



III. 1

Map showing the self-apellation of Roma in Europe.

Adapted from:  
<http://www.sinti-roma.at/die-namen-der-roma/>



1.7

# Romani group names

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The Roma are not a homogeneous group as many would expect. They represent a mosaic of innumerable endogamous Romani groups which define themselves to be different from the other Romani groups. Group names are a symbolic means to differentiate oneself when opposed to others. The boundaries of Romani groups are not stable and so group names are also characterized by dynamic changes. Group names generally originate in traditional professions, religion, life style and geographical locations.

## ROMANI GROUPS AND GROUP NAMES

The Roma represent a highly heterogeneous group both linguistically and culturally, a fact which is often neglected or unknown by the surrounding populations. The most important factor which defines individual Romani subgroups is endogamy. This means that members of a certain group can only marry within the group. The subgroups are often divided to further groups which also practice endogamy. An example is the subgroup of Vlax Roma which is an umbrella term for various endogamous units such as Lovari, Cerhari, Colari, Drizari or Kherari among others.

The identification of individuals or communities with a certain group has the function to differentiate the various Romani groups. In other words, the need to identify with a certain group is triggered by the existence of other, linguistically or culturally different, Romani groups. The best example of this practice is the fact that several Romani groups primarily identify themselves with the term Roma both to the outside world and group-internally, while they only use the specific name of the group when opposed to other Romani groups. Others distance themselves from the ethnonym Roma and use their own group name such as *Sinti*, *Manuš*, *Tatere*, *Kale*, *Romaničel*, *Ashkali*, *Egyptians* or *Boyash* instead. This is especially the case in

Northern and Western Europe as well as among the groups of Romani descent which have shifted from Romani to the majority language.

Names for ethnic groups and subgroups are commonly referred to as ethnonyms. Dealing with ethnonyms, one should differentiate between so-called endonyms and exonyms. The former are ethnonyms which are used by the members of a group in reference to their own group. In contrast to that, exonyms are group names which are used outside a certain Romani group in order to denominate this group.

One Romani group may use more than one endonym. This also holds true in reverse: One Romani group may be labelled by more than one exonym. For example, the most numerous Romani group in Hungary usually calls itself either Hungarian Roma (Hungarian *magyar cigányok*) or Musicians (Hungarian *muzsikusok*) [III. 5]. Moreover, there are some communities of Hungarian Roma which have accepted the exonym *Romungri* (lit. Hungarian Roma) and use it for self-denomination. Another example to illustrate the complexity of group naming is the Romani group of Deaj in Romania which uses even four endonyms, depending on what they want to communicate towards the others. The Romani endonym *Cărămidari* (Romanian *cărămidă* 'brick') 'brick makers' refers to their traditional profession. The Romanian endonym *Țigani de*

## Some Romani group names derived from traditional occupation

**Ajdžides**

'bear trainers'  
Turkish *ayı* 'bear'

**Aurari**

'gold diggers'  
Romanian *aur* 'gold'

**Fandari**

'soldiers'  
Greek *φαντάρος* 'soldier'

**Keserišta**

'Grinders' Hungarian  
*kösörűs* 'grinder'

**Rudari**

'miners'  
Slavic *rudar* 'miner'

**Mečkara**

'bear trainers'  
Bulgarian *мечка* 'bear'

**Colari**

'carpet-dealers'  
Romanian *oală* 'rag'

**Kanaloš**

'spoon makers'  
Hungarian *kanál* 'spoon'

**Kovači**

'blacksmiths'  
Slavic *kovač* 'blacksmith'

**Sepetdži**

'Basket makers' Turkish  
*sepetçi* 'basket maker'

**Ursari**

'bear trainers'  
Romanian *urs* 'bear'

**Čurari**

'sieve makers'  
Romanian *ciur* 'sieve'

**Kelderari**

'caldron makers' Roma-  
nian *căldare* 'caldron'

**Lovari**

'horse-dealers'  
Hungarian *ló* 'horse'

III. 2

*casă* 'House Gypsies' stresses the fact that they are engaged in a settled way of life in contrast to other, itinerant, Romani groups. They use in addition two Romanian endonyms: *Țigani Româniizați* 'Romanianised Gypsies' and *Țigani de mătase* 'Silk Gypsies'. The former indicates a higher level of integration into the Romanian society as opposed to other Romani groups, while the latter endonym expresses that they have a higher social status among the Roma. On the other hand, the exonyms used for this Romani group are *Romunguri* 'Hungarian Roma' and the mocking name *Lolo po pār* '(those who are) red on the belly'.

Ethnonyms are not unique identifiers of endogamous Romani groups, since the same designation may refer to Romani groups which speak different languages/Romani dialects or differ in religion, shared history, and the way of life or social status. An example is the group of the Musician Roma in Hungary, which comprises both Romani-speaking communities and communities which have few centuries ago shifted to Hungarian. The Romani communities which claim to belong to this group have also varying social status. On the other hand, all of them are Christians, have a settled way of life and share a common history for at least the last few centuries. The fact that individuals or communities which declare membership in a group does not necessarily imply that the other members of the group will also accept them as members. Thus, the group borders are dependent on the perception of the self-declared members and are often subject of debates, negotiations or even internal struggles among them. Turning back to our example, the Musician Roma are generally perceived as a group with a high social status in Hungary. The vast majority of Hungarian Roma defines itself as Musician even though they have no direct ancestors who would have performed music. Nevertheless, in the collective memory of the community a mythical ancestor appears who made his living from music. The use of the name 'Musicians' by these communities is vehemently opposed by 'real' Musicians; meaning by those who can trace their ancestry back to a musician. Furthermore, in Hungary there is a Romani group called Grinders that are perceived by the others as a subgroup of the Hungarian Roma. Some Grinder communities even divide the Hungarian Roma into three subgroups: the Musicians (i.e. Hungarian Roma with hereditary musician

families), the Grinders (i.e. Hungarian Roma with grinder ancestors), and the so-called Beggars (Hungarian *kódisosok*; i.e. Hungarian Roma with adobe-maker ancestors). Among these groups the Musicians have the highest status, followed by the Grinders and, as the name indicates, the Beggars are attributed the lowest status.

The group name Grinders is yet another example to illustrate that the same group name may refer to various Romani groups. In Hungary there are two Romani groups referring to themselves as Grinders. Firstly, there are the Grinders who are perceived as a sub-group of the Hungarian Roma. Secondly, another group with the self-denomination Grinder speaks a distinct Romani dialect and is labelled by others as German Roma or Sinti.

We may find Romani group names that have the same meaning but are borrowed from different contact languages across countries or even within one country. These designations may also refer to various Romani groups. For example, Romani groups which were traditionally engaged in training bears are called *Ursari* in Romania (from Romanian *urs* 'bear'), *Mečkara* in Bulgaria (from Bulgarian *мечка* 'bear') and *Ajdžides* in Turkey (from Turkish *ayı* 'bear'). All these names are based on the word for 'bear' which is borrowed from the respective contact language. On the other hand, the three Romani groups are endogamous and are not related to each other.

### ORIGIN OF GROUP NAMES

Group names are most frequently connected to the declared traditional profession of the group, irrespective of the truth value of such claims. These names are known by the term professionym.

Romani groups are usually not mono-professional, neither were they in the past. An occupation often became a group name because it provided the community with the most significant income. Group names are also a symbolic means to express or achieve the desired social status, as it has been illustrated on the case of several communities of the Musician Roma.

Most professionyms are borrowed into Romani from the recent contact languages with a few exceptions such as *Kherari* 'peddler' which is based on the Romani word *kher* 'house'.

The second most common origin of group names are geographical or geopolitical locations such as country names,

## The ethnonym Sinti

There is no agreement among scholars regarding the origin of the ethnonym Sinti (also called Sinte). A popular etymology among the Sinti is that their self-appellation is based on the Pakistani province of 'Sindh'. Such explanation indicates that the Sinti were already before the migration to Europe distinct from the Roma, a fact which supports the Sinti in underlining their separate identity. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about that the ethnonym Sinti cannot be of Indic origin, since the word 'Sinti' is inflected as European loanwords (see the below table). It however remains un-

clear from which contact language was the word Sinti borrowed and what was its original meaning. Based on historical sources, Matras (1999) assumes that the ethnonym Sinti turned up at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and was used as a name of a particular Romani group among the German Roma. The original endonym of the group was Kale, a Romani group name which is widespread also in other Western and Northern European countries. The new group name Sinti seems to completely replace the older name Kale in the beginning of the 20th century.

		MASCULINE SINGULAR NOUN	FEMININE SINGULAR NOUN	PLURAL NOUN	ADVERB
pre-European words	– 'Rom'	<i>Rom</i>	<i>Rom-ni</i>	<i>Rom-a</i>	<i>rom-anes</i>
European words	– 'Hungarian'	<i>Ungr-o</i>	<i>Ungr-eca</i>	<i>Ungr-e</i>	<i>ungr-etikes</i>
?	– 'Sinti'	<i>Sint-o</i>	<i>Sint-eca</i>	<i>Sint-e</i>	<i>Sint-etikes</i>

areas, regions, towns, villages or landscapes. The term *Vlaxi* 'Walachian Roma' indicates that the origin of these Roma is found in the historical principality of Walachia. The term *Vixodňara* 'those from the East' is an ethnonym which refers to the Slovak Roma inhabiting eastern Slovakia. The group name *Lotfitka Roma* 'Latvian Roma' refers to the Romani group (originally) residing in Latvia. An example of a Romani group labelled by another locality is the Burgenland Roma. As the name indicates, they live in the Austrian federal state of Burgenland. Dolenjska Roma are named after the traditional region Dolenjska (Lower Carniola) in Slovenia. The Bergitka Roma resides in Poland and received the attribute Bergitka after the German word *Berg* 'mountain' referring to the Carpathian highlands. Another example is the Romani group called *Sinti* which is divided to several subgroups. These subgroups are attributed by localities such as *Piedmontese Sinti* 'Sinti of the Piedmont region', *Lombardese Sinti* 'Sinti of the Lombardy region', *Venetian Sinti* 'Sinti of the Venetian region' and *Sinti Estrexarja* 'Austrian Sinti'. As it is apparent from these examples, names of localities are always borrowed from the recent contact languages and combined with the word 'Roma' or with another endonym such as 'Sinti'.

The Romani groups that are identified by certain localities do not necessarily inhabit those places. In some cases Romani groups call themselves by the name of the locality where they (allegedly) originate from. For example, the Romani group called *Mačvaja* received its name after the Serbian region Mačva and preserved it, even though today they live in the USA.

There are cases when the meaning of the local attribute of a group name faded away. For instance, the most numerous Romani group in Slovakia used to call themselves *Servika Roma*. The attribute *Servika* (from Hungarian *szereb*) means Serbian, and so the group name refers to Serbia as the previous home country or, rather, to the previous stop on the migration route of this Romani group. Today, there is no awareness among the *Servika Roma* about the origin of this group name which has been by now almost entirely replaced by the group name *Slovak Roma* or *Slovačika Roma* 'Slovak Roma'.

Group names may also refer to the dominant surrounding population. The ethnonym Hungarian Roma are used by Romani groups which live in Hungary or among ethnic Hun-

garians in Slovakia or Romania. In Transylvania, the so-called Hungarian Roma (used to) live among ethnic Hungarians, while the Romanian Roma among the Romanian-speaking population. Group names of this kind do not necessarily reflect the historical reality of the community.

Names of nationalities or ethnicities can be transferred to a Romani group without any historical connection between them. For example, the term *Čuxni* is originally a Russian colloquial term for Finns, which is also used by the Russian Roma when referring to the *Lotfitka Roma* 'Latvian Roma'. Similarly, the term *Polaka* which has the original meaning 'Polish' is used by the Slovak Roma when they refer to the Romani group originating from the historical principality of Walachia.

The way of life may also be reflected in the group name. The Romani group name *Arlija*, for example, is based on the Turkish word *yerli* meaning 'local'. In other words, they are the local, i.e. settled, Roma in contrast to the recently arrived itinerant Romani groups. The *Cortorari* group in Romania received its name after the Romanian word *cort* 'tent', and so the group name refers to their nomadic way of life. Similarly, the group name *Cerhari/Čergari* is based on the word *cerha* 'tent'.

Few ethnonyms reflect the religion of the community. An example of it is the *Xoraxane Roma* 'Muslim Roma' in contrast to the *Dasikane Roma* 'Christian Roma'.

Rather rare are Romani group names which are derived from the clan or kinship system. An example is the Romani group called *Gábor* in Transylvania, the name of which refers to the real or semi-legendary ancestor called Gábor (English: Gabriel).

Exonyms are sometimes used in order to diminish the social status of the other group like the pejorative exonym *Beggars*. Endonyms, on the other hand, may be used to indicate a higher social status. An example of it is the group name 'Silk Gypsies' used by the Romani-speaking community in Deaj in Romania.

The ethnonym *Manuš* used by a Romani group in France is uncommon regarding its origin. The name comes from the Romani word *manuš* and translates simply as 'humans'. Finally, there are ethnonyms with unknown origin such as *Sinti*, a designation of a Romani group in Germany. [III. 3]

## III. 4

Musician Roma in the 2nd half of the 20th century, Hungary.



The origin of group names shows an interesting geographical distribution. Professionyms are the most widespread group names among the Roma in the Balkans, while in western and northern Europe the designation Roma has been replaced by group names such as *Kale* in Finland, *Cale* in Spain, *Tatere* in Norway, *Sinti* in Germany, *Manuš* in France or *Romaničel* in the United Kingdom. The most frequent group names in Central Europe are based either on geographical locations (e.g. Burgenland Roma) or on the ethnic designation of the surrounding population which is transferred to the Roma, e.g. Hungarian Roma, Servika Roma, etc.

## GROUP NAMES IN CHANGE

Naming of Romani groups as well as the formation of Romani groups are subject to constant changes. Several group names based on a certain profession are preserved although the traditional profession has disappeared, while other Romani groups had sought for a new ethnonym. Group names are also used as ethnolinguistic markers of identity. The German *Sinti*, the

Norwegian *Tatere*, the *Egyptians* and *Ashkali* in the Balkans or the *Beás* in Hungary are groups which oppose the denomination Roma and use instead their own endonym.

Numerous endonyms were originally exonyms and were accepted only later by the community members as an endonym. Such an example could be the ethnonym *Kale* in Finland or *Cale* in Spain and France, both meaning ‘the black ones’. The group name *Tatere* ‘Tatars’ is another example of an exonym which has later been accepted by the group and used as a self-appellation. The designation *Tatere* has its origin in the arrival of Roma to Europe who were mistakenly labelled by the surrounding population after the nomadic Tatars. As already mentioned, the designation *Romungri* was originally used by the Vlax Roma when referring to the Hungarian Roma. Today, some Hungarian Roma have internalised this group name.

The prestige of a group name may result in that it is also accepted by other Romani groups. This can be observed, for example, in case of the group names Musician Roma and Lovari Roma in Hungary.

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