Romani Subaltern Challenges," Critical Romani Studies 1, no. 1 (2018): 44–61.

21. Tara Zahra, 'Condemned to Rootlessness and Unable to Budge': Roma, Migration Panics, and Internment in the Habsburg Empire," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 3 (2017): 711. .

22. Marian Zăloagă, "Consensus and Disparities in the Reception of Archduke Joseph's Involvement with The Gypsy Studies / Question: Voices From Academic Literature and Daily Press," in *Discourse and Counter-Discourse in Cultural and Intellectual History*, ed. Marian Zăloagă, Carmen Andras, Cornel Sigmirean (Sibiu: Astra Museum), 121.

Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris.[23] During the existence of *Acta Comparationis*, Włislocki published a collection of Rromani folklore in the pages of the journal coordinated by Meltzl.

Meltzl's concern for the Rromani language and literature thus falls within a broader category of studies about Roma in nineteenth-century Europe. Moreover, Meltzl maintained correspondence with several of the scholars involved in this field. The literature review section of the journal's first issue reported that Johan Pineherle had recently published a translation of the *Song of Songs* into the "Gypsy language" in Trieste. Just six months later, the first Roma folk songs appeared in the journal, with Ihnatko's *Grammar of the Gypsy Language* as their source. In this context, Archduke Joseph's work was cited; he was regarded by Meltzl and Brassai as an authority in the field of Rromani linguistics.[24] Another frequently mentioned author in *Acta Comparationis* is Barrow. The editors noted his 1844 trip to Transylvania, where he apparently failed to find any Rromani folk songs for his folklore collections, an activity he carried out across Europe.[25] Meltzl was likewise aware of the works of Leland, Bataillard, Constantinescu, and Pott.

Roma in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Role of Transylvanian Roma Intellectuals

To recapitulate, by the nineteenth century, the Roma had already become a significant subject of study for European linguists and ethnographers. Many Western scholars' interest in Roma was driven primarily by an exotic fascination with an Oriental language and population located at the heart of Europe. In contrast, Romanian intellectuals like Budai-Deleanu and Kogălniceanu instrumentalized the figure of the Roma to draw international attention to the political subordination of Romanians in Moldova, Wallachia, and Transylvania to the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. How about the *Acta Comparationis* editors? Were they or some of their contributors instrumentalizing the Rromani language to allegorize the position of Hungarian in the linguistic system of the empire and the world?

The best-known policy towards the Roma in eighteenth-century Transylvania was one of assimilation and "civilization." Initiated by Empress Maria Theresa in 1757 throughout the Habsburg Empire—with the exception of Transylvania—it was later extended to include Transylvania under Joseph II in 1782. The most important measures of this policy were the abolition of the jurisdiction of the Gypsy voivodes, the prohibition of the use of the Rromani language, traditional clothing and crafts, and the limitation of the number of Roma who could settle in one place. The objective was to transform the Roma into agricultural workers and erase any particularities of their ethnic identity. These assimilationist policies continued during the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy (1867–1918), with authorities in Budapest restricting the movement of Roma across the empire[26] and refusing to officially recognize the Rromani language, even though the Roma constituted, according to linguistic criteria, the fourth largest population in Transylvania after Romanians, Germans, and Hungarians.[27]

The only formal setting within the Austro-Hungarian Empire where the Roma were recognized as a culturally distinct group was in *Kronprinzenwerkand* (The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Word and Image), a multilingual, twenty-four-volume encyclopedia published between 1886 and 1902 and aiming to bring out the cultural diversity and convergence of the empire's nations. It included two ethnographic articles on the Roma. One was written by the Romanian author Demeter Dan and was included in the volume on Bukovina; the other was written by Archduke Joseph, who was known not only for his academic interest in the Roma but also for his involvement in colonization programs targeting them. Representing the Roma as primitive and exotic, both emphasized the essential differences that separated the "Gypsies" from the other nations of Austro-Hungary.

Despite the state's efforts to supress their ethnic identity—denying them the same political and cultural rights as other nationalities in the empire—and despite epistemological discourses that racialized them as outsiders, the Roma community had its own political and cultural aspirations. One of the earliest pieces of evidence in this regard dates back to 1850, when the Roma from Neudörfl (then in Hungary, today in Austria) sent a delegation to the Kaiser to hand him the Petition um nationale Gleichberechtigung (Petition for National Equality), in which they requested that the Roma receive equal rights along with the other nationalities in the empire. In 1865, Sava Mihaly, a sedentary Roma from Szunyogd (present-day Șuiug, Bihor County, Romania), and Janos Kaldaras, voivode of the nomadic Roma living around the city, publicly petitioned the Royal Office of Hungary to establish a separate administrative-territorial unit for the Roma, to be called "Roma Voivodina." Their official request was published by the Hungarian newspaper *Fővárosi Lapok* (1865), as well as by the Austrian newspaper *Klagenfurter Zeitung* (1865).[28] These steps were clearly guided by political intentions aimed at building a national (ethnic) identity.

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23. Levente T. Szabó, "Cultural Brokers, Forms of Hybridity and the Emergence of the First International Comparative Literary Journal," *Philobiblon* 22, no. 2 (2017), 76.

24.Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok,* no. XII (June 30, 1877): 259–260.

25. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* 34 (September 30, 1878): 830.

26. Zahra Tara, "Condemned to Rootlessness," 707.

27. Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 117.

28. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, eds., *Roma Portraits in History Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II* (Schoening: Brill, 2022), 11.

Further evidence of Roma efforts to assert their identity lies in their engagement with the Rromani language. The first Rromani-Latin-Hungarian glossary was compiled in 1790 by the Roma student at the Calvinist College in Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris, Mihály Vistai Farkas. The eighty-page manuscript was written together with Pap Mihály Szathmári and contained 2,148 Romani words. A few decades later, upon learning of Archduke Joseph's interest in the Rromani language, several Roma intellectuals sent him letters, some of them directly in Rromani, in which they presented expressions in different dialects, old Rromani words, or even poems and translations from Hungarian into Rromani. A part of these writings were later published by the Archduke to be exploited as a language sample in order to enrich the field of Rromani language studies, without any consent from the senders.[29] The activity of some of these Roma intellectuals would be later documented by Roma researcher János Orsós, who sought to recover the memory of Roma writers predating the twentieth century. In 2015, he published an article titled "Precedents to Roma Written Culture and Literature in Hungary" on the website of the Roma Association Romedia Foundation.[30] Rromani authors discussed by Orsós include Ipolysági Balogh (1802–1876), Ferenc Nagyidai Sztojka (1855–1929), and József Boldizsár (1825–1878), a Roma musician and intellectual interested in Rromani literature and language. Boldizsár was one of the contributors to *Acta Comparationis*, for which he translated into Rromani poetry by Petőfi. In turn, Balogh was a musician, first violinist in the band of the renowned violinist and composer János Bihari for six years. He sent the Archduke the manuscript of a Hungarian-Rromani dictionary that served as the basis for the royal descendant's grammar book, *Czigány nyelvtan [Gypsy Grammar],* translated into Rromani as *Romano Csibakero Sziklaribe* in 1888. Balogh published as early as 1850 a booklet of Catholic prayers translated into Rromani, entitled *Legelső czigány imádságok a melly mind a kézivőt negány a kézit negány számáró* [*The First Gypsy Prayers, which [Are] for Both Nations in the Hungarian House*].[31]

Another Roma intellectual who corresponded with the Archduke was the poet Ferenc Nagyidai Sztojka. According to Orsós, he published in 1886, and then in the second edition in 1890, with the support of the Archduke, the Roma-Hungarian dictionary, *Ő császári és magyar királyi fensége József Főherceg Magyar és czigány nyelv gyök-szótára* [*His Emperor and Hungarian Royal Majesty Archduke József's Root Dictionary of the Hungarian and Tsigane Language*]. This dictionary is divided into four parts: the first part contains 13,700 Rromani words and their Hungarian translations and the second one includes liturgical texts (the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and other prayers) and Rromani translations of works by Hungarian poets such as Sós Márton Etédi's "Magyar gyász" [Hungarian Mourning]) and Petőfi's ("A király esküje" [The King's Oath], "Vándorlegény" [Wayfarer], "Ilyen asszony való nékem" etc.). The third section—arguably the most significant—includes Nagyidai's own Rromani poems and their translations ("Királyi üdvözlet" [Royal Greeting], "Rudolf koronaherceghez" [To Crown Prince Rudolf], "Jókai Mórhoz" [To Mór Jókai] etc.). Finally, the fourth section contains Rromani songs, Rromani proverbs, and New Year's greetings in the Rromani language. This final part contains two historical dramas written by the Roma poet. The first one is entitled "Czigány lakodalom" (The Gypsy Wedding) and the second is titled "Czigányvár!" (The Gypsy Fortress). The volume includes Sztojka's epic poem "A cigányok vándorlása" (The Wanderings of the Gypsies), in which the author disscusses the myth of the origin of the Rromani people in fifty-seven stanzas.[32]

All these literary and linguistic efforts by Roma intellectuals in the nineteenth century demonstrate a clear political will and a desire to assert their rights alongside other nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their work to legitimize and elevate Rromani language and literature can be interpreted as a meaningful expression of the Roma's struggle to cultivate a national identity and cultural consciousness.

Rromani Language in *Acta Comparationis*: Between Valorization and Hegemony

While the Rromani language was not officially recognized in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Roma were one of Europe's racialized populations, Meltzl sought to support the Rromani language and literature; he did so in response to a long history of discrimination that this population had suffered. A quick look at the presence of the Rromani language and literature in *Acta Comparationis* reveals that a significant amount of space is dedicated to folklore, which may be divided into two categories. The first appeared under the heading *SYMMIKTA - Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner/ Gypsy folk song from Transylvania /Erdelyiliyika Romane Zilya*, consisting of short pieces. The second category comprises longer songs—ranging from 65 to 80 stanzas—that follow a

29. Marian Zăloagă, "Consensus and Disparities," 132.

30. János Orsós, "Precedents to Roma Written Culture and Literature in Hungary," Romedia Foundation, September 2015. https://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2015/09/15/precedents-to-roma-written-culture-and-literature-in-hungary/.

31. Zăloagă, "Consensus and Disparities," 132; János Orsós, "Precedents to Roma Written Culture and Literature in Hungary." https://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2015/09/15/precedents-to-roma-written-culture-and-literature-in-hungary/.

32 János Orsós, "Precedents to Roma Written Culture and Literature in Hungary." https://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2015/09/15/precedents-to-roma-written-culture-and-literature-in-hungary/

broader narrative structure; Meltzl referred to them as ballads. These include *Kalai Voda/Black Wodas, Bokilo* and *Florikutsa*, and the Roma story entitled "Paramis, le Nedelsi." Another type of text in Rromani is the translation of poetry from Hungarian and German into Rromani. To these is added a text written entirely in Rromani in honor of Pott and two commentaries on the Rromani language and literature: *Beitrage zur Transilvanichen Zigeuner – Folklore & Rom-Philologie and Beitrage zur Siebenburgischen Zigeuner Sprache*.[33]

Starting with issue 13 of the journal, published on September 15, 1877, at the end of the *SYMMIKTA* column, one could find folklore pieces, generally consisting of four-line stanzas. Based on the order of their appearance, one can infer that hese come from three separate collections – two attributed to Meltzl and one to Włisloki. Meltzl published a collection of Transylvanian Roma folklore entitled *Jile Romane*, both in *Acta Comparationis* and in its twin series, Fontes, in 1877. The themes most often addressed by the poems are related to family life, marriage, lost youth, aspects of everyday life, love between young people, and adulterous love. The texts were collected mainly from the regions of Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris and Bistrița/ Bistritz/ Beszterce, and are accompanied by ethnographic notes and notes on transcription. The main informant is Theresia Tini, a Roma woman who lived in northeastern Transylvania and who "wrote poetry herself," as the editors repeatedly state.

Regarding the transcription and identification of an orthography that accurately reflects the orality of the collected folklore, Meltzl mentions that this corresponds to the method of transcription of Sanskrit used by the orientalist H. Brockhaus.[34] For a connoisseur of today's standard Rromani alphabet, it is not difficult to read the fragments in Rromani, but a series of inconsistencies still appear. For example, in the case of the verb "he/she ate," "xaliăs" – in today's standard alphabet - Meltzl transcribes "Çalyas," which creates confusion and may lead the reader to think of the verb "ćajlăs" – "He/she got fed up."

The German translations of the earliest folklore pieces published in the journal were reproduced in later issues, raising questions regarding the method of collecting Roma folklore and the editors' knowledge of the Rromani language. Taking as an example the transcription of the word "laʒavo" (shame, in Rromani), transcribed by Meltzl as two words, "la" and "ʒavo," I conclude that Meltzl transcribed the text as he heard it at the time of collection. This fact is demonstrated by the song "X," published in the Rromani language in the issue of November 30, 1877. In the issue of May 15, 1878, where its translation should have appeared, it is mentioned: "Unfortunately, we found out too late that the commentary on this song seems to be quite obscene, which is why we no longer want to deal with this issue."[35]

Presenting the case of the Aboriginal Marawara dialect published in *Acta Comparationis*, Nicholls questions the methodology used in collecting and publishing folklore in the journal, noting that the processes of mediation and translation in the Marawara case involved power asymmetries associated with colonial contexts.[36] Given Meltzl's direct access to Roma informants, unlike the Aboriginal informants who were located at a considerable distance, can Nicholls's claim also be extended to the Roma case? Delia Grigore, in the preface to the Romanian edition of the work of Włislocki, Meltzl's student, describes his working method: "in the first phase the text in Rromani was listened to, then it was transcribed phonetically, and then the informant was asked to translate what he had said" Grigore thus casts doubt on the authentic character of the texts collected by Wlislocki.[37] Meltzl likely used the same method. It is probable that the editors would adapt the texts after obtaining the original translation from the informant.

What is surprising about the German translations of Roma folk songs is the exaggerated stylization. The collected material is aestheticized to the point that it loses both its playful-popular spirit, as well as its anthropological dimension. This approach reflects a colonizing/civilizing perspective on the Roma and the Rromani language. "The 'Other' is invented, through translation, into a "European language." Here is an example in this regard: "Gulai batsi dye dural/ Tshude tut mande tshorlal/ Thai kikide man shukar/ Khe tshumindo tut shukar."[38] The song refers to a secret love between a man from outside the community and a Roma woman. This observation is based on the use of the word

33. The first one is a text in Latin, excerpt from T*he Origin and Progress of the Different Nations of Dacia and Their Religions with Their Related Principles* [Ortos et Progressus variarun in Dacia gentium ac religionum cum principibus ejustem], originally published in 1764 in Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris, at the Academy Printing House, followed by a popular legend about the religion of the Roma, written in German. The second one is a glossary of Roma words belonging to the Cortorari Roma from Turda/ Thorenburg/Torda made by a student at Heidelberg in 1867; Hugo Meltzl, "Beitrage zur Transilvanichen Zigeuner – Folklore & Rom-Philologie," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. 169-170 (1885): 131-132; Hugo Meltzl, "Beitrage zur Siebenburgischen Zigeuner Sprache," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 29, no. 193-195 (1887): 62–64.

34. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no. 21 (January 30, 1878): 449.

35. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no. 29 (May 15, 1878): 598.

36. Nicholls, Angus, "Stadial Change and the Emergence of Comparative Studies in German-Speaking Europe Around 1870–1900: Hugo von Meltzl Reads Wilhelm Scherer," in *Comparing and Change: Orders, Models, Perceptions*, eds. Antje Flüchter, Kirsten Kramer, Rebecca Mertens and Silke Schwandt (Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2024), 110.

37. Delia Grigore and Vasile Ionescu, preface to *Despre poporul nomad al Rromilor. Imagini din viața rromilor din Transilvania* [About the nomadic people of the Roma. Images from the Roma life in Transylvania], by Heinrich von Włislocki (Bucharest: Atlas, 2000), 9.

38. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no. 15 (15 October, 1877): 327.

"batsi" (man, in Hungarian). The context could involve either a married woman who has a lover or an unmarried woman who hides this relationship either from her parents or the community. The German translation loses the essence of the forbidden aspect of such a relationship, instead emphasizing a certain candor. The line "Tshude tut mande tshorlal," which can be translated as "Sneak up next to me," carrying a clear sexual connotation, is translated as "Druck verstohlen mir die hand" ("sneak up my hand secretly"), an adaptation that reduces the triviality of the situation. This method of translation appears similar to the early colonial translations of ancient Indian texts, which were adapted into forms more accessible and useful to European culture by the orientalist William Jones.[39]

The English translation of the ballad *Kalai Voda,* published in January 1879, is incomplete, noting that the last four verses are incoherent and therefore not translated.[40] I cannot explain what methods were used to collect this folklore or what language it was first translated into, because the last four verses are not incoherent, but actually complete the story. Despite Meltzl's claim regarding these lines, they appear translated in the June 15 issue, which contains another translation of the text. This translation preserves both the lyricism of the song and its rhythm, being made by Rasmus Anderson, a professor at the University of Wisconsin and a collaborator of the journal. It is unclear whether Anderson knew the Rromani language, but the translation is signed by him. With the publication of this song in an English translation that preserves both its form and the lyrics, Meltzl introduced it into international circulation, to the extent that his journal circulated. Another element that incorporates this song into world literature is its theme, passional revenge.

Recurring themes in world literature are found in the two other ballads published in the journal. If in *Bokilo* the anthropophagic element situates it within one of the oldest traditions of universal literature, the ballad *Florikutsa* fits into the myth of the kidnapped virgin. In his commentary on *Florikutsa*, Meltzl suggested that the heroine's name corresponds to the Roman goddess Flora-Metra-Acca, who can in turn be linked to the ancient goddess Istar-Aphrodite-Kore-Tanaït, also known as Diana Britomartis.[41] These comments reveal Meltzl's effort to frame and compare Rromani literature with world literature. For example, in the case of the song *Ker man dela*.... published in the issue of January 31, 1887, Meltzl notes that this genre overlaps with Romanian "Fama-Donne" songs and Hungarian folk songs, all being interconnected.[42]

Brassai and Meltzl, as Levente T. Szabó explains, viewed polyglottism as a unique possibility through which cultures and literatures better situated geopolitically could interact with "literary cultures without nation/state."[43] The principle of polyglottism was later reduced to that of decaglottism - the primacy of ten Western European languages that the editors considered to be developed. Szabó argues that this decision was not merely a practical one, as the editors claimed, but rather a philosophy through which they aimed to revitalize the "Cinderella" languages, adding status and value and allowing them to fulfill the same literary roles as standard linguistic variants.[44] In contrast, Nicholls interpreted the limitation of the principle of polyglottism to decaglottism as evidence of the journal's colonialist orientation, arguing that by introducing decaglottism, the editors were following a stadial model historically used by Europeans to justify colonialism. According to Nicholls, the climate in *Acta Comparationis* was hegemonic, whereby languages and literatures outside decaglottism were represented mostly through folk songs. Following stadial theory, "primitive" non-European cultures needed to be "ethnographically saved" in relation to "European civilization" because they contribute to the understanding of European prehistory.[45] In the case of the Rromani language, Meltzl worked to preserve folklore in its original form, maintaining all its dialectal peculiarities without visible modern influences. In a note accompanying collected folklore, he explains: "they were repeatedly recited aloud and softly by different groups of Roma over the course of a year and were even revised by the highly educated Rromani poet József Boldizsár, preserving some dialectal peculiarities, with which the Roma poet did not agree."[46]

The obsession with orality and the preservation of folklore was a strong characteristic of the Gypsylorist discourse of the time. Gypsylorists used Rromani folklore in much the same way that Orientalists did in their search for the "Ur"

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39. William Jones, "The Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus," in *The Work of Sir William Jones* vol. 4 (London: John Stockdale and John Walker, 1807), 212-235.

40. The only long piece of folklore that benefitted from a translation in both German and English is Kalai Voda/Black Wodas. The lack of translation of the other folklore pieces is invoked as a lack of space, but the translations no longer appear in the journal at all, which leads to the idea that it was actually a matter of the difficulty of translation considering the complexity of the collected material.

41.Hugo Meltzl, "Florikutsa – Unedierte volksballade der transilvanischen Zigeuner," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* XIX, no. 193-195 (1887): 57–58.

42. Meltzl "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, no. CXCI-CXCII (1887): 3137.

43. Levente T. Szabó, "The Subversive Politics of Multilingualism in the First International Journal of Comparative Literary Studies," in *Paradoxes du plurilinguisme littéraire 1900. Réflexions théoriques et études de cas*, ed. Britta Benert (Bruxelles, 2015), 231–232.

44. Szabó, "The Subversive Politics," 233–234.

45. Nicholls, Angus, "Stadial Change," 104-105.

46. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no. 34 (30 September, 1878): 830.

language, considered the key to civilizations and human origins.[47] The ethnographic notes in the margins of Roma folklore texts demonstrate a close relationship between early comparative literature, folklore studies, and the emerging discipline of anthropology as a structure of power.[48] The editors of *Acta Comparationis* made remarks about Roma trades, traditional Roma lifestyles, religion, and various beliefs/superstitions. According to Nicholls, such a method is equivalent to the "the musealization of the primitive."[49] Meltzl collected and published not only folklore in the *SYMYKTA* column, but also more complex songs. He drew public attention to the fact that the Roma possessed a vast national literature, as he calls it in the January 15, 1879 issue of the *Revue Polyglotte* column, where he criticizes Barrow: "It is well known already that the Rrom possess a very respectable national lyric, but for ought we know, even Mr. Borrow has not laid a proper stress on the fact, that they possess a very remarkable national epic literature. Their national ballads and lyrical poems are called, at least in Transylvania Sili (silabau = I sing.). We shall therefore soon publish some such very characteristic, and as they appear to us, very old ballads. The fairy lore of the Gipsies is also extremely rich."[50]

Meltzl did not publish any poetry written by any of the journal's Roma collaborators. During the eleven years of the journal's activity, seven translations of poetry into the Rromani language were published: six translations by Petőfi (five translated by Boldizsár and one by Tini) and one translation from Goethe, signed by "Nagy." Comparing the number of poetry translations with the number of Rromani folklore texts published in *Acta Comparationis*, it can be stated with certainty that the orality of Rromani language occupied a larger space than poetry. The first translated poem was *Rezket o bokor, mert* (Te Quivering Bush, Izdral o czino ruk, in Rromani), in the issue of January 15, 1878. The next two *Ugy Sirhatnek* and *Mi foly ott a mezon* appeared in the issue of March 31, 1878, and this time, the section was titled "Petőfi Rom," instead of "Cygani Petőfi." In October 1882, a Rromani translation of the poem *Esik, Esik, Esik*, translated as *Perel, Perel, Perel* in Rromani language, appeared again in the Petőfiana column, and only in the January 1887 issue was there a new translation from Petofi published. For all five poems, it is mentioned that they were translated by the Roma poet Boldizsár, and for the last two, it is specified that they were published posthumously. Tini signed the translation of the poem *Rezket o bokor, mert* from the issue of April 30, 1882. This is done in the "*Bistrizer Rom - dialekt*" of which I assume she was a speaker. The translation is accompanied by a note by Meltzl, mentioning that the metric rhythm that Boldizsár achieved when he translated this poem into the "Klausenburger dialekt" in an older issue of the journal was preserved. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Goethe's death, Meltzl published, in March 1882, a collection of translations of Goethe's work into the languages of Transylvania, under the title "Nordtransilvanische Polyglotte zur Semisaecularfeier des Todestages Goethe." He collected seven translations of the poem "Gleich und gleich," including one into Rromani, in the "Kolozsvári tajszolas," signed by "Nagy." Meltzl did not provide more information about this collaborator, but I believe it could be the Hungarian Roma poet Nagyidai Sztojka Ferenc (1855–1929). He signed most of his texts with Nagydai or Nagy. It is assumed he took this name from the village of Nagy Ida (today Vel'ka Ida in Slovakia), this place being legendary for the Roma.[51]

The translations, especially the five made by Boldizsár, reveal not only his literary talent but also his clear inclination to standardize the Rromani language. He tried to avoid borrowings and to develop within the Rromani language itself. An example in this sense is the translation of the word "diamant" as "kucs bar," which can be translated literally as "precious stone." His use of synthetic forms for degrees of comparison, such as "budeder" or "feder" instead of linguistic calques like "maj but" or "maj latcho," indicates his commitment to preserving the Hindi linguistic structure.[52] Boldizsár never appears on the frontispiece of *Acta*, along with other contributors, although it seems that Meltzl had special respect for him and his vision concerning the Rromani language, considering him "an important self-taught and natural poet."[53] Meltzl published some of the poems translated by Boldizsár after his death in June 1878, referring to them as "Boldizsár's legacy." Moreover, in certain cases, Meltzl used the term "Roma" out of respect for Boldizsár, who was very keen on using this term "for the name of his nation."[54] Tini, who collaborated throughout the entire period of the journal as the main informant, also does not appear on the frontispiece. Meltzl's wife, who contributed to *Acta Comparationis* with a series of translations of folklore texts from Romanian and Ruthenian, received the same treatment. Instead, his brother, Oskar Meltzl, a professor of political economy and parliamentarian, was mentioned on the frontispiece, despite having no contribution to the journal.

Was *Acta Comparationis* a fair, truly hospitable space in which different languages and literatures of the world could

47. Ken Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 141.
48. Siraj Ahmed, *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundation of the Humanities*, Stanford University Press, 2018.
49. Nicholls, Angus, "Stadial Change," 112.
50. Hugo Meltzl, "Revue Polyglotte," *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 5, no. 41 (1879): 932.
51. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, eds., *Roma Portraits in History Roma Civic Emancipation Elite*, 11.
52. Hindi uses postpositions, not prepositions like in Western languages. This is the case of the Rromani language, too.
53. Hugo Meltzl, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner." *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no.XXXIV (1878): 830.
54. Hugo Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, "Volkslieder der Transsilvan Zigeuner," *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok*, no. 38 (1878): 894.

interact and enrich each other? Or was it allied with the imperial policy of a supposed unity-in-diversity meant to maintain power structures? Regarding the Rromani language, the language of the most marginalized and racialized ethnic group in the empire, did *Acta Comparationis* genuinely promote the cultural and literary initiatives of the Roma, guided by their political aspirations for the construction of the Roma ethnic identity and "national" consciousness? At first glance, it may seem that the efforts of Meltzl and his collaborators to publish folklore and translations into the Rromani language achieved their goal. However, considering the political context of the Austro-Hungarian dualism in which the journal appeared, I wonder whether the publication of the Rromani language was not an initiative to forefront Hungarian—especially given that six of the seven poems translated into Rromani were originally by Petőfi, who would become the Hungarian national poet. None of the poems of the Roma poet Nagyday Stojka, a close collaborator of Archduke Joseph, are found in *Acta Comparationis*, and no reference is made to his publications on Rromani language.

Acta's ambiguous self-positioning recalls Shu-Mei Shih observation, which is worth reiterating here: even if it is real, "polyglotism is not a guarantee for the absence of racism."[55] Meltzl's approach must be contextualized within his broader effort to lay the foundations of a new field, comparative literature. This endeavor cannot be separated from the scientific model produced and promoted at the time by anthropology, an essentially colonial product.[56] The situation of the Rromani language in *Acta Comparationis* fits, at least partially, the colonial epistemology described by Nicholls.[57]

Acta Comparationis and Its "Gypsy Studies" Legacy

The most important contribution of *Acta Comparationis* to studies about Roma was by Henrik Włislocki. Meltzl's student at the University of Cluj/ Klausenburg/ Kolozsvár/ Kusvaris, Włislocki came from a Polish-Saxon family from Brașov/ Kronstadt. He was encouraged by the founders of *Acta Comparationis* to publish a collection of Roma folklore in their journal and was later supported by them in developing an international career in studies about Roma, becoming one of the most important and prolific Gypsylorists.[58] Over the course of his career, Włislocki published over eighty articles and papers on the Roma and became a member of the editorial team of the *Gypsy Lore Society* journal. The folkloric and ethnographic material he published was the result of his field research conducted in 1883 among the nomadic Roma of Transylvania.

Even though he employed the participatory-observation method, Włisloki failed to overcome the attitude of the "civilized man" studying the "primitive," thus continuing the direction opened by Grellmann a century earlier and maintaining the dominant essentialized representations of Roma. Like Barrow, he focused on searching for the "authentic Roma," who, in his view, were the nomadic Roma. The criterion he used to define the "authentic Gypsy nature" was the daily use of the Rromani language.[59] In his 1890 work, *Vom wandernden Zigeunervolke. Bilder aus dem Leben der Siebenbürger Zigeuner. Geschichtliches, Ethimologisches, Sprache und Poesie*, translated in Romanian in 2000 under the title *Despre poporul nomad al rromilor. Imagini din viața rromilor din Transilvania* [*About the nomadic people of the Roma. Images from the Roma life in Transylvania*], Włisloki stated: "The character of the Gypsies is by no means a pleasing one... Their moral attributes represent a bizarre mixture of vanity and infamy, manners, seriousness and genuine superficiality, accompanied by a harmless cunning and pretense... degrading servility whose sole purpose is to deceive others... they lie with an overflowing impertinence... they completely lack shame... guided more by the senses."[60] These remarks place Włisloki among the "white" European scholars who characterized the Roma as wanderers and uncivilized, lazy and uneducated, thus reinforcing common beliefs about the need to civilize and assimilate the Roma.

The research on Roma initiated by Grellmann not only contributed to the racialization and dehumanization of Roma identities, but also reinforced the social and political construction of "whiteness" within power relations, positioning Roma as subalterns.[61] Thomas Acton argues that the Gypsy Lore Society, the oldest academic association for studies about Roma, was deeply racist from its founding in 1888 until after World War II.[62] Although it attempted to distance scholarly discourse from notions of scientific racism after 1945, the legacy of past

55.Shu-mei Shih, "Decolonizing US Comparative Literature: The 2022 ACLA Presidential Address," *Comparative Literature* 75, no. 3 (2023): 245.

56. Diane Lewis, "Anthropology and Colonialism," *Current Anthropology* 14, No. 5 (1973): 581–602.

57. Nicholls, Angus, "Stadial Change."

58. Levente T. Szabó, "Cultural Brokers," 74.

59. Marian Zăloagă, *Romii în cultura săsească în secolele al XVIII-lea şi al XIX-lea* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2015), 123.

60. Delia Grigore and Vasile Ionescu, preface to *Despre poporul nomad al Rromilor,* by Heinrich von Włislocki.

61. Margareta Matache, "Word, Image and Thought: Creating the Romani Other," October 5, 2016 https://fxb.harvard.edu/2016/10/05/word-image-and-thought-creating-the-romani-other/; Dezso Mate, "Paradigms of History. Academic Antigypsyism, and Resistance," KWI-Blog, [https://blog.kulturwissenschaften.de/paradigms-of-history/], 2024. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, "Challenging Anti-gypsyism in Academia: The Role of Romani Scholars," *Critical Romani Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 8–28.

62. Thomas A. Acton, "Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 7 (2016): 1.

decades continues, shaping the production of knowledge about Roma even today.[63] These studies, from their very beginning, had an important impact on the development of Rromani literature. One example in this sense is *Acta Comparationis* itself, where the editors chose to emphasize the "valorization" of folklore rather than publish the works of Roma authors. This approach reinforced the perception of the Rromani language and literature as being solely oral. Thus, instead becoming a true space for the affirmation of Rromani language and literature, *Acta Comparationis* created a dominant framework for representing Roma, contributing to the perpetuation of the exotic gaze toward them. As a result, Rromani literature has yet to establish a firm canon, still being perceived predominantly as oral and treated as an exotic phenomenon.[64]

With the increase in Roma representation at civic and political levels, especially after the first International Roma Congress in 1971, one of the responses of Roma intellectuals to "Romani studies" was to deconstruct them, leading to the creation of a new fild: Critical Romani Studies. Beginning in the 2000s, the number of Roma intellectuals grew, and they prioritized resistance against anti-Roma racism. Reflexive knowledge, self-narrative, and the "repression" of the oppressive academic discourse became tools aimed at challenging power dynamics, prevailing norms, and conventional perceptions. This critical reaction is visible in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, but research of Rromani literature has been lagging behind. Creating spaces for the production of Rromani literature remains a challenge for Rromani intellectuals and their allies.*History of Rromani Literature* by Rajko Đurić is one of the few works that reviews Rromani literature at an international level. It shows that the first consistent works in Rromani appeared in the former USSR and former Yugoslavia, where the authorities encouraged Rromani cultural production.[65] Despite the standardization of the Rromani language in 1990 at the International Romani Congress in Warsaw, only a minority of Rromani writers use standard Rromani. Most write in their own dialect, which is often not easily understood by readers who speak other dialects of the language. Moreover, texts written in one and the same dialect can use different notations, especially in Latin vs. Cyrillic. Given the transnational character of the Roma, the most accepted definition of Roma literature refers to works written by Roma authors and/or in the Roma language that are primarily aimed at the Roma audience and are based on themes related to the tragic history of the Roma, persecutions and social injustices, the Holocaust, relations between Roma and non-Roma.[66]

Developing and strengthening institutions that ensure the conditions for the production and recognition of Rromani literature is one way to recovere and promote it, placing it in equitable dialogue with other languages within the concept of world literature, considering the transnational character of the Rromani language.[67]

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63. An example in this regard is the recent debate on the *PARI* project. (https://shorturl.at/tg2Vh).

64. Rajko Djurić, *Istoria literaturii rrome – I istòria e rromane literaturaqi* (Bucharest: Credis, 2002), 8.

65. Djurić, *Istoria literaturii rrome – I istòria e rromane literaturaqi*, 6.

66. Raluca Bianca Roman, Sofiya Dimitrova Zahova, Aleksandar Georgiev Marinov, *Roma Writings: Romani Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until WWII* (Paderborn: Brill, Schöningh, 2021), 5–6.

67. An example in this regard is that of the writer Ferenc (Fardi) Nagyidai Sztojka, whose image and work were recovered by the Roma Civic Mouvement in Hungary and by the Roma linguist Marcel Courthiade who republished Nagyidai's dictionary in 2007: *Voir Un dictionnaire rromani oublié* (Paris: INALCO et Rromani Baxt).

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