

***Gitanas* without a tambourine: Notes on the historical representation and personal self-representation of the Spanish Romani woman**

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Ester Alba Pagán 
and Aneta Vasileva Ivanova 

University of Valencia, Spain

Abstract

The performative representation of the Spanish Roma woman reveals a historical journey that brings her closer to many symbolic elaborations of the feminine, giving her a special affinity with the imaginary concerning the colonized woman, particularly with the Orientalist vision. Developed initially by the travelling intellectuals in Spain who sought a fusion of the topics of sexualized exoticism, the myth was reworked by local artists and thinkers without undermining their power to silence and make invisible the reality of the most vulnerable and most represented members of the ethnic group, their women. Today, a growing awareness of the importance of collective action directs Roma women to initiatives such as the revision of their historical memory, at the intersection between the external gaze and self-perception. These searches lead to the pioneering creation of community museum institutions, which have arisen around feminine Roma associations and are a symptom of an emerging desire to be heard. Based on the terminological tools shared by women and memory studies, this article seeks the personal dimension of this invitation to listen. The authors analyse a series of interviews with Roma women that investigate the social agents of representation, self-representation and their conceptual and experiential foundations.

Keywords

Alterity, critical museology, gendered ethnic stereotype, historical memory, representation, Roma woman

Corresponding authors:

Ester Alba Pagán and Aneta Vasileva Ivanova, Facultat de Geografia e Historia, Universitat de València, Avda. Blasco Ibañez, 28, Valencia, 46010, Spain.

Emails: éalba@uv.es; Aneta.Vasileva@uv.es

Introduction: Resignifying pre-memorial themes

The objective of this article is, on the one hand, to understand the relevance of initiatives such as the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* in Granada, Spain, and Romani women's associations in the self-construction of the contemporary Roma identity. While, on the other hand, it seeks to establish a deconstructive dialogue between today's Roma women and social stereotypes produced within mainstream society. We interrogate how words and images interact in order to create how we look at ourselves and others. Thus our study purports to dissect some stereotypes that are attributed by the Western cultural memory to the Spanish-rooted Romani woman (or *Gitana*¹). We address these stereotypes with the help of Romani women, as our co-authors, asserting that they have the real authority to reinterpret and counter them.

Similar to the tripod of the visionaries, this research is based on three mismatched lines. The oldest line chronologically covers the period of elaboration of the classical mainstream, Orientalist vision of Roma ethnic and gender identity, the time of ordering the hierarchy of the imaginary and the production of the exotic monsters that populate its margins. The second discursive line deconstructs these identity monsters, through the prism of a feminist postmodernist analysis and critical museology by interrogating the artefacts of memory disseminated by cultural institutions. The third line involves the rereading of the personal visions of Roma women that do not obey any previous configurations: our task in this part of the investigation was to be open to unforeseen results.

Our vision of critical historical imaginary is based on the experience of a new type of museum: the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* in Granada, a museum about Roma women, created by the Roma women themselves, empowered through associative work. This museum is familiar to women who are more committed to and engaged with Roma associations. However, it is not well-known to all Roma women. This is especially so among the younger ones and those who have economic problems. One of the main reasons for not knowing about this and other emerging similar museums is the marginalization of Roma from mainstream society and lack of communication among Roma communities, but also the fact that the official educational system does not teach either Roma history or their contemporary position within Spanish society. Nevertheless, this article intends to show how Roma museums and associations claim their history, culture and public access in order to build their identity, and how similar these requests are to the self-identity claims of the ordinary Roma women and men whom we interviewed. The *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* in Granada is a pioneer that act critically to redefine self-representations.² Effectively, these kind of initiatives coincide with the paradigms of critical museology.

We go on reviewing the tools of the second axis. Critical approaches to representations of Roma began to make cracks in the racist, mainstream images of unitary identity during the 1960s, with post-structuralist and deconstructivist theories. Conceptualization of multiple or nomadic identities is closely intertwined with the contributions of the latest feminist wave, asserting that considering various aspects of identities separately is nonsensical (Braidotti, 2004: 55–66). The main relevance of the new theorizing lies in analysis of national and ethnic identities as constructs with a political and historical background, and not as factors that predate social phenomena; and perhaps it was

Zygmunt Bauman who best summed up the critical thinking about identity: as a fragile and constantly cobbled artefact, like a patchwork (Bauman, 2004). Enriched by the understanding of gender construction, such an analysis reaches conceptual rigour. The works of Judith Butler show two opposite ways of considering identity. The traditional epistemological model presents a binary world, where a supposed unknowable subject that is essential and prior to discursive practices opposes a series of diffuse alterities that become the objects of a supposed rational knowledge. It is easy to imagine how this black box encloses both nature and any marginalized group that is excluded from the dominant subject hegemony (Butler, 1990: 144). The alternative model seeks to understand the processual construction of identities – of gender, race, ethnicity – as a signifying practice. The Self in Western philosophy, which is allegedly unitary and coherent, is revealed as the result of the ritual repetition of a retroactive role; each identity is performative (Butler, 1990: 140). The concealments that silence the contradictions of the culturally preconfigured requirements of being a woman, or any other being, constitute a process whose fractures are exposed as soon as their mechanism is questioned (Butler, 1990). Showing the multiplicity and confusion of categories is a programme of subversive struggle against the phallogocentric hierarchy that adjusted them until they corresponded to a stable ideal structure. That means to make clear identity's performative character. The view of a person as an inconclusive process that challenges rationality reflects what we can recover when we question the official historical narrative. That is, a humanity in movement, whose hushed imaginary has arisen from remote encounters and fluctuating crossings (Maalouf, 1998). In the words of McDowell, the non-dogmatic knowledge of people shows them as the result of:

. . . an amalgam of memories of places and origins that has little or nothing to do with institutionalized memory. (1999: 215)

On the other hand, long before the aforementioned postmodern thinkers, Benjamin (1999 [1927–1940]) stipulated that the contemporary visual culture corresponds to an indissoluble blend of new and old. In that sense, the desire of knowing oneself can transform the showcased museum's artefacts, considered by the mainstream society as the petrification of a soulless past. These artefacts may assume an open narrative, which can either build new stories or transmute into desiderative images. Through these images, a group seeks to transfigure the social immaturity based on atavist, everlasting representations. Within the latest trend, the Romani culture has found its turning point in the new museum typologies that flee from the 'classical' object exposition. Born in the time of the Enlightenment, museums emerged with the utopian need to make available to a society of free women and men the enjoyment that provides knowledge, in short, culture. From this multifaceted world of the expository vision of our past, the new museology and community museums developed, in which social participation emerges as a substantial element that is inseparable from the collective memory. In such a paradigm shift, museums aspire, as living institutions, to insert themselves into the social fabric and involve the community in their activities; that is, to become agents of growth and to promote sensitivity as instruments that evoke culture but are equally receptive to the present. In this way, in times of crisis and change, museums can actively interrogate the history-society binomial.

The historical understanding of the cultural notion of 'memory' (Green, 2008) reveals it to be inseparable from other notions like 'inheritance' or 'loss' (Babelon and Chastel, 1980).³ In this process, Roma women associations have raised their voices, with the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana*⁴ in Sacromonte (Granada). Its groundbreaking perspective on memory allows us to appreciate how cultural values have been maintained, destroyed or have mutated (Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010). Seen this way, culture moves away, relatively, from the feeling of identity to approach the idea of preserved or lost memory.⁵ This type of analysis recreates the lines of decisions that have marked the current perception of a cultural object: conservation, modifications, or functional, aesthetic or symbolic resignifications over time. In this way, musealized cultural traditions are a discursive production that links identity, collective memory and social values (Smith, 2006).

As in a multiple mirror effect, the aesthetic experience, which is mediator between the individual and the cultural fact, not only renews interpretations of the world but also can absorb them. The work of art is a two-dimensional medium; even if its original function has been lost, it can generate meanings and values that are commuted, or it can replace the previous meanings and values (Habermas, 1984). It is not surprising then that this new critical paradigm of cultural history is nourished by the conceptual heritage and practical experimentation provided by the intersection of the gender perspective and postcolonial studies (Klein, 2005). However, before asking the Roma women, fundamental subject of our research, to look at themselves in this new mirror, we will trace the frames that traditional history offered to our protagonist. Then, by changing the paradigm, we can oppose these traditional frames in a museum space that is dedicated to the female face of Roma culture and that is driven by Romani women.

La Gitana: Performative portrait and new museum reinterpretations

The survival of Carmen's versions on the screen for over more than a century demonstrates the outstanding place of the Spanish Romani women in the ranking of mass culture myths. However, when Prosper Mérimée monumentalized in the mid-nineteenth century the brunette *femme fatale* in the first *Carmen* (1952 [1847]), the myth already had a significant pre-history. This pre-history almost ignores Roma man, who was regarded as some kind of child with priapism who barely reaches the level of a second-class bandit. Since the premiere of the stereotype in the Golden Age (Gallego Morell, 1995), the entire weight of this racial mythology is aimed at women.

Before its rise in the nineteenth century, along with the transformation of Spain into a destination for a cultured traveller, the *Carmen/femme fatale/La Gitana* myth was created in close relationship with another foundational tourist myth, the Oriental. In either myth, the role of the artist or intellectual from another more developed country, especially the French neighbour, does not correspond with the role of the local thinker. Spanish Orientalism,⁶ for example, was created because of the efforts of European writers to find in the country the sublime landscapes, the picturesque archetypes and the forbidden passions that they sought in the Maghreb. However, Spanish Orientalism was

enriched by the local endeavour, which needed to resurrect the colonial ghost by claiming the Arab-Andalusian cultural heritage that justified the expansionist African policy (López García, 2011; Martín-Márquez, 2011).

The odalisques that reflected this part of the identity construction process were not the only female type that marked the consolidation of the nationalist discourse that was oriented both inwards and outwards. The nineteenth-century public squares were filled with monuments to middle-class heroes that had at their feet naked female allegories which eternalized the virtues of the bourgeois order (Reyero, 1999; Warner, 1996). These abstract images coexisted with popular images that allowed women, excluded from political and economic activity, to represent a more theatrical form of identification. If in the late eighteenth century aristocrats enjoyed seeing themselves drawn in the colourful costumes of the *majas*, in the century of the bourgeoisie the wealthy provincials commissioned portraits of their wives in festive peasant attire. Within this carnival, the Romani woman has fulfilled the most ambiguous role. For the Spanish citizens, she was the absolute Other of the middle-class woman. For the foreign/European eye she was the perfect feminine personification of the Spanish nation.

The dichotomy of repulsion–excitement that epitomized the idea of racial mixing shaped firstly the myth of the Roma woman in an evident linkage with the racist theories that accompanied European romantic thinking. During the eighteenth century, travellers cited the dance of the southern Iberian Peninsula as a product of miscegenation: its dangerous sensuality was sometimes attributed to the ‘Moorish blood’ and other times imputed to a mysterious relationship with the customs of Indians and Africans from the American colonies (Charnon-Deutsch, 2004). In order to trace the mechanisms through which the stereotypes of Spanish dance would end up being identified with the stereotypes of Roma woman, we use three representative artistic images. The first of them belongs to the father of French romanticism – Victor Hugo. It marks a quite early staging where three topics coincide: essentialized femininity, Andalusian Romanis, and a massive music performance. Thus, the appearance of Esmeralda, the protagonist of *Notre-Dame de Paris*:

Her little foot, too, was Andalusian . . . She danced, she turned, she whirled rapidly about on an old Persian rug . . . ; and each time that her radiant face passed before you, as she whirled, her great black eyes darted a flash of lightning at you. All around her, all glances were riveted, all mouths open . . . (Hugo, 2001 [1831])

Hugo developed his own creation: in 1829, his *Granada* was personified by the aromatic dance, in the summer wind, of flowers and women, who were both objects of the Orientalist desire (Hugo, 2000 [1829]).

In 1862, one of the most exemplary testimonies of the Spain-as-European-invention continued to draw on the ‘arguments’ of an Oriental past in order to fuse the pastiche label of *Gitanismo*. In this year, a writer, Charles Davillier, and a versatile artist, best known as an illustrator and engraver, Gustave Doré, documented their journey through Spain with countless orientalized images of cities, passionate bandits and dark beauties, especially barefoot *Gitana* dancers with tambourines (Figure 1). A paragraph that refers



Figure. I. Gustave Doré (1874) Illustration to *L'Espagne* (also known as *Journey through Spain*).

to their entry into Andalusian lands illustrates the functioning of this mythological mechanism:

One could easily believe that he was in Brazil or in the Antilles; it's the wonderful Andalusia of which the witty *Voiture* speaks, this enchanted land that reconciled him with the rest of Spain. 'You will not find it strange', he says in one of his letters, 'to praise a country where it is never cold and where the sugar cane is born. I am served by slaves who could be my mistresses, and I can pick up, without danger, everywhere the palms.' (Davillier, 1874: 353)⁷

In order to achieve credibility, the European traveller needed the reference of a predecessor rather than an accurate description of his direct experience. This male ancestor played the role of objective observer, while the native female was responsible for representing a spectacle that alluded to both ethnic and social alterity and to a sexual fantasy: the slave-mistress is the core of pornographic story. The only figure that could convincingly assume the Orientalist, theatrical and libidinous attributes was the legendary character about whose real life nobody had certain data: the Romani woman. The casting operates by analogy, while from the sensation of truthfulness, the eschatological details are in charge: dirty feet, lousy hair, clothes in tatters.⁸

In addition to the immortal engravings of Doré, the Romani *bailaora* is reflected in many European paintings of different stylistic tendencies. We can name works as different as *Un baile de gitanos en los jardines del Alcázar, delante del pabellón de Carlos V* by Alfred Dehodencq (1851), *El jaleo* by Sargent (1882) and *Zambra de gitanos* by Rougeron (1883).⁹ However, in the final decades of the century, when the image is taken up by the Spanish artists, the character suffered an important transformation.

It was then that Santiago Rusiñol, a heterodox symbolist painter, described the frustrating musical show that a group of Andalusian Romani organized at his request. The musicians were exhausted and grotesque beings that were marked by:

. . . the lethargy of habit, the icy air of a life of enforced revelry, the push of fatalism cornering the joke like a dry leaf. (Rusiñol in Gallego Morell, 1995: 220)¹⁰

The romantic imprint that condemns these agonizing bodies is here as destructive as the assumption of a fixed ethnic identity; the conscience they demonstrate of this accepted curse rips their identity even further apart. The writings of Rusiñol responded to a new type of painting that attempted to rescue the truth about the Roma people beneath their performative mask, but it only managed to turn them into another kind of symbol, a symbol of the rebellious search of the artist of the pictorial avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. The works that show this renewed stereotype are not those of foreign voyagers; they belong to Spanish artists. Perhaps the most extreme examples include *Andares gitanos* by Anglada-Camarasa (1902), where a group of young women stage a parodic way of moving that is directed exclusively to the stereotyped view of the observer, and the series of Romani female portraits by Isidre Nonell, who were personified by their names, but with their faces erased by despair. However, few pictures are more meaningful than the *Cante hondo* by Julio Romero de Torres (1924) (Figure 2).¹¹ In this quasi-religious altarpiece, the naked body of the woman receives all her mythological stigmas: mannequin, performer, muse and victim of ritual violence. Her pubic area stands as the geometric and logical centre of the narrative.

Overwhelmed by the number of instances of alienating visual memory, we undertook the dialogical approach to the Romani women's self-perception through a place of renegotiation: the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* (the Romani Woman Ethnological Museum) of Granada. This public institution of cultural memory is managed by Roma women. One of the main organizations in Spain that fights against the stigmatization of the Romani culture is the *Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano* (State Council of the Roma



Figure 2. Julio Romero de Torres (1924) *Cante hondo*. ©Museo Julio Romero de Torres, Córdoba.

People), an organization that acts as liaison between Roma people's associations and the state. In these associations, women have been increasingly taking a significant role, as evidenced by involvement of the *Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas (ROMI)* of Granada (1990), the museum's promoter, and *Asociación Mujeres Gitanas Alboreá* (1995).¹² The recent appearance of the *Asociación de Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad* (2013) represents a new paradigm.

The *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* of Granada is one of the few community museums in Spain and for a long time the only community museum that is part of the Virtual Network of Women's Museums.¹³ The *Museo de la Mujer en el Flamenco* in Arahál (Sevilla) is a more recent addition to this virtual network.¹⁴ More than a traditional museum, the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* has become a centre for women dedicated to cultural exchange.¹⁵

In Spain it was not until recently that the role of women in museums and the inclusion of a gender perspective began to turn into a reality.¹⁶ In this panorama, the creation

in the 1990s of the association of Roma women and the creation of their first museum served as a tool for dissemination and conservation of their own culture. At the same time, a platform that claims their own history is doubly significant. Thus, the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* is framed in the context of museums that are dedicated to preserve cultural traditions associated with women, and simultaneously promotes new forms of social participation that are far removed from the division between the exhibition authors and a passive public. Later, we will turn to the contradiction that this combination can entail. Within this context of museums that are involved with their community, feminist museology has relied on a cultural heritage that is both intangible and tangible, shown through material artefacts and through oral history. Accordingly, we could read the objectives of the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* of Granada as integral to the improvement of the quality of life of Roma women, the promulgation of their rights, the adaptation of their traditions and their continuing education.¹⁷ The modification of an imposed canon by women's empowerment and the need to introduce it into the collective dimension invite us to consider that the collection is more than a milestone in the transformation of traditional museum practices and discourses. The museum's content seems to corroborate this idea. Neither its location in the heart of the Sacromonte quarter, the birthplace of the most deeply rooted clichés of *Gitanismo*, nor the related location in its symbolic caves is coincidental. The first cave, which houses the Roma History Room, is dedicated to the centuries-old migration of the Romani people. The references to the symbolic strategies with which local artists frame the Roma identity already appear there. With these references, we see reflected in the documentation the persecutions, the restrictions and how they correlate: the historically predetermined attempts to 'investigate' the ethnic group. There is also the insistently muted theme in school programmes concerning the Second World War: the *Porrajmos* or *Samudaripen*.¹⁸ The other rooms are dedicated to customs, such as cooking or marital rites, and to institutional, political and artistic recognition of the Roma people. In this way, with a somewhat risky approach, the art that the Romani people create coexists with the avant-garde works that they inspire.

We did not leave the museum without exploring the rooms dedicated to esotericism, music (who does not have his or her personal vision of 'gypsy magic/music?') and the various training programmes that lie at the very heart of the museum's conception. One of the key points of the museographic paradigm, probably the most important, is women's protagonism: women are recreating the museum and are working daily with it, as if they were interacting with a living organism.

The new framework of the Roma women's self-representation, which is the Museum, offers us the portrait of a surprising female heroine: her way of challenging traditional representations goes beyond mediation of the communicative value of the images and tries to rescue the self-affirmative truth behind the derogatory facts or words. We are convinced that in order to unravel relations among concepts, imposed imaginary and self-perception (in addition to the polynomial tradition-criticism-gender), we must speak with Roma women, as the rooms of this unique museum reveal ambiguity and contradictions. The rise of Roma women's collective expression gives us a double opportunity: to ask them questions inspired by oral history methodological guidelines, but also to accept their own guidelines, their own ways of telling, understanding and reconstructing their

past and their image. Or, even better, to listen and learn outside of any guideline. We tried to use these ideas in a series of interviews.¹⁹

In her own voice: Self-representation of Roma women

The aforementioned painter, Santiago Rusiñol, described an old man who posed for tourists in his thread-bare romantic suit, presenting himself as a *Gitano* prince and model of a famous artist (Gallego Morell, 1995). This chameleon-like mirror accommodation to the myth, which has been corroborated by several observers, reminds us of the alienated mutism of the subaltern characters described by Gayatri Spivak. Her essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' (2010) expresses a deep doubt about the possibility that a colonized woman can express her thoughts or be understood: this woman appears instrumentalized in order to legitimize the interests of the dominant groups or their opponents, and her will is fatally unrepresentable (Spivak, 2010).

Similar to the Indian women discussed by Spivak, the Romani women seldom had an opportunity to express a voice of their own that reflects a personal experience parallel to social change. Instead, stagnant concepts drew them as a descriptive trope, that is, a subject as homogeneous as it was invented, seamless, without development or contradictions. According to the critical thinking, a way of looking at this obscured voice may be the deconstruction of the historical paths traced by the dominant culture and crystallized in concepts, official narratives or images (Derrida, 1967, 1996). However, we also want to practise a decentralized listening based on the interlocutor's daily life and assured by a dialogue between an individual, within a group that has common objectives, and a heterogeneous society. Spivak however notes that there is only one opportunity for the victims of historical silence to speak:

When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been introduced into the long road to hegemony. (Spivak, 2010: 65)

We share the hope that access to the community action by the silenced women can become a space where they will dare to question the concepts and images that contribute to build their memory, by reflecting on cultural violence and personal resistance that are intertwined under the term 'identity'.

We interviewed four groups of Romani women between the ages of 17 and 45 years, and contrasted their responses with some Romani men's responses. All the interviewees, who have very different educational levels, have a strong relationship with the work of various associations in Valencia and Madrid: *Federación Autónoma de Asociaciones Gitanas de la Comunidad Valenciana (FAGA)*, *Federación Maranatha*, *Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Alboreá*, *Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas de Madrid Romi Serseni* and *Asociación Gitanas Feministas*. The interviews were based on the self-representation through concepts, images and repeated social interactions. We also encouraged our participants to take an active role and we informed them of the purpose of this project and its intention of dignifying the Roma community (Raleigh Yow, 1994: 153). The generous solidarity they showed us exceeded any of our previous experiences in interviews.

The core of the interviews consisted of a series of questions, such as ‘What does the word *Gitano* or *Gitana* mean to you? And for your grandmother/mother, did these two words mean the same thing?’ ‘Where, within the mass media and the different artistic genres, have you seen or heard of *Gitanas*? How are they represented? Do they resemble the Roma women you know or not?’²⁰ The question about the meaning of the terms *Gitano* and *Gitana* came in the middle of the campaign against institutional hijacking of definitions of these words, by the Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE), and all the interviewees were aware of it. It is important to note that the official dictionary of the Spanish language includes the negative definition of ‘*Gitano*’, equating it to a person who with ‘lies tries to deceive someone’. In contrast, for ‘*Gitana*’ the meaning of having ‘grace and art to win the will of others’ is equivalent to sexist praise (RAE, 2016). Currently, the campaign of social sensitivity promoted by the *Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano* has received a partial allusion in the dictionary, with the promise of a final correction in future editions (#YoNoSoyTrapacero, 2015).

For the Roma women and men we interviewed, the words that name them unchain a list of positive meanings with a very strong emotional charge. The name becomes a decalogue of sacralized virtues: it speaks of dignity and respect for one’s own history and towards differences with other people, of the solidarity and affection in relationships with the people around them, of the passionate and tender love that they profess for their families, and of the practical commitment of leading their daughters and sons on the path of equality for both ethnicity and gender. All the interviewees, without exception, identified the denomination of their ethnicity with the values that unite the past and future, the meeting points of culture, formation and progress.²¹

These words, *Gitano* or *Gitana*, which belong to the oral, much more than the written history of the community, and are bearers of the essence of direct experience, also presented a new revelation. For the previous generations, the interviewees reflected that expressing with a proper name the feelings of their existence was a forbidden subject, and their memory of suffering and persecution was lived as unnameable and unshareable in public spaces. The idea of the cruel inequality between genders is also related to these unspeakable times. Although the interviewees attribute to the past the injustice that condemned women to illiterate silence and domestic confinement, this does not prevent their answers regarding the meanings of ethnic denomination from being sexually differentiated. None of the women or men interviewed forgot to equate the name of their own with the words ‘pride’, ‘respect’ and ‘family’. Both sexes related the pride of being who they are and respect for their own and other people’s differences with the name that designates their own gender: women, with *Gitana*; men, with *Gitano*. The affectionate concern for the education of their children who will overcome racist discrimination was attributed by all to the opposite sex, whereby Romani men see the ethnic woman as the pillar of the cultural wealth that is transmitted by the family, and the women insist that there is no father more tender and liberal than the Roma man.

The proper name that creates this emotional stock, which is so strong that it does not allow any negative connotations, coincides with the word that for the rest of the world works as the carrier of the worst human characteristics. Although, Roma women and men do not hesitate to attribute, once again, to this transmitted word the capacity to generate racist confusion and distrust: non-Romani children do not experience any ‘feeling’

until the repetition of the word 'gypsy' changes them because it is charged with the ignorance of older generations. Moreover, for many teachers the word *Gitana/Gitano* seems to designate typecasting in mediocrity that they also reproduce. Our interviewees told us: 'When we try to ask, they do not answer our questions, they simply replace the problems with other easier problems . . . and then they complain that we do not study because we are gypsies' (L, 18-year-old woman, corroborated by other interviewees). For young and mature Roma women alike, the countermeasures to such discrimination are evident: education, training, communication, and we heard recommendations on how important it would be to teach the Romani language to the non-Roma population.

Asked about the main attributes that identify the group, Roma women once again insisted on the same positive features that are the result of the intertwining between a culture of resistance and the desire for development. The capacity for dialogue, which emanates from intense family communications and spreads to the entire society, and respect, culture, formation and freedom seem to be for them the keywords to define the Roma specificity. It is necessary to remember that for the social imagination, the attributes of the ethnic group occupy an intermediate place between the conceptual and the visual, which are usually expressed by objects with a symbolic charge. For the Orientalist artist and anthropologist, the Romani women cannot exist without their inseparable tambourine, their bare feet and bright but dangerously dirty hair, etc. – a set of objects and characteristics that are also anchored in the confusion between the Spaniards and the *Gitanos* within the musical orgy that is at the base of this representation. For the actual Roma people, these rhythmic attributes, a symbol of almost oneiric spectacle, are replaced by the concept of respect, an attitude of understanding, listening and adapting to change and the basis that cements both solidarity among similar groups and dialogue with other societies.

All our interview questions were designed to trace the self-perception and self-representation of Roma people and we found answers that interpreted this representation as a definable concept that is immediately expressed in a social rite eternalized by repetition. These answers were contrary to the dominant discourses that tend to petrify concepts in mental and visual images, with the help of symbolic objects. A common denominator of the interviews, regardless of age or gender, was the unanimous rejection of how they are represented in racist, Orientalist depictions by the mainstream society. A typical representation offers an image (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) where the trope or the group stereotype prevents its transformative evolution. The social discrimination and racism suffered by Roma people attack women in a specifically gendered way and reach all social levels. For the interviewees this discrimination is especially significant in high school education where the word 'gypsy' is used as an insult. As already mentioned, the behaviour of some teachers that associates ethnic origin with the intellectual incapacity of the collective relegates young Roma girls to the bottom of the educational community. Faced with this, various associations, federations and groups have carried out awareness campaigns and showcased positive examples of Romani, especially of Roma women who have attained higher education and who are a role model for young people.

In the field of representation, another issue was social integration. Most of the women claimed their total integration and did not see themselves as different, although they

admitted to have been discriminated against or to have received racist insults almost daily. For them, integration was a fact:

. . . we are evolving despite the circumstances, which prevent you from being an evolved woman in this life full of difficulties. Proud to take firm steps in that sense. (Interview with RM, 37-year-old woman)

Among the difficulties they bring up, they found a serious problem in the images offered in the media that present a fundamental gap in the perception of Roma, in stereotypes that were never positive. In the news, the Roma delinquents are emphasized, just like other marginalized groups such as immigrants, or are present through the parodied, histrionic images that are offered through current reality shows.

We established the conceptual and semantic connections in the field of self-representation, and took a critical distance from the other person's perception expressed through art history. We encouraged the interviewees to take a position in the assimilated or autonomous search for Romani's willingness to present their selves. The Roma woman painted, sculpted and reproduced in films and musicals, the *Carmen*, is barely identified by the interviewees. Not only do they not recognize themselves in it, but also they do not suspect the qualities attributed to it: her fatal beauty is recognized by women in the positive terms of virtue and dignity without ever approaching the myth of perdition due to sexual excess.

The reactions to the theme of dance or flamenco music were more complex, as an art of their own in general associated with the transmission of the authentic and pristine message. We could not avoid recalling how Spivak (2010) resorted to Marx and his *Eighteenth Brumaire* in order to establish the difference between 'presenting' and 'representing': the musical performance created by Romani people was accepted by society with an extraordinary consensus to the point of becoming a container of all topics; for the Roma women and men it is not a fictitious 'representation', but a legitimate 'presentation' of the intimate truth of a silenced people.

The artistic-musical space is perceived as almost the only territory where ethnicity is a positive feature in social perception compared to other trades where they are forced to hide their ethnicity. We could say that such space is appreciated as a site of expressing identity that claims its roots from an essentialist vision:

. . . flamenco arises in a moment of suffering, similar to the blues in the Black communities in the USA, it is the moan turned into art, the lament to express its suffering. Today, flamenco is World Heritage but it is lost in the memory of general society that it is a characteristic of our culture and the essence of who we are. (Interview with J, 45 year-old-man)

This last aspect is linked to the questions of memory, transmitted orally especially by women and endangered by the silence of the written Western culture that made even their margins invisible (Todorov, 1998). For example, the interviewees are becoming aware of the Romani's genocide during the Second World War, the *Samudaripen* or Great Slaughter. It is a memory actively claimed by the youngest, who know their history through the activism of Romani associations, despite the gaps in schools and textbooks.

The women's associations also claim the recovery of other parts of Romani history that are absent from school programmes, like the Royal Pragmatics of the Catholic Monarchs, the laws of vagrants and thugs or the regulations of the Civil Guard that survived into the first decades of the Spanish democracy.

Conclusions

Reviewing the theoretical bases that made our research possible, we saw how a discipline that is dedicated to the public use of memory in its most persuasive aspects is naturally allied with the ideas of critical theories. These intersections of the new museology with postmodern and postcolonial feminist thinking proceed to a new vision of memory that is only beginning to be constructed. We were convinced of the enormous theoretical and practical work that remains to be done after analysing the interviews with Romani women and men, with their answers to the topics of representation (from the concepts, images and interactions) that keep them out of the circuits of citizenship. We conducted this analysis by taking into account the guidelines that the Romani women, related to the interviews, used as a response to the memory challenges in their own museum.

The identity's memory is extremely present in the Roma women's point of view. All cite the family as the guarantor of both cultural memory and the resistance to marginalization. In this sense, we find a strong analogy with the writings of the feminist bell hooks (1991), who pointed out how Afro-American women find support in the family structure in brotherhood with man. This perspective is incomprehensible by white feminism and is explainable with the secular conditions of segregation and the objectives of shared resistance within the family unit. However, it should be noted that for the interviewees, the family, which was understood as a focus of liberating dialogue, was also seen as a guarantor of social change that would lead to equality between the genders. In a vision that perhaps expresses something more than a controversial utopia, the Romani man appears to them as the prototype of the 'good father': a magical hero whose vital function is to watch over the liberation of his daughters through education and social development.

One of the crucial questions in the interviews was the question of integration, which is perceived as a true assimilation campaign that does not consider the social and cultural reality of the Romani people, since the way in which they are represented assumes that the customs and the way of being Roma cause the lack of harmony with the majority of society. The common denominator of social policies that serve social minorities is to focus on changing the social behaviour of majorities, or the society as a whole, and they seek a change in perception; but in the Romani's case, change is sought through assimilation policies. Currently, there is a strong commitment to the vindication of Roma history, its culture and its language, which, in practice, has not been made effective because it remains unexplained in textbooks, or continues to be shown through stereotypes. In the Spanish case, there is also the problem with language: Romani is spoken throughout the world, except in Spain and Portugal where it has been lost, and ignorance of Romani precludes its total integration at the international level.

Regarding Roma women, the problem is even greater. The ideological view of some feminists may be problematic. Sometimes, only analyses based on Eurocentric approaches

and social status are conducted, away from the possibility of being accepted or having a real impact on minority societies. These analyses result in a feminism that does not represent these subjects, because it ignores the collective memory of constant discrimination that is lived by individual beings with concrete histories. Among the young Roma women who begin to develop their own conceptual maps, the desire for dialogue is evident. The themes of this pending communication are the same as the themes detected in the museological dialogue constructed by the Romani: to review the history of persecution and resistance to discern positive values even in the most seemingly topical. None of our interviewees doubted this dissection of the stereotype; they appropriated it and reread it in a way that pointed to the appreciation of personal emotion, such as the admiration of beauty, the recognition of artistic mastery, the greeting of the dignity of others. They had no difficulty in detecting and denying the noxious, the unconscious and ignorant repetition of the erasure of the individuality of the victim which accompanies repressive legislation. Thus, in the halls of the museum, the traditions that spoke of beauty in the daily life of women came to life through collective arts that have an ambiguous encounter with the topic, since behind their forms emerge the faces of specific women that are difficult to idealize.

This discernment, between the restructured memory and the vindication of the present individual effort, requires new terms that the analysis of the contemporary discourse on margins hardly possesses. It is worth looking to them and listening to the people who have built their history and who must be the protagonists of their long-drawn-out story in order to stop being instrumentalized and to speak for themselves. Many Romani women have already started on this path.

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ORCID iDs

Ester Alba Pagán  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0858-1156>

Aneta Vasileva Ivanova  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9472-3020>

Notes

1. Please note that in Spanish the word *gitana* is not pejorative (as gipsy woman is in English). *Gitana/Gitano* for the Roma people in Spain is something to be proud of, that is why in this text we will refer to them as *gitanos*. As Liégeois (2013) indicates, it is convenient to use the word Roma and *Gitanos* in order to respect both social diversity and the political interests of the Roma people. It is true that in the Spanish language the word *gitano* historically has been used as an insult, but not for the Spanish Roma people, who proudly defend the dignity of this term.
2. We relate the work of the museum to the *social innovation model* advocated by CEPAL (*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*: www.cepal.org/es/temas/)

innovacion-social), which defines the model as a set of processes, practices, methods or systems developed by citizen movements, through citizen participation and based on the establishment of co-beneficiaries, something that in the field of heritage is much more developed in Latin America than in Europe. The basis of this methodology has to do with the management and participation of collective intelligence, that is, with the promotion of talent, knowledge and human capabilities. In the equity field, participatory issues have been consolidated in the communicative process associated with the dissemination of heritage values, leading to the generation of knowledge and therefore appreciation and to raise awareness. We have chosen to interview Romani women and men residing in cities far from Granada – and we have discovered that they know little about the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana*. Nevertheless, there is a strong association between the ways our interviewees and the museum represent history and the contemporary lives of Roma in Spain.

3. In fact, the historical process of appreciation of several cultural manifestations cannot be perceptible through the preserved artistic or monumental objects. Nevertheless, the academic process of writing their narrations is equally important (Gramsci, 2009). In that sense, the role of researchers has been substantial in its capacity of transformation and appreciation, to a larger extent, it has decided their historiographic fortune and, more importantly, their survival, destruction or oblivion (Colmeiro, 2005). In the case of cultural minorities such as that of the Roma people, where the cultural transmission of the past has been clearly oral, this phenomenon is doubly worrying as it was not until recently that through associations, collective work and community museums they have begun to write their own history (Appadurai, 2004).
4. Roma Women's Ethnological Museum in Granada (<http://mujeresgitanasromi.blogspot.com>).
5. Indeed, the renunciation of uses and traditions, the destruction of works of art, etc., are frequently due to natural catastrophes, but above all to actions that come from certain cultural fashions or that adhere to economic, ideological, political, cultural or religious reasons (Shotter, 1990). Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness in the society as a whole, but especially within political authorities, economic agents and other stakeholders. Nowadays, cultural values must go beyond subjective conditions or speculative assessments. In this process, it is unavoidable to understand that cultural heritage has an immanent capacity to receive historical and cultural memory, far from the mutable valuations of the past. This will allow, through a conscious act, to adopt measures that will enhance conservation which will in turn allow us to keep on enjoying the individual and collective pleasure of understanding ourselves culturally and socially (Middleton and Edwards, 1990).
6. We use this term in its classical meaning defined by Edward Said (2003 [1978]). In our case it includes the processes of reception and extrapolation of cultural violence. Once stigmatized by the image of exotic delay, Spanish society tried to take advantage of it. That is to say, in this way, for example, the myth about the affinity between the Spanish and the Arab justified the imperialist wars in North Africa.
7. Original in French: 'on pourrait facilement se croire au Brésil ou aux Antilles; c'est bien cette merveilleuse Andalousie dont parle Voiture, le bel esprit, cette terre enchantée qui l'avait réconcilié avec tout le reste de l'Espagne . . . "Vous ne trouverez pas étrange, dit-il dans une de ses lettres, que je loué un pais où il ne fait jamais froid, et où naissent les cannes de sucre . . . J'y suis servi par des esclaves, qui pourraient estre mes maistresses; et sans péril, j'y puis partout cueillir des palmes"' (authors' translation into English).
8. Linda Nochlin (1989) described the role of false authenticity in this discursive model in relation to the female Orientalist representations; earlier Edward Said (2003 [1978]), in *Orientalism*, analysed the 'copy-and-paste' structure in the creation of the imperialist touristic myth. The tool that we could call 'barefoot dark beauty' is central in the visual narrative

- of Gustave Doré when he illustrates the Roma theme of Spain (Davillier, 1874). A century later, we can still see the dancer's feet, similar to the label of the Carmen-derived figure in Mankiewicz's drama *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954).
9. *Bailaora* is the traditional expression that refers to the Roma woman who dances flamenco. Dehondencq shows a Roma dance in an Orientalizing context such as the historical Al-Andalus palace in Sevilla. *Jaleo* by Sargent alludes to the stereotypical racket or typical bustle of Roma people in Spain, and Rougeron shows on this occasion an original Roma dance (*zambra*) from Granada.
 10. In Catalan, dated 1896: 'l'ensopiment de la costum, l'aire gelat d'una vida de gatzara obligatoria, l'empena del fatalisme accorant-la broma enllà com fulla seca' (authors' translation).
 11. Anglada-Camarasa represents the peculiar way of walking of Roma people, and Julio Romero de Torres represents the oldest songs of Spanish flamenco.
 12. For more on these associations, the work they do for women in culture and work and the symbolic contents of the museum, see: <http://mujeresgitanasromi.org/english/museum-of-gypsy-women>; www.gitanos.org/actualidad/dossieres/96044.html.es, www.gitanasfeministas.org/; www.mundogitano.net/; www.asociacionmujeresgitanasalborea.org/; <http://asociacionromi.org/>; www.romiserseni.es
 13. Women's museums have strongly emerged since the 1980s, around the idea of a didactic exploration of women's contributions throughout history. We should mention the Women's Museum in Dallas, whose example was taken up and adapted by many others (López and Llonch, 2010). Later, this initiative, characteristic of the claims of the second feminist wave, was enriched by the assumption of theories akin to post-feminism. The museum story began to turn towards the exhibition of multiculturalism as a defining feature of humanity (Alario-Trigueros, 2010). At the same time the dissemination of heritage revalued marginalized cultures. In the respective waves of ecomuseums and community museums, the feminine protagonism in the transmission of diverse human knowledge gained strength; we can cite for example the Centre for the Advancement of Working Women in Tokyo, among others (López and Llonch, 2010: 13).
 14. Museum of Women in Flamenco in Sevilla: <http://museodelamujerenelflamenco.blogspot.com/>
 15. This part of the results seems to us valuable enough to deserve a separate study. Can we accept that dignifying the proper name – which has always belonged to the marginalized community as a refuge and a sign of hope – transcends the denigrating sense that the oppressive culture has given it? Does this approach contradict the linguistic deconstruction to which we refer, speaking of Derrida? We believe that the complexity of the subject is one more reason for further research. For the moment, we underline the huge positive potential that the discussed word entails for all respondents.
 16. Recently, the Ministry of Culture and the researchers of the Feminist Research Institute of the Complutense University of Madrid developed the research project 'Museos en femenino' (www.museosenfemenino.es/). It analysed the presence/absence and representations of women in the permanent exhibition of five museums: the Prado Museum, the Reina Sofia National Art Centre Museum, the National Archaeological Museum, the Costume Museum and the National Museum of Ceramics and Sumptuous Arts 'González Martí' of Valencia. The 'Heritage in Women' project of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (2011–2016) offered virtual exhibitions that analysed the museum collections that belong to the Digital Network of Museum Collections of Spain from a gender perspective. The association Women in the Visual Arts (MAV), created in 2009, analyses the situation of professionals in the visual arts, in addition to designing strategies for the implementation of egalitarian policies (www.m-arteyculturavisual.com). Femicidio.net denounces gender violence, especially in

- art. In this regard, the Feminist Network of Organizations against gender-based violence, created in 2002, has participated in international campaigns of social cyberfeminism and feminist hacktivism.
17. We would like to point out that among the heritage, development and alternative museums, nowadays the ones that stand out are those that include the participatory and inclusive narrative (Arpin et al., 2000). These museums can be educational or pedagogical museums, local or ecomuseums; the *Museo Etnológico de la Mujer Gitana* is a paradigmatic example, as the museum is the territory itself (Varinc-Bohan, 2007).
 18. *Porrajmos* and *Samudaripen* are two terms that are commonly used to describe the genocide of the European Roma population during the Nazi regime (1933–1945). Some Russian and Balkan Roma activists have protested against using the word *Porrajmos*, which became common through the work of Ian Hancock (2000). In the dialects of the Balkan Peninsula it is synonymous with the word *poravipe* which means ‘rape’, so activists consider the term offensive. Roma Balkan activists prefer *Samudaripen*, coined by Marcel Courthiade, but rejected by others for not being a Roma word (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070719123554/http://dosta.org/?q=node%2F37>), also the Russian Romani Union considers *Samudaripen* to be the appropriate word to name the Nazi genocide against the Roma (online activists use *Kali Traš*; see also Bernadac, 1979; Bernáth, 2000; Stewart, 2004). Here we follow the criteria of the International Resource on the Samudaripen: Survivors and Remembrance Project – iSurvived.org: http://isurvived.org/TOC-I.html#I-7_Romanies. In Spain, several associations such as the *Unión Romani* (<https://unionromani.org/tag/internacional/>), the *Fundación de Secretariado Gitano* (www.gitanos.org/quienes_somos/index.php), the *Federación Maranatha de Asociaciones Gitanas* (www.mundogitano.net/index.php/es/) and the *Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano* accept the term *Samudaripen* by consensus (www.msbs.gov.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/PoblacionGitana/docs/tripticos/TripticoCastellano.pdf), as does the *Federación de Asociaciones de Mujeres Gitanas (Fakali)* (www.fakali.org/2-uncategorised/497-el-consejo-estatal-del-pueblo-gitano-conmemora-el-genocidio-gitano-samudaripen). The *Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano* (Spain) organizes the Commemoration of the Samudaripen, which recalls the tragic events of ‘The Night of the Roma’, from 1 to 2 August 1944. In a single night, more than 3000 Roma victims were killed in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. In Spain, the Roma victims of the Roma General Prison, carried out by Royal Order of Ferdinand VI, on 30 July 1749, are also commemorated (<https://unionromani.org/2019/07/23/el-consejo-estatal-del-pueblo-gitano-organiza-la-conmemoracion-del-samudaripen/>).
 19. In this endnote we would like to break the claim of objectivity, hidden behind quasi-academic anonymity. We allowed ourselves to interview members of the Roma community from the most uncomfortable of all positions: the border. One of us, of Romani and non-Romani origin, always tried to provoke a reflection on the phenomena of cultural crossings. The other, an emigrant forced to make all social and cultural strata compatible, shared for more than a decade the struggles and hope of the most disadvantaged in the Roma community, in the ghetto for Roma and foreigners. Our continuous efforts to promote an academic debate on these issues rarely reaped responses.
 20. In the preparation and conduct of the interviews, we followed some critical principles of oral history that we share: completing, shading and adapting the questions to the flow of ideas of the interviewee; that is, to begin with a fixed content but to arrive at the widest and most open structures as possible in order to give the interviewee the leading role (Raleigh Yow, 1994: 41). The interviews were conducted during July and August 2018. In addition, in relation of the linguistic debate, we must stress that the Spanish Romani assume with great critical clarity the words *Gitano* and *Gitana*, and give priority to this term in public debate forums.

21. Nevertheless, the most striking result is that their fight to have knowledge of their own history and culture and the dignifying of their own identity are common goals in these small women's associations that are also present in the Granada museum. In this sense, associations are extremely important. There are many Roma associations that work in a network with small interconnected communities, that follow the example with a real sense of innovation.

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