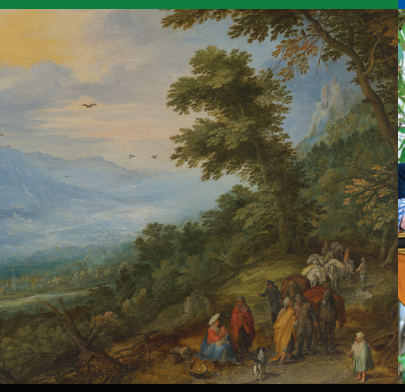
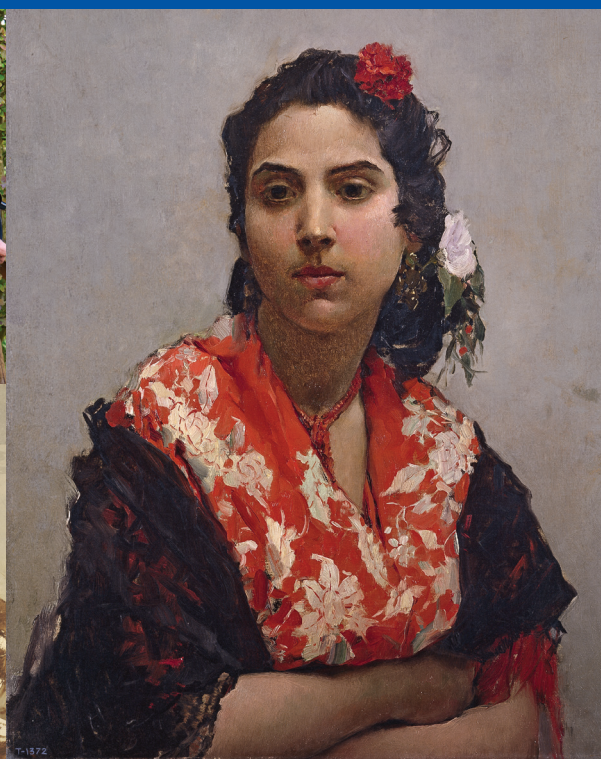
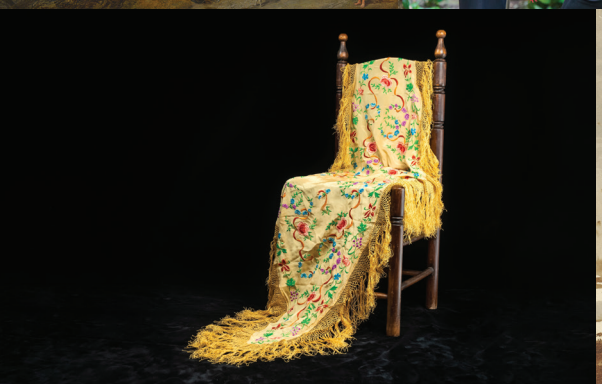
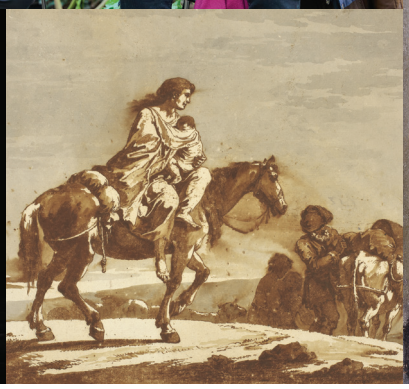
Tool 3

The history of Roma and Traveller communities

Historical briefings



TOOLKIT FOR TEACHING ROMA AND/OR TRAVELLER HISTORY

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Tool 3

The history of Roma and Traveller communities

Historical briefings

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Council of Europe

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The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

Contents

How to use the historical briefings

It is challenging to collect the necessary information to teach the history of Roma and Traveller communities. To make this easier, we have created a series of historical briefings focusing on different aspects of the history, culture and impact of Roma and Traveller communities as a starting point for teachers and educators.

At the end of each historical briefing, you will find discussion questions to help reflect on their experiences. You will also find online resources of images, testimonies and archives that can be used in the classroom; additional resources to deepen your knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Roma and Traveller communities in Europe; and guidelines on how to ensure an anti-racist and antigypsyism approach in the classroom.

This document contains a wide range of cultural depictions of the Roma and Travellers, which have been included to brief teachers on how the Roma and Travellers have traditionally been and often still are portrayed. It is not our intention for teachers to reproduce these depictions in the classroom. Rather, it is hoped that they will serve as an important starting point for discussions on the nature of prejudice in general, and antigypsyism in particular.

Keep in mind that the historical briefings are only a starting point. They do not cover all information about the history of the Roma and Traveller communities, nor do they cover the local history of one specific country or a set of countries across Europe. Each one serves as an initial source for historical background information about the history, culture and impact of the Roma and Traveller communities in Europe. Thus, they will not answer all your questions but serve as an inspiration on what to focus on and where to start.

1. History of Roma and Traveller communities in Europe

A short introduction to the Roma

The Roma people are the largest ethnic minority in Europe. It has been demonstrated on the basis of linguistic evidence that they originated from north-western India, where their language shares similarities with other Indo-Aryan languages.

It is difficult to assign hard dates, but linguistic and written evidence seems to suggest that the Roma left India around the turn of the first millennium at the latest, and spent time in both the Persian and Armenian areas before eventually reaching the Byzantine Empire, and from there Europe, where they had spread throughout the continent by the 16th century at the latest.

Currently, there are several distinct Roma subgroups living in Europe, among them the Romanichals in England, the Kale in Wales and Finland, the Manouche in France, the Gitano in Spain, the Sinti in Germany, Austria and Italy, and the Beyash in Croatia. While these subgroups differ from one another, they are generally referred to as "Roma" because of their common roots and shared history of discrimination. Unlike the word "gypsy" and its variants, Roma is an endonym, native to Romani, chosen as a term to refer to the various Roma subgroups at the First World Romani Congress in 1971. The term ultimately comes from the Sanskrit *doma*, and consequently has no link to either Rome or the Romanians.

Arrival in Europe

The historical reconstruction of the Roma's travels from north-western India to the European continent poses a great challenge: the lack of written evidence left by the Roma people themselves. Unlike many other historical narratives based on detailed records left behind by the communities themselves, the Roma's early history is essentially built on accounts provided by external observers, oral traditions and the linguistics-based reconstruction of their migration from the Indian subcontinent. Given this historiographical challenge, writing the history of the Roma is an ongoing endeavour, which has increasingly included Roma scholars, researchers and historians themselves. Linguists played a key role in this development by studying the similarities between the Romani language and the Indo-Aryan languages of northern India and analysing the influences of local languages on Romani throughout their journey from northern India to all corners of the European continent. This linguistic analysis, and the written accounts of those who encountered the Roma during their westward journey, confirm that they left the Indian subcontinent in different waves and reached Europe around the 13th century, having migrated via Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor. Several genetic studies seem to further confirm these theories.

The first written accounts of the Roma's presence in Europe date back to the Byzantine Empire in the 13th century, in what is now Greece. Primary sources from that time describe the encounters between local communities and groups of people believed to be Roma, who both fascinated and frightened the local populations with their foreign religion and culture. In other words, the Roma have long been subject to stereotyping, prejudice and negative perceptions of antigypsyism, which is a specific form of racism.

Many exonyms used to describe the Roma probably also originated in this period. In several sources, the Roma are referred to as *atsigani*, a derogatory Greek term from which originated many exonyms used to describe the Roma today in various languages, such as the Hungarian *Cigány*, the Romanian *Tigan*, the German *Zigeuner* and the Norwegian *Sigøyner*, all of which are associated with stereotyping, prejudice and negative perceptions of the Roma people.

The Roma were also especially linked to a region of the south-western Peloponnese often called "Little Egypt", which probably served as the origin of the supposed link between Roma and Egypt and thus the exonym "gypsy". From the area of today's Greece, they appear to have travelled to other regions of Europe.

From 1385 onwards, there is reliable evidence about the Roma in the rest of south-eastern Europe. The oldest accounts originate from Serbia, Wallachia and Moldavia, where groups of enslaved Roma were handed over and given as gifts to monasteries. A fact that is often overlooked is that the Roma people were the last to be liberated from slavery on the European continent. The official abolition of this dehumanising practice – the longest recorded uninterrupted period of slavery in the world – took place as late as 1856 in Wallachia.

Middle Ages and modern history

By 1450, the Roma people had reached most European cities. From the Balkan Peninsula, groups of Roma continued to travel, reaching western Europe in the 15th century, and eastern and northern Europe in the 16th century. This is also the period when groups of Roma, not always voluntarily, significantly reduced their travels or gave them up altogether. In western Europe, this led to a degree of cultural osmosis between the Roma and local populations, or sometimes forced assimilation, with some Roma community reducing their nomadism. However, apart from exceptional cases, the majority of Roma people continued to be marginalised and persecuted. One of the exceptional cases was the first anti-discriminatory law for Roma issued by Sigismund of Luxembourg on 18 April 1423.

The presence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans from the 14th and 15th centuries onwards strongly influenced the history of this region. Most of the Roma became part of the Ottoman administrative, military and economic systems, while a smaller group continued to travel within as well as outside, the borders of the empire, despite the authorities' attempts to settle and register them. The Roma population in the Balkans began to establish themselves in villages, primarily as craftspeople. In the 16th and 17th centuries, some Roma people also became involved in agriculture, and this led to the development of Roma villages.

The Roma have historically experienced widespread poverty, exclusion, discrimination and violence. From the 16th century, the development and intensification of negative stereotypes of them gave rise to a wave of persecution that included policies of assimilation and expulsion throughout Europe. Newly established modern nation-states saw themselves as represented by particular features of national identity, and Roma people were not regarded as sharing these (discussed below).[1] Furthermore, strict citizenship laws left many Roma people stateless, while new vagrancy laws prevented them from pursuing a nomadic lifestyle. These changes determined two ways in which Roma people came to be seen: as exotic deniers of modern civilisation at best and as dirty, lazy social parasites at worst. These stereotypical views of Roma people were reinforced by travelogues and reports from various European ethnographers and tourists.[2]

Life under industrial capitalism

In the mid-19th century, industrial capitalism and eugenics ideology encouraged nation-states to act even more oppressively towards minority communities. In response, local Roma organisations were established worldwide to advocate for the protection of Roma people from discrimination and from the adverse impact of industrial capitalism on their lives.[3] However, it was also then that race theorists such as Arthur

1. The labelling of the Roma as the "other" is the key of antigypsyism. D. Zachos, "How Europe gets Roma culture and identity wrong", 30 April 2018, Social Europe, https://www.socialeurope.eu/roma-culture-and-identity (English).
2. Ibid.
3. Acton T., "Beginnings and growth of transnational movements of Roma to achieve civil rights after the Holocaust", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/beginnings-and-growth-transnational-movements-roma/.

de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain started to divide humans into "superior" and "inferior" races. This led some governments to attempt to define the Roma as a "race", a group defined by shared biological characteristics.

One example was the Bavarian government, which created a Central Office for Gypsy Affairs in 1899 to survey and gather information about the local Roma community. Over four decades, the authorities in Bavaria devised a system for identifying, documenting, regulating and intervening in the lives of the Roma people.[4]

When the National Socialists took power in Germany in 1933, these discriminatory practices continued and were strengthened to lay the groundwork for systematic genocide during the Second World War.

Travellers

Another group that is often confused with the Roma are the Travellers. "Travellers" is a general term for various other historically nomadic groups in Europe, such as the Yenish in Germany and neighbouring countries, the *Tatere/Fanter* (derogatory terms) in Norway and Travellers in Ireland. These groups, though generally unrelated, are categorised together because of similar ways of life and living conditions.

In general, most of these groups appear to have split from the majority of settled society in the early modern period, and rarely intermarried with them. They each developed a distinct language: Shelta for the Irish Travellers, Scandoromani and Rodi for the Norwegian Travellers and Yenish for the Yenish. Some of these languages seem to have developed out of cants – deliberately convoluted speech designed to confuse outside listeners.

These languages also often contain some influence from Romani, as their similar ways of life brought the groups into close contact with each other. There is a strong influence of Yiddish in Yenish, while Shelta contains both Irish and English. In general, the distinction between the various Roma groups and the Travellers has historically been quite fluid, both because of similar lifestyles and intermarriage and because both have been the targets of antigypsyism.

The Travellers also share a history of discrimination with the Roma. Like the Roma, the Travellers were seen as somewhat suspect from the very beginning, as they travelled around outside the bounds of settled society. At the same time, however, they served important functions in society as merchants and specialised labourers.

This changed in the 19th century, when Travellers, like Roma people, were increasingly seen as uncivilised "others". At the time, internal travel in Norway required a passport, and Travellers were forced into workshops, poorhouses and other institutions designed to discipline them. As with other minority groups in Norway such as the Sami, attempts were made to bring the *Taters* and the Roma (in Norway different terms are used to distinguish the minority groups of Roma heritage arriving in the Middle Ages and more recent arrivals in the second half of the 19th century) into the fold of the national community and to make them conform to social expectations of "civilised" behaviour, by force if necessary. Travellers in other countries were the target of similar treatment. For example, in Switzerland Yenish children were taken from their parents between the 1920s and 1970s to force them to fully assimilate into the rest of society. Like the Roma, the Travellers were considered "undesirables" in the Third Reich and attempts were made to register them, though the extent of their persecution remains unclear.

4. Dawsey J., "The Bavarian precedent: The Roma in European culture", National WWII Museum, 25 January 2021, www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/bavarian-precedent-roma-european-culture.

Discussion questions

- What sources are available in your country to learn the history of Roma and Traveller communities? Who has written them? Do they include the voices of the community?
- Can you make a timeline of the history of the Roma and Traveller communities in your country? You can find an example below.

11th century
First written accounts of Roma in the Byzantine Empire.

13th century
Accounts of Roma communities in Serbia, Wallachia and Moldavia. Probable start of Roma enslavement in Wallachia and Moldavia.

1423
First anti-discrimination law against the Roma instituted by Sigismund of Luxembourg, king of Bohemia.

16th century
Accounts of Roma in England, Scotland and Ireland. Bohemia, Poland and Lithuania start passing anti-Roma laws, while England, Sweden and Trent (now in northern Italy) try to expel the Roma or stop them entering the country.

17th century
Countries move towards politics of assimilation, allowing Roma communities to stay but prohibiting their cultural practices and language.

19th century
Eugenics ideologies drive nation-states to establish more oppressive regulation over minority groups.

1856
Roma slavery banned in Wallachia (present-day Romania), ending Roma slavery in the world.

1899
Bavarian government creates the Central Office for Gypsy Affairs to monitor and collect information on the local Roma community.

1933
National Socialists take power in Germany, leading to systematic discrimination against, and persecution and extermination of, Roma communities.

1944
Roma prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

1956
German Federal Court of Justice denies any racial persecution of the Roma before the Auschwitz Decree of 1942.

1970s
Roma women in Czechoslovakia are forcibly sterilised.

1971
The first World Roma Congress held near London, at which the term "Roma" is declared to be the official self-designation.

1979
The Association of German Sinti and the Society for Threatened Peoples organise the first large-scale international remembrance ceremony for Roma victims at the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

1999
During NATO's intervention in Kosovo,* Albania forcibly expels two thirds of Kosovo's Roma.

2012
Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism established in Berlin.

2015
The European Parliament establishes 2 August as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

*All references to Kosovo – the territory, institutions or population – in this text shall be understood as being in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

2. Impact of Roma and Travellers on European culture and society

The Roma and Travellers have influenced European art in a myriad of ways. On the one hand, there are various cultural representations of the Roma, often as stereotyped others and reflecting their marginalisation. Think of depictions of the Roma and Travellers in paintings. What comes to mind? Traditionally, Roma have been depicted sporting "exotic" costumes and hoop earrings, living in makeshift encampments and telling fortunes with a crystal ball. Such depictions, which first emerged during the 15th and 16th centuries, cemented the subaltern position of the Roma in Europe. These continued to be reproduced in the following centuries. While the politics of representation evolves through time, their oppressive nature remains, shifting only between more or less pronounced forms. Some of these early representations may not have been intended to encourage prejudice against the Roma, but they persist up to the present and continue to harm understanding and public presentation of Roma and Traveller culture.[5]

On the other hand, there are the Roma people's own cultural productions. Many of these, such as their music, folklore, fashion and crafts, have entered the mainstream of European culture.

Roma and Travellers in pictorial art

Since art historians began to study Roma communities, many representations of women in pictorial art formerly thought to be from Asia have been reclassified as Roma. The first depiction of a Roma person is a German drawing from the last quarter of the 15th century, now at the National Gallery in Prague.[6] It shows a mother in a turban and wearing a long cloak, holding her child, with the inscription "Ziginer" over her head. Different versions of the cloak continued to appear in artworks until the 19th century.

There are also several representations in which Jews appear in Roma clothes, for instance, the "Gathering of manna" scene in the *Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament* in Leuven by Dieric Bouts. The Roma became one of many stock characters, alongside Saracens (Muslims) and Jews, who served as the antithesis of Christian Europe. Several sources trace the Roma back to the condemned or denied characters of the Bible.[7] It is thus hardly surprising that the dark-skinned Roma people came to signify morally questionable types in Christian iconography. However, some artists, such as Jan van de Venne, depicted Roma characters in his paintings, often engaged in daily activities and in a realistic manner, which earned him the nickname "Master of the Gypsies".

From the 16th to the 18th centuries, however, few artworks depicted real Roma individuals. The vast majority were fictional stock characters. Around this time, the Roma started to be demonised and criminalised, and to be cast in barbaric, evil, ugly and thieving roles.[8] Their poverty and supposed wretchedness were often accentuated, for example in *Bohemians on the March* (1621) by the French painter Jacques Callot. This poverty was also sometimes portrayed in a more positive light. As the Roma were often treated in a similar way to the peoples colonised by the Europeans, they were cast in the role of the noble savage, as coming from a simple and primitive people untouched by the corruption of civilisation. During the Enlightenment, several detailed drawings and genre woodcuts were made of traditional Roma costumes

5. Junghaus T., "Towards a new art history – The image of Roma in Western art", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/visual-arts/roma-in-art-history/towards-a-new-art-history/.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

and occupations;[9] for example, Roma figures appearing as musicians and performers. Thus, the lifestyle of the Roma and Travellers became an emblem of what was considered to be "bohemian" (in France, the term *bohémien* was traditionally used from the 15th century to describe the Roma, who were believed to have come from Bohemia), living for momentary pleasures and art. Bohemianism – a way of life embraced by artists and others in the early19th century – was a counterculture.[10]

This traditional way of exoticising the representation of the Roma in art continued into the 20th century. Otto Mueller, also known as "Gypsy Mueller", often depicted naked Roma women, and Pablo Picasso drew Roma musicians in indoor scenes.

However, perhaps more importantly, there is also much art by the Roma themselves. Several Roma painters became popular in the wave of naïve art – that is, art created by people who are not formally trained – which developed over time into a genre of its own. One example is Ceija Stojka, an Austrian Roma, who was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps during the Second World War at just 10 years of age. Later in life, she painted and wrote about her experiences and was active as a spokesperson for the recognition of the Roma and Sinti genocides until she died in 2013. Another painter was Micaela Flores Amaya, "La Chunga", who in addition to being a talented flamenco dancer and a muse to artists such as Picasso and Salvador Dali, was herself a talented naïve painter. A more recent example is the Polish Roma painter Małgorzata Mirga-Tas whose art often features Roma people and history. Examples of her work are her 2011 wooden *Monument to the Memory of the Holocaust of the Romani* and her more recent embroidery *Out of Egypt*, which reclaims Callot's *Bohemians on the March* (often also called *The Egyptians*), using contemporary Roma clothing as material.

"Gypsy" jazz and flamenco: Roma musical influences

Although some speak of "Romani music", no single musical genre encompasses the range of Romani music. Many different styles such as flamenco, jazz manouche, Russian "romances", Balkan music and Hungarian csardas as well as variants of jazz, hip hop, Western art music (classical music) and various folk genres have all been influenced by Roma to some extent, but no unifying "Roma" traits link them. Nonetheless, there are pan-Roma songs, for example "Gelem, Gelem", which was institutionalised as the national or international Roma anthem in 1971 at the first World Roma Congress. Until then, the song had been known as a folk song to many Roma people, primarily in the Balkans.[11] Together with the Roma flag, which usually accompanies the anthem in political contexts, these two symbols launched a set of discourses collectively known as Roma nationalism.

Some features are present in several Roma musical styles. Percussive vocables (nonsense syllables) can be traced back to the Indian subcontinent. The dances also have commonalities, such as swirls, footwork and stomping, hip and shoulder movements, and arm work. Even Roma groups that seem to have had no contact with one another, given their different dialects, music and beliefs, have common dance movements and song lyrics.[12]

János Bihari, Panna Czinka, Pista Dankó and Riccardo Sahiti are a few Roma composers and orchestral conductors who have had a strong influence on European classical music from the 18th century up to the present. Roma instrument makers have also contributed to orchestras and chamber groups in many countries.

While it may have been uncommon in the past for women in many societies to play musical instruments, girls in Roma families were not excluded from formal instruction in the violin,[13] (The Girls of the Rajkó Ensemble),[14] guitar, cimbalom or other instruments.

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9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Gelbart P., "The Romani anthem as a microcosm of diversity", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/music/romani-anthem-microcosm-diversity/.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Hooker L., "The girls of the Rajkó Ensemble", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/music/europe/girls-rajko-ensemble/.

"Gypsy jazz" is the name of a genre based mainly on the recorded work of the guitarist Django Reinhardt, who became internationally famous with the Quintette du Hot Club de France in the mid-1930s. The backbone of the Parisian jazz scene, even under Nazi occupation, Reinhardt toured Europe and the United States. His legacy extends far beyond jazz, for he has been a key influence on guitarists worldwide; for example, he pioneered techniques for solo guitar improvisation and is considered one of the greatest contributors to the jazz guitar.

In south-eastern Serbia, Roma brass musicians play a significant role in the region's musical culture. They were probably introduced to brass instruments during military service in the Balkan Wars (ca. 1912-13), and later formed ensembles to perform folk music. These bands have preserved older repertoires from the 19th century, which they continue to play at celebrations. Roma musicians are expanding the popularity of Balkan gypsy brass music to reach national and international audiences.[15]

Flamenco as an art form is a form of oral history bringing together gestures, poetry, dance, music and emotions to document a people's and a region's past. Flamenco originated with the Spanish Roma and is closely linked to interactions between non-Roma and Roma peoples. Consequently, a large part of the Gitano artistic movements in 19th-century Spain relate being Gitano directly to being flamenco, which complicates the task of studying the history of the Roma people in Spain.

Apart from the influence of Roma and Travellers in developing music genres, many renowned performers, musicians and composers have Roma roots.

- Šaban Bajramović, dubbed the "King of Romani music", came from Serbia and had a long and prolific musical career. He was inspired by and performed in many different genres, including traditional Romani and Serbian music, as well as jazz.
- Esma Redžepova, hailed as one of the world's "50 Great Voices" and crowned the "Queen of Romani Music", was perhaps the most famous Romani singer in the world. She was the first Roma musician in Yugoslavia to reach mass audiences in the Romani language and the first Macedonian woman to perform on television.

Yuri Yunakov is a saxophone superstar from Bulgaria who was awarded the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship Award in 2011 by the US National Endowment for the Arts, the highest honour for an American folk musician. He gained international recognition for his pioneering work in Bulgarian wedding music, a genre officially banned by the socialist government during the 1970s and 1980s that became a form of countercultural expression. During this period, Yunakov went to jail for playing this music.[16]

- The Rajkó Ensemble, the Gypsy Orchestra of the League of Young Communists Artists Centre, was founded in Budapest in 1952 as a folk ensemble, bringing together talented Roma youth from across the country.[17] The ensemble reshaped the traditional "gypsy band" according to state socialist ideology.
- Valfrid and Tuula Åkerlund are Roma musicians with a repertoire of many original gospel songs, which grew out of Finnish Roma folk music and became an established style among the Roma in Finland.
- Damian Drăghici, a Romanian musician of Roma origin, is renowned for combining jazz with traditional Romanian pan flute music, as well as for being elected as a member of the European Parliament.

From *Time of the Gypsies* (1988) to *Peaky Blinders* (2013): Roma and Travellers in theatre and films

The Roma and Travellers have been present in the development of European theatre and cinema since its inception, as dramaturgs or directors, actors, dancers, acrobats, animal tamers and scriptwriters.

The myths, stereotypes and clichés about the Roma people that exist in the collective imagination, as well as their artistic creations, have been and remain a fertile resource for theatre and cinema creators. It should

15. Marković A., "Romani brass bands in southeast Serbia – An overview", www.romarchive.eu/en/music/balkan/romani-brass-bands-southeast-serbia-overview/.
16. Silverman C., "Yuri Yunakov – Bulgarian saxophonist", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/p/yuri-yunakov/.
17. Hooker L., "The girls of the Rajkó Ensemble", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/music/europe/girls-rajko-ensemble/.

be noted that many of these depictions have played, and still play, on the exoticisation of and prejudice against the Roma. When used in the classroom, they must therefore be carefully contextualised to avoid merely reproducing and perpetuating stereotypes and antigypsyism.

The portrayal of Roma women on European stages has also perpetuated these stereotypes. One of the earliest depictions of a Roma woman was in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), where Shakespeare used the association of Egyptians with the Roma to depict Cleopatra's sensuality. The trope of the hypersexual Roma woman who seduces white men continued in the centuries that followed. Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) is a notable example, whose story of the relationship between a Roma woman and the Spanish soldier Don José scandalised audiences.[18] The popularity of *Carmen* has played a large part in promoting a harmful image of the hypersexualised Roma woman.

There are many more examples of popular culture depicting the Roma and Travellers, not necessarily positively, including the Gyptians in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Material*s series. In the *Star Wars* films, the Ryn species is allegedly inspired by the Roma. Robin in the *Batman* comics is part Roma, as is Doctor Doom in the *Marvel* comics series. The television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has Roma characters, while both the Lee and Shelby families in the popular BBC series *Peaky Blinders* have Traveller heritage.[19]

Many people will be familiar with the many adaptations of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and there has been much criticism of its film adaptations, which have stereotyped and exaggerated facial characteristics and sexualised Esmeralda's character. These depictions all show how negative stereotypes of Roma people have been perpetuated through European and/or Western cultural productions, which have sometimes been criticised for them.

At the same time, there have been much more sensitive and accurate portrayals of Roma and Traveller communities. For example, Aleksandar Petrović's *I even met happy Gypsies* (1967) is one of the earliest internationally released features to be made in the Romani language and shot entirely among Roma people, showcasing everyday life. Another sensitive portrayal of the Traveller community is the Irish film *Into the West* (1992), directed by Mike Newell. The film accurately portrays Irish Travellers' tendency to settle and their social exclusion in Irish society. In addition, Emir Kusturica's films, particularly the *Time of the Gypsies* (1988), have played a considerable part in making Roma culture, especially its musical aspects, available and accessible to large audiences. Having become familiar with the Roma community of Sarajevo during his childhood, Kusturica conducted fieldwork for the film, learned the language, which ultimately led to the film being shot in the Romani language, and used actors from the Roma community. Kusturica made many other films featuring Roma characters, music and culture, including *Black Cat, White Cat* (1997) and *Underground* (1995). However, his films also used and disseminated exoticised and stereotypical images of the Roma, and so are contested within the community.

There have also been critically acclaimed film-makers and actors with Roma origins such as Tony Gatlif, who was born Michel Dahmani into a family of Algerian-Andalusian *Gitanos*). His film *Corre gitano* (1982) was filmed in Spanish with a cast of *gitanos* from Granada and Sevilla. But his real success came with a film about a sedentary group of Roma in Paris, *Les princes* (1983). Today, Gatlif is a spokesperson for the Roma in Europe, appearing on television to denounce the exclusion and discrimination suffered by these communities. The renowned early 20th-century British comic actor Charlie Chaplin had Roma heritage through his paternal grandmother.

As this briefing has demonstrated, the Roma and Travellers are not isolated communities but, rather, an integral part of the societies in which they live and with whom they share common general cultural characteristics. Like any other culture, Roma culture is not static and rigid but rich, dynamic and constantly evolving.

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18. Wagner S., "Bizet's Carmen and the wanton woman", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/music/classical-music/bizets-carmen-and-wanton-woman/.
19. Bedworth C., "Remarkable Romani – Astonishing works by and about the community", *Daily Art Magazine*, 8 April 2024, www.dailyartmagazine.com/roma-art/.

Discussion questions

- Can you identify other characters in popular culture who represent the Roma and Travellers? How can you identify them? How are they portrayed? Do stereotypes play a role in how their characters have been shaped?
- Find popular Roma and Traveller artists from your country. How did they contribute to the development of the arts and culture of your country? How has their influence been acknowledged?

3. The Roma and Travellers today: politics and strategies of resistance

Although there are huge discrepancies between the figures for the Roma population listed in official censuses and the estimates published by independent human rights organisations, it is estimated that around 10 to 12 million Roma and Traveller people live in Europe today. The overarching term "Roma" is often used in the international community to refer to the distinct Roma groups and subgroups living in Europe (Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Romani/Tatere, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Travellers, Dom, Lom, etc.).

Many of these communities face deep social problems such as poor schooling and formal qualifications, high unemployment and precarious employment, inadequate housing and lack of access to health services. Crucially, the gap between the Roma community and majority populations has grown significantly in recent decades and is worsening as a result of the economic crisis, the growth of racist discourses and movements, the lack of guarantees and exercise of rights, spatial segregation and the absence of consistent policies to reverse these trends. These factors are interrelated and give rise to a vicious circle of social exclusion. The underlying cause of many of these problems is a systemic and deep-rooted "antigypsyism": "a specific racism towards, Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatised as 'gypsies' in the public imagination".[20] It is important to note that antigypsyism does not reside primarily in the traits or conditions of the group defined as "Gypsies", nor in negative actions or attitudes towards this group. The core of antigypsyism is the very act of labelling people as belonging to such a group and constructing this group as other in relation to the similarly constructed majority group. Consequently, antigypsyism can take many concrete forms, from violent right-wing rhetoric and acts to a widespread common or day-to-day antigypsyism, to romantic and exoticising stereotypes and paternalistic attempts to help the "others", not because they are citizens with national or universal rights, but because they belong to a perceived disadvantaged other.

In discussing a population as diverse as the Roma and Travellers, it is important to consider not only diversity and similarities within these groups, but also the effects that being labelled as specific groups has had, and still has, on them. While there are a growing number of public displays and information sources on Roma traditions and customs, direct and reliable information is still difficult to access. At the same time, specific discriminatory images of Roma continue to be disseminated in mainstream fiction, film and folklore. Any attempt to historicise the presence of the Roma and Travellers in Europe must start with addressing and deconstructing these deeply embedded myths and stereotypes.

Discrimination and persecution in the 20th century

For centuries, Europeans feared and mistrusted the Roma and Travellers, frequently accusing them of various crimes and labelling them as "antisocial" and "lazy". During the First World War, Germany suspected them of spying and required that they register with the police so that the latter could continue to monitor them.[21] In other countries, some Roma people were interned in prison camps for years, while others served in their country's army, often returning as highly decorated soldiers.

In the interwar years, tensions grew and local authorities were less willing to provide funds for the education and welfare programmes that benefited many Roma people. For instance, police authorities co-operated internationally to create records of Roma people and employed fingerprinting for that purpose

20. "Antigypsyism", ENAR, www.enar-eu.org/about/antigypsyism/.
21. "Targeting the Sinti and Roma", Facing History & Ourselves, 2 August 2016, www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/targeting-sinti-roma.

for the first time. From 1912 onwards, files were created for "Gypsies", complete with photographs and fingerprints. In 1933, representatives of all the Austrian political parties came together in Oberwart for a "Gypsy conference", where plans were first discussed for their forced labour or deportation to Africa.

Like the Jews, the Roma were considered subhuman and were targeted for extermination by the Nazi regime and its allies. The concrete numbers are disputed, but the most common estimate is that at least 500 000 Roma were killed in what has been referred to as the Roma Holocaust, the Roma Genocide, *Samudaripe(n)* ("murder of everyone", which is reminiscent of the Hebrew term *Shoah*, "destruction") or *Phar(r)aj(i)mos* and *Por(r)ajmos* ("that which devours"). This genocide was officially recognised by the German state only in 1982, almost four decades later, a reflection of the unequal treatment of the Roma in the official recognition and reparations for the Holocaust. During the Second World War, escape attempts and networks of solidarity with prisoners were key elements of the Roma's self-assertion and resistance, together with their desperate attempts to prevent mass shootings in occupied territories. For example, on 16 May 1944, the Roma in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp resisted their planned murder and succeeded in delaying their mass execution by several weeks. Additionally, groups of Roma joined partisan organisations in eastern Europe, while others were part of the French Resistance.

Nonetheless, the road to recognition was a long one. At the Nuremberg trials, from 1945 to 1949, and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, from 1963 to 1965, the crimes committed against the Roma received only marginal attention, even though survivors testified as witnesses in both trials. Furthermore, on 7 January 1956, the German Federal Court of Justice denied any racial persecution of the Roma before the Auschwitz Decree of 1942. In their statement, the judges used racist stereotypes that were akin to those used in Nazi propaganda. Their statement not only directly affected restitution and compensation for the victims, but also justified the persecution and discrimination perpetrated by the National Socialist regime. The ruling was revised only in the 1960s and was condemned only in 2012 by the then president of the Federal Court of Justice, Bettina Limperg.

In Czechoslovakia, in the 1970s and 1980s, Roma women were forcibly sterilised to stop them reproducing, while in Bulgaria, until the 1950s, it was forbidden to speak Romani in schools.

After 1945, the development of Roma political activism was fragmented. Since then, demands for recognition and restitution have contributed to developing the Roma civil rights movement. The quest for recognition of the Roma Holocaust and the pursuit of claims against Germany were also crucial, and paved the way for the international Romani movement in the 1950s.

In the 1970s, the emerging civil rights movement gained attention through several high-profile campaigns. Most notable was the first World Roma Congress in 1971, which led to the adoption of the term "Roma", the Roma flag and the Roma anthem. These shaped the idea of Roma identity and of a Roma nation that transcends borders. Another important event was the first large-scale international remembrance ceremony for Roma victims at the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1979, organised by what was then known as the Association of German Sinti and supported by the Society for Threatened Peoples. It was attended by around 2 000 participants, including the first female president of the European Parliament, Simone Veil.[22]

A turning point in the civil rights movement was the hunger strike staged by 11 Sinti people and the Munich social worker Uta Horstmann at the Church of Reconciliation in the grounds of the former Dachau concentration camp. The strikers called for a reappraisal of the Nazi genocide perpetrated on the Sinti and the Roma. After seven days, the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior relented and acknowledged publicly that any form of discrimination against the Sinti and Roma was to be abolished.[23]

In 1981, the civil rights movement occupied the Tübingen University Archives, where documents from the Nazi Racial Hygiene Research Centre were stored. These included thousands of family trees, measurement card files and thousands of photographs, all of which continued to be used for scientific research.

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22. "Racial diagnosis: Gypsy", www.sintiundroma.org/en/exclusion-after-1945/civil-rights-movement/commemoration-in-bergen-belsen/.
23. Ibid.

Political developments and the present situation

The last 50 years have seen the birth of organised Roma movements. The seminal moment was the 1971 first World Roma Congress, which was followed by a congress every few years, the 11th being held in Berlin in 2023. These have been important occasions where the Roma have raised issues to be addressed.

The congresses gave rise to the International Romani Union. Today this is one of many Roma organisations actively working for Roma rights and interests, including the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO) and the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC).

In addition to these international or European-level organisations, there are also many national institutions and organisations working for Roma interests. Roma activism has gained attention from numerous high-level actors, such as the European Union, which has established multiple frameworks for dealing with the Roma's marginalised position, the most recent of which covers the period from 2020 to 2030. The European Union has also responded to calls from the Roma community for increased awareness, acknowledgement and commemoration of the Roma Holocaust. In 2015, the European Parliament passed a resolution declaring 2 August to be the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, adding to other established Roma commemorative days, for example International Roma Day on 8 April and World Day of the Romani Language on 5 November. The years-long struggle for compensation and recognition also included the wish for a central memorial in remembrance of the victims of the Roma Holocaust. This culminated with a memorial being erected in Berlin in 2012.

However, despite numerous political programmes and strategies, Roma minorities remain socially and economically marginalised in many countries, with higher levels of poverty, lower levels of education, worse health and shorter life expectancies than the majority population. Likewise, antigypsyism is still a huge problem, perpetuating Roma marginalisation and otherness. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, Roma and Traveller communities continue to be among the most socially excluded communities and continue to experience racism and discrimination.

Discussion questions

- What is the situation of the Roma and Traveller communities in your country today? How has this changed through time?
- What strategies for the dehumanisation of the Roma and Traveller communities can you find in this briefing?

4. Online resources on Roma and Traveller history

Archives and repositories with testimonies, biographies and photographs

Gypsy Lore Society Collections, https://libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/gypsyloresociety (English).

Online archive with testimonies, Forced Labor 1939-1945: Memory and History, www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/en/sammlung/ueberblick/index.html (Czech, English, German, Russian).

Online book for students with pedagogical instructions, *Elses Geschichte*, www.elses-geschichte.de/ (German).

Online exhibition, "The forgotten genocide: The fate of the Sinti and Roma", https://romasinti.eu/ (Croatian, Czech, Dutch, English, German, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian).

Online exhibition, "Romani in Europe", developed by Archives Portal Europe, www.archivesportaleurope.net/explore/highlights/romani-in-europe/ (English).

Online map, "Traveller Community Mapping Coolock StoryMap", https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/62f124c0295c439ebd0de48f4ce2619c (English).

Online platform with videos, music, articles and testimonies, RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/ (English, German, Romani).

Online repository of testimonies, "Remembering Westerbork", https://learning.westerbork-interviews.org/#/ (Dutch, English, German).

Online testimonies, Tajsa.eu, www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2nR7IWKWwk&list=PLK-WOwh6Y_2nYEXg5D9-G-5EjTHXCu1Mw (English).

Repository of resources on various topics, Romani Cultural & Arts Company, www.romaniarts.co.uk/resources/ (English).

Repository with biographies, "Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand", www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/topics/172-resistance-by-sinti-and-roma/ (English, German).

Repository with biographies, "Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, The Roma Genocide", www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-persecution/the-roma-genocide/ (English).

Repositories with biographies, "Lebensweg", https://verortungen.de/lebenswege/ (German).

Repository with educational tools, European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma, "Educational tools and places of learning", www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/educational-tools-and-places-of-learning/ (English).

Repository with films, European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma, "Films about the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma", www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/films-about-the-holocaust-of-sinti-and-roma/ (English).

Short video on Sinti and Roma in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6auhJZ1yUT8&t=1s (13:13 min.) (German with English subtitles).

Short video on Sinti and Roma in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEVA9od6dMs (24:29 min.) (German with English subtitles).

Video series with eight episodes, *Was ist antizynganism?*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVtfm2fLRkA (German with English subtitles).

Readings and videos to strengthen historical knowledge

Open Society Foundation, *Gypsies, Roma, Travellers: An animated history*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6wSLfGBVGY (English).

Candy Bedworth, "Remarkable Romani – Astonishing works by and about the community", *Daily Art Magazine*, 13 January 2025, www.dailyartmagazine.com/roma-art/ (English).

ERIAC, Barvalipe Roma Online University, video courses and lectures, https://eriac.org/barvalipe-roma-online-university/ (various languages, English subtitles for all).

ERIAC, Barvalipe Digital Library of Critical Romani Scholarship, https://eriac.org/digatal-library-of-curricula-roma-scolarship/ (English).

ERIAC, Stories of Resistance, https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance-stories-of-resistance/ (English).

ERIAC, "Roma Heroes" educational board game, https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance-heroes-game/ (English).

Facing History & Ourselves, "Targeting the Sinti and Roma", www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/targeting-sinti-roma (English).

Council of Europe, "Roma History Factsheets", General introduction, https://rm.coe.int/factsheets-on-romani-history-general-introduction/16808b18e9 (English, French, Albanian, German, Italian, Romani, Romanian, Serbian, Swedish).

Council of Europe, "Factsheets on Romani literature", www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/factsheets-on-romani-literature (English).

Council of Europe, "Factsheets on Romani culture", www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/factsheets-on-romani-culture (English).

Council of Europe, "Roma genocide", www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide (English and French).

Current Biology, "Reconstructing the population history of European Romani from genome-wide data", www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(12)01260-2 (English).

Herinneringscentrum Kamp Westerbork, "Persecution of Sinti and Roma", https://kampwesterbork.nl/en/history/second-world-war/persecution-of-sinti-and-roma (Dutch, German, English).

IHRA, "Roma Memory Porajmos".

Junghaus, T., *Towards a new art history: The image of the Roma in Western art*, www.romarchive.eu/en/visual-arts/roma-in-art-history/towards-a-new-art-history/ (English).

"Key dates for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people throughout history", www.gypsy-traveller.org/grthm/.

Mirga-Kruszelnicka A. and Dunjeva J. (eds), *Re-thinking Roma resistance throughout history: Recounting stories of strength and bravery*, ERIAC, https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance-book-roma-resistance/ (English).

Pollák P., "Romani in Europe", 31 January 2024, www.archivesportaleurope.net/explore/highlights/romani-in-europe/ (English).

Roma and Sinti genocide website with teacher guidelines, information divided into topics and country reports, https://romasintigenocide.eu/en/a-f (English, German, French, Romani, Hungarian, Czech, Slovenian, Polish, Romanian, Swedish).

RomArchive, "Roma civil rights movement", www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/ (English).

Sinti und Roma, "Racial Diagnosis: Gypsy", www.sintiundroma.org/en/ (English, German).

Thomas Acton, "Beginnings and growth of transnational movements of Roma to achieve civil rights after the Holocaust", RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/beginnings-and-growth-transnational-movements-roma/ (English).

Zachos, D., "How Europe gets Roma culture and identity wrong", 30 April 2018, Social Europe, www.socialeurope.eu/roma-culture-and-identity (English).

Bibliographies and life stories

Keen, E., *Right to remember: A handbook for education with young people on the Roma genocide*, ed. R. Gomes, Council of Europe, (English), https://rm.coe.int/168008b633.

About I. and Abakunova A., *The genocide and persecution of Roma and Sinti: Bibliography and historiographical review*, IHRA, https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/genocide-roma-sinti-bibliography (English).

Anti-racist guidelines to prevent antigypsyism

Alliance against Antigypsyism, *Antigypsyism – A reference paper*, 2016, https://antigypsyism.eu/reference-paper/ (English, Spanish, French, Bulgarian, German).

Anti-bullying Alliance, "Gypsy, Roma & Traveller targeted bullying", https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/at-risk-groups/racist-and-faith-targeted-bullying/gypsy-roma (English).

Council of Europe, "Education of Roma children", www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoCulture_en.asp (English).

Council of Europe, "Mirrors – Manual on combating antigypsyism through human rights education", www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/mirrors-manual-on-combating-antigypsyism-through-human-rights-education (Bulgarian, Catalan, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Russian, Spanish).

Bennett L. et al., *Out of site: Challenging racism towards Gypsy, Roma and Travellers*, 2022, www.gypsy-traveller.org/policy-publications/ (English).

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