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Romani Musicians: The Fantasy of the Exotic in Film and Popular Culture

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ROMANI MUSICIANS: THE FANTASY OF THE EXOTIC IN FILM AND POPULAR
CULTURE

by

Grace Coleman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the International Studies

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Spring 2017

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
International Studies have been completed.

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POPULAR CULTURE**

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Oleg Timofeyev, Advisor

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically investigates the appropriation, marginalization, and romanticization of Roma as an ethnic group, specifically as these issues relate to the musical performative abilities of Roma displayed in popular culture. Through a critical examination of numerous films depicting Roma throughout Europe and North America, I explore how depictions within popular culture perpetuate limiting stereotypes that impede cultural empowerment and social integration. Contrasting representations in Western and Eastern European films, including analyses of a variety of stereotypical themes across numerous Roma films, especially focusing on their relationship with performance and music, I argue that generalizations and misconceptions of Roma rooted in 19th century Romantic literature, music, and opera continue to have a damaging effect on Roma marginalization as the “other” in modern social, cultural, and political discourses.

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INTRODUCTION

Originally from India, the Roma, commonly referred to as “Gypsies”, are an ethnic group found throughout Europe. They have long been an object of fascination for outsiders who romanticize their cultural traditions of performance, music, and dance. The Roma have traditionally led separate lives from others, both socially and physically. This isolation is driven by their historic semi-nomadic lifestyle and practices (influenced greatly by their persecution by local populations) and by internal social practices based in the Indian caste system. Persecution drives many of the challenges Roma still face today, and longstanding prejudices lead to higher unemployment and lower graduation rates among Roma than others within many of their host countries. Europeans and Americans alike maintain misconceptions about Roma, associating “Gypsies” with transient free-spirited lifestyles, inherent musical ability, and petty theft. These associations are perpetuated and reinscribed throughout literature, music, and art. Within the realm of recent popular culture, these stereotypes continue to be reinforced, along with the general assumption that Roma are limited exclusively to professions as musicians, dancers, fortunetellers and performers. These portrayals in the arts provide a means of exoticism and escapism for Western viewers, exploiting the dramatized culture of the Romani for the purpose of entertainment, or as Yaron Matras says providing “essential niche services to the majority.”¹ These depictions promote entertainment and enjoyment, but fail to leave space for accurate or inclusive representations. The mythology of the Gypsy as a romantic figure furthers the cultural separation between Roma and other cultural groups, because it associates them with a limiting fantastical ideal rather than regarding them as established members of society. Roma are

¹ Yaron Matras, *I Met Lucky People: The Story of the Romani Gypsies* (London: Penguin, 2014), 160.

primarily assumed to be deeply in touch with their cultural and folk roots, and are typecast into careers as performers and entertainers, reinforced by restricted access to other possibilities within professional and educational spheres. These associations exclude Romani from opportunities that would allow social mobility and the possibility to integrate into larger European society outside of Romani traditions and social circles, thus limiting them to the careers that they are traditionally assumed to be a part of. As performers, many Roma, especially musicians across Europe, have adapted to fit the expectations and prejudices of the countries in which they reside to gain recognition and employment, incorporating styles and stereotypes from these cultures into their own “Gypsy” music, attempting to adapt and coexist into the culture they inhabit alongside, and to cater to the expectations and desires of European audiences.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Throughout European history, the Roma people have faced significant persecution and prejudice from the non-Roma populations of the many countries in which they reside. It was not until the late 19th century that Romani origins in Northern India were definitively confirmed, and details about the origins and early culture of the Roma are still not entirely known today.² Earlier assumptions of Romani origins in Egypt (hence the name “Gypsy”) or other farfetched locations still persisted in popular imagination (and occasionally in professional publications) long after these theories were disproved. Speculations associated with Roma origins, the class and professions of historical Romani, and many other cultural factors, still continue to shape perceptions of Roma by outsiders today. One misconception long believed by scholars relating

² Ian Hancock, *We Are the Romani People* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002), 13.

the inception of the migration out of India is that the Romani were originally part of a group of musicians given to the Shah of Persia by an Indian King in the 5th century, a story referenced in the Persian *Book of Kings*.³ However, this has been disproved through linguistic analysis, and the story instead is believed to reference an unrelated group of musicians predating the movement of the Roma from India. Due to the similarities between words in Romani related to warfare and battle and their similarity to comparable words with Indian linguistic origins, it has been concluded that the Roma did not move out of India until closer to the 11th century, likely accompanying an Indian militia responding to Muslim expansion.

The Roma were likely comprised of members of the militia themselves (mostly from the Rajput region of India) and were also drawn from the large group of camp followers who assisted in cooking, entertaining and caring for the soldiers.⁴ The prevailing popular belief is that the Roma must have historically belonged to a lower caste in India because of their association with menial jobs and entertainment. However, according to scholar Ronald Lee “Contemporary writings by Firdawsi, a Persian scribe...prove beyond doubt that we [Roma] originated in India but were not one specific group of Indians, not all of one caste and not even one people.”⁵ Romani social and linguistic structures corroborate that both historic and modern Roma share far more similarities with the practices of higher castes in India than lower ones, but that they may have originally come from a variety of castes. The importance of caste in Romani social practices have continued to significantly influence Roma familial and social interactions today.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Hancock, *We Are the Romani People*, 11.

⁵ Ronald Lee, “A New Look at Our Romani Origins and Diaspora,” *Kopachi.com*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://kopachi.com/articles/a-new-look-at-our-romani-origins-and-diaspora-by-ronald-lee/>.

Many Roma continue to follow a strict code of cleanliness called “*mahrime* code”. Ronald Lee describes the differences between Roma and Western values of cleanliness this way:

while Europeans in general have two categories, clean and dirty, and things which are dirty can become clean by washing, Romanies, on the other hand, have three categories, *wuzho* ‘clean’, *melalo* ‘dirty’ and *mahrime* ‘defiled/polluted/taboo.’ Traditional Romanies tend to see themselves as a pure caste and all outsiders as potential sources of pollution.⁶

This etiquette of cleanliness serves to reinforce the outsider status of Roma within European society, because many interactions with non-Roma that comply with European social conventions are deemed inherently unclean according to *mahrime* standards. Conversely, many Western concepts of cleanliness are not adhered to within Roma culture, causing both groups to view the other as “dirty”, deepening the cultural divide on both sides. Additional cultural discrepancies, like the differing attitudes toward begging -- within the caste structure it is seen as an acceptable source of income, whereas in Western culture it is seen as lazy or thieving -- increase misunderstanding and cultural separations.

In addition to contradicting long held beliefs about Roma social status, linguistic evidence has also disproven the deeply ingrained association of Roma with natural nomadism. Roma are often referred to as “travelers” and are intrinsically linked to a life of carriages and movement. However, in Romani, words associated with travel -- camp, wagon, tent, etc. -- are not related to Indian roots as one would expect if nomadism was a traditional practice for early Roma. Instead, these words were acquired much later, whereas words associated with settled land-owning do have Indian origins.⁷ This indicates that early Roma in India were primarily stationary, and did not begin to incorporate travel and nomadism into their lifestyle until military

⁶ Lee. “A New Look at Our Romani Origins”.

⁷ Hancock, *We Are the Romani People*, 14.

movements necessitated it. This revelation that the Roma are not naturally migratory and have no genetic predisposition to wander or travel is hugely important, because it indicates that migration was associated with wartime movements and later ethnic persecution rather than an innate nomadism present within their culture. However, linguistic evidence has by no means dispelled the association between Roma and nomadism from the fantastical image of “Gypsies” that non-Roma have built and cultivated over time.

As part of military movements, possibly as defeated captives, the Roma eventually arrived in the Byzantine Empire, where, because they were not Muslim, they were given a lower social status, often as slaves. As slaves, Roma were limited to practicing a narrow list of specific trades, such as blacksmithing or playing string instruments similar to modern-day violins, which further contributed to their segregation within these communities.⁸ Over time, the Roma moved further into Europe, and as they did they continued to be categorized as slaves and tradesman-- associated with the fixed trades they had been limited to in the Byzantine empire, and afforded few rights. The prejudices in Europe, however, sparked from a misconception that the Roma were Turkish, and therefore Muslim. This directly contradicts the Byzantine prejudice against the Roma because they were *not* Muslim, but ultimately resulted in similar systems of oppression and intolerance. Additionally, when not assumed to be Muslim, Roma were occasionally thought to be associated with the other primary outsider group in Europe -- Jews. The association between Jews and Roma was perpetuated because of the presumption (incorrect in the case of the Roma) of their shared Egyptian roots. Both groups also lacked countries exclusively populated with either Roma or Jews, causing both to perpetually remain outsiders, and therefore inherently suspect. The association of Roma with Jews, a traditionally marginalized and outcast group

⁸ Hancock, *We Are the Romani People*, 19.

within Europe, furthered the prejudices against the Roma, and increased the enforcement of laws preventing Roma from settling or undertaking a variety of diverse occupations.⁹

The misconceptions formed throughout the history of the Romani journey from India throughout Europe have left a lasting influence on how Roma have been treated historically, and how they are represented in social, cultural, and political arenas today. Speculations rooted in false history -- of Roma as an exclusively musical group (the story of the Shah), as travelers by nature, and as originating from lower castes in India (justifying religious and social stigmatization) have all directly negatively impacted the treatment of Roma within European society. These historic systems of oppression and prejudice have created the foundation for a social structure in which Roma remain outsiders within their home countries and are denied access to social or economic mobility because of preconceptions associated with them that seem nearly impossible to dispel. Traits such as nomadism and musicality, and negative associations with theft have been so deeply normalized into depictions and attitudes toward Roma throughout European society that they continue to cause measurable racialized prejudices that are persistently and profoundly damaging to the Roma community. Inaccurate histories and the subsequent reference to these historical “facts” in literature, music, and the arts have deepened the plausibility of these beliefs, and ingrained them in the prevailing attitudes toward Roma within public discourses and popular entertainment.

ROMA IN FILMS

Films, literature, and performances have often capitalized on non-Roma expectations of Romani culture through the recurring motif of the free-spirited but morally questionable,

⁹ Ibid., 31.

sexually promiscuous, and musically gifted “Gypsy” stereotype to draw on fantastical images and oversimplifications of Roma for the entertainment of Western audiences. From the expressively ornamented Brahms *Hungarian Dances* (1869) to Shakira’s 2010 song *Gypsy* featuring Indian inspired tabla and sitar with lyrics such as “I might steal your clothes/ And wear them if they fit me/ I never make agreements/ Just like a Gypsy,”¹⁰ the West has always held a fascination with the exotic life of the Roma. These depictions have varied over time and by geographic area, but all share similar depictions grounded in long-standing prejudices and racism for the purpose of dramatic effect rather than reality or updated historical research. In literature, opera, and films, Romani characters are used to add a touch of the exotic -- of freedom, intrigue, drama, and crime -- to plotlines centered around more morally grounded Western heroes and heroines. While some Roma characters are used as momentary asides and others are centered as main plot points or protagonists, Roma are consistently depicted as musically inclined, often dancing and singing in wedding scenes or in Gypsy camps where characters have their fortune told by Gypsy fortunetellers.

Audiences in Western Europe and the United States receive images of Roma mediated through exotic and romanticized images derived from 19th century texts and operas such as Bizet’s *Carmen* and Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Eastern European audiences to a large extent receive inaccurate romanticized depictions of Roma as well, despite the increased percentage of Roma present and visible within Eastern European societies. However, discriminatory stereotypes of Roma as lazy, thieving scoundrels who often swindle unsuspecting passersby have more prevalence in Eastern Europe, where non-Roma often have the opportunity to interact with Roma on a daily basis. The more romanticized images of Roma as harmless and

¹⁰ Shakira, “Gypsy,” *She Wolf* (United States: Epic, 2010).

free-spirited dancers and singers in the West are therefore presented alongside more negative assumptions influenced by social interactions. In the United States, where Roma comprise a tiny fraction of the overall population and very few Americans have interacted in person with Roma, real Roma are practically invisible within society. Therefore, the image of “Gypsies” in films and culture is seen as more of a mythological symbol than a depiction of a real group of people living and functioning within society today. As Nikolina Dobрева comments on the differences between East European and Western depictions of Roma, “Hollywood cinema often represents a mediated fantasy (the adaptation of a 19th century European text), while East European cinema represents real contemporary people with real problems.”¹¹ Still, whether in films and popular culture in countries where Roma are a minority that is prominently visible and frequently discriminated against through legislation and daily behavior, or in countries in which Roma are relatively invisible, the fantasy of the musical and free Gypsy character is a strong theme throughout many cultural productions in both the East and West. Centuries-old romanticization of Roma by authors and composers like Pushkin and Bizet, who gave little to no considerations to the accuracy of their depictions and put no depth or background research into creating realistic depictions, still largely influence how Roma are viewed today within both creative outlets and political discourses.

In this paper, I will explore the origins of the free-spirited Gypsy musician and examine how these stereotypes are reinforced in popular culture through their presentations in a number of popular films throughout Europe and North America. I will investigate how these depictions are informed by a Romani desire for coexistence within a majority culture and how the

¹¹ Nikolina Dobрева, “The Curse of the Traveling Dancer: Romani Representation from 19th-century European Literature to Hollywood Film and Beyond” (doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, 2009), 118.

mythology of the “Gypsy” has been appropriated by non-Roma for the sake of exoticism. Integrating visual as well as aural stereotypes, the films I will discuss portray a wide variety of Romani groups throughout Europe and the US. I begin with a presentation of the historical background of the Roma and movement from India to Europe, continuing with depictions of Roma in films from Russia and Eastern Europe (*Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, *Latcho Drom*, *Gadjo Dilo*, *Time of the Gypsies*, *Black Cat*, *White Cat*) as well as Western Europe and North America (*The Red Violin*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*). I will examine how these films challenge or reinforce existing marginalizing stereotypes of nomadism, musicality, and exoticism, and explore how these depictions are reflective of larger social beliefs surrounding Roma musicians and Roma as a whole.

RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE

Emil Loteanu: Gypsies are Found Near Heaven

The Moldovan filmmaker, Emil Loteanu, like his Eastern European counterparts Emir Kusturica and Tony Gatlif, directed many films focused on Roma, specifically highlighting their musical ability through the thematic plot content and background accompanying music. In his Russian-language 1975 Soviet drama *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven* [Табор уходит в небо] (alternately titled *Queen of the Gypsies* in English), music and dance play a prominent role in the scenes depicting Roma culture and those accompanying the blossoming romances that take place in the film. The film is loosely based on Maxim Gorky’s short story “Makar Chudra”, which tells the story of two young Romani who fall in love, Rada and Zobar, and the inevitable collapse of their catastrophic and dysfunctional love. Rada, a carefree Romani dancer, embodies a character similar to Bizet’s *Carmen*, a seductive and mysterious woman who woos unsuspecting non-

Roma and Roma men alike through her dancing and rebellious, yet intoxicating spirit. Zobar, a hot-headed horse thief, also personifies a stereotypically masculine and stubbornly independent Rom man.

Both Rada's love interests in the film, the wealthy *gadjo* Antol, and the Roma horse thief Zobar, meet and fall in love with Rada during scenes in which she displays her performative abilities. Antol first encounters Rada in the streets of a small town where she is singing and dancing with a group of her friends as she seductively stares into the camera smoking a pipe. Antol offers Rada a ride in his carriage, and is immediately enchanted by her adventurousness and beauty and quickly asks her to come live with him in his home, where he promises will give her everything she desires. Rada refuses, saying she has no desire to bow to his wishes and authority, but hopes to always be independent and free. Antol, the only *gadjo* character in the film is representative of the antithesis of Roma culture, providing a foil to Zobar in a community that stands in diametric opposition to Antol's (and the viewer's) lifestyle. In a similarly choreographed introduction to Antol's, but one with completely different romantic implications, Zobar formally meets Rada (he initially met her briefly in an earlier incident in which she appears in the wilderness to heal him of a wound and then disappears) in a Roma camp where she is performing a wild and raucous dance and song performance. The scene begins when Zobar visits the Roma camp of an unfamiliar Romani group on his travels and is welcomed into their community due to his fame as a horse thief. Zobar is handed a guitar as soon as he enters the encampment, and expected to start singing on the spot. His guitar strumming soon transitions into an elaborate performance in which the women of the camp dance intricately as a background chorus sings an accompaniment to their motions. Rada and Zobar dance together as the music becomes faster and livelier, and flashbacks to their first meeting play across the screen,

strengthening their immediate romantic connection and love for one another. In these scenes, the musical abilities of the characters are displayed at the forefront, epitomizing the essence of the world of the film, one in which the logic of *gadje* narratives has no place. The film provides a glimpse into this nonsensical world, and indicates that while some outsiders, like Antol, can possibly break into it, they will never truly understand the Roma community.

Ultimately, Rada proves to be too wild and hard-headed for either of her two suitors, the first of whom, Antol, she repeatedly rejects despite his pursuits. Zobar also cannot tame her wild spirit, though Rada has strong feelings for him, and after many encounters and re-encounters, loving duets, and declarations of their passion for each other, she ultimately decides he is also not worth sacrificing her freedom and individuality for *unless* he submits to sacrifice some of his pride and freedom as well. Zobar follows Rada's group as they move away from their initial encampment with his companion, who as they walk plays a guitar while carrying another guitar as well as a violin on his back in a display of extreme musicality. Rada's group also displays exaggerated musicality, singing together along the way as they walk, which provides yet another representation of both the wandering and transitory life of the Roma and their musical ability.

When Zobar finally catches up to Rada, he declares his love for her and says that he will kneel before her, surrendering some of his authority to her despite both their strong dominant personalities. Zobar states "Last night I looked into my heart and discovered that the old free life no longer matters to me. Only Rada matters. And so, I have decided to bow down in front of her as she asked me to, to show everyone that her beauty conquered Zobar (1:30:55)."¹² However, after publicly surrendering to Rada's will, Zobar expects Rada to surrender some of her strong will to him as well, and asks her to give him her hand before he bows in front of her. When Rada

¹² *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, directed by Emil Loteanu (Russia: Sovexportfilm, 1975), DVD.

refuses to do this, Zobar immediately becomes enraged and stabs her through the heart with his knife. In retaliation, Rada's father then stabs Zobar in the back as well, and both Rada and Zobar die in each other's arms, still desperately in love and desperately stubborn. Habiba Hadziavdic remarks "[t]he perpetual overdetermination of Gypsies' music as passionate, best characterized and recognized by its fervor, craze, rhythmical variations, vehemence, and general verve, serves as an elucidation of Gypsies as loose, uninhibited, spontaneous, instinctual, and unrefined brutes."¹³ This is represented in *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven* through both the music that is performed throughout and the over-dramatic and unpredictable plot and characters, most notably the phenomenally unrealistic ending. Both Rada and Zobar act out of passion and feeling rather than careful forethought, often in scenes that intrinsically weave musical displays into their presentations, further highlighting Hadziavdic's characterization. These scenes, like the ending death or the introductory dances, exoticize the lifestyle and artistic practices of the Roma while simultaneously casting negative judgement on the disreputable subversiveness perceived to be within their lifestyle.

Throughout *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, imagery linking music and musical expression to Roma identity, unrestricted independence, motion, and freedom are extremely prevalent. Rada serves as a representation of the stereotypical female Romani woman: a fiery and independently defiant seductive female dancer, while Zobar is the stereotypical male Roma: also fiercely independent and musically inclined, but gifted in string instrumentalism rather than dancing and singing, and criminal in nature, making his living as a horse thief stealing from unsuspecting *gadje* landowners. These positions are reinforced frequently throughout the film, as the actions each character makes further uphold the expectations of them dictated by their

¹³ Hadziavdic, ""The Construct 'Gypsy'," 124.

stereotypical archetypes. The film is a tragic love story, with many of the characters fitting expectations within this genre that are present regardless of Romani stereotypes -- drama, mystery, and romance all follow unrealistic narratives that fit with the audience's romanticized expectations of a traditional love story. However, the addition of Roma characters and a Roma-centric plot amplify these expectations, because of the exotic and otherworldly associations with the Roma as a group, as well as their connection with poverty and tragedy compensated for with a *joie de vivre* rooted in music. These preconceived associations provide the perfect groundwork for a tragic and sensational story surrounding Roma characters who ultimately come to disastrous ends. The viewer is given a glimpse into the adventurous and dangerously subversive life of a rough and tumble, gritty, and mysterious group, without having to personally reflect on the stereotypes the film upholds or the position of the Roma within real-world settings and current issues in which the viewer may actively contribute to their marginalization.

The music for *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven* plays a central part in contributing to the folkloric tale that is told and the unique world of the characters and their culture. Describing the music used in the film, the director, Emil Loteanu, said

We traveled around the country, listened to the songs of Moldavian, Carpathian, Baltic, and even Siberian Gypsies, choosing the best of the best among them, and above all, songs that were completely unknown...in Tabor we took the path of stylization – enriching them and liberating them from any type of suspicious layering.¹⁴

The music in the film consisted of recordings of Roma musicians from Radvanka, Ukraine.¹⁵

Musical themes and tunes in the film were chosen for their exotic, romantic, and intriguing sounds, sounds that would draw the viewer into the intrigue of the plot while also maintaining a level of cultural authenticity due to the depth of research and field recordings done by the

¹⁴ Dobрева, "The Curse of the Traveling Dancer," 136.

¹⁵ Adriana Helbig, "'Play for Me, Old Gypsy': Music as Political Resource in the Roma Rights Movement in Ukraine" (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2005), 81.

director during the process of sourcing his musical content and providing inspiration for the music he chose to include in the film. The “layering” Loteanu referred to was removed from the final score by the composer for the film, Evgenii Doga, who altered and refined the music to remove the rawness and unpredictability of the authentic music that Doga and Loteanu observed in their field research, making it more suitable for their audiences (in a very similar manner to Gatlif’s musical editing).¹⁶ Like many of the following films, while there was some effort made by Loteanu and Doga to stay true to the reality of Roma performers of the time, the end result was akin more to the “reality” that the non-Roma director, composer, and actors imagined to be the truth -- one based on a perfected yet narrow depiction of Roma as a singularly representable group with universally defining characteristics that accurately and fully encompass all Roma (at least all Roma living in Eastern Europe). As each population of Roma in individual countries, and areas within those countries often have vastly different practices and values, no one film can properly portray these complexities unless the film focuses specifically on one subset of Roma in one area, and relies on Romani expertise and guidance for crafting the characters, plot, and narrative. Each of the films discussed here has not done this to the full extent possible, and many did not try particularly hard to do so, using Roma as a filmic trope to evoke specific feelings and assumptions by their audience rather than as a depiction of the culture as a unique and diverse one, to varying degrees.

Tony Gatlif: Latcho Drom and Gadjo Dilo

Tony Gatlif, a filmmaker who emerged in the 20th century as one of the prominent producers of films related to Romani people in Eastern Europe, has produced several films that

¹⁶ Dobreva, “The Curse of the Traveling Dancer,” 137.

in many ways both condemn and reinforce existing stereotypes about Romani culture. As Nikolina Dobрева comments “French-Algerian-Romani director Tony Gatlif’s and Bosnian-Serb Emir Kusturica’s “Gypsy films” attempt a layered, multicultural approach to Romani representation, but fail to avoid earlier romanticized depictions of the ethnic group as carefree non-national musicians.”¹⁷ Gatlif, a French-Algerian, positions himself as an insider into Roma traditions, citing his own partial Romani descent as a platform from which he claims authority to portray Romani culture free from the stereotypes held by non-Romani outsiders, or *gadje*. However, Gatlif did not grow up within the Romani community or practice any Romani cultural traditions, and many have questioned whether distant heritage alone gives him the authority to speak on behalf of an ethnic group that he culturally shares very little in common with. In reference to Gatlif’s similarities to his own fictional protagonist in his film “*Gadjo Dilo*”, author Andrew McGregor comments “Gatlif’s claims to cultural authenticity as an ‘indigenous’ gypsy filmmaker function in much the same way as the delusions of his protagonist.”¹⁸ Thus, while Gatlif’s films do focus more than many others within the genre on the complexities of Romani culture and the unfair discrimination and marginalization directed at the Roma by many Europeans, and bring to the forefront of public discourse many social and political issues that should be discussed, Gatlif is not wholly successful in completely dispelling many of these stereotypes which have been ingrained in Western audiences’ assumptions about Roma from historical texts as well as Gatlif’s own work.

Within his films, Gatlif focuses heavily both on the wandering, free-spirited nature of the Roma and on their musicality. These themes are especially clear in two of his most widely

¹⁷ Dobрева, “The Curse of the Traveling Dancer,” vii.

¹⁸ Andrew McGregor, “French Cinema in Exile: Trans-National Cultural Representation in Tony Gatlif’s 1998 *Gadjo Dilo*,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 6, no. 4 (2008): 75.

recognized films surrounding Roma: *Latcho Drom*, released in 1994, and *Gadjo Dilo*, released in 1997. The first, *Latcho Drom*, is presented in a quasi-documentary style without narration -- only music. While Gatlif describes the film as “neither documentary nor fiction, but a ‘musical film,’ a setting of a happening/scene (*mise en scene*), with one continuity: the historical route of the Gypsies from India to Egypt,”¹⁹ it has been misidentified as a documentary by many critics and viewers despite its heavy interpretational liberties and loose connection to history. The film, which is entitled “safe journey” in Romani, follows the path of Roma migration from India throughout Eastern and Western Europe. *Latcho Drom* includes very little text or speech, and the film is centered almost entirely around the musical practices that it documents. As the film follows the path of the Roma from India through Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, France, and Spain, local Roma populations are filmed singing and dancing to traditional Romani music, positioning the Roma as a universally marginalized community that shares inherent musicality as a unifying trait across Roma groups throughout Europe. The numerous locations of Romani musicians highlight the adaptability of Roma to new culture and new musical styles, while emphasizing that they still often remain outsiders within these communities. According to Habiba Hadziavdic “The contemporary Gypsy music is the music adopted and interpreted from the tradition of the country in which the flexible and adaptable Gypsies live.”²⁰ The differing songs and musical styles in each of the film’s locations exemplify this adaptation while highlighting the underlying similarities rooted in historical traditions. The lack of dialogue also places the journey and the music of the group at the forefront -- positing that Romani music

¹⁹ David Malvinni, “The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music and Film,” *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 177.

²⁰ Habiba Hadziavdic, “The Construct “Gypsy”. Nomads and Entertainers: From Circus to the Early Silent Films,” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2006), 115.

alone is enough to encompass the overarching similarities of the complexly diverse and elaborate cultures the film presents.

Because the sole communication in the film is through visuals and music, Roma are essentialized first as a group of musicians, while any other cultural identifier is presented as secondary to this. While many other aspects of Roma society are often condemned within European social discourses as acts of laziness, theft, and greed by outsiders, Roma music is viewed positively, as the essence of their creative and fantastical side. Gatlif aims to portray Roma to a sympathetic audience in his film, so the musicality of Roma as they move from India to Europe is highlighted. However, by solely depicting traveling musicians in the film without explaining the pressures that contributed to nomadism and entertainment as defining characteristics of Romani culture, Gatlif limits the Roma to a group of fluid and musical nomads rather than fully including a variety of their cultural and professional practices. As David Malvinni states “[The] film purports to give us Gypsies, and especially Gypsy music, when in fact...what it gives us are one-sided Western stereotypes about Gypsies and their music, while simultaneously forgetting the sometimes harsh political and economic reality of Roma life.”²¹ Thus, the film continues to portray a romanticized picture of Romani life through the guise of a cultural documentary, reinforced in part by its apparent authenticity via Gatlif’s “insider perspective” through his distant Romani heritage.

In each musical scene depicted in *Latcho Drom*, the act of singing and the musical characteristics of Romani songs -- the melody, rhythm, and structure -- as well as the meaning of the words in the lyrics, convey the sadness of the Roma resulting from their persecution. Music is therefore used as a means of finding solace, comfort, and community within an unwelcoming

²¹ Malvinni, “The Gypsy Caravan,” 164.

place. This musical community is presented as one that spans several countries and eras. Though the film focuses on the music of the Roma, the musical selections in the first few locations (India and Egypt) do not depict Romani singers, but instead depict traditional dancer and singers of those areas, with the assumption that these groups have the same musical practices as the Romani groups who left India hundreds of years ago, and belong to the transnational heritage of “Gypsiness”. While this juxtaposition draws interesting parallels between the groups, it is important to note that these groups are not definitively related to the Roma, a misinterpretation that could easily be made given the lack of text or narration in the film along with its position as a quasi-documentary. According to scholar David Malvinni “The idea of “Gypsy music” seems to assume a universal quality of *Gypsiness* in the musics played by Gypsies throughout the world...”²² This rings true in the film even when these communities are not truly Roma, but simply Gypsy-esque, with musical practices that are similar enough that they are conflated, indicating a sense of community with other Roma-identifying groups thousands of miles away.

As a call for recognition of Roma suffering and marginalization, *Latcho Drom* has been interpreted by viewers as a documentary-style art house production that aims to make a powerful and moving socio-political statement about the treatment of Roma as a minority group throughout Europe, rather than a film made for commercial success. However, though well-intentioned, Gatlif’s depiction is somewhat problematic and overly simplistic in that it condemns the negative stereotyping of Roma by European majority groups while steadfastly upholding the Romani stereotype of musicality as the sole symbol of the group as a whole. While this initially seems like a solely positive generalization, it can also be damaging because it does not portray

²² Malvinni, “The Gypsy Caravan,” 187.

Romani as diverse and multifaceted beyond the musical realm. Roma culture in reality extends far beyond the musical, which represents only a portion of their societal and cultural life.

Another of Tony Gatlif's films, *Gadjo Dilo* (1997), is presented as a drama rather than a documentary, but contains many similar themes surrounding music and displacement also prevalent in *Latcho Drom*. *Gadjo Dilo* employs humorous and satirical self-critique within the emotional complexity of its main character, Stephane. In the film, a young Frenchman, Stephane, travels to a small Romani village in rural Romania in search of a singer, Nora Luca, who his father recorded singing many years earlier. As Stephane knows neither Romani nor Romanian, and the Roma he encounters do not know French, communicating about why he has come and who and what he is looking for is initially very difficult. Though the village is suspicious of him and his motives at first -- in an act of subverting the negative stereotypes of theft commonly associated with Roma, they are worried that he may steal valuables or women from their village - he is soon welcomed and taken under the wing of Izidor, whose own son was recently arrested. Stephane is idolized for his Western-ness by Izidor, and to some extent the rest of the villagers, many of whom are fascinated by his foreignness and falsely believe that he comes from a country that is much more accepting of Romani. Stephane stays in the village for many months, and though he eventually learns some of the language and begins to communicate more easily with his surrounding neighbors, he is still unable to determine the whereabouts of Nora Luca. To this end, during his questioning regarding Nora Luca's location, the Roma in the village continuously tell him that they know where she is and will take Stephane to her, but frequently go back on this promise, leading him to some other event where she is not present.

Eventually, after many months without success, Stephane abandons his goal of recording Nora Luca specifically, and instead plans to create new recordings of the Roma whom he has

befriended in the village. In Stephane's search for a truly authentic representation of Roma music, he attempts to control the recording he facilitates and create these recordings perfectly pristine and free from outside interfering noises or interruptions. Stephane learns, however, that "...dancing, singing or social events such as weddings and mourning rituals are inseparable from the lyrics of the songs that he discovers."²³ His expectation of musical purity detracts from the authenticity of his recordings rather than maintaining it, because it is not genuine to the settings in which Roma perform music -- the music never takes place in a perfectly prepared recording studio or space in which the audience is completely silent. While looking for purity of sound and musical authenticity in his recording, Stephane reprimands Sabine, a local Romani woman and his lover, for getting too immersed in the music -- dancing and singing along and interfering with his recording. This scene reinforces Stephane's position as an outsider (despite learning the language and being welcomed into Izidor's home) because his paternalistic attitude toward obtaining an immaculately polished representation of Roma music and culture is presented in stark contrast to the reality of the variances and unpolished nature of the community he lives in and the music he records. The music is not only important for its auditory aesthetics, but for its performative function within the community, something that Stephane does not realize.

Ultimately, after an altercation with the neighboring non-Romani townspeople involving Izidor's son, Adriani (after he return from jail), the whole Roma village is burned to the ground by angry *gadje* Romanians. In despair at the hatred and destruction that caused this event, Stephane destroys the tapes of the musical performances that he has compiled, realizing finally that the whole of Roma culture cannot be captured in a few recordings, and that to present his

²³ Mirielle Rosello, "French-Romani Dialogues in Gadjo Dilo: Who Teaches European Languages and Minority Cultures?," *European Studies: A Journal of European Culture, History and Politics* 29, no.17 (2012): 315.

few recordings in France as representative of the entirety of Romani culture -- or even just of the culture of the single village he lived in -- would be harmful in its oversimplification. This ending moral, reinforcing the complexity of Roma culture and warning against essentializing a group to a narrow set of stereotypes, can also be extended to the film as a whole and Gatlif's own presentation of the fictional story. The audience, too, is drawn into Stephane's realization, and experiences a revelation of their own along with him. As Andrew McGregor states, "Stéphane's destructive act is the supreme assertion of his respect for the Roma and of their value, and an accusation and a rejection of himself. As viewers, we are also jolted into recognition."²⁴ As sympathetic viewers to Stephane as the protagonist, the audience likely complicitly approved of his actions throughout the film and did not question his ability to record and preserve Roma music as an outsider. When this naivety is ultimately disrupted, the viewer then shares Stephane's guilt in misunderstanding and misrepresenting the culture he was trying to depict in a respectful way. However, this guilt extends not only to the viewer, but to the filmmaker as well, who has similarly blundered in his one-sided portrayal of the Roma as musicians. While Stephane cannot capture the entirety of Roma music in a few recordings, Gatlif also cannot capture the entirety of Romani musical culture in one film (especially one in which the actors portraying Romani characters are largely not of Romani descent). This is even further supported by the music chosen to be used for the soundtrack of the film, which is not "authentic" (as defined by Stephane) Roma musicians recorded in the field, but music mediated through Gatlif's preferences and perspective.

While both Stephane, within the framework of the film, and Gatlif across the entirety of its creation try to portray Romani musical culture accurately, surprisingly, much of the music

²⁴ McGregor, "French Cinema in Exile," 81.

Gatlif used for the soundtrack of the film was composed and arranged by Gatlif himself. In the following quote, Gatlif expands on his views of Romani music, discussing both the unique emotional intensity and spirit of it as well as its rough crudeness in his eyes.

It's music which expresses the fear and pain of a people whose soul is hurt. That's why Gypsy music is beautiful. Otherwise it's 'anything goes,' full of false notes, the instruments are put together with whatever's on hand. But their music is the cry of pain, an ancestral pain which comes from the soul of a whole nation of people. That is its strength and its beauty. It is pure revolt, nothing is fabricated, all is unleashed. And that, in effect, is how I had imagined the film [*Gadjo Dilo*]" (interview with director Tony Gatlif).²⁵

This attitude of finding harsh beauty in the unrefined music of the Roma reinforces both the unprofessionalism associated with Roma musicians and the association of Roma musicians with natural untrained talent -- a form of virtuosic improvisation that is antithetical to Western ideals of musical composition and consistency. This trait is both exoticized for its uniqueness, and also looked down upon as less sophisticated and somewhat primitive. As Habiba Hadziavdic comments "[The] magical and irmate (sic) talent of Sinti and Roma for playing musical instruments (a pick-up-and-play principle) stands in sharp contrast to the assumed absence of such abilities among non-Gypsies."²⁶ Roma are admired for their unique and irreplicable musical skills, but these abilities are not consistent with Western standards of musical training and performance, and are viewed as lesser forms of art because of it. While Gatlif wished to accurately portray Roma life and music through his film and display its unbridled freedom, he also desired to present a polished and perfected version that captures the free and wild spirit while maintaining a well-edited and produced musical score. In this way, Gatlif's own strategies for composing and recording the music for the film also mirror Stephane's attempts to have a

²⁵ McGregor, "French Cinemas in Exile," 79.

²⁶ Hadziavdic, "The Construct 'Gypsy'," 22.

“perfect” recording of Gypsy music. Gatlif, in editing and polishing the music used in his film according to his own preferences, displays these exact stereotypes, as authentic recordings seemed too rough and raw to him for the purposes of his film. Whether Gatlif’s employment of the strategies of composition he criticizes his own characters for using is hypocrisy or a self-aware meta-critique is hard to discern. Regardless, the multilayered use of musical recordings both within the soundtrack and as a central plot point contributes to the discourse surrounding representations of Roma and the social commentary presented within the film.

In *Gadjo Dilo* (similarly to *Latcho Drom*), Gatlif positions the Roma as victims of persecution by the non-Roma majorities in the countries they reside in (in the case of this film, Romania), urging the viewer to sympathize with the plight of the Romani and the mistreatment of Roma within European society as a whole. This animosity between the Roma and the Romanians is represented in *Gadjo Dilo* through the arrest of Izidor’s son by the *gadje* police and the eventual torching of the Roma community due to this disagreement, resulting in the death of Adriani. The beginning and end of the film are framed by these acts of discriminatory violence, while the central plot of the story works to dispel the viewers’ identification with the perpetrators and familiarize them with Roma culture and daily life. However, the effectiveness of Gatlif’s message, or the authenticity of his motives are not always clearly anti-marginalization. As Andrew McGregor states, rather than providing a poignant and thoughtful critique of Westerner’s assumptions and views about the Roma, Gatlif instead plays into the expectations and desires of his Western audience who expect to see a film that “offers momentary cultural ‘titillation’ – a brief, often humorous filmic ‘experience’ of an otherwise potentially destabilizing cultural ‘other’ that both excites Western viewers and secures them in a reassuring position of

conventional orientalist centrality.”²⁷ Gatlif portrays a side of Romani culture that is less simplistic than many other film which narrowly depict Romani as minor characters who act as stand-ins for the culture as a whole -- morally questionable performers and entertainers (either dancing, playing musical instruments, or telling fortunes) who are likely to steal and double-cross any non-Roma. *Gadjo Dilo* still, however, upholds the musical centrality that many non-Romani associate with all Romani peoples. Very few social and cultural issues beyond a generalized sense of animosity and marginalization and the importance of music are addressed, reinforcing rather than dispelling assumptions that music is the preferred and natural livelihood for Romani people. This solidifies Roma as a performative group permanently seen as outsiders catering to the entertainment expectations of their audience, but never fully integrating into the societies around them, either in the workforce or in more social settings, rather than working to challenge these portrayals.

Emir Kusturica: Time of the Gypsies and Black Cat, White Cat

Another prominent Eastern European filmmaker, Emir Kusturica, also directed several films that extensively portray Romani characters and life in ways that expand upon previously developed themes surrounding Roma. These include *Time of the Gypsies [Dom za vešanje]* (1988) and *Black Cat, White Cat [Crna mačka, beli mačor]* (1998). Kusturica, a Serbian-born filmmaker, does not claim any personal Romani, but like Gatlif he also comes from a self-proclaimed marginalized past growing up in Yugoslavia. A past that, as Nikolina Dobрева states, is similar to Gatlif’s “in the manner in which they have promoted their public image as rebel

²⁷ McGregor, “French Cinema in Exile,” 76.

outsiders driven by music.”²⁸ Much of both of their work focuses on socially marginalized groups living on the fringes of society, reflecting their own personal cultural backgrounds. Similar to Gatlif’s cinematographic style, Kusturica’s Roma-centric films heavily rely on music as a base identifier that serves to instantly legitimize the “Gypsiness” of the films’ content and authenticity. Kusturica, however, does not primarily portray Roma as marginalized victims who resort to theft and petty crime only as a response to this marginalization, like Gatlif does. Instead, Kusturica emphasizes the supposedly fundamental criminal nature of the Roma. In his films, Kusturica portrays plots and storylines surrounding intrigue, betrayal, and mob bosses similar in persona to the American mafia and American gangster movies, often subtly referencing specific American movies throughout his films and reinforcing the idea that the Roma live outside of the law with their own unique perspectives and customs regarding morally acceptable activities.

In Kusturica’s first Roma- related film, *Time of the Gypsies*, the main protagonist, Perhan, is taken on a comedic journey of love, betrayal, magic and confusion. The film provides significantly less overt social commentary than Tony Gatlif’s films, instead satisfying viewers’ expectations without any judgement or accusation of them. Employing significant amounts of magical realism, the film exploits the mysticism attached to Roma culture to interweave elements of impossibility and magic with Roma culture, further deepening the divide between the viewer and the “other” of Roma-ness, portraying Roma as so separate from mundane life that they exist within communities in which magical powers are both believable and commonplace. In *Time of the Gypsies*, Perhan displays telekinetic tendencies throughout his life. These telekinetic powers add a flair of the mystical and mysterious to the film that reinforces assumptions about the otherness of Roma and their unusual practices and powers, and positions the film as a light

²⁸ Dobрева, “The Curse of the Traveling Dancer,” 165.

comedy rather than a serious drama. As Nikolina Dobрева states “[Time of the Gypsies] continues to characterize Gypsies as exotic beings who, grounded though they may be in contemporary reality, nonetheless seem to transcend it.”²⁹ Roma are frequently reinforced as outsiders through the plot points, character development, and interactions with non-Roma. For example, at the beginning of the film, Perhan falls in love with his neighbor, but is seen as an unacceptable suitor because his father was a *gadjo* soldier, making him half-*gadje* and therefore not a complete insider in the Roma community. Later in the film, Perhan is coerced into a life of crime by the leader of a network of beggars and thieves, Ahmed. Perhan eventually discovers that Ahmed has deceived him and he becomes disillusioned with the criminal lifestyle, returning home to his grandmother and his now-pregnant girlfriend. Perhan does not believe the child is his own, however, and contemplates killing the baby because of this. In conjunction with the previously depicted illegal and double crossing dealings of Perhan and Ahmed, these events once again integrate and normalize the stereotype of Roma as unlawful and immoral.

Musical stereotypes of Roma are upheld through the centrality of music to the important events and celebrations within the Roma community, whether they are joyful or mournful. A band of Romani musicians plays both when Perhan leaves with his sister to the hospital, and in the multiple wedding scenes, symbolizing emotional change in a variety of significant situations. Similarly, Perhan frequently turns to his accordion during times of stress. Perhan reveals that he intends to buy his son an accordion to continue with the tradition of accordion playing, but this is ultimately not possible, because Perhan is later killed. However, this wish gives symbolic significance to the accordion as an instrument and the musical traditions it represents. After Perhan’s untimely death, his son later steals the coins from Perhan’s eyes at his funeral,

²⁹ Dobрева, “the Curse of the Traveling Dancer,” 171.

indicating once more the “natural” (according to Kusturica’s presentation) tendency toward theft, even at a young age. Throughout the film, greed, revenge, and petty crime are commonplace and central to the characters and the way in which their social society functions. As scholar Habiba Hadziavdic argues “[T]he so-called positive images of Gypsies as musicians often function along the same lines as overtly racist depictions of Gypsies as criminals, child-traffickers, beggars, and fortune-tellers.”³⁰ This is clear in *Time of the Gypsies*, where Kusturica employs both these overtly racist themes of criminal activity and the more seemingly positive themes of music alongside one another.

Music that is sonically evocative of the magic and mysticism of the film’s structure as a whole is also prevalent throughout. This is especially apparent in dream sequences, such as the ethereal depiction of Perhan impregnating his girlfriend in a dream, resulting in her real pregnancy in the world outside of the dream. In another scene, Perhan’s girlfriend dies during childbirth, and the accompanying song, entitled *Ederlezi*, incorporates otherworldly-sounding vocals with a slow and steady beat, reinforcing the ritualistic and supernatural visuals associated with Perhan’s marriage and his wife’s death, as well as the magical realism interspersed within the film. The song used in this scene, *Ederlezi*, is a popular traditional Romani folk song, and would be familiar to many viewers and further contextualize the story within the narrative of historic and folkloric Roma figures. In addition to accompanying scenes of tragedy and mysticism, music is also used to reinforce comedic scenes. This adds an air of lightness to the story and contributes to the farcical atmosphere of the framing and presentation of the film, despite its unhappy plot and bleak outcomes for the majority of the characters, many of whom are killed in dramatic ways. The film’s diverse soundtrack was composed by Goran Bregović, an

³⁰ Hadziavdic, “The Construct ‘Gypsy’,” 9.

internationally famous Bosnian musician known for incorporating a variety of styles, including traditional music of the Balkans as well as some Romani-influenced music, into his work. According to Nikolina Dobрева “Although not of Romani origin himself, Bregović is, however, familiar with a wide variety of ethnic musical styles in the Balkans and has been able to synthesize them into a unique and popular blend.”³¹ Thus, Bregović’s (a non-Romani) interpretations of Romani music act as the voice for Romani culture, much like the use of non-Romani actors to portray the characters causes those faces to represent the face of the hidden Romani community, continuing the long legacy of depictions of Roma that have had little input or contribution from the group itself, easily leading these depictions to be stereotypical and one-sided.

In another of Kusturica’s films focused on Roma, *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998), many of the themes present in his earlier film, *Time of Gypsies*, are referenced, reimagined, and expanded upon. Much of the magical realism present in *Time of the Gypsies* extends into the creative world of *Black Cat, White Cat*, further normalizing the stereotypes Kusturica presents of magic, crime, and music in Roma culture as a truism rather than a fictional representation based on fantasies and fallacies. An accordion also plays an important role in the plot of *Black Cat, White Cat*, once again as a mode for trans-generational cultural legacy. In a reflection of Perhan’s desire to connect with his son through purchasing and teaching him accordion in *Time of the Gypsies*, in *Black Cat, White Cat*, the main character’s grandfather plays an accordion as an outlet to relieve stress in times of familial tension, and hides his entire fortune inside the accordion. Eventually, the grandfather passes on the accordion and the money within it to his grandson in the last scene

³¹ Dobрева, “The Curse of the Traveling Dancer,” 173.

of the film as an act of love, a similar variation on the father-son accordion bonding scene in *Time of the Gypsies*.

In *Black Cat, White Cat*, the protagonist, a young teenager named Zare, is persuaded into aiding his father in various get-rich-quick schemes, often involving stolen or smuggled goods. Every time, however, his father is tricked by the man he works with, Dadan, a well-to-do gangster evocative in his characteristics and actions of American mob bosses. The film involves a variety of hijinks, humor, romance, and betrayal, aligning with Kusturica's depictions in *Time of the Gypsies* of Roma as criminals. As usual for films depicting Roma, music plays a significant role in the plot and in the portrayal of the Roma characters. The music in *Black Cat, White Cat* was written by a different composer than Kusturica used for *Time of the Gypsies*, but one who, unsurprisingly, is also a non-Roma. *Black Cat, White Cat's* soundtrack was written by Nele Karajlić, a member of a Bosnian band with Kusturica entitled "Zabranjeno Pušenje", or "Non-Smoking Orchestra". In one scene in the film, Zare goes to visit his grandfather in the hospital and brings along an entire Gypsy band, which accompanies them as they orchestrate an over the top exit from the hospital, complete with a parting voyage in a tiny boat with the numerous musicians also onboard.

Throughout the film, the musical accompaniment is often absurd and extravagant, pairing well with the tongue-in-cheek satirical atmosphere of the film's narrative involving several converging plotlines and dramatic turns of event. Like many other films depicting Roma, a mouth harp is used for scenes of comedy and travel, adding a dynamic feel of motion and energy to the scenes along with humor and chaos. Traditional Roma bands featuring accordions, strings, and other instruments are interspersed with more current popular rock inspired music, which the gangster leader Dadan frequently listens to in his car and home. This heavy driving music

sharply contrasts to the slow polkas of the Roma band as scenes cut from one parallel plotline to another. In one scene, a rather large opera singer belts out an exaggeratedly emotional song as she removes a nail from a post behind her with her large backside. As the film progresses, multiple gangsters cross paths in their attempts to gain money, and Zare becomes involved in this deep mess of political and social ties throughout the film. Through Zare's misfortune and the ineptitude of his deadbeat father, he eventually is forced to marry the sister of mob boss Dadan, an arrangement he is displeased with because he is already in love with his neighbor, Ida. However, against the will of Zare and his new bride, Afrodita, the wedding proceeds, complete with extravagant displays of food, wealth, and flamboyant musical numbers. During the ceremony, Dadan makes a point to insist that his sister *must* dance during the festivities to make the marriage legitimate, solidifying the status of music and dance as integral parts of the Roma social and familial culture.³² This scene explicitly references expectations of musical ability both within the Roma community and from outsiders projecting their own expectations onto what they believe the value of music should be for Roma music practitioners.

After significant drama and confusion, including two seemingly dead old men (one of whom is Zare's accordion-playing grandfather), everything is put back to right. Importantly, before the "death" of Zare's grandfather, the grandfather promises Zare that he will prevent his wedding to Afrodita and begins to play his accordion while chanting cryptically "the dead with the dead, the living with the living" as the camera spins around him and he closes his eyes, appearing dead. In the end, the grandfather is somehow revived, though how he came back to life is never explained, and the wedding is prevented. Zare marries his love Ida, and Afrodita marries the son of Grga, another powerful mob boss and friend of Zare's grandfather. This second,

³² Dobрева, "The Curse of the Traveling Dancer," 175.

happier, double wedding also includes many scenes of dancing and music to celebrate the now truly deserved festivities. It is during this ending scene that Zare is given the accordion by his grandfather, an important symbolic gesture because of the accordion's large role in initiating the happy ending. After receiving the accordion, Zare rows away on a boat with his new wife playing it, and as he plays he discovers that his grandfather's fortune was hidden inside the accordion all along. Throughout the film, Zare's father complains about his own father's fortune and his belief that it should be passed on to him, so the gift of the accordion, and therefore the money, to Zare is indicative of his grandfather's appreciation for his comparative level-headedness and lack of greed (contrasting with the majority of Zare's Roma counterparts). This action highlights the idea that monetary gain and music are therefore both two of the most prized possessions of the Roma and are central to their culture, reasserting themes that were frequently referenced throughout the film.

While Russian and Eastern European films have their own specific way of representing Roma on the screen, informed by the everyday interactions and presence of Roma within the daily lives of many Eastern Europeans, the depictions of Roma in Western Europe and the United States are rooted even more deeply in the romantic literary representations of Roma from the early 19th century. This is primarily because Roma comprise an incredibly small minority within American society (and to a lesser extent Western European society as well) that is almost entirely invisible with the public consciousness. This shifts the Western expectations of what Roma culture entails from one based on racial and economically motivated social factors alongside the literary romantic influences, to one that is almost purely romanticized. Roma culture, and the word "Gypsy" is viewed as synonymous with a nomadic and free-spirited "Bohemian" lifestyle and a canonical literary image rather than with Roma as a visibly present

ethnic minority. Because of this, there are fewer depictions of Roma in contemporary settings in the American and Western European films. Instead, Roma appear primarily in historical dramas focused on the romantic period, reasserting 19th century literary depictions of Roma fortune-tellers and musicians in travelling camps. With the exception of the reality TV show, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (which has several seasons both in the UK and the US), recent American films primarily depict Roma in this historical rather than contemporary light, choosing to ignore current issues of racism and representation within a contemporary framework. Examples of this include the American Disney film (an adaptation of Victor Hugo's 1831 novel) *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), the 1998 drama *The Red Violin*, and the 2011 film *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*.

WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

The Red Violin

The film *The Red Violin*, which centers its plot around the travels and “life” of a fictionally famous and prized violin, deeply examines the role of music in the lives of many different individuals and cultures over a large period of time, spanning from the violin's tragic beginnings in 1681 to its purchase at an auction in 1997. The Red Violin travels between owners, from a luthier in Italy, to an orphan in Vienna, a group of Roma traveling to the United Kingdom, a concert violinist in England, and a woman during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, until it is put up for auction for millions of dollars in Montreal. Surprisingly, despite comprising almost a third of the time in the film's chronology (nearly 100 years between the late 18th and 19th centuries), this section of the film in which the Roma have possession of the violin constitutes only a few minutes of the film's entire length. Despite its brevity, the Roma section

manages to reference many of the aforementioned marginalizing stereotypes surrounding Roma - theft and crime, natural music talent, and a wandering lifestyle. The scene begins with a desecrated grave and the camera quickly pans to the grave robbers who committed the crime and pilfered the Red Violin -- a group of Roma. The film then presents several generations of Roma playing the violin, all as they walk along roads with their caravan or playing around campfires with varying scenery -- mountains, pastures, forests, and ocean journeys -- as a backdrop to the music.

After this quick transition spanning a large number of locations and years, the violin is taken from a Romani woman by a wealthy landowner and violinist, Frederick Pope, in England. Pope allows the group to stay on his land in exchange for the violin, which he feels inexplicably drawn to after hearing a Romani woman playing. In a flashback in which a fortuneteller explains the story of the violin to its maker in 1681, the fortuneteller draws the card of the devil at this point in the story, indicating that Pope's talents are drawn from sinister and diabolic sources. This reference alludes to the comparable story of the historical figure of Paganini, a man who allegedly sold his soul to the devil to gain his astonishing violin technique.³³ With the Red Violin in hand, Pope has immense success in his subsequent performances, playing virtuosically in front of adoring audiences. Pope finds inspiration in his compositions first from his English mistress, Victoria, and later from the Gypsy woman he obtained the violin from, who becomes his lover as well. In a fit of jealousy, Victoria shoots the neck of the violin when she returns and finds Frederick with the Gypsy woman. Consequently, Frederick takes his life soon afterwards, allowing the violin to be passed on to its next owner in China. It is notable that, rather than shooting Pope, as one would expect to happen in cases of infidelity, Victoria chooses to shoot the

³³ Malvinni, "The Gypsy Caravan," 175.

violin instead, opting to destroy Pope's musical livelihood and soul rather than his corporeal form.

The role of the Roma characters within this section of the film is clearly secondary to the genius of the English violinist Frederick Pope. The Roma as a group are used purely for the purpose of transition between portions of the film, and are shown briefly in transit, without the solidly grounded plots of the Western (Italy, Austria, England) or Eastern (China) parts of the film. The Roma scenes act as a bridge between the violin's owners, with no speech present in the traveling Roma montage -- only music. Additionally, the female Romani violinist is reduced to no more than a sexual object, implicitly reinforcing the believed seductiveness of Roma women. She acts as an inspirational muse for Pope's talent, but has no musical agency of her own, despite appearing to be a gifted player when she is first introduced to the viewer (and Pope). While every other person who has ownership of the violin in the film possesses immense talent and inspiration, none of the Roma characters visibly displays this quality while maintaining ownership over the instrument. Throughout the generations of ownership, the Roma players all appear to be naturally talented to some degree, but not to level of ingenuity of Pope or of many of the previous or subsequent owners. While the Roma are depicted solely through music, their musical individuality never reaches the level of many of the other players throughout the film. The Roma sustain a quality of raw natural talent, but a talent that can never reach the level of a true prodigy like the young Austrian boy who owned the violin before the Roma, or English virtuoso who owned it after them. Though Pope drew his own inspiration in part from the Roma and from the alluring Roma woman, his talent was deemed greater and more awe-inspiring overall than any of the Roma instrumentalists. While Pope continued to be a well-known and respected musician long after his death, the unnamed Roma musicians were quickly lost into the

obscurity of time. Thus, within the framework of the film, Roma musicians are shown to be inspiring and naturally talented trade musicians, but ultimately, in comparison with other musicians like Pope who are more sophisticated and polished in their performances, they are deemed amateurs.

Notably, the score for *The Red Violin* was created before the script for the film itself, and therefore played a fundamental role in the essence of the film's inception, deeply motivating the journey of the violin and the characters associated with it. The film's score was composed by John Corigliano, and the violin solos were performed by Joshua Bell, a prodigy in his own time. While much of the music was meticulously researched and composed, the source music does not uphold historical accuracy. According to scholar David Malvinni "His [Corigliano's] background music is masterful...[but] according to a musicological standard of "authenticity," the source music (so-called "diegetic" [sic]music), by contrast, is a catastrophe."³⁴ One illustration of this lack of attention to possible anachronisms or inaccuracies is found in the Roma travel sequence, in which the Roma players (Joshua Bell playing continuously as many generations of Roma are shown) perform a solo mournful and passionate cadenza. The cadenza has few similarities in melody or rhythm to Roma music that would be representative of the time and place it was performed, and was composed by Corigliano with little source influence.³⁵ Additionally, the instrumentation is in no way reflective of the actors and instrumentalists depicted onscreen. Though the scene depicts a solo violinist, and later more instrumentalists, the music that the viewer actually hears includes differing instrumentation (accordions that are seen and not heard and a clarinet that is heard and not seen, for example). This implies that while the Gypsy musicians play an important role in setting the scene of the violin's legacy as deeply

³⁴ Malvinni, "The Gypsy Caravan," 174.

³⁵ Ibid., 176.

creative and richly historic, the Roma musicians as individuals are not deemed significant enough to characterize accurately or thoroughly.

Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows

In another recent British-American film that is less centrally focused on music but still involves Roma within a historical setting, the 2011 action drama *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, Romani characters are briefly incorporated. A Romani Carmen-like fortunetelling character, Simza, aids Sherlock and Watson in their adventure. Additionally, there is also a brief scene that takes place in a Gypsy camp, which adds to the intrigue and drama of the film. The Roma are initially introduced into the film in a bar setting, where Sherlock has his fortune told by a young attractive Romani woman, Simza. It is soon revealed that Sherlock knows that the woman is in danger, and that she is inadvertently connected through her brother to a group of anarchists who are involved in a terrorist plot (this is an unlikely scenario, but the assumption that Roma are criminal is referenced once again). A Cossack assassin then drops from the rafters, attempting to murder Simza, but after an intense fight scene in which it appears that the Cossack assassin is an invincibly skilled fighter, he falls into a river and Simza and Sherlock escape alive. This scene, which incorporates not one, but two exoticized Eastern European groups (Cossacks and Roma), exemplifies the epitome of exploitation of the groups for romantic, exotic, and dramatic effect. As the scene unfolds, a frantically fiddled version of an Irish reel plays in the background -- a piece that captures the spirit of improvisatory folk music that is in some ways like Roma music, but is distinctly Irish rather than Romani. The song is a representation of the frenzied and free spirit of the characters and scene rather than an attempt to remain historically accurate to the ethnicity of the characters present or to situate the characters within an accurate

cultural setting. After this scene, Sherlock and Watson then travel with Simza to a Gypsy camp, which aligns flawlessly with the viewer's expectation of what a "Gypsy camp" should look like - with numerous caravans, clothes out to dry on the line, and several grimy looking children and adults milling around, some playing instruments.

Upon arrival at the Gypsy camp, Watson's scarf is immediately stolen from him. While they are there, Holmes and Watson continue to participate in a variety of unusual and colorful "Gypsy-esque" activities -- consuming hedgehog goulash, drinking, and dancing along with the Roma as they play music (a composition entitled "Romanian Wind") around a campfire. This setting depicts with accuracy the subversive, eccentric, exciting, and somewhat dirty lifestyle that many viewers unfamiliar with Roma would expect to see. Though the Roma are only depicted briefly in the film, all of the classic stereotypes one would expect to find in a mainstream film incorporating Roma are present -- a seductive Roma woman, music and dancing around a campfire in a traveling Roma camp, unsavory Roma men involved in criminal activities, and a glimpse into an alluringly free lifestyle. Despite these obvious overgeneralizations and lack of adherence to reality, the soundtrack, composed by Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer, is actually heavily influenced by authentic Romani music. In his compositional process, Zimmer made a concerted effort to accurately research and integrate Romani influenced-music, traveling to Slovakia to learn firsthand about the music he wished to emulate. Zimmer said about his experience "I went there to find musicians we can work with. Not out of a sense of authenticity, partly because of inspiration, and partly because every time I heard a recording from these people, it just sounded different, it sounded like stuff I couldn't do

in Hollywood or London.”³⁶ Zimmer incorporated two Romani bands, *Cigánski baróni* and *Kokavakere Lavutára - Sendreiovci*, into the soundtrack, adding cultural legitimacy at least to the musicians incorporated in the soundtrack, if not to the dramatic depictions in the film itself. While films like *The Red Violin* to some extent attempt to maintain historical accuracy throughout their depictions in films, and films by aforementioned Eastern Europe such as Kusturica and Gatlif put even greater effort into achieving “authentic” representations, Roma in *Sherlock Holmes* are used more as an aside -- adding to the general sense of adventure, humor, and engaging action in a high-spirited jaunt -- rather than contributing to key plot points or themes. This visual and thematic portrayal contrasts heavily with the depth of care and scrutiny put into upholding cultural and ethnic authenticity through the instrumentalists and musical compositions.

Big Fat Gypsy Wedding

In even further diversion from depicting truth in favor of light entertainment when displaying Roma themes, the British reality television show *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* (2010), along with the American spinoff, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* (2012), depicts modern Roma in a wholly implausible light. The television show claims to follow the real-life wedding preparations of Irish Travellers and Romanichal in the United Kingdom and the United States respectively, as they aim to continue a life in line with their “traditional” Romani values. However, the show has gained significant criticism from Romani communities in the UK and the US, as well as non-Romani scholars, who say the show misrepresents Romani life and

³⁶ Jordan Zakarin, “Hans Zimmer’s Roma Collaboration For ‘Sherlock Homes Game of Shadows Score,’” *Huffington Post* (2011), accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/08/hans-zimmer-roma-sherlock-holmes-2_n_1133058.html.

encourages racist stereotypes that are based on depictions by characters who are non-Romani actors personifying and speaking for the real Romani community. Reflecting unrealistic depictions of groups outside of the mainstream throughout the genre of reality television, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* and its British counterpart feature manufactured reality for the sake of light entertainment. What makes depictions such as this especially damaging beyond the standard fake-real reality television, is that groups like the Roma have limited visibility or representation in American and British society already. The depictions of Roma through these shows may be all some viewers know about contemporary Roma, and this only serves to further entrench damaging and incorrect stereotypes into the public consciousness in the United States and United Kingdom, where no other more respectful or accurate representations are widely available.

In *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*, Roma are portrayed as low-class, gaudy, and overtly sexual. Each episode centers around a wedding or a party in which young Romani girls look for potential husbands. The episodes open with a character discussing traditional Romanichal culture, usually highlighting the gender roles within their households -- women spend the majority of their time in the house cleaning and taking care of the children, and men as breadwinners (many have careers in manual labor). As the episodes unfold, young girls, usually between 14 and 17, gush over potential husbands and occasionally elope with them, creating drama especially if they are non-Roma, or “Gorger”, as the characters call them. In the show, the image of Roma as musicians is less prominent than in many European and historical films. Instead, the show focuses on the Romani in the US and the UK more or less a minority group comprised entirely of blue collar workers who spend beyond their means, lavishly wasting money they do not have on tacky displays of wealth, while maintaining backward traditions

involving gender norms, sexualization of young teenagers, and an excessive amount of familial conflict. However, the importance of dance still remains prevalent, and every episode of the show incorporates a dance as it's central activity, either at a wedding or at a community dance designed to match young girls with potential husbands.

The soundtrack for the American and British versions of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* features "Gypsy"-sounding music from a variety of cultures, as well as classical compositions inspired by Roma tunes, such as Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, which is featured in nearly every episode in some varying arrangement with a variety of instrumentations. The composer and arranger of the soundtrack of the both the American and British version of the show, Ian Livingstone, is a popular television and video composer, and has composed for a wide variety of genres. However, Livingstone has no Roma ancestry or connection to Roma culture, further making it apparent that absolutely no one involved in the show has any true insider knowledge about how and what should truly be portrayed about the Roma people. Shows like *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* are absurdly inaccurate and their relationship to the real daily life and culture of Roma is barely apparent. However, with the popularity of shows like this and their numerous spin-offs, and the relative scarcity of accurately respectful representation of Roma in the media, audiences' perceptions of the Roma are mediated almost entirely through these falsehoods, or tamer versions of these stereotypes as illustrated in the previous films.

PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES

ROMA AS NOMADS

Several themes regarding Roma and Roma culture are displayed throughout each of the aforementioned films and television, shedding light onto attitudes toward Roma within popular media. The motif of Roma as travelers without a homeland is one such theme that reappears throughout many of the films discussed. This is exemplified most obviously in Emil Loteanu's *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, in *The Red Violin*, and in Tony Gatlif's *Latcho Drom*. In *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, the prevailing conflict within the characters' romance surrounds independence and movement. The life of contrast, transition, and movement in traveling camps projects an association with freedom, spontaneity, and autonomy. Both of the primary characters, Rada and Zobar, are fiercely resistant to the possibility of being tied down -- either to a stationary home or to a stationary constricting relationship. The characters are shown always on the move, both physically and psychologically. Similarly, throughout *Latcho Drom*, transitions between filming locations are framed by roads and travel -- either by caravan, horse, train, or car -- and emphasize heavily the supposed transitory and wandering nature of the Roma as a group, positioning them as a stateless nation dispersed throughout the world. According to scholar Adriana Helbig "The majority of traditional Roma songs reference the road, camp life, and the trials and celebrations of freedom and movement."³⁷ Songs and images like these play a prominent role throughout these films, where the transitions and movement of the Roma are highlighted both through the music and the visuals representation of motion and change. As with many of the other films discussed, the Roma scenes in *The Red Violin* are primarily used as representation of transition. Though the Roma possess the Red Violin for a significant amount of

³⁷ Helbig, "Play for Me, Old Gypsy," 80.

time within the film's temporal framework, they are not given a significant storyline beyond their role as a transitional mode for the violin to pass from the hands of one owner who is crucial to the film's plot to another. The Roma exemplify the musical spirit of the violin, but none is deemed important enough to get an individual story of their own.

In the film *Latcho Drom*, the film's musical journey takes the viewer through many countries spanning from India to Spain. As the film ends in Spain, the closing scene depicts empty streets with boarded-up houses, many with cemented doors and windows, reinforcing once again the theme of persecution and symbolizing the hostility toward Roma wherever they reside. This scene highlights all of the central themes of the film -- music, transition, and persecution. These themes reappear throughout the film, but are especially noticeable in the ending and in transitions centered around the road and travel, as well as in scenes highlighting struggle and persecution. In one such scene, a girl on a train in Hungary (once again travel is prominently featured) sings a mournful song which has lyrics that read "the whole world despises us, we have been banished, we have been cursed... condemned to a life of wandering" (*Latcho Drom*). This line hints at a "life of wandering" that is forced and not chosen, a hint at a perspective on Romani nomadism that is outside of the generally expected assumption that travelling is an innate quality of Roma. This hint, however, is just that, and is not followed by a fully examined narration of any sort. This single line briefly and finally brings to question the impact of legal and social barriers put in place throughout Europe throughout history that prevent Roma from permanently settling or feeling welcomed and safe in many areas, an important critique that, though only somewhat mentioned, is lacking in many other depictions of Roma.

Because nomadism is vilified in much of Europe as being antithetical to traditional concepts of nation, state, community, and a commitment to land and agriculture, Roma are

frequently condemned for their nomadic behavior and seen as outsiders. Adriana Helbig, in her investigation of Roma in Ukraine, states “[The] idea that Roma are a displaced group from India that is not tied to current home (Ukraine or others) is harmful to their position as ethnic minority because they are continuously viewed as outsiders and “others” even if they have lived in Ukraine for hundreds of years.³⁸ Within the films *Latcho Drom* and *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, this outsider status is frequently alluded to. Though *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven* and *The Red Violin* seek to romanticize this cultural tendency, and *Latcho Drom* uses it to highlight the marginalization of Roma in European society through a study of the Roma’s rich cultural heritage, all three fail to contextualize this position of transitory outsiders within larger systematic pressures. Antiziganist laws that have prevented Roma from owned land or practicing particular professions have caused this ostracism to become normalized, but these are not addressed specifically within any of the films.

ROMA AS THE EXOTIC “OTHER”

Throughout each film presented, Roma are portrayed as outsiders, whether as a way of romanticizing the exotic “other” or as a way of disenfranchising them. Interactions with non-Roma are limited, involving single instances of *gadje* breaking into the inner circle of a mysterious culture (Stephane in *Gadjo Dilo*), or limited to situations in which the Roma use the *gadje* as a source of income, either through payment for entertainment-related services, illegal transactions, or theft (Kusturica’s films). Roma communities are portrayed as very insular -- there is little to no interaction between Romani and non-Romani outsiders beyond their immediate community. Any dealings with *gadje* usually involve a monetary transaction or

³⁸ Helbig, “Play for Me, Old Gypsy,” 81.

blatant theft in conjunction with other illegal activities, or out of necessity, as with Simza's interactions with Sherlock Holmes in *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. Similarly, with the exception of *Latcho Drom*, there are rarely any references to a larger Roma community beyond the communities in which the films take place, or to the origins of their homeland in India. Thus, Roma are further depicted as "others", completely separated in life and culture from surrounding ethnic groups in their area, appearing unwilling to assimilate to the culture around them or even, for the most part, acknowledge its existence. Films like *Gadjo Dilo* and *Latcho Drom* deeply analyzes the treatment of Roma by outsiders and explore the complexity of navigating between the Roma and non-Roma worlds and the interplay between them, but they are still shown to be decidedly different and separate. Other films do not address these issues at all, instead choosing to portray Roma as mythical romanticized figures -- completely separate from the viewer's way of life. The magical aspects Kusturica's films, in which many Roma have magical powers, or of Simza's fortunetelling in *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* further emphasize this separation, making the Roma community seem as if it is completely exotic and otherworldly, hidden, and outside the realm of normalcy. Through these, viewers are provided an inside glimpse into the fantasy of a wild, free, and independent cultural realm, but one that is decidedly separate from their own established values and way of life.

MYTH OF THE FREE GYPSY WOMAN

Depictions of Roma as the "other" often share a characterization of Romani women as seductive and independent, often as the forbidden and intoxicating love interest for a *gadjo* man who admires her free spirit and the danger and mystery of her allure in comparison to traditionally conservative Western women. This is evident throughout films, operas, and

literature historically and today. From the 1875 operatic image of Carmen as an alluring dancer, exoticizing the sexuality of Romani women has become commonplace. Rada in *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, Sabine in *Gadjo Dilo*, and the Romani violinist in *The Red Violin* all exemplify this ideal – characterizing Roma women as refreshingly free from Western proprietary demands and irresistible to unsuspecting *gadje* men. In *Gypsies are Found Near Heaven*, Rada's independence comprises a central part of her personality and of the film's main plot. It is this appealing and seductive independence that draws both Antol and Zobar to her, but also causes her eventual dramatic death. Rada is rebellious and free, and every scene involving her incorporates seductive dancing (scenes in which she is introduced to Antol and Zobar) and displays of her strong free will (driving Antol's carriage recklessly around town or her rejection of Antol and Zobar because she refuses to be controlled by men). Sabine, as well, is similarly captivating to Stephane in *Gadjo Dilo* because she is representative of the absolute antithesis of Western culture as a whole and Western women. Stephane is drawn to her because of this embodiment of individual liberation and the seductive unknown. He does not completely understand Sabine's actions or motivations, but he is infatuated with them. Similarly, the Romani violinist in *The Red Violin* acts as a muse for Frederick Pope's musical ingenuity because of her embodiment of exotic sexual appeal as well. Despite her lack of significant displays of independence or agency, she acts as a representation of the freedom of Roma as group and as sexual and creative inspiration for Pope. Though these depictions of Romani women as fiercely independent and flirtatious through their dancing and musical abilities are widespread, they are contrary to many Romani customs and social expectations, which are grounded in strictly gendered positions within the home and work, and reflect a Patriarchal social system. Romani

women, contrary to popularized images, are often deeply family-oriented and modest rather than independent and sexually seductive.

DEPICTIONS OF ROMA THROUGH AN OUTSIDER LENS

In their films, the aforementioned directors attempt to portray fictionalized authenticity (and in the case of *Latcho Drom*, documentary truth) when depicting Romani life while still providing the cultural escapism viewers desire. To this end, many of their films include a few Romani actors, though the main characters are almost always non-Romani. In instances such as the masquerading of non-Roma as authentic members of the ethnic group in the reality show *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, Roma are completely ignored and replaced with stylized depictions that, though completely inaccurate, better reflect the image the filmmakers are hoping to portray. In Gatlif and Kusturica's films, however, the few Romani actors and musicians who are present are "...expected to assume a role of representing all Gypsies for the satisfaction of non-Gypsies' curiosities and fantasies..."³⁹ There are numerous scenes in which Romani is spoken (in addition to French, Romanian, Serbian, etc.) in an attempt at cultural authenticity. However, despite the limited effort to portray "authentic" Roma, both Gatlif and Kusturica fail to completely portray Roma in an accurate or wholly realistic light. Both, according to Nikolina Dobрева "...offer a superficially authentic representation of the Roma in their films, considering that they both employ Romani actors and authentic (on-location) settings. Plots and character relationships, however, remain within the parameters of stereotypes."⁴⁰ Authenticity within each of these films is only used insofar as it reaffirms existing stereotypes, and is ignored or refuted when it

³⁹ Hadziavdic, "The Construct 'Gypsy'," 122.

⁴⁰ Dobрева, "The Curse of the Traveling Dancer," 188.

contradicts the expectations of the storyline, director, or audience. This serves as an extension of the historical canon of depictions of Roma in film, literature, theater, and performance in which *gadje* are concerned about portraying the “real”, true, gritty life of the Roma, but stage their scenes and characterizations according to their own beliefs of what “real” Roma life is truly like, rather than building their expectations and narrative from observations or consultations with Roma themselves.

Tony Gatlif’s representations of Roma are particularly notable, because, though Gatlif claims to have an insider perspective due to his Roma heritage, this heritage contributes very little to his personal knowledge about Roma culture. Many, if not all, of the musical scenes in *Latcho Drom* are staged, making the film, though filmed in a documentary style, not purely a documentary. These scenes are not examples of the filmmaker documenting a cultural event that was already occurring, but are depictions of real cultural practices and songs displayed in a choreographed and arranged setting. *Latcho Drom* has been described by scholars as a “cine-poem”, or a “film where the music takes precedence over the image, that is, where the image’s purpose is to add to the meaning of the music.”⁴¹ The film provides an artistic interpretation depicting musical practices, but does not document them in an unbiased way. The lens of the filmmaker is wholly biased and selective, focusing solely on the musical journey of the Roma without significant political, social, or historical context. Throughout *Latcho Drom*, and his later films, including *Gadjo Dilo*, Gatlif unintentionally reinforces many of the stereotypes relating to travel and musical ability that contribute to the very discrimination and displacement his film seeks to condemn through his narrow-minded perspectives and portrayals.

⁴¹ Malvinni, “The Gypsy Caravan,” 185.

In another example, Alaina Lemon discusses in her book, *Between Two Fires*, an experience she witnessed in which a Moscow television show traveled to a Kelderari Roma village in Russia. She watched as the director carefully chose the most “authentic” houses, dancers, musicians, and scenes, and ignored those that did not fit the image he wished to portray. In one home, he asked a man to play a mournful guitar song, and admonished the man when he began to play a piece of music on a six-string guitar, saying “How can you lose the tradition of the seven-string guitar.”⁴² The director did not realize that seven-string guitars were never played by the Kelderari Romani group, which originally came to Russia through Romania. The director continued to orchestrate the scenes in this way, carefully choosing who was allowed in each shot and who was not. In many scenes, he did not allow men wearing jeans and t-shirts to dance within the camera shot, because they did not look traditional enough. Later, he asked the group to light a bonfire outside in the street to add an interesting element for the sake of his documentary, even though this would not normally have been done in the winter.⁴³ Consistently, non-Romani *gadje* make decisions such as these, informed by stereotypes they have gained from inaccuracies told and displayed to them throughout their lives, and re-inscribe these inaccuracies into their own depictions, all the while believing that they are portraying the true reality of Roma life and of Roma cultural heritage.

As illustrated above, the Roma themselves are marginally involved with many projects, documentaries and representations of them as a group created by outsiders for an outsider audience, and have little to no input in deciding what representations are true to life and which are simply contrived to meet the expectations of an ignorant audience. Scholar Aniko Imre also

⁴² Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), 155.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 156.

discusses this lack of Roma control over their own representation in music and film, claiming that the few Roma musicians who are able to break into the popular music scene and generate a wider audience are still prevented from contributing to their own representation in a larger context. In reference to this, Imre commented “[T]he degree to these musicians’ control over their own representations remains questionable. The price to pay for stardom invariably appears to be a willingness to sell back to the national majority the exoticizing, touristic vision they produced in the first place.”⁴⁴ In this way, Roma musicians often cater to the expectations of their audiences when performing, further blurring the lines between what is “authentic” and what is the manufactured fantasy created and propagated by non-Roma, because the Roma themselves are performing “inauthentic” entertainment for their audiences

MYTH OF NATURAL MUSICALITY

Nearly every representation of Roma archetypes relating to nomadism, theft, exoticism, “other”-ness are mediated through depictions of musical performance. Music comprises a central focal point of Roma culture from which every other aspect is drawn. Interactions with non-Roma are primarily related to performative transactions -- whether through begging, fortunetelling, dancing, or music, all of which are intrinsically tied together. Music, therefore, provides an integral role in depictions of Roma within various texts. Within the realm of film, attempts by directors and composers to create musical authenticity in the soundtracks associated with their films vary. In some, like *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, a distinct effort to include Roma musicians and research accurate styles and instrumentation is clear, while other examples such as

⁴⁴ Aniko Imre, “Roma Music and Transnational Homelessness,” *Third Text* 22, no. 33 (2008): 336.

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding make absolutely no effort to maintain any cultural authenticity -- musical or otherwise. Whether faithful to authentic music practices or not, in each film, music plays a central role in characterizing the cultural values and practices of the Roma.

Music is one of the most positively received stereotypical traits by non-Roma, and therefore the aspect of Roma culture that is prominently highlighted in many of these films and other depictions that aim to either empower and or glorify Roma culture. As scholar Adriana Piotrowska points out in referencing changing societal attitudes away from improvisation in Western music in the 19th century "...composing was credited to be connected with the idea of order and persistence, a calculated and sophisticated act... whereas improvisation was characterized by such adjectives as primitive, spontaneous, natural."⁴⁵ As Roma music is not based on written musical traditions, and involves high levels of improvisations on well-known themes, as well as new spontaneous content in the moment of performance, it is an ideal example of non-Western music that is seen as lacking refinement by Western audiences. However, this does not prevent listeners from idealizing Roma music as projecting the freedom and exoticism of Roma culture. Piotrowska states that "Since the mid-19th century it has often been underlined that improvisation...is a concept relevant to non-Western cultures (including Gypsy cultures) and possesses 'primitive' pedigree."⁴⁶ Improvisation is both exoticized for this "primitive pedigree" and discredited and devalued for it, reflecting similar opinions regarding Roma culture as a whole.

From the naturally talented Roma in *The Red Violin* who leave no individual lasting legacies of skill but simultaneously embody the spirit of music and musicality, to Stephane's

⁴⁵ Anna Piotrowska, "Expressing the Inexpressible: The Issue of Improvisation and the European Fascination with Gypsy Music in the 19th Century," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 43, no. 2 (2012): 332.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 337.

search for the perfectly authentic recording of Gypsy music in *Gadjo Dilo*, music is integral to every representation of Roma and the essence of Roma culture. In films like *The Red Violin* and *Latcho Drom*, music is seen as such a strong cultural identifier that it replaces other forms of narration and speech altogether, while other films represent musicality within the Roma community to varying degrees. In each, music integrates familial and communal bonds, employment, artistic expression of persecution and times of stress, and a representation of the inexplicable otherness of Roma culture. It is the first association many who are not knowledgeable about Roma have when they hear the word “Gypsy”, and is thus one of the primary modes of identification and association with the culture of the group as a whole, lending it an extremely important position in terms of representation and the possibility for social empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Whether completely absurd or subtly stereotypical, depictions of Roma within the vast majority of the media general audiences consume throughout the Eastern and Western Europe and the United States reinforce deeply entrenched existing notions of what it means to be “Roma”, or rather, according to many, what it means to be “Gypsy”. This cultural identification is overwhelmingly linked with music and music as a performative event -- whether through interactions with street musicians or in films portraying Roma musical practices. Roma who want to have their voices heard among the multitude of others speaking for them in the realms of social, political, and cultural society often need to first adhere to these limiting expectations to be able to break into the sphere of public discourse and work toward a more multidimensional and inclusive depiction of the group as a whole. Therefore, Roma are influenced in their presentation

of their own culture by a number of outer and internal factors, balancing their desire to meet the expectations of their audiences as entertainers in order to make a living, and maintaining authenticity within their own cultural representation. In this way, musicians present multi-layered musical displays -- to adhere to the expectations of audiences informed by depictions in popular culture, Roma must present music that is both “authentically folkloric”, that is, uniquely Roma, and also adapted to the expected tastes of their audiences.

Music has historically been an important source of income for Roma groups. Roma have emphasized their musical abilities because Romani musicians have often been seen more favorably by *gadje* than those of other professions. In a dissertation on Roma rights movements in Ukraine, author Adriana Helbig states “Historically, male Roma musicians enjoyed greater respect from non-Roma than other Roma did. Castle records from the 17th and 18th centuries show that Roma musicians...were employed as entertainers by members of the Hungarian ruling class.”⁴⁷ Families of Roma musicians were allowed to live within the city walls, while those who were employed in other professions were not afforded this protection. Thus, performing and displaying their positively viewed attributes to downplay negative reactions to Roma presence in a given area has long been an integral part of Roma strategies for coexisting among host countries and cultures, making it difficult to distinguish generalization about musical ability that are perpetuated by the Roma themselves and those that are oversimplified and inaccurate. Roma musicians today often still use music as a way of presenting Roma culture to outsiders, and many also hold themselves to the expectations of natural musical ability present outside the Roma community, adhering to commonly held stereotypes that have been so ingrained in societies’ beliefs surrounding Roma that they have become, in many ways, difficult to distinguish from

⁴⁷ Helbig, “Play for Me, Old Gypsy,” 164.

reality. Often, the expectations of Roma by non-Roma are internalized by the group, resulting in performances that are simultaneously authentic and manufactured. Self-identification within the Roma community as exceptionally musical or prone to performative professions can provide a space for community identification in larger social systems that may seem unwelcoming and unfamiliar. While overarching generalizations in representations of Roma by others can be limiting, it is important to acknowledge that, to some extent, many of these stereotypical traits can provide social identification within the Roma community and meaningful modes of employment as well as expression among the Roma themselves when asserted as self-expression and identification rather than as labels placed upon them by others. Thus, through their own performances as well as the portrayals of Roma by others, “Roma” has become synonymous with music.

Stereotypes of Roma rooted in musical ability continue today through codified systems of oppression, exploitation of romanticized ideals of “Gypsiness” for the purpose of advertising and entertainment, and the reassertion of these preexisting assumptions throughout available media and popular culture. As Ian Hancock states “[T]he literary image of the “gypsy” blurs the distinction between the real and the imagined population, so that even factual reports of anti-Gypsyism seldom receive the concern they deserve.”⁴⁸ The lack of Roma representation in the public eye, in part due to the barriers put in place to separate Roma from the countries they live in and maintain the “us” and “them” dichotomy of Roma as a vilified group, and the difficulty of many Roma to break out of cycles of poverty to obtain advanced degrees or professions, causes the voices of the Roma who do wish to be heard on defining their own struggles and cultural characteristics to be drowned out. Cultural pressures to maintain a separation from *gadje*, rooted

⁴⁸ Hancock, *We Are the Romani People*, 63.

in the Indian caste system, have only deepened this divide. Media that is most readily available to a non-Roma audience, such as film and popular music, has, as shown by the examples enumerated in the previous pages, served primarily to reinforce and deepen existing stereotypes in strikingly consistent ways. Depictions that are not derogatory or accusatory, casting Roma as thieves and swindlers, are instead overly eager to portray Roma as happy-go-lucky musicians who wholeheartedly volunteer to live their lives outside of traditional society. The latter associations serve more to satisfy an outsider desire to exoticize the unknown than to disseminate cultural heritage. Neither of these extremes takes into consideration the larger structures of discrimination and oppression that shape how Roma are treated within European society, or how this is reflected in the actions and presentation of Romani culture to the outside world. For this to change, and for Roma to break out of the social systems that both romanticize and vilify them, more diversified representation needs to occur. The outdated representations of Roma by non-Roma majorities strictly as free and independent musical culture must be negated by more multidimensional and complex portrayals, throughout films, other forms of popular culture, politics, and social discourse.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

gadje – multiple non-Roma outsiders

gadjo – a non-Roma man

Gypsy – derogatory term referring to Roma, often used by non- Roma

mahrime – Romani word meaning defiled/polluted/taboo

melalo – Romani word meaning dirty

Rom – masculine noun or adjective, man of Romani ethnicity

Roma – plural noun or adjective, used to refer to a group of Romani or the ethnicity as a whole

Romani – adjective or plural noun, used to refer to Roma ethnicity or a group of Roma, also refers to language of the Roma

wuzho – Romani word meaning clean

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