***Reciprocal Humanization: Problematizing Archival Photography Depicting Roma***

*Gopalas Michailovskis*

The leading Latvian Roma institution’s website packs a punch right in the very first sentences of their general introduction to Romani culture: “In the modern world the Roma began to lose Kindred law—*romanipen*. The Roma commune system is a particular one. This means family. This means there is an elder who has authority and whom everyone follows. Those are immutable laws followed by everyone. Each Roma knew: if you break the law you get kicked out of the commune. Nothing was worse than this, because a person became an outcast—a *magirdo*. Even the family was forbidden not only to help, but to see him. The Roma was left alone. This was equivalent to death.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Quirky phrasing aside, the first few paragraphs are enough to leave one with a distinct feeling of uneasy disconnect from the very subject of the page: the Roma people. The present essay, invited by the editors of [*insert book title*], is an attempt to unpack various perspectives and relevant philosophies that may not only explain this unease, but also shed light to the necessity of critical thinking in such undertakings as the present volume.

As stated by the editors, the main goal of this album is to raise public awareness of the history of Roma communities in the Baltics, to preserve and disseminate archival materials, and to strengthen academic pan-Baltic cooperation in the field of minority studies, cultural heritage, and folklore. Focusing on interwar-period archival photographs depicting Roma communities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the editors also wished to include an introductory text from Critical Romani Studies perspective on Roma representation and empowerment. This brief contribution, in turn, challenges photography’s proclaimed objectivity in representing the “real world,” taken for granted since its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, and broaches the complex subject of photography as “difficult heritage” and as an instrument of both the perpetuation of stereotypes and building appropriate institutionalization.

I believe that those who allow themselves or being ‘selected’ to speak in the name of Roma must not be regarded as neutral authors producing innocent knowledge. As will be shown below, the positioning of my own voice as author is of utmost importance in this text, essentially a part of the metadiscourse, since by no means does it pretend to be the general voice of Roma communities and individuals in the Baltic region. Neither an ‘epistemic’ member of a Roma community nor an academic, employing sophisticated theoretical frameworks, can speak in the name of the totality of Roma. In relation to this, one of the aims of this essay is to provide a glimpse into the complexity of tokenism, stereotypes, and “the Gypsy subject.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

On the other side of the same coin, I will also examine layers of the relevant discourse and metadiscourse, especially in light of the distortions and abuse stemming from representations by individuals occupying privileged positions. Borrowing postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s thoughts on the vice of the subaltern—in our case, the Roma— it is crucial to create conditions by which subalternity can not only speak but also be heard.[[3]](#footnote-5) Following Spivak, I will also argue that questioning whether the subaltern can speak is not the matter of tokenistic accommodation of their voices in initiatives implemented on their behalf, but rather of a constant process whereby subalternity as such disappears. Since identity plays a significant role in envisioning the future of Roma, understanding the formation of it as the subject of both discourse and metadiscourse in the past is a prerequisite for the present and future in the project of the dissolution of subalternity.

Finally, I apply the theoretical underpinnings discussed to a couple of examples of governmental indifference pertaining to systemic racism against Roma, specifically by the tokenization of the cause through symbolic cultural projects and events, which lack an adequate investment in the institutionalization of Roma heritages. Not only an adequate investment in institutionalization is needed, but also its legitimate and democratic management as opposed to current paradigms of Roma and pro-Roma leadership, also briefly addressed below. This critique is made particularly poignant by drawing on Paulo Freire’s philosophy and pertinent insights from Critical Romani Studies and outlining possible methodological directions in the struggle faced not only by oppressed but also by the oppressors.

PARA

MOVED TO CONCLUSION

***The formation of the “Gypsy subject”***

Talking about the past, present, and future of Roma history, it is crucial to begin with the notion of anti-Roma racism or antigypsyism. Broadly speaking, both categories emphasize the need to analyze structural and institutional forms of racism against a people which has been the subject of perpetual oppression and most blatant violence throughout the course of history. Regardless of endonyms or various exonyms—Roma, Gypsies, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, Sinti, Zigeuner, Cigani, Gitani, Kalderash, Lovara, and so on—they have always suffered from a constant association with the imaginary “Gypsy subject.” This subject and the authoritative approaches in dealing with, or rather “taming,” it, have been created and substantiated through representation in arts and politics in the late medieval and modern period.

The ethnicity of the “Gypsy subject,” lumping an extremely diverse people across Europe under a homogeneous category, is the achievement of the Enlightenment, most notably by the then nascent science of comparative linguistics. The founding fathers of the “scientific” invention of the ethnic “Gypsy” subject, accompanied by the elaboration of their morals as universal truth, were Johann Rüdiger and Heinrich Grellmann. Through their work, the ‘Gypsy’ were assigned an Indian origin and their journey launched into the unknown future as a homogeneous cultural group—and continues to be regarded as such. However, their views were not identical on the subject matter. For example, as Yaron Matras points out, Rüdiger had more favorable views towards the Roma than Grellmann. He was also critical towards the institutional practices pertaining to “Gypsies” and practiced an “objective science,” while Grellmann’s highly negative attitudes towards the subject matter and methodological shortcomings both carry the trappings of pseudo-science.[[4]](#footnote-6)

This important differentiation was first flagged by Wim Willems, whose book was an important milestone in Romani Studies, a field that has been dominated by essentialist and racist epistemologies.[[5]](#footnote-8) Employing a constructivist theoretical framework, with its roots in Saussurian semiotics, Willems demonstrates how the Gypsy subject has been historically created through authoritative institutions and their coercive practices. He dismisses as pseudo-scientists all scholars who operate in the tradition of Grellmann and Rüdiger, creating and perpetuating the prevailing negative epistemology on the subject. His analysis draws on the Gypsy Lore Society, which, founded in 1888, has been (and still is) one of the main representatives of Roma culture across the world. The pressing need to reappraise Romani Studies reached a critical moment in 2012, when Roma activists associated with Critical Romani Studies petitioned the society’s board at their annual meeting in Istanbul, demanding that the society assume historical responsibility for the crimes that have been inflicted on Romani people.[[6]](#footnote-10)

Willems’s work, indebted to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, draws a parallel between the European perception and representation of the Orient, and the “Gypsy.”[[7]](#footnote-11) As Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé sum up, “these recent contributions to the debate are welcome interventions that focus on the analysis and historicization of power structures and relations, including the ways in which canonical institutions and discourses of knowledge production tend to continue sidelining Roma from society, culture and their centres of power, policymaking and knowledge formation.”[[8]](#footnote-12) Necessarily, the comparison is to demonstrate how the “Gypsy subject,” similarly to the Orient, was created by an authoritative discourse, possessed and perpetuated by a dominant group. In other words, the ethnic “Gypsy subject” is not an innate identity but a by-product of discourse and institutional practices, imposed on people by stereotypical representations raging from evil as the figures in Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*, to exotic as Victor Hugo’ Esmeralda.

the “” His thinking, rooted in social constructivism, points to a broader dilemma of Cartesian modernity and the self-knowing subject, or, in Madan Sarup’s words, the “narrator who imagines that he speaks without simultaneously being spoken.”[[9]](#footnote-15) In the following, I will look into how the post-structuralist intellectual project emerging in opposition to this may be used to destabilize binary oppositions or more generally to deconstruct a human person by the means it was constructed. Post-structuralism calls into question the notion of the conscious self and attempts to decenter consciousness. There is no longer a sovereign self, it is a mere product of a process of history and differentiation among Sausurrian signs. In other words, self is not an inherent or innate feature granted at the moment of birth; self is the multiplicity of interactions, a process of maturation of the fragmentary infant ego—to use Jacques Lacan’s post-structuralist psychoanalytical terminology—it is shaped through discourses in culture and society.[[10]](#footnote-16)

It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge [*savoir*] into being mediated by the other’s desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the *I* into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process. The very normalization of this maturation is henceforth dependent in man on cultural intervention, as is exemplified by the fact that sexual object choice is dependent upon the Oedipus complex.[[11]](#footnote-18)

“”relevant in the nuanced understanding articulating the processes of the formation of the “Gypsy subject” throughout history. I emphasize the need to analyze the means of its invention and perpetuation and argue that it is through institutional and structural practices where it has gained its substantiality and matured through the image in the “mirror.”

Cartesian self-knowledge and Lacan’s understanding of the ontogenesis of individual identity open to broader dilemmas discussed in post-modernist and postcolonial discourse. Particularly pertinent here is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s critique of “Intellectuals and Power,” an interview between Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze, who rejected any representation of the subaltern by intellectuals, proposing that the subjects can speak on their own.[[12]](#footnote-19) Spivak’s response criticizes and deconstructs this standpoint. First of all, she nuances that although Foucault and Deleuze want to get rid of representation as a barrier not allowing subaltern to speak, they largely ignore the question of ideology, intersectionality, and the conditions under which the subalterns can speak, which are not the same in France and postcolonial world. She criticizes their standpoints on the basis of the totality that their narratives aim to reach and articulates how these meta-narratives exclude the voices of the subaltern that both philosophers seek to reveal. In this way, the benevolent scholars, in the name of subaltern eliminate their subjects’ voices without leaving an opportunity to negotiate and articulate their struggle.

Moving on from the voice and formation of the subaltern in general to Roma identity in particular, Angéla Kóczé, notes that racialization of Roma lacks the same level of theorization as that of Muslims, Jews, or blacks.[[13]](#footnote-20) By drawing on Thomas Acton’s argument that despite its denouncement within academia as illegitimate inquiry, scientific racism continues to inform discourse in academia and popular culture, Kóczé argues that the meaning of race and its ramifications “never evaporated.”[[14]](#footnote-21) Her critique is accompanied by David Goldberg’s insight on invisibility and erasure of race in Europe as an analytical and terminological means to perceive the mechanisms of oppression primarily formed by racial exclusion. These mechanisms continue to play role in the present. “The concept of race”, Kóczé proceeds, “has been “solidified in social relations, practices, and structures.”[[15]](#footnote-22)

As regards, the Roma identity in particular, the constructivist approach stands in opposition to essentialist visions, which orbit around the politically “neutralized and objective” eighteen-century discovery of the Indian origins of Romani language and, consequently, of their ethnic identity.[[16]](#footnote-23) As noted above, this scholarly discourse gave rise to the essentialist epistemology about an innate ‘Gypsy’ identity that has guided the approaches of scholarship, politics, and perceptions in the society. As a counter discourse to essentialist approach and closely associated with the post-structuralist theoretical project, a constructivist approach emerged in Romani Studies. Wim Willems’s aforementioned book was to mark the emergence of this approach within the scholarship dominated by essentialist methodology. Mihai Surdu, as other scholars of Romani Studies embracing a constructivist approach regarding the Roma identity, also stresses its institutionally constructed nature. For these theorists, the ethnicity of Roma is not an inherent characteristic one acquires by birth, rather it is the result of historical processes of labeling and stigmatization.[[17]](#footnote-24)

Constructivist approaches in Romani Studies have much in common with what Spivak is critical of: the “Gypsy subject” has been produced through various means including the institutional practices of depicting it. Using a constructivist approach, its rearticulation via Lacanian methodology is useless. Spivak’s strategic essentialism is also unproductive. However, it is important to mark the positionality of these constructivists, most of whom do not live in a body subject to anti-Roma racism or antigypsyism. Thus, for them, getting rid of Roma identity is an easy task that they can implement as soon as they finish writing their texts.

The two main theoretical approaches within Romani Studies scholarship, constructivist and essentialist, are criticized by Angéla Kóczé, who contends that both contribute to the racialization of Roma. While the essentialist approach isolated, constructed, and reconstructed the peculiar distinctiveness of inflexible Roma identity, the constructivist theoretical paradigm called into question the politicization of Roma identity by suggesting that the “narrative of Roma as a suffering, homogenized, and continually victimized ethnic group” leads to a “counterproductive and homogenizing political claim.” Kóczé argues that constructivist approaches towards Roma identity, put forward by Lucassen, Willems, Cottar, Kovats, and Surdu, “eliminate any kind of ethnicized or racialized term at the expense of neglecting and obscuring Roma identity and its interplay with structural racism.”[[18]](#footnote-25)

As a response to this rhetoric and in search for productive ways out from perennial crafting of race, Kóczé suggests that it is imperative to deconstruct the existing literature on Roma by explaining the changes, continuity, and resistance of Roma.”[[19]](#footnote-26) Moreover, it is to be done through intersectional lenses, whereby race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other identities intertwine and act in concert, as an oppression of a subject. For Kóczé, critical analysis is important to reveal the interconnectedness of “various local histories, narratives, and struggles” for creating synergies and solidarities amongst them. She suggests that this approach can serve as an instrument to construct “a new language and analysis” by which Roma population is humanized.[[20]](#footnote-28) Apresentcanconducted

***Institutional photography as a means of the formation of “Gypsy subject”***

In the spirit of Kóczé’s call to deconstruct existing representations, images such as those collected in the present album have the potential to use oppressed voices and histories as a critique against the dehumanizing mechanisms of representational practices that perpetuate racialized hierarchies. Photography is a practice by which meanings are produced and disseminated. But photography is, in itself, a construct that needs to be a subject of critical consideration, especially in the case of presenting photos of Romani individuals. Victor Burgin suggests that photography theory must be interdisciplinary, rejecting the understanding of photography as “evidence” of the real world. As Burgin argues, photography cannot be treated as a “window on the world” but must interrogate “the determinations exerted by the means of representation upon that which is represented.”[[21]](#footnote-30) He stresses the importance to inquire the discourses that guide beliefs and decision-making mechanisms in the practice of photography production and its utilization exactly because of photography’s nature to convey meanings and represent worlds, perpetuating hierarchical structures of power by producing knowledge.[[22]](#footnote-31)

What a mirror is to the child in Lacan’s metaphor is similar to what photographs are to a community and its members. The power of the discourses in shaping perceptions—in John Berger’s words: “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe”—is amply elaborated by Said’s famous work.[[23]](#footnote-34) Photography, in this light, must be seen as a discursive practice shaping one’s beliefs. Moreover, it should be located within broader social practices wherein it operates. It is because of the “causative link between the pre-photographic referent and the sign” is created by “discriminatory technical, cultural and historical process” that by means of documentation aims to describe experience and “produce a new reality.”[[24]](#footnote-35) This passage echoes the logic of Lacan’s theory of primordial fragmentary condition insofar as both the pre-photographed subject and the sign are created, not natural or inherent. Thus, discriminatory technical practices can be seen as the mirror through which the subject matures as a consequence of processes of coercion.

According to Susan Sontag, the act of photographing is also an act of violation by which one sees people “as they never see themselves.”[[25]](#footnote-36) It is an act of objectification, their symbolical possession. This at least partially reflects and contributes to the insights purported in contemporary Critical Romani Studies, whereby various authors articulated the need to understand continued institutional and structural practices of racism that have constructed the epistemology of Roma identity by exercising the most blatant modes of violence.[[26]](#footnote-38)

Given these issues inherent in photography authoritatively shaping the subject, the conditions under which photographs were produced, as well as their intentions and consequences are to be examined in order to better understand the systemic, institutional, and structural racialization of Roma. The necessity of such investigation once again recalls Lacan’s understanding of the formation of a self, suggesting that it is a cultural and social processes whose “normalization of the maturation is henceforth dependent in man on cultural intervention.”[[27]](#footnote-39) Specifically, since the subjects are not inherently fixed to their self, which is ultimately a creation of the individual in the course of their history, the agency and means are needed to intervene in the processes of maturation of self, to shape in sustainable and responsible ways.

In light of institutional practices and uses of photography, Angéla Kóczé’s ideas about Roma identity are applicable to Mihai Surdu’s argument that depicting Roma through photography reflects the practice of grouping them by imposing racialized fixed visions. Surdu adds that this has been a tool of physical anthropology to “capture race in distinct, measurable, recognizable and unchanging racial types.”[[28]](#footnote-40) In this way, photography reflects the mechanisms “of racial classifications based on anthropometric measurements of body parts and skin color but also on contextual clues of clothing, objects denoting occupations, housing and other aspects of life.”[[29]](#footnote-41) Once again, this evokes Lacan’s theory: Surdu’s description shows precisely how the subject’s maturation is constantly guided by the image of the institution. Not only guided, but it is also sterile and impenetrable.

In this vein, it is imperative that the present photo album of archival interwar pictures depicting Roma communities across three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, be approached critically. The photographs herein representheritage that deserves to be explored, documented,and critically assessed. Since these photographs are the property of the various state institutions, their contextual portrayal of Roma, the labeling of entries as “Gypsies, others, vagabonds” and similar titles, these photographs certainly comprise what Sharon Macdonald calls “difficult heritage.”[[30]](#footnote-42) I argue that a meaningful investment in the institutionalization of Roma cultural heritages and their democratic and legitimate management are crucial pillars in shaping adequate cultural interventions in the Lacanian sense. These archival photographs, as well as other objects concerning Roma identity formation must be taken into consideration, for they are a significant instrument to deconstruct the patterns and unearth the oppressive mechanisms by which racism is perpetuated.

RACIALIZATION PARAGRAPHS MOVED FROM HERE

***The Status Quo: Tokenistic approaches to Roma culture in the Baltic states***

What is imperative in Kóczé’s thinking—deconstructing existing literature on Roma by explaining the changes, continuity, and their resistance—is far from becoming an imperative in the three Baltic states. Governments typically prefer a “carnivalesque” representation of Roma culture, authoritatively granted opportunities to perform the very character, the “Gypsy” on public stages with folkloric dances, songs, or attire. To me, this is tokenization: privileging Roma culture by performing the ever present “Gypsy subject.” For them, it is an achievement of multiculturalism.

Multicultural tokenism is a well-known concept in academia referring to broader concerns within heritage practices and embodying a critique of benevolent gestures for diversity—the “saris, samosas, and steel bands syndrome,” when cultural policies fail to go beyond mere representation and delve into the institutional practices perpetuating such tokenism.[[31]](#footnote-50) The implications are enormous. It not only hinders the oppressed to use cultural means for the critical investigation of the practices that authoritative institutions have undertaken against them throughout history but also prevents the process of reciprocal emancipation (as explained below).

The tokenization of Roma cause and the perpetuation of stereotypes result in insufficient and undemocratic institutionalization of Roma cultural heritages. In Baltic states, for example, it has led to the lack of archives, museums, memorials for the Roma victims of the Holocaust, and other relevant cultural institutions. This situation exists regardless of the sound rhetoric to protect Roma cultural identity and heritage as stated in their respective national Roma integration (currently inclusion) strategies, as well as in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities that all three countries have ratified at the beginning of the twentieth century.[[32]](#footnote-51) While there are some Roma cultural centers in the region—notably the Roma Culture Centre in Latvia led by one privileged Roma family,[[33]](#footnote-52) and Roma Community Centre in Lithuania, a pro-Roma NGO led by non-Romani—they usually operate with essentialist presuppositions of Roma culture as a naturally fixed identity, as shown in the passage cited at the beginning of this essay.

VIGNETTE MOVED FROM HERE TO INTRO

Besides the self-explanatory problematic of this kind of articulation of Roma culture, the lack of transparency of the finances of these partially state funded institutions is also problematic, which evokes Spivak’s insights regarding the double oppression in terms of intersectionality. In this context, the oppressed are twice oppressed by the governmental and non-governmental structures. The Latvian Roma Culture Centre’s webpage citing the law of Romanipen also evokes exclusionism, can such accounts on Roma culture be friendly to the “marginalized within the marginalized”? In Lithuania, the Roma Community Center, founded and funded by the Department of National Minorities dominates the Roma field for more than twenty years, since its establishment in 2001. While their stated goals include implementing measures designed for the integration of Roma national minority into the life of Lithuanian society, encouraging the protection of Roma national identity, intercultural dialog, and systematizing statistical, historical, and demographic data about Lithuanian Roma, the director summed up their mission as “the protection of the identity is to protect Roma cultural folklore, attire, songs, dance, language. It is by organizing various cultural events.” The challenges posed by antigypsyism or anti-Roma racism are admittedly not addressed by the institution, neither do they manage systematized archives.[[34]](#footnote-54)

In both Latvia and Lithuania, these NGOs are government-funded and embedded in international networks, for example, the Lithuanian Roma Community Centre is a member of ERGO, European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network. Yet, it seems that their implementation of Roma integration strategy remains without any serious deliberations and self-criticism, becoming an example of tokenization of the Roma cause and demonstrating how NGOs can be instrumentalized by the state, endlessly delaying the meaningful dialog among the relevant actors. The desire to penetrate the “metaphysics” of Romani culture (as Grellmann and many others attempted) signifies both the lack of knowledge and deliberate actions taken by the institutions to prevent it from entering the structural and institutional means of knowledge production. Another challenge is the fear of assuming historical responsibility and restoration of injustices inflicted upon Romani people, a problem especially prone to dangers of tribalization, or the debates surrounding the predatory nature of identity politics in general.[[35]](#footnote-55)

Uncritical institutionalization, no matter how benevolent, fosters what Paulo Freire calls “false charity,” whereby the oppressor perpetuates injustices: “true generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish *false charity*.”[[36]](#footnote-56) In this regard, the “false charity” may also occur when the respective governments grant Roma or pro-Roma NGOs with insufficient grants to do the “heritage job,” which contributes to the perpetuation of unjust social order. Moreover, their instrumentalization of NGOs hinders the dissolution of hierarchical structures within the civil society itself. Freire’s ideas underpin questions of the fear of meaningful dialog and go beyond it in light of the present publication in particular, and regarding the adequate and democratic institutionalization of Roma cultural heritages in general.

***A Step Further: Pedagogy of the oppressed as a way out from subalternity and false charity***

Whilst criticizing the governments it is important to realize that the risk of a toxic dialog is paramount. A more productive way to pursue the dissolution subalternity in general needs the thorough and meaningful engagement with all stakeholders. For Paulo Freire, a prominent Brazilian philosopher known for his philosophy of critical pedagogy, it is crucial to realize that the “emancipatory radar” should not solely focus on the oppressed, considering the fact that the oppressors have been distorted by normalized orders of suppressive regimes, or, to put in the Lacan’s metaphorical example, by the mirror through which the fragmented infant’s self matures. Freire contends that dehumanization features “not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it.”[[37]](#footnote-57) Freire also reflects on the impact of dehumanization on the humanity as whole, assessing it as “a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human.”[[38]](#footnote-58) Thus, the mission of humanization is a reciprocal process in which determinant dichotomies such as black and white, oppressed and oppressor, Roma and *gadje*,[[39]](#footnote-59) and so forth, are not to be over-essentialized.

Freire’s method of dialog as a platform where two groups (oppressed and oppressor) meet can be criticized for over-emphasizing two distinct entities—an overly dichotomic separation. The implausibility of such a confrontational approach evokes the implicit critique towards Romani Studies scholars by Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé approaching questions of whiteness, white supremacy, and majoritarian identity politics. Specifically, they are critical of what they articulate as a risk of tribalization of white scholars, citing both Violeta Vajda’s and Margareta Matache’s insights. Vajda advocates for a hermeneutic learning process, whereby the historical prejudices by the non-Roma are explored and perceived by the process of *Bildung*, opening a prospect for new insights regarding their own and Roma identity: “to be ready to seek out and genuinely accept the provocation (or learning experience) held up by Romani people and communities that they encounter.”[[40]](#footnote-60) The prioritizing in her approach may be seen as privileging the oppressed over the oppressor, which, under a critical inspection, diverges from the reciprocal process described by Freire. Similarly, Matache, endorses a “shift away from the currently dominant, excessive focus on the Roma and their ‘vulnerabilities’ to a concentration on the impact of racism and whiteness.”[[41]](#footnote-61)

MOVED SOME OF THIS LONG QUOTE UP WHERE IT IS MORE RELEVANT What scholars such as Matache and Vajda add to this [post-colonial] debate is, among other key issues, the crucial importance of reflecting on positionality, privilege and the conditions under which they are maintained or challenged in and beyond scholarship. At the same time, however, if we want to maintain the criticality of postcolonial studies – or, for that matter, of critical race studies, whiteness studies, citizenship studies, migration studies, gender studies and, last but certainly not least, critical Romani studies – scholarship should avoid falling into the trap of tribalizing ‘white people’ (or ‘white scholars’), which can all too easily coincide with a shift of focus to white privileges, institutional racism and calls for the self-reflexivity of, in particular, ‘non-Romani’ people (and scholars). Indeed, without suggesting that Vajda’s or Matache’s interventions do or imply so, such a tribalization and the interrelated reductionist understanding of racialization and racism would bring with them exactly the kinds of problems that Fukuyama and his like have addressed regarding the proliferation of identity politics.[[42]](#footnote-62)

The warning about “tribalization and the interrelated reductionist understanding” echoes Freire’s thoughts on the consequences of an overly dichotomic approach: “Almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.”[[43]](#footnote-63)

Both these arguments suggest that it is vital to go beyond the “tribalization” of actors involved in the process of negotiation, which is especially relevant for establishing the methodological guidelines of a meaningful dialog and democratic institutionalization of Roma cultural heritages. As a means and an objective in one, the institutionalization of Roma cultural heritages, starting with contributions to dedicated documentation and archiving such as the present volume, may pave the path towards the humanization of the dehumanized and towards the liberation of both oppressed and oppressors. It is to dissolve the subalternity and the “Gypsy subject” by neither reifying the essentialist views of identity, nor “tribalizing” any group in the spirit of constructivism.

***Conclusion***

have d an adequateand the have also brought a few local examples to showinI attempted to draw together the thoughts of theorists from various fields to argue that it“”of the with deeply entrenched historical roots

So far, Roma are everywhere but nowhere and the unquestioned epistemology of the created subject remains unchallenged. Institutional photography may be seen as one of the means of the authoritative construction of the “Gypsy subject.” As conveyor and legitimizer of racialized discourses and oppressive power mechanisms, it dehumanizes and racializes its subjects. But photography as a potential tool to deconstruct and build a new language regarding Roma identity must not be ignored. While it has power to perpetuate patterns of dehumanization, it can also be envisioned as a site of resistance encouraging dialogue between oppressed and oppressor. This dialog, however, should go beyond “tribalization,” it should pave a way towards reciprocal emancipation. In a world where racial justice is paramount, it is crucial to understand the power dynamics ingrained in production, documentation, and uses of photographs depicting Roma.

The undertaking of the present book is not to be dismissed as yet another NGO initiative but should be properly institutionalized by allocating adequate funds and envisioning its democratic management. Without this kind of institutionalization, it is difficult to preserve, disseminate, or analyze the historical materials related to Roma culture. foracross.Ware“”in the course of history. Their importance cannot be overstated: theof this construct societal change and the

1. “About us,” Roma Culture Centre in Riga, Latvia, accessed October 27, 2023, http://romucentrsen.weebly.com/roma.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although “Gypsy” is now considered a slur in the epistemology of Critical Romani Studies, and to some extent Romani Studies, some groups, for example, Gypsies in the United Kingdom use it as a marker of their

   ethnic identity. While I do not question the choice of those who accept it as the marker of their ethnic identity, I regard this word as a slur in the practice of various institutions. Accordingly, “Gypsy” is strictly an analytical category here, specifically referring to the ideology that was constructed by various institutions such as academia, museums, archives, or governments. It refers to the institutional and structural practices perpetuated throughout the course of history, and is also used in order to avoid anachronistic language. The term “Roma” is a more recent political category, a product of the first National Roma Congress held in 1971 in London, encompassing diverse and heterogeneous groups such as Sinti, Gypsies, Travellers, Romanichals, Lovara, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [*Definition of subaltern here.]* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, n.d. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
4. Yaron Matras, “The Role of Language in Mystifying and De-Mystifying Gypsy Identity,” in *The Role of the Romanies*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
5. Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution* (Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1997). For more on racism in popular science, see Thomas A. Acton, “Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 7 (2016): 1187–1204, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1105988. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
6. 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, https://doi.org/10.29098/crs.v1i1.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy*; Ken Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 44, no. 2 (2000): 129–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
8. Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé, “Introduction: The Roma in Contemporary Europe: Struggling for Identity at a Time of Proliferating Identity Politics,” in *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020), 21–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
9. Madan Sarup, *Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Guilford: Biddles, 1998), 1–3. This is not the best edition to cite, use the Longman or the Uni of Georgia Press editions instead. But in general, this is a uni textbook, it doesn’t really *argue* anything, but rather it provides an overview of or explain already existing scholarship, so cite and use language accordingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
10. If you want to go there, you need to cite Lacan, not a handbook on post-structuralism. Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience (Delivered on July 17, 1949, in Zurich at the Sixteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis),” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, Heloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 99. Then you could add “For a brief overview of this school of thought, see XXXXX.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
11. Sam Han, “Structuralism and Post Structuralism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory*, 2nd edition (London, New York> Routledge, 2021), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
12. Cite original interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
13. Angéla Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. Immanuel Ness and Zack Cope (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
14. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
15. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
16. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
17. Angéla Kóczé and Huub van Baar, “Introduction. The Roma in Contemporary Europe: Struggling for Identity at a Time of Proliferating Identity Politics,” in *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, 1st ed., vol. 3 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
18. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
19. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
20. Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
21. Victor Burgin, “Introduction,” in *Thinking of Photography*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
22. Burgin, “Introduction.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
23. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books, 1972), 7. This is not a profound statement, it’s kind of a truism – e.g. I used a Goethe’s “Man sieht nur das, was man weiß” quote to refer to this well-known phenomenon in my own book. No need to cite a sentence from the introduction of a general audience book, when it’s not the conclusion of analytical research unique to the author, just a general observation. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
24. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
25. Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave,” in *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 1977), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
26. Angéla Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. Immanuel Ness and Zack Cope (City?: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
27. Han, “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,” 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
28. Mihai Surdu, “Collecting Photographs, Assembling Numbers, Suspecting Roma” (Roma Archive, n.d.), 1–2, https://www.romarchive.eu/en/politics-photography/politics-photography/collecting-photographs-assembling-numbers-suspecti/. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
29. Surdu, “Collecting Photographs, Assembling Numbers, Suspecting Roma.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
30. Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*, 1st ed. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2010). Macdonald originally used this term for the heritage of Nuremberg, a city intrinsically linked with Nazism in general perception. The original archival, interview and ethnographic sources in the author’s understanding are not only a matter of fascination, “but also a more general innovative theorizing of the relationship between heritage, identity and material culture.” Please note that this sentence is unclear (Who is the author? What sources? Macdonald’s book or the photo album?) and the quote seems irrelevant to your topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
31. Jo Littler, “Heritage and ‘Race,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 94–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
32. The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage. (Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Article 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
33. The leadership of the Roma Culture Centre in Latvia is challenged by the community: recently, there was a demonstration organized by Latvian Roma community, which gathered to protest against the unfair domination of the institution. The demonstration took place in front of the Latvian Ministry of Culture. Personal interview with a colleague from Latvia during the Roma Youth Summer School in Estonia, 2023. Personal archive. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
34. “We are not an academic institution, it is not our job; there are historians, sociologists, and the like, it is their job. Moreover, we have neither sufficient human resource nor adequate financial assignations.” Interview with Svetlana Novopolskaja, the director of the Roma Community Centre. Vilnius, 2022, December. Personal archive. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
35. Francis Fukuyama critiques identity politics when it becomes excessively divisive and prioritizes group identities over shared, universal values. Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
36. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45. (Emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
37. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
38. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44-46. (Emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
39. *Gadjo*, *Gadžio* and variants within the various languages of Roma refer to non-Roma individuals. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
40. Baar and Kóczé, “Introduction: The Roma in Contemporary Europe”, 21–22. It would be more elegant if you added the reference to Vajda (Cited in ….) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
41. Baar and Kóczé “Introduction: The Roma in Contemporary Europe.” Cited in Margareta Matache, XXXX [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
42. Baar and Kóczé “Introduction: The Roma in Contemporary Europe,” XX. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
43. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)