A Study of Research Literature Regarding Turkish Gypsies and the Question of Gypsy Identity

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This study of material regarding Gypsies in Turkey and the topic of Gypsy identity has two main objectives. The first objective is to investigate and evaluate some of the research that has been carried out about the Gypsies in Turkey so far (especially that by foreign researchers), as a means of examining the research work on Turkish Gypsies from a critical perspective. The second objective is to challenge the impression that the different Gypsy groups in Turkey (Rom, Dom, Lom and those we may describe as Travellers) do not have an ethnicity of their own and have become assimilated into other cultures. A subsidiary intention of this study is to attempt to outline the self-perception of Gypsies in relation to the image that is imposed upon them by majority society, in light of Eriksen's and Mayall's theories of "the self in opposition to the other" and notions of "culture being socially constructed".[1]

Ethnicity and Identity: What is ethnicity?

"Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction."[2]

Before attempting to make a number of observations regarding Gypsy ethnicity in Turkey, and what ethnicity means for Gypsies themselves in terms of group identity or identities, it is appropriate to briefly consider a few interpretations of the broader concept of *ethnicity*. Max Weber, who was one of the earlier sociologists who contemplated the nature of group belonging,

[1] Thomas Eriksen (2002), *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, [2nd ed.] Chippenham, England, Pluto Press; David Mayall (2004), *Gypsy Identities, 1500-2000: From Egyptians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany*, London, Routledge.

[2] Eriksen. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, p. 12.

suggested that ethnicity does not necessarily rely upon biological distinctions, but also includes notions of common customs, shared memories of a common past and an attachment to what might be termed certain 'lifestyles', to illustrate his understanding of what ethnicity is.[3] Ethnicity is not fixed but represents a category of identification that relies upon notions of both self and other definitions around a series of characteristics or what might be described as elements of diversity, and these can be articulated or manipulated through concrete social actions primarily to achieve political ends and shifts in status.[4] Weber's understanding of ethnicity strongly suggests that the connections between ethnic identification and political communities lies behind the use of particular cultural aspects to be emphasised, regardless of how important or unimportant they may seem to others, as a point of origin for the group tendency to aggregate or create a closed unit.[5] This concept of ethnicity as a definition not determined in 'racial' clichés, but as an inspiration for social actions by rational human beings, relates clearly to Weber's understanding of social class. The interplay between ethnicity and class status further contextualises the concept, as self-identification may rely upon notions of common descent, culture, language, religion, shared memories of migration and *diaspora*, but also historical experiences of colonisation, conquest and subjugation. In such terms, the external aspects of diversity used by others may impose another relationship between groups and individuals where more general *meta-identities,* such as 'white European' and 'black African' disrupt or cut across *micro-identities* of 'Roma' and 'Ibo' for example. Thus ethnicity and identity are multi-layered and contextual, according to Weber.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen follows Weber in stressing the importance of ethnicity and identity in the definition of the *self* or what we might call 'self-hood'. By defining the *other*, we automatically define ourselves in opposition. He suggests that ethnic groups in a multiethnic society are, more often than not ranked hierarchically in social classes.[6] This means that to belong to an ethnic group automatically categorises individuals by social class, determined by the cultural attributes they have or those that are imposed upon them by other groups, what Eriksen calls "socially sanctioned notions of cultural differences – not real ones."[7]

Other interesting ideas concerning ethnicity brought up by Eriksen are concerned with stereotyping and the standardisation of relationships between groups. The presupposed image that groups have about each other establishes fixed behavioural patterns which are unquestioned and followed.[8] In other words, by placing a person in an ethnic group, members of differing

[3] Montserrat Guibernau, John Rex (2005) "Introduction", in M. Guibernau and J. Rex [eds], *The Ethnicity Reader- Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, Oxford: Marston Book Services Ltd., p. 2-3.
[4] Max Weber (1978), *Economy and Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 388.
[5] Ibid., p.388.
[6] Eriksen. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, p. 6-8.
[7] Thomas Eriksen (2001), "Ethnic identity, national identity and intergroup conflict: the significance of personal experiences" in Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder [eds.] *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict and Conflict Reduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p.42-70.
[8] Eriksen (2002) op. cit. p. 23.

groups assume a definite behaviour towards that particular person determined by, in most cases, prejudices and preconceived notions regarding the "nature" of the group the individual comes from.

On David Mayall's Gypsy ethnicity

Mayall uses the ideas of Fredrik Barth about ethnicity and culture being socially constructed through interaction and group formation, and through self-interest and practical needs, to make a comparison between Gypsy and other cultures.[9] Ethnic identity is viewed as fluid, subject to change and dependent on external circumstances, in opposition to notions of 'primordialism' that suggest identity is given, a constant that is fixed.[10] The former argument makes it clear that Gypsy social flexibility their way of adapting to different societies by using various survival strategies reflecting practical needs and external pressures, is not a unique feature of Gypsies but exercised by all cultures. Gypsy ethnicity and culture is just as flexible as other cultures, which have used similar survival techniques. The main difference between Gypsies and other ethnic groups is that most other ethnic groups claim a bond to territory through a *mythos* [common myths and alleged historical memories that are articulated through a mass public culture] that is a key element of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith suggests the following criteria as defining an "ethnie" or ethnic community: "a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity […]."[11]

This notion and understanding challenges both the claim that Gypsies do not have an ethnicity but have only assimilated to other cultures, by clearly referring to the notions of common ancestry and shared historical memories, but also the identification of Gypsies as a 'nation' with a link to a specific territory. Herein lies the basis for the Prague 2000 Declaration of the Roma as a "nation without a territory", promulgated by the World Romani Congress; an attempt to articulate an ethnicity in the discourse of identity that seeks to adapt such definitions as limited to the concept of the nation-state.[12] Denying the ethnicity of the Gypsies re-enforces their marginalised situation and eliminates their rights as a minority. Mayall argues that not only are the Gypsies being excluded socially and politically as an ethnic group,[13] but they are also absent to a large extent academically from the general work on ethnicity because of the "ill-defined

[9] Mayall (2004) op. cit. p. 194, 196, 199.
[10] Reed Coughlan and Jack Eller, (1993), "The poverty of primordialism: the demystification of ethnic attachments", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 10 no.2, (April), p.183-202.
[11] Anthony Smith (1996), "Culture Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism", in *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1944-), vol. 72, no. 3 "Ethnicity and International Relations" (July), p. 445-58.
[12] Thomas Acton and Ilona Klimova (2001), "The International Romani Union: an East European answer to West European Questions?", in Will Guy, *Between Past and Future: the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press, p.157-219.
[13] Mayall, op. cit. p. 188.

nature of [this] concept itself […]."[14] He mentions several possibilities causing group-formation, one of them being "a response to opposition and hostility from the wider society".[15] This idea suggests that hostility from the general society that excludes the Gypsies helps in the construction of group-formation and a sense of belonging and unity. Also the state is defined as an agent in the formation of groups:

"[…] the state, both historically and in the present, also engages in defining groups and constructing boundaries when identifying people for purposes of persecution or protection from persecution. The state, by defining criminal behaviour, also defines criminals".[16]

In other words, in this process the state is not only fostering inequality between its citizens, but also paving the way for discrimination of certain select groups by discrediting them. The state sets a precedent for the general society by treating some of its citizens as less significant than others, and through this justifies the discrimination of certain groups. Even if the state does not discredit particular groups within its territorial boundaries as a matter of public policy, it still shapes general perceptions of disadvantaged groups as a result of simultaneous and continuous actions against them. Mayall's work explains, through an in-depth deconstructive methodology, why it is justifiable for Gypsies to be accepted as an ethnic group. He accomplishes this by contrasting the historical developments of the terms 'race' (a concept he refutes in his argument)[17] and ethnicity, and the latter's connection to notions of the primordial identity, with what he identifies as "the most commonly adopted approach in scholarly and other writings on the group"[18] that Gypsies do constitute a distinct *ethnie*, or ethnic community.[19] In this, Mayall does not discount the constantly evolving and changing definitions that attend such approaches; indeed he argues that the necessity of accepting such a process of negotiated and renegotiated ethnicity is part of the "key issue […] of multiple identities" in defining the Gypsies.[20] In the same way, *all* ethnic and national identities in general are contested, constructed and contextualised through myths, imagined pasts and invented traditions, the establishment of boundaries and shared or common characteristics.[21] The notion that these processes deny the underlying validity of ethnicity itself is common in Romani Studies scholarship and political activism, and this lies at the heart of the debates, arguments and disputes surrounding notions of the formation of identities, their evolution and change over time and circumstances, historical experiences and relationship to other groups. What Mayall describes as the "elusiveness of self-

[14] Ibid. p. 189.
[15] Ibid. p. 235.
[16] Ibid. p. 196.
[17] Ibid. pp. 189-92.
[18] Ibid. p. 189.
[19] Ibid. p. 219.
[20] Ibid. p. 237-43.
[21] Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand (2006), "Introduction" in A. Marsh and E. Strand, *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested*, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions 17, Istanbul and London, I. B. Tauris, p. 11-26.

identity… [is a problem]… that cannot, indeed must not, be simply ignored or swept away in pursuit or defence of some mythical or mystical essential whole".[22]

In his chapter "Constructing the Ethnic Gypsy"[23], Mayall discusses the key elements which are used by commentators (many of non-Gypsy backgrounds), to define Gypsy ethnicity, such as a narratives of origin (the Indian *diaspora* or dispersal of migrant Gypsy populations from the Indus and Ganges basins),[24] language, kinship, ancestry, cultural distinction and persecution by the *gadjé* (non-Gypsies).[25] By discussing the nature of *Romany* [sic.] ethnicity, Mayall considers "the extent to which the ethnic Gypsy has been formed by the group itself or from outside".[26] He is critical of the primordialist desire to stress the Gypsy ethnic identity as culturally static and unchanging. He suggests the dynamic nature of the interaction between Gypsies and the non-Gypsy society, together with creative adaptation, is part of a process of survival, and the multiplicity of identities among the Gypsy groups should be recognised as part of this process, and not one that undermines or denies the "ethnic Romany".[27]

Gypsy ethnicity in Turkey

Those notions of ethnicity mentioned briefly above are relevant in this study of Gypsy ethnicity in Turkey for several reasons. Firstly, by concluding that ethnicity does not necessarily signify the 'blood ties' of its members, that an ethnic group is not biologically determined within fixed boundaries,[28] we can establish that the diversity of Gypsy communities in Turkey, regardless of their 'blood relations', may be considered as an *ethnic* group. This conclusion is based on the following observations:

First, it is difficult to draw clear-cut boundaries between cultures in Turkey because ethnic groups living within this national territory are closely intertwined and cannot be homogeneous and 'racially' or even 'culturally' discreet, but have profoundly influenced each other and have many more characteristics in common than presumed. Based on the notion that culture is dynamic and never fixed, we may assert that all identities are constantly reconstructing and rediscovering themselves. With this in mind, it can be stated that Gypsies, meaning Rom, Dom, Lom and the groups we might define as Travellers, can be classified as related ethnic groups and to some level, share aspects and experiences related to their identity.

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[22] Mayall op. cit. p.245.
[23] Ibid. p. 219-51.
[24] Ibid. p. 220-26; Paola Toninato (2008), "The Making of Gypsy Diasporas", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, forthcoming.
[25] Ibid. p.219.
[26] Ibid. p. 233.
[27] Ibid. pp. 234-5.
[28] Ibid. p. 5.

Secondly, following the Weberian definition of ethnicity as common customs and attachments to a certain way of life, there are more than a few examples of shared customs and shared experiences (including the stereotypical images imposed on them by the majority communities around them) and a way of life among those who are labelled as *Çingene* (Gypsy). Regardless of in which part of Turkey they live, which majority culture dominates them or whether they lead nomadic or sedentary lives, the cultural pattern is still there. This leads to the common experience of poverty and exclusion for these groups as a *direct* result of the social and economic marginalisation these groups are affected by.

The Gypsy identity vis-à-vis the *other*

If we agree with Eriksen regarding his ideas about the connection between ethnic groups and social class, in conjunction with his ideas of 'the self *contra* the other', and apply these concepts to Gypsy communities in Turkey, we may find that many of his suggestions conform to the actual circumstances which Gypsies face in Turkish society. The incontestable truth about Gypsies as a group, belonging to the lowest stratum of the social and economic hierarchy in Turkey and maintaining a fixed position as the oppressed of the oppressed is one example. But there are also elements that derive from other factors such as confessional identity that may contradict Eriksen's arguments.

Contrary to Romani communities in Europe, Gypsies in Turkey are more hesitant to subjectively assume an *ethnic* identity as Gypsies, or even separately as Roma, Lom or Dom, due to a fear of being targeted and harassed by nationalists who seek to portray as 'separatists' any groups that assert an identity appearing to disadvantage the notion of national unity. They are therefore hesitant to admit the public discrimination and harassments they endure, and often choose to deny any injustices they are being subjected to. A Turkish Gypsy often asserts their Turkish Muslim identity before their identity as Romani, Dom or Lom, which comes as a 'sub-identity' under the national/religious one. Strand argues that the "Romanlar in Turkey" have "the option of activating multiple identities", and suggests that the characteristic of Islam as an inclusive religion, crosses ethnic boundaries and connects the Turk, Kurd and Gypsy despite their *ethnic* differences, as equals during prayer in the mosque. This is appealing to many Turkish Gypsies.[29] "I believe that here lies the crucial difference between the Romanlar of Turkey and the Roma in Europe. A Muslim Roma identifies himself/herself more with a Turkish Muslim, albeit he/she is *gadjo*, and less with a foreign (Christian), *yabancı* Rom."[30]

Eriksen is correct when he argues that, in order for an ethnic group to define itself as separate and classify its cultural distinctions, there needs to be a contrast with another ethnic group or

[29] Elin Strand (2006), "Romanlar and Ethno-Religious Identity in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective", in A. Marsh and E. Strand [eds], *Gypsies and the Problem of Identity: Contextual, Constructed and Contested*, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, p. 102.
[30] Ibid. p. 101.

identity. The Romanlar may do this through their antipathy towards Kurds[31] with whom they nowadays share the same *mahalles* (neighbourhoods). The Romanlar frequently view Kurds as 'separatists', traditional or 'backward' and a closed group in general,[32] and this perception has had an effect on Gypsy civil society in Turkey. Gypsy associations are cautious of making pronouncements that might be perceived as ethnically divisive and viewed as another 'separatist' group by the Turkish society, even though they are not considered a threat to the national unity as the Kurdish movement is. The slow growth of Gypsy associations' activities can be restricted by fear of being associated with negative attributes that potentially conflict with the authorities and their policies concerning ethnicity.

Urban Gypsies in Turkey have differing layers of identity and association in the secondary and close sense of belonging being the *mahalle* or local community, which the members consider them a part of. The mahalles maintain their distinctiveness by contrasting themselves with one another, but recognise each other as related. This sense of relationship is the third layer of identification, with the national (Turkish identity) being the primary identity. Mischek argues that the different mahalles, as a means to distance themselves from common stereotypes imposed on them by the general society, "downplay" one another by constructing a "self" in contradistinction to the "other". In this way they try to "clear their name" by claiming that the other Gypsies are the "bad" "Çingene", whereas they are the good Romanlar. Mischek further elaborates on this argument by implying that this particular behaviour and denigration of other mahalles shows that Gypsies themselves reinterpret the stereotypes that majority Turkish society ascribes to the Gypsies.[33]

It should be emphasised, based on the argument above that the negative perception the different Gypsy communities have of each other derives from the external images fixed upon them by non-Gypsies. The negative characteristics ascribed to Gypsies as "natural" have been internalised and, to some extent, has become a subjective part of the self-image of Gypsies.

An illustration of this negative self-image, aside from Mischek's example, is the number of unsuccessful Rom, Dom and Lom children at school. The large number of 'drop-outs' before secondary school, and the lack of interest in school among Gypsy children cannot be explained as a cultural trait. It is the product of similar mechanisms, poor expectations by the society in general, by the teachers and even the parents of Gypsy children, and a presupposed notion that these children are not fit for education. These have a crucial impact on their ability to be 'good' students.

[31] Udo Mischek (2006), "Mahalle Identity. Roman (Gypsy) Identity under Urban Conditions", in *Gypsies and the Problem of Identity*, p. 160.
[32] Strand (2006), "Romanlar and Ethno-Religious Identity in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective", p. 100.
[33] Mischek, "Mahalle Identity: Roman (Gypsy) Identity under Urban Conditions", p. 159.

"Reaching the Romanlar"

According to Marsh and Strand, the objective of this study was to map certain Romani communities in Istanbul with emphasis on their social situation (education, accommodation, employment and health) within the general society.[34] This report makes clear that there is an immense need for further research in Turkey concerning the disadvantaged situation of the Gypsies, regardless of whether they are Rom, Lom or Dom. Marsh and Strand stress the importance of mapping the different communities across Turkey and the conditions they live in, as a means to deal with the discrimination and exclusion they face.

Besides presenting an alternative perspective on Gypsy history, Marsh and Strand also highlight the difference in self-perception between the Romanlar of Istanbul and European Roma. One of the most obvious differences is the assurance, by the Romanlar as well as the non-Gypsy alike, that Romanlar in Turkey are not a 'minority' but a part of the larger Turkish entity. The report states: "In Turkey, the notion of regarding the Gypsies as a separate ethnic minority is largely rejected, even by Gypsies themselves as it is seen as divisive and therefore discriminatory."[35]

After examining the ethnic and religious affiliations together with the prejudices encountered in society against Gypsies, the report continues with an evaluation of the contemporary awareness and organisational developments taking place in Turkey at the time.[36] Although the main assessment concerns the areas "Health",[37] "Housing",[38] and "Employment"[39], "Education",[40] is clearly highlighted in this feasibility report. The authors suggest that this is the key to the future social inclusion of Gypsies in Turkey.[41] While assessing the attempts in the past to improve the educational situation of Roma elsewhere and suggesting possible alternatives for Romani children of Turkey, this report is seeking to first evaluate the situation in order to evaluate the action needed for an improvement of the life situation not only for a deprived youth, but also for the future of several wide Gypsy communities.[42]

Origins of Gypsies

The question of the origins of Gypsies has fascinated and intrigued scholars and romantic explorers alike, but significant scholarly research about Roma in Europe was not carried out

[34] Ibid. p. 7.
[35] Ibid. p. 20-21.
[36] Ibid. p. 33-39.
[37] Ibid. p.38-9.
[38] Ibid. p.38.
[39] Ibid. p. 36-7.
[40] Ibid. p. 33-6.
[41] Ibid. p. 59.
[42] Marsh and Strand (2006a), "Recommendations", p. 58-9.

until the end of the 18th century.[43] Although there were several bizarre theories and presuppositions about where these people originated, the predominant notion about the origins of Gypsies has become that they had travelled from the regions of northern India.[44] In Europe where nationalist sentiment was growing rapidly, the need for locating and binding "races" to certain territorial regions was becoming embedded in the concept of the 'nation-state'. The general idea was that all races, regardless of their "inferiority", had to have a land of their fathers and therefore had to be categorised and placed somewhere.[45]

A common fixation of early scholars in Europe was their habit to view other non-Western cultures as less 'developed', and therefore inferior, but also to come to simplistic and overly determinist conclusions based on comparative study between what is familiar to them in their own habitat and their object of study. These early researchers often viewed Gypsies either by romanticising them as 'children of nature' or as a 'filthy people' engaged with indecent conduct and occupations such as thievery, depending on the writers' own perceptions.

Similar to the Gypsy lorists of the 19th and 20th century, the English ethnologist John Crawfurd was greatly influenced by the 'racial anthropological' methods of his time with a focus on physical rather than cultural differences. In his thesis, Crawfurd presented his argument of Gypsies as *not* originating from India, or even from the northern parts of this region, based on a comparison of physical features and languages, between the people living there and Gypsies in Europe. Crawfurd particularly stressed the dissimilarities between what we call *Romani* (or more properly *Romanës*) and the Sanskrit language. Instead of looking at what similarity there may be, in common with most other scholars interested in origins, Crawfurd was arguing the opposite. He rejected the idea that Gypsies once started their migration from northern India and that they had sufficient language and cultural likenesses, without presenting a convincing alternative theory of origins. The "blackness" of the Hindus and the absence of tribes in India with skin "as fair as the Gypsies in Europe"[46] along with the variety of colouring in the eyes and complexion of the Gypsies encouraged Crawfurd to suggest a *racialised* view that, "[…] Gypsies are, in fact, a mixed race, and in blood far more Europeans than Hindus."[47]

It is obvious that European scholarship adopted a Eurocentric perspective during earlier periods. Most scholars, including the Gypsy lorists of Great Britain, had a wide-ranging interest in Gypsies that reached beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Turkey and the rest of the

[43] See Donald Kenrick (2000), "Romany Origins and Migration Patterns" in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Vol. 17, no.3, Fall; Ian Hancock (2002), *We Are the Romani People: Ames am e Rromane dzene*, Paris and Hatfield, Centre de recherches tsiganes and University of Hertfordshire Press, pp.2-14; and Angus Fraser (1992), *The Gypsies, Peoples of Europe Series*, Oxford, Blackwell, p.10-32 for useful surveys.
[44] See Mayall, p.55-83.
[45] See Ernest Gellner (1983), *Nation and Nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, p. 1-7.
[46] John Crawfurd (1865), "On the Origin of the Gypsies", in *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 3. (1865), p. 26.
[47] Ibid.

'Orient' were only infrequently within the scope of their interest. The absence of much scholarly Gypsy research from these lands is proof of this. There were, however, Gypsy lorists who produced a few documentary articles from Turkey and Persia that can provide us with a glimpse of Gypsies from these earlier years. One such scholar was Alexander G. Paspati, a member of the Gypsy Lore Society, who travelled in the Western Ottoman Empire of his time (the 1860's and 1880's) and wrote about Gypsies in these lands.

Paspati's "Memoir on the Language of Gypsies, as now Used in the Turkish Empire" is a primarily philological work, with an aim of demonstrating the relationship between Sanskrit and the language spoken by Gypsies in Turkey. Paspati also provides a short history of Gypsies in Europe with a brief acknowledgement of the persecution against them in several countries; though he goes on to attribute the causes for this as entirely lying with Gypsies themselves. In Turkey he admits, Gypsies were better treated by the Muslims, whom "[…] are not particularly punctilious in the choice of their wives, [and who]… often marry Gypsy women" unlike the Christian communities, which were less inclined to interact with them and furthermore kept them out from churches and other religious offices.[48]

Like most early intellectuals, Paspati emphasised the differences between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in a way that positioned them outside of the 'civilised' world. He wrote that, "They have no principles, they serve no God but the God of gain and fraud, and they conform to all religions. They excite the voluptuous passions of others, but rarely fall themselves into the sins which they lead others into."[49] Further, he stated, "History has not traced their mysterious migrations, or noted any sudden irruptions into more cultivated lands. It has marked, however, their rigorous wickedness, their unconquerable propensity to roaming and pilfering, and their universal abhorrence of the customs and religion of the people amongst whom they roamed or dwelt."[50]

A further article written by Paspati for the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society in 1888 was entitled "Turkish Gypsies". In this article, Paspati presents several interesting observations, such as how Muslim Gypsies were relieved from the exemption tax (the *bedel*) in 1874, usually paid by non-Muslims *in lieu* of doing military service. This is an important event in the history of Turkish Gypsies as Paspati suggests, since up until that time Muslim Gypsies were not considered as genuine and equal to other Muslims in Ottoman law. Aside from this, the article also provides information regarding places where Gypsies lived and the occupations they pursued. They had certain 'traditional' professions that they took up, and were known to be talented violinists, basket makers and ironmongers. Gypsies were not known as robbers and they did not hunt, Paspati asserted.

[48] Alexander Paspati (1860-1863), "Memoir on the Language of the Gypsies, as Now Used in the Turkish Empire" [trans.] Hamlin, in *C. Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 7, p. 148.
[49] Ibid. p. 146.
[50] Ibid. p. 150.

Although the author is less critical of Gypsies in this article than he had been in his earlier work, he maintained his attitude of Gypsies as a people indifferent to religion. At the beginning of the article, Paspati tells a story about a Gypsy "bear dancer" who dies in an accident and who is refused a Christian funeral because all his life he was known to be a Muslim called Mustapha. It was later proved he was Christian by the fact that he was not circumcised as a Muslim, and he was eventually buried with the consent of the Christian priest. Paspati comments that, "It is a striking example of their indifference to religion".[51] With this comment, Paspati assumes that Gypsies adopt religion without any true conviction, questioning their ability to have faith and a will of their own. What Paspati does not consider is the efforts of Mustapha's close friends to give their friend a proper funeral according to his avowed faith by trying to prove his religious identity. The Muslim name Mustapha adopted may have been an attempt to blend in and be more accepted by the dominant population. Despite his judgmental view of Gypsies, Paspati's work is requisite due to the factual details about Turkish Gypsies he has provided, which are otherwise hard to come by.

Some Observations on Turkish and Persian Gypsies is another article written by a Gypsy lorist, Dr Herman Arnold. This is a field report following a journey to Persia, through Edirne, İstanbul, Ankara, Kayseri and Erzurum, between August and September 1965. Dr Arnold provides us with very poor observations from Turkey. He principally looks for nomadic Gypsies and tent-dwellers and claims that it is impossible for the foreigner to classify and make a distinction between Gypsy nomads and others.[52] It appears that Dr Arnold and his team were hurrying to Persia without spending much time in Turkey, since in his article he writes: "Between Üsküdar and Ankara there were no Gypsies to be found."[53] His assumption had been that because Persia and other Middle Eastern countries are more familiar with nomadic lifestyle, the nomadic Gypsies would be found there. The report claims that only near Kayseri did the group see Gypsies again and no other until the Persian frontier.[54] They mention nothing about the nomadic Dom groups in substantial numbers travelling in the south eastern part of Turkey. It is clear that Persia was the main topic of research for these people, since much of the text is dedicated to the *Koli* Gypsies of Iran. The objective of their mission was to compare the Romanës of Europe with the language spoken by the Koli in Persia; in the section entitled "Linguistic Problems" there is a comment about the disappearance of the "true" Gypsy language spoken in Europe. Dr Arnold claims the Romani language of the European Gypsies is the true and original language, whereas the languages spoken by the non-European Gypsies are merely made up "secret languages". The linguistic assimilation is blamed on the wider contact of Gypsies with the rest of the population in Persia.

[51] Alexander Paspati (1888), "Turkish Gypsies", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Vol. 1, no. 1, p. 3-5.
[52] Hermann Arnold (1967), "Some Observations on Turkish and Persian Gypsies" in *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Vol. XLVI, p. 105.
[53] Ibid. p. 106.
[54] Ibid.

"Marriages among the Gypsies of Turkey"

The article "Marriages among the Gypsies of Turkey" by Ali Rafet Özkan, published in 2006, is one of a limited number of publications on Turkish Gypsies to be found in recent years. It is included in this review in order to indicate the persistence of stereotypical and stigmatising imagery of Gypsies in academic literature.

The author analyses marital customs among Turkish Gypsies and categorises these customs as "exchange," "abduction," and "purchase". To "exchange" brides means that parents choose to marry off their daughters to families who have daughters of their own that they can offer to their own sons in return. In this way, families facing economic difficulties can avoid dowry expenses. "Purchase" on the other hand means that families negotiate a price for the bride, "buying" her as the author of this article describes it. The final custom is "abduction", which, according to Özkan, is carried out when the groom does not have the financial means to marry a girl from a richer family. We can see a pattern here that suggests that all three customs are based on economic factors, and Özkan is plainly suggesting that Gypsy marriages are primarily the result of economic relations.

Another point stressed in the article is that Gypsies are not allowed to marry outside of their own culture, viewing "gadjo" as impure. They may however marry those individuals who choose to be a part of the Gypsy community and 'become' Gypsy themselves. Özkan boldly asserts:

"The ban on marrying a non-Gypsy is also an issue to which Gypsies attach importance since the Gypsies can preserve their traditions only through endogamy marriages."[55]

Özkan's assertions deliberately seek to portray Gypsies as a primitive people, who consciously insulate themselves from the broader society and its development.

Further in his discussion about marital customs among Turkish Gypsies, the author notes that "[…] among the Gypsies in Turkey plural marriages are free and easy, so is divorce. The fact that official marriages are not common […] paves the way not only to multiple marriages, but also to [multiple]… divorces"[56] Here is another statement that simultaneously projects negative values and furthers popular prejudices regarding a lack of respect from Gypsies towards the sanctity of marriage.

[55] Ibid. p. 469.
[56] Ibid.

Analysing the relationship between men and women in Gypsy communities, the author offers the following comment:

> "Thus, male deficiencies such as incompetence, clumsiness, ugliness, etc. are ignored and disregarded. On the other hand, female qualities are ignored and disregarded, in particular, the fact that it is the women who are mostly endowed with the economic burdens of the household. Therefore, it is really unjust for Gypsy women to be always regarded as worthless even though they have significant functions in the family. Moreover, the marriage of a man to a second and even a third wife in dissatisfaction with the self-sacrificing efforts of his principal wife is a clear sign of male supremacy and female worthlessness."[57]

Although one might give Dr Özkan some credit for expressing a dislike for injustices deriving from sexual stereotyping, his assertions are questionable from being overly generalised and biased, in that an impression is given of the said features being uniquely attributable to Gypsies.

It is quite obvious that the writer lacks the in-depth knowledge regarding Gypsy groups in Turkey that he suggests he possesses, since there are several essential elements he fails to note. Information about the existing variety of religious convictions, and sufficient details concerning the divergence between these groups is most obviously absent from his analysis. When naming the different groups of Gypsies in Turkey, Özkan does not help the reader to distinguish between them. Two of the names he uses, *Posha* and *Mıtrip*, are labels used by the majority communities for certain Gypsy groups. The group referred to by the author as Posha, for instance, identifies itself as Lom and regard the former term as pejorative. Drawing upon field research carried out by the ERRC/hCa/EDROM project "Promoting Roma Rights in Turkey", it can be asserted that Lom have a language of their own, *Lomavren,* and a distinct sense of community. The group Mıtrip, a term deriving from Arabic and meaning 'musicians', mostly live in the eastern and south eastern parts of the country and also have an 'in group' name and language of their own, namely Dom and Domari. When informing the reader about the different customs of marriage, the author indiscriminately lumps all Gypsy groups and communities together, assuming that the customs apply to all in the same manner. He does not mention at all the Bektaşi or Alevi groups amongst Gypsies, who differ significantly in their ways and customs.

On the whole, this research is not convincing nor compelling enough to be regarded as a satisfactory study of Turkish Gypsies.

[57] Ibid. p. 464.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed about Gypsy identity and ethnicity, it may be concluded that social exclusion and external stereotyping of Gypsy communities and individuals has caused, and continues to cause, serious damage to the understanding of the Gypsy *self*. This damage leads to a series of consequences such as permanency of Gypsy segregation and mistreatment that restrains Gypsies from ascending the socio-economic hierarchy.

The lack of sufficient research about Gypsy communities of Turkey has two primary causes. Firstly, the disregard that Western scholars and romantic folklorists alike have shown towards Gypsies living in the region (Turkey and the remainder of the Middle East) until today has largely kept Turkish Gypsies as an unknown and unrelated group from other European Roma. The long history of research regarding Gypsies in Western, Central and Eastern Europe has provided substantial information concerning Gypsy communities that has contributed to their self-awareness and directly or indirectly to the discourse of Roma (or perhaps *Rroma*) ethnicity. The discussions around Gypsy identity and discrimination in Europe rarely include Gypsy communities in Turkey, which is a direct cause of this lack of knowledge regarding Turkish Gypsies. There may be said to be insufficient interest shown by scholars and researchers due to an academic Eurocentrism.

Secondly, the political situation in the Republic of Turkey, maintaining as it does what might be described as an assimilationist and nationalist line of reasoning, does not encourage studies and research concerning ethnicity in general which would endorse a culturally pluralist and heterogeneous society. This may be another explanation for the scarcity of research regarding Turkish Gypsies. It is difficult to elicit unbiased substantive research material about Gypsies, as Turkish scholars are sometimes unable to maintain a non-ideological bias when they are studying Gypsy cultures. By and large, the causes for the social exclusion of Turkish Gypsies are being sought exclusively within the Gypsy communities themselves as a result of poverty and marginalisation, rather than a consequence of discrimination and prejudice, as if the Gypsies themselves are to be blamed. In a number of instances, academic research in Turkey sadly encourages rather than dispels prejudices against Gypsies and fails to bring any understanding to the problems they face or offer constructive solutions to their everyday dilemmas.

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Historically, Turkey has been an important place for Roma and for the development of Roma culture; according to some scholars in the field, Sulukule neighbourhood in today's Istanbul is considered to be the first Roma settlement in Europe. Despite the continuous presence of sizeable Roma communities over the course of centuries, Roma in Turkey face serious obstacles to the exercise of fundamental rights on equal footing with other citizens. While the protection of fundamental human rights, and minority rights in particular, has become prominent in recent years in Turkey, especially within the process of EU accession, Roma rights issues have not yet been an integral part of this discussion.

With the aim of contributing to the advancement of the Roma rights movement in Turkey, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) developed and implemented the "Promoting Roma Rights in Turkey" project, in partnership with the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa) and the Edirne Roma Association (EDROM) in the period between December 2005 and April 2008. The book We Are Here! which is one output of this project draws on research and experiences during the project and reflects partners' expertise in Roma rights advocacy, the promotion of values of democracy, social justice and peace, and the grassroots mobilisation of Roma communities. Above all, We Are Here! seeks to portray the Roma of Turkey as citizens of the Republic, with their own history, social positions and relations as well as their specific problems. In doing so, the book also describes the recent efforts of Turkey's Roma activists to organise themselves to strengthen their own communities.

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