

THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF TURKISH ROMAN DANCE

By

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Abstract

Utilizing Peircean semiotics and Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication, this research analyzes the dance style known as *Roman havasi* or, Turkish Roman dance. Elements and influences under consideration include costuming, dance vocabulary, musical instruments and traditions, gender-based stylistic differences, spheres of performance, audience member and participant demographics, and notions of authenticity in embodiment and presentation. An abridged history of the Roman is also presented, including public policies that influence the rights and lifestyle of Turkish Roman, as such factors have influenced their sense of social belonging as well as their dance and musical expressions. Romani people have experienced marginalization wherever they have immigrated, and scholarship regarding them has not always been beneficial. This thesis aims to increase the visibility, recognition, and appreciation of their culture. Research data was collected via participant observation as a Turkish Roman dance student and performer in Anchorage, Alaska, and from structured interviews with instructors and performers. Video footage was also gathered for analysis and was obtained by the author or via public domain websites. This thesis is accompanied by a collection of video clips featuring various elements of Turkish Roman dance referenced herein, and is available as supplemental material.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Carol Ann McCarty, and to the memory of my late father, Terry “Rabbitt” Dale Carter.

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Preface: Notes for non-Anthropologists

“The truest expression of a people is in its dance and in its music. Bodies never lie” — Agnes de Mille

“Dancing is our most important custom” — Paul John

“If you really want to understand a culture, study its dance” — Rabia Azra Birkland

Why Research Dance?

Personal reasons for choosing this research topic were manifold. First and foremost, I have always had a love of dance. I have been fortunate enough to take advantage of opportunities to study numerous dance styles, including various Asian, Middle Eastern, European, African, North American, and Latin American forms. My endeavors led me to Turkish Roman dance,¹ a form whose music and iconic gestures I found intriguing. Indeed, when I first saw Turkish Roman dance, I felt a resonance with it, as if I inherently understood something about it. I knew that it inspired me.

The use of dance as a medium for storytelling captivates me. I enjoy exploring the different ways that feelings and ideas can be expressed nonverbally, whether I am a participant or observer. When I perceive choreographic movements as capturing the essence of a feeling or concept, it inspires a sense of innate understanding, and connection. I particularly enjoy observing dance styles that utilize gestures to indicate an emotion, idea, feeling, or object in a way that is neither pure mimicry nor total abstraction. I find Indian classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam or Odissi to be good examples of the latter. As such, in learning, performing, and studying Turkish Roman dance, I found myself particularly drawn to its mimetic gestures, and to what is being expressed and how. I was also intrigued about the lifeways of the people from

¹ Otherwise known in Turkey as *Roman havasi* or *Roman dansi*. However, according to my experience, the dance is generally referred to as Turkish Romani in the US, and sometimes as Turkish Roman. As Roman is the preferred nomenclature among the Roman of Turkey, I will refer to the dance style as Turkish Roman throughout my thesis, except in direct quotes.

which this style was born. Some of the other dance styles I had studied such as flamenco or Turkish Oriental also had Romani roots.² Furthermore, I was provided with the opportunity to study Turkish Roman dance intensively. The combination of the above inspired me to choose Turkish Roman dance as my thesis topic.

Throughout my dance studies, I learned more about the various Romani dance forms and the people from which they originated, and I became interested in the similarities and differences between their respective styles. It appeared to me that Turkish Roman dance is unique among its peers in its very literal mimesis of everyday activities or objects. For example, Flamenco (another dance style considered by some of its scholars and aficionados to have been most heavily influenced and significantly developed by the Spanish Romani population and, therefore, a Romani dance form), while also earthy and intensely expressive, is more figurative in its communication. I wanted to document the rich language of Turkish Roman dance, in hopes of deepening my own experience of this style and with the aim of adding to the still-scarce resources available for studying this art form.

I am also motivated by the aims of social equality. I feel satisfied that this thesis contributes to the growing body of research which enhances the visibility and reinforces the legitimacy of Romani cultures. As Arayici (2008) noted, Romani peoples comprise the largest ethnic minority in contemporary European countries.³ Yet, they remain obscure, misunderstood,

² *Türk Oryantal dansı* (Turkish for Turkish Oriental dance) is referred to as Turkish Oriental in English.

³ It is generally considered disrespectful to refer to Romani people as Gypsies due to its history of pejorative use. However, while Romani is generally considered an acceptable term, it is ideal to ask Romani groups or individuals what their preferred nomenclature is, as not all will self-refer as Romani. For example, Turkish Roman generally self-refer as Roman (I. Hancock, personal communication, April 8, 2021). Regarding her research among Turkish Roman, Seeman noted that the term Roman “has been expressive of the grass-roots consciousness and pan-communal identity and self-empowerment since the 1970’s” (2006). Yet, some Roman families and individuals prefer other self-designations such as those based on occupation (2006). Within this thesis I use the terms Romani (as an umbrella term for the members of the Romani Nation) or Roman (referring to those residing in Turkey), except in the case of direct quotations. Hancock (2002) stated that the terms Rom, Roma, Rrom, Rromani, Romany, and Romani are all used to refer to the Romani people (p. xviii-xxii). However, some Romani groups may reject the

and are regularly treated with discrimination and prejudice (527). Indeed, findings reported by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) stated that the Roman citizens of Turkey “are severely affected by unemployment and are also victims of many forms of social, economic, professional, cultural and educational discrimination” (4). Moreover, as Hancock stated, the legitimacy of the Romani people as an ethnic group—and not merely a “lifestyle”—is still disputed (2002, p. 67). I believe that social scientific documentation and dissemination of Romani dance traditions could prove useful to the pan-Romani movement’s aim of acquiring autonomy, recognition, and social leverage.⁴ In addition, such research may be used to illustrate both the commonalities and differences among Romani cultures in a manner which builds strength through diversity and inclusivity.

Human rights activist Nicolae Gheorghe described the emergence of the Romani nation thus: “a social group, previously occupying a despised and inferior position, [is] moving from

terms Rom, Rrom, or Roma. According to Hancock, this is because “Rom originally meant ‘married Romani male’” (xix). However, he stated that “all groups use the adjective *Romani* to describe themselves” (p. xix). He also reported that Romani is the most accurate way to refer to their language, as Romanes is an adverb in the Romani language. Moreover, Romani is an adjective while Romanies is a plural noun (p. xx).

⁴ It is noteworthy, however, that not all Romani people necessarily share an interest in emphasizing their ethnicity, particularly above their citizenship. Indeed, some Roman feel concerned that pronouncing their shared Indian origins could further justify the xenophobia they endure in the societies in which they live (Hancock 2002, p. 78). Nor do they necessarily recognize their connection with other Romani groups. Hancock (2015) examined the challenges to cohesion between Romani groups, including the fact that for some individuals, a sense of “global ethnicity” is low on their list of priorities (p. 4). Silverman (2012) likewise noted that “Muslim Turkish speaking Roma in eastern Bulgaria” self-referred as Turks. She stated “they ‘became’ Turkish during the Ottoman Empire, when Turkish culture and language were the marks of civilization and they could ascend the social scale by adopting them” (p. 44). Despite the fact that they referred to themselves as Turks, others around them referred to them as Turkish Gypsies. While they understand that the terms Gypsy and Gypsies are pejorative, they do not consider Roma to be an improvement. However, Silverman gave the example of a musician who utilized various labels such as “Bulgarian, Gypsy, Romani, and Turkish... depending on the context,” illustrating the kind of negotiations of identity Roman are sometimes required to navigate (2012, p. 44). Meanwhile, Arayici (2008, p. 535) spoke of the poor organization and low participation in politics among Turkish Roman people and attributed this to the “conflicts between nomadic and sedentary Gypsies, who find it difficult to see themselves as a group with a single identity, refuse to form alliances with each other and contradict each other.” Fonseca (1996) argued that Romani people did not historically have “an idea of, or word for, themselves as a group” (p. 276). Rather, “they recognize different tribes and... extended families or clans” (p. 276). She argued that exonyms such as Gypsy “suggest a monolithic whole” that reflects how non-Romani view Romanies, rather than how the Romanies view themselves (p. 276). However, she drew the following parallel: “But things are changing. Just as Eskimos have chosen to call themselves the Inuit [sic]—which means ‘people’; ‘Roma’ is emerging as a common name in signaling the arrival of a new collective identity” (p. 276).

this position to some kind of respectability with a sort of equality with other social groups in the hierarchy of social stratification on the basis of a revised perception of their identity”

(Georgieva-Stankova 2015, p. 441). In Turkey, Turkish Roman dance and its accompanying musical style, known as *Roman oyun havasi*, have been instrumental in helping them to achieve improved social standing and self-regard.

Georgieva-Stankova paraphrased the International Romani Movement’s (IRM) approach to nation building as involving

the creation of a formal historical narrative, the formalization of cultural codes and diacritics, the invention of symbols and traditions and the standardization of Romani culture and language. Contrary to such traditional strategies in nation-building, the Roman nationalist case presents a novel perspective on nationhood, as non-territorial and transnational... (Georgieva-Stankova 2015, p. 441)

Research on expressive culture is useful to the IRM’s goal of constructing a Romani nationality in multifold ways. For example, this thesis situates and reaffirms Romani history, as well as Turkish Roman cultural codes, symbols, and traditions. These aspects of expressive culture function as points of national pride.⁵ I believe that dance and music are especially salient cultural currencies with which to bolster Romani pride in their accomplishments and identities,

⁵ Le Bas (2010) expressed that the “land-focused” notion of diaspora has influenced Romani self-understanding. He voiced concern regarding the degree to which homogeneity and Indian origins are emphasized as “signifiers of identity”, as such criteria can generate notions of a Gypsy archetype against which all Romanies would be compared (p. 62, 68). Le Bas’ position is given added dimension via Hancock’s (2005, p. 4) argument that Romani people have been a “composite” population “from its very beginning, and at that time was occupationally rather than ethnically-defined.” Furthermore, Hancock argued that Romani identity and language were essentially formed “in the West” (2005, p. 4). Le Bas’ and Hancock’s points are well taken. Therefore, I find it necessary to state that I am not advocating the use of this research to support the formation of a homogenous Romani identity or archetype, but rather to bolster the agenda of enhancing the visibility and rights of the peoples of *all* Romani cultures. Indeed, dissimilarities can serve as points of strength, yet the recognition and establishment of inter-group commonalities seems a pragmatic tool for developing the cohesion and collective power necessary for effective political action. I have thus taken certain liberties in applying the IRM’s nation building criteria to Turkish Roman dance and its use in expressing and affirming Roman-ness.

as they frequently serve as professional entertainers in their respective regions and often cite their musical prowess as something “in their blood” (and therefore an inherent part of their cultural identity).⁶ Furthermore, it is a realm in which they have high visibility within popular culture and an occupation with which they are frequently associated.⁷ Lastly, dance and music can serve as an effective means of communicating identity and of negotiating one’s social position.

Another aim of this thesis is to document dance practices which in time will, undoubtedly, significantly change.⁸ It is true that no culture or its customs exist in a vacuum, nor do I wish to suggest that they should remain static. Yet, there is value in the preservation of cultural practices, even if all we have left of them lies in a descriptive document.⁹ Harrison argued the following: that when we lose any language, we lose a unique way of viewing the world (2008, p. 7). He stated that by studying different languages and dialects, particularly those which are endangered and are least similar in structure to the world’s most widely-spoken varieties, we can gain insight into the human capacity for knowledge (Harrison, 2008, p. 18-19). I would like to extend these claims to dance. Dance communication serves as a vehicle of expressing and reifying values, practices, concepts, beliefs, feelings, and experiences, as well as

⁶ Potuoğlu-Cook (2010, p. 101) noted that most Turkish Roman citizens considered their “performance skill as innate” referring to such quotes as “‘We were born to dance and sing,’ or ‘If she can sing like that, she was definitely moulded by the gypsy mud.’” However, the latter notion has also “further primitivatised” Romani bodies and artistic expression (p. 101).

⁷ However, it is important to recognize the diversity of contributions that Romani people have made to their respective societies, given the pitfalls of essentialization and stereotypes. Examples of some of the historical and contemporary occupations of Turkish Roman people are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁸ It seems that the broader cultural context and dynamics pertaining to Turkish Roman dance have not received much scholarly attention. Some publications in English include Girgin-Tohumcu (2014), Marsh (2018) and Corry (2021). However, I do not speak or write Turkish, therefore access to potential non-English resources was considerably limited, although I did seek assistance from native Turkish speakers in my attempts to locate pertinent resources.

⁹ For example, the classical Indian dance form Odissi was endangered (and nearly lost) at the time of India’s colonial rule. Reconstruction efforts undertaken by gurus such as Deba Prasad Das, Mayadhar Raut, and Pankaj Charan Das helped to reestablish Odissi as a viable dance form. This task was undertaken by researching ancient texts and by referring to bas-relief poses carved into stone temples (Courtney 2017).

group and/or individual histories. The documentation of various dance forms is valuable, as it preserves knowledge related to our human capacity for nonverbal communication and symbolic forms of representation. Also, such materials likely provide information about other important cultural phenomena.

Conventional Turkish Roman dance is gender-associated and contains indexical, iconic, and iconic index gestures. Studying Turkish Roman dance helps us to understand how Roman view and interact with their environment, and how they channel and condense this experience into performance. For example, the women's dance vocabulary contains various gestures that depict their domestic duties, such as hanging the laundry or making bread, while the men's contains numerous movements which index their bravado and strength, reflecting the patriarchal Roman social structure. Furthermore, many of Turkish Roman's dance gestures can be used to communicate more than one thing at a time. A woman performing the gesture for washing laundry can be indexing difficulty as well as her domestic prowess.

Women's dance vocabulary is of particular interest to me, as it contains a significant number of iconic gestures. However, my dance instructor and primary consultant Rabia Azra Birkland, (nee Gültekin),¹⁰ believed that the feminine form of the dance has become less iconic and is becoming increasingly similar to the masculine style. She claimed that such "traditional" Turkish Roman gestures are at risk of being forgotten because Turkish Roman youths (in particular) are significantly changing the dance.¹¹ According to Rabia, these changes have been

¹⁰ After introducing my dance teachers by their first and last name, I will hereafter refer to them by their first names only. It is conventional to refer to individuals by their last names after their introduction in a scholarly paper, unless they are a consultant. In the world of professional dance, performers often go by either their first or both their first and last name. Dancers may also go by stage names (non-birth names specifically used for the development and promotion of their stage persona), which are usually comprised of a first or first and last name.

¹¹ Rabia was the primary consultant for my research. However, the majority of what I learned from Rabia was taught to me through her classes, before I formally began my research. Therefore, I cannot cite an exact date for most of her statements. I will include exact dates for those statements that occurred during interviews gathered in preparation for my thesis, or during its writing.

inspired, for example, by hip-hop, pop, reggaeton, club music and dance, and changes in traditional gender roles.

At the same time, new iconic gestures are being innovated. Examples include the gesture which indicates flipping through photos on a smartphone, or the “money shower.” Such innovations are easily incorporated into the Turkish Roman lexicon. While Rabia considers “traditional” Turkish Roman dance to be more unique than the newly evolving form, and therefore preferable and worthy of conservation, she admits that Roman elders are, for the most part, “going with the flow” regarding any changes to the dance style.¹² Roman performer Reyhan Tuzsuz’s international presence as a teacher and performer of Turkish Roman has arguably made her synonymous with the dance form. Yet, she will also utilize contemporary musical pieces for her performances and innovate new moves.

As Turkish Roman dance continues to evolve, the documentation of such information provides future researchers and practitioners with important insight into the daily lives, values, and beliefs of previous Turkish Roman people. In addition, the dissemination and documentation of Turkish Roman dance may serve the purposes of posterity, identity affirmation, cultural restoration and continuity, and also aid further studies. For example, future research may utilize the findings in this thesis as a background with which to illustrate Turkish Roman dance’s evolving capacity to represent both “traditional” and contemporary life values.

A Note on Cultural Appropriation

I would like to address the concern that some readers might have regarding the learning, teaching, and performing of Turkish Roman dance by non-Roman persons. It is understandable that some individuals may be alarmed that members of a more socially privileged group have

¹² However, Rabia also mentioned that older folks often preferred the "traditional" style, while the younger generation tended to prefer the newer style.

obtained and disseminated information that originated within a marginalized group. Superficially, the answer may seem simple: non-Roman should not learn, teach, or perform Roman dances. However, I believe that this point of view is over-simplistic and does not acknowledge the autonomy of Roman who choose to transmit their knowledge to others (including non-Roman), nor does it accurately account for the complexities that comprise history and identity. For example, non-Roman Turkish citizens may grow up considering Turkish Roman dance to be a part of their culture, too.¹³ Moreover, neither Turkish nor Turkish Roman cultures exist in a vacuum, but have instead continually influenced one another. I believe that the sharing of such cultural knowledge offers yet another valuable means with which to raise awareness of the plight that many Roman still face, while familiarizing them with Roman culture and fostering an appreciation of their unique societal contributions. The latter agenda affirms Roman ethnicity and culture, and I maintain that a particularly salient way of actualizing it is through providing people with the experience of embodying and distilling Roman culture via dance. This is because as students learn a dance and it becomes a part of who they are and what they care about, it has the potential to create an embodied “buy-in.” This “buy-in” can lead to a greater, internalized awareness of the Roman experience and an emotional investment in Roman wellbeing. It is also a way of generating personal investment in the viability and longevity of the cultural information being transmitted. While participation in Roman dance traditions by broader Turkish society has not freed Roman from social stigmatization, its commodification and desirability have had unintended positive effects on their confidence and have favorably altered non-Roman perceptions of them. I believe that their social stigmatization can in part be further

¹³ As Rabia pointed out, Turkish Roman dance is interwoven with Turkish culture and is a part of casual (*e.g.*, gatherings at home) as well as formal events (*e.g.*, weddings) and everything in-between. Both Serkan Tutar and Rabia asserted in an interview that while they are not Roman, they consider their dances to be a part of their culture as well. (R. Birkland and S. Tutar, personal communication, September 2, 2016).

remediated through proper dance instruction. In Artemis Mourat and Rabia's dance classes, both teachers described the discrimination that Roman people experience, as well as other aspects of Roman society, including the symbolism and cultural significance of Turkish Roman dance. Indeed, Artemis considers it part of her life's work to educate people regarding the social discrimination that Romani experience, while fostering an appreciation of and respect for their cultural contributions. It is possible, then, to use dance instruction as a platform with which to raise awareness among individuals who otherwise may not have been familiar with the concerns of Romani people, or cognizant of their cultural practices or contributions. Indeed, one might observe a Turkish Roman performance and perceive the relationship between the values and lifestyles of Turkish Roman people and how these manifest as unique mimetic and figurative movements (particularly if an explanation has been provided to the audience), as well as develop an appreciation of the art's cultural meaning and aesthetic appeal. Yet, I believe that the development of such knowledge and esteem is especially likely during the transmission process from teacher to student. In short, the sharing of Turkish Roman dance with non-Roman persons may be utilized as a method of building "power with" Roman, rather than "power over" Roman.

The fostering of appreciation for Romani culture and contributions and the affirmation of their ethnicity and society remain particularly critical goals given the fact that the legitimacy of Romani ethnicity is still contested. Moreover, Romanies have been accused of merely appropriating or extrapolating from their respective dominant societies, rather than making any original developments of their own. Responsible dance instruction can help correct these misperceptions through the proper education of students.

For those readers who may be concerned about consent as it applies to the teaching and learning of Turkish Roman dance, I invite you to access

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X50nKQuYjQ> to view an interview with Reyhan, wherein she discusses the encouragement and support she received within her community for teaching the dance to non-Roman persons.¹⁴ In addition, it bears noting that Rabia also reported receiving consent and encouragement from Roman persons to teach Turkish Roman dance.

A Note on Reification

Within this thesis, I refer to “traditional” Turkish Roman dance in contrast to more contemporary forms. Therefore, the following bears noting: anthropologist Alexander King warned that discussing “‘traditional’ as an authentic standard, against which all deviations are judged assumes a spurious model of tradition that is static, unchanging, and not transferable to contemporary situations” (2011, p. 254). Furthermore, he argued that to do so perpetuated “a Modernist hierarchy whereby Western-educated scholars decree what is genuine tradition through codification and inscription into authoritative knowledge (and ethnographic Canon)” (King, 2011, p. 254). It is not the intention of this research to attempt to establish “the authentic standard” of Turkish Roman dance, although I am aware of the reifying power of documentation and have taken whatever steps were possible to situate this research. As such, I wish to state that my use of “traditional” to describe a style of Turkish Roman dance is in recognition of the distinction that Rabia espoused. She considers traditional Turkish Roman dance to be those movements and gestures that have been (comparatively) long-standing, that have been influenced by “traditional” Turkish Roman music, and that reflect gender roles.

¹⁴ Değirmenci (2011) reported that Roman musician Hüsni Şenlendirici considered the "incorporation of Roman music into world music" to be "a really positive development," as it allowed him to expand his musical horizons, and to collaborate with people from “different places...and...different cultures” (p. 114). Değirmenci described him as utilizing his “Romanness as means to extend beyond boundaries—the boundaries of his community and nationhood” (p. 122).

Lastly, the reality of the lived experience of a Roman or Romani person is far more complex than I can attempt to speak to within this paper, not only due to the limitations of my research, but also due to the nature of identity itself. This thesis briefly discusses the formation of the pan-Romani identity, and how that inter-relates to the Turkish Roman experience, including their sense of self, expressed in cultural activities such as music and dance. Despite the strategic essentialism present in the pan-Romani movement, inter-Roman discrimination complicates any sense of shared identity. Sonia Seeman contended that “cultural practices serve as a form of presentation of historical community and continuity, while also making distinctions between insider and outsider, even among Roman” (2002, p. 73). She therefore argued that, in addition to examining forces of hegemony from outside of Roman communities, one must also comprehend the effect of “structural constraints of habitus...on cultural practices within Roman communities” (p. 72). I do not wish to gloss over such dynamics in discussing the effects of the pan-Romani movement, although my research cannot extrapolate on Seeman’s claims. Further research could examine the manifestation of Roman inter-group politics and identity and how they relate to Turkish Roman dance.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Turkish Roman Dance and Its Relevance, Research Scope, and Methods

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of Turkish Roman dance based on my experience as a student, dancer, and ethnographer in Alaska. I will examine the semiotics of this style by exploring its movement vocabulary and cultural context with the broader goal of revealing Turkish Roman dance as a vehicle of identity expression and resistance. This thesis utilizes linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes' *Ethnographies of Communication* as an entrance point to analysis. While Hymes' focus was upon speech events, his framework is equally useful for other types of communication and performance, including dance. His criteria provide a rigorous methodology with which the researcher may consider all the elements of a communicative event. I utilize a semiotic approach to communicative actions, as it requires the observer to consider the multiple meanings a communicative event may contain, as well as the various modalities that are used in order to convey meaning. I also draw from semiotically-oriented linguistic anthropology that investigates how identity is expressed through performance.¹⁵ Writing about dance among the Koryak of Kamchatka, for example, linguistic anthropologist Alexander King (2011) wrote that dance serves as “synecdoches of native cultures in general” and therefore “a Koryak dance indexes Koryak culture and tradition; an Eveny dance indexes Eveny culture, and so on” (p. 83). This thesis discussion includes the historical formation and context of Turkish Roman dance, its embodiment process, the indexical, iconic, and emblematic characteristics of its gestures, how they are used in identity work, and why it is important to study.

¹⁵ See Mertz (2007) and Duranti (2003) for an overview of influential works in the “semiotic functionalist” tradition of linguistic anthropology.

1.2 Turkish Roman Dance, *Roman Oyun Havasi* Music, and Roman Identity

Contemporarily, the commodification of world music has framed *Roman oyun havasi* music as desirably exotic and ethnically symbolic. Seeman (2002) noted the following example of the effects of this phenomenon: Osmantan Erkur, the non-Roman Turkish manager of the band *İstanbul'un Sesi Orkestrası* was consequentially inspired to regard “Turkish Roman music as something worthy of producing” (2002, p. 357).¹⁶ Moreover, Roman engagement with jazz fusion and world music projects provided an opportunity for such musicians to present “an enlarged sense of what it means to be Roman” (p. 376). Therefore, the practice of *Roman oyun havasi* generated both a musical and cultural dimension within which Turkish Roman could re-define “the socially ascribed identity of disparate and hitherto disconnected Roman communities” (p. 3). The perpetuation of the musical style by various regional Roman communities as well as the process of its commercialization provided Turkish Roman peoples with a medium to further affirm and express their ethnicity (p. 4). I argue that Turkish Roman dance has also co-evolved with *Roman oyun havasi* music as an emblem of Turkish Roman ethnicity. However, Turkish Roman dance as a semiotic modality or channel of expression offers visual representational possibilities that music does not and therefore deserves ethnographic attention in its own right.

The greater recognition of, and appreciation for, Roman expressive culture has not ensured them immunity from discrimination. Turkish scholar Gonca Girgin-Tohumcu cited

¹⁶ Seeman’s ethnomusicology dissertation is based on four and a half years of research in Turkey exploring how Roman identity is communicated via *Roman oyun havasi* music performances. She gathered her data through interviews and firsthand observations. This thesis had already been formatted utilizing Seeman's dissertation before her book *Sounding Roman: Representation & Performing Identity in Western Turkey* was published in 2019. Her book appears to be an expansion of her dissertation and other articles (including those that I reference within this document). Therefore, citations of information obtained from Seeman's dissertation that was already written prior to her book's publication, reference her dissertation. However, this information can also be found within her book.

Nieuwkerk in asserting that many societies tend to view professional entertainers as low-class, particularly in Muslim countries (146). In an interview, Reyhan stated that Roman performers of Turkish Roman dance were (and are) treated with greater discrimination than non-Roman performers (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016). Indeed, Turkish Roman people and their music are attributed “a range of negative as well as positive associations” cultivated by the “polysemy of meanings” attributed to them by the broader society in which they live (Seeman, 2002, p. 58).

Despite the increase in worldwide regard toward Turkish Roman dance, the Roman neighborhood of Sulukule in Istanbul was bulldozed in 2009 (Gökçen, 2009). Sulukule was a very significant region not only to its residents, but also to aficionados and practitioners of Turkish Roman music and dance. According to Rabia, it was to Roman dancers and musicians what Hollywood is to actors (R. Birkland, personal communication, May 12, 2017). In Sulukule, employment as either a Turkish Roman or Turkish Oriental dancer was still a crucial source of income for Roman women and their families (Foggo 2016, p. 41).¹⁷ It is believed that Sulukule was one of the oldest Romani settlements in the world (Letsch 2011), but as a result of the neighborhood’s razing, many Roman were displaced (Gökçen, 2009).¹⁸ Sulukule’s destruction serves as a stark example of the contradictory light in which Roman people and their dance and music are held within Turkish society.

An increasing number of Roman neighborhoods have been demolished, or are slated to be demolished, under urban renewal projects by local governments. Developers have taken advantage of these renewal projects by buying houses and land well under fair market value,

¹⁷ Turkish Oriental is the Turkish style of belly dance (otherwise known as *Türk Oryantal dansı*). Turkish Oriental has historically been performed by professional Roman dancers (including in the former entertainment houses of Sulukule) (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 148, 152).

¹⁸ Schoon (2015) described how “urban renewal” projects in Turkey impacted the Roman people.

and threatening homeowners with lawsuits to force the homeowner to sell (Seeman, 2009, p. 209-210).¹⁹

Corry discussed the impact of the destruction of Tarlabası—one of the few Roman neighborhoods left remaining in Istanbul—on Roman culture. She explained how the razing of such *mahalles* (neighborhoods) and the resultant “loss of their traditional systems of knowledge reproduction” has affected Roman cultures (2013). She cited her interview with Roman dance instructor Sema Yildiz wherein Sema claimed that “all of the best musicians and dancers” were in Tarlabası during the 1960s and 70s (2013). Despite a turbulent period that followed, including “crime-waves” and “Mafia control,” Roman music and dance practices persisted (2013). Sema, who is from Sulukule, stated the following: “We never took dance lessons. We just danced together, old and young. Now that’s gone. You don’t see anybody just dancing in the streets, you have to take lessons and pay money to learn” (2013). Similarly, Reyhan told Corry that “there used to be a wedding in the Rom *mahalles* almost every day, and this was like our school” (2013). Corry specified that in Ottoman times, persons acquired trades (*e.g.*, horse-shoeing, entertaining, etc.) specific to their *mahalle* (or community within it) through apprenticeship. Such an education began “from birth” as community members would grow up observing such skills, and eventually apprentice with a master. However, she paraphrased Murat Gül in claiming that since the inception of Ataturk’s 1920 reforms, “the distinct cultures of the *mahalles* have been under fire in an attempt to create uniform Turkish identity” (2013). Furthermore, as a result of

¹⁹ Seeman added that an “additional and immediate negative result of social-spatial” neighborhood organization inherited from the Ottoman Empire makes it easier for the government to target areas of dense Roman population (2009, p. 212).

the current Islamic neo-liberal regime's destruction of such neighborhoods in favor of North American style gated suburbs, these communities have dissipated, leading to a loss of friendships, support networks, and also the destruction of this millennia-old *usta/çirak* (master/apprentice) system. (2013)

Activists perceive such gentrification as coming at a heavy cost to both the Roman and to “the greater Turkish society” (Corry, 2013). Corry cites Yaşar Adanalı as referring to such gentrification as “a kind of ‘Disneyfication’” that converts the heritage of an area into something “flashy” and “shallow” (2013). She stated that in regards to Roman cultural expressions, this phenomenon is also combined with “Orientalism from foreigners and nostalgia from Turks” (2013). As such, Roman dancers “perform at ‘Turkish nights’ hotels for orientalist tourists and wealthy Turks” (2013). While Roman girls are still being taught “traditional 9/8 dances in their homes, on the stages of Turkish nightclubs and on Turkish television programs... Romani dancers... are more likely to perform Turkish Oryantal” (2013). However, neither the marginalization of Roman communities nor their strategic adaptations to market demands for economic purposes is anything new.

Despite the significant symbolic and tangible impact Sulukule and Tarlabası's bulldozing had on the lives of Istanbul's Roman and on the Roman dance and music scene, the popularity of the 9/8 rhythm and admiration of Roman culture is having a positive impact on their self-esteem. Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) elaborated, asserting that previously, Roman social bonds were based on their marginalized social position, but now, Roman are expressing gratitude and pride for their

ethnic identity.²⁰ She noted that this confidence is also being reflected in Roman performances,²¹ and that being Roman or “‘having a Romani spirit’ has become a popularizing social trend” (p. 158). Additionally, various forms of media utilizing Roman-inspired musical pieces (e.g., sitcoms, commercials and films) elicit responses on the internet such as “I wish I could do the Romani dance” or “I want to become Romani” (p. 158).²² Therefore, “the fetish approaches of non-Gypsy populations to the fields of music and dance make Romani identity more visible and extend the area of their performance practices” (p. 158). However, such appreciation may be fleeting, generalizing, and also dismissive of those Roman whose professions are more “ordinary,” for example, flower sellers (p. 158). Indeed, Kolukirik mentioned that it is problematic that Roman people are “remembered and identified only with music,” and asserted that their musical aptitude has been highlighted as a result of “social and historical conditions, and the fact that their music represents a ‘tool’ for micro marketing within the scope of globalization” (2007). Moreover, distillations of Roman identity into a single facet such as musician or dancer obliterates the actual pluralism of identity that they live. For example, Roman persons may be “doctors, parliamentarians, lawyers, teachers, as well as the frequently-narrated identities” such as “professional musicians, entertainers, housewives, basket weavers, sieve makers, flower sellers, [and] bottle-and paper-recyclers” (Seeman, 2006).

The incongruence between the increased admiration for Roman arts and the actual social treatment that they endure highlights the fact that there is still much room for improvement in

²⁰ Such notions are also expressed in song texts including the words to “*Kara Enseni Romansin*,” which lists various attributes “of being Romani: dark skin color, engrossment in music and dance, a feeling of estrangement from society ... and the particular everyday experiences of living in Roman neighborhoods” as being “positive characteristics” (Seeman, 2002, p. 28).

²¹ Girgin-Tohumcu did not qualify what she meant by confident, although it seems reasonable to assume she was implying a projected quality, and perhaps also referring to the dancer’s posture.

²² Marsh (2018) reported that popular Turkish TV shows all feature Turkish Roman dance to some degree, and positively reflect Turkish Roman culture. However, such depictions are limiting, as they perpetuate the “image of Romani people as only dancers and musicians” (2018, p. 12).

recognizing Roman autonomy and in appreciating their society and contributions. The commodification and desirability of Roman culture alone is not enough to gain them adequate social leverage and in fact it may serve to reinforce certain stereotypes.²³ Indeed, some Roman musicians sought to distance themselves from *Roman oyun havasi* in the professional sphere.

However:

they also played it with passion, often at the end of evenings, in secretive in-group gatherings, and danced to it at family weddings. Such responses can be seen as the result of a conflict between negative experiences of social positioning born of a history of overt and covert discrimination against Roman in a historical legacy from the administrations of Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Turkish Republic rule, and positive experiences of belonging to a community of shared cultural practices. (Seeman, 2002, p. 30)

Indeed, *Roman oyun havasi* remains a powerful internal force for generating Roman pride and national cohesion. Broadcast of the *Roman oyun havasi* genre created a medium with which

²³ According to Szeman, the “Gypsy stamp” has been utilized as a way to exoticize Balkan music (2009, p. 114). In her opinion this label has reinforced “romantic Gypsy stereotypes” which failed to “bring either the Roma or the Balkans—in their diversity and complexity—closer” (p. 114). Meanwhile, Değirmenci (2011) also discusses the stereotypes Roman musicians must navigate as performers who have to choose between parochial, local identities and cosmopolitan ones. Moreover, Silverman (2015) noted that, ironically, “at the same time that Gypsy music has become a ‘hot’ commodity...a rising tide of xenophobia and anti-Gypsyism has swept Europe” (p. 6). Değirmenci claimed that residential segregation of Roman has helped foster their outsider status so that their music is “as exotic as...African music even for the people living in the same city with the Roman communities” (2011, p. 111). He also stated that while profitable in the global markets, “cultural goods with a glaring ethnic label” are not as “viable in Turkey; they mostly remain marginal outside the ethnic community they address” (p. 120). The statements above underscore the lived duality that Roman persons experience in Turkish society as they are at once admired and praised, yet marginalized and heavily stereotyped. An in depth look at how these claims intersect with the popularity of Turkish Roman dance, my consultants’ testimony that Turkish Roman music and dance is a part of broader Turkish culture (and therefore engaged in by Roman and non-Roman alike), and its representation as an ethnic dance in a variety of formats including national dance presentations is beyond the scope of this thesis. Further research could clarify how seemingly contradictory findings such as Roman-as-exotic-other and Roman-as-familiar correlate.

Roman people can communicate relevant social issues while expressing their identity in a positive light (2002, p. 32).²⁴

While globalism has undeniably introduced many new, significant problems, it is arguable that this phenomenon is also of considerable benefit to Romanies and other marginalized groups.^{25,26} Media such as television, film, literature, radio, and internet have been used to help them continue to establish solidarity, apply political pressure, gain greater visibility, and to assert control over their own image and the way in which it is presented. Examples of the above include the 2011 film *A People Uncounted*, the website <http://www.romea.cz/>, a Romani news source which aims to “allow the young generation to get to know the Roma from a different side than currently presented by the media,” while giving “as much space as possible to the Roma themselves” (“O Romea.cz”), and the Roma Virtual Network, a “public grass-roots initiative aimed to provide the international Roma community and friendly non-Roma organizations and individuals with useful information on Roma issues in a variety of languages via the Internet” (Pressenza International Press Agency, 2015).²⁷

²⁴ While Seeman does not specify it as such, I take for granted that this statement includes *Roman havasi* (Turkish Roman) dance as well, particularly when the dance accompanies song texts expressing pride in Roman heritage or criticism of their social position/circumstances.

²⁵ As Barker, Fienup-Riordan and John (2010, p. 212) noted with respect to Yup'ik dance, "While many predicted that globalization would put an end to distinctive traditions, instead indigenous people all over the globe have sought to appropriate the world in their own terms. In southwest Alaska as elsewhere, expressions of cultural distinctiveness have grown up alongside increased global integration." They argued that despite all the new technologies that allow for greater connection on a global scale, cultural artifacts such as Yup'ik dancing remain relevant to the Yup'ik themselves (p. 212).

²⁶ Peter Gross (2006) listed the hindrances to effectively dispersing written or broadcast Romani activism media as due to several factors, including inadequate funding, high illiteracy rates, and lack of televisions and radios among Romani. However, Matache and Bhabha (2015) noted some successes towards the goal of reparations. Therefore, despite complications and difficulties, Romani activism is also making some important headway.

²⁷ It is notable, however, that pop-culture depictions of Romani people can challenge the headway made by Romani-driven media and that they can prove harmful, as they reinforce ignorant views and negative stereotypes. Shows such as TLC's *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* have come under the scrutiny of Romani activists for their stereotypical, unflattering and inaccurate portrayals of Romanies. Romani author and tutor Glenda Bailey-Mershon stated that after the airing of the aforementioned show, her Romani students reported being bullied (Strochilic, 2017). As Cox and Uştuk (2019) stated, Romani people are highly visible as "exotic others" for the entertainment of non-Roman persons, yet conveniently invisible when it comes to addressing the issues that plague the Roman community (p. 176). Or, as Howard (2020) noted: "A title from Keil's (2002) musing on music participation, 'They

Various media have been (and continue to be) utilized to broadcast Turkish Roman dance within Turkey and beyond. One particularly salient example is the number of *Roman oyun havasi*, *Roman havasi*, *Roman dansı*, or Turkish Roman dance videos posted on YouTube. It appears that such films, alongside instructional DVDs, dance classes, workshops, and live performances on both domestic and international stages, have been effective mediums for disseminating the art form.

In sum, Turkish Roman people are tenuously positioned in broader Turkish society. While they are, on the one hand, appreciated, admired, and solicited for their entertainment skills, they are on the other, socially marginalized. Indeed, Turkish Roman dance, alongside its music, has become part of the world music and dance phenomenon, which has bolstered non-Romani regard for Romani culture as well as Romani pride. Yet, the discrimination that Roman still endure in Turkish society can drastically affect their lives and challenge any notion of greater equanimity being acquired as a result of this newfound esteem. Studying this art form allows us to observe how these contrary experiences (among others) are expressed by Turkish Roman people in their dance and music. Examples include the oblique or coded “hidden transcripts” utilized in their song lyrics and dance movements, as well as those aspects of performance which are present within in-group acts, but not outside of the Roman community or vice versa. Moreover, there is a general belief among Roman and non-Roman alike that Roman performances are more “authentic” when practiced among themselves. Further research could explore how changes in Turkey’s socio-political environment manifest in Turkish Roman dance, in situ and abroad.

Want the Music But They Don't Want the People fits this dilemma.’ Roma music and musicians were and are sought after, but for their service rather than their human existence” (p. 53).

1.3 The Broader Conversation

This thesis contributes to ethnographic literature that offers a Peircean semiotic analysis of performance. According to Peirce, a sign “is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign” (Zeman, n.d.). Peirce (1955) argued that there were three categories of signs, in order from most complex to the most simple: symbol, icon, and index. Although Peirce considered it to be the most complex type of sign, I begin with the symbol because it is the concept most familiar and accessible to readers and acquainted with Peircean theory. To Peirce, a symbol’s meaning is arbitrarily allocated. In other words, the relationship between a symbol and its meaning must be learned. Examples include flags, written language, and traffic signs. In contrast, an iconic sign resembles the object that it stands for in that it possesses some of its qualities. Examples include sound effects, drawings, and maps. Turkish Roman dance, (particularly the feminine style), contains iconic gestures within its movement vocabulary. For example, the gesture for scrubbing laundry entails grabbing handfuls of cloth from one’s garment (*e.g.*, the bottom of a shirt or skirt) in each hand and rubbing them together. This gesture resembles the action of washing clothes, making the gesture iconic. Lastly, an index may bear no resemblance to what it signifies. Its meaning is not arbitrarily designated, but rather, indexes involve a relationship of co-presence or connection between a sign and what it represents. Peirce uses the example of a weathervane as an index of the direction the wind is blowing (1955, p. 109). Another example of an index is a lichen that only grows on the north side of trees or rocks. The lichen is connected to and indexes north. With respect to language and communication, a regional accent points to or is “co-present with” the speaker being from a particular geographic region. In the context of Turkish Roman dance,

the dance itself indexes Turkish Roman identity, but so do movements associated with the genre, such as the *göbek atma*.

Studying dance allows us to understand how communities and individuals condense complex concepts into semiotic communication, and also which thoughts, values, beliefs, and actions are considered worthy of, or requiring, such representation. Dance allows us to contemplate how such communication changes over time and why. In addition, dance can play an important role in identity expression and management. In the case of Turkish Roman music, Seeman stated that considering “the relationship between metaphoricity and iconicity in terms of the condensation and augmentation of signs within the genre of *Roman oyun havasi* illuminates the meaningful power of the genre for Roman communities” (2002, p. 58). I believe this applies to Turkish Roman dance as well, and a discussion of the semiotics of dance movement and its context within Turkish Roman dance performances is provided within this thesis. In discussing the semiotic qualities and power of indigenous Koryak dance, King argued that “it is an iconic index, containing elements of mimesis or resemblance as well as a direct connection to other things, such as social relationships, ethnic identity, and a cultural epistemology” (2011, p. 86). Similarly, Turkish Roman dance is an iconic index or is emblematic of Roman ethnicity and culture, and it also utilizes gestures which are both iconic and indexical.

Dance studies offer insight not only into the ways in which people perceive, interpret, and augment their environment and their position within it, but also into the process in which they embody such knowledge. As Tomie Hahn described in her 2007 ethnography “cultural sensibilities” can be “succinctly imparted” through dance. For example, she described a lesson with her headmaster of *nihon buyo*, Tachibana Hiroyo, wherein her teacher instructs her to “know with your body” (Hahn, 2007, p. 1). Such knowing underscores the Japanese value of the

interdependence of the mind and body, and the development of theory based on practice (rather than the converse). Therefore, as she pointed out, dance research can also illuminate methods of teaching and learning within a society (2007, p. 2). She drew from Cynthia Bull's work and stated that "the particular characteristics of each dance form and its unique manner of transmission and performance encourage priorities of sensation that subtly affect the nature of perception itself. Dance finely tunes sensibilities, helping to shape the practices, behaviors, beliefs, and ideas of people's lives" (2007, p. 3). As such, exploring the ways in which a culture's art forms are "sensually transmitted" can inform us as to how our senses influence our conceptualization of the world external to our bodies, its perceived relationship to us, and provide insight into the means of constructing "sensible worlds of shared cultural meaning" (2007, p. 4). Naturally, Turkish Roman dance offers opportunities to study such epistemologies and their embodiment. For example, among some Turkish Roman people, it is believed that only they can dance like a Roman and this idea is often correlated with talent that is "in the blood".²⁸ According to Seeman's findings, *Roman oyun havasi* "musicians and audiences invoke notions of social space and geographic place, particularly through referencing the neighborhood (*mahalle*), retelling local stories, and the use of in-group references and linguistic codes" and that "critical analysis of local performances reveals how senses of place and space are reproduced

²⁸ Seeman's research also confirmed the existence of a belief that there is a particular way in which only Turkish Roman dancers can move (2002, p. 27). Rabia stated that among some Roman, no matter what your experience or skills, if you are not Roman, your dancing is not "authentic." However, this sentiment is not unanimous, and, in fact, she reported that she rarely encountered it. Rabia claims that she has largely received praise for her dancing skills and encouragement to continue performing and teaching the form. Indeed, there were times when she was mistaken for being Roman herself. The notion that only Roman dancers can perform Turkish Roman properly is likely largely perpetuated as a result of the social divides between non-Roman Turkish citizens and Roman Turkish citizens. Also, while Turkish Roman dance is part of the fabric of Turkish culture, it is even more salient to Roman culture, particularly given its use as a significant means of economy and ethnic identity expression for the latter (both topics will be discussed in this thesis). While Turkish citizens perform Turkish Roman dance and music as a part of events such as weddings, circumcisions, and other celebrations and events, the Roman are generally engaged with these activities routinely.

and renegotiated through aesthetic expressive means” (2002, p. 89).²⁹ In this thesis, I will demonstrate how aspects of Seeman’s findings regarding *Roman oyun havasi* musicians and performers also apply to Turkish Roman dancers.

Additionally, dance and other cultural performances do more than communicate cultural values, they are part of how people reflect upon their own society and are instruments of change themselves. As Turner stated:

cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting “designs for living.” (Turner, 1988, p. 24)

Indeed, Turkish Roman dance is a vehicle for expressing the following: the embodiment of cultural values, the dancer’s feelings or opinions regarding their position in society, pride in their identity, as well as changes in social mores.³⁰ An example of the latter includes Rabia’s observation that, as it becomes increasingly common for female dancers to embody the masculine style, we can witness how societal changes in gender roles are interpreted and incorporated into expressive culture by Roman. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, Turkish Roman dance is now emblematic of pan-Roman identity and is interwoven with political issues which concern Roman welfare.

²⁹ In my own experience as a Turkish Roman dance student, location was not emphasized as part of the dance embodiment process, although song lyrics and topics may invoke place and influence choreography. For Rabia, one’s physical location is not particularly a “part of the dance” itself. However, she stated that one can glean information about place from regional differences in musical styles or in gesture meanings (R. Birkland, personal communication, May 12, 2017). Surely, the underscoring of place through dance is more salient if one understands the Turkish or Roman lyrics outright, and/or if one has intimate knowledge of the in-group dynamics of Roman.

³⁰ I believe these facets are especially salient for Turkish Roman people given their history of marginalization and exoticization. The latter is particularly applicable to Roman women, as they are viewed as sexually uninhibited in comparison to non-Roman Muslim women (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 152), a view which further marginalizes them.

Seeman contended that one must examine the “social, economic and ideological constraints” under which Turkish Roman people exist when contemplating the phenomenon of *Roman oyun havasi*, and argued that *Roman oyun havasi* performances express both a sense of “belonging to a particular historical community and resistance to the strictures of dominant Turkish society” (2002, p. 76-77). Given the co-evolution of *Roman oyun havasi* music and dance as emblematic of “Roman-ness” as well as their frequent co-performance, we must also consider the same in exploring Turkish Roman dance.³¹

According to King, dance has the power to present concentrated symbolic power as a “dramatic spectacle,” all the while indexing what is considered “typical of ordinary forms of movement” within a culture (2011, p. 87). Turkish Roman dance is no exception to this observation, and in fact, possesses a significant body of iconic gestures which mimetically present quotidian tasks in an abstract and dramatic way. Seeman draws from Ricoeur’s theory of mimesis in stating that it involves

the intersection between the referential meaning and cultural works and the grasping together of those meanings as conferred by the productive imagination, thus affecting a re-inscription of reality in the mind of the interpreter. This operation opens the possibility for reality to be confirmed, challenged, or changed. Thus mimesis, as the creative imitation of action, provides a model for reality and an opening for possible action. (2002, p. 62)

Both King and Seeman’s observations support the theory that dance portrays a society’s cultural themes, values, and processes of social and cultural evolution, as well as Turner’s provision that dance is also a vehicle for enacting such change (Turner, 1988, p. 24).

³¹ Seeman utilizes the term Roman-ness as shorthand for Roman identity and experience (2002, p. 28, 86). I use the term as such in this thesis.

Seeman applies practice theory to *Roman oyun havasi* performance, arguing that dance and other performances can help illuminate the “nonmonetary value” that such expressions possess regarding the constitution of “belonging,” the definition of “insider versus outsider status, and ritual displays of social standing” (Seeman, 2002, p. 73). Using Bourdieu’s understanding of symbolic capital, I approach Turkish Roman dance as an expression of Roman group belonging and as a resource for affirming Roman identity. In addition, Turkish Roman dance can communicate the social status of an individual within Roman society, *e.g.*, via displays of prowess or domestic accomplishments. Historically, Roman dance and music have arguably served as symbols of prestige (on behalf of the consumer) since they were products that were obtained for the purposes of entertainment and leisure. Currently, Turkish Roman dance also possesses prestige *because* of the fact that it is a Roman dance.

In regard to the political culture of nation states, Girgin-Tohumcu claimed that “political representation” is “most visible in social practices such as dance and music” (2014, p. 145). While this notion may not be universally applicable, the study of Turkish Roman dance can provide insight into Turkish politics and social attitudes regarding Roman people. For example, Turkish national dance ensembles did not initially include Turkish Roman dances within their repertoire. As Turkish Roman dance started to be viewed as a commodity and vehicle for nationalistic aims, it began to be featured in national ensemble choreographies as a distinct (and specifically Roman dance) style (2014, p. 154). Indeed, various socio-political aspects helped to solidify Turkish Roman dance as an index of Roman culture (such aspects will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3). The effects of similar socio-political factors were observed by King (2011) during his research in Kamchatka, where the dances of the area’s various ethnic groups not only served as synecdoches of “nativeness,” but also served as indexes for the groups

themselves. In both Turkey and Russia, socio-political and nationalistic phenomena have impacted the practice of dancing, resulting in dances which are strongly emblematic of their respective ethnic groups. Therefore, dance can serve as a visual vehicle with which to better understand how the politicization of groups interrelates with and effects their identity, cultural practices, and self-expression.

Turkish Roman dance is used to communicate Roman sentiments regarding their position in society, to subvert the dominant social power, to reify and celebrate their ethnic identity, as well as to express details of an individual's life. However, dance can also serve as a method of cultural restoration. As Barker et al (2010) observed in regards to the revitalization of Yup'ik dance, "The contemporary emphasis on traditional values and activities reflects both ethnonationalism and political activism among numerous indigenous peoples, including the Yupitit" (p. 212). Persons desiring to use dance as a restoration method "have strong political agendas, seeking not merely to revive selected practices but to vindicate them after...dismissal and condemnation" (p. 212). Yup'ik people join indigenous peoples worldwide who self-consciously counterpoise their traditions "to the forces of Western imperialism...not merely to mark their identity but to seize their destiny" (p. 212).

In anthropology, dance has historically been approached "as an object of study in its own right," and as a means with which to comprehend "other domains of human activity such as gender, politics, memory, kinship, religion, identity, mobility, health, or cognition" (Gore and Neveu Kringelbach, 2018). As anthropology has evolved, it developed analytical and theoretical tools with which to examine dance within its social environment and, consequentially, increasingly unified both approaches to the topic (Gore and Neveu Kringelbach, 2018). Examples of recent dance research includes Siri Mæland's (2018) "Unifying pleasure,

knowledge, creativity and choreography through couple dancing in Norway” and Marie Mazzella’s (2018) “Embodied negotiations in free-form, transformative dance. Redefining contemporary Western modes of relationship to oneself and to others.” The former paper explored how elements such as dance mastery and interpersonal connection produce transcendental experiences among dancers, and utilized “a combination of ethnochoreological movement analysis and of cognitive anthropology of bodily practices” as a part of her methods (Mæland, 2018). The latter illustrates how “Free-form, transformative dance” such as 5 Rhythms or Soul Motion “point to a specifically contemporary Western way of experiencing and defining oneself in relationship with others” (Mazzella, 2018). Mazzella explored questions such as:

In the absence of words, clear instructions or choreographies, how do participants use gazing, touching, breathing, sound-making and gestures to negotiate their danced interactions? How do they enter into a danced relationship, initiate duets, trios or quartets, judge the appropriateness of a touch, eye contact, or degrees of physical proximity?
(2018)

A 2018 panel convened by Georgiana Gore (University of Clermont Auvergne) and H el ene Neveu Kringelbach (University College London) illustrates the breadth of topics which dance ethnography is exploring. Selected submissions (including the aforementioned papers) investigated topics such as the ways in which creative processes are articulated in choreographic movement; how dance studies may shed light on the relationship between humans and the natural world, as well as the ways in which dance establishes such social ties; the evolution of dance practices over time and what such processes communicate regarding time and memory; and the ways in which technological advances “contribute to our understanding of creative bodies in movement” (Gore and Neveu Kringelbach, 2018).

1.4 Contributions to Alaskan Dance Ethnography

This thesis does not focus on the Turkish or Turkish Roman Diaspora in Alaska or in the US, nor is it an ethnography of the dance classroom. However, the fact that this style of dance was taught by a Turkish native indicates the cultural and ethnic diversity of Alaska, as well as the international scope of Turkish and Romani culture. When she was still living in Anchorage in 2017, Rabia claimed in a newspaper interview that at least 50 Turkish people lived in the community (Early, 2017). When traveling abroad for performances or studies, Rabia came to be identified by others as “Rabia of Alaska.” In a 2015 *Anchorage Press* article, Rabia claimed that she came to proudly own that title, and that it opened doors for her (Swann, 2015). While Rabia did not specify which doors were opened or why, it is presumably because it offers an easily identifiable novelty to her considerable dance experience as she traveled to teach, perform, and study among the international dance community.

This thesis not only contributes to dance ethnography, but also to the ethnography of Alaska. Ethnographies in Alaska tend to focus on its rich and diverse indigenous cultures. Examples include Teresa John’s (2010) dissertation *Yuraryararput kangit-llu: Our Ways of Dance and Their Meanings* and Hiroko Ikuta’s (2004) dissertation “*We Dance Because We Are Iñupiaq*”, *Iñupiaq Dance in Barrow: Performance and Identity*. Ikuta’s research takes place among the Barrow Dancers of Utqiagvik, and examines the use of dance, song, and drumming as tools for constructing, maintaining and expressing Iñupiaq identity in a social environment that is experiencing flux. John’s dissertation explores the role that Yupik dance and music plays “in organizing and maintaining various societal infrastructures” such as those that pertain to the spiritual, economic, and societal spheres of Yupik culture and how this role “has evolved over time” (iii). Despite Alaska’s far north location and sparsely populated landmass, Anchorage, its

largest city, has “the three most ethno-racially diverse neighborhoods in the country” and “the top 26 most diverse public schools in the country” (Early, 2017). Therefore, this thesis helps to tell the story of place by contributing to the representation of the additional ethnicities now shaping Alaska’s cultural landscape.

1.5 Scope of Research

It is not my intention to present a complete history of the Romani or Turkish Roman people, or their struggles regarding human rights and identity politics. Rather, historical highlights will be discussed in order to provide a basic foundation with which readers may familiarize themselves with facets of the Roman experience, particularly as this relates to their dance form. It must also be noted that this thesis cannot be considered a complete encyclopedia of Turkish Roman dance moves, as the actual movement vocabulary is more varied (and continually evolving) than what can be presented herein. Lastly, while elements of Turkish Roman music will be discussed, it is highly recommended that the reader look to other resources for a more in-depth exploration of that subject matter.³²

1.6 Methods

My methods were influenced by Hahn’s 2007 ethnography wherein she explored the process of transmitting *nihon buyo* dance skills from teacher to student, as well as the embodiment of such cultural knowledge. She began studying *nihon buyo* at the age of four, and at the time of her book’s publication, she had been dancing the form for 30 years. She began her lessons in Tokyo, and continued them at the Tachibana school in New York. Similar to Hahn’s statement about her research, my field site was my own body. Indeed, my primary understanding

³² Seeman’s (2019) book, *Sounding Roman: Representation & Performing Identity in Western Turkey*, is an excellent resource for researching Turkish Roman music. Değirmenci (2011) addresses the interface of Roman identity expression and world music. Other treatments of Romani music include Silverman (2007) and Szeman (2009), both of which explore the exoticization and marketing of Romani or “Gypsy” music and related dynamics.

of Turkish Roman dance came from the direct experience of receiving the holistic, experiential, multi-sensory transmission of Turkish Roman cultural knowledge and skills, and from the experience of embodying the form. Hahn's approach inspired me to reflect upon the processes of transmission and embodiment in assessing my own experience in learning Turkish Roman dance. Her writing illustrates how a culture's history and values influence both the transmission and embodiment of its dance, as well as the dancer's "experiential orientation" (2007, p. 5). I have sought to include the latter elements within my own research. For example, the low social position that the Roman have historically experienced has resulted in coded elements of performance, or hidden, shared meanings displayed and thought to be understood by fellow Roman, but not by outsiders.

I acquired my data via participant observation as both a student and performer of Turkish Roman dance. I relied upon my years of experience as a student of Turkish Roman in analyzing its elements and in relaying information about its history, aesthetic qualities, and meanings. Open-ended interviews pertaining to the dance form's history, embodiment process, aesthetics, semiotics, notions of authenticity, social significance, performance contexts and demographics, and its relationship to its musical accompaniment were conducted with selected performer-instructors of the form. Due to funding limits and time constraints, ethnographic fieldwork with Roman in Turkey or outside of Alaska was not possible. Many of my teachers were not of Roman descent, yet several of them were from Turkey and/or had studied extensively with Roman teachers, in the US and abroad.

I began my journey studying Turkish Roman dance when I was living in Santa Cruz, California, where a local dance studio hosted a workshop by Elizabeth Strong. Shortly afterward, I moved back to Anchorage, Alaska. I became re-involved with the Anchorage belly dance

community almost immediately, where I met Rabia, a local Turkish folkloric, Turkish Roman, and Turkish Oriental dancer. When Rabia began offering dance classes I signed up, as I was excited to expand my experience with all three of the latter dance forms. When she decided to form her Turkish dance troupe *Gözde Dans* (“Favorite Dance”), I successfully auditioned, eager to continue honing my performance skills. Before, during, and after the formation of *Gözde Dans*, Rabia hosted national and international dance professionals in Anchorage in an effort to facilitate the development of our folkloric and belly dance community, and to expand dance opportunities for its members. She made arrangements with a variety of dance professionals to come to Anchorage to teach workshops, which were sometimes accompanied by a public performance featuring the instructor and local talent, or an informal dance party (open to the dance community) known as a *hafla*. She hosted guest instructors of American belly dance, Egyptian belly dance, Turkish Oriental, and Turkish Roman dance. I met my other consultants, Reyhan and Serkan Tutar, during such workshops. However, Reyhan’s reputation had preceded her, as I had already used her DVD and studied with Elizabeth (one of her students) years before I met her.

The mission of *Gözde Dans* was to facilitate an appreciation of Turkish culture and art through faithful representation and to serve as a bridge between cultures. I believe I speak for all of the troupe members when I say that our personal goals also included sharpening our professional dance skills and broadening our dance experience, as well as getting paid to perform. All of us had “day jobs” and welcomed any opportunities to financially support our passion and art. Frequently, our performances were free, such as those presented during Bridge Builder’s Meet the World Event and the Anchorage Folk Fest. Some performance environments were formal, such as Istanbul Nights, and others were less so, such as Gay Pride. Some events

were coordinated by Rabia and were meant to feature our troupe alongside other talent, while for other occasions, we were invited to participate by an organization or business. Venues included local restaurants, outdoor events, and performing arts centers such as the Wendy Williamson Auditorium at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Performance frequency fluctuated, depending on the demand and prevalence of local events. The styles that we performed included Turkish folkloric, Turkish Oriental, and Turkish Roman dance. Troupe size averaged six adult women during my membership. Dancer profiles varied in terms of dance experience, age, ethnicity and cultural background. Rehearsal times varied from week to week, depending on our performance schedule, with a rough minimum of one 90-minute meeting per week, up to about three 90-minute sessions per week. Rehearsals were held at Rabia's home studio or at a local dance studio. Troupe structure was as follows: Rabia was the artistic director, followed by an assistant director who would facilitate rehearsals if and when Rabia was unavailable. Money made from performances was used to cover costs and any remaining funds were to be divided among troupe members.

As my scholarly demands intensified, I left the troupe to focus on independent study with Rabia. I attended her public classes and took private lessons with her. Private lessons were intermittent, about an hour and a half to two hours long and took place at her home studio. Meanwhile, the dance classes were approximately an hour and a half, once a week and took place at local dance studios.

As previously mentioned, it was while living in California that I first observed Turkish Roman dance and when I first had instruction in the style. After moving to Alaska, I was able to continue my classes and observation as an audience member and to perform the style as well. By that point it appeared that Turkish Roman dance had achieved greater international renown, as

more and more dancers were familiar with the style and as more and more materials appeared online, including YouTube videos depicting the dance in its native context or as instructional videos.

Rabia was the primary consultant for this research. She was also my primary instructor for Turkish Roman, Turkish folkloric and Turkish Oriental dance. My studies with Rabia began in 2013, and ended when she departed Alaska in 2017. I have also studied Turkish Roman with Reyhan Tuzsuz, Elizabeth Strong, Serkan Tutar, Gigi Dilşah, and Artemis Mourat (I studied Turkish Oriental with the latter three instructors as well). I have supplemented my studies with DVDs and online videos with various instructors of Turkish Roman dance.

Rabia grew up in Turkey, where she was taught how to drum and dance at an early age. While her first teacher was her mother, she also pursued a formal dance education, performing folkloric dances at various events and studying with Reyhan Tuzsuz, Sema Yildiz, and Ahmet Öğren. Rabia moved to Alaska in 2002, and, missing elements from her home environment, decided to bring them to Alaska through teaching Turkish dances and organizing Turkish cultural events. Her goal was to create community for Turkish Alaskans as well as cultivate appreciation of Turkish culture. At the time, Rabia stated that she was acquainted with the majority of the Turkish Alaskan population. Periodically, Turkish people would join her dance classes. They would also attend our troupe's performances or join the pre-or post-event gatherings. Two dancers with Turkish backgrounds (including Rabia) were in the troupe during my membership. I recall a time that Rabia choreographed a piece for a few members of the Turkish community in order for them to be a part of an event, even if they were not involved with her troupe in an official capacity. At the time, I was no longer a troupe member but was still Rabia's student. My impression was that these dancers were neophytes, but that Rabia hoped to

encourage them to embrace this part of their culture and to grow in confidence in performing its traditional dances. Rabia always encouraged the involvement of Turkish persons in her efforts. Indeed, according to a 2017 *Alaska Public Media* article, she hoped that the members of the Turkish Alaskan community that she helped to forge would continue to gather after she left (Hughes, 2017).

Rabia has taught and performed internationally, including at events such as Rakkas Istanbul and Eilat International Belly Dance Festival. While instructing and performing Turkish Oriental, Turkish folkloric, and Turkish Roman dances in Anchorage, Rabia also worked as an advanced practice registered nurse with a surgical specialty. She also has a BA in physical education and a MS in nursing education.

Collectively, my instructor's classes and workshops in Turkish Roman taught me about the following: its embodiment process, aesthetics, movement vocabulary, and semiotic communication, as well as the relationship between the dancer and music, and pertinent cultural and historical insights. I was also informed about the connection between Turkish Roman and Turkish Oriental dance, which I discuss in further detail at the end of Chapter 4. In addition to my classes and workshops, I was granted interviews with Rabia, Reyhan, and Serkan wherein I was able to delve more deeply into the above topics.³³

1.7 Thesis Layout

Chapter 2 provides an abridged history of the Romani people, including their origins in Northern India, as well as theories regarding their impetus for migration, and their migration routes. I review the dates of their arrival into Anatolia and elsewhere along with their current estimated global population, and provide a highly condensed synopsis of pan-Romani activism. I

³³ For more on each of these performer-instructors, see Appendix B.

touch on the historical discrimination experienced by Romani people and the impact of their activism.

Chapter 3 relays the history of the Turkish Roman people, from their arrival during the Byzantine Empire to modern times. The implications of Byzantine and Ottoman era policies and values on past and present Roman lives are explored, particularly as they apply to Roman of the Ottoman Empire. I also discuss the phenomena of the *Roman oyun havasi* music and Turkish Roman dance style. I argue that many of the conclusions that Seeman drew pertaining to the role of music in Turkish Roman lives also apply to Turkish Roman dance, and I elaborate on this in Chapter 4.

The history of the Romani people is relevant to this discussion because, despite their presence in Turkey since Byzantine times, they are still treated as outsiders and have historically been treated as such wherever they have gone. This social climate has impacted their sense of belonging, which is expressed in their music and dance. Indeed, Romani innovations have often been dismissed, both in Turkey and abroad. Instead, Romanies have been positioned as outsiders who, rather than having a culture and history of their own, simply take from the society they are living in or “passing through.” Therefore, an exploration of the services and innovations Roman offered to Byzantine, Ottoman, and Turkish Republic societies is warranted in order to further understand their historical and contemporary experience.

Utilizing Peircean semiotics and criteria outlined in Hymes’ 1964 article “Towards Ethnographies of Communication” as a foundation, Chapter 4 examines the various elements which I observed, during my ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and literature and film reviews to comprise Turkish Roman dance. My analysis of Turkish Roman dance as an expressive form includes its primary channels of communication, its gestural meanings and capacity for coded

and bivalent messages, the gendered differences between masculine and feminine styles, its relationship to the 9/8 rhythm and to other appropriated dance and musical elements, the significance of variations in its spheres of performance and in performer and audience composition, its relationship to Roman identity and its emblematic features and criteria of authenticity, as well as its process of transmission and embodiment. Costuming, prop usage, and the innovation of new gestures such as those which reflect technology are also reviewed. The influence of the “genrification” of Turkish Roman as a result of politics, commercialization, and globalization on its practice and expression is also discussed as it relates to the aforementioned topics.

Chapter 5 concludes this thesis with a broad recapturing of its essential themes and claims, followed by a comprehensive list of works cited.

Appendix A lists the Turkish Roman gestures and elements of dance featured in the video recordings that accompany this thesis. This collection is meant to assist the reader in understanding the analysis of the Turkish Roman dance moves presented in Chapter 4. Appendix B contains collaborator biographies and links to select videos and websites

Chapter 2: A Brief Overview of Romani History: The Formation of a Nation without Territory

2.1 Introduction

Turkish Roman dance is, in part, a physical embodiment of the historical and contemporary positioning of Romani individuals and communities on both the local and national level. Sentiments regarding Romani identity or belonging to the Romani Nation can vary from person to person and from community to community. However, even those individuals or groups that do not identify as Romani or consider themselves a part of the Romani nation are likely to have their environment influenced by the changes generated via the formation of the Romani Nation, and by the world music phenomena (discussed in Chapter 3). Reviewing the history of the Romani people provides one with a greater understanding of both the overt and covert expressions utilized within Turkish Roman dance in order to communicate their sense of self, and their relationship to their environment.

2.2 Romani Origins

Scholars have yet to agree which century ancestors of the Romani people departed India.³⁴ Linguistic and genetic evidence as well as written records have been utilized in an attempt to solve this mystery, although some of the theories estimating their time of departure vary by several hundred years. For example, Arayici (2008, p. 528) claimed that the Romanies first left northern India between the 1st and 9th centuries CE, while Kochanowski advocated for a departure date as late as A.D. 1191 (Hancock, 2005, p. 29). However, most scholars support a departure between the 5th and 9th centuries (with Hancock being partial to the earlier half of this

³⁴ Originally, it was conceived that Romani ancestors included the Lom and Dom, and that these groups departed together. However, more recent scholarship argues that they left India in three separate migrations (Hancock, 2005, p. 5).

spectrum) (Hancock, 2005, p. 5-8).³⁵ The exact impetus for the Romani people's departure from India has also been disputed.³⁶ Theories include the notion that Romani ancestors may have been captured by the Seljuks and brought into Anatolia, or they may have left India as a result of the Ghaznavid invasions (Hancock, 2002, p. 14).³⁷ Indeed, the oral history of some Romani groups claim that they left India because of "a great conflict with Islam" (Hancock 2002, p. 13), and both the Seljuks and the Ghaznavids followed Islam.³⁸

The Romanies are generally thought to have originated from Punjab and Rajasthan (Arayici 2008, p. 528).³⁹ Previous notions surmised that Romani people are descendants of low-caste members of Hindu society (Hancock 2005, p. 3-6). The latter theory seems to be largely based on the idea that those professions which Romanies occupied (in the societies in which they eventually lived) must have been based upon their social position in their original Indian homeland (Hancock 2002, p. 4). However, Hancock argued that Romanies were instead Rajput warriors "whose army was composed of a great variety of castes" (2005, p. 33). Hancock based his theory in part on the fact that contemporary Romanies possess a vocabulary pertaining to warfare that is Indic in origin, whereas words pertaining to "artisan or agricultural skills" are scarce (for example, the blacksmithing vocabulary is from Greek) (2002, p 5,10).⁴⁰ Additionally, the ancestors of contemporary Romanies were not likely to be itinerant members of society as

³⁵ Hancock (2005, p. 5-8) provides a summary of various arguments pertaining to the century in which the ancestral Romanies departed India.

³⁶ Kolukirik and Toktaş (2007) state that research indicates that "famine, poverty or ethnic-religious conflicts" could be possible explanations for their emigration (p. 761).

³⁷ See Hancock (1998) for an in-depth exploration of theories pertaining to the impetus for the ancestral Romanies' departure from India.

³⁸ Two empires of Turkic origin, at odds with one another. The Seljuk empire (1035-1157) included Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and the majority of Iran (977–1186 CE), while the Ghaznavids ruled Khorāsān (located in modern-day northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan and northern Afghanistan), Afghanistan, and northern India.

³⁹ However, Courthiade's research indicated that the Romanies came from Kannauj, located in Uttar Pradesh (Hancock, 2005, p. 16).

⁴⁰ An example of a trade skill which has been presumed to have been practiced by the Romanies before they left India, but was in fact "acquired in the Byzantine Empire or in Greece" (Hancock, 2002, p. 10).

their Indic vocabulary included words for domestic concepts such as “house” and “land owner,” but did not include expressions implying a nomadic life such as “set up camp” or “strike camp” (p. 41).⁴¹ Indeed, Indian scholars have highlighted the similarities between Romani culture and the behavior of high caste members of Hindu society (p. 41).

Arayici (2008) stated that by at least 950 CE, Romani immigrants had reached Isfahan, Persia (p. 528). Those that traveled westward reached “Anatolia, Thrace, and parts of South-Eastern Europe (what is present-day Turkey) by 1045 (Marsh 2018, p. 1). Many settled in Istanbul and Anatolia, others journeyed farther west, entering the Balkans by the 12th century, and present-day Germany by the 15th century.⁴² From there, Romanies first traveled through southern Europe, second, through the northern countries, and third, through Siberia (Arayici 2008, p. 528).

2.3 Historical Persecution of the Romani people

Archival evidence suggests that Romani immigrants initially enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence after arriving in Europe (Thiel-Cramér, 1991, p. 28). Indeed, they were offered “letters of safe conduct” by King Frederick II in A.D. 1442 and by Pope Martin in A.D. 1483 (Hancock, 2002, p. 30). However, their welcome was short-lived. They soon faced ostracization and persecution (Schreiner, 1990, p. 39). Romani people endured “five and a half centuries of slavery” in Wallachia and Moldavia, and experienced various periods of slavery in England, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and Scotland (Hancock, 2005, p. 26-29).

⁴¹ Hancock believed that the Romani language is most similar to Hindi/Urdu. Scholars have analyzed Romani language for linguistic similarities to other languages, including Sindhi, Marwari, and Jataki. He argued that the findings indicate that these latter languages have a shared origin in Rajputic (2005, p. 16).

⁴² Scholars do not universally agree on the Romanies’ date of arrival in Persia, nor on their arrival into the Byzantine Empire (Hancock, 2005, p. 5-6, 29).

More recently, the Romani were victims of genocide during the Holocaust (Schreiner 1990, p. 39). Hancock (2002) cited Haberer (2001) as stating that during the Holocaust the “persecution of gypsies... equaled that of the Jews” and that “their liquidation was part and parcel of the Nazi’s agenda to eradicate ‘worthless life’” (p. 50). Because Romani people were historically treated as pariahs, Nazi attempts to exterminate them went unacknowledged (Weyshert 2020, p. 140). This dismissal of Romani history has been attributed to “global systemic discrimination” (Csanyi-Robah et al., 2016) which Hancock refers to in his book as “institutionalized antigypsyism” (Hancock, 2002, p. 53). Today, Romanies are working to gain worldwide recognition of their persecution during the Holocaust, and many governments are changing policies in response to that effort (Kalsås and Helakorpi, 2020, p. 3878). Germany has officially recognized the wartime treatment of Romani people as genocide. However, Romanies are still targeted by “neo-Nazi and other extreme right-wing groups,” particularly in Eastern Europe (Csanyi-Robah, et al., 2016).⁴³

According to Fosztó (2003), “the societies in which Roma live often treat Roma with discrimination, or pursue persecutive or assimilative policies. The interplay of these forces have and continue to shape the development of the Romani movement” (p. 110). He attributed the foundation of Romani activism to the “Nazi genocide of WW II, the Cold War and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe” (p. 110).

2.4 A Brief Summary of Romani Activism

While Romanies belong to a broad diaspora stretching across five continents, they are without their own specific territory. In addition, Romanies are “diverse in customs, languages

⁴³ Although the Turkish Roman fared better than their European counterparts, they still experienced discrimination, a topic which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

and dialects, religions... and citizenship” (Klímová-Alexander, 2017, p. 1). However, they are “becoming increasingly bound by common political and cultural mobilization” (p. 1).

An abridged timeline of achievements in Romani activism:⁴⁴

- 1500s: Swiss Romanies organized protests^a
- 1879: Hungary hosted a Pan-European Roma conference^b
- 1933: The Romanian Roma Association’s international conference (Bucharest, Romania) discussed Romani unity under one flag. Thereafter, numerous associations and organizations in European countries emerged^b
- 1959: Ionel Rotaru (Romanian Roman) established the World Romani Community (France)^c
- 1965: Vanko Rouda (Hungarian Lovari Rom) founded the International Gypsy Committee, which hosted the first World Romani Congress (April 1971, Orpington, England)^c
- 1965: The Committee of the Roma is founded (Paris). Their EU implemented program addressed social rights, war crimes, language standardization, culture and education^a
- 1970: The Indian Roma Studies Center was founded^a
- 1971: The first World Romani Congress was held (Orpington, England)^c

The perennial agenda of the Romani movement has been group unity and collective representation (Fosztó, 2003, p. 111). However, rather than focusing on “national minority claims” their approach in realizing this goal has emphasized “universal and human civil rights” as well as the “transnational” nature of their proposed community (p.117). Fosztó claimed that it was through refugee-oriented work that the notion of a “pan-European minority” originated, and that it was the Roma National Congress (based in Hamburg) that championed Romani

⁴⁴ Key to citations in the abridged timeline: a: Kolukirik and Toktaş 2007, p. 764; b: Hancock, 2002, p. 113; c: Fosztó, 2003, p. 111-112.

nationalism based on these civil rights, and the notion of a transnational Romani community (2003, p. 117).

The first World Romani Congress (WRC) included representatives “from twenty countries including India” (Fosztó, 2003, p. 112). Participants selected a national flag and anthem, and “commissions for social affairs, war crimes, language standardization and culture were established” (p. 112). They also selected the terms Rom and Roma “from the European *Romanes* language as a cover term for ethnic communities variously known as Rom, Sinti, or Manush” (Seeman, 2006). In 1995, the Council of Europe heeded the recommendation of Roma associations in adopting the term “Rroma” in its documents in order to refer to the Roman people (Hancock, 1998). Seeman, in discussing this history, pointed out that “the control over self-designation was part of a larger move towards self-empowerment” (2006). WRC meetings were also held in 1978, 1981, 1990, and 2000 (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 764).

In her 2017 discussion of global Romani activism, Klímová-Alexander asserted that while Romanies resist “conforming to the bureaucratic state-centric international system,” they also “use this system to their advantage” (p. 1). Indeed, Romanies engage “in the process of nation-building through elite political and cultural mobilization” in an effort to position “themselves within the framework of the nation-states dominated world” (p. 1).

Initially, the concerns of “high culture” elites within the movement addressed Romani unification, the standardization of language, and the creation of an encyclopedia (Fosztó, 2003, p. 118). According to Fosztó (2003), contemporary activism has centered the community in “European-based operational projects” as opposed to within the symbolic Indian homeland (p. 120). He summarized this phenomenon thus: “The Indian origin thesis is not abandoned, only balanced by the awareness of centuries in Europe that could make Roma European” (p. 120).

Klímová-Alexander described contemporary Romani activism as emphasizing “individual integration” within countries and municipalities, while global activism efforts pertain to “equality through a collective recognition” (2017, p. 5). She added that strategies for Romani activism also include the “promotion of folklore, festivals, education and publications in the Romani language” (p. 5). Klímová-Alexander argued that Romani activism had fostered the creation “of a state-like structure with its own constitution and embryonic government, parliament and diplomatic corps,” aspects which were established at the Fifth World Romani Congress (p. 1), held in Prague, Czech Republic, in July, 2000.

Fosztó recounts that during the 1980s and 1990s, attention to Romani rights increased thanks to “developments in democratization, human rights and political participation” (2003, p. 120). Concurrently, the EU “specified the integration of the Roma in candidate countries as a condition and allocated budgets and funds towards this aim” (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 765). Meanwhile, globalization also facilitated various groups in making “their voices heard” (p. 764). In Turkey, society had become more tolerant of Roman activism. As such, the Izmir Roma Association was founded in in 1996, while The National Roma Confederation emerged in 2000. From 2002-2004, legislative reform packages required by the EU increased “freedoms of opinion, expression and association” as well as permitting the formation of associations “founded on cultural and ethnic grounds” (p. 764). The latter led to an increase in the “number of Roma associations” (p. 764), including the establishment of the Edirne Roma Association (p. 765).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Hancock noted that it is likely that more Romani organizations were formed in the past few centuries than have been documented (2002, p. 113).

2.5 Turkish Social and Administrative Dynamics and Roman Rights

During Ottoman times, the government administration utilized *millet*s (or government recognized religious communities) to organize society, with the primary demarcation being between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. Although Roman were generally Islamic (and therefore belonged to the dominant millet), the state still discriminated against them and did not grant them “full rights and privileges” (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 762). Today, Roman people still endure discrimination and a “low socio-economic status with low levels of income and education” (p. 762).

The Turkish government complied with the Lausanne treaty of 1923 and officially recognized minority populations within Turkey. However, the only minorities recognized were non-Muslim groups which include the “Armenians, Greeks and Jews” (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 763).⁴⁶ Since Roman citizens were categorized as a part of the Islamic millet, they were not acknowledged as a minority, and were not granted “specific rights” as such (p. 763).

Article 10 of Turkey’s Constitution proclaimed the following:

All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, gender, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations. Men and women have equal rights. The State shall have the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice. No privilege shall be granted to any individual, family, group or class. State’s organs and administrative authorities shall act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings. (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 762-763)

⁴⁶ During Ottoman times, all three of these groups comprised major millets of the Empire (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 763).

However, according to Kolukirik and Toktaş, Turkey has prioritized national identity at the expense of “minority rights or identities, be they ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural in nature” (p. 762-763).⁴⁷

According to Girgin-Tohumcu (2014), Turkish Roman people do not “exhibit politically dissident stances that include rioting or revolt” (p. 145). Rather, Turkish Roman are motivated by political movements generated by non-Roman groups. She wrote that

only non-Gypsy politicians and/or academicians carry out discussions of Romani human rights, while most of the Romani populations remain out of the picture. When a political movement suits their needs, they can easily become part of the newly created system, and they see no harm in doing whatever it is incumbent upon them to improve their status within this system. (p. 145)

Important changes to the Turkish government’s policies have empowered Roman with additional resources and greater control over their representation in Turkish society. In 1992, the municipality of Edirne officially recognized Mehmet Körüklü, the Edirne Roman folklore ensemble leader, as a Roman community figurehead by conferring him the “administrative title of Çeribaşı” (Seeman, 2006).⁴⁸ The latter was the result of a remarkable “shift in government attitudes in conferring state legitimation of Roman communities as a recognized ethnic minority” (Seeman, 2006). This recognition is particularly striking in light of Turkey’s emphasis on a mono-ethnic national identity (Seeman, 2009, p. 209). During the 1990’s, Körüklüs’ in-community social position gained political power by promoting folkloric representations to

⁴⁷ Turkey's constitution was ratified on November 7, 1982 (*Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*), and has been amended multiple times since (Yapp and Dewdney, 2018). Article 10 has had paragraphs added to it on May 7, 2004 (Act No. 5170) and on September 12, 2010 (Act No. 5982 and Act No. 5982) (“Constitution of Turkey”).

⁴⁸ According to Rabia, the position of Çeribaşı within Roman culture is roughly equivalent to a chief. As Seeman noted, in this case, “the Edirne municipality shifted the in-group term for leadership into a government-appointed position” (Seeman, 2006).

counter non-Roman portrayals of “Gypsy” stereotypes. Such state recognized political representations empowered Roman with “local clout, media coverage, and the possibilities of touring” (Seeman, 2006).

Moreover, in 1999, a Roman folklore ensemble was established in Edirne (Seeman, 2009, p. 208). This ensemble receives monthly salaries, has office space in city hall, performs at national festivals, and is considered a model for other Roman cultural associations (p. 209). Such establishments combine “folkloric presentations” with the community services they supply (p. 209). Additionally, they support the ability of music and dance performances to serve as vehicles of identity expression and “political representation” (p. 208).

The Turkish government’s acceptance of European Union initiatives that recognized minority groups and ensured their rights energized Roman activism. Moreover, its support of “research on Roman communities in regional studies” has “generated a new discursive field for Roman as representative of regional folklore” (Seeman, 2006). Legislation was enacted to establish *dernek* (society cultural associations) in 2002 (Seeman, 2009, p. 207). By 2007, there were nearly 30 Roman, Dom, and Lom cultural associations that combine folkloric presentations with community services. Summarized goals for these associations included “to make Roman known to non-Roman (*tarutma*), self-help (*yardimlasma*), [and] activities (*etkinleri*)” (p. 209). Association leaders are eager to “present Roman folklore to non-Roman audiences as a means to educate non-Roman about their communities” (p. 209).

Seeman cited Adnan Keser, Roman Cultural Association director, describing his sense of pride in his position and in his ability to help others because of it. He credited his position to his ability to provide “150 wedding ceremonies” and give “sixty people an education” (2009, p. 207). Moreover, he expressed his pleasure at being able to “bring people’s wishes to the City

Hall” (p. 207). Seeman also reported that several association leaders are advancing large projects such as a compiling a Roman/Turkish/English dictionary and a collected set of Roman language songs for publication (p. 212). According to Seeman, Roman activists feel compelled to maintain their visibility, especially in light of neighborhood gentrification movements (Seeman, 2009, p. 211).

2.6 Romani Scholarship and Self-Representation

Marsh maintained that scholarly treatment of Romani history is increasingly being “undertaken by Gypsies themselves” (2007). A scholar of “Romanichal (English Gypsy) and Irish Traveller origins,” he posited that when considering the scholarship of Romani history, one must examine the context of its production including who conducts the research, who is funding it, and what purpose is being fulfilled (2007). In addition, Vermeersch (2005) discussed the consequences of centralizing a minority’s cultural identity in the struggle for political recognition, stating that this process can further stigmatize them through the reinforcement of stereotypes and by the essentialization of their identity. Therefore, some scholars have been producing research that serves as a “counter-narrative” to the dominant tropes which depict Gypsy persons as “excessively poor, often itinerant, ignorant and under-educated, disenfranchised politically and marginalized economically, socially excluded and culturally appreciated in a very narrow context” (Marsh, 2007).

Current Romani scholarship seeks to center Romani voices, and to depart from the predominantly male, non-Romani scholarship of the past, while exploring topics such as the impact of sexism and racism on Romani women, as well the topography of youth activism. For example, youth activism seeks to “promote a positive identity grounded in ethnic pride, and

distinctly aims at constructing narratives of self-esteem and empowerment,” rather than building their identity around “stigmatization, victimhood, and subalternity” (Ivasiuc, 2002, p.18).

2.7 Turkish Roman Demographics

Factors such as rural locations, poverty, and stigmatization make population numbers unreliable and explain why the estimate of Turkish Roman citizens varies from 500,000 to 2.5 million (Eroglu and Atalan-Helicke, 2020, p. 114).⁴⁹ Despite the fact that there is “no official data regarding the exact population” of Roman people living in Turkey, Kolukirik and Toktaş estimated that in 2007 they comprised close to 14% of the total population (2007, p. 762). They also estimated that there are 120,000 Roman in Istanbul alone (p. 762-763).

Kolukirik and Toktaş’ 2007 survey of 90 Roman, age 19 to 67 years, who lived in the Bornova district of the Aegean city of Izmir revealed the following:

- 80 of the respondents were married (while about 50% of them preferred marriage between Roman exclusively);
- Family households were generally comprised of 3 to 4 persons;
- 25% of the participants were illiterate, 50% had an elementary school education, while the remaining 25% had a middle school education;
- Occupational demographics determined that men were primarily employed in unskilled labor or as municipal officials;
- Women were primarily housewives although a small number were employed seasonally as agricultural laborers;
- About 30% of participants did not benefit from any form of social security, and monthly income was generally below US\$345 per month.⁵⁰

Girgin-Tohumcu argued that while Roman people traditionally reside in specific *mahalle*, their relationship with non-Roman people is similar to John Furnivall’s concept of medley in that “the

⁴⁹ A Reuters article stated that "some experts believe there may be as many as 5 million" Roman in Turkey (Osterlund, 2017).

⁵⁰ Kolukirik and Toktaş (2007, p. 765-766).

latter, even though they live side-by-side, only interact for economic transactions” (2014, p. 137-138). Whether or not this remains true nearly 10 years later, I could not ascertain.

Thrace is the area with the greatest Roman population in Turkey. The latter believe themselves to be descendants of the immigrants that arrived from Salonika during the “population exchange of 1923-1924” (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 139). According to Girgin-Tohumcu, the “geographical dynamism of this region is reflected in the music and dance of the Roma,” due in part to the fact that the center of the Turkish music industry is located in Istanbul (and therefore, within Thrace) and also because of the area’s “cultural exchange with the Balkans” (p. 139). Furthermore, as a result of their proximity to Turkey’s music industry hub, Thracian Roma are among the most familiar Roma communities in Turkey (p. 139).



Figure 1: Thracian Region and Salonika.⁵¹

⁵¹ Based on “Terroir” and Wadman, 2015.

Today, Romani people live all over the world, although their exact numbers are unknown (Arayici, 2008, p. 528). The largest population of Romani people remains on the European continent (Kolukirik and Toktaş, 2007, p. 761); estimated to be 10-12 million people, according to United Nations Development Program regional surveys (Eroglu and Atalan-Helicke, 2020, p. 108). A 1991 estimate postulated that the worldwide population could “be between 40 and 45 million individuals” (Arayici, 2008, p. 528).

This thesis briefly discusses the historical and contemporary marginalization of Romani people, particularly as it pertains to the Turkish demographic. This allows us to better understand the context of Turkish Roman dance, how it is practiced, and what it communicates. Such factors are particularly relevant given that this dance form has arguably become an emblem of the pan-Romani identity. Moreover, Turkish Roman dance has been influenced by the marginalizing, essentializing, and exoticizing non-Roman perceptions of Roman culture, as Roman have both reproduced and altered such stereotypes in their own music and dance performances.⁵² However, despite its use as an act of resistance and representation, it is important for the reader to understand that these facets cannot be taken for the whole of Turkish Roman dance, nor as its defining characteristics. While these elements are worthy of consideration, we must also view Turkish Roman dance holistically—with the understanding that within Roman communities, its primary function is one of entertainment, enjoyment, celebration, a way to mark rites of passage, and as a means of communal and self-expression.

⁵² Seeman discussed the emergence and presentation of various “Gypsy” stereotypes in Turkish society and how they continue to inform non-Roman beliefs about Roman persons. Moreover, she addressed how these stereotypes are navigated by Roman performers, including how they engage with or resist them (2006).

Chapter 3: The Historical Roots of Turkish Roman Identity

“Memory inspires the dance, and dance inspires the memory” – Anna Tsing

“Wherever it occurs and in whatever form, dancing continues a lived tradition—simultaneously rooted in the past and embedded in the present” – James Barker

3.1 Limitations of the Historical Documentation of Byzantine (330-1453) and Ottoman (1453-1922) Roman People

There is a decided paucity of literature on the history of the Roman people, from their arrival during the Byzantine times through the Ottoman era.⁵³ Their obscurity in historical documents indicates their marginalized status in both empires. Furthermore, that information which does exist is often biased against them. Byzantine and Ottoman era documentation was authored by “politically and religiously empowered historians and administrators” (Seeman, 2002, p. 97). During both eras, writing was a skill obtained by those who had the means to pursue the education necessary to become either civil or religious administrators. Therefore, written documents which served as primary sources for historians who attempted to “reconstruct social and political life of the past, privileges the voices of those in administrative and religious power” (p. 97). Many of the records regarding Roman people were legal or administrative in nature and detail “negative sanctions” against them (p. 98). Documents which record encounters between non-Roman and Roman people were presented through the lens of the former’s “prejudices and interpretations” regarding Roman culture (p. 98). Also, authors from the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe had the habit of incorporating previous writings into their own work without proper citation. Therefore, it has been difficult to determine whether or not an

⁵³ Kolukirik and Toktaş also concluded that there is "little research" on the Roman of Anatolia or of the Ottoman Empire (2007, p. 761). Also, Roman studies were primarily "of Western origin" and generally failed to acknowledge Roman diversity (p. 761).

event happened during the author's lifetime, or whether or not they had placed information from a previous text within their own materials (p. 98).

3.2 Roman and The Social Order of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires

As previously mentioned, the Roman have been in Anatolia since at least 1045 CE (Marsh, 2018, p. 1). In the early 16th century, Sultan Salim I unified Anatolia into the Turkish Ottoman dynasty (Howard, 2001, p. 23-31).

According to Seeman (2002), the enshrinement of Byzantine and Ottoman social organization ideologies still impact modern Turkish Roman communities, including their sense of historical consciousness (p. 95).⁵⁴ During Byzantine rule, morality, Christian Orthodoxy, and the stability of the Empire were conflated (p. 101). Similarly, the Ottoman Empire's administration was informed by religious values wherein the city structure reflected an Islam-inspired "idealized social and moral order" (p. 96). Indeed, one's *mahalle* (neighborhood in which one lived),⁵⁵ occupation, manner of dress, religious affiliation, taxation, among other criteria, were all determining factors in the enforcement of social hierarchy. Therefore, contemporary Roman notions of belonging to a particular community depended on their historical placement in the social hierarchy. Since Roman people are still experiencing marginalization in Turkey, the thread of continuity between historical and contemporary administrations and social environments remains (p. 96). Marsh (2018, p. 10) noted that modern Turkish society regards "dance and music [as] one of conflicting positions and contradictory perceptions," much as it was in the Ottoman court. "Dance and performance [were] perceived as morally ambiguous" and the "boundary between dancers and courtesans" regarded as fluid (p.

⁵⁴ Both the Byzantine and Ottoman Empire's attempts to consolidate administrative power were challenged by the ethnic and religious diversity of their respective populations (Seeman, 2002, p. 117).

⁵⁵ Despite the emphasis on *mahalle* during the Ottoman Empire, such neighborhoods were not always ethnically nor religiously homogenous (Seeman, 2002, p. 128).

10). Moreover, in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, Roman music and dance performances have remained “a dual mode of production; playing and dancing for clients and customers...and playing for community celebrations and events” (p.13).

The segregation policies enacted during the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires were exploitative of labor, specifically “military services, agrarian work, commercial trades, and services” (Seeman, 2002, p. 95).⁵⁶ Seeman argued that, on one hand, such policies imply that Roman were integrated to some degree into the broader society.⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, the roles that Roman fulfilled in both empires were valuable in both a social and economic sense. Yet, as Seeman notes, in spite of their contributions, Roman citizens were made to live in segregated communities (2002, p. 95–96). In other words, Roman contributions were assimilated to the degree that they were determined desirable and useful, while the people producing them were deemed second-class.

During Byzantine times, Roman became referred to as *athinganoi* (the name of a heretical sect), due to their similarities in practices such as fortune-telling and sorcery.⁵⁸ According to Seeman, referring to Roman as *athinganoi* “indicates the means by which notions of religious heresy and social danger became embedded in the term used for Roma communities” (2002, p. 104).⁵⁹ She argued that such negative associations characterized the relationship between the Roman and the administrations of the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Turkish Republic. Derivatives of *athinganoi* such as *zigeunar* (German), *tsiganes* (French), *çingane* or *çingene*

⁵⁶ Seeman believes that future research may show that the Ottoman Empire's administration elaborated on Byzantine practices of exploiting Roman labor (2002, p. 102).

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2 of Seeman (2002) for details regarding the exploitative power of such policies.

⁵⁸ The *athinganoi* were an eastern Christian sect considered to be heretical for their integration of Judaic practices. Historians do not know what term the Roman people used to refer to themselves during Byzantine times. See Seeman for more information regarding variations of the term *athinganoi* (2002, p. 104-106).

⁵⁹ Marsh (2018) noted that they were also referred to as *Aigúptoi*, meaning “Egyptians” (p.1).

(Turkish) and their attending sentiments continue to be applied to Roman communities today (p. 106).⁶⁰

Traditional Roman occupations such as soothsaying, bear keeping, and entertaining were sanctioned by the Byzantine church. Roman and non-Roman alike faced the threat of excommunication for engaging in such activities (Seeman, 2002, p. 107). Intellectuals and church officials identified Roman people as partially responsible for the Empire's decline (p. 109-111). Common Roman vocations included fortune-telling, sorcery, juggling, dancing, sieve-making, and the training of animals such as bears, monkeys, and snakes for use in magical practices and entertainment (p. 103-104).⁶¹ Despite the association of Roman practices with heresy and moral decay, citizens of various classes of the Empire engaged in rituals which predated Christianity, including some members of the church clergy. Roman services grew in demand, as they served "the needs of a diverse population that continued a variety of pre-Christian practices" (p. 110). The popularity of Roman services arguably threatened the hegemony of the church, hence, Roman became official scapegoats (p. 110-111).

The Roman people were relegated to marginal spaces within the Ottoman social hierarchy. This placement was evident in their occupations, military service, neighborhoods, and tax categories. Moreover, the "ascribed liminality" projected upon the Roman people by non-

⁶⁰ Rabia confirmed that the terms *çingane* or *çingene* continue to be used derisively to refer to Roman people in Turkey (R. Birkland, personal communication, July 8, 2017).

⁶¹ While Seeman cited an account from the early 14th century that described Roman "acrobats, jugglers and dancers who traveled as a troupe" (2002, p. 104), Marsh stated that there are no records of Roman people working as dancers "for public or private entertainment" during the Byzantine Empire (2018, p. 3). While he admits that it is possible that Roman performed dance at that time, he stated that the only available evidence is dubious at best. He referred to a "gold and cloisonné enamel" crown dubbed the "Crown of Monomachus" which depicts dancing scenes (2018, p. 1-3). He asserted that the earliest records of Roman performers begin in 1315 CE, referring to acrobats in Constantinople on their way to the Balkans and Iberia. Therefore, he believes that Roman may have become musicians and dancers during the Ottoman Empire because the opportunity "presented itself" around 1335, "after the establishment of the first Ottoman court at Bursa" (2018, p. 1).

Roman came to be considered a characteristic of the former group (Seeman, 2002, p. 95-96, 133).

Contemporary Roman communities “strongly identify with their families and neighborhoods, as the seat of local family history and community belonging” (Seeman, 2002, p. 133). Seeman suggested that this sentiment is not unique to Roman, but “references to specific *mahalle*” cultivate in-group belonging and communicate “insider values, beliefs, and information” unfamiliar to non-Roman (p. 133). Roman also strongly identify with music and dance professions “not merely for commercial purposes, but as essential components of their self-identity, their status in the community and their sense of continuity with the past” (Marsh, 2018, p. 13).

Ottoman city structures served as a physical manifestation of idealized social order (Seeman, 2002, p. 120). The philosophy behind this model of city planning held that it was possible for government to organize citizen’s lives in a way that maximized their individual potential. This ideal could theoretically be achieved by properly placing each group within society and each individual within the occupation they were deemed most suitable for (p. 112, 117).⁶²

During the Ottoman Empire, Roman occupations included singing, dancing, puppeteering, acting, acrobatics, animal training, fortune-telling, locksmithing, basket weaving, brick-casting, various kinds of metalsmithing, “selling raw and prepared foods, herbs, and other agrarian products; raising, selling and trading livestock; seasonal agricultural work” and adjunct military service (Seeman, 2002, p. 134). In some areas, Roman women plied a variety of goods

⁶² However, Seeman noted that it was via the “unique services that Roma provided to a variety of Ottoman communities” that some were able to “break through social and economic barriers” (2002, p. 146).

and services including produce, prepared foods, herbs, and flowers.⁶³ Historical documents reported labor division wherein men procured supplies or manufactured a product, while women made the sales for items such as flowers and sieves. Women acting as vendors contrasted with Ottoman notions of feminine honor, which was upheld by the covering of their bodies and their sequestration. Furthermore, their forthright manner and engagement in activities such as fortune-telling also challenged such ideals (p. 135, 136).

The first records of Roman performers in Anatolia and Thrace refer to the *mehter* (military band) musicians of the Ottoman armies that conquered Byzantium. The *mehter* preceded the Janissaries into battle, including those playing the *davul* (large drum) and the *zurna* (wind instrument)—both of which are synonymous with Roman musicians today—as well as the *boru* (a trumpet made from horn), “*zil* (cymbal), the *kös* (kettle drum), and *nakkare* (small kettle drum)” (Marsh, 2018, p. 4). In addition to accompanying the military forces in battle, the *mehter* also performed daily at the Ottoman court “within the public court (*enderun*), servitor’s complex (*birun*), and at official, public ceremonies held in the towns, cities and military camps, often in the presence of the sultan or *çelebiler* (princes)” (p. 4). Such performances were a part of the daily life of Ottoman elites, and many of the “bands attached to high-ranking officials... were highly trained and skilled” (p. 4).⁶⁴

Some of the movements that are a part of the contemporary masculine style of Turkish Roman dance stem from early medieval Islamic war practices (Marsh, 2018, p. 4). Therefore:

⁶³ Flower selling is still an important profession for Roman people in Turkey and the greater Balkan region (Seeman, 2002, p. 135).

⁶⁴ Marsh noted that “the tradition of Romani and other ‘Gypsy’ musicians in the Turkish Armed Forces survives, in that the majority of Romanlar, Domlar or Lomlar young men who perform their compulsory military service in modern Turkey are drafted into the military musical units” (2018, p. 2).

the connections between dance and music in the Ottoman Empire are, in part, intrinsic to the organization of the state for war, which broadly impacted upon wider Ottoman society in many and various ways – the regulation of economic production and manufacturing, agricultural and animal husbandry, and the scientific and technological development in Ottoman culture and intellectual endeavors, all aimed at principally serving the state and the state’s needs for material and resources to campaign effectively and extend, through military conquest, the boundaries of the *padişah*’s “well-protected domains”. Romani dance, and its corollary, Romani music, serve the interests of the Ottoman elites and military, as much as, possibly more so, than those of popular entertainment. (p. 5)

3.3 Roman as Entertainers and “Excursion Places”

As with the Byzantine times, Ottoman Roman filled important niches for non-Roman communities, including entertainment. Performance venues included taverns, restaurants, tea-houses and coffee-houses that were predominantly owned and staffed by men. Here Roman “dancers, musicians, storytellers, puppeteers and fortune-tellers engaged with a clientele that was largely male” (Marsh, 2018, p. 9). Homes within the Roman community, known as “entertainment houses” offered “small ensembles of musicians and two or three dancers, for a late evening’s entertainment” (p. 9). Both male dancers (known as *köçek*) and female dancers (known as *çengi*) were sought out for “performances at royal ceremonial displays, for hire at excursion sites, and for private entertainment among urban residents for family ritual celebrations” (Seeman, 2002, p. 137).⁶⁵ Yet, engagement in such contentious activities, however

⁶⁵ *Köçek* comes from the Persian term *kuchak* meaning young or small whereas *çengi* comes from the word “*çeng*, a kind of harp” (Marsh, 2018, p. 3). For more on the history of *köçek* dancers, see Avcı (2015) and Marsh (2018, 6-7). For more information regarding historical references to *çengi*, see Zecher (2020).

valued, once again reaffirmed Roman as socially marginal beings in the eyes of non-Roman citizens (p. 137).

While some Muslim scholars thought dance was an acceptable practice for a pious Muslim, others considered it a form of idol worship. Therefore, Muslim urbanites did not dance in public, although they appreciated dance as a form of entertainment.⁶⁶ Despite the fealty to Islam required of upper-class citizens, those with the means to do so would venture to “excursion places” on the outskirts of cities to engage in socially questionable activities, out of the immediate reach of the moral and political authorities (Seeman, 2002, p. 126-127). Such activities may have included listening to musicians, watching dancers, puppeteers, wrestlers, or folkloric theater performances. It is probable that the musicians were Roman and that such events also provided Roman women the opportunity to dance, sing, or tell fortunes for their patrons (p. 126-127). Itinerant Roman made camp within areas of Ottoman cities, creating pit-stops for music and dance entertainment. These events were performed around a fire, by “less sophisticated dancers and costumes in somewhat poorer circumstances” (Marsh, 2018, p. 9-10).

We can get a glimpse of what Ottoman dance looked like from records such as those written by the 17th century voyager Evliya Çelebi. He described the dance moves of “Gypsy, Greek, Jewish and Armenian youths” as comprised of “belly shaking, heel stroking, walking on the tiptoe as if running, head sliding, shoulder shimmies, waist slinging, backward jump[s], swinging and shaking” (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 146).

3.4 Roman Dancer Guilds of the Ottoman Era

Based on Çelebi’s account, by the 17th century, there were at least 12 guilds (comprised of 200 to 400 members each) of male jugglers, comedians, and dancers. Many of the guilds

⁶⁶ Orthodox Islam particularly frowned upon dance or musical performances by women and viewed such activities as “immoral or improper behavior” (Marsh, 2018, p. 7).

included Greek, Jewish and Armenian minorities. However, at least four of the guilds, including *Serçeşmeler kolu*, *Ahmed kolu*, *Baba Nazli kolu*, and *Çelebi kolu*, were composed entirely of Roman members. Members of the *Servi kolu* guild consisted of Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Roman individuals (Seeman, 2002, p. 138). Çelebi did not mention women's dance or music guilds (despite their mention in other historical documents), which poses the question of whether women were incorporated into the men's guilds, or whether they had guilds of their own. By the mid-20th century, sources proclaimed that all professional *çengi* dancers were Roman (p. 139).

3.5 Palatial Entertainers of the Ottoman Era

Despite the ambivalence towards dance in Ottoman society, it was a part of palace life. *Çengi* groups which worked outside of the palace may have been exclusively Roman or may have been comprised of dancers of “unmarked” ethnicity and their accompanying Roman musicians. *Çengi* and *köçek* of the Ottoman palace were selected and trained from the palatial servant class. Female palace slaves were selected for their beauty and potential and were taught how to sing, dance, play instruments, as well as read and write. Religious (Islamic) observations were also included in their curriculum. In general, entertainers from the slave class and those belonging to guilds were separate, with the occasional exception of slaves who joined independent guilds. Additionally, dancers from outside of the palace were not hired for entertainment within its walls, except during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim (1640-1648) (Seeman, 2002, p. 140-141).

In addition to serving as dancers and musicians, Roman women were present at court in a variety of roles. They also provided laundry, garment making, and divination services, and “often carried messages and tokens” between members of the harem and family and friends

(Marsh, 2018, p. 7). The latter implies that they played an important role maintaining social ties for members of the court.

3.6 Dance as a Palace Spectacle

Musical education and dance instruction were tightly controlled by the Topkapi Palace and was also kept segregated by gender (Marsh, 2018, p. 4). Women's quarters (the harem) were "forbidden to men (excepting the *padişah*)" (p. 6). Divisions "between male and female dance and performance" became solidified during the "consolidation of the Ottoman Empire (from early 16th century onwards)" (p. 6). Therefore, women only performed for the "*padişah* and *cariye*, *haseki* sultan and *valide* sultan", as public dancing by women was considered immoral and often forbidden by edicts (p. 3-4). While women danced for private engagements, male dancers adopted "both male and female roles" for "public performances" (p. 6).

Ottoman court dancing was full of ritual and ceremony (Marsh, 2018, p. 4-5). Marsh described the Palace spectacles thus: "the traditions of dance at the Ottoman courts of *padişah* and *paşa*... drew upon performance of stories, tales and episodes from the epics of Turkish poetry, the *destan*" (p. 5). Male and female dancers also utilized pantomime for their performance, and

often performed with a kind of wooden castanet, called *çengi*, *çubuğu* or *çalpara*, particularly for dance pieces with faster tempos, whilst slower dances and movements were accompanied by silk handkerchiefs, mendil or long-sleeved silk kaftans covering pantaloons, waistcoats and blouses, with scarves over their heads and often around their shoulders. The other popular dancer's accompaniment was the *kaşıklar* or wooden spoons, still very much [a] part of Turkish traditional dance, which has become

associated with dances such as the *hiilya kaşiklar* dance from the Konya to Selifke region. (p. 5)

Accompanying musical instruments included the following:

tambourines, upright bowed fiddles rebab or kemançe, the ney or bamboo reed flute, miskal or multi-reed flute, santur (dulcimer), and çagane (a percussion instrument), kopuz (and Anatolian stringed instrument like a saz), ud or atva, the Arab lute, tanbur or long-backed, Oriental lute, and kaval or shepherd's flute. (Marsh, 2018, p. 6)

Gestures and music reflected one another as percussive, dramatic pieces accompanied “the quick steps, leaps and turns of kaşiklar dances” (p. 6). Wind and string instruments conveyed the more courtly dances in which performers utilized “swaying, elegant hand and arm movements,” as well as “individual turns and circular group patterns” (p. 6).

Meanwhile, Seeman (2002, p. 140) cited İrtem as describing the following:

Sultan Abdülhamit (ruled 1876-1909) was reported to be extremely fond of dance, and commanded performances during which girls performed Circassian and Arabic dances accompanied by their finger cymbals (*zil*) and by *ud* and frame drum (*tef*). During this period, the rage for professional dance spectacles was such that almost every prince's apartment had an ensemble made up of young girls, and there was an ongoing competition among princes and their wives to procure the best troupe.

In Ottoman society at large, dancers and musicians were primarily a part of public performances at festivals (Marsh, 2018, p. 7). During official processions, musicians and dancers would “precede the dignitaries, particularly when they were acting as ambassadors to foreign potentates” (p. 4). However, Roman dancers and musicians were also a “part of individual Ottoman families' lives, as they provided entertainment for births, circumcision ceremonies,

engagement events and marriages” (p. 8). Indeed, the homes of well-to-do families sought to emulate life at the palace by procuring and/or training female slaves to serve as entertainers for the women of the household harem. Some of these slaves were imported from places such as Syria. It is also possible that some of the female slaves that were trained as dancers were Roman. In addition, Circassian or Georgian slaves fetched a higher price than others, and therefore, Roman slaves may have claimed “another more prestigious identity for themselves, or were claimed as Muslim, Circassian, or Greek by their slave owners” (Seeman 2002, p. 141-142).

3.7 Roman Women and Dancer’s Guilds

It is not clear whether female Roman musicians and dancers worked independent of guilds up until the 19th century, or whether they were incorporated into the men’s guilds. While historical documents mention Roman women employed “as professional dancers, musicians and singers”, there is no mention of guild membership (Seeman, 2002, p. 142). When Thévenot (a 17th century French traveler) encountered Roman dancers, he described them as dancing with wooden clappers and working for tips (p. 142-143). Nineteenth and early 20th century memoirs depicted small groups of Roman women traveling on foot through a variety of *mahalle* in order to perform folksongs and dances for compensation. Female musicians accompanying *çengi* dancers are described and characterized as primarily Roman women. As Seeman (2002) pointed out, the fact that he mentioned the ethnicity of the musicians, but not the dancers, begs the question of whether the dancers he encountered were not Roman, or at least appeared not to be Roman. Yet, by the 19th century, *çengi* guilds became increasingly composed of Roman women. Indeed, in 1939, ethnographer Mehmet Halit Bayri claimed that non-Roman *çengi* became *çengi* through association because of their profession (p. 143). Likewise, “*köçek* dance troops were recruited from Romani and non-

Muslim populations, so much so that the identification between dancers, dance as an occupation, and ethnicity became entwined, and all dancers were assumed, by dint of profession, to be Romani regardless of their actual ethnic origins” (Marsh, 2018, p. 7).

According to Seeman (2002), *çengi* was a popular term used by Roman and non-Roman alike to describe female musicians and dancers up until the 1990s.⁶⁷ Contemporarily, the term *dansöz* has been widely adopted by professional Roman dancers (Seeman, 2002, p. 143-144).

3.8 Association of Roman with Specific Instruments

Roman musicians established professional niches for themselves by becoming adept at playing specific instruments. By the 17th century, Roman men of the Balat neighborhood of Istanbul played the *çeşte*, “a five-string short-necked lute-type instrument with a small spherical body and numerous frets” (Seeman, 2002, p. 144). The latter instrument was played by musicians at a number of excursion places, including those belonging to the districts of Eyüp and Kâğıthane. By the late 19th century, Roman adapted the Western European clarinet (p. 144). Also, *davul* (double-headed drum) and *zurna* (wind instrument) players of Western Turkey and the Balkans were nearly always Roman, and have been so for generations. Seeman argued that “the association of Roma ethnicity and the *davul* and *zurna* ensemble has become so interlinked in Western Turkey and the Balkans that Roma are almost exclusively the only professional musicians who play these instruments” (2002, p. 152-153).⁶⁸ Moreover, such instruments “came to be associated with Rom performers” and

In providing professional entertainment services to heterogeneous communities, Rom entertainers have historically served as cosmopolitan culture brokers, skilled at

⁶⁷ There is confusion as to whether or not *çengi* at one point referred to both male and female dancers. However, it seems clear that by the 19th century, the term was applied to female dancers only (Seeman, 2002, p. 138-139).

⁶⁸ Likewise, Marsh stated that “the *davul* and *zurna* instruments are ubiquitous in their identification with Roman musicians and traditions” (2018, p. 4).

communicating across boundaries which separated diverse linguistic, ethnic and religious communities. Professional performer's skill in providing entertainment services allowed them access to various segments of society, often adopting the cultural practices of their patrons. (p. 145)

3.9 Emergence of the *Roman Oyun Havasi* Musical Genre

The musical genre of "*Roman oyun havasi*" (the style associated with Turkish Roman dance) was catalyzed as a result of 45 rpm recording technology and the consequential expansion of music markets during the latter half of the 20th century. These recordings of 9/8-meter dance songs became associated with Roman communities via "marketing strategies of the 1960's recording industry agents" (Seeman, 2002, p. 273).⁶⁹ According to Seeman's research, three primary factors predicated its emergence: the existence of 9/8-meter pieces within the diverse repertoire of Roman communities, the inclusion of non-Roman generated *kanto* stage songs into the Roman repertoire and the innovations of a handful of "wedding musicians from Edirne who developed topical songs for their Roman audiences during weddings" (p. 274).⁷⁰ These three elements combined with the innovations of individual musicians, inspired regional Roman to accept the 9/8 rhythm as part of their signature genre. Seeman contended that this appropriation was founded in the practice among Roman urbanites of Thrace and Istanbul of cultivating 9/8 rhythm pieces within their repertoire (p. 274).

Indeed, the musical style that was to become known as *Roman oyun havasi* was originally developed by Thracian professional Roman musicians mainly for performance at

⁶⁹ So much so that, according to Girgin-Tohumcu, "the first thing a nine-beat dance tune brings to mind for many people in Turkey today is the Rom and Romani dance" (2014, p. 158).

⁷⁰ *Kanto* are theatrical songs which present stereotypical, outsider perceptions of the Roman, and which were initially performed by non-Roman (Seeman, 2002, p. 187, 200-201). Specifically, Roman women were presented in *kanto* songs as "an embodiment of eroticism, sexuality, and intoxication" (Seeman, 2002, p. 201).

Roman weddings. Roman musicians embellished a pre-existing 9/8 rhythm called *karşılama* “with newly elaborated rhythmic patterns and topical song texts... performed by Thracian wedding band ensembles” (Seeman, 2002, p. 2). As these Thracian Roman wedding bands traveled throughout the country, they introduced this “dance song style with its syncopated rhythms” to other Roman communities, including the Marmara and Aegean regions (p. 2).

The thriving practice of Roman 9/8 rhythms in Thrace was specifically selected by 45 rpm record companies in order to establish regional markets in the area. Among Thracian Roman peoples, *Roman oyun havasi* was a dance music genre “embedded in particular historical traditions and an intrinsic part” of their “expressive practices” (Seeman, 2002, p. 256). By the 1990s, musicians from various areas throughout Western Turkey were recording their own interpretation of *Roman oyun havasi*. Nonetheless, Seeman (2002) argued that the primary features of the genre can be linked to the aforementioned customs of Thracian Roman communities. Some of the first musicians to record *Roman oyun havasi* pieces accompanied by Thracian wedding ensembles came from local populaces, specifically Edirne. These musicians consequently established the defining features which comprise the *Roman oyun havasi* style (p. 256). Between 1964 and 1968, the first recorded instrumental 9/8 rhythm songs were specifically marketed as Roman (p. 283-284).

Before and during the advent of the commodification of Thracian Roman 9/8 wedding dance music, regional Roman peoples enjoyed a “rich variety of dance types,” including a 9/8 style called *karşılama* (Seeman, 2002, p. 274, 360).⁷¹ By the 1990s, *Roman oyun havasi* had

⁷¹ Girgin-Tohumcu (2014, p. 144) gave the following example in discussing Thracian Roman dance practices: in addition to Turkish Roman dance, non-Roman forms such as the “open circle type...*hora* and *kasap* dances” are also performed. These dances were enacted with an awareness that they were non-Roman dances, and therefore, “do not involve a bodily emphasis on identity” (p. 144). Other dances she encountered during her research in Edirne, Kırklareli, and Çorlu included the İspanyol Kasabı, Düz Kasap, Sırto, and the Ali Pasa. She also referenced performances of *çiftetelli*, a dance form practiced in various regions of Turkey but considered “particular to

become interwoven with the “pan-Romani identity” (p. 363). Indeed, Seeman contended that *Roman oyun havasi* music had “gradually come to symbolize Roman communities to themselves and to non-Roman outsiders” (p. 1). Rabia believed that any apparent lack of variety in Roman dance types was due to the predominance of *Roman oyun havasi* tunes (particularly those which have incorporated outside influences such as hip-hop or pop). She asserted that if a variety of “traditional” music is played, that they will dance different styles accordingly. Her remarks indicated that while such dance styles are not lost or forgotten, they are currently being supplanted by the popularity of *Roman oyun havasi* music and its associated dance style (Turkish Roman). Indeed, as mentioned elsewhere, the incorporation of outside music influences into *Roman oyun havasi* songs have been changing the Turkish Roman dance movement vocabulary.

Professional Roman musicians generally come from families who make their living as entertainers. They are trained within their natal group and are provided with the appropriate instrument/s and business connections. Their apprenticeships include performance and skill-assessment opportunities such as playing at weddings and in the home environment (Seeman, 2002, p. 262). Turkish Roman people ascribe considerable prestige to families of Roman musicians. According to Seeman’s research, Thracian Roman musicians are hired by Roman and non-Roman alike, and work in their hometowns as well as other communities in the region. For example, some musicians living outside of Istanbul will travel there for employment, which includes seasonal work opportunities in Sulukule’s “entertainment houses” and/or perform for the city’s transplanted Thracian Roman or non-Roman populations (p. 258-259). Seeman (2002) postulated that Turkish Roman peoples have a history of travel between Edirne and Istanbul, and that through this migration, “musical practices and repertoire” were exchanged (p. 259).

Istanbul” (p. 144). The *çiftetelli* is also primarily considered a woman's dance, regardless of the fact that men perform it on occasion (p. 144).

In sum, the identities of Roman musicians are constructed from numerous interweaving elements such as their family's occupation, their region of origin, the instruments they play, and the settings in which they perform professionally. Seeman opined that such factors are incorporated into the musician's selfhood as a component "of their ongoing expression of belonging to distinct historical communities" and are a result of efforts to create "occupational niches" (2002, p. 258-259). Such niches at once provide economic support as well as a means of establishing identity (p. 258-259). It is likely that similar facets comprise, communicate, and affirm the identity of a Roman dancer, as well as their position in society.

Roman oyun havasi lyrics describe the pleasures and struggles of the daily lives of Roman people. Yet, performing a genre which strongly indexes Roman identity butts up against the social stigmatization which oppresses Turkish Roman people. Such tensions cultivate multilayered, volatile song meanings which are "profoundly felt and expressed" by Roman "in verbal and extra-verbal realms" (Seeman, 2002, p. 2). Dancing to such songs can be viewed as a physical expression of these sentiments.

The commercialization of *Roman oyun havasi* has influenced musical tastes and contributed to its function "in maintaining and articulating a distinct sense of community" (Seeman, 2002, p. 296). Indeed, *Roman oyun havasi* song lyrics detail narratives of the Turkish Roman experience and express notions of group belonging. Seeman included the song "*Bizim Mahalle*" (our neighborhood) as an example. The lyrics tell of vocational and behavioral dynamics: knowledge that would only be privy to local Roman (p. 296). Furthermore, Seeman claimed that in an effort to "maintain a secret code language" Roman musicians borrow code words from other local Roman dialects for use in their songs (p. 173 n8).

Roman oyun havasi's popularity was considerably enhanced by its commercialization, and led to changes to song texts and performance.^{72,73} Moreover, the demand for *Roman oyun havasi* superseded the former repertory for “in-community events” in some places. Meanwhile, celebrities of the genre were hired to perform for those Roman communities whose musical traditions had not previously incorporated this style. Ultimately, the emergence of *Roman oyun havasi* “gave communities a new name, ‘Roman,’ and enabled musicians and their communities to define what ‘Roman’ means in their own terms” (Seeman, 2002, p. 4). Seeman elaborated that while non-Roman were “re-embedding iconic caricatures” of *çingane* into literary works, Roman people regained control over images through the success of *Roman oyun havasi* and the self-referential term “Roman” appears to be directly related to the beginnings of this new musical genre, circa mid-1960s (Seeman, 2006). The 45-RPM recordings “linked particular dance movements, [and] musical and rhythmic patterns to the neologism of Roman” an association which began to be accepted “by Roman communities in Western Turkey” (Seeman, 2006). Indeed, Seeman ascertained that the *Roman oyun havasi* category created a new arena within which formerly disconnected Roman groups could re-define their “socially ascribed identity” (2006). In addition, the fusion of Roman musical stylings and expression with jazz and world music by Roman artists provided an avenue with which they could broaden their identity (Seeman, 2002, p. 376).⁷⁴

⁷² However, Seeman (2002, p. 374) argued that because of “the introduction of 45 rpm recording technology, small-scale companies sought to carve out new regional niche markets to sell the recordings. This shift in interest toward regional repertoire provided an opening for the music of regional Roman communities.” Therefore, “rather than destroying the authenticity of local musical styles, mechanical reproduction made possible the dissemination of Roman musical representations that were more closely connected to in-community musical practices, and derived from local traditions” (p. 374).

⁷³ Films such as *Time of the Gypsies* (1989) and *Latcho Drom* (1994) also generated interest in Roman music and dance and “putatively related groups” (Seeman, 2009, p. 213). This caused “Western European and American promoters” to seek Roman musicians “for recordings and festival appearances” (p. 213).

⁷⁴ According to Seeman, by the 1990’s, this musical repertoire had the potential to consign a Roman artist “to a musical ghetto” and to become another “narrow caricature, despite its recent history as a cover term signifying, and

Roman oyun havasi music's continued appeal is due to musicians' ingenuity in creating and adapting song lyrics, rhythms, and instrumentation. As Seeman wrote, this genre was not "the servile repetition of what was or what always has been, but... a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation" (2002, p. 376). Indeed, we can witness a similar phenomenon in regards to Turkish Roman dance as it, too, reflects environmental changes such as those pertaining to technology, gender roles, social status, and the incorporation of new musical features and dance movements, and at the same time, has helped to innovate many of these changes.

3.10 Emergence of Turkish Roman Dance Genre

Girgin-Tohumcu divided Turkish Roman dance history into "three major periods" (2014, p. 147). This included the "preliminary years" (the 1950s until the 1980s), which were characterized by the absence of Roman dance in representations of Thracian folk dance culture; the "recognition of Romani dance" (the 1990s), wherein *karşılama* choreographies included Roman dance "figures"; and "becoming an ultimate genre" (the 2000's), which saw "the transformation of the Romani dance from social stigma to an ultimately successful and acceptable dance genre" (p. 148).⁷⁵

By the mid-19th century, she states that Sulukule had become "known as the fashionable neighborhood of the *çengi*" (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 148.) Not only was it the longest established Roman neighborhood of Istanbul, but it was also the epicenter of the initial "manufactured social perception of the Gypsy in Turkey" (p. 148). Here, since the turn of the

effecting, social empowerment" (2006). The term "Roman" indicated "particular sounds, text, instrumentation, and rhythmic patterns" (2006). For more on the relationship between world music, jazz fusion, and *Roman oyun havasi* see Seeman 2002, p. 322-365.

⁷⁵ Rabia described certain footsteps present in Roman dance as borrowed from the *karşılama*, and she described the latter as a form of Turkish folk dance.

20th century, most Roman women became dancers while most Roman men became musicians.⁷⁶ According to Girgin-Tohumcu, Thracian Roman for the most part dance in weddings and celebrations, while in Sulukule it had “been an organized profession...since Imperial times” (p. 148.)

The entertainment houses of Sulukule were in operation from 1953 to 1992. Here, patrons could enjoy music and dance performances, as well as refreshments. Events would last from early evening until early morning. Musicians would play from a repertoire of classical Turkish music, and “the evening would invariably end with a glamorous belly dance show...” (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 148). At the time, 9/8-meter Roman dance was unfamiliar to clients and therefore not requested.⁷⁷ Roman dancers performed Turkish Oriental for commercial purposes, while continuing to dance their own form “as a cultural practice” (p. 148-149). Girgin-Tohumcu attributes the incorporation of belly dance moves within Turkish Roman dance to these commercial performances (p. 148-149).⁷⁸

Amidst the political turmoil from the 60s-80s, media outlets promoted entertainment as a distraction (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 149-150). The music industry capitalized on the situation by producing LPs of the music that was being performed at venues such as entertainment houses and marketed them to provide amusement for “the poor masses who could not afford to have the fun live” (p. 150). These albums sported titles such as “Sulukule Romanlari (Roma) or Sulukule eglenceleri (entertainment) and featured the music of the entertainment houses with its Oriental sound” that has been “synonymous with belly dance in Turkey since the 1940s” (p. 150). Girgin-

⁷⁶ Girgin-Tohumcu wrote that for Roman families, having a girl is preferable to having a boy as girls “become belly dancers and substantially help their families” (2014, p. 148). Rabia expressed a similar sentiment to me.

⁷⁷ Rabia made the same claim.

⁷⁸ From classes with Rabia and workshops with Artemis, I have learned that certain movements present within Turkish Oriental dance were likely borrowed from Turkish Roman dance, *e.g.*, fist-striking. As such, the gestural incorporation Girgin-Tohumcu mentions went both ways.

Tohumcu argued that it was during this time that “the concepts of Romani and Romani dance tunes became culturally legitimate for the first time” (p. 150). These LPs also all featured belly dancers on their covers and contained the sort of dance tunes associated with them. Some of these songs referred to “Gypsies” or had lyrics in Roman. However, Girgin-Tohumcu cautioned that the aforementioned was not in an effort to cultivate an awareness of Roman culture, but rather to take advantage of the position that the Roman held “in the entertainment sector” (p. 150). Media coverage of the entertainment house phenomenon also helped to reinforce stereotypes held against the Roman, particularly against Roman women, reinforcing their supposed forthright, promiscuous, and pleasure-seeking natures (p. 149). Nonetheless, the result was that market demand reinforced an increasing recognition of a distinctive Roman expressive culture.⁷⁹

The Turkish film industry also capitalized upon Roman entertainers and stereotypes of Roman people. The earliest movies (1952-1981) featured “Gypsies” as “funny and tacky personae hailing from the Balkans, usually doubling as thieves...” or as “just another character in the social life of the burgeoning Istanbul shantytowns” (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 150). Female Roman were specifically depicted as femme fatales. However, it was the 1981-1985 *Girgiriye* films (considered classics of Turkish cinema) that “single-handedly created the music playing, thieving, happy and honest yet crass and naïve Gypsy type” all the while underscoring the in-born nature of their musical skills (p. 151). Girgin-Tohumcu argued that the portrayal of “Gypsies” as musicians and dancers is the “most consistent element” of *Girgiriye*’s films (2014, p. 151).

⁷⁹ Girgin-Tohumcu stipulated that, while it may be tempting to view Turkish Roman dance “as a product created in the magical hands of the music industry”, it in fact already existed as a “structured bodily practice” that became “a cultural form” through its recognition and admiration in popular culture (2014, p. 159).

The first staging of Turkish national dances by *Devlet Türk Halk Danslari Topluluğu* (Turkish State Folk Dances Ensemble or DHDT) began in 1975, and by 1992, nods toward Roman rhythms and dance moves were incorporated into their productions. However, the latter motions were modified with the aim of making them fit in with biases of what a national art form should look like (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 153).⁸⁰ Those Thracian ensembles that previously tried to incorporate “Roman–esque” movements in national dance events such as the nationalistic “People’s Houses” performances (1932-1950) and the Yapi Kredi Bank’s “inter-association/high school/university folk dance competition” (initiated in 1954) were disapproved of by the organizing committees (p. 154). During the 1990s, Roman dance moves popularized in films and TV programs became a fashionable addition to non-Roman wedding dances (p. 153-154).⁸¹ Roman movements integrated into *karşılama* choreographies also gained popularity. With the support of the music industry, Roman “artistic identity was finally taken up and legitimized by state authorities” (p. 154).⁸² Indeed, the first of Roman dance genre’s “genuine” stage performances occurred during the late 1990s, despite the fact that such dance practices existed since the 1940s. In 1999, the Roman Halk Müziği Topluluğu (Romani Folk Music Ensemble) “was founded in the city of Edirne under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture” (p. 154). According to Girgin-Tohumcu, its members “play and dance as they do with their own weddings, performing in colorful costumes that stress their identity” (p. 154).⁸³

⁸⁰ According to Girgin-Tohumcu, such choreographies even included moves created by non-Roman persons in imitation of Roman dance (2014, p. 153).

⁸¹ I was unable to ascertain how this timeline relates to Rabia's assertion that Turkish Roman dance is a rather ubiquitous but important part of every celebration in Turkey which she, and others, grew up with. However, Marsh asserted that it was during the “modern, post-millennial Turkish Republic” that Roman dance became “recognized as a part of mainstream Turkish culture, both as Romani and Turkish” (2018, p. 12).

⁸² Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) cited Özbudun (2010) in stating that “the overvaluation of...ethnic identity under neoliberalism has had the effect of ‘gentrifying’ the genre” (p. 154).

⁸³ However, Seeman (2009) reported that the Edirne Roman folklore ensemble leader, Çeribaşı Mehmet Körüklü, utilizes “costumes that signify Roman but in a regional, folkloric format. Girls wear stylized pants-*salvar*-in bright red-supposedly a Roman color, with headscarves and vests, drawing on theatrical representations of Roman more

Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) cited Potuoğlu-Cook (2010) in stating that the staging of (and therefore popular acceptance of and appreciation for) Turkish Roman dance reflects “the bodily discourse of the new multicultural nationalism” (p. 154). Indeed, by the early 2000’s, the popularity of Turkish Roman dance had reached the point that “even its most haphazard performance in its natural environment [was] interpreted as art itself” (p. 155).

3.11 Turkish Roman Dance as a Part of National Culture

According to Marsh (2018), modern Roman dance retains qualities from “much older, Ottoman and Anatolian roots, varieties of ‘folk dance’ that stem, in their origins from central Asia and the nomadic, *Yörük* and *Türkoman* groups, from other groups and historic ethnic minorities in Anatolia (Greeks, Armenians and Jewish communities), and from innovation by Romani choreographers” (p. 2). These connections are present in contemporary Turkey through “wedding rituals, circumcision ceremonies, aspects of ‘folk dance’ (such as those performed by the *Köçekçe*), public authority sponsored performance (such as the municipality supported Romani dance groups in *Trakya* [Thrace], school orchestras and dance groups), [and] through Turkish popular culture,” especially via TV shows such as Flash TV’s *Roman Star* and various out-group public performance events (p. 2). Folk dance movements that have been borrowed from other styles of dance are visible in the masculine style of Roman dance. The latter includes “crouches, kicks and foot-slaps” (p. 2). Men and women will also utilize the *kaşıklar* or wooden spoons as percussive dance props, which reflect the historical use of *çalpara* (wooden castanets) by *çengi*. Moreover, many of the *makams* used in classical Ottoman music are originally 15th century CE in origin. An example is the popular Roman dance pieces known as “*Roman havası*” that are played throughout Turkey (p. 2).

than actual local Roman dress” (p. 212-213). Other groups wear “flounced skirts, evoking Spanish flamenco dress styles” (p. 212-213).

As the Turkish Republic embraced Western ideas of modernization, and as the “notion of ‘Ottoman’” became viewed as “profoundly negative,” the grand processions and feasts of the Ottoman Empire ceased (Marsh 2018, p. 11). However, Roman music and dance provides a thread of continuity from Ottoman times, “albeit in changed environments and contexts” (p. 12).

Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) noted that the Turkish entertainment industry considers “Romani identity, culture, and dance” to be “cheap entertainment vehicles that manage to popularize themselves” (p. 155). In addition, Roman are considered to be a “historically ‘harmless’ ethnicity...that is not prone to dissent” (p. 155) and therefore, in contrast to Kurds and Armenians, “represent the pleasant, ‘safe face’ of cultural/political pluralism” (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2010, p. 101). As such, funding and promoting Roman entertainment ventures is not considered socio-politically risky. Rather “anything and everything Romani becomes highly desirable as a commodity that can be conveniently discovered, reproduced, and consumed” (Girgin-Tohumcu 2014, p. 155). Since Turkish Roman is a folk dance that established its reputation “through the politics of the new nationalism and via globally networked access to technology, Romani dance is now under the sovereignty of the non-Gypsies” (p. 155). At the same time, the greater visibility of Turkish Roman dance and music enhanced the self-confidence of Turkish Roman communities.⁸⁴ Yet, Girgin-Tohumcu cautioned that it is overly generous to attribute their improved self-regard to their representation within the nation-state. Although their dance is exploited in the pursuit of Turkey’s desired democratic image, Roman are not treated as equals (p. 159).

⁸⁴ Indeed, Girgin-Tohumcu elaborated that certain media representations proliferated from the 1980s onward caused an increase in Roman confidence and "sense of cultural belonging" (2014, p. 156). Examples include Roman "dance tunes...being reissued as cover versions" and new television series emphasizing Roman identity and "entertainment culture" (p. 156).

Despite its history of stigmatization, Turkish Roman dance started to be regarded as part of Turkey's official national culture during the late 20th century.⁸⁵ Formerly, Roman dance movements had merely been incorporated into other dance styles (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 159).⁸⁶ In addition to the impacts Seeman mentions regarding *Roman oyun havasi*'s commercialization, changes in political ideologies helped to elevate the dance form, and "a new emphasis was placed on choreographies that referenced ethnic cultures" (2002, p. 137). Additionally, Turkey's effort to join the European Union in the 2000's sparked political debates regarding topics such as human rights. As a result, "formerly invisible and repressed cultural forms and identities began to be recognized, characterized, and accepted" (p. 159).⁸⁷ Since then, Turkish Roman dance has been conceptualized and presented as "an integral category rather than a theme in another dance" (p. 159). According to Rabia, the group Anadolu Ateşi ("Fire of Anatolia"), which began touring in the early 2000's, was also highly influential in generating greater interest in both Turkish Oriental and Turkish Roman dance.⁸⁸ This ensemble broke new ground by choreographing group pieces in both styles for the purpose of theatrical presentation. Some of Rabia's colleagues (dancers of various Turkish styles) believe that Turkish Roman was already arranged for and presented on stage even before the formation of Anadolu Ateshi. Rabia believes this may be because Turkish Roman was already being performed (but only as an

⁸⁵ For more information about the history of Turkish nationalism as it pertains to dance and ethnic representation, see works by Potuoğlu-Cook (2010), and by Öztürkmen (1993, 2002, 2012).

⁸⁶ Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) asserted that such incorporation was deliberately limited, stating that "the folk dancer's community" controlled "the extent and content of Romani figures in its choreographies as well as the general staging criteria" (p. 156). However, during this time, Roman dance starts to become "independent of the Thracian *karşılama* dance" (p. 156).

⁸⁷ Seeman (2009) writes that "Folklore ensembles unite regional, ethnic, linguistic and religious difference under the flag of a single country, re-mapping such differences as regional" and that these "regional mappings can mask deep historical, linguistic, and ethnic differences" (p. 212). For example, choreographies labeled "Southern Anatolian" cover primarily Kurdish areas and "Black Sea" for primarily Laz areas (p. 212).

⁸⁸ For a video clip featuring the work of Anadolu Ateşi, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ntarxMaoho>.

improvised performance) on stage for *Kakava*, as a part of *Hidirellez*, a celebration of spring. Rabia argued that Anadolu Ateşi is at least the most well-known group to innovate choreographed Turkish Roman dance for the stage and that it introduced the use of choreographed Turkish Roman pieces rather than improvised pieces. She maintained that they “got Turkish Romani dance more attention and inspired others to choreograph Turkish Romani pieces” (R. Birkland, personal communication, May 12, 2017).

According to Rabia, Turkish Roman dance was adopted as one of the official Turkish folkloric styles in 2000 and it is now considered a part of the Turkish Folkloric Federation (R. Birkland, personal communication, May 12, 2017). The latter organization represents all regions of Turkey and holds dance competitions. While Turkish Roman is included in the competition as a national folkloric style, it is still recognized as “Roman dance,” in other words, it is viewed as a dance which belongs to the broader Turkish culture, while at the same time symbolizing Roman-ness. Both local, municipally-funded dance competitions as well as national, government-funded competitions take place in Turkey today. Meanwhile, the popularity of Turkish Roman dance has generated an international following. Students from abroad are drawn to Turkey to study the form, while professionals such as Reyhan are supported in teaching and performing at local and international classes, workshops and events.

3.12 The Marginalization of Contemporary Roman

The Roman were providers of entertainment during both the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and in each era, they were socially marginalized (Seeman, 2002, p. 136-137). Both regimes significantly affected the lives of Roman people via policies of segregation that were both social and physical. Yet, the important role that Roman entertainers fulfilled in each of these societies gained them greater social visibility as well as a means with which to negotiate

self-representation. During Ottoman times, the Roman were permitted to form guilds, participate in the military, and perform agrarian labor for the Empire. Based on the latter facts, Seeman argued that Roman peoples were more incorporated into the fabric of Ottoman society than they had been during the Byzantine era.⁸⁹ In spite of this more inclusive environment, Ottoman administrative ideals were still a marginalizing force for Turkish Roman people (Seeman, 2002, p. 163). Indeed, the legacy of the Ottoman administrative practices and ideologies that had segregated its Roman citizens still impacts their communities today. The demolition of culturally, economically, and socially important neighborhoods such as Tarlabası and Sulukule (in Istanbul) result in the displacement of Roman people and the erosion of cultural traditions. Indeed, Sulukule is rumored to be the world's first permanent Romani settlement, and was located within a UNESCO priority protection zone. Sulukule's demolition (slated as "renewal") was purportedly due to the fact that some of the neighborhood's homes were in a state of disrepair, and because of concerns about rampant drug trafficking. However, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee ultimately labeled the Sulukule Renewal Project as a "gentrification project", advocating that "a balance must be found between conservation, social needs and identity of the community" (Young, 2011).

Turkish Roman experience "high levels of discrimination, despite their professed loyalty to the notion of 'Turkishness' and support for Turkish nationalism" (Gökçen and Öney, 2008, p. 135). While Roman citizens of Turkey do not face the same confinement to segregated

⁸⁹ For example, Seeman (2002) argued that "the position of Roma in the Ottoman military structure demonstrates one facet of limited incorporation into Ottoman society" (p. 153). While they were not prohibited from military service, their "marginal status" was reinforced by the fact that they were only conscripted into "specific auxiliary categories of service" (p. 153). Moreover, she stated that at the end of the 18th century Ottoman administrators made efforts at settling and registering nomadic Roman with the aim of "levying troops for war campaigns" (p. 162). However, the resultant Ottoman taxation categories can be viewed as "an elaborate classification of social types and sanctions for behaviors" in which both Muslim and Christian Roman were "subjected to extremely high and unfair taxation" (p. 159, 161).

communities as their Central and South-Eastern European counterparts do, they endure the circulation of harmful stereotypes regarding their characters with descriptors such as “fickle”, “superficial”, “criminal”, and “vicious” circulated via media and through commonly used turns of phrase (p. 135). Gökçen and Öney (2008) assert that little else is known about Turkish Roman people by the society at large other than these stereotypes.⁹⁰ The government of Turkey does not officially gather data on ethnic groups nor does it recognize those minorities that fall outside of those delineated by the Lausanne Treaty.⁹¹ Tensions between “ethnic and religious groups, which would not or could not assimilate into the ‘Turkish identity’ and the state have forced most of these groups to hide or even totally reject their original cultural roots” (p. 135). The label of “minority” is seen as diminutive and demeaning by both the state and the groups themselves. Rather than identifying themselves as a minority, Gökçen and Öney claim that Turkish Roman generally situate themselves as “Turks with a Sunni Muslim affiliation” (p. 136). As such, the aforementioned authors attribute this to a familiar, cross-cultural tendency for marginalized minorities to “blend in” with the majority (p. 141). Given certain nationalist attitudes which view “the EU and ‘other foreign agents’” as institutions which aim to “destabilize Turkey” via human rights agendas, Turkish Roman are seeking equal citizenship rather than minority rights (p. 141).

⁹⁰ Seeman stated that constraining representations such as the *çingene* stereotype “presented and performed in genres such as Karagöz shadow puppet theater, *kanto* theatrical songs, and literature...portrayed Roman as the quintessential social ‘other’-the most ‘other’ among an array of diverse social types” (2002, p. 373). She maintained that such stereotypes “continue to be incorporated into contemporary cultural works, and inform non-Roman perceptions of Roman communities” (p. 373).

⁹¹ Which does not include the Roman people.

Chapter 4 The Visual Language of Turkish Roman Dance: Its Elements, Themes, and Meanings

“We bring our life to our music and to our dance. We explain ourselves with our body language because we are dancers and not singers.”— Reyhan Tuzsuz

“Learning to dance gives you the greatest freedom of all: to express with your whole self the person you are.” – Melissa Hayden

“[To the Koryak], [k]nowledge is best thought of as a process, as ‘knowing.’ Knowledge is inextricably connected to what kind of person one is; you are what you know.”— Alexander D King

4.1 Introduction

Turkish Roman dance can be summarized thus: it is a celebratory action, a pastime, and an economic means used by Roman to mark rites of passage, to entertain themselves, and to make a living. This dance simultaneously affirms their ethnic identity and communal ties, asserts their existence in the face of hegemony, and can be used to confront their social position or for other means of self-expression.⁹² Turkish Roman dance is also deployed by Roman to engage with stereotypes applied to them as an economic strategy, as a means of exploring identity, and as a way of confronting or augmenting such clichés. Marsh characterized Roman engagement with their dance as a “dual mode of production” wherein it is performed either as an economic activity, or as an in-group celebratory event (2018, p. 13).

Turkish Roman dance is emblematic of Roman-ness to both Roman and non-Roman. This appears to be true regardless of the ethnicity of the performer or whether it is performed in Turkey or abroad.⁹³ Its movements depict the lifeway and experience of Roman, or, as Girgin-

⁹² Seeman stated that Roman communities “invest much of their self-expression into cultural practices to assert their existence” (2002, p. 371). She noted that song narratives which refer to place, quotidian experiences, and other themes such as “expressions of love and longing between Roman men and women”, explore and delimit the “Roman experience” (p. 372). Through such “reiteration, the musical display of Roman-coded cultural practices proclaim the existence of unique and distinct communities” (p. 372).

⁹³ While some viewers may consider only Turkish Roman dance performed by Roman to be “authentic,” this does not prohibit Turkish Roman dance from being symbolic of Roman-ness, regardless of the performer.

Tohumcu described it, “the mundane, vulgar, and personal stories from everyday life” (2014, p. 141). According to Reyhan, it is a very literal form, and “not very poetic” (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016). However, double entendre also emerges in this genre. For example, Elizabeth noted in one of her handouts that gestures can also be sexually evocative, a sentiment with which I concur.^{94,95} Moreover, while some movements are highly mimetic (for example kneading bread resembles a person kneading bread), other motions are more symbolic such as “the vertical striking of closed fists” which indicates “let the ones who envy us crack!” (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 141). Or, as Rabia put it, “you can’t break me.” The latter may be a salient example of what James Scott (1992) refers to as the “hidden transcripts” often embodied in the actions of those groups which are marginalized by society. He argues that these transcripts are utilized by subaltern groups as a form of covert resistance. Through the use of satire and reinterpretation, aspects of dominant culture are transformed and appropriated by the subordinate groups. This critique may go unnoticed by those in power. Indeed, Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) applies Scott’s theory to the Roman practice of taking Turkish music and dance and reinterpreting them for their own purposes (p. 140). As part of their identity affirming process, Turkish Roman utilize “masked cultural expressions... oblique references, coded language, stylistic inflections and other forms of expression felt to be less dangerous” yet possessing

⁹⁴ Particularly relevant examples include the pelvic thrusting motion of the *göbek atma*, and the myriad hip gyrations that appear in the style. The execution of iconic gestures may also be suggestive. For example, the gesture for “scrubbing the laundry” generally incorporates the gathering of the dancer’s clothing into two closed fists (often in the pelvic region) which then rub against each other to the rhythm. Depending on the performer’s execution of the gesture, this motion may or may not be sexually evocative. A film clip of this gesture is included in the supplemental materials that accompany this thesis.

⁹⁵ Double entendre is also utilized in song texts. See Seeman (2019, p. 283-289) for examples. *Mani* poetry “are improvised using rhyme and syllabic schemes” and are “an important resource for Roman dance song texts” (p. 283-289). Meanwhile, *hocali* are “improvised poetry shouted by women during public celebrations,” including weddings (2019, p. 283-289). Seeman noted that “Balikhani Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey described the practice of shouted *hocali* among late nineteenth-century *çengi* during professional performances” (2019, p. 283-289), portraying the historical continuity of this custom within Roman dance presentations. Therefore, instrumentation, lyrics, and movements combine in a performance to communicate Roman-ness as well as convey bivalent meaning.

“greater expressive power” (Seeman, 2002, p. 88).⁹⁶ However, greater expressive power is not limited to the ability of Turkish Roman dance and music to communicate in code or double entendre. As contemporary Roman musicians continue to blend their talents with other musical genres, the boundaries of their identity expand (Seeman, 2002, p. 376). Likewise, as Turkish Roman dance grows beyond its own community via mainstream representation, international commodification, and via fusion with new musical and lyrical frontiers, it also offers the potential to broaden Roman identity and agency. Indeed, as Seeman (2002, p. 4) stated in regard to *Roman oyun havasi* music, Turkish Roman dance has “transcended the particular local circumstances of its creation.” To continue with this comparison, Turkish Roman dance has undoubtedly also been a part of providing Roman communities with a new term to attach their ethnic identity to while helping them “to define what ‘Roman’ means in their own terms” (p. 4).

Turkish Roman dance is characterized via its relationship to its accompanying music, and by the dancer’s clothing, posture, affective tone, and movement vocabulary. Its movement vocabulary can be used to communicate broader cultural themes, as well as illustrate one’s attributes, activities, gender, and social status (and the individual’s attitude toward them). Conventionally, its gestures are generally gender-associated and relate to gender roles, although there is fluidity between the masculine and feminine dance styles. It appears that gestures such as the playing of musical instruments, the “money shower,” or flipping through phone pictures are gender neutral.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Seeman (2002) did not define her use of dangerous in this context, however, I believe she was implying that it is less dangerous because it is less threatening to the social hierarchy (in which non-Roman have dominance over Roman) and therefore a safer mode of expression.

⁹⁷ However, men are generally the professional musicians in contemporary Roman society. Therefore, it is possible that such gestures are associated with masculinity, despite the fact that both men and women utilize them.

Seeman (2002) described art and therefore, Turkish Roman dance and music, as a form of play. Seeman saw “cultural performance as emergent” and paraphrased Gadamer in stating that under such conditions “what is emerges.” She argued that the significance of “what is” remains “multidimensional and polysemous” and that this quality provides “the truth of affective presentation in performance” (p. 81). Indeed, Turkish Roman dance is multidimensional and possesses multiple meanings as it communicates social position and identity in both overt and covert ways, inside and outside of Roman communities. For example, a woman may show off how many bracelets she has in order to indicate wealth, or she might demonstrate the domestic chores she completed during the day to boast about her accomplishments. In each scenario, she is communicating both her gender identity and social status, and perhaps also her desirability.⁹⁸ She may include additional symbolic commentary on these topics through means such as affectation or by “playing off” of song lyrics. Another example includes dancing to song lyrics with Roman code words, or the utilization of gestures such as the “brush-off”, wherein other’s projections (or one’s personal problems) are figuratively flicked or brushed off of the dancer’s body, as if they were a speck of dust.⁹⁹ Code words possess both their literal translation and also their symbolic meaning, the latter of which communicates their insider status. However, Turkish Roman gestures need not be subversive or covert in order to communicate Roman identity because they are viewed by non-Roman as originating from and expressing Roman culture, despite the fact

⁹⁸ Seeman (2019) relays the following story: a contact of hers—a Roman woman named Nuran—had moved to a neighborhood with her family and musician husband where she was snubbed for years by the local Roman community. After her husband was chosen from among the other clarinetists in the neighborhood to make a demo tape and go on tour, Nuran performed a semi-public dance to his recorded music in front of her open, lit window, announcing, “This is *my* husband playing” (p. 307-308). Seeman made note of this performance as a strategy for Nuran to be able to communicate her frustration, while signaling “the increase of her reputation” and simultaneously “thumping her nose at the neighborhood residents after years of being snubbed” (p. 307-308). Turkish Roman dance is not only utilized for communicating the dancer’s feelings about their position within broader society, but also within their own community.

⁹⁹ While the meaning of this particular move is symbolic, the action looks just like a person brushing dirt off or flicking a bug off of their leg or shoulder.

that the dance is also considered a part of broader Turkish society. Therefore, gestures such as the “brush-off” communicate and affirm Roman identity in *addition* to their subversive meaning.

Furthermore, Turkish Roman dance possesses both iconic and indexical elements. For example, iconic gesticulations invoke the objects involved, or utilize the same movements required to perform the actual act (*e.g.*, the actions involved in executing the gesture for making bread dough). Indexes are exemplified by more abstract signs such as the aforementioned striking of fists symbolizing an unbreakable spirit, or a man performing a vigorous back and forth shimmy in order to emphasize his manhood. Furthermore, Turkish Roman dance itself indexes Roman identity, and, has arguably become emblematic of the pan-Romani identity as well.

Seeman stated that “it is in the working of the human productive imagination in perceiving meanings that signs have their efficacy, not in the inherent resemblance of signs themselves” (2002, p. 57). Surely, familiarity with the context of a sign allows it to become maximally legible to the viewer, and in accordance with the intent of the presenter. However, the viewer does not have to know exactly what the presenter intends in order for the viewer to assign meaning that causes them to believe or feel that they have understood it.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Peirce’s model of the sign does not require that there be an intentional “sender” or “transmitter” of the sign, only an interpreter. This may account for the claim that various Turkish Roman groups inherently understand each other’s gestures, despite evidence to the contrary, or, the sense of emotional understanding that non-Roman persons may feel toward the dance form, whether or

¹⁰⁰ As previously mentioned, when I first saw Turkish Roman dance, I felt like I understood something about it, even if I couldn’t read the gestures in the way that I do now. While my knowledge about the form has increased, my feelings about it haven’t changed.

not they have a knowledge of the gesture's meanings.¹⁰¹ According to Ricoeur, "rather than expressing inherent resemblance" or "re-duplicating presentation," iconicity is the "rewriting or re-inscription of reality" (Seeman, 2002, p. 56). In other words, it is not through faithful duplication that a sign becomes meaningful, but rather it is through the dancer's interpretation of the activity being represented and hence, their manner of presentation, as well as the viewer's subsequent understanding of it.

In Turkish Roman dance, day-to-day actions are semiotically reproduced for the viewer to interpret in an emotional and intellectual sense. Indeed, the duplication of one's actions, removed from its original context and presented for performance, also allows the dancer to develop a new perspective or relationship to such activities. For example, domestic chores are elevated from the mundane facts of life to an expression of one's strength, struggles, pride, social standing, ethnicity, and gender identity. As such, Turkish Roman dance relays the quotidian aspects of Roman existence in addition to the emotional and psychological relationship that the performer has to their life experience. Concurrently, Turkish Roman dance communicates Roman ethnic identity.

Turkish Roman dance may be appreciated on one level by non-Roman persons and on another by fellow Roman persons who are privy to coded language utilized in song lyrics, and other aspects of in-group dynamics.¹⁰² Hand-in-hand with this phenomenon is the liminal state that Roman people occupy: they are in name considered to be equals, belonging to greater

¹⁰¹ It is also possible that a sense of shared identity among Roman may be construed for an inherent ability to understand what other Roman are saying through their mimetic actions. Further research could explore whether this notion of mutual understanding is disrupted between Roman groups that do not feel affiliated with one another.

¹⁰² This statement does not mean to imply that non-Roman dancers cannot experience great depth and meaning in performing Turkish Roman dance or possess a great understanding of, or "fluency" in, the style. In addition, non-Roman dancers may develop valuable insight regarding Turkish Roman dance and its context and symbolism precisely due to their "outsider" status. Rather, I mean to specify that Roman persons engage with their dance as an arguably quotidian expression of ethnic identity, and in such a way that includes elements that may not be readily accessible to "outsiders".

Turkish society, but in reality, are still treated as social outcasts. Despite any gains made by the popularization of Turkish Roman dance and *Roman oyun havasi* music, Turkish Roman people effectively dwell in two worlds, whether they desire to or not.

Tropes present in Turkish Roman dance and *Roman oyun havasi* music include themes such as striving, oppression, expressions of masculinity and femininity, musicianship, dance skill and enjoyment, celebration, ethnic identity, a passionate or itinerant nature, romance, a longing for home or a loved one, separation from loved ones, poverty, wealth and being well fed, and occupations frequently performed by Roman persons such as flower selling. Tropes are often expressed through song lyrics, but may also be associated with specific gestures. For example, wiping sweat from one's brow is a way of expressing hard work, while displaying household chores or assuming a demure posture are means of expressing feminine identity. Such tropes were salient in my classes or rehearsals with Rabia as she would frequently translate song lyrics and explain the meaning of the gestures we were using, in order to help us to better embody what each song was expressing.

Tropes may originate from and reinforce certain stereotypes, such as the notion that Roman people are inherently passionate or transient. Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) asserted that “coding by outsiders helps cement the non-Gypsy’s general perception of the Gypsy: ‘fun-loving, talented, free, passionate, daring, relaxed, happy go lucky’” (p. 147). These adjectives are used as descriptors that “whet the non-Gypsy’s appetite for non-realistic and top-grossing products” seen as “exotic” (p. 147). As such, Roman performers may exploit these themes for their commercial value, or, as Seeman noted when discussing their appropriation of the *kanto* song “Above My Tent,” because they are perceived by Roman to have some element of truth in them (Seeman, 2002, p. 279-281).

To capitalize upon the trope of passionate nature that has been thrust upon them, Roman performers may engage in “auto-exoticism.” In discussing tango dance, Savigliano (1995) defined “auto-exoticism” as when “exotic others laboriously cultivate passionate-ness in order to be desired, consumed, and thus recognized in a world increasingly ruled by postmodern standards” (quoted in Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 147). Moreover, Girgin-Tohumcu stated that “just as the Gypsy offers his body performance to the other to construct the other’s difference, the non-Gypsy other represents the Gypsy’s body as other. In the final instance, the same cultural body gets ‘othered’ twice through its own and the non-Gypsy’s representation. It then becomes the material of changing ideologies at different times” (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 147). Girgin-Tohumcu also noted that the text of the dancing body will change depending on the circumstances, and that generally, when non-Roman are representing Roman, they heed “the marketing strategies of cultural forms” (p. 146). I interpret Girgin-Tohumcu’s latter statement as claiming that non-Roman representations tend to reflect pop-culture conventions of Roman performance. However, she also claimed that Roman performers will present themselves as both “‘exotic’ and ‘strange new’ with the intent of profit-making,” asserting that “in the process of offering oneself to another, what matters is what the other wants to see. Therefore, it is possible that in an actual performance, the Gypsy represents his own culture to the other exactly the way the other would like to see it: as an entertaining cultural product that inspires awe and deserves praise” (p. 146-147). Ultimately, it appears that the self-exoticization and other market-driven modifications present in commercial Roman performances blur the differences between Roman and non-Roman enactments of Turkish Roman dance.

The difference between the two representations is made clearer when examining in-group performances versus stage productions. Within in-group contexts, Roman “may just be having

fun or moving through a rite of passage” (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 146). For commercial “performance, however, it [sic] dances in order to entertain the other” (p.146). While Roman dancers are clearly entertaining one another through their in-group engagements, it is not as a showcase of their ethnicity with the purpose of their “otherness” being consumed by members of other ethnic groups. Regardless of which tropes are being presented or in which circumstances, Turkish Roman dance communicates Roman-ness.

Seeman wrote that “cultural identity is relational and conjectural rather than essential” and that a “factor in the effectiveness of social and political change lies with the degree of agency allowed performers and audiences” to “self-identify with a greater plurality of images” (2006). Changes in group self-designations are “important signifiers that make possible large social and political shifts” which, when accompanied by cultural practices, solidify “expressions of new identities” and exert “relatively localized control over these contested self-fashionings” (2006). The creation of *Roman oyun havasi* brought “a newly-revised repertoire of representations into an on-going staging of established representations, with the latter primarily under the control of non-Roman artists and audiences” (2006). Symbolic representations by “Roman” are not utopian, but they promote “alternative possibilities, which can be realized in multiple and unpredictable forms of expression” (2006). Further research could explore how the representation and utilization of certain stereotypes change as Roman people continue to gain control over their own representations, and as their voice becomes increasingly centered within Roman activism.

Despite Turkish Roman dance’s numerous unique features, Roman people have been accused of merely appropriating pre-existing cultural features rather than innovating anything of

their own.¹⁰³ Yet, in addition to generating a distinct dance form, Roman have also innovated ways of resisting marginalization via performance, not just through the use of subversive motions or lyrics, but also by defying or manipulating the stereotypes that have been thrust upon them from outside groups.¹⁰⁴

When non-Roman dancers perform Turkish Roman dance, they engage with it as a genre, versus as an expression of their own ethnic identity. This does not necessarily preclude the presence of double entendre or hidden transcripts within their performance. Indeed, in my own training, some teachers emphasized the importance of understanding Turkish Roman history, culture, and social experience in order to accurately embody the dance. Furthermore, we were educated about the differences between fantastical versions of Turkish Roman dance versus how it is engaged in within the Roman community, as well as some of the bivalent meaning being communicated through the movement vocabulary. Often, we would be given instructions regarding the cultural context of our choreographies and a translation of what the song lyrics

¹⁰³ Değirmenci (2011) wrote that some authors argue that there is no genuine Roman music as they have adapted every musical form to their “own” style. However, he paraphrased Shapiro’s argument that songs sung in Romani and performed “within and for their communities” should be considered Roman music; this includes adapted music and their common “patterns of musical styles” (p. 99). In referring to Roman perspectives of acquisition and ownership, Değirmenci claimed that Roman musicians “do not search for or claim any particular music form that exclusively belongs to their community” (2011, p. 100). He noted that the popular Roman musician, Selim Sesler, “defines the difference between Roman music and Turkish music in very superficial terms: for him only the performing style matters and makes a form exclusively Roman” (p. 100). Girgin-Tohumcu added that in procuring non-Roman songs into the Roman repertoire, popular songs that utilize a 4/4, 2/4, or 8/8 measure are “adapted to the 9/8 meter” (2014, p. 144). While the “lyrics and melodic theme of the song do not change,” the variation in the “rhythmic structure...refers to group identity” (p. 144). In light of the aforementioned criteria, we can see how cultural materials (such as music) can belong to both Roman and Turkish culture, as well as understand how the ethnicity that is indexed by such materials can change through specific adaptations. Turkish Roman dance is arguably more descript than the musical style due to its numerous unique gestures. However, we can apply Shapiro’s statement to any of the dance’s features that are thought to have been borrowed from outside Roman communities, such as the *karşılama* footsteps.

¹⁰⁴ For more information on the generation and proliferation of stereotypes regarding Roman people in theatrical performance, dances, literature, and in song, see Chapter 3 of Seeman 2002, or her 2006 publication. Silverman (2012) claimed that while “Romani performers sometimes strategically use stereotypes, they also actively resist certain representations of themselves,” noting that while musicians may not be able to control how they are marketed, they can exercise control over their repertoire (p. 7). Marković (2015) echoes this statement, claiming that Romani musicians engage in playing these stereotypes against each other (p. 264).

expressed in order to aid in our ability to emote and add dimension to our movements. For example, in one of our choreographies, the song lyrics described the frustration of the Roman singer with the dirtiness of Istanbul, and the difficulty of making a living there. The motions featured in this choreography were robust and energetic, and also included stalwart gestures such as fist-striking, as well as those referencing labor, such as flower selling, or exertion, such as “wiping sweat.” Non-Roman persons index Roman-ness through utilizing the previously mentioned attributes that characterize the dance form, *e.g.*, the dancer’s clothing, posture, affective tone, gestures, and musical accompaniment, as well as engaging in themes common to the Roman experience. However, in such circumstances the performance persona is likely to be more compartmentalized than it is for a Roman person whose day-to-day experience is expressed through the dance.

According to Girgin-Tohumcu, alongside “improvisational narrations, the Roman dance has a movement lexicon that comprises hundreds of figures born from cultural dynamics and discourses” (2014, p. 141). In my own research, I encountered about 30 distinct gestures that had iconic or gendered meanings, although the inclusion of movements without specific meaning such as footwork or non-referential arm motions would increase the movement vocabulary exponentially. Indeed, many movements are without particular meaning, yet aid the dancer in keeping time and expressing the music. There are likely to be many more iconic and indexical variations in movement vocabulary among the various Roman communities given the regional variations of the dance, and as dancers continue to innovate new gestures and movements.

Turkish Roman communities engage with their dance organically. Performances are improvisational, meaning that the dance movements are not choreographed in advance. Individual expression is valued in this dance form, particularly when dancers are able to add their

own style or flavor to moves, or invent their own moves that fit within the Turkish Roman schema. This schema requires such movements to fit into the 9/8 rhythm and to express some truth of their surroundings or experience. However, Rabia mentioned that Roman performers will also adapt elements of performance to meet consumer demands.

As Turkish Roman dance has become a commodity sought out for both domestic and international stage performances and classes, choreographed pieces have become more common. Presumably, this is in part due to the fact that it is often easier to teach and learn a consistent choreography, particularly in workshop environments. Furthermore, choreographed performances more easily lend themselves to stage performance and viewer consumption (especially in the cases where the dance pieces are performed by a large dance troupe). I doubt that this trend has impacted in-group performances, however, and assume that this applies only to consumer demands for the purposes stated above.

The following section of my thesis utilizes Hymes' (1964) criteria for analyzing communicative events. This model is a useful tool for analyzing dance, since it is also a form of communication. As I have demonstrated, Turkish Roman dance not only indexes ethnicity, but also uses indexical and iconic movements in order to represent quotidian life, gender, social status, and other aspects of Roman culture. Turkish Roman dance performances and choreographies also serve as a means for communicating resistance to hegemonic Turkish culture. According to Hymes, ethnographic accounts of communicative events must evaluate various factors such as the kinds of participants involved, *e.g.*, the addressors and addressees, "interpreters and spokesmen", and so on (p. 13). One must also consider the various channels available, the ways in which they are used, and their effect upon the senses. His examples of the former include activities such as speaking, drumming, facial expressions, or moving one's body.

Hymes also includes the “various codes” shared by the participants, including “linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, musical, and other” (p. 13). He established that the settings, forms of messages and their genres, the message content, and “the events themselves, their kinds and characters as wholes” must also be taken into account in the ethnographic analysis of events and social interaction (p.13). While my findings cannot address all of Hymes’ criteria (for example, some are more specific to language), it has helped guide my perspective of this research and it has contributed to my process of analyzing Turkish Roman.

The organization of topics begins by relaying the transmission and embodiment process of Turkish Roman dance. Then, the dancer’s relationship to *Roman oyun havasi* music is investigated, followed by the tone of the dance form, and the primary channels utilized in the style. Next, I present a head-to-toe approach to the dancer’s body and how the corresponding elements of Turkish Roman are embodied accordingly. Included is an examination of how “authenticity” of performance is evaluated and signified, as well as the means with which Roman-ness and gender are indexed. Gendered differences within the dance form are explored, as are details such as prop usage, costuming, and their significance. This is followed by an evaluation of the spheres in which Turkish Roman is performed and the relevance they have to the Roman people. Chapter 4 closes with a look at the unique contributions that Roman people have made to Turkish dance culture.

Under Hymes’ criteria, the overarching message of Turkish Roman dance can be viewed as an expression of Roman-ness. Turkish Roman dance communicates the day-to-day reality of Turkish Roman people. Popular themes include their relationship to their economic strategies, gender roles, interpersonal relationships, celebratory events, and their place in society. The latter aspect, particularly in its veiled forms, indicate that this dance style has evolved in part as a form

of social action. Indeed, as Seeman argued that *Roman oyun havasi* has become a symbol of the Roman people to themselves and to others (2002, p. 363), I argue that Turkish Roman dance has as well.

Readers who are familiar with Kaeppler's 1972 article, upon reading my thesis title, may have expected that my analysis would utilize Kaeppler's structural movement analysis (SMA) framework. For those unfamiliar with her work, Kaeppler is an American anthropologist who devised SMA, with the goal of analyzing "culture [dance] (or parts of it) in such a way that the resulting description would be comparable to a grammar which enables an investigator to learn to speak a language" (p. 173). Thus, SMA treats dance as analogous to language. By applying two levels of linguistic structure to dance performance, Kaeppler calls the smallest component of dance movement a kineme, which is analogous to the phoneme in linguistics (p. 174). In linguistic analysis, phonemes, aka, sounds, in combination comprise morphemes (prefixes, suffixes, and root words). Linguists consider morphemes the smallest meaningful unit of language (*e.g.*, adding a suffix such as "s", changes the root word book to books and changes the meaning from singular to plural). For Kaeppler, the analogy to a morpheme is a morphokine. Her direct analogy with levels of linguistic analysis and structure ends there. She does not offer an analog to constituents in syntax (noun phrase, verb phrase, etc.). The next analytic level she introduces in SMA is with the caveat that it may only be applicable to some dance traditions. She borrows the term motif from folklore, and defines it as "a frequently occurring combination of morphokines that forms a short entity in itself", which proves to be practical for understanding Tongan dance (p. 202). Her final level is genre (also referred to as a choremes). Tongan dance has named ethnosemantic categories which are comprised of "different combinations of structural elements from the lower three levels of dance organization and elements external to

dance movement” (p. 215). I chose not to employ SMA because for my research, the most productive analogy between dance and language does not lie in the structure of movements, but in holistically approaching dance performance as a type of communicative event. Hence, my decision to employ Hymes’ Ethnography of Communication as my core analytic framework for describing dance movements in relation to performances as a whole.

4.2 Embodiment Process

It is common for Turkish Roman people to “grow up” learning their dance, generally from within their own families and communities. Young students may be given specific instructions from family members, or learn from casual observation and experimentation. Most frequently, they develop their skills through a combination of these techniques. Reyhan mentioned that she has been practicing Turkish Roman dance since she was six years old, and that her first teacher was her mother (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016).¹⁰⁵ As Aydin (2016) noted, within “their own community celebrations, men and women of all ages are encouraged to get up and express their unique cultural identity to the *Roman Havasi* music, which always includes the characteristically Turkish *aksak* (uneven) 9/8 rhythm” (p. 2274). However, non-Roman Turkish citizens are also likely to grow up learning the dance form. Rabia described how she was raised with Turkish Roman dance. As a child, she learned from her mother, who taught her Turkish folk dance and Turkish Roman. She also received instruction from the children of the seasonal Roman workers who would help with the harvest in her family’s orchard. When asked how her mother came to learn Turkish Roman dance, Rabia explained “because it is a part of Turkish culture.” Turkish Roman dance “is a part of every wedding, circumcision, and every other important celebration.” At such events, non-Roman

¹⁰⁵ Seeman (2002, p. 144) noted that the Turkish Roman dancers of Bergama were also trained within their family.

people also dance in the Roman style. Turkish Roman dance is frequently portrayed in various venues, including festivals and dance showcases, some of which incorporate Turkish Roman as an aspect of Turkey's national dances, others of which focus on Roman heritage. Therefore, non-Roman Turkish citizens are very familiar with this dance form, and in this manner, may "grow up with it," too (R. Birkland, personal communication, May 12, 2017).¹⁰⁶

The dissemination of Turkish Roman dance has allowed individuals, who did not have the privilege of learning it as children, to study with a variety of teachers from diverse backgrounds, in countries all around the world.¹⁰⁷ Workshops, like those held by Artemis, provide opportunities for students to study the dance in a concentrated format. Rabia, Gigi, and other teachers may also host online classes, or provide lessons through YouTube, or in a DVD format. For example, both Elizabeth and Reyhan offer instructional DVDs. In my experience studying Turkish Roman via workshops, classrooms, DVDs, and online videos, the teaching styles varied from a follow-the-leader, improvisational demonstration to a piece-by-piece breakdown of the steps. In other words, Turkish Roman dance instruction may consist of the teacher performing the dance as the student observes and does their best to follow along, or it may be more constructed and consist of repeatedly rehearsed individual moves that are "broken down" for the student.¹⁰⁸ Turkish Roman dance is not codified, although some features such as

¹⁰⁶ Similar to my consultants, Marsh (2018) claimed that Roman dance "has become part of Turkish culture" (p. 15 n28). He describes Roman dance as "hugely popular" among non-Roman Turkish citizens, maintaining that most individuals will perform some version of Roman dance. He added that Turkish pop music has also been significantly influenced by Roman musicians and singers (p. 15 n28).

¹⁰⁷ It seems logical to conclude that in general, the student bodies of formal classrooms tend to contain higher populations of non-Roman persons, given the fact that Roman dancers are usually instructed by their own family members. Future research could study how gentrification is impacting the ability of Roman people to learn to dance at home or within their own communities.

¹⁰⁸ Rabia reported a similar experience in her studies of Turkish Roman dance, as the teaching methods she encountered varied from teacher to teacher. I observed that in Reyhan's teaching style, the moves are not broken down and the student follows along to the best of their ability, while Rabia will break down the steps and explain them to her students.

the *göbek atma* seem to be universal in both name and appearance among the regional or communal variations of its movement vocabulary. In my experience learning the dance in the US, gestures were generally spoken of in terms of what they imitated or symbolized (after an initial introduction to the movement's mechanics), while non-referential motions were generally described in terms of their mechanics only. Future research could further examine the teaching methods and embodiment processes utilized within Turkey, among both Roman and non-Roman practitioners.

4.3 Turkish Roman Dance and its Relationship to *Roman Oyun Havasi* Music

According to Girgin-Tohumcu (2014), Turkish Roman dance is based on both the rhythmic structure and foot movements of the Thracian *karşılama* dance, “embodied in the Romani style” and including depictions of improvisational and mimetic “themes from everyday life” (p. 140-141). She argued that the *karşılama* dance was a style that the Roman appropriated and reproduced which, citing Desmond, exemplified “the form’s inscription in a new community/social context” (p. 140).¹⁰⁹

Seeman argued that *Roman oyun havasi* music is “significant in that it marks the first genre in which many Roman communities have been able to maintain some degree of control over representations that depict their communities” (2002, p. 372). As previously discussed, even some of the *kanto* songs generated by non-Roman for the purposes of stereotypical theatrical

¹⁰⁹ According to Girgin-Tohumcu, “the *karşılama* has been known at least since the 1940s and is performed by couples or groups of couples generally in a 9/8 meter. Outside of Thrace, the dance is practiced in many parts of Turkey (central Anatolia and the Black Sea, among others) and in the Balkans (*e.g.*, Serbia, northern Greece and Bulgaria) under different names and rhythmic patterns. It is different from the Romani dance except for some foot movements and rhythmic structure” (2014, p. 141). She maintained that “among the various *karşılama* dance genres, the *tulum* is “in terms of bodily disposition and steps...so similar to the Romani dance that it may be only the name that is different” (p. 141). Meanwhile, Rabia reported that Reyhan considers *karşılama* to be Roman. In the context of my discussion with Rabia, I interpreted this statement as implying that Reyhan did not consider *karşılama* to be something appropriated from Turkish culture, but rather originating within Roman culture, or at least something that is also Roman.

portrayals of the Roman have been appropriated by the latter for their use (Seeman 2002, p. 280).¹¹⁰ Moreover, *Roman oyun havasi* functions as a method with which Roman may maintain and express group belonging. Indeed, song lyrics may include Roman “code terms and obscure references” to which non-Roman would not be acquainted (Seeman 2002, p. 296). Nonverbal vocalizations are another feature utilized in some *Roman oyun havasi* songs, and according to Girgin-Tohumcu, “involve codes particular to Roma custom” (2014, p. 142).¹¹¹ An example of the latter is the “ai-ai-ai, oh-oh-oh” exclamations heard in the song “*Antalya Gaydası*” by DJ Yilmaz. While such vocalizations do not have a literal translation, they add atmosphere and emotion to songs.

Rabia claimed that while the Roman did not invent the 9/8 rhythm, they have capitalized upon its potential and essentially made it their own. As Artemis stated in one of her workshops, one can move however one likes to a 9/8 rhythm, but one cannot dance Turkish Roman without it. Given how salient the 9/8 rhythm is to Roman identity expression and how essential it is to Turkish Roman dance, I preface the analysis of Turkish Roman dance movements with a brief discussion of its relationship to musical accompaniment. See Figure 2 for the basic 9/8 rhythm notation.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Seeman postulated that a number of factors could be involved in the appropriation of *kanto* songs by Roman. For example, the incorporation of *kanto* songs into the Roman wedding repertoire may have happened as a result of Roman performing as entertainers for non-Roman persons, because Roman perceived some truth in certain *kanto* songs, or because these materials were actually originally taken from them, and then appropriated for theatrical use (2002, p. 279-281). She also noted there “may be a historical link between actual in-community Rom dance performance and *kanto* dance movements” (p. 186). Since “female *kanto* performers were from minority groups,” there may be a connection “between the adoption of *çengi* and *köçek* movements by members of these minority groups, translated into *kanto* performances” (p. 187).

¹¹¹ Rabia also discussed Roman use of code in song lyrics and utterances, echoing Seeman's and Girgin-Tohumcu's findings.

¹¹² Although there are variations of 9/8 rhythms, this particular manifestation was frequently presented to me as the de facto form.

song's narrative is communicating.¹¹³ Since lyrics can inform what the dancer emotes via body position or facial expression, or which gestures they use, instrumental pieces allow the dancer to improvise such expression free of this context. Musicians may call out “dance commands”, or what Seeman refers to as “improvised poetics,” generally “shouted by male musicians to the mostly female dancers” (2019, p. 301). These commands include the following: “*Göbek*” (Belly), “*Yandan*” (To the side), “*Salla*” (Undulate), “*Kaynat*” (Boil), and “*Şaba*,” a call “to throw tips” (presumably directing observers to tip dancers) (Seeman, 2019, p. 301).¹¹⁴ However, in the case of the improvisational in-group performances that Rabia referred to, wherein singers rap about what the dancer is doing, it is the dancer who influences the lyrics. Moreover, dancers may also influence the music in the case of live performance. For example, they may give cues to the musicians telling them to speed up or slow down the music.¹¹⁵ In addition, musicians and dancers will play off of one another, mutually inspired by the other's performance, and will adjust what they are doing in a back-and-forth, improvisational, co-creative dialogue.

As mentioned in the introduction of Chapter 4, Turkish Roman dancers may engage specific tropes such as industriousness, romance, longing, or celebration, or they may communicate information about gender, occupation, social status and social frustrations, ethnic identity, and other cultural values (such as musicianship and dance ability). I am not fluent in Turkish or Romani, nor am I an expert on song lyrics common to either culture. However, during my dance training, understanding song meanings was emphasized so that one could correlate the appropriate gestures and emotive qualities within their choreography.

¹¹³ Further research could determine how this applies to instrumental versions of songs that have lyrics or whether this is consequential to gesture use.

¹¹⁴ Seeman noted that “dance commands” were recorded within 19th century “descriptions of *çengi* and *köçek* performances,” demonstrating the endurance of this tradition within Roman communities (2019, p. 301).

¹¹⁵ Seeman (2019) mentioned the following example when observing a wedding dancer: the woman “signaled to the band with two pumps of her right fist, held near her belly, a silent signal for ‘beat it twice,’ understood to signify Tulum, a slower 9/8 rhythm with two heavy...strikes on the first two beats of the measure” (p. 303-304).

It is my observation that when performed to songs with lyrics, iconic and indexical gestures are often used to obliquely refer to the text.¹¹⁶ Therefore, gestures that are iconic in their literal mimetic qualities, are also indexical in terms of what they imply via their subtext. An example of the former includes scrubbing the laundry or wiping one's sweat to reference difficulties or hardship being expressed by song texts. Therefore, gestures are not constrained in a literal sense to lyrics. Despite the proliferation of iconic and indexical motions within Turkish Roman, some movements are without meaning or implication (*e.g.*, non-descript arm movements). In other words, some movements index Roman-ness (and any other additional meaning) in and of themselves, while others do so only as a part of the broader performance.

Seeman (2002) identified three primary types of 9/8-meter songs. The latter includes *karşılama* (a category that she reports is not specific to Roman), *gordel*, and *tulum* (both of which are categorized as Roman). *Tulum* can be further subdivided into heavy or *ağır Roman*, or *yeni tulum* (fast or new *tulum*) (p. 275-278). Rabia stated that *ağır Roman* is generally instrumental and therefore iconic gestures which imitate playing instruments are frequently utilized during such pieces, although dancers may use any number of gestures that they are inspired to use during instrumental songs (including those which suggest male bravado, or those which mimic domestic duties). In one of her class handouts, Elizabeth stated that performing during *ağır Roman* is a chance for the dancer to move in an especially soulful manner.¹¹⁷

Musical instruments used in *Roman oyun havasi* “can vary depending on the geographical location” (Aydin, 2016, p. 2274). However, it is common that the *davul* or

¹¹⁶ In other words, gestures that are inspired by lyrics might be viewed as an abstracted representation of concepts, rather than an attempt at literal representation. Further research could explore the contexts and manner in which new gestures arise.

¹¹⁷ Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) mentioned that for the majority of her consultants, “the figures accompanying the *ağır Roman* and the figures and themes in Romani dance are quite different” (p. 143). However, she did not elaborate on what these differences were, nor did my research reveal similar findings.

doumbek keeps rhythm, accompanied by wind instruments such as the clarinet, *zurna*, or saxophone and stringed instruments such as the *kanoun* or violin (p. 2274), which provide melodic accompaniment. To this list Rabia added the *cümbüş* (similar to the banjo).

According to Rabia, traditional Roman music has been influenced by pop, hip-hop, reggaeton, and club music elements.¹¹⁸ These influences have resulted in the absence of the *taksim*, causing the music to become monotonous, and thereby reducing the dance vocabulary.¹¹⁹ She claimed that the latter musical styles have played a part in changing the Turkish Roman dance vocabulary. These changes include less emphasis upon the *göbek atma* and iconic gestures (such as those featured in the feminine style), a greater similarity between the masculine and feminine dance styles, as well as the introduction of new moves such as twerking. She also noted that the Roman perform a variety of song styles including party or dance pieces, wedding songs, and topical songs about Roman life.

4.4 The Tone of Turkish Roman Dance

The tone of Turkish Roman dance is “casual” when, for example, compared to that of classical ballet, a dance form that encourages the purposeful cultivation of aloofness. Ballet dancers exude refinement and regality and command that they be viewed in such a light by the audience. In contrast, Turkish Roman dance is far more approachable and “down to earth.” This is likely due to its improvisational nature, and to the communal and participatory origins of the dance form as a cultural practice among the Roman, and within broader Turkish society. Within Roman communal events, people of all ages will dance together and spontaneously interact with each other, or with the musicians, playfully riffing off of one another. However, such interactions

¹¹⁸ Girgin-Tohumcu also noted that since Roman dances reflect “contemporary fashions, their bodily expression now includes break and hip-hop dance figures” (2014, p. 158).

¹¹⁹ My understanding of *taksim* (based on my dance training) is that it is an improvisational, generally melodic, and often solo portion of a musical piece.

do not appear to be formulaic or choreographed, as a participant may also be at least somewhat internally focused while dancing. Dancers can be seen mouthing song lyrics, and bidding audience members to join them in dancing, sometimes clapping along as encouragement. Participants don “everyday” wear or party clothes for such events. I have observed the same clothing trend for more scripted performance environments such as stage appearances. However, for such occasions, performers may also choose to appear in formal attire. Or, if they are members of a dance troupe, they may perform in “assigned” costumes.

While the basics of Turkish Roman dance—the 9/8 rhythm accompaniment, gestures which capture “truths” of the Roman experience—are requisite, individual innovation is generally welcome and admired. Such innovation may include the generation of new gestures, such as Reyhan’s shoulder roll movement described in section 4.4, the incorporation of movements from outside dance forms, and dancing to songs utilizing other musical styles, such as 9/8 rhythm pieces featuring hip-hop or reggaeton elements. The ability to innovate new moves through improvisation (as opposed to a codified dance vocabulary) also lends a casual feel to Turkish Roman dance.

The casual tone of in-group Turkish Roman dance performances can be impacted by adaptations to the conventions of stage performance through costuming, choreography, audience orientation, dancer interaction, musician-dancer interaction, music selection, and performance environment. For example, presentations in highly-scripted environments, such as performing arts centers, that feature large groups of audience-oriented dancers enacting the same movements in unison, while wearing the same costume, and dancing to recorded music, alters the tone of the dance.

4.5 Primary Channels

The primary channels of movement in Turkish Roman dance include the torso (shoulder shimmies and rolls), arms and hands (iconic, indexical, and non-referential gestures), pelvic and abdominal region (*göbek atma*, belly shimmies, *amis*), legs (leaps and jumps), and feet (grapevine, *karşılama*, etc.). All channels within Turkish Roman dance operate in time with the 9/8 rhythm, tying the dancer to the musical score.

4.6 Facial Expressions and Gaze

Facial expressions, while more consequential in other dance styles (e.g., *Odissi*), are not codified in Turkish Roman dance. When combined with iconic gestures, facial expressions can be understood as indexing the dancer's orientation toward that activity. For example, smiling while imitating playing an instrument may indicate joy, while a plain or pained expression may relay concentration or passion. The gaze of a Turkish Roman dancer may be direct, and used as a means to interact with others, whether they are fellow performers or observers (that latter of which is generally more easily facilitated during less scripted performances). A dancer's gaze may also be cast upwards, to look "beyond" the audience, or downwards. A downward-cast gaze may indicate introspection, shyness, or "feeling the music/movement," but it may also be used to direct attention toward foot or legwork, gestures, and/or *göbek atma*.

4.7 Shoulder Rolls and Shimmies

Shoulder shimmies are characterized by the punctuated back and forth motion of the shoulders. Shoulder rolls, wherein the shoulders are rotated in a circular motion within their joints, appear less common, although Reyhan has a signature move which features shoulder rolls. She steps to one side of her body with a straight leg and pointed foot, while the other leg is bent and holding her weight. As she is shifting her weight onto the straightened leg, it begins to bend

while she rolls her shoulders backwards in an alternating pattern. Both men and women perform shoulder shimmies.

4.8 Belly Shimmies and Belly Rubs

Turkish Roman abdominal shimmies differ from those seen in belly dance in the sense that they are not generated via the contraction and release of the gluteal or leg muscles. Rather, the dancer's hand is placed flat on the abdomen with enough firmness to vibrate the stomach by rapidly alternatingly moving the hand up (towards the head) and down (towards the feet). Men and women alike perform abdominal shimmies. However, back-to-front hip shimmies are conventionally indicative of masculinity, and are associated with the masculine style of Turkish Roman. These shimmies involve rapidly twisting the hips back-to-front in an alternating pattern. The arms are held aloft and horizontally away from the body while the torso elongates with a slight forward bend. Belly rubs consist of placing the flat palm of either hand over the abdomen and rubbing it in a circular motion (either clockwise or counterclockwise) in time with the music. This gesture indicates either hunger or being well fed, and is performed by both men and women. Hunger may also be indicated by a dancer "slicing" the lateral side of their hand across their abdomen, presumably imitating the cutting pangs of going hungry.

4.9 Snaps (*parmak şiklatma*)

Snaps are another essential component of Turkish Roman dance. Similar to the *göbek atma*, there are not rules governing how a dancer uses them to emphasize the 9/8 rhythm accent beats, although certain patterns seem to be common (please see the explanation located in the *göbek atma* Section, 4.14). However, these snaps are quite different from those which generate sound by pressing the thumb against the middle finger until the latter slaps into the palm. *Parmak şiklatma* require the pressing of the index, middle, ring and pinky finger pads of the non-

dominant hand onto the dominant hand's same four fingers, about two inches down from the fingertips. The non-dominant hand's index finger presses against the bottom palm-side of the opposite hand's index finger until it slides medially across it, striking the inner side of the bottom of the dominant hand's middle finger. The thumbs are loosely crossed and support the tension between the two hands (see clip 1). It should be noted that such snaps have slight variations in form. In the film clip, Rabia specifies what your dominant versus your non-dominant hand are doing (as I do above), although their roles can likewise be switched. I have had instructors teach this to me in two different ways. Both Girgin-Tohumcu (2014, p.143) and Rabia asserted that snaps are more frequently used by female dancers.

4.10 Overview of Iconic/Mimetic Gestures

As Peirce stated, signs can be both iconic and indexical. Indeed, many of Turkish Roman's gestures are both iconic and indexical. However, for ease of communication, I assign its semiotic articulations into the categories of icon and index utilizing Peirce's criteria. I categorize gestures that primarily resemble an action as iconic, despite its indexical meaning. Meanwhile, I categorize those movements that do not literally resemble an activity or object, but rather imply their connection, as indexical signs. The latter may point to notions such as gender, status, fertility, or Roman-ness. Examples of iconic-index signs include the *göbek atma*, and scrubbing the laundry. The *göbek atma* is iconic in that it resembles part of the sex act, and indexical in that it implies fertility and confidence. Moreover, it also indexes Roman-ness to the degree that it has arguably become emblematic of the dance style. The gesture for scrubbing laundry is iconic in that its motions resemble the quotidian activity, yet it can be used to communicate status among women and also to index difficulty, striving, or hard work. Depending on its execution it may appear to have erotic undertones. While icons seem to be

accompanied by indexical meanings, some motions are merely indexical. An example of the latter includes the “T” position often utilized in the masculine dance style. This posture is associated with bravado, but does not appear to literally represent an activity.

Rabia specified that the articulation of gestures can vary from region to region within Turkey and among the various Roman groups therein. An example includes the “greeting” gesture, which consists of the following motions: one hand’s edge (pinky side) is placed horizontally against the lower abdomen, where it touches briefly, and then the same hand arcs away from the abdomen (palm towards the stomach) as if caressing a pregnant belly so that the index finger side of the hand briefly touches the bottom of the sternum. Another variation is executed by taking one hand and briefly touching the abdomen, the heart/chest area, and the forehead with the fingertips (see clip 2). Despite the regional differences of some gestures, others are more consistent, such as the gesture for gathering flowers and throwing them (see clips 3 & 4 respectively), and the *göbek atma*.

However, in spite of the presence of seemingly universal signs such as flower gathering and throwing, Rabia mentioned that not all Roman will attribute the same meaning to a gesture. According to her experience, when asking dancers about a gesture’s meaning, it was common to get a different definition from each individual. A similar sentiment was expressed by Elizabeth in a handout she provided to students in one of her workshops I attended. In the brief description of her dance apprenticeship, she mentioned that there were times that she believed Reyhan (her teacher) spontaneously produced a meaning when asked what a specific gesture indicated. Yet, my inquiries also suggest that Turkish Roman individuals generally believe that they share an understanding of what their fellow Roman are communicating through iconic gestures (regardless of such variations). Shared schemas of Roman culture as well as song texts likely

attribute to this phenomenon, as the latter describe, verbally, what the dancer is presenting nonverbally, even if obliquely, as in the case of the gesture for “wiping sweat” being used to index difficulty or struggle (versus merely indexing working hard). Rabia asserted that gestures not only follow the song lyrics, but often originate from them, and she considered the dancer to be a translator of their meaning. Therefore, it appears that song lyrics can be highly influential to the process of gesture formation and meaning assignment, and in assisting the expression of Roman-ness in dance.¹²⁰

According to Rabia, some gestures are chiefly performed within the company of other Roman (although I was not able to ascertain which gestures fall into this category), while others are primarily performed on stage. One example of the latter is the gesture for looking for someone.

Other icons that I encountered, but which I do not have illustrative clips for, include the following: “wiping sweat” washing one’s self, showing one’s “beautiful face,” getting dressed or undressed, and (assumedly holding) candles. “Wiping sweat” may include brushing the back of the hand across the forehead (featured in clips 14 and 15). It may also be depicted by wiping the palm of one hand over the outside of the opposite arm, in either a flowing or staccato motion. According to my research, the gesture for washing one’s self is generally depicted via the following: the dancer places one of their arms across their chest so that the palm of their hand is touching the shoulder of their other arm. Then, the dancer will run their palm either in one smooth movement down the inner side of their opposing arm, or in a staccato motion in time

¹²⁰ However, I was not able to determine how this phenomenon applies during strictly instrumental musical pieces. I speculate that the degree to which song lyrics are held responsible for gestural generation likely varies depending upon the specifics of the performance as well as upon whom you ask. For example, it is probable that those Roman who have more contact (*e.g.*, from within the same *mahalle*) with one another need rely less on lyrics in order to invent gestures relating to their daily experiences and for them to be understood as intended.

with the 9/8 rhythm accent beats. This is then repeated on the other side. Showing one's "beautiful face" consists of placing the back of one hand underneath (but not touching) the chin. Then, the back of that hand moves up around the side of the head until it reaches the top of the person's head (with the palm facing the head), then it continues to move down along the other side of the head with the back of the hand until it reaches its starting point beneath the chin. This motion is executed in one smooth circular motion around the head. A variation of the gesture for getting dressed includes the following: the dancer steps either leg away from the body while simultaneously running their hands along either side of their leg, which is then repeated on either side. Meanwhile, the gesture for taking off a shirt includes the crossing of arms in front of the dancer's body and pulling the arms over the head before bringing them back down to the side of the dancer's body. Holding or carrying candles consist of both arms being held straight above the head with index fingers pointing toward the ceiling, while the other fingers are curled in toward the palm with the thumb loosely crossing over them. Additional icons include the "brush-off" (described in section 4.1), and, as discussed in section 4.11, the gestures for "money shower," flying an airplane, and looking at pictures on a cell phone. Rabia also mentioned gestures for metalsmithing, shoveling dirt, listening to a cassette tape, as well as harvesting wheat/grain. However, I do not describe the mechanics of the latter four gestures in this thesis because while I understand their significance, I have not seen them performed.¹²¹ The iconic and indexical gestures that I was able to acquire film footage of are described in the sections that follow and can be found in the supplemental material that accompanies this thesis.

¹²¹ Seeman (2002, p. 369) also referred to gestures which simulate "metalsmithing activities."

4.11 Gesture Innovation

Evolution in environment and concepts are reflected in Turkish Roman dance via props, clothing styles, musical influences, song lyrics, movement vocabulary, performance venues, and participant demographics. For example, the incorporation of Western influences in each of these categories indexes globalization (e.g. pop music elements, hip hop moves). Both indexical and iconic gestures can be inspired by environmental fluctuations such as changes in values and technology. The former is demonstrated by the following: changes in Roman social structure may explain the shift in the feminine style of dance towards the masculine style. Examples of the latter include the gesture for a flying airplane, flipping through cell phone pictures, and the “money shower.” The airplane gesture is comprised of both hands forming a triangle by partially laying one set of fingers flat (and at an angle) on top of the other (in the same flat, angled position). The formation is then “flown” around the dancer, above the head. Or, the “plane” will graze across the inner thigh of one of the legs while it is bent away from the mid-line of the body and perched on the ball of the toes or while outstretched on the heel of the foot. Flipping through cell phone pictures is indicated by the dancer holding the palm of one hand toward their face while the other hand points the index finger (a couple inches away from the palm) and swipes the air between them from left to right. A “money shower” is depicted by holding the left hand’s palm up toward the ceiling while the right hand swipes its palm along the left hand’s palm, from the base of the left hand’s palm towards its fingers.¹²² This motion is generally repeated a few times. A variety of footwork may be layered with any of these moves. The innovation and incorporation of gestures within Turkish Roman dance is a subject worthy of further research.

¹²² Either hand could perform either “role” in this gesture.

4.12 Fists

Closed-fist dance gestures appear to be another Roman innovation. The lateral side of a fist (or fists) may lightly strike the side of the dancer's hips or they may be "stacked" on top of each other (lateral side of closed-fist hand hitting against the lateral side of the other closed-fist hand) in front of the abdomen, chest, or overhead. As previously mentioned, Rabia stated that this movement means "you can't break me!" or, as Girgin-Tohumcu put it, "let the ones who envy us crack!" (2014, p. 141). Moreover, fists can be used to accentuate the music through other applications. In addition to hitting the front or side of the dancer's hips, fists may also strike the dancer's backside, the shoulder opposite of the fist, or even imitate striking the side of their head, or hitting the outside of their foot (on the same side as the fist) when the leg is kicked up (bottom side of the foot toward the backside of the person) (see clip 5).

4.13 Instrument Icons

Imitating playing instruments is common in Turkish Roman dance and is done by both men and women, even though men are generally the musicians in contemporary Roman society. These gestures mimic playing the most common instruments which, as stated by Rabia, include the *darbuka* (goblet drum), the *davul* (bass drum), the *zurna* or clarinet, *kanun* (a large zither), *keman* (violin) and *cümbüş* (similar to the banjo) (see clip 6 for a demonstration of the clarinet, violin, and bass drum, and clip 7 for the tambourine and hand drum).

4.14 The *Göbek Atma*

The *göbek atma* or, as Rabia described it, the "throwing of the belly," is so salient to Turkish Roman dance that it may in itself be considered emblematic of the style. For example, according to Girgin-Tohumcu, the *göbek atma* (along with snaps) are "inherent to the expression

of this dance.”¹²³ It is comprised of core contractions which tilt the top of the pelvis backward, and the bottom of the pelvis forward (see clip 8). These contractions, or what some of my teachers referred to as an “up” (signified with an asterisk) are executed in time with the 9/8 rhythm, with the beats frequently accented in the following pattern:

* * * * *
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

However, a dancer may choose another combination such as:

* * *
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

or

* *
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Or, theoretically, any other variation of the five accent beats (1, 3, 5, 7, 8,). While there does not appear to be any rules regarding which combination of the five beats are accented, the above patterns seem to be commonly used. According to Rabia, the *göbek atma* is to be performed nearly continuously (emphasizing all five accent beats) and in concert with other movements. Yet, I observed that, in practice, many dancers do not combine the *göbek atma* with *all* of the movements of their performance, nor does it appear to follow strict rules in terms of how it emphasizes the five accent beats.

Indeed, according to my own observations, some Turkish Roman dancers seem to use the *göbek atma* infrequently. I have witnessed some Roman and non-Roman performers use it sparingly in US performances, and have seen film clips of in-group performances in which it is

¹²³ Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) mentioned that she has witnessed the *göbek atma* utilized among “many Gypsy dance types of the Balkans” (p. 142). She believes that this movement likely originated from the Ottoman *köçek* and *çengi* tradition (p. 142).

not prominently featured, or in which dancers' preference other hip articulations. Rabia noted that Reyhan now incorporates belly dance *amis* (horizontal hip circles) in her movement vocabulary at the expense of the *göbek atma*. Rabia attributes the supplanting of the *göbek atma* to at least three different factors: generational differences, adaptations to theatrical performance and market demands, and the appropriation of outside dance influences. While men and women both incorporate the *göbek atma* into their dancing, it is "more emphasized" in the women's style (R. Birkland, personal communication, February 2, 2018). Among the older generation (especially women) the primary dance movement is the *göbek atma*. In fact, as Rabia stated, sometimes "that's all they're doing" (R. Birkland, personal communication, February 2, 2018). Indeed, in my review of YouTube videos, I noticed that it was frequently the older and/or more traditionally dressed women whose dance primarily emphasized the *göbek atma*. Innovations in Turkish Roman have been influenced by other dance forms and the style as a whole appears to be increasingly integrating new moves. An example of the latter includes the incorporation of twerking into Turkish Roman dance, primarily by the youth. However, Rabia added that the *göbek atma* is more common within Roman community events (as opposed to stage performances) and its use is still "very predominate" in the Aegean region of Turkey (R. Birkland, personal communication, February 2, 2018).

When asked where the *göbek atma* comes from and what it means, Rabia stated while she does not know its origins, her interpretation is that it is a way of showing off, of saying "I'm here to dance for you." In Bauman's terms, this is "a key to performance," a moment wherein the dancer indicates that they are aware that they are offering a performance to be evaluated and enjoyed (Bauman, 1975, p. 295-297). While men and women both incorporate the *göbek atma* in their dancing, it is "more emphasized" in the women's style (R. Birkland, personal

communication, February 2, 2018). Rabia believes that the *göbek atma* is also associated with sexuality and fertility, and in the case of women's performance, their ability to give birth.

In order to emphasize the belly motion of the *göbek atma*, dancers will tie shirts or scarves around their waists (with the tie in the center front of their body), or place objects such as a cigarette pack into the center front of their waistband. Girgin-Tohumcu noted that "Gypsy women place slippers, a cigarette pack, or a child's T-shirt, and Gypsy men place a bottle or jacket, in their waistbands in order to emphasize this movement of the belly" (2014, p. 142). Rabia mentioned that women will often tuck fabric from their skirt into their waistband in order to emphasize their belly motion.¹²⁴ She also stated that the placing of objects such as shoes or bottles in the waistband or in the sleeve of a shirt tied around the waist may also symbolize or proclaim manhood, regardless of whether the dancer is a man, or a woman imitating the men's dancing style. Rabia noted that Roman women will not dance in the masculine style during hired performances. Therefore, female Roman dancers will not tuck shoes, cigarette packs, or other objects used to imitate the masculine dance style into their waistband during such events. These items will only be used as props for in-community enactments.

4.15 Lameness/Injured Leg Gesture

A dancer conveys lameness by straightening one of their legs and dragging it as they step with their "good" leg to their side. They may place their hands upon their "injured" leg to give the impression that they are also helping to pull it along. Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) claimed that this serves as a "symbol of life's difficult conditions" (p. 141). Other leg work generally consists of leaps or jumps.

¹²⁴ This phenomenon is visible in the film footage accompanying this thesis, as Rabia had tucked some of her *shalvar* fabric into her waistband in order to accentuate her movements.

4.16 *Karşılama* and Other Footwork

Rabia claimed that some steps present in Turkish Roman have been linked to *karşılama*, a Turkish folkloric dance. As previously mentioned, Girgin-Tohumcu referred to Turkish Roman dance or “*Roman dansi*” as primarily an adaptation of Thracian *karşılama* dance (2014, p. 140-141). Rabia taught that the following Turkish Roman steps are borrowed from the *karşılama*: the right leg is quickly bent to the right side (away from the body’s central line), lifting the right foot off of the ground and successively placing it behind the left foot, with the medial arch of the right foot facing the back of the left foot’s heel. In turn, the left leg is also bent and placed behind the right foot, while this motion repeats once more with the right leg. As the right leg is placed behind the left for the second time, it displaces the left foot so that it kicks forward, and the right foot then chases it in a galloping motion, only to repeat the displacement once more.¹²⁵ The upper body remains upright, yet slightly bent forward at the hip. *Karşılama* footwork appears frequently within Turkish Roman dance and features prominently in the masculine style. This move can be performed emphatically, particularly to slower music. However, a less dramatic version of this move is shown in the video recording accompanying this thesis, as the fast-tempo music required Rabia’s expediency in executing the movement. Clip 3 features two different *karşılama* steps.

In addition to the *karşılama*, footwork elements include tapping, “chasing” footsteps, small flicks of the foot, and steps which cause the hips to twist, such as the “grapevine.” Other movements include “skipping” or “hopping” steps, or what Marsh claimed “are known as *tavşan adım* or “rabbit steps” (2018, p. 2). Footwork such as the aforementioned taps or light “stomps”

¹²⁵ Although I describe the *karşılama* move using a right leg to start, it can also be executed starting on the left.

followed by “releases” (small flicks of the foot) may be emphasized to create punctuated accents in time with the music.

4.17 Authenticity: Posture and Transmission

Turkish Roman dance is generally executed with a forward-tilted upper body, bent slightly at the midsection. However, for some movements, the dancer may push the pelvis and abdomen forward while leaning their torso backwards. These forward or backward leans give the Turkish Roman dancer a casual yet self-possessed demeanor, and places the “weight” of the dancer into the upper torso and pelvis. Additionally, much of the movement vocabulary emphasizes the pelvic region, thereby lending the dance a grounded character. Such positioning is a stark contrast to the aloof quality embodied by the upright posture of classical ballet—a dance form which has influenced many other styles, particularly those originating in the Western hemisphere. Perhaps this influence is at least partly responsible for the perceived difference in posture between Roman and non-Roman dancers. In an interview with Reyhan, she claimed that the primary difference between Roman and non-Roman dancers was their posture—the latter being more erect—and that “one” (presumably Roman persons) can always tell whether or not a dancer is Roman based on this criterion. In order to become a better dancer—or, to dance more like a Turkish Roman person—Reyhan emphasized the importance of students spending time in individual apprenticeship with Roman instructors, as this allows the student to be infused with their teacher’s performance style. Additionally, Reyhan stated that in terms of a performer’s ability to develop a skilled and “authentic” presentation of Turkish Roman dance, it doesn’t matter whether a student studies in Turkey or abroad (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016). However, Reyhan (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016)

and Rabia (R. Birkland, personal communication, July 8, 2017) both advised students to spend ample time listening to the 9/8 rhythm in order to better embody it.

4.18 Ethnicity and “Authenticity” of Performance

Seeman reported that there is a common sentiment among Roman and non-Roman alike which affirms that “only Roman can dance like Roman” (2002, p. 27). Rabia believes that a skillful presentation of Turkish Roman dance is not based on one’s ethnicity but rather one’s ability, and to base performance skill upon ethnicity is discriminatory by nature. She considers her criteria for evaluating a performer’s skill as (generally) the same as those of the Roman. The latter includes respecting and being knowledgeable of the dance form and Turkish Roman lifeways and experience within broader Turkish society. This allows one to excel at interpreting and embodying Roman music and culture. Rabia stated that she does not see a difference between the capacity of a Roman and non-Roman dancer to index “authenticity” or Roman-ness. Indeed, Rabia’s performance skill has led Roman people to mistake her for being Roman.¹²⁶ It is her opinion that any perceived difference is likely due to the fact that Turkish Roman dance and music are such integral parts of Roman culture, and that both phenomena are emblematic of it, even when integrated into the broader Turkish society. Those from both inside and outside Turkish Roman culture may conflate the continuity and/or mastery of a particular practice with inborn skill, and it may seem logical to conclude that members of a culture would be naturally more capable of performing whatever skills, arts, or crafts emerged from within it. However, cases wherein a non-Roman dancer’s provenance is mistaken as Roman belie this seemingly common belief. Regardless, both points of view are found among Roman and non-Roman alike.

¹²⁶ Rabia stated that rather than being told by Roman people that she “can’t dance Turkish Roman like them,” she has received encouragement, compliments, and been given approval to perform (R. Birkland, personal communication, July 8, 2017).

4.19 Authenticity: Indexing Roman-ness

Rabia discussed the multiple ways in which gestures and clothing are powerful indexes of Roman-ness, and therefore authenticity, in performance. Both factors communicate gender within Roman communities. Many gestures utilized in Turkish Roman dance are unique to the genre, and therefore index Roman-ness in and of themselves. Most of its gestures are gender-associated, regardless of who is using them. Furthermore, they communicate Roman ideas and values about gender and information about their lifestyles. Rabia maintained that the feminine style of dance is particularly indexical of Roman identity and authenticity as she considers their vocabulary to be especially distinctive. She also made this claim regarding conventional Roman women's clothing, as it signals Roman identity within broader Turkish culture. The expression of gender in dance style and in costuming are discussed in greater detail in sections 4.20 and 4.21 respectively.

Roman oyun havasi music also indexes Roman authenticity, both to themselves and to others (Seeman, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, the combination of *Roman oyun havasi* and the unique gestures present in both the masculine and feminine styles contribute heavily to the distinction of this dance form.

As previously mentioned, Seeman argued that geographical and social place are culturally significant to Roman and are evoked within a *Roman oyun havasi* performance. I was not able to ascertain how geographic locale is represented through the accompanying dance movements themselves. I assume that musical lyrics, particularly those which contain "in-group references" to specific communities are largely responsible for this claim, or perhaps, this is also conveyed through the use of gestures that are not familiar to others outside of their community.

Further research could explore this topic, as well as how this intersects with the notion that Roman intrinsically understand one another's dance communication.

Although geographic locale was not emphasized in my dance training, social position and dynamics between women and men were. When learning a choreography to a song that lamented the difficulties that Roman experience living in Istanbul (as told from a Roman perspective), we were directed to emote frustrated, passionate feelings while enacting motions that corresponded to the lyrics. Another example includes a choreography which centralized a male figure who was flanked by female figures. At one point during this choreography, the women were sitting on the floor miming domestic duties while the man stood in the middle utilizing motions meant to flaunt his bravado. According to our instructor, this piece metaphorically referenced the elevated position that men hold in the patriarchal Turkish Roman culture. While this choreography was an artistic interpretation and does not appear to be based on any Roman conventions of performance, it signaled truths about Roman culture.¹²⁷

Regardless of their ethnicity or where they perform, Turkish Roman dancers may signify and embody Roman-ness through several channels simultaneously. First, is the act of dancing to *Roman oyun havasi* music, as this style is considered emblematic of the Roman. Second, is the utilization of gestures which are unique to or commonly used by Roman. Third, is the act of dancing to Roman lyrics (whether improvisational “raps” or traditional songs texts) and/or the use of gestures which subvert power structures (for example, the vertical striking of fists). Fourth, is the use of elements of costuming or dress which are emblematic of the Roman, such as

¹²⁷ I am not aware of such choreographies being a part of Roman in-community practices. This is not surprising given the improvisational, communal, and “day to day” nature of Turkish Roman dance outside of its purpose as a commodity. They are likely only produced for stage purposes, wherein Roman people may or may not be involved.

headscarves, *shalvar*, *etek*, and props such as a waistline-tucked beer bottle.¹²⁸ Due to the increased dissemination and recognition of Turkish Roman dance and its accompanying music, this style not only represents Roman-ness, it also indexes and has become an emblem of pan-Romani identity.

4.20 Gendered Differences

Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) stated that since the “common denominator of being Romani” is an “ethnocultural identity issue,” the “gendered differences” in Turkish Roman dance are unremarkable (p. 143). She referenced the lack of “strict borders between the male and female dancing repertoires” in support of her argument (p. 143).¹²⁹ My research indicated that while the borders between the masculine and feminine styles are permeable, there is a significant presence of gender expressions and an awareness of what is being communicated. Indeed, phenomena exist within Turkish Roman dance that reflect the conventions that Roman observe in regards to gender roles. A primary example includes the panoply of gestures for domestic chores or female-associated occupations such as flower selling that are expressed by female dancers, as they are associated with the women’s domain of power. According to Rabia, the masculine style possesses fewer iconic gestures, and is therefore less distinct than the feminine style. Moreover, she asserted that women imitate the masculine style much more frequently than the converse. This reflects masculinity’s unmarked status in Turkish Roman culture. Consequentially, the gendered aspects of the masculine style may be less easily recognized. However, it too reflects

¹²⁸ Please note that the various channels which communicate Roman-ness during a dance performance are numbered for the purposes of organization, and do not reflect a hierarchy of importance in communicating said identity.

¹²⁹ Girgin-Tohumcu (2014, p. 143) justified her claim by stating that the *göbek atma* “reveals the non-gendered tradition” of Turkish Roman dance, as “male and female bodies can tell their own stories” utilizing this movement. However, the statement that both genders are able to “tell their own stories” with the same motion implies the recognition of gender expression, despite the fact that movements such as the *göbek atma* are shared between genders. In addition, Rabia noted that before women began to adopt the features of the masculine style of dance, the *göbek atma* was a significant part of the feminine style.

gender-related values, including male-associated vocations and Roman patriarchal social structure.

My training with Rabia emphasized the gendered aspects of Turkish Roman dance and how it reflects the conventional roles between men and women. Traditionally, women dance in a more demure and constrained manner than the men. Their movements are often closer to the body and softer in quality (see clip 10). Conversely, men's dance is more expansive, overt, and often features movements which are considered displays of masculinity or bravado.¹³⁰ For example, men's arms are frequently held straighter and extending away from the body (*e.g.*, in the "T" position).^{131,132} Leg motions may also be larger and more grandiose, and may include leaps. Other acrobatic actions may be displayed such as somersaults.¹³³ These moves may be a visual metaphor for possessing greater social space in a patriarchal society. Dress shirts may be partially unbuttoned or completely removed and tied about the waist. If a shirt is being worn on the torso, the cuffs and front hemline may be tugged-at and straightened during the dance. Sometimes a shoe is tucked into one of the arms of a shirt tied around the dancer's waist, to accentuate the dancer's groin. The shoe adds extra bounce to the *göbek atma*, in imitation of his "manhood."¹³⁴

Stewardship of the home is conventionally women's domain. Therefore, mimesis which portrays or relates to activities, such as making and drinking tea (see clip 11), making bread (see

¹³⁰ I encourage readers to view the following clip for an example of a Turkish Roman dancer utilizing many of the features of the masculine style: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILPt2KsOT4>. The link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYSzK00T7k> displays additional examples of male stylization and also illustrates how men playfully compete with one another. Some musician-dancer interaction is also visible.

¹³¹ I have observed this same movement in flamenco, Greek folk dance, and other Balkan dances, and in each case, it appears to communicate male bravado.

¹³² According to Girgin-Tohumcu, this is a representation of "being exalted and brave," although I believe these qualities are generally embodied in the masculine style's movement vocabulary (2014, p. 143).

¹³³ Girgin-Tohumcu also listed a "macho walk" as a way to portray masculinity (2014, p. 141).

¹³⁴ Women may also use this technique when imitating the masculine style.

clip 12), grinding coffee (see clip 13), washing and hanging laundry (see clip 14), stirring the stewpot (see clip 15), and wiping sweat from one's brow (see clips 14 and 15),¹³⁵ frequent their dance vocabulary (the list of accompanying video clips is found in Appendix A). Rabia mentioned that often, in addition to their household duties, women work outside the home. Therefore, in general, Roman women provide more economic support to their families, in terms of both financial earnings as well as domestic work.

According to Rabia, occupations commonly performed by Roman women include housewife, entertainer, flower seller, harvester, and vendor of textiles or their husband's wares. Hence, many of the iconic gestures seen in the feminine style depict domestic and nondomestic economic activities. Yet, gestures will also portray other actions such as getting dressed or undressed, and display concepts such as being well fed.

Rabia indicated that the accomplishment of domestic chores is a source of pride among Roman women.¹³⁶ When dancing together, they may playfully compete by symbolically exhibiting their domestic prowess through the use of gestures that indicate their homemaking skills or status. However, Roman women who are wealthy enough to not have to perform household duties are proud of this fact, and may use other movements to compete.¹³⁷ Examples of the latter include gestures which indicate wealth or desirability such as "showing off bracelets" (see clip 16) or that display the dancer's "beautiful face."

Conventionally, men's movement vocabulary is more indexical and less iconic than those of women, although male dancers will also use gestures which portray economic activities such

¹³⁵ Which indicates hard work or as Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) stated it, "tiredness" (p. 141).

¹³⁶ Rabia noted that this pride in domestic accomplishments generates social collateral among women, but not between women and men.

¹³⁷ Rabia mentioned, for example, that it is desirable for the wives of local chiefs (*çeribaşı*) to not have to perform domestic duties. While Roman women have frequently been breadwinners for their families, it is now a sign of status for a *ceribaşı* to be able to afford to support his wife so that she does not have to work at home.

as metalsmithing, agrarian work, or playing musical instruments. Rabia believed that this iconic disparity alludes to the conventional arrangement wherein Turkish Roman women take care of the household chores “all day while the men hang out in cafes practicing their musical instruments” in preparation for their jobs as musicians and entertainers (R. Birkland, personal communication, September 2, 2016). Of course, this sentiment is hyperbolic, as Roman men are engaged in a number of other vocations, including as statesmen, administrators, or lawyers (or metalsmiths or laborers, etc., as their iconic gestures attest). It is Rabia’s opinion that attitudes towards gender roles are changing to some degree within Roman communities, *e.g.*, the idea of women seeking an education is becoming more acceptable.¹³⁸ Yet, domestic concerns are still largely the domain of Roman women.¹³⁹

Although Turkish Roman dance is gendered, there is fluidity between the two forms. For example, men and women share many of the same iconic and indexical movements (airplane, cellphone, *göbek atma*, fists, snaps), as discussed above. In addition, Rabia stated that women who are adept at dancing in the masculine style are admired, rather than ostracized for their gender-bending behavior. See clip 17 for a video recording of Rabia dancing in the masculine style.¹⁴⁰

I was not able to ascertain whether or not the ability of a male performer to imitate the feminine style was similarly valued. Somewhere along my dance training experience, I heard that when men are imitating the feminine style, they are considered to be “making light” of it.

¹³⁸ According to Rabia, the education of Roman women is encouraged by the Turkish government.

¹³⁹ In an interview with Reyhan, she mentioned that in Roman culture, peacekeeping is the woman's job. According to Reyhan, when men get drunk and make trouble, the women step in to soothe disruptions and maintain social ties (R. Tuzsuz, September 2, personal communication, 2016).

¹⁴⁰ The following clip shows dancer Sophie Armoza performing the masculine style of Turkish Roman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocVXcTFnS34>. Bear in mind that this is a stage interpretation. I am not aware of women changing into men's clothing in order to imitate the masculine style of dance within Roman community performances, and according to Rabia, Roman women do not imitate men onstage.

Such phenomena could be due to the fact that men are given deference in Roman society. Moreover, a unilateral dynamic wherein it is admirable for women to become skilled in the masculine style (but not the converse) would indicate that the feminine style of dancing is marked, while the masculine style is unmarked. This would not be surprising given Roman society's patriarchal structure.

Potuoğlu-Cook (2010) observed women's gender bending behavior at a Roman wedding celebration, reporting that "they used promiscuous expressions reserved for men" (p. 100-101). She opined that "the gendered malleability of quotidian movement was, in part, due to a shared lower-class status...and alleged immodesty" (p. 101). She viewed this dynamic as representing "collective resistance, or political possibility, against a state that deemed Roma performers dispensable and/or displaceable" (p. 101). Potuoğlu-Cook drew from Browning in describing such dances as "intimate choreographies of sexual, aesthetic, and political...freedom" (p. 101). It is also possible that women's ability to skillfully imitate the masculine style of dance is a form of subversion of their society's patriarchal structure.

It is Rabia's view that the feminine style is becoming increasingly similar to the masculine form, especially among the younger generation of Turkish Roman dancers, and that the two styles are becoming less distinct. For example, iconic gestures, particularly those referring to domestic life, are becoming utilized less frequently. Rabia contends that women's articulations are generally still more "gentle" than those of their male counterparts, although the range of motion (away from the body) of their gestures is becoming broader. Traditionally, women's movements emphasized the *göbek atma*, snaps, belly shimmies (hand-generated), and the gestures referring to their daily activities. Footwork, on the other hand, was primarily

conducted by men. Now, women are increasingly incorporating footwork into their dancing.^{141,142}

Changes in gender roles (specifically, the fact that women are acquiring more opportunities outside of the home) are being reflected in Roman dance via the increased adoption of the masculine style. While some traditional gestures such as the playing of musical instruments or striking of fists are utilized by both genders, new iconic gestures that do not index gender are also emerging, such as those referencing technological phenomena (e.g., flipping through cellphone pictures or an airplane flying). The impact this trend will have upon the creation of iconic gestures and how dancers will create new ways of communicating gender identity is a promising area for further research.

When asked what Roman elders make of these changes, Rabia stated that she “hasn’t heard any complaints” but rather, that they are “going with the flow.” Rabia prefers the “traditional” form, as she considers it “more unique.” It is her opinion that the introduction of club and hip-hop music influences, for example, makes Roman music less distinctive. Yet, she acknowledges that many Roman have embraced the fusion (R. Birkland, personal communication, July 8, 2017).¹⁴³ Reyhan herself uses a considerable amount of music containing the aforementioned influences, but also performs to “traditional” Turkish Roman pieces. It is

¹⁴¹ Rabia elaborated that customarily, a woman might incorporate footwork in her dance (albeit it was not as emphasized as in the masculine form), while her arm motions stayed closer to the body (the latter being a characteristic of traditional feminine style).

¹⁴² In the following clip, we can observe a young man and woman dancing together, showcasing some of the similarities in dance style as well as the emphasis on the leg and footwork: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdlQqn71dpQ>. Whereas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk_8q1Ko6a8 illustrates the emphasis upon the *göbek atma* in conventional women's style Roman dance. It also displays how women will use the *göbek atma* to playfully compete with one another. The next clip depicts a choreography which utilizes several iconic gestures associated with the feminine style of Turkish Roman dance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jssEX_4S2OE.

¹⁴³ Girgin-Tohumcu, however, reported a different finding. According to her research, some Roman admired the incorporation of new dance moves (in this case, from Bollywood) while others disapproved (2014, p. 144).

arguable that the incorporation of dance movements or dance styles from other cultures serves a similar purpose as the adoption of outside musical influences has in expanding Roman identity and agency.

4.21 Clothing as Prop

Men might manipulate their shirts while dancing, perhaps even using one of their shoes as a prop to emphasize their virility.¹⁴⁴ Women who imitate the masculine style may choose to handle their clothing in the same manner. Women (dancing in the feminine style) may also grab the edges of their shirt, skirt, or side of their pants (wherever they can most conveniently grab a handful of fabric in both palms) in order to rub the two fistfuls of material together to mimic the scrubbing action that is made when washing clothes by hand.¹⁴⁵

A contemporary stage-innovated use of clothing props is the incorporation of the skirt as a main component of a choreography. Rabia considers such skirt-work to be fusion. While she was not certain where this influence had come from, she speculated that it may have been borrowed from flamenco. Artemis believes that it comes from Romani dance traditions from “Russia, India, Spain and Turkey” that have been “fused together with non-Romany material into theatrical performance pieces” (Mourat, 2021). An example of skirt-work includes when a dancer grabs the edge of their skirt in both hands and, on both sides of their body, holds their arms aloft while spinning. Rabia noted that traditionally, Turkish Roman women did not bare their legs publicly, and so it follows that the more conventional dancers would not use their arms

¹⁴⁴ The following clip features the dancer Bulut Şeker using his jacket as a dance prop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFLPsEFfIL>.

¹⁴⁵ The action for scrubbing the laundry is often followed by a gesture which imitates hanging the laundry on a clothesline. This gesture is indicated by the individual holding both arms stretched out in front of their body and at an angle, so that the hands are about head-height. The tips of the fingers are brought together as if pinching a cloth, and the wrists are flicked upwards in time with the 9/8 accent beats (clip 14).

to swing their skirts around them while dancing.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Rabia stated that skirt-work is more popular among non-Roman and the younger generation, while the older generation remains more conservative in this regard. However, she also said that professional Roman dancers will adapt to market demands by incorporating phenomena such as skirt-work into their routine.

Traditionally, a portion of the bottom of a dancer's skirt or of the voluminous *shalvar* fabric is tucked under the waistband, positioned front and center. Positioning the fabric in front of the dancer's belly helps to emphasize the movement of the *göbek atma*. According to Rabia, women with larger bellies do not require the extra emphasis provided by the tucked skirt or *shalvar* fabric. She added that in conventional Turkish Roman society, larger bellies are desirable, as they are associated with being well fed. Furthermore, Rabia correlated the emphasis on the *göbek atma* (particularly in the feminine style) and appreciation for larger bellies with the following Turkish Roman cultural aspect: the recognition of, and respect for, women's ability to give birth.

4.22 Costuming

For in-group performances, dancers appear to wear "street" or party clothes. Men's costume staple consists of a shirt (T-shirt or dress shirt) and pants (jeans or slacks) (see figure 3), although a jacket, vest, or hat may also be worn. Traditional women's clothing consists of a headscarf, modest shirt, and *shalvar* or *etek*. These ensembles generally appear to be more popular among the older generation (see figure 4). Whereas "Western style" jeans, slacks, skirts, tops, and dresses seem to be popular among younger women. There are some notable differences between women's stage-innovated and conventional costume within Turkish Roman dance.

¹⁴⁶ Artemis noted that for some Romani cultures, it is taboo to touch one's skirt. While this clearly does not apply to all Romani groups, the flashy and dramatic skirt-work that was once presented in the US as an authentic facet of Turkish Roman dance has now been proven to be an amalgam (Mourat, 2021).

Historically, a dancer's midriff would be covered, but according to Rabia, it has become fashionable for women to wear costumes that expose the abdomen for stage performances. According to my video review, young women could occasionally be seen wearing outfits with exposed mid riffs during in-group performances, and "club wear" items such as formfitting dresses with short skirts seemed to be somewhat popular.



Figure 3: Film still of Serkan performing Turkish Roman dance, wearing conventionally masculine clothing (photo retrieved from [\(316\) Male Belly Dancer Serkan Tutar Roman Havasi improvisation dance & interview in stage - YouTube 12/20/2020](#)).

In both the US and Turkey, some Turkish Roman dancers choose to wear belly dance-like outfits for their staged performances. Indeed, in the US, I have noticed that many dancers will wear a "Gypsy fantasy" style costume while performing Turkish Roman dance. The latter consists of: voluminous skirts accompanied by belly dance-style hip scarves or belts, either a tie front top with flouncy sleeves (midriff exposed) and/or a belly dance style "bra top," which is

sometimes paired with a “Turkish vest.” furthermore, with few exceptions, much of the dance that was billed as Turkish Roman in the US in the recent past would have been more accurately described as fusion dance featuring Turkish Roman moves or music. However, awareness of what is or is not a part of Turkish Roman dance (as practiced by Roman) seems to be increasing within the US dance community.



Figure 4: Reyhan performing Turkish Roman dance, dressed in conventionally feminine clothing (photo retrieved from [International Roma Day 2013 - Voice of Roma](#) 12/20/2020).

Such fusion pieces may include extensive skirt-work, which is not a traditional part of Turkish Roman dance. Marsh commented that frequently, what is described as Turkish Roman

dance and music outside of Turkey “bears little relation to authentic heritage and performance,” especially as it pertains to Turkish Oriental, “reflecting the ‘fantasy’ of both ‘the East’ and of the imaginary ‘Gypsy’, in European and northern American cultures” (2018, p. 2).¹⁴⁷ He argued that it was the “influence of European Orientalism and the ‘fantasy’ of the harem, and the imaginative (and inaccurate) representations of Ottoman women in Western art and literature” that “changed the costume of dancers to reflect this, absorbing such ‘Oriental visions’” (p. 15). He continued:

Exposing parts of the body, such as midriff, arms, and shoulders, came to be ‘expected’ of ‘Oriental dance’ in the Western gaze, to the extent that ‘belly dance’ became predominantly associated with Turkish dance in general – despite its origins both in Egyptian dance and as a commercial enterprise in the turn-of-the-century (1890s to 1900s) United States. (p. 15)

Future research could explore the historical and contemporary non-Roman perceptions of Roman, particularly as they relate to Orientalism, as well as the expression of Turkish Roman dance in diaspora, and the dynamics of the feedback loop between in-group and out-group performances of the style. Additionally, the correlation between these facets and globalization, market demands, economic strategies, Roman identity, and shifts in cultural facets such as costuming and dance merit investigation.

4.23 Performance Spheres and Relevance within the Roman Community

Turkish Roman dance has undergone modifications as a result of its adaptation for stage. A dance form that was originally only improvised is now also crafted into carefully

¹⁴⁷ As Marsh described, the modern “Orientalist fantasy” interpretations of Turkish Roman or Turkish Oriental costumes bears little resemblance to the historical outfits of Ottoman entertainers (2018, p. 5). Rather, *cengi* and *köçeks* were conservatively attired (p. 6).

choreographed stage presentations. These pieces may be created for either solo or group performances. Girgin-Tohumcu (2014) described staged enactments of Turkish Roman dance as primarily differentiated “for women” via leg and foot work as well as hip motions (p. 157).¹⁴⁸ Variations in leg and footwork have increased, and have overshadowed the conventional *göbek atma*. Additionally, “the hips of women, which were traditionally moved by steps naturally, became a crucial tool for the new hip movement combinations. For instance, one of the most widespread hip figures is to circle the hips in four times repetition by getting back in every eight-note time” (p. 157). She reported that “the latest fashionable form is an interpretation where professional or amateur performers are arranged in a half-circle and/or a line dance” (p. 158). The military precision that was applied to choreographies such as those presented in the circa 2000’s Sultans of the Dance project, wherein audience members admired forty performers executing the same movements in unison, is now being applied to Roman choreographies to maximize “viewer enjoyment” (p. 157). The pace of the music is also increased, which she attributed to the use of electronic music. These staged interpretations of Roman dance disbursed via media have been appropriated for use by Roman. This includes the manner in which the dance has been “re-embodied via other genres” (p. 157).

Rabia stated that Roman have adopted non-Roman adaptations of Turkish Roman dance because they have commercial value. In addition, she explained that when Roman people see their dance presented in a commercially exalted (and often flashy) environment such as filmed dance competitions, any novel elements presented (even if they are foreign to the style) will seem desirable to adopt. An example includes using skirt-work as a part of the choreography.

¹⁴⁸ She did not elaborate on how this impacts men's choreography, although it is implied that the superseding of the *göbek atma* by leg and footwork and the increased musical pace applies to them as well.

The dynamic experienced between performers, observers, and musicians is also altered in staged performance. As Maleyft noted regarding flamenco performances in Andalusia, Spain, attendees of intimate performance environments acted as participants rather than merely observers (1998, p. 69). Thus, the totality of the latter experience is one of group co-performance versus one in which a defined line exists between performers and observers. Within Roman community events dancers, musicians, and audience members interact with one another improvisationally, riffing off of one another in co-creating the experience.¹⁴⁹

Rabia asserted that Turkish Roman people consider the performance of their dance within their own communities to be the most authentic. Within their own enclave, dancers have greater context for the meanings that they wish to convey. Such context is developed to varying degrees by daily or regular in-group interactions, and/or via notions of the shared identity and experience of being Roman. These shared experiences generate meaning and reify group belonging. Meaning is in turn expressed in the form of dance gestures, or in the form of verbal or musical communications.

When asked how Turkish Roman people understand the meaning of a new gesture that a fellow dancer has improvised, Reyhan replied that “you just know,” because of the context (R. Tuzsuz, personal communication, September 2, 2016). While lyrics are helpful in such circumstances (as Turkish Roman gestures are often prompted by lyrics), many songs are instrumental. In the latter case, the “knowing” Reyhan refers to is likely based on familiarity with the details of the lives of the performers and/or audience members, and/or the shared knowledge of Roman identity, culture, and experience. As articulated by Tannen, schemas are the “knowledge structures in the minds of participants in interaction” cued by symbolic behavior

¹⁴⁹ Such dynamics can be conveniently observed by looking at *Roman havasi*, *Roman dansi* or *Roman oyun havasi* videos on YouTube.

(1985, p. 328-330). Therefore, knowledge of individual and/or community (be it a specific *mahalle* or the Roman community at large) experiences serve as a schema which inspires and informs the execution of a Roman dancer's movements, and also facilitates the audience's ability to understand what is being said.

However, the signs indicating various tasks are not universal, and are not always understood by the observer(s). For example, both Serkan and Reyhan discussed their observation that the older generation of Turkish Roman did not understand what the gesture for flipping through cell phone pictures meant, while the younger generation did not recognize the gesture for listening to a cassette tape (R. Tuzsuz and S. Tutar, personal communication, September 2, 2016).

Similar facets which cause Roman to consider the performance of their dance within their own community to be more authentic also apply to their musical performances. When hired as entertainers for private events, Roman musicians play a medley of various song styles, but they save what they consider to be "their own music" for performing in their "own community."

Not all Roman songs are considered appropriate for choreographed stage performance. When asked why this is, Rabia explained that the lyrics of many Roman songs don't "make sense" to non-Roman listeners.¹⁵⁰ Presumably, this is due to at least two factors. First, is the nature of the spontaneous "raps" that frequent Roman songs which are based on events or personal details that derive from the singer's experience. During in-group performances, Roman singers will often improvise such "raps" to the music that is accompanying them. These "raps" may tell a story about one of the dancers, something that the singer has experienced, or depict a narrative that is relevant to the other members present. Rabia claimed that "raps" are not a part of

¹⁵⁰ I was not able to determine whether or not there are instrumental Roman pieces considered inappropriate for out-group audiences. Based on what I believe is the criteria for in-group musical pieces, I presume not.

public performances. This is probably because such prose is often spontaneous, and frequently based off of current community or familial happenings. The intimacy and multilayered meaning present within in-group performances would obviously be more challenging to reproduce in circumstances outside of this context, and may be less marketable to outside groups. Hence, these raps are both a product of the Roman in-group environment, as well as a means to reify it.

Second, is the sense of common experiences or schemas of knowledge that are shared between Roman people, particularly those of the same neighborhood, community, family, etc. Indeed, Rabia and Reyhan claimed that even if a Roman person was not present for the original events which inspired a song's creation, they would understand the message within its seemingly-cryptic lyrics. An example includes the 2017 song "*Antalya Gaydasi*" by DJ Yilmaz. Rabia, Serkan, and Reyhan asserted that this is a song whose lyrics won't make sense to non-Roman persons, but which are implicitly understood by Roman people (R. Birkland, R. Tuzsuz, and S. Tutar, personal communication, September 2, 2016). These assertions are similar to Seeman's findings that Roman use in-group language in their songs which can incorporate "obscure references" as well as "code words" from other local Roman dialects (2002, p. 173 n8, 296). Rabia mentioned that the latter may also include slang terms or vocables/exclamations. Girgin-Tohumcu elaborated by stating that the "chanting in chorus of syllables such as *ehe*, *aha*, or *tek* on the accented beats of the rhythmic structure" involve "codes particular to Roma custom" (2014, p. 142).

According to Rabia, while in-group Roman music may not be considered fit for public performance due to its coded references, there are Roman musicians, singers, and songwriters who compose and/or perform pieces that are considered appropriate for staged Turkish Roman dance, and therefore suitable for public consumption. Examples of such artists include Selim

Sesler, Yaşar Akpence, and Ahirkapi Roman Orkestrasi. Generally, a professional Roman dancer will choose a song considered appropriate for staged events (and for other out-group functions). However, this is not a rule carved in stone. Reyhan, for example, dances to in-group Roman songs on stage. Rabia clarified that she may choose to do the same, but with a caveat: the accompanying dance would be improvisational. It is her impression that performing on stage to such music in solo or group pieces is acceptable if the dance is improvisational, as it stays true to the traditionally spontaneous nature of the dance form. Roman music which is slated for public consumption may accompany either choreographed or improvised dance pieces.

Staged performances of Turkish Roman dance may feature Roman or non-Roman dancers in solo or group pieces, which may be either choreographed or improvised, regardless of whether the performance occurs at highly scripted, formalized events, or at more casual events such as festivals.¹⁵¹ While Turkish Roman dance is undeniably more intimate and contextualized within the Roman community, it is woven into the fabric of greater Turkish society and used to mark all manner of important occasions, “even when there are no Romani participants” (Marsh, 2018, p. 12).

The “genrefication” of Turkish Roman dance and music has led to new economic opportunities. According to Girgin-Tohumcu (2014), Turkish Roman dance is now “an autonomous genre and private dance schools have added it as such to their class list” (p. 158).

¹⁵¹ As of 2014, Girgin-Tohumcu asserted that “competitors and performers” are primarily amateur Roman dancers as “media fantasies performed by the bodies of non-Gypsies do not satisfy the audience anymore, and the audience seeks a real cultural body with its Romani energy” (p. 157). Yet, it appears that, seven years later, staged performances such as national competitions continue to include non-Roman dancers. Indeed, my non-Roman consultants have participated in such events and have been awarded for their performances. Meanwhile, in-group performances are unlikely to include non-Roman dancers. Various social dynamics are likely at work here. Further research could delineate in greater detail the differences between various performance venues and contexts, *e.g.* informal Roman gatherings or staged performances for national competitions and how this impacts factors such as costuming, choreography, audience demographics and interaction, as well as who participates in representing the dance form.

Marsh cited a “growing ‘dance tourism’” (primarily featuring US tourists and taking place within Roman neighborhoods) that “has sought to revitalize so-called Oriental dance and provide a connection with “genuine” Romani music and dance in Turkey” (2018, p. 2). Turkish Roman dance is being taught, studied, and performed by both Roman and non-Roman persons within Turkey and internationally. Throughout the world, festivals such as Tarazade (Istanbul, Turkey) and Rakkas Minneapolis (Minnesota, USA), feature Turkish Roman dance professionals.

4.24 Turkish Roman Contributions to Turkish Dance Culture

In addition to the contributions that Roman people have made in innovating their own unique dance form and musical stylizations, they have also influenced Turkish Oriental dance. This is important to mention as it further discredits the erroneous notion that Roman people have only taken from the surrounding culture and not made any contributions of their own. Also, it illustrates another way in which Roman people express and modify their identity in different contexts.

Historically, Roman dancers were a fixture in the entertainment houses of Sulukule (1953-1992), performing Turkish Oriental to classical Turkish music pieces. Turkish Roman dance had yet to become a commercial commodity and was therefore not a part of the dancers’ entertainment house repertoires. These performers would presumably only engage in Turkish Roman dance within their own community. Girgin-Tohumcu believed that it was Roman dancers’ experience as belly dance professionals that led to the incorporation of some belly dance moves into Turkish Roman dance, and as such, considers their vocation to be “reflected in their cultural practices” (2014, p. 148-149).

Rabia elaborated upon the relationship between Turkish Roman and Turkish Oriental, stating that several movements were incorporated into the latter from the former. Examples of

such motions include what Rabia refers to as the side step/backwind (the footwork pattern featured in clip 10, which exhibits the feminine dance style), the *göbek atma*, and the use of closed-fist gestures. The latter is not surprising given the fact that historically, Roman women would have performed Turkish Oriental (Girgin-Tohumcu, 2014, p. 152). This is because Muslim women could not dance publicly, although Roman women could (2014, p.144), as they were not subject to the same moral guidelines.^{152,153} Marsh maintained that in fact, Turkish Oriental originates from Turkish Roman “forms” (2018, p. 12).¹⁵⁴ Indeed, as previously mentioned, records like Celebi’s claim that dancer guilds were composed of “Gypsy, Greek, Jewish and Armenian youths” performing movements that are evocative of contemporary Turkish Oriental dance vocabulary. The incorporation of Roman dance elements into Turkish Oriental is still practiced today, and is a part of the latter’s distinct flavor.

¹⁵² Girgin -Tohumcu (2014, p. 152) noted that until recently, belly dance performance was associated with “women who danced in seedy bars, at weddings and who were seen as prostitutes.” She elaborated by stating that “even though the magic and precision of belly dance is publicly appreciated, the negative connotations of being a belly dancer in a Muslim country continues to prevail and dancers are seen as loose, dangerous women” (p. 152). This image first began to transform as a consequence of Nesrin Topkapi’s 1979 broadcast performance wherein she dressed in “semi-conservative costume that did not reveal much” while exhibiting “a dance aesthetic based on technique” (p. 152). As a result, “the popular perception of the belly dancer” changed (p. 152). Then, during the 1990s, “the Kemalist inspired interpretations of [the] DHDT” began consolidating “the image of the performers of this dance as proper dancers” (p. 152).

¹⁵³ In my classes with Artemis, she made similar claims based upon her own studies. However, van Dobben (2008) suspects that “outside of court life Muslim Turks from the lower classes most certainly did become professional performers,” and suspects that the lack of disclosure on the matter is due to “modern Turkish historians” seeking to “disassociate the Ottoman performing arts from Turks” and to instead “characterized them as foreign” (p. 45-46).

¹⁵⁴ As stated during her workshops, Artemis also believes that Turkish Roman is “the mother of Turkish Oriental.”

Chapter 5: Closing Remarks

“Until my last breath, I will continue to teach”—Reyhan Tuzsuz

Roman entertainers have long served as cultural brokers that adopt, adapt, and reproduce the local musical and dance traditions for the purpose of consumption. Despite the fact that Roman people and their artistic expressions have been (and still are) stigmatized, they have also been integrated into the fabric of Turkish society. Furthermore, their innovative expressive culture is now a source of national pride. What was once a Thracian wedding dance is now an internationally known phenomenon and commercial product that is economically viable both locally and abroad. While Roman people endure the paradoxical experience of being socially ostracized while simultaneously sought out for their talents, the “genrefication” of Turkish Roman dance and music has helped generate Roman pride as well as greater appreciation for their talents among non-Roman.

Turkey’s socio-political environment and the resulting cinema, theater, and music market demands, coupled with Roman innovation, helped to create a music and dance genre emblematic of what it means to be Roman. In fact, despite any variations in gestural meaning, Turkish Roman dance is now a signifier of Roman-ness among themselves and to non-Roman alike. Turkish Roman dance communicates the lifestyle, values, and experience of the Roman people. For example, it displays information regarding the gender roles and quotidian activities Roman women and men negotiate within their own community, while also conveying their feelings about their place in Turkish society. However, Roman-ness is not static, nor is its embodiment in performance. Gestural themes and styles reflect their changing values and environment. For example, they have created new gestures illustrating current technology such as smart phones. Women dancers have adopted elements of the men’s style, reflecting changing attitudes toward

gender roles in Roman society. While globalization has helped to popularize and commodify Turkish Roman dance and music, it has also introduced new cultural material which has been incorporated into already established features of the style. While this dynamic expands the notions of what it means to be Roman and the spheres in which one may negotiate autonomy, it also displaces “traditional” aspects. An example of the latter is the hip-hop, pop, reggaeton, and club music influences which have replaced some of the more traditional song elements and dance moves.

Undoubtedly, the boundaries of Roman-ness and its embodiment in Turkish Roman dance will continue to shift over time. In regards to his research on Koryak dance, King said the following:

Just as a symbol is meaningful only insofar as it is connected to things and ideas, people’s lives are meaningful because they are connected to other people, places, and practices. So long as relationships among Koryaks...continue to support young and old in moral ties in soul-fulfilling ways, the future of Koryak tradition is secure. (2011, p. 262)

Likewise, the future of Turkish Roman dance is secure as it continues to be a tool with which to explore, reify, and redefine the Roman experience. Indeed, subsequent research could explore how such phenomena continue to be expressed in their dance form.

Girgin-Tohumcu stated that Turkish Roman dance “has first been denied, then accepted, and finally characterized in the Turkish cultural theater” (2014, p. 159).

Furthermore, it has become a sought-after commodity whose popularity precedes those for whom it has come to serve as an emblem. A dance style once rooted in the Ottoman Empire is now taught, performed, and consumed as a form of entertainment and artistic expression in various countries around the world, and even in far north communities such as Alaska. This is

a testament to the versatility, creativity, and artistic power of Roman culture and Turkish
Roman dance.

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Appendix A: Video Clips¹⁵⁵

“To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak”—Hopi saying

Clip 1: Snaps

Clip 2: Greeting the Audience

Clip 3: Gathering and Throwing Flowers

Clip 4: Gathering and Throwing Flowers Cont’d.

Clip 5: Fists

Clip 6: Instrument Icons: Violin, Clarinet, and Bass Drum (*Davul*)

Clip 7: Instrument Icons: Playing the Tambourine and Hand Drums

Clip 8: *Göbek Atma*

Clip 9: *Karşılama*

Clip 10: Dancing in the Feminine Style

Clip 11: Making and Drinking Tea

Clip 12: Making Bread

Clip 13: Grinding Coffee

Clip 14: Washing Laundry, Hanging it to Dry, Wiping the Brow

Clip 15: Stirring the Stewpot and Wiping the Brow

Clip 16: Showing off Bracelets

Clip 17: Dancing in the Masculine Style

¹⁵⁵ The appendix lists the film clips in order of their subject’s appearance (where they are described in greatest detail within the main body of this text). They are listed alphabetically within the supplemental materials file. Many of the clips feature Rabia demonstrating a movement repeatedly. To get a sense of how gestures flow together, see clip 10, or refer to the YouTube links found in various footnotes within Chapter 4. Also note that moves such as making bread or stirring the stewpot, while demonstrated in a kneeling position, may also be executed while standing.

Appendix B: Instructor Biographies

Note: These biographies were extracted from web sites and e-mails as provided and remain unedited.

Rabia Azra Birkland, (nee Gültekin):

Rabia is an internationally acclaimed performing artist, researcher, Instructor, choreographer and one of the leading performers of Turkish Romani Dance in USA.

Rabia found her love of music and dance at a young age in Turkey where she started dancing, drumming, and performing at early childhood age during traditional henna nights where her mother played a frame drum. Growing up listening and dancing to the complex rhythms of Turkey's beautiful Aegean region, where Romani people still exists today, was to her benefit during her formal dance education. Today she uses western vocabulary to bridge the cultures. Rabia passes her enthusiasm for improvisation to her students, demonstrating how to physically connect with melody and rhythm and using the body as a visual musical instrument. Her unique dancing and teaching style is rooted in Turkish culture and tradition. She has performed at numerous events in Turkey as a part of her folklore education and has taught nationally and internationally.

In addition to being a surgical registered nurse, she holds a Bachelor's in Physical Education with an emphasis in athletics/dance, and Master of Science in Nursing Education. She integrates her formal educational background into her dance instructions to benefit her students.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/turkishdancebyrabia>

Reyhan Tuzsuz:

I was not able to procure a self-published biography for Reyhan in English. Therefore, I am utilizing the following write-up sourced from Rakkas Istanbul's 2018 festival website ([Reyhan Tuzsuz \(rakkasistanbul.com\)](http://RakkasIstanbul.com)).

Reyhan is a dancer from Gazi Osman Pasa, one of the largest Roman neighborhoods in Turkey. She has been dancing since before she can remember and has mastered this particular style. Since 2001 she has been opening her door to international students interested in learning Turkish Roman.

She is one of very few willing to teach this dance; and she does so with enthusiasm, patience and a terrific sense of humor. Her students come from all over the world, from a variety of dance backgrounds and levels of expertise. Reyhan teaches by doing.

Each of her lessons include a dynamic movement vocabulary, presented with positive energy and laughter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivZpNhrMxsM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8xTsPNLEWA>

Serkan Tutar:

International award winning bellydancer & teacher.

“Male Bellydancer of the world 2008” and winner of “Brandon Oasis 2006”

Organizer of Rakkas Istanbul International Oriental Dance Festival.

A 10 year old Turkish boy arrives in Arabic countries. Living there for 3 years, he gets charmed by the Oriental dances of the Arabic women on festivities such as weddings. The sound of their music touched his soul and opened his door to dance. Back in Turkey, he goes deeply into the Egyptian and Turkish style bellydance. The working out process on especially body sensation, muscle control and lighthness gets its reward when Serkan performs for the first time at the age of 17.

Not only in Turkey but also in Germany his numerous performances are a great success and soon he decides to share his experience by teaching the dance that has swept away his heart. After developing himself and educating others in Turkey (Istanbul, Izmir, Kusadasi) and Germany, he enters the millennium in Belgium.

He has performed and instructed workshops all over Belgium, Hong Kong, Singapore, Israel, Germany, France, Egypt, England, Austria, Turkey, Italy, Greece , Holland , Czech Republic, Croatia, Sweden, Switzerland, Bosnia, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Russia, USA, Alaska, and more.

He is teaching Turkish style bellydance, Modern Egyptian style, Baladi, Saidi, Shaabi, Turkish Gypsy style, Veil dance (double and single) , His signature “Crazy drum solo’s”, and many more dance styles,...

He is continue to dance and give workshops in all over the world.

For more info, contact, and booking don’t hesitate to write him or call him (Serkan.be/aboutserkan.html).

www.serkan.be

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6KMoy_3S_M

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLgfuzMyrd8&list=PL87F7B11B5C715D26>