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Immersion in Othering

An exploration of the construction of representation of Romani culture at three European festivals - KHAMORO, Welcome in Tziganie and Yagori



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Abstract

Music is a strong identity marker in cultural representation, and music festivals are an expression of this, engaging many people at once and bringing different communities together on a common ground. However, this can be detrimental to minorities if power relations are not taken into account. In my research, I acknowledge the position of every agent and their role in the festival (directors, programmers, performers, volunteers, visitors) in relation to the larger community they attempt to represent - Romani culture. From my analysis of three music festivals that focus on it - World Roma Festival Khamoro (Prague, Czechia), Welcome in Tziganie (Toulouse, France) and Gypsymusic Festival Yagori (Oslo, Norway) – using mixed research methods (Jepson and Clarke, 2016) based on critical discourse analysis and autoethnography (Lamond and Platt, 2016).

I explore how music festivals can develop a better relationship with their role, how they show themselves to their public, and how they treat the communities they are representing through their programming. Through participant-observation (Gobo, 2008) my personal experiences working with them and an assessment of their organisation. This is done according to six points which contribute to a final balance of its success and failures: its direction and power roles, the diversity in ethnic representation, the festival's goals, its social purpose, the cultural motivations, and the evidence of culture.

I propose that postcolonial concepts of representation help festivals to become more aware of their power positions and their influence on the construction of a transnational notion of Romani culture, through immersion and inclusivity. By focusing on these two conditions, I suggest ways to contribute to the culture that do not create inequality, by applying Hall's representation issues of othering, stereotyping, and identity imposing (Hall, 1997) in a reorientation (Young, 2003) of the festival's goals towards a more responsible role.

Keywords

Romani music festivals, cultural representation, identity, postcolonialism, stereotypes, Romani culture, immersivity, othering

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Introduction

In the spring of 2023, I attended Prague's World Roma Festival KHAMORO as a visitor for the first time in ten years. For the previous nine years, I had been professionally involved with the event in various roles, from programme assistant to office manager and from grants coordinator to head of production and project manager. I found my place there, feeling a strong sense of belonging to the multinational and multicultural team which was unique, especially in the Czech environment. As a core member of the festival team for so many years, I was able to befriend, besides the directors and my colleagues, many of the regular festival visitors, most of whom are Roma.¹ This year, not being responsible for the festival production I expected to see more of the programmed events than in previous years, but (once again) I spent most of my time at the festival venues talking to other visitors whom I was very pleased to see. My different role allowed me to experience the festival from a different perspective this time. I finally understood why so many people come to the concerts every year, but hang around in the back of the concert halls or in front of the venues, talking to their friends whom they have not seen at all throughout the year. It took me over an hour and a half to get from the front door to the stage, not because of waiting in queues, but because of stopping to chat with pretty much everyone I met on my way. Even though most of the people I talked to were aware of the fact that I am no longer a member of the production team, many of them were still bringing up the production issues or the programming during our casual discussions. Among others, I spoke with Dušan Vagai, a great double bass player and a journalist working for *O Roma Vakeren*, a Romani broadcast aired by Czech Radio. He is one of the many representatives of the Romani minority in the Czech Republic who is respected, among non-Roma as well as Roma, and who has dedicated most of his life to promoting Romani culture across various channels. During our friendly conversation, he told me that Khamoro without me has not been the same anymore and that many Roma miss seeing me around during the festival week. He even said that he (and also others) thought of me as a representative of what the festival was about - the promotion of Romani culture. This compliment made me very happy because it fulfilled my ever-existing desire to be seen as a part of the community, as a person who shares Romani culture (or even Romani identity). When I thanked him by replying that this was, of course, very heartening I also noted that it even made me happier seeing that now the festival production was led by two young Romani women, and that I believed Khamoro should be organised by Roma, he answered that this approach did not make sense and that I should not think about it like this, that it is not about the roots of the person but in the way they

¹ I use the adjective "Romani", singular noun "Rom", plural noun "Roma". And "Romanes" for the Romani language.

approach other people and their connection to the festival in the context of both their personality and their job.

I introduce this anecdote for its value in showing in what ways and why festivals are so powerful in creating a sense of belonging among the visitors, team members, musicians, journalists, partners, volunteers and all of those who are brought together, on repeated occasions, working with the same goal in mind. We all share, as regular attendants of at least one of the researched festivals as active participants or audience members, our affinity to Romani culture, and our decision to be related by our choice if we are not by the culture itself² (this can be applied to any festival). Our individual standpoint turns into “collective experience, a potent and often mystified operation”³ which is defined by the previous local, as well as global, position of each participant. Swedish ethnomusicologist Dan Lundberg calls musicians, and other cultural professionals who work organising or promoting multicultural events, “expressive specialists”⁴ who gain roles in an ethnic performance through their activities. He goes on to argue: “they are ascribed an ethnic belonging through the work they convey whether they want it or not.”⁵

0.1 My Position in the Field

With my position in the field as an active promoter of Romani culture, I belong to the expressive specialists. I grew up in a family where Romani music was always present in a way that made me feel partly identified with Romani culture, or at least to see it as a familiar rather than an exotic (other) culture. This view of Romani culture came to me through first-hand contact with it. Mostly through my mother's recordings of Romani musicians, which she collected during her field trips (to which I sometimes accompanied her), but also thanks to the Pentecostal Romani bands that played during services in the church hall directly below our flat.

Before I could create in my mind a stereotypical picture of Romani culture as presented by the mainstream and by the media, I got to know it as represented by Roma themselves. Romani culture is close to my heart, and it is natural for me to be among Roma. At the same

² I am paraphrasing here Donna Haraway's thoughts on affinity in her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* as quoted by Barbara Lundman, “Affinity,” in *65 Years of the European Cultural Foundation: Sotires of (1954-2019) Europe*, ed. Lore Gablier and Sabrina Stallone (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2019), 169.

³ Donna J. Haraway, *Idem*. 113.

⁴ Dan Lundberg, “Music as identity maker: individual vs. collective,” in *CORTE-RE-AL: Migracoes Journal - Special Issues Music and Migration*, October 2010, no.7, ed. Maria de Sao Jose (Lisbon: ACIDI, 2010), 40.

⁵ Lundberg, *Ibid*.

time, I am aware of the ontological quintessence of my research position, which is defined by the colour of my skin, my privileged background compared to the difficult social and economic situation of many Roma living in Europe and the power positions resulting from it.⁶ Therefore my approach to my research topic is grounded in the awareness of my constructivist thinking-creating which is shaped by the cultural background in which I was raised.⁷

As a teenager, driven by activism and a desire for a more equal world, I decided to apply for Romani Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague. I wanted to learn as much as I could about Romani culture to understand the differences that could lead to alienation between Roma and non-Roma. As part of my studies, I mastered *Romanes*⁸ and learned about various elements of Romani culture and identity. Having a couple of classmates of Romani origin, I also found great friends among them and became more engaged in events (re)presenting⁹ Roma and their culture. Along with the completion of my university studies, I became involved in the World Roma Festival KHAMORO, a major festival presenting Romani artists and thinkers since 1998, when it was founded by Jelena and Džemil Silajdžić, war refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They successfully established themselves in Prague, despite the life-threatening reality of war together with the cross-cultural and cross-national oppression they endured right before leaving their homeland - Jelena's maiden name was typical of Serbia and Džemil's surname was common among Bosnians, which is something they spoke about for the first time only after the war broke out.¹⁰ In the third chapter I elaborate on the influence their roots and cultural background have had on the foundation of the KHAMORO festival, but because their personal story has always been a major inspiration for my private life as well as for any projects I was professionally involved in, I mention it for its relevance in affecting my present positioning in the field. I worked with KHAMORO and Slovo 21, the organisation that runs the festival, for over ten years. Next to the KHAMORO festival, I also coordinated other programmes that aimed at helping Roma to achieve a better position in Czech society and I managed many cultural events representing various minorities' arts as well as mainstream music, mostly within the concept of a festival.

⁶ Allan Jepson and Alan Clarke, "Creating Critical Festival Discourse Through Flexible Mixed Methodological Research Design," in *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, ed. Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 61.

⁷ Jepson and Clarke, Idem. 64.

⁸ I speak the North Central dialect of the Romani language.

⁹ I use the term (re)present because I think some Roma could argue that a few of the events I was part of did not represent their culture, but merely present an aspect of what Romani culture might be.

¹⁰ Jelena told me this personal story during one of our many talks.

I consider music to be the most unifying art form, and I think of festival teams as temporary family units that cooperate intensely for a limited period of time. I have always felt a very strong sense of togetherness and unifying membership within every festival team I have been part of. Even at KHAMORO, although I was aware that I was not a Rom (Romňi)¹¹ and that there were some cultural and identity aspects that I would never share, I felt comfortable and not foreign among members of the Romani community. However, in recent years the emergence of concepts such as cultural appropriation or majority-minority power relations has contributed to a feeling of insecurity in my role as a representative of a culture I was not born into because I realised that I was not speaking only for myself. I have used my personal experience as an introduction because this, as my intimate lived experience, defines both my choice of case studies and my approach to them, as the North American professor Donna Haraway writes in her book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: every collective practice is defined by “crucial binary pairs - that is local/global and personal/political.”*¹² When it comes to events we all act as individuals as well as one community with our joint ‘situated performance’ defining how our collective representation is seen by ‘an audience,’ by outsiders.

0.2 Research Questions

The intersection of “affinity politics”¹³ in determining how cultures of Others are represented, through the intense spatiotemporal experience that festivals offer, is the core matter of my thesis and something I am personally involved in and interested in. My central research question asks: How do three European Romani festivals - Khamoro, Yagori, and Welcome in Tziganie - contribute to the construction of a transnational notion of ‘Romani culture’ through the specific conditions of festivals’ immersivity?

Along with this main question, several sub-questions emerged: When do festival directors and programmers function as “situated actors”¹⁴ actively participating in the “process of meaning creating”¹⁵, and when are they appropriators or abusers of their positions of power? How is stereotyping visible in various aspects of each festival? I try to answer these questions within the framework that festivals present - events that “offer distinctive

¹¹ That is, a Romani woman.

¹² Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 111.

¹³ Kirstin Hotelling and Alexandra Schulteis, “Affinity, Collaboration, and the Politics of Classroom Speaking,” *Feminist Teacher* 11, no. 2 (1997): 123, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/405457.89>.

¹⁴ Katherine Daspher, “Researching from the Inside: Autoethnography and Critical Event Studies,” in *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, ed. Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 215.

¹⁵ Daspher, *Ibid.*

meanings, which help individuals to form communities and make sense of who they are.”¹⁶ This is important because, at the same time as festivals have an impact on personal identity-making, they are also exemplary cases of an environment where various relations are strongly shaped by power positions.¹⁷ By placing the focus on festivals, further sub-questions emerged. Namely: Why does the immersive nature of festivals create a space that is both welcoming and othering? What makes a festival an inclusive and diverse event? How does music programming shape cultural representation?

To answer all these questions, I examined various aspects of festivals representing Romani culture by looking into their internal processes and external outcomes. To challenge the simplistic conclusion that any culture can only be performed or presented by members of its community to avoid appropriation, I decided to study three festivals: World Roma Festival KHAMORO, Welcome in Tziganie and Gypsymusic Festival Yagori. As I describe later on in my analysis, each case study tells a different story of representation, despite not differing much in their programming. All three case studies are festivals with which I have had a professional relationship, having been involved in the organisation of past edition(s), which gives me an insider's perspective on how they work. This is not just limited to my specific experience but is current through my close relationship with their respective directors, which I still maintain and which helps me to see the changes and nuances from one edition to the next in all three cases.

The KHAMORO festival in Prague is the one with which I have the most experience and where I actively participated in its shaping through programming, booking, production and promotion. The Welcome in Tziganie festival in Toulouse, France is a popular event run by a French non-Rom where Romani as well as various types of global and popular music is showcased. I participated in this event once as a backstage volunteer and for a decade I was in touch with the director who brought numerous Romani bands to KHAMORO. Finally, I visited the Norwegian festival Yagori - organised by a Romani family - as a guest and experienced it from the point of view of a “VIP” visitor, also spending time backstage with the organising team and the performing bands. In addition, I have regularly exchanged tips for Romani bands with the director and invited the organisers to perform or run various workshops at KHAMORO. I believe that the site-specificity of each of the festivals, the

¹⁶ Udo Merkel, ed., “Making Sense of Identity Discourses in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles,” in *Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals, and Spectacles* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2015), 5.

¹⁷ Trudie Walters, Raphaela Stadler, Allan Stewart Jepson, “Positive power: Events as temporary sites of power which “empower” marginalised groups,” [Manuscript submitted for publication](2020), 5. https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/24452/Final_manuscript_accepted.pdf?sequence=1

different contexts in which they are organised, and the different degrees of involvement I have had in each of them help me to look at the festivals as objectively as possible and to compare them critically.

0.3 Postcolonialism as a Framework of Inequality

In her book *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*, Paula Saukko writes that there are three questions at the centre of all cultural research. The first one is if we can truly understand non-Western cultures without being judgmental; the second question is how can we “critically analyse culture” when we are part of it; the third query is about culture being a relevant topic for research in the socio-economic context of inequality.¹⁸ She answers that these can be answered through “three-dimensional interest in lived experiences, discourses or texts and the social context.”¹⁹ These three pillars are presented throughout my thesis - first of all, I introduce the theoretical framework, methodological approach and discipline that guided me throughout my research, then I explain the social context in the chapters on Romani identity and festivals and the third chapter is dedicated to my lived experience from each of the festivals.

As a framework for the topic of a representation of a culture of a minority in an unequal position, I chose postcolonialism which offers a lens that looks at the research questions through othering, stereotyping, identity imposing, inequality, the intersection of politics and culture²⁰ and through the optics of “whites versus non-whites.”²¹ On top of that, Robert J. C. Young writes in his book *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* that the postcolonial theory aims to reorientate “towards the perspectives of knowledges, as well as needs, developed outside the west.”²² But as I share in my exploration, two out of the three festivals represent Romani culture through a cultural identity imposed on Roma by the non-Romani directors. There is no colonialist approach in the way that the festival organisers see themselves as members of superior cultures,²³ it is the opposite, the festivals share the collective cultural contestation of ‘high culture,’ but at the same time cultural events always represent someone’s subjective point of view and are “ideological in that they participate in

¹⁸ Paula Saukko, *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 12.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=343955>.

¹⁹ Saukko, *Idem*, 33.

²⁰ Jeffery Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 159.

²¹ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

²² Young, *Idem*, 6.

²³ Nealon and Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox*, 159.

the production of forms of common sense.”²⁴ Last but not least, not only the responsible personas for the festival programming and promotion but also culture itself can reproduce “certain interests and in doing so [it] reproduces stereotypes.”²⁵

0.4 Critical Discourse Analysis as a Tool for Critical Event Studies Discipline

To complement Paula Saukko’s triangulation of cultural research, I used critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA has three main pillars - critique, ideology and power - which are inextricably linked to the notion of festivals that participate in the representation of cultural identities of Other(s) and subsequently to issues of cultural appropriation, stereotyping and power structures, all of which are rooted in the existing unequal access of minorities to their own representation. CDA also “presents a layered approach to research methodology that is abductive in character, since it goes back and forth between theory, data and sociopolitical context.”²⁶ This can be seen in my chapters on Romani identity as well as festival immersivity where I am going back and forth between these three aspects. My thesis is based, as critical discourse analysis teaches, on thorough literature examination as well as a long-term participant-observation,²⁷ which, as the name suggests, is built on studying participants in a given setting through observing their “routines, beliefs, values, and relationships”²⁸ with bearing in mind that our observation is filtered through our position defined by “language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity.”²⁹ Following the teachings of the British sociologist Eric Dunning, I tried to combine theory and research equally in my study.³⁰

In order to frame a critical discourse analysis within a discipline, I have chosen to define my research boundaries by critical event studies where CDA is often used.³¹ Since I am writing about festivals, which are spatio-temporal celebratory occasions representing various communal cultures, this discipline fits well as a research framework. According to Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt, the editors of the book *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, Critical Event Studies (CES) is an emerging field that offers a wide variety of new “theoretical frameworks and research approaches rather than present a basic

²⁴ Nealon and Giroux, *Idem*, 156.

²⁵ Nealon and Giroux, *Ibid.*

²⁶ Montessori, “CDA, Critical Events and Critical Event Studies,” 134.

²⁷ Giampietro Gobo, *Doing Ethnography*, (London: Sage, 2008), 1.

²⁸ Daniel Turner and Elliot Pirie, “Problems of Involvement and Detachment: A Critical Approach to Researching Live Event Experiences,” in *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, ed. Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016), 26.

²⁹ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 24.

³⁰ Denzin and Lincoln, *Idem*, 25.

³¹ Ian T. Lamond and Louise Platt, “Introduction,” in *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, ed. Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016), 9.

methodological 'how to' guide."³² The authors also proclaim that event studies should be part of the social sciences³³ because of its powerful influence on and crucial role in identity formation. Udo Merkel, a British researcher of cultural studies, agrees with the idea of using an interdisciplinarity and multi-methods research approach and mentions that "no single theoretical framework can encapsulate the totality of social phenomenon."³⁴ The juxtaposition of the very intimate reality of identity self-affirmation coupled with a grand stereotypical showcase of vivid colours and noises at Romani festivals greatly illustrates the necessity of a multi-methodological approach in my thesis.

The strength and at the same time the weakness of this thesis is my passion for the subject and my extensive practical experience in festival production. First of all, I have tried to reduce possible bias in this thesis by thoroughly describing my position in the field of research and in each of the festivals. The different levels of my involvement in each of the events are reflected in the use of mixed methodological approaches. The need to use various methods for the exploration and the following explanation also shows the intricacy of the analysed field and the complexity of the social values of Romani culture and festivals in a wider context.³⁵ The festivals I researched contribute to the creation of the image of Romani culture which makes the decision-makers of the festivals important actors in the possible connection or alienation with the culture from the wider public.

To reflect my active involvement in the field for many years, I used the reflexive methodology as a starting point. Then, to follow the principles of "detour via detachment",³⁶ I used observation, participation, interviews with the organisers, various sensory techniques (photos, videos, popular articles, recordings),³⁷ and a short survey from one of the festivals; in conclusion, I used various techniques needed for successful participatory research. Last but not least, I see the benefit of the use of mixed research methods in increasing the validity of the gathered data.³⁸

In some parts of this thesis, particularly in the third chapter, where I describe each of the festivals, I have decided to adopt a more personal style of writing. This is theoretically supported by my choice of autoethnography, which is "highly personal, often emotional and

³² Lamond and Platt, *Idem*, 2.

³³ Lamond and Platt, *Idem*, 5.

³⁴ Merkel, "Making Sense of Identity," 15.

³⁵ Lamond and Platt, *Introduction*, 10.

³⁶ Lamond and Platt, *Idem*, 7.

³⁷ Lamond and Platt, *Idem*, 11.

³⁸ Jepson and Clarke, "Creating Critical Festival Discourse," 73.

evocative, [and] accounts to try and engage the reader in the event experience,³⁹ as one of my research methods. Autoethnography comes from a practice of narration which “requires a thorough consideration of how a personal story (the ‘auto’) links to wider social issues (the ‘ethno’) through carefully crafted writing (the ‘graphy’).”⁴⁰ This seemed very fitting to explore and write about a culture that is built upon oral history and storytelling. I believe in the power of personal stories to challenge the wider social phenomena^{41,42} and to act as connecting dots between academia and practice.

To gradually answer how each of the festivals contributes differently to the formation of a notion of Romani culture despite very similar programming, I structured the thesis in the following way. First, I introduced my position in the field and the theoretical framework and skein of methodologies I used for my field exploration within the discipline of critical event studies. Following the instructions of critical discourse analysis, which guided me through my research, the next section summarises academic discussion on the representation of Romani identity and culture. The second chapter explains why festivals play such a significant role in the identity-building and representation of cultures and the third, central, part of my thesis presents my field research findings and my interpretation of them. The final chapter answers the research questions and concludes the roles and responsibilities of the festivals in presenting Romani culture and the risks of potential harm caused to the culture through a stereotypical representation.

³⁹ Lamond and Platt, *Introduction*, 11.

⁴⁰ Daspher, “Researching from the Inside,” 215.

⁴¹ Lamond and Platt, *Introduction*, 12.

⁴² Daspher, “Researching from the Inside,” 213-214.

1. Representation of Romani Identity and Culture

The father of the modern discussion on cultural representation and identity Stuart Hall wrote that “culture is about shared meaning”⁴³ and interpreting our world(s) in a similar way. Another scholar, James O. Young, who studies the topic of cultural appropriation, compares culture to “a family resemblance concept,” a set of shared traits - language, knowledge, religion, and customs.⁴⁴ But almost none of these apply to Romani culture. Romani⁴⁵ identity cannot be characterised by internationally recognised territory or as a group of people sharing one religion and language but rather as a dispersed, religiously and historically mixed group of people with multiple nationalities, languages and traditions that share some meanings and practices but differ greatly in others. One of the examples given by the American scholar Carol Silverman, who has devoted her whole life to Romani culture, in her book *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics & Balkan Music in Diaspora* is: “Balkan Roma share more cultural patterns with their Balkan neighbours than with other Romani groups.”⁴⁶ It is also important to remember that Roma (like everyone else) belong to multiple identities - among others the Romani identity and the national identity of the state from which they come.⁴⁷ We lack the safe space of unified “traditional” cultural aspects that could be used as illustrative elements. The only common and visible feature of many Roma might be the similar phenotype (darker skin, darker hair), which is partly recognisable in different Romani subgroups, but again not everyone, especially Roma in Northern Europe are often blond and blue-eyed. However, the phenotypical argument can become a dangerous conversation that anthropologists and sociologists are reluctant to have, even though it is an important aspect because Roma are often judged based on their skin colour.

As with other supranational identities (e.g. Jewish, European), there are shared historical realities. The horrific experience of *porrajmos*⁴⁸ among all Romani sub-groups in Europe during the Second World War and the general oppression throughout history are among the gloomy aspects that can be considered as shared meanings that create the existing common culture and identity through the politics of remembering - our past is important for

⁴³ Stuart Hall, ed., “Introduction,” in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London, SAGE Publications, 1997), 1.

⁴⁴ James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 1.

⁴⁵ In my thesis when I write Roma, I have in mind mainly the Roma living in Central and Eastern Europe. I am not distinguishing between the many Romani subgroups such as Sinti, Calo, Vlachikane Roma, Romanichals, Travellers or others.

⁴⁶ Carol Silverman, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

⁴⁷ Monica Sassatelli, “Narratives of European Cultural Identity” in *Identifying with Europe: Reflections on a Historical and Cultural Canon for Europe*, ed Arthur Sonnen and Ineke van Hamersveld (Amsterdam: Boekmanstudies, 2009), 34.

⁴⁸ Romani world for Romani genocide during Second World War.

our current identities.⁴⁹ Along with that, the establishment of the International Romani Union,⁵⁰ the official representative body of Roma, can be seen as a milestone in defining Romani identity and culture. But in over a decade of organising artistic events representing Romani culture, I have not heard these two aspects (the historical and political) being considered by the general society as elements representing Romani identity or cultural belonging. An interesting juxtaposition to the supranational Romani culture is the European culture, also very difficult to define, but often understood as a space demarcated first and foremost by institutions and shared symbols, rather than a set of cultural principles.⁵¹

In my experience, the most unifying aspect of Romani identity is the historically rooted othering and stereotyping. The comprehension of the Romani cultural identity is built upon stereotypes repeated even by fans and supporters. They usually come up with notions such as *great musicians, wild, free, cheerful, without boundaries, nomads, family-oriented, living as if there is no future, etc.*⁵² This confirms Stuart Hall's definition that culture is about feelings, attachments, and emotions which at the end "influence our conduct and consequently [have] real, practical effects."⁵³ Moreover, many Roma do not define their cultural belonging in terms of historical and political narratives but more through cultural elements such as family cohesion and traditions, typically food. Stereotyping, which is never subtle or sophisticated, is the main cause of the general hostility of many people towards Roma. Particularly because it goes only on the surface by using what Hall calls "sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes - [...] repelling-because-different / compelling-because-strange-and-exotic,"⁵⁴ sometimes all of it together. Leaving out the important parts of the narrative because they do not serve our purposes can cause serious damage. As the art historian and curator Nuria Enguita Mayo argues in her article "Disguised Geographies, Veiled Histories":

It is very dangerous to position the Other as an abstract being deprived of history, de-contextualised from any real geography or historical period. They represent essential cultures and identities, not currently relevant or socially constructed,

⁴⁹ Leonidas Donskis, "The European Cultural Canon and the Predicaments of Memory Politics," in *Identifying with Europe: Reflections on a Historical and Cultural Canon for Europe*, ed. Sonnen, Arthur, and Ineke van Hamersveld (Amsterdam: Boekmanstudies, 2009), 109.

⁵⁰ IRU was established in 1978.

⁵¹ Monica Sassatelli, "A Sentimental Journey through Europe," in *Common Ground 2022*, ed. Friso Wiersum (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2022), 137.

⁵² Carol Silverman, "Global Balkan Gypsy Music. Issues on Migration, Appropriation, and Representation," in *The Globalization of Music in Transit. Music, Migration and Tourism*, ed. Simone Krüger and Ruxandra Trandafoiu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 185.

⁵³ Hall, *Introduction*, 2.

⁵⁴ Stuart Hall, ed., "The Spectacle of Other," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London, SAGE Publications, 1997), 229.

getting dangerously close to the question of race and ethnicity or imaginary and mythical traditionalism without any historical or scientific basis.⁵⁵

The (re)presentation of any group of people in simplifying categories is certainly dangerous but within the festival industry, it can be used as the most straightforward marketing strategy, which is appreciated in any promotion and advertising. In addition to the need to use simple communication tools in the promotion of any cultural event, Carol Silverman reminds us of the ambition to monetise the "difference" of exoticized cultures, adapted to be more easily accepted by Western expectations.⁵⁶ I believe that in the current hunt for uniqueness, or as Nuria Enguita Mayo calls it "fetishist cult of rarity, [...] or 'authenticity'", the Romani culture will again become more popular in the coming years, following waves of consumerism and hunger for originality. In his textbook, Stuart Hall gives examples of the desire of white Westerners to experience black culture:

Making 'difference' leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes 'difference' powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural orders.⁵⁷

The same "lust", to use Hall's vocabulary of sexual desire of white people for Black people, can be traced in the duality of the love-hate relationship towards Roma. As I could experience repeatedly, through the presumed cultural symbols such as 'traditional' clothing, smashing glass bottles with their heads or while listening to a number of songs in popular culture about *sexy Gypsy women*, the attractiveness of the imagined taboos about Romani culture is what brings some non-Roma to festivals presenting Romani music. The opportunity to safely experience for a limited amount of time, what it feels like to be free, to drink without limits (as shown in various films about Roma), to wear belly dance hip scarves and flowers in their hair or to experience something forbidden, not respected by wider society is what the immersiveness of festivals offers in the densest form. The festivals give the non-Romani audiences a chance to create an imagined community⁵⁸ of Romani culture to which they ascribe themselves through the use of stereotypical elements. All the stereotypes mentioned above are tangible assets that function as "membership markers"⁵⁹ even if the person is not a member of the culture. In the case of the KHAMORO festival,

⁵⁵ Nuria Enguita Mayo, "Disguised Geographies, Veiled Histories," in *65 Years of the European Cultural Foundation: Satires of (1954-2019) Europe*, ed. Lore Gablier and Sabrina Stallone (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2019), 79.

⁵⁶ Silverman, "Global Balkan Gypsy Music," 188.

⁵⁷ Hall, "The Spectacle of Other," 237.

⁵⁸ I use the term "imagined community" here both in the sense of Benedict Anderson's concept of socially constructed community and in the sense of almost fairy tale imaginations of what it means to be part of Romani community.

⁵⁹ Lundberg, "Music as identity maker," 31.

where the audience consists of similar numbers of Roma and non-Roma, I was able to observe an interesting mixture of an audience composed of visitors who shared one culture, but while for half of them Romani culture was something they were born into, that they had it “moulded”⁶⁰, for the other half, it was a culture that they had to imagine instead.

There are many other elements of Romani identity and culture and its representation that should be addressed and that I recommend as topics for further study outside of this thesis. Among these is an important observation brought to our attention by Nuria Enguita Mayo. Mayo points out that festivals that present themselves as promoting Romani culture and offering space for meaning-making through discussion can cause the false impression that a cultural dialogue is taking place when, outside of the festival, in our everyday lives and in our regular environments, these cultures are kept separate, “if not shut away without a voice.”⁶¹ Another topic that deserves more in-depth research is the cultural transformation of Romani communities that has occurred in recent decades due to the radical change of political systems in Western and Central Europe, in comparison to the continuing reasons for the belonging to Romani culture still defined through an emphasis on tradition and heredity. Since identity, like culture, is ever-changing⁶², the definition of meanings - of what is normal and contemporary versus what is *other* and outdated - should also be changing, which is something I do not see happening, particularly in our relation to Romani culture.

Following on from the issues listed in the previous paragraph which cannot be addressed in a paper of this length but which are important to see the bigger picture, in this chapter I have tried to give a brief introduction to what Romani culture is, what the critical points of its representation are, and how collective events influence a (self)identification with the culture. Festivals representing Roma culture provide a space for the community to meet. At the same time, through (re)presentation, Romani culture is conceived through stereotypes and othering. The scattered Romani culture is framed by the spatio-temporal boundaries of a festival designated by the production team, always lacking part of the necessary context. In the next chapter, I follow up with an explanation of why festivals are so seminal in setting up stages (both literally and figuratively), that are used for both othering and (self-)identification, and how they can create a context in which, in representing a culture, they can help others to understand it better.

⁶⁰ Mayo, “Disguised Geographies,” 79.

⁶¹ Mayo, *Ibid.*

⁶² Hall, “Introduction,” 9.

2. (Music) Festivals as Places of Identity-making and Representation

2.1 Introduction to the Festival Field Research

Keeping in mind the multi-layered nature of the topic, I look at how three European festivals of Romani arts contribute to the perception of Romani cultural identity. I will also explore the issues that accompany any cultural representation, such as how these festivals (re)create the notion of Romani culture, who has the right to (re)present someone's culture, when the fine line between cultural appreciation and appropriation is crossed, and the importance of having official representatives of Romani cultural identity. As I describe in the next chapter, the directors of KHAMORO and Welcome in Tziganie are not aware of concepts such as cultural appropriation or unequal power roles. On the contrary, they programme the festivals without worrying about the possibility of crossing imaginary boundaries and are therefore unaware of what their choices may symbolise and define.

I also acknowledge how all artistic artefacts and performances (such as events, books, films, exhibitions, installations, etc.) play a crucial role in cultural representation and help to (re)assure and (re)affirm our identities.⁶³ Of all the possible cultural 'products', I chose to focus on festivals because of their immersiveness, complexity, clearly defined spatio-temporality, and growing popularity, as well as for my personal experience and involvement with them. I was intrigued by Slavoj Žižek's comment on events which, according to him, are "ruptures in the structure of the ideological domain - opening up space for an alternative vision to emerge and to take shape enabling the formulation of new imaginaries."⁶⁴ The reality of festivals offering to experience an intense imagination is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a festival can be a space where people begin to feel like members of a community, bringing various cultures closer together through a better understanding of each other's identities as well as through the creation of a spatio-temporally bounded shared identity. On the other hand, it can also create a false sense that outsiders are members of the community, without acknowledging that after the festival, most of the disadvantages of their newly 'acquired' identity will become apparent to the actual members of the community, those who are related to the community by blood (i.e. born in it) rather than by choice. The immersivity of festivals can lead to subliminal

⁶³ Donskis, "The European Cultural Canon," 109.

⁶⁴ Nicolina Montesano Montessori, "CDA, Critical Events and Critical Event Studies: How to Make Sense of Critical Events in a Society of Radical Change," in *Critical Event Studies: Approaches to Research*, ed. Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 133.

appropriation “of another’s [...] experience and the delicate construction of the just-barely-possible affinities, the just-barely-possible connections.”⁶⁵

Many scholars agree that various cultural gatherings, and festivals in particular, contribute to the amplification of identity belonging. British event management lecturers Ian R. Lamond and Louise Platt write, for example, that “events have become a key strand in national identity building.”⁶⁶ Merkel, in *Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals, and Spectacles*, also argues that festivals “contribute to the formation and expression of identity discourses and narratives”⁶⁷ and that festivals help people to realise who they are and what their identities are.⁶⁸ The role of the festivals is not necessarily to validate their identities but to challenge, further (re)construct, and present them, all of which are interconnected processes.⁶⁹ From my personal experience, not only as a frequent festival-goer but also as a festival organiser, I second these observations. However, it is important to keep in mind that many festivals are not only community-embracing events but also highly commercialised gatherings where the sense of community is artificially supported in order to profit from it, e.g. through the sale of membership markers⁷⁰ such as Indian headbands,⁷¹ or any other visible accessories and merchandise. The diversity aspect itself can also be used as a promotional trick, to give its potential audiences the impression that they are experiencing something special and ‘authentic’. Another reason why festivals support this, especially in Western Europe, is when a festival asks for public support, it usually needs to aim for diversity in order to receive funding.⁷² But none of the above appropriative approaches diminish the confirmed reality that festivals provide a safe space for like-minded people who did not know each other before the gathering, and who begin to communicate and socialise more in the enclosed (in spatial, temporal and cultural terms) event space than in everyday life.⁷³ Every festival is a designed space where special attention is paid to the overall atmosphere. This also leads to a unique cultural composition, which is defined by other aspects (location, promotion and accessibility) than just the programming of particular artists. These specificities of cultural composition can also contribute to the credibility of an event - limiting the sense of the event being seen as Other -

⁶⁵ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 113.

⁶⁶ Lamond and Platt, *Critical Event Studies*, 4.

⁶⁷ Merkel, “Making Sense of Identity,” 5.

⁶⁸ Merkel, “Making Sense of Identity,” 5.

⁶⁹ Merkel, “Making Sense of Identity,” 3.

⁷⁰ Lundberg, “Music as identity maker,” 31.

⁷¹ I am using the word ‘Indian’ intentionally as a terminology which is used while selling these products.

⁷² Britt Swartje and Paul Berkers, “How Music Festival Organisers in Rotterdam Deal with Diversity,” in *Festivals and the City: The Contested Geographies of Urban Events*, ed. Andrew Smith, Guy Osborn and Bernadette Quinn (London: University of Westminster Press, 2022), 100.

⁷³ Swartje and Berkers, “How Music Festival Organisers,” 95.

as in the case of KHAMORO and Yagori, festivals held in centrally located venues that are highly appreciated by music fans of different genres.

In my thesis, I write about festivals representing Romani culture which may seem like clear examples of inclusive festivals. However, as I will argue later, this is not the case for all of them. The KHAMORO festival does not necessarily focus on general inclusion but on a specific identity affiliation and appreciation and on cultural representation towards the Roma community both within and outside of the festival - as I have heard several times, KHAMORO is seen as a flagship of Romani art even by Roma who are not fans of its programming and who do not attend regularly. The KHAMORO festival is a space where Romani identity is constantly supported and reaffirmed through the display and promotion of recognisable and unifying symbols such as the Romani flag and anthem, and the inclusion of Romani role models as festival representatives (e.g. spokespeople or event hosts). These self-affirming aspects help the community members to become more self-confident to the extent that they have a stronger and better understanding of their own identity. The search for identity always reflects a crisis of traditions and of our individual misunderstanding and inability to accept the world as it is.⁷⁴ This is why it is important to show the people within the framework of a cultural event, the tradition they may fondly remember, and feel connected to, together with current narratives that are shaping the cultural identity at the moment, especially since culture and identity are always transforming. We also need to “distinguish between two major aspects of identity: the idea an individual has on what he or she is, and the individual’s collective identity, which is dependent on a social context.”⁷⁵

2.2 Diversity and Innovations in the Festivals’ Hearts

All of the festivals I researched represent a culture of a minority which places them among festivals that have diversity at the heart of their purpose. They aim to represent Romani culture to a wider audience. Other goals such as bringing Roma and non-Roma together to celebrate a cultural identity that is mostly condemned, providing a safe space for members of the community or changing a public narrative about who Roma are, were specific to each of the festivals. I am a proponent of truly inclusive cultural practices that have an obvious goal - such as the representation of Romani culture - but that, at the same time, do not forget about other target groups of diverse gatherings (gender, age, social status, physical accessibility, etc.) which is especially reflected in Welcome in Tziganie through the involvement of a large number of elderly volunteers. In an article on Rotterdam festivals’

⁷⁴ Donskis, “The European Cultural Canon,” 106.

⁷⁵ Lundberg, “Music as identity maker,” 39.

search for diverse approaches, the authors, Britt Swartje and Pauwke Berkers, list a couple of principles of full-fledged diverse events:

(...) using local suppliers, authorities and volunteers; partnering with community-based organisations; offering internships and volunteer programmes; devising marketing strategies to reach marginalised groups; providing free or discounted tickets; and showcasing local talent... Diverse programming might also play a role in creating inclusive events.⁷⁶

This is another reason why it is important to study the representation of Romani culture within the framework of festivals - because they are known for innovations and prototyping in many areas, including ecology, inclusivity, circular economics, etc.⁷⁷ Swartje and Berkers add to this argument that “festival spaces [can become] learning spaces with regards to diversity”⁷⁸ which is something I would like to see more of in all the festivals I write about - non-Roma learning about Romani culture, Roma experiencing ecological approaches, youth spending more time with elders.

2.3 Key Research Themes

The three festivals I researched are not exclusively music festivals but music is at the heart of their programming. It is a combination of music being the most positively recognised aspect of Romani culture and the unifying power that music has. As the ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice argues, music is not only a pleasant free-time activity or a way to make money but it “can, of itself, change and construct new social order and cultural understanding.”⁷⁹ For this reason, I believe that any event that presents Romani music, even in a stereotypical way or without additional efforts to contextualise the performances, challenges the negative opinions about Roma by presenting a feature of their community that is a ‘positive’ element, as music is usually seen. In the next three sub-chapters, I describe each of the festivals separately but all of them follow a structure defined by Allan S. Jepson and Alan Clarke in their graphic “Key research themes and theories surrounding the research phenomenon.”⁸⁰ They divided the topics into seven groups - Festival construction; Representation of ethnically diverse cultures (regarding the programme, audience, employees, and partners⁸¹); Documented festival goals; Festival purpose; Cultural motivations, Organiser and visitor

⁷⁶ Swartje and Berkers, “How Music Festival Organisers,” 96.

⁷⁷ e.g. <https://circularfestivals.nl/about/default.aspx>

⁷⁸ Swartje and Berkers, *Idem*, 100.

⁷⁹ Timothy Rice, “Ethnomusicology in Times of Trouble,” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 46 (2014): 205,

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/stable/10.5921/yeartradmusi.46.2014.0191?seq=15>.

⁸⁰ Jepson and Clarke, “Creating Critical Festival Discourse,” 72.

⁸¹ “Diversity and Inclusion Code,” Stichting van de Arbeid (the Dutch Labour Foundation), accessed August 9, 2023, <https://codedi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Code-Diversity-and-Inclusion-EN.pdf>

contexts; Evidence of culture and Elements contributing to the success or failure of the festival. This structure anchored me in reflecting the same aspects of each of the festivals and, most importantly, helped me to search for the answers to my research (sub)questions. The categories presented by Jepson and Clarke highlight, within the structure of any festival, its representation of minorities, diversity and inclusivity (othering and stereotyping), the situatedness of directors, power roles and the wider contexts of the festivals. These themes follow all the aspects of CDA by exploring all three pillars - critique, ideology and power.

Although I followed the same structure to describe each of the festivals, I tried to avoid coming up with just a description or comparison. As I went through dozens of books and articles to get a solid theoretical foundation for this thesis, I noticed a recurring pattern of many academics trying to find commonalities and principles that can be turned into generalisations - "from a sample to the wider population."⁸² In my case, I am presenting three events that might seem akin at first sight due to similar programming but they all differ substantially in their objectives and outcomes. Because of the major differences in each festival and also because of the breadth of the topic I am researching, I have analysed the events one by one, being involved and detached, actively participating and at the same time aware of an 'outsider' position.⁸³ According to Udo Merkel the core question of a researcher when analysing cultural identities is not who are the ones I am researching but "Who am I?"⁸⁴ I found out that my research could help me explore my position in the field of promoting and producing festivals that represent the cultures of others. The autoethnographic approach guided me through my reflections on "self-other interactions"⁸⁵ and framed my experience in the larger picture of what Romani culture is, how it is represented by festivals that offer space for immersion, and where I am in this picture.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to point out how festivals are important cultural gatherings for interpretation of Romani culture, and for Roma self-identification with it, because of the immersiveness and inclusiveness they offer. Through their ability to influence public opinion, as well as the intimate feelings of Romani community members, the festivals have a responsibility for their contribution to the representation of Romani culture. Festivals should have at their core a concern to implement the importance of postcolonial reframing of ideas that should be "developed outside the West" - in this case, developed outside the majority

⁸² Jepson and Clarke, "Creating Critical Festival Discourse," 62.

⁸³ Lamond and Platt, *Critical Event Studies*, 18.

⁸⁴ Merkel, "Making Sense of Identity," 16.

⁸⁵ Daspher, "Researching from the Inside," 214.

contexts and outsiders' expectations, and without the power structures that I write about in the next chapter - from the programming to the festival goals and their purpose to society.

I also introduced Jepson and Clarke's "Key research themes and theories surrounding the research phenomenon" which I used to guide my exploration of each of the festivals in the next chapter.

3. Three Festivals with Identical Programming but with Different Outcomes

3.1 World Roma Festival KHAMORO

One of the subtopics of the research on festival construction is the existence of decisive roles, represented in my case studies by the directors who are in charge of programming, partnerships, development, finances, redistribution, etc. At KHAMORO, Welcome in Tziganie, as well as Yagori, the current directors are also the ones who built the festivals and are the key figures behind all strategic and programming decisions. Therefore, they are the ones who really decide how Romani culture is represented. My mother, the Czech ethnomusicologist Zuzana Jurkova, inspired by Dan Lundberg, introduced in one of her articles, the directors of KHAMORO Jelena Silajdžić and Džemil Silajdžić as “expressive specialists”⁸⁶, context-creators for representation of Romani culture in the Czech environment. KHAMORO, considered to be the largest festival in the world devoted exclusively to Roma culture, is a place where many artists want to play, also because they can negotiate fair financial deals. But at the same time, the art director Džemil Silajdžić has strong opinions on the repertoire as well as on the way the music is performed, and performing at the festival means playing the way the organiser demands. Thus, in the case of KHAMORO, the self-representation of Romani musicians at the festival is limited by the boundaries set by the director who defines the form of the performing identity of the artists. Over the years that I have been involved with the festival, it has become very clear that the directors have strong opinions about what should be included in KHAMORO, and it is only after a long time that I have proven to be an expert in the field, that I have been invited to participate in some decisions.

3.1.1 Festival Construction - The Directors

The certainty of how the music should be played comes, in my opinion, partly from the previous high-profile careers of the KHAMORO directors. Jelena and Džemil Silajdžić are from Sarajevo, which they describe (in the pre-war period) as "a symbol of multiculturalism."⁸⁷ Their previous regular contact with Romani culture in Sarajevo (and in Yugoslavia in general at that time), the experience of living in a very multicultural society and above all their (former) new reality of being a minority in a foreign country, made their position as organisers of cultural events of other minorities remarkable. Their experience of

⁸⁶ Zuzana Jurkova, “Backstage People,” in *Voicing the Unheard: Music as windows for minorities*, ed. Yves Defrance (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2019), 139.

⁸⁷ Jurkova, *Idem*, 144.

the war made them allergic to any form of oppression and injustice (as both of them mentioned repeatedly during the years I worked with the organisation) and the multicultural environment in the former Yugoslavia made their relationship with Roma distinct from what can be seen among the Czech majority. As Silverman and Marković⁸⁸ explain in their papers, Roma musicians in the Balkans have always been invited to play at various family celebrations of Roma as well as non-Roma. In addition, Jelena (because of the friendly relationship I have with all the festival directors, I call them by their first names) worked as a producer on some of Emir Kusturica's movies, including *Time of Gypsies* which was shot in Šutka, Macedonia, the largest Romani settlement in the world. Other films by Kusturica that dealt with Romani culture also made the directors "live it [the Romani culture],"⁸⁹ as Džemil mentioned in an interview with Jurkova. In the same interview, he also spoke of meeting the Serbian-Russian Romani band Cigani Ivanovici in Sarajevo, very popular in Yugoslavia at that time, as one of the reasons why he later became involved in promoting Romani music.⁹⁰

Both directors were highly respected in their field in Yugoslavia - Jelena as a movie producer with a Golden Palm from Cannes, and Džemil from a family of professional musicians with university diplomas in music - but when the war broke out they had to flee the country and later on reinvent their careers in Czechia. With such a rich background in cultural production, they began to work again in the arts, mainly for former Yugoslavians living in the Czech Republic. In 1998 while organising a multicultural event for ex-Yugoslavs in Prague, they invited, among others, a Czech Romani band called Khamoro. During the concert, the sound engineer sabotaged their performance, saying that these 'Gypsies do not deserve to play on stages and that tents and streets should be enough for them.' Jelena commented on the experience: "And we were furious, and in the evening we came home and we still had refugee status and my husband said, 'We are going to make the biggest and best professional Romani festival in the world.' And that's how the Khamoro idea arose."⁹¹ In 1998 the KHAMORO festival took place for the first time, from the beginning with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Municipality of Prague and a partnership with the Czech Television.

According to Jepson's Key research sub-themes, one of the points that should be analysed is the festival strategy.⁹² KHAMORO has always had a clear vision that its goal is to give

⁸⁸ Alexandr Marković, "'So That We Look More Gypsy': Strategic Performances and Ambivalent Discourses of Romani Brass for the World Music Scene," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24:2, 264.

⁸⁹ Jurkova, "Backstage People," 146.

⁹⁰ Jurkova, *Idem*, 147.

⁹¹ Jurkova, *Ibid.*

⁹² Jepson and Clarke, "Creating Critical Festival Discourse," 72.

recognition to Roma and to “show that their culture is equal (to ours.) [...] that this is professional music and culture, and no one will have any reason to denigrate it,”⁹³ as Jelena said in an interview. Artistic director Džemil maintains the aspect of professionalism by keeping the concerts very traditional, forbidding bands to use modern instruments and requesting them to follow his orders (these rules are usually accepted with less resistance by members of his own culture - by musicians from the Balkan - where the power relations are deeply rooted). At the same time, Jelena pushes the promotion of Romani culture as evolving (as any other culture) which is why there is a strong emphasis on the accompanying programme that consists of concerts of contemporary (hip-hop, funky, pop) and classic (Romani musicians trained in classical music) genres, exhibitions of Romani visual artists and performers, street dance competitions, movie screenings, original theatre plays, children's day with performances by young artists, etc. A very important part of the festival strategy is to point out that Romani culture is not merely about music. To emphasise this point, in addition to other arts events, KHAMORO also runs professional programmes including international conferences, summer schools co-produced with the Charles University in Prague, and an educational project called Khamoro Shares Experience for young Roma who want to learn how to become cultural promoters.

3.1.2 Festival Construction - Power Roles

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of festivals representing minority or diverse cultures is the issue of power relations because, as Trudie Walters wrote: “All event stakeholder relationships are shaped and influenced by power.”⁹⁴ In the theoretical discussion in academia on festival production there is an effort to limit the unequal division of power and to distribute it more evenly. This topic looks good on paper but it overlooks all the practical aspects that every festival organiser faces such as shortage in funding, lack of time, a deficit of skilled workers, media information overload, and more. Despite all this, there is always space for improvement. In order to properly analyse the various aspects of festival power relations, I decided to follow a system of eight themes and concepts developed by Trudie Walters and his co-authors.

Firstly, according to the article “Positive Power: Events as temporary sites of power which ‘empower’ marginalised groups” any festival representing the minority should *give a platform*⁹⁵ to the community to present itself. All the festivals I researched gave various representatives of the Romani minority a stage to “have their voices heard.”⁹⁶ Khamoro,

⁹³ Jurkova, “Backstage People,” 148.

⁹⁴ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, “Positive Power,” 5.

⁹⁵ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, *Idem*, 15-16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

unlike the other two festivals, does not give the musicians their platform to present themselves freely because of directing what they can and cannot play. Džemil's relationship with Balkan musicians is different from his relationship with other bands with whom he shares neither culture nor language. The respect he has earned as the older man who pays the bands' fees plays a special role in his dealings with most Balkan musicians, a respect that is lacking with those from other countries (including the Czech Republic). I am aware that something can get lost in translation, but in general, the respect for the superior figure is more present in situations involving musicians from the Balkans. His identity is recognised by others who share his identity and culture;⁹⁷ Romani musicians from the Balkans share with the director one of their identities, but with other musicians he shares none. Brian Paltridge describes various public figures and their performance to the public to secure their position in the culture to influence the outcome.⁹⁸ But I argue that even by keeping your identity and not changing it (even if it is necessary to achieve diplomatic results) you also change the discourse and what the public sees by influencing how the performers act on stage. "It is not just through the performance of identities, then, that they are created. It is also by the fact that they are recognized by other participants in our interactions with them."⁹⁹

The second notion of power is about *giving or taking ownership*¹⁰⁰ of the event, which, in the case of KHAMORO, is a bit complicated. The community is part of the festival, over half of the team are paid Romani employees and staff, and many visitors talk about KHAMORO as if it is their festival when in fact the power is in the hands of the directors, which means the festival and its narratives are defined by their decisions. It is also important to recognise that there are many voices within any community, and giving ownership to some members does not usually resolve potential disagreements about forms of representation. As a team, when my Romani colleagues were discussing bands to present to the director, they often disagreed because they had different preferences for different artists. Last but not least, with ownership comes responsibility, especially when organising major events with hundreds of participants where the production manager is not liable only for his/her team but also for the outcomes presented to the audience and general public. Therefore, there needs to be an appointed person who takes responsibility for the final decisions and the reactions that follow.

⁹⁷ Brian Paltridge, "Language, identity, and communities of practice," in *Language and Identity in the Modes of Communication*, ed. Dwi Noverini Djenar, Ahmar Mahboob, Ken Cruickshank (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 17, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=1209355&ppg=27>.

⁹⁸ Paltridge, Idem, 19.

⁹⁹ Paltridge, Idem, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, "Positive Power," 16.

The third and fourth themes of power relations are about *gaining confidence*¹⁰¹, *pride and affirmation*¹⁰² which has always been a core topic of KHAMORO. Jelena has told me numerous times that she wishes that Roma who come to the festival see the artists on stage and feel proud of their culture. At KHAMORO various accompanying programme events offer a stage for unknown Romani artists to give them a chance to gain confidence through performing.

The fifth topic is *empowering with/through knowledge* dissemination¹⁰³ which KHAMORO achieves through its educational programme Khamoro Shares Experience. This activity literally disseminates the knowledge that the organisers have gained throughout the years and empowers the younger generation of Roma to organise other professional events representing their culture in their towns and cities, with production supervision and financial support from the KHAMORO festival.

The sixth and seventh topics of power relations are about *respect*¹⁰⁴ and *freedom to be*,¹⁰⁵ both of which the community lacks often in their everyday lives. The festivals representing minority cultures should be able to offer to the visitors (also participants) an opportunity to “fill [their] emotional tank”¹⁰⁶ and experience (at least spatiotemporally) a society in which they are not judged because of their otherness.

The last notion is defined as *resistance*,¹⁰⁷ meaning that the members of the culture should be empowered by the event itself, to gain enough strength to be able to address stereotypes at the event, as well as after it ended. In order to put this issue in context, it is necessary to mention that KHAMORO is only one of the activities of the organisation Slovo 21, which helps Roma to gain self-confidence, education and the ability to represent their own culture professionally.

3.1.3 Representation of Ethnically Diverse Cultures

The representation of ethnically diverse cultures is at the heart of the KHAMORO festival. This is reflected not only in its programming, but also in the esteem in which the festival is held by top Czech politicians (who give their patronage, visit the festival, give speeches on stage, etc.), and in the fact that the festival is included in the Strategy of the Integration of

¹⁰¹ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, “Positive Power,” 17.

¹⁰² Idem, 20.

¹⁰³ Idem, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Idem, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Idem, 21-22.

Roma in the Czech Republic 2021-2030¹⁰⁸ and recommended, by The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic,¹⁰⁹ to receive support from the state budget as an exemplary and functioning inclusive and diverse event. Among others, Daniel Herman, a former minister of culture of the Czech Republic, said in an interview that KHAMORO “is a concrete way to bring Romani and non-Romani communities together.”¹¹⁰ Extensive media coverage and a long-term partnership with Czech Television are also important aspects of representing Romani culture outside the bubble of festival fans and supporters.

3.1.4 Documented Festival Goals

KHAMORO's goals are defined by an emphasis on public image, engagement with the international Romani community, and creating a sense of community in a welcoming environment. Regarding the first one, the promotion of Romani culture as professional and equal to others, I find there is no other Romani event in Europe that has tighter partnerships with national media, annually receives the auspices of the mayor of Prague, the minister of culture and the president of the Czech Republic, while at the same time it gives space to various Romani artists – ranging from children presenting their artistic endeavours to the best Romani musicians from around the world playing on Prague's main stages. Great importance is attached to the festival's visuals, which are created every year by internationally recognised graphic designers. These promotional materials help classify the festival next to other professional events and are often appreciated by partners and sponsors, helping the festival to stand out.

With regard to the second goal of providing opportunities for Romani artists and scholars to present themselves, KHAMORO is open to non-performing artists - every year over a hundred Romani artists (musicians, dancers, writers, visual artists, performers, actors...) and experts (professors, lecturers, activists, mentors) present themselves at the festival. As collaborators, they are given a set of limited boundaries defined by the artistic director. Finally, KHAMORO has a clear intention to offer Roma and non-Roma a safe space where they can feel welcome, a space where they can meet. They have created a communal event to which many people attend repeatedly, mainly to meet with other people. In one of the annual video documentaries made together with Czech Television, Olga Fečová, a Romani

¹⁰⁸ “Strategie rovnosti, začlenění a participace Romů (Strategie romské integrace) 2021 - 2030” [Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy (Roma Integration Strategy) 2021 - 2030], Úřad vlády ČR, accessed August 11, 2023, https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/04-Strategie-romske-rovnosti-zacleneni-a-participace-2021---2030---textova-cast-cista_1.pdf

¹⁰⁹ As the central body of state administration, it functions as a research and advisory body to the government of the Czech Republic.

¹¹⁰ “Khamoro 2015,” filmed 2015 in Prague, Czech Republic at World Roma Festival KHAMORO, video, 28:40, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/14205440486-khamoro/21554215016/>.

personality, teacher, art brut painter, writer and activist, said: “I met Ms Silajdzic 16 years ago [when the festival was established] and since that time I have lived Khamoro.”¹¹¹ Visitors often describe KHAMORO as a meeting place rather than a cultural event, making it an annual meeting. Through music, the festival has helped to build a community between Roma and non-Roma, and to develop a loyal audience. As Džemil says in a TV interview: “I believe in the 16 years we did something for white people and Roma to get closer to each other”¹¹². While in the above-mentioned video documentary, a visitor comments: “I believe music can bring people together and Khamoro can do this. That people will come, listen to the music, see everything else and this will cause it.”¹¹³



Various posters advertising KHAMORO.

3.1.5 The Festival's Purpose

It is not known what motivates people to celebrate their identity and when they want to do so,¹¹⁴ wrote the Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis. But I dare to disagree and argue that role models who are appreciated by members of one's own culture as well as by members of other cultures motivate people to celebrate their own identity. In addition to showcasing the most popular cultural representatives such as musicians, KHAMORO also reserves a place for the expert programme where Romani scholars and artists can discuss what should be addressed within the community (a safe space to challenge our own identity)

¹¹¹ “Khamoro 2014,” filmed 2014 in Prague, Czech Republic at World Roma Festival KHAMORO, video, 01:24, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/14205440486-khamoro/21454215719/>.

¹¹² “Khamoro 2015,” 28:10.

¹¹³ “Khamoro 2015,” 38:30.

¹¹⁴ Donskis, “The European Cultural Canon,” 106.

as well as what message should be conveyed from the community to outsiders. Through various exhibitions and lectures, KHAMORO also supports the re-affirmation of Romani identity through the remembrance of the common past. Last but not least, the programme of this importance provides a channel for a public debate on topics that are crucial and current.

3.1.6 Cultural Motivations, Organiser and Visitor Context

What I feel is important to mention in writing about the fifth key element is the interconnectedness of organisers and visitors. Many members of the festival team started out as audience members, assistants in some of the programme elements or participants in the Khamoro Shares Experience project. Many people who come to the festival are in contact with the organisation that stands behind the festival - Slovo 21 - which also runs other activities that help Roma to achieve equal status, such as tutoring, emancipation meetings for Romani women, mentoring programmes for young Roma, networking of Romani organisations, advocacy... In the interview with Zuzana Jurkova, Jelena Silajdžić says that now she wants to focus her work on “empower[ing] these small NGOs.”¹¹⁵ In conclusion, the motivation of the organisers of the KHAMORO festival is to achieve a better position for the Romani minority in the Czech Republic which is also a context of the surrounding community around the festival, which consists mainly of people interested (or involved) in the issue of empowerment of Roma. Nevertheless, KHAMORO was the project that initiated the establishment of Slovo 21 which confirms that art can be a starting point for a broader socio-political discussion.

3.1.7 Evidence of Culture

Last but not least, the practical aspects of the festival production need to be described. KHAMORO lasts one week - from Sunday to Saturday with around twenty to twenty-five events taking place over the seven days, most of which are open to the public, some of which are open only to registered participants (such as expert seminars), and some of which are for invitees only for personal or practical reasons (such as celebrations of the lives of various Romani personalities). The activities take place in various locations in Prague, the capital of Czechia. Each event is held in another venue, from open-air activities (workshops, storytellings, performances) happening at public squares, municipality parks and private yards, to respected (and expensive) clubs with a capacity of two thousand visitors. The festival's audience has changed slightly over the years, partly depending on promotional activities, with at least half of the audience being Roma. Otherwise, Czechs, Slovaks and also foreigners, tourists and often students from abroad visit KHAMORO regularly. One of

¹¹⁵ Jurkova, “Backstage People,” 152.

the significant events of the festival is a costume parade in the city centre, with around two hundred fifty participants and thousands of spectators. This event with children dressed in traditional Romani (folk) costumes and a horse-drawn carriage is a vivid example of stereotyping used for marketing purposes that I write about in the third chapter.

3.1.8 Elements Contributing to the Success and Failure of the Festival

As is listed above in the subchapter on the festival goals, the core purpose has been fulfilled throughout its existence. Within the ten years I participated in the festival, mainly as its employee and a representative, I have seen the interest in the festival rise and fall, with covid-19 pandemic hitting hard, especially with low vaccination rates among Roma in the Czech Republic. In my opinion, the main elements contributing to the success of the festival are the enthusiasm of the team and the tenacity of the directors, thanks to whom the festival was founded and has been organised for twenty-five years. I think the most likely factor for failure is the financial uncertainty that the festival has been experiencing for many years, with prices rising and state support remaining the same. Also challenging is the power structure that forces musicians to bend their artistic expression to the dictates of a non-member of the community, sometimes resulting in a backlash in the form of a negative online review (mainly on Facebook). Overall, I see KHAMORO as an important and at this moment irreplaceable element in the complex “politics” of the promotion of Romani culture in the Czech Republic. Comparing my views with Belfiore’s - who sees the cultural value and ‘authenticity’ as the most important aspect of minority representation - I also believe in the urgency of cultural events to be diplomats and voices of the community (or rather possibly together with) to those who would not otherwise listen. One of my favourite musicians, Robert Glasper, mentioned in an interview that “sometimes you need the white guy to say something that you have been saying for a long time to other white guys.”¹¹⁶ So I see the level of reach and impact as being as important as any other aspect of a ‘successful’ event. Brian Paltridge wrote in his article “Language, Identity and Communities of Practice” that people construct who they are and how they want to be seen through communicative strategies.¹¹⁷ This last point, in particular, the community of practice, is what KHAMORO tries to build by combining multiple strategies to bring together Roma and non-Roma.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “Robert Glasper On How To Get More Young People Into Jazz,” at Whats Good With Strecht & Bobbito podcast, 33:50, <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/20/669722901/robert-glasper-on-how-to-get-more-young-people-into-jazz>

¹¹⁷ Paltridge, “Language,” 23.

¹¹⁸ Paltridge, *Ibid.*

3.1.9 Conclusion

To carry through the role of KHAMORO in the construction of the transnational notion of Romani identity, the festival combines stereotyping as a marketing tool and traditionalism (also defined partially by stereotyping) which is supposed to confirm the high professionalism (“the old things are the good ones”) together with contextual communication about both the presented topic and the community’s self-representation, which is built in a participatory way (mainly through the accompanying programme). Despite having representatives of the Romani community as part of the team, the decisive powers stayed with the non-Romani directors. The festival also juxtaposes the emphasis on tradition with the representation of contemporary art forms, or, in other words: the othering with the aligning. The KHAMORO festival offers various experiences to various audience members - Roma can enjoy the feeling of a safe space together with other members of the community, defined by the spatio-temporality of the festival, which many of them prefer over the programming designed by non-Roma, but also through the use of the activities commemorating shared history. In this way, complemented with the use of recognisable symbols, the Romani identity is reaffirmed.

3.2 Welcome in Tziganie

If you compare the programme of KHAMORO with that of Welcome in Tziganie, at first glance it might seem that they are almost the same festival. Both share many performers, and I estimate that almost 80% of the Romani bands that played at one festival also played at the other. But since attending Welcome in Tziganie for the first time this year, I have seen that the same programme does not have to have the same aim or outcome. This does not diminish its importance in promoting Romani culture, but it does reduce the number of Romani community members who benefit from the event. In the following paragraphs, I break down how Welcome in Tziganie meets the definition of a diverse and inclusive festival representing Romani culture without having any Roma in the audience.

3.2.1 Festival Construction - The Director

The work of the festival's director and founder Florian Calvez (French, 35 years old) can be described by James O. Young's term "existential authenticity"¹¹⁹ which describes the commitment of an artist (in my case a promoter) to his work. Florian truly enjoys Romani and Balkan cultures, speaks fluent Serbian, and regularly travels to the Balkans to attend music events and visit his Romani and Serbian friends he has made since falling in love with the region. His knowledge of Serbian is an essential component of his created "membership" of the Serbian Romani community that can be "achieved by learning the ways of doing, and ways of using language which fit with that of members of the community."¹²⁰ Stuart Hall has repeatedly written about the importance of language (as a system of symbols and signs) for representation as "the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged"¹²¹ but in my experience, a language is also a key that unlocks doors to a community. When Florian talks to the bands in Serbian, it gives him the opportunity to do business with them, to become their manager and sometimes to also become their good friend. This is a good example of Brian Paltridge's idea of belonging through shared language: "It is, then, through the use of language - along with other semiotic resources - the people belong (or not) to groups."¹²² But in the hierarchy of linguistic belonging, *Romanes* occupies a higher position. As I experienced this year at Welcome in Tziganie, when I started talking in in Romani lingo to one of the bands that Florian manages, they started calling me *amari phen* (our sister) and asked me to become their manager instead of Florian because 'I know more about the Romani culture'.

¹¹⁹ Young, *Cultural Appropriation*, 49.

¹²⁰ Paltridge, "Language," 16.

¹²¹ Hall, "Introduction," 15.

¹²² Paltridge, *Idem*, 20.

Florian can be seen partly as a member of the community of Romani musicians from Serbia, but first and foremost he is a cultural professional. In addition to organising Welcome in Tziganie, Florian is also a booker and manager for various Romani bands from the Balkans, which is also how we met when he came with one of the bands Džemil had invited to the KHAMORO festival. He is a successful producer and promoter of his own festival, which continues to grow - the last edition was almost sold out, with around twelve thousand people in attendance. Even though Welcome in Tziganie is “first and foremost a music festival where people come to have a good time,” as Florian told me, and even though he does not share the experience of being a member of a minority, he is, like any other organiser of a festival presenting Romani music, an interpreter of the (Romani culture) narrative.¹²³

3.2.2 Festival Construction - Power Roles

In this subchapter, I return to the eight aspects of “positive power”¹²⁴ as defined by Walters, Stadler and Jepson. Firstly, the power relations can be seen in *giving a platform* to the members of the minority (the Others). Welcome in Tziganie festival was created with the idea of giving a platform to the Romani (and Balkan) musicians. Florian has not only invited musicians, but in recent years the hosts of the concerts have been famous Romani artists who are presented in a different role than they are used to taking on. This can lead to somewhat amateurish performances - as I witnessed with the singer Eleonora Mustafovska - who is a great singer and performer but not a multilingual professional presenter. Nevertheless, this challenges the stereotypical expectations of the majority that Roma participate in such events only in the role of musicians.

The second theme around power relations, according to Walters, Stadler and Jepson, is *giving/taking ownership*. Even though there are no Roma involved in the final selection of the programme or other decision-making process, the bands that are invited to the festival own their allotted time slots (during which they perform) and are not bound by any strict rules, except for the time frame of their performance. This also applies to workshops or lectures given by invited Romani artists and speakers. But overall, the festival is owned by the director, and he is the one making any decisions as well as bearing the responsibilities. On the other hand, I disagree with the oversimplification of many scholars, including Silverman and Marković, who blame Western promoters for the appropriation of traditional music. As Marković writes in his paper, which is aptly titled “‘So That We Look More Gypsy’: Strategic Performances and Ambivalent Discourses of Romani Brass for the World Music Scene”,

¹²³ Sassatelli, “Narratives of European Cultural Identity,” 16.

¹²⁴ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, “Positive Power,” 1.

Romani musicians “must engage with stereotypes”¹²⁵ to be able to access a music market outside their territory (a couple of villages, a county or, in exceptional cases, a whole country or an entire region of the Balkans). According to Marković, the bands adapt their performances - repertoire and showmanship - as well as their online profiling - including promotional materials.¹²⁶ In my experience of managing festivals presenting other genres of music, this is mainly due to the capitalisation of music and not a primary result of cultural appropriation. By writing about Romani musicians as about those who must change their manners to conform to our expectations we take responsibility and decision-making out of their hands, present them as incompetent, and end up acting superior by judging their decisions as right/wrong. Even though Silverman points out various examples of possible appropriation throughout her academic work, she does not agree with the concept of authentic music becoming commercialised only for the market: “I cofound the simplistic assumption that music starts out “pure” and “authentic” in bounded communities and becomes hybrid only when it moves to non-Romani market.”¹²⁷

The third notion of power is *gaining confidence*. Due to the lack of Romani participants in both the team and the audience, I do not see how the Welcome in Tziganie festival would challenge the basic power structure. Walters, Stadler and Jepson cite the performances themselves as an example of how to gain confidence, but Romani musicians are traditionally already highly respected within their own community and by non-Roma,¹²⁸ and performing for bigger, more (?) knowledgeable audiences does not help them to gain confidence.

The fourth notion is *empowering with/through knowledge*. The authors of the study on festival empowerment claim that knowledge is a key “factor in social/structural empowerment”¹²⁹ which is why raising awareness of the cultures presented is a key aspect of rebalancing power relations. This is why, as mentioned in the introduction, I see festivals like Welcome in Tziganie, which do not involve community members in the decision-making processes, as equally important in the representation of Romani culture. In addition to many Romani bands, various Romani personalities such as writers, academics, activists and artists are invited to the festival to take part in the fringe programme and help break down some of the stereotypes. At Welcome in Tziganie, only a small part of the audience is

¹²⁵ Markovic, “So That We Look More Gypsy,” 260.

¹²⁶ Markovic, Idem, 260-263.

¹²⁷ Silverman, *Romani Routes*, 4.

¹²⁸ Speranta Radulescu “The Gypsy Musicians of Romania: The Past and the Timeless Universe that Takes Its Place” in *Music-Memory-Minorities: Between Archive and Activism* Jurkova and Veronika Sedlova eds. (Prague: Charles University, Karolinum Press, 2020). 21-35.

¹²⁹ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, “Positive Power,” 18.

interested in the expert talks, but they are still a valuable contextualising part of the programme.

Another concept of “psychological empowerment”¹³⁰ is *respect*, which can be shown by giving members of the community equal opportunities in the organisation of the festival, but it can also be shown directly to the performers through the appreciation by the audience. Bearing in mind that these concepts do not have to apply only to the subject of my study, which is a Romani community, I see the themes of gaining confidence, empowering with/through knowledge and gaining respect in how over two hundred volunteers within the festival production team are approached. All volunteers were treated fairly and kindly by the organising team (consisting of only two paid staff), with respect, with enough time to experience the festival and with appreciation for their work. Unfortunately, volunteers were not always treated with respect by the performing bands, as with a Black girl at catering who was whistled at by one of the Romani musicians to serve faster.

The sixth notion of empowerment is *pride and affirmation*, which could be seen backstage where the bands were showing off after their show went well and was appreciated by the audience. I heard one Romani Serbian band mention to the director that another Romani Serbian band did not have such an energetic and grateful audience as they had. A clear self-affirmation of their superior qualities which was to be judged by the audience. On the other hand, I would not validate that “event participants were therefore seen ... to experience a strong sense of meaning, competence, sense of autonomy and impact as a result of the event.”¹³¹

As the seventh notion of power, the authors introduce *freedom to ‘be’* explained as events where participants do not feel judged.¹³² After talking to a couple of people in the audience I am very positive that the visitors do not judge Romani culture, on the contrary, they appreciate it which is the reason why they came to the festival. Moreover, as I experienced repeatedly, sometimes the majority is judged by the minority. I have heard comments made by the Romani musicians on how non-Roma dance (“jumping like goats”) or I have understood how worthless my positive feedback - as a white young girl and non-musician - is to their musical mastery.

¹³⁰ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, Idem, 20.

¹³¹ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, Idem, 21.

¹³² Ibid.

The final aspect of empowerment is *resistance* defined by the authors as an event that allows “marginalised groups to ... counter hegemonic discourses and stereotypes.”¹³³ Again, this is a very difficult notion to confirm or deny when viewed through both the lens of identity representation and festival production, which are sometimes at odds with each other. The Welcome in Tziganie festival does not force the bands to conform to stereotypes but, the organisers are still the ones who direct what the event looks like. The traditional and stereotypical view of Romani musicians is that of poor artists playing in the villages in Romania/Serbia/Hungary as portrayed in many movies. By giving the bands a chance to perform on a professional stage with high-quality sound in front of thousands of non-Romani, the festival organisers support the resistance against the stereotypical views of the bands. The bands want to protest against stereotypical views not only for the sake of greater recognition but also for practical reasons, such as the division of financial resources from playing,¹³⁴ while at the same time meeting expectations of authenticity.

3.2.3 Representation of Ethnically Diverse Cultures

“Performance is also a complex and contested concept that helps us to understand social and cultural processes,”¹³⁵ writes a collective of authors about heritage events. This is how I understand festivals that present Romani culture - by giving the stage to Romani musicians who represent their own identity, the events educate their audiences. In the programming of Welcome in Tziganie, Florian combines traditional Romani musicians - Ekrem Mamutović, Roby Lakatoš, Saša Krstić - with high-profile (global) music stars such as Dubioza Kolektiv from Bosnia, Balkan Beat Box from Israel or Shantel from Germany. This year he invited more international (non-Roma) music stars than in the previous years, which paid off with an almost sold-out festival (two out of three days). According to the promotional material (posters, flyers) and the reactions I collected during my research, the non-Romani bands were considered the bigger stars and many people came to the festival to see them.

After visiting Welcome in Tziganie, I thought about what makes a festival a diverse event. Britt Swartje and Pauwke Berkers present four different aspects that make “a diverse festival space”¹³⁶. They are Programming and Audiences, Partners, Format and Location within the City with a particular emphasis on programming being “a key to producing a diverse festival.”¹³⁷ But as I could see at the Welcome in Tziganie festival, even diverse

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Markovic, “So That We Look More Gypsy,” 265.

¹³⁵ Ullrich Kockel, Máiréad Nic Craith, Cristina Clopot and Baiba Tjarve, ed., “Heritages, identities and Europe: Exploring cultural forms and expressions,” in *Heritage and festivals in Europe: Performing identities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 2-3.

¹³⁶ Swartje and Berkers, “How Music Festival Organisers,” 101.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

programming does not necessarily bring a diverse audience in terms of race, ethnicity or nationality. The audience was mostly French and white. On the other hand, I was pleasantly surprised with the fifteen-member volunteer backstage team (that I was part of) that consisted of people from at least six different countries and various ethnic, as well as social and economic, backgrounds. Some of the other two hundred volunteers who helped with the festival production were also from other countries, with the majority being French. While I applaud the wonderful international community experience of the backstage team and the great diversity of the Welcome in Tziganie programme, the audience does not at all “match the programme,”¹³⁸ as Swartje and Berkers recommend if a festival wants to follow the principles of inclusivity.

With regard to the other three principles of diverse festivals listed above, when it comes to partners, none of the festivals I researched have such major partnerships that they would change the course of the relationship between the audience and each of the festivals. What I see as more defying is the format and the location. The importance of getting the ticket pricing right is very difficult - the organisers need to strike a balance between being able to cover costs and paying artists fairly, not diminishing the value of the event, and possibly offering free or discounted tickets to members of the community who cannot afford them.

The festival site (described in more detail below, in a section on the visitor’s context) has its paid area and a park in front of the venue is accessible free of charge and is dedicated to the accompanying programme including other smaller stages, a market, a Cultural Village that offers a presentation of Romani literature, film screenings and exhibitions. An expert programme, which this year included three discussions on topics related to Romani culture, took place in various event spaces around the village Seissan, where the festival takes place. Even though Florian says that Welcome in Tziganie is first and foremost a music festival, he follows the principle of representing the culture of Others having in mind that: “When we observe and interpret the world around us from an ethnic perspective, we have to remember that the interpretation is in the hands of the observer,”¹³⁹ which is why it is important to offer a variety of information (in formats as well as points of view) so that the observer can interpret the introduced culture from an educated position and avoid stereotyping because identities are stripped of context and history.

¹³⁸ Swartje and Berkers, *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Lundberg, “Music as identity maker,” 40.

3.2.4 Documented Festival Goals

In *Welcome in Tziganie* two main goals can be identified. On the one hand, the goal is to promote Romani music to an audience that is not familiar with it. The other is to organise a commercially successful music festival, an enjoyable experience that reaches as many people as possible. The first goal is not only focused on Romani culture in general, but *Welcome in Tziganie* has a particular focus on Balkan culture. The original idea behind the event was pure fascination with Romani and Balkan music, which the director wanted to introduce to a new audience that had no idea of its existence. In this sense, it is taking advantage of the outsider's perspective: "The perspective of an outsider on a culture can be an advantage when it comes to producing work of arts that provide insight into the culture"¹⁴⁰ writes Young in his book on cultural appropriation. With this in mind, it has to be noted that Florian's passion for music helped him to establish a successful and internationally recognised festival that gives the opportunity to Romani musicians to play outside their usual territories and to expand the possibilities of reaching new audiences.

As for the second goal of organising a successful music festival, *Welcome in Tziganie* is expected to attract a large number of participants and aims to be a sold-out event with a high number of attendees. The same as any other cultural artefact "music is also a commodity to sell to Roma and non-Roma"¹⁴¹ writes Silverman in her book *Romani Routes*. No matter how many times I asked Florian about possible cultural appropriation, he always replied that he just wanted to show music that he loved and that he wanted other people to hear. There is no contradiction between the two, because from a practical point of view, producing a festival with an international line-up is expensive, and if the promoter wants to pay the artists fairly, the festival has to be run like any other commercial event, balancing expenses and income. Ultimately, their hope for the financial success of the festival is motivated by their desire to bring Romani and Balkan music to a wider audience.

¹⁴⁰ Young, *Cultural Appropriation*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Silverman, *Romani Routes*, 3.



Promotional materials for Welcome in Tziganie, 2020 and 2023 editions.

3.2.5 The Festival's Purpose

Humanities scholars sometimes tend to over-analyse events that might otherwise be simple. “A simple meeting between people is suddenly turned into gigantic building schemes to be engineered and administered by the carpenters of culture,”¹⁴² writes Lundberg, which corresponds with Florian’s clueless facial expression when I asked him about cultural appropriation of Romani music. His festival aims to present the music he values and feels it is important to share with others. His personal appreciation, combined with the search for new markets by today’s Romani musicians, is what makes festivals like Welcome in Tziganie possible. According to Lundberg, musicians place more emphasis on their relationship to the music itself than on the relationship between their identity and their music.¹⁴³

In addition to the simple purpose of presenting Florian's favourite music, the director wants to run a great festival where people can enjoy their free time. With a growing number of visitors every year, this goal is successfully achieved. Welcome in Tziganie also brings people from various backgrounds to meet each other closely - festival production is always a critical (extremely demanding) environment which gives a feeling of temporary solidarity (spatio-temporally limited) - which helps to break down barriers even in the long term. Also,

¹⁴² Sunar (1997) as quoted in Lundberg, “Music as identity maker,” 41.

¹⁴³ Lundberg, “Music as identity maker,” 39.

(not only) local volunteers create “communitas’, through [shared] participation in the ritual,”¹⁴⁴ including many older people from the village of Seissan.

3.2.6 Cultural Motivations, Organiser and Visitor Context

The festival's name, Welcome in Tziganie, gives an idea of the visitor's context. The festival site, based on “mythical traditionalism”,¹⁴⁵ is divided into two parts - the outside space where visitors can enjoy a free accompanying programme and the main (also open-air) venue, where admission is charged. The area looks like a made-up stereotypical picture of a Balkan *gypsy* (tzigane) village with Serbian *kafana* (café), jewellery stalls, *gypsy* wagons, a tattoo stand, fortune teller's parlour and lots of food and drinks. Next to all that, one smaller stage with mainly non-Romani musicians playing Balkan, Jewish and Romani music and various accompanying programme events happening throughout the area such as a tightrope walkers' show, and a workshop of basket weaving. To add more stereotypes to the mix, the venue happens to be a (newly built) bullfighting arena for which the local mayor received funding from the European Union. The controversy of organising an event in the actively used bullring is not at all commented on by Roma themselves but, according to Florian, some volunteers refused to participate in a festival taking place where animals are killed. Although I share this opinion, from the production point of view, the arena is perfect for this event: partially covered, with space for both sitting and standing (partying), and enough room for bars, shops, toilets, etc. It is a feel-good place setting of a small village in the south of France. When I asked Florian about the fortune tellers, he replied that he knew it was stereotypical, but that “people like it,” which corresponds to Halls' description of the human desire to experience something that is “...taboo, threatening to cultural orders.”¹⁴⁶

From the perspective of a former festival organiser, I see the appeal of this venue and of its stereotypical layout. It reinforces the romantic idea of Roma and helps visitors to endure the feel-good spirit the festival wants to offer. At the same time, I believe it is important to keep in mind that stereotypical representation of Romani culture shows Roma as reactionary, as those who do not keep up with the world which is moving forward, as the Others. As I quoted Donna Haraway in the introduction, everything is local as well as global, personal as well as political,¹⁴⁷ and any event representing Romani culture is all of these at once. The othering

¹⁴⁴ Cristina Clopot and Catherine McGullagh, “The Construction of belonging and Otherness in heritage events,” in *Heritage and festivals in Europe: Performing identities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 48.

¹⁴⁵ Mayo, “Disguised Geographies,” 79.

¹⁴⁶ Hall, “The Spectacle of Other,” 237.

¹⁴⁷ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 111.

and the exoticising make the event political, even without aiming for it, because “difference is political.”¹⁴⁸

3.2.7 Evidence of Culture

The representation of Romani and Balkan cultures is visible throughout the festival, as well as through other various events that Florian organises. For the three days of the festival, the whole village turns into a cultural beehive with evidence of culture visible everywhere: from decorated shop displays to thousands of festival-goers loitering on the squares, nearby meadows and around the festival area to the sounds of music being heard from various corners - both organised and spontaneous small performances.

Although the festival makes money out of stereotyping Romani culture, it does not forget to educate those who are interested. Similar to what Esma Redžepova, a Romani music celebrity, said in her appearance on the American radio station KEXP: “We are presenting a real culture without playing so much on stereotypes because the music industry is profiting enormous amounts of money without bothering to educate the general public.”¹⁴⁹ When it comes to the location of the festival, Florian sees this as the biggest reason why Roma do not come to the festival. The village Seissan is over eighty kilometres away from Toulouse, the nearest bigger city, so there are hardly any casual visitors. He also mentioned that the only time Roma from Toulouse and other areas, both near and far, were interested in the programme was when the aforementioned Esma Redžepova, a famous Macedonian singer known as the Queen of Roma, performed at the festival in 2014. According to Florian, the Sinti Roma¹⁵⁰ he has befriended, do not consider Welcome in Tziganie to be an event that represents their culture, either, because it does not feature Sinti artists. They do not consider the Romani music from the Balkans (or any other Romani music) their own, even though Sinti are a Romani sub-group. This is an example of what Swartje and Berkers write about music that “can act to exclude as well as include people who have a similar cultural taste, influencing one’s feeling of belonging (or not) to a festival space.”¹⁵¹

3.2.8 Elements Contributing to the Success and Failure of the Festival

As with most cultural events, the financial aspect would be the main element that would make or break the festival. Compared to KHAMORO (and Yagori as well), Welcome in Tziganie is neither a political event nor a safe space for Roma to meet, show and promote

¹⁴⁸ Idem, 109.

¹⁴⁹ “Esma Redžepova & Folk Masters - Full Performance (live on KEXP),” Youtube, 1 October, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf0lwS22e9E>.

¹⁵⁰ Sinti are considered a Romani sub-group.

¹⁵¹ Swartje and Berkers, “How Music Festival Organisers,” 96.

their identity. These aspects, which help KHAMORO and Yagori to get financial support from the state, are not something that Florian can count on. Therefore, Welcome in Tziganie could be in jeopardy if the regular audience cannot come. On the other side of the coin, if there is a political change, Florian does not have to worry about losing the subsidies he needs.

The two main elements contributing to the success are Florian's interest and passion for music and the venue, which, as Florian mentioned, is in need of a professional music programme. As I have found with various cultural events that have been running for many years, the most difficult aspect of running a successful event is balancing the enthusiasm for the event with the finances. Welcome in Tziganie, which is produced by two employees and two hundred volunteers, has to maintain the atmosphere of a community event where people feel they are “engage[d] with ‘producing culture.’”¹⁵² Finally, another important element contributing to the success, in my opinion, is the suitability of the area for the festival. The mutually beneficial cooperation with the municipality, as well as local entrepreneurs who accommodate, feed and mostly enjoy the event, is another core aspect of the success. As I witnessed, many shops were displaying the ‘membership markers’ of their belonging and support to the festival - again, to the benefit of all involved.

3.2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, Welcome in Tziganie is an example of an immersive festival that offers its audience a space to identify with a new culture for a limited period of time, and thus, to have a new identity for the duration of the events, which is undoubtedly part of the festival's charm. The lack of proper contextualisation, as well as the non-existing empowerment of the community whose culture is presented, is reflected in the immersion in othering of the non-Romani audience. It results in othering precisely because of how successful it is in offering such a strong immersive experience to the audience, and the change they can experience. Except for the director not limiting the music performances of the participating Romani bands, the festival does not give a stage to the members of Romani culture so they can define how they want to be seen and represented. However, the director is not seeking representation of Romani culture - he wants to organise a “fun” event that will be well received by a large audience. Finally, by actively including volunteers of various backgrounds and generations, as well as equally engaging with the locals, Welcome in Tziganie is the only of the three festivals I explored that fulfils other principles of inclusivity, beyond representing a different culture.

¹⁵² Clopot and McGullagh, “The Construction of belonging,” 48.

3.3 Gypsymusic Festival Yagori¹⁵³

Because I have the least experience with the Yagori festival, which is also the smallest of the festivals I have researched, this last subchapter will be the shortest. As with the two previous festivals, I have a good personal relationship with the director and I have spoken to her repeatedly for work purposes or in a personal manner. I have only visited the festival once - in 2017 - through bilateral cooperation financially supported by the so-called Norwegian grants. I am aware that qualitative research is ever-changing¹⁵⁴ and that within the last six years, the festival has probably evolved in some aspects. I am also aware of “dependability”: a relation between collected data and “what actually occurred within the research setting”¹⁵⁵ which has been majorly influenced by the passing of time since the event occurred. However, I believe it is important for the analysis of festivals representing Romani culture to include the Yagori festival even if it is presented with only the limited information I was able to gather.

As I will explain in the following paragraphs, the Yagori festival is a community event centred on one Romani family. The unique combination of a high-profile public event together with the presentation of the Bielenberg’s family very personal cultural identity can be explained by the words of American ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino:

Music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups ... Music and dance are key to identity formation because they are often public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique.¹⁵⁶

3.3.1 Festival Construction - The Director

Like the other two festivals, the Gypsymusic Festival Yagori, founded in 1999, is still run by the same people who founded it. The festival was established by the Bielenberg family, namely Raya Bielenberg - originally a singer and a dancer of the internationally acclaimed Russian ensemble Teater Romen - and her daughter Natasha Udovikova Bielenberg who was married to Petro Jovanović-Ivanović, one of the musicians in the Cigani Ivanovići ensemble - the Russian-Yugoslavian band that caused that Džemil Silajdžić, the director of the KHAMORO festival, fell in love with Romani music. Today, Natasha occasionally performs together with her son Aleco, her “second ex-husband’s second ex-wife”¹⁵⁷ Tatiana

¹⁵³ YAGORI, “Gypsymusic festival Yagori, Oslo, Norway,” Facebook, October 7, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/7525799954/>.

¹⁵⁴ Jepson and Clarke, “Creating Critical Festival Discourse,” 66.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life. The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2.

¹⁵⁷ As Natasha told me during our phone interview.

Ivanovitch Voronina and annually, at the Yagori festival, also with Raya - being born in 1931 (or 1935¹⁵⁸) - and Petro Jovanović. Alongside this family unit, another of Natasha's ex-husbands, Tore-Jarl Bielenberg, a Norwegian journalist who advocates for Romani rights, participates in Yagori every year. Illustrated by Silverman's clear statement: "Since family means everything...",¹⁵⁹ and quotes from various Roma she has interviewed: "Your family is who you are and it is there forever... The family is so strong because we are not accepted anywhere. It has become almost an obsession,"¹⁶⁰ it is not difficult to understand the above-described combination of family-community relations. As Natasha told me during a phone interview: "I am still running the festival partially because of my mother. She needs to be on stage but she is 92 so she cannot travel much but if she does not sing, she will die."

Just like the other two directors, Natasha, the festival's producer, is also one of the "expressive specialists". In her case, of those who have "important status as qualified bearers and interpreters of their groups' cultural identities."¹⁶¹ Natasha met Jelena and Dzemil Silajdzic during one of her tours with Cigani Ivanovici in the former Yugoslavia, and just as they (and their band) influenced the KHAMORO directors' views on Romani music, KHAMORO was one of the festivals that inspired Natasha and her mother to create their own event to represent their culture in Norway. Since the first year of the festival, Natasha has been running all the organisational aspects together with one of her sons, Aleco, who helps with production. Another of Natasha's sons, Nick (Nikak), exceptionally participates in the Yagori festival as a guitarist in the family band performing under the name Raya & Company.

3.3.2 Festival Construction - Power Roles

Due to the lack of opportunity to follow this festival, I am aware that my conclusions regarding the power roles may be partially inaccurate. What helped me to follow the "detour via detachment" methodological approach was my long-term interest in the Romani culture; in the last five years, I have also visited three other organisations working with Roma in Oslo - a group of women social workers employed by Oslo municipality, The Educational Wergerland Centre¹⁶² and a newly built centre of Romani culture called Romano Kher. None of them cooperated with Natasha or her family on a regular basis and no one mentioned the Yagori festival as their communal space. This follows Zuzana Jurkova's article "Myth of

¹⁵⁸ "Raya Bielenberg," Wikipedia, accessed October 7, 2023, https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raya_Bielenberg.

¹⁵⁹ Silverman, *Romani Routes*, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Idem, 65.

¹⁶¹ Lundberg, "Music and identity marker," 32.

¹⁶² <https://theewc.org/about-us/>

Romani Music in Prague,” where she divides various Romani *soundscapes* into three types according to the relationship between who is the organiser/performer and who is the visitor,¹⁶³ and where she argues that the element of Romani performers/organisers does not guarantee the presence of a Romani audience.

Even though Yagori *gives a platform* (the first aspect of power-balanced events) to Roma to present their artistry, the festival itself does not give a platform to Roma in a wider context and could not be seen as a representative space for Norwegian Roma. This is related to the *giving/taking ownership* element which can be questioned back to who can be a representative of Roma who are a very diverse minority. The festival gives ownership to some Roma but only to those who are invited - who are chosen - by the director. In general, I would say that the Yagori festival actually represents a more limited spectrum of variations of Romani culture than KHAMORO which is organised by non-Roma.

The third and fourth aspects of power are that the festival should help its community *to gain confidence* and *empower with/through knowledge*. In the case of Yagori, these elements can be partially applied only to the Roma who are personally invited by the director and who perform on stage. In the absence of any additional educational activities or dissemination of knowledge, the participating Roma do not learn any new skills, which is a fundamental principle of gaining confidence. The fifth and sixth power principles - gaining *respect* and *freedom to be* - are explained from the outsiders’ point of view on the community. Surprisingly, Norway has one of the most outdated integrational policies towards Roma, recognising Roma as a national minority only as late as 1998¹⁶⁴, and only having accepted the term Roma instead of “Gypsies” only since 2008.¹⁶⁵ Other similar steps, which are necessary for the Romani minority to gain respect, can be achieved through the promotion of positive connotations of Romani music. This also speaks for the power rule about festivals being places where the members of minorities feel free. With Yagori, the festival itself does not serve this purpose since Roma do not come to the festival, but Yagori might serve this purpose within society more widely by helping Roma to experience *freedom to be* within general society.

¹⁶³Zuzana Jurkova, “Myth of Romani Music in Prague,” *Urban People*, 2009. <https://lidemesta.cuni.cz/LM-1036.html>.

¹⁶⁴Vidar Fagerheim Kalsas, “Norway - narrating essay,” *RomArchive*, accessed September 30, 2023, <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/norway-narrating-essay-long/>.

¹⁶⁵Jana Baudyšová, “Parallel worlds: The life of Romani people in Norway,” *Romea*, December 29, 2014, <https://romea.cz/en/world/parallel-worlds-the-life-of-romani-people-in-norway#>.

The last two power positions are about *pride and affirmation* and *resistance* - all of which are aimed at the community gaining an appreciation of their culture within the community and from outsiders as well. In the case of *pride and affirmation*, I believe that some of the bands performing in Norway for the first time can affirm their pride, but the overall impact is not as strong as at the KHAMORO festival where the Romani audience can gain pride and affirmation through the performances of other members of their community. Finally, in terms of the next level of pride and affirmation, resistance, Yagori does fulfil such a role. In the article on these aspects of power, the authors write that the resistance means that the event counters stereotypes¹⁶⁶, which is true in the case of the Yagori festival. With its fancy venue, professional programme and well-organised production, this event is far from how this culture is often presented in the media, where Roma are portrayed as beggars and troublemakers.¹⁶⁷

3.3.3 Representation of Ethnically Diverse Cultures

The festival is based on the presentation of ethnically diverse cultures in the same way as the World Roma Festival KHAMORO - both festivals represent a culture outside the majority discourse but neither of them shows the diversity of different cultures. At Yagori, the representation of Romani arts lacks a broader introduction to the topic of Romani culture within the context of connective structures in social and temporal dimensions.¹⁶⁸ By not fully introducing the Romani culture that Yagori represents, it ignores both its present position in society and its larger context throughout history. This limits the potential impact of the festival on casual visitors, as it does not contribute to the avoidance of stereotypes; instead, the directors use exoticism as a marketing strategy.

3.3.4 Documented Festival Goals

Yagori's goals were a little harder to pin down, as the festival's origins are much more personal. It is based on two premises: the goal of promoting Romani music and the goal of celebrating the life of Raya Bielenberg, the original founder of the festival, by creating a social network. In both cases, the goals have become more defined over time. In the beginning, promoting Romani music was the main goal. According to Natasha, the family originally had no plan other than to "just put together a similar Romani festival that many people around Europe organise." As she told me during our telephone interview, her mother,

¹⁶⁶ Walters, Stadler and Jepson, "Positive Power," 21.

¹⁶⁷ Runa Falck, "Discrimination against Roma: Evidence from two survey experiments in Norway," in *Migration Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 3, (September 2021), 370, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnaa026>.

¹⁶⁸ Jan Assman, *Kultura a paměť* (Prague: Prostor, 2001), 20, quoted in Zuzana Jurkova and Veronika Sedlova ed., *Music - Memory - Minorities: Between Archive and Activism* (Prague: Charles University, Karolinum Press, 2020), 9.

Raya, came up with the idea after they had performed at various festivals around Europe. Similarly, the second festival goal was not intentionally implemented but turned out to be more transformative than the original plan.¹⁶⁹ Over time, Yagori became a familiar event where everyone celebrates the life of Raya Bielenberg and her artistry. From what I have experienced, it is more of a community gathering around the figure of Raya. However, festivals can also provide the space to celebrate “marking the passing of time, and building social networks”¹⁷⁰ which I see as the central (coincidental) goal of Yagori.

Following my theoretical framework on the representation of Others, I cannot really say that Yagori uses any of the othering stereotypes, because it is not aiming to create a representation of all Romani culture, but the larger narrative of the Bielenberg family. Instead, the Oslo festival founders create “formative memories” for themselves and the community around their family “and keep ... them present, enclosing images and history from another time in the ongoing horizon of the present.”¹⁷¹



Poster for Yagori's edition of 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Laing and Judith Mair, “Music Festivals and Social Inclusion: The Organiser’s Perspective,” in *Leisure Sciences*, 37:3, 253, DOI: 10.1080/01490400.2014.991009.

¹⁷⁰ Idem, 252.

¹⁷¹ Assman, *Kultura a paměť*, 20, quoted in Jurkova and Seidlova, *Music - Memory - Minorities*, 9.

3.3.5 The Festival's Purpose

According to Natasha, the main purpose of the festival is to present high-quality Romani artists and, through representation of Romani music and culture, to create a better understanding of who the Roma are. The space in which the festival takes place also partly defines its purpose and outcome. For more than fifteen years the festival has been held in the very centre of Oslo in Kulturkirken Jakob, a former church that is a beautiful and expensive event space. As Natasha mentioned in our interview, since moving into the church, Yagori has become a more respected and popular event in Oslo's cultural scene.

3.3.6 Cultural Motivations, Organiser and Visitor Context

From the beginning the cultural motivation of the organisers has been a representation of the Romani culture and at the same time representation of their own personal "cultural heritage" which is mainly created in the persona of Raya. She is an iconic figure in the history of Romani culture for many reasons - this creates an interesting duality where cultural and personal motivations are equally important elements. James O. Young's analogy of culture to "a family resemblance concept"¹⁷² is fulfilled.

In recent years, as Raya has been unable to travel due to her health problems, Yagori is the only stage in the world where people can see this renowned singer whose life represents the bigger historical narrative of Roma. Raya comes from the very famous Romen Theatre whose members performed, among other things, in the worldwide movie sensation *Gypsies Are Found Near Heaven*, a representative of the old-school tradition of Romani art from Russia which is quite specific even within the Romani cultural scene. The origins of the family traditions make the festival follow cultural frameworks that might seem stereotypical for an outsider - old Russian songs, colourful costumes, and very expressive (to the point of pathos) performance are the essential cultural resemblances of the Bielenberg family. When the festival's Facebook page, managed by Natasha, says: "Get ready for a colourful weekend packed with energy, joie de vivre and melancholy in beautiful harmony,"¹⁷³ it is not a marketing claim but a depiction of reality.

The festival only uses a Facebook event and a Facebook group page as its communication channels which makes it difficult to generate wider interest in the event but helps to maintain the community feel. The family participation and the community feeling - the same people have been involved with the festival for over a decade, including a cameraman and the

¹⁷² Young, *Cultural Appropriation*, 1.

¹⁷³ Kulturkirken JAKOB, "YAGORI gypsy music festival," Facebook, October 7, 2023, translated by Google translator from Norwegian, <https://www.facebook.com/events/186444234113463/?ref=newsfeed>.

technical team, some of the visitors come annually and part of the musical programming does not change either. Returning bands see the event more as a family reunion than a festival performance, as I was told by Puerto Flamenco, a Spanish band that performs at Yagori every year. This all “indicate[s] belonging and community,”¹⁷⁴ which helps to keep a loyal audience, but can also create an unwelcome feeling of a closed group. As Lundberg argues: “... while symbol indicates belonging, it also marks dissociation. By signalling ‘us’, we single out ‘the others.’”¹⁷⁵ The lack of change in the line-up may be one of the reasons why almost no members of Oslo's Romani community come to the festival because they never find ‘their’ bands playing there.

3.3.7 Evidence of Culture

Critical discourse analysis teaches that no event exists “outside of discourse, but [an event] will only gain significance through discourse.”¹⁷⁶ In the case of Yagori, I would argue that the festival, because of its taciturnity, is a stand-alone event that lacks context for both non-Roma and Roma. The evidence of culture is only presented internally to the family/festival community which is already familiar with it, therefore an upskilling of power roles¹⁷⁷ is absent or meaningless.

3.3.8 Elements Contributing to the Success and Failure of the Festival

With Yagori, the elements of success and failure are more difficult to define. There is no pronounced desire to increase audience numbers, no quest for unique and unparalleled programming, and no drive for political recognition or international acclaim. The constant reality of the festival is perhaps the greatest positive and negative facet that can cause unalterable success or failure. The success or failure of the festival's main purpose, keeping the Bielenberg family legacy alive, can only be measured after Raya is no longer able to perform.

3.3.9 Conclusion

To summarise the position of Yagori among other festivals representing Romani culture, I, again, try to avoid generalisation. The Yagori festival is first and foremost a family (communal) event celebrating the life of its founder, Raya, who is also a representative of a bigger narrative within Romani culture. The issue, then, is not that it is not engaging with Romani culture, but that their position focuses on a side of it that is not representative of the current reality of it. However, the festival programming is dedicated and the people involved

¹⁷⁴ Lundberg, “Music and identity marker,” 33.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Montessori, “CDA, Critical Events and Critical Event Studies,” 134.

¹⁷⁷ Laing and Mair, “Music Festivals and Social Inclusion,” 261.

make this an experience full of energy which creates a small community surrounding it, but the context is the festival itself, and not the specific narratives of Roma. Unfortunately, due to the lack of an accompanying programme, political engagement and wider publicity and promotion and because the notion of Romani culture is presented outside of a context, Yagori does not fulfil its “political” purpose - Romani music as a tool for better understanding of what is Romani culture - and becomes a stand-alone musical event.

4. Conclusion

I started this thesis with a personal story, and I would like to end it with another one before summarising my research findings and how they correspond to my research questions. When I attended the Yagori Gypsymusic Festival in 2017, I travelled to Oslo with two of my colleagues, a white man and a Romani woman, all of us being around twenty-five years old and all coming from Czechia. We stayed in Norway for a couple of days, enjoyed concerts at Yagori, met with some activists, Roma as well as non-Roma, and social workers in local Romani organisations, and on the last evening we headed towards a local music club. Once we got to the door of the chosen venue, two security guards refused to let my Romani colleague in, saying that her eyes were strangely sparkling which they said was a sign that she was on drugs. This made me very angry, I argued with them very loudly and in the end I was also escorted out of the venue.

There have been many similar stories of racism and hatred against Roma that I have experienced first-hand while attending Romani music festivals or spending my free time with my Romani friends. But I have also repeatedly heard from Roma how safe they feel at KHAMORO (and also other cultural events presenting Romani culture in the Czech Republic) and how this festival, where thousands of non-Romani audience members cheer the Romani artists, affirms their belonging and supports their pride. I have encountered the same enthusiasm coming from Roma who have not grown up in Romani families (either adopted children or orphaned Roma) who have experienced Romani culture for the first time at KHAMORO (or International Romani Day celebrations) and immediately felt a strong connection. All of this shows that Romani culture is both political and personal, global (through the presence of Romani bands from around the world and the representation of internationally recognised symbols) and local. It also shows that being appreciated as a musician or Romani expert and being invited to fly across Europe as an expert or a guest, does not guarantee you entrance to a club where you do not perform, demonstrating how Roma can be privileged for one aspect of their personality at one moment and oppressed for another the next.¹⁷⁸

This is at the heart of the findings of my research, which shows how representation of Romani culture is made possible by the festivals that give it space, but at the same time,

¹⁷⁸ Bloechl, Olivia. "Race, Empire, and Early Music." In *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, edited by Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg, 77-107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 49.

they can also contribute to harmful representation if this space is not managed according to a reality of the culture that does not treat them as an exotic, stereotyped community. To give a better idea of how I reached this conclusion, I present an overview of my research question with its subquestions. In the following section, I compiled the answers that I have proposed through my case studies as seen through my framework.

4.1 Findings on my research questions

In researching the role music festivals play in the affirmation and definition of identities through music, in the context of Romani culture, I followed a main research question: How do three European Romani festivals - Khamoro, Yagori, and Welcome in Tziganie - contribute to the construction of the transnational notion of “Romani culture” through the specific conditions of festivals’ immersivity?’

Because the representation of Romani culture is such a ‘dual’ issue, in that it both affirms and challenges and redefines culture, all festivals that contribute to the creation of the notion of Romani music bear a great responsibility. Roma themselves are not in charge of their own representation, their own stereotyping - which is visible not only at festivals organised by members of the majority but also in the case of Yagori, where only a small fragment of Romani representatives participate in the decision-making, as I note in my analysis. The discursive constellation of festivals as spaces where immersion takes place gives the floor to deep cultural self-affirmation for the members of the community as well as for strong stereotyping and othering within a wider context of representation of Roma. As I have argued in my analyses, othering creates a negative caricature of what Romani culture might be, which makes it all the more important for festivals to try to represent the whole context and avoid simplification. The culture shown through heritage and traditions is attractive because it feels (somewhat) authentic, but it puts Roma in the position of Others, it makes them “weird” and reactionary, and it turns them into repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic.¹⁷⁹

In each chapter I dedicated to my case studies, I noticed how stereotypes were present and communicated information in different ways. Stereotyping is visible in the promotion, in the costumes, and, for example in the case of Welcome in Tziganie, also in the venue, and in the way the events are presented on social media. Already in the use of words such as ‘colourful’, ‘passionate’ or ‘free’ we can already see repeating stereotypes of Romani culture. This, as I introduced in the first chapter, can function as what Hall calls the ‘lust’ that

¹⁷⁹ Stuart Hall, ed., “The Spectacle of Other,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London, SAGE Publications, 1997), 229.

exoticizes and objectifies, but they can also function as what Enguita Mayo calls 'membership markers' (see page 18). These stereotypes were present throughout the different analyses, from Yagori's enthusiastic quote: "Get ready for a colourful weekend" (see page 49).

My conclusion is that there are various affinities to the same cultural phenomena. Even with the same programming choices, the context in which they are (re)presented will be different, organised differently and with other goals in mind. "Group membership displays differing degrees of compatibility, even in cases where membership is marked by the use of similar symbols."¹⁸⁰ As my case studies show, the same programming can symbolise three different identities or ways to relate to identity, according to the festival's affinities: non-Roma (outsider who could be considered a cultural appropriator), members from other minorities that share the condition of Other but still do not represent Romani culture, and Roma representing their own culture but only for their own communities.

It is true that the immersivity of the festival can affirm stereotypes, but what I propose is that it also has the potential to contribute to the creation of a newly grasped - more current and less exclusionary - representation of Romani culture.

The festivals representing Romani culture are sights of discursive meaning-making which can make them inviting to those who have a stereotypical and simplifying idea about Romani culture. On the other hand, the festivals need to be aware that many members of the represented minority do not have access to be able to contribute to the curatorial choices of the festival and cannot oppose the presented stereotypes or come up with alternative interpretations of their own culture. While comparing the three festivals, an interesting finding comes up - Yagori, the only festival where programming is run by Roma, is the most stereotypical, both in its programming and in its online marketing. In this case in particular, the immersive nature of the festivals makes audience members who do not belong to the represented culture (since they were not born in it) feel part of it without acknowledging the complexity of the topic.

My research made it clear that this was not only true for other attendees, but also for my positioning as a researcher, as a festival visitor, and as a human being. My own awareness of the potential risks presented by the immersivity of the festivals was sharpened by questioning the privilege of others. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have always felt

¹⁸⁰ Lundberg, "Music and identity marker," 33.

comfortable in the environment of Romani culture, but the academic and professional public discussion of cultural appropriation made me question myself and my affinity with it. On the one hand, I believe that the expert background I have gained through my studies in Romani culture and through my long-time involvement in the field, working alongside my Romani colleagues, has helped me gain a different position, compared to the non-Romani directors of the festivals that focus only on the programming of the music. I feel that my position is closer to Jelena Silajdžić, one of the directors of KHAMORO, who seeks to show context and opposes the reactionary representation of Romani culture. My deep affinity with the researched topic, as well as personal relationships with all the directors, helped me to gain backstage access to all the festivals, but at the same time, it also hindered me from being more critical and motivated me to look for more positive aspects in the festivals, leading me more towards general praise for the existence of these festivals. Although I expected that my research journey on Romani music festivals and my position within them would lead to the confirmation of my decision to step down, the autoethnographic approach to comprehend the 'self to other' interactions helped me to realise that this discussion is presented more on a theoretical level than in the everyday relations between Roma and non-Roma within the Romani cultural scene. After all, we all are limited by our own cultures and prejudices that come with it but "humans for all of their cultural and other differences are not so different that they are incapable of understanding each other."¹⁸¹

My exploring was also affected by my deep feelings for culture and my belief in the power of the arts, namely music. In Romani art, there is also a space for the personal and less symbolic feelings that culture offers. Each of us has different memories and emotions associated with music of different types and genres. Also, many people are attracted to music so they come to a festival to listen to the music, and then they become interested in other aspects of the represented art, or about who the other members of the audience are. "Thanks to the unifying powers of music, preconditions for other activities are created, a fact that many immigrants emphasise,"¹⁸² writes Lundberg. This is the sense of belonging that music creates, as I stated previously. Lundberg adds: "Maybe these are the two most important aspects of music; its ability to be both an actual part of culture itself and, at the same time, to serve as a transmitter and symbol of cultural community."¹⁸³

In contrast to this emotional side, as mentioned in the final chapter on Yagori, Romani music is also seen (like any other art) as a commodity for the international market, and the

¹⁸¹ Young, *Cultural Appropriation*, 60.

¹⁸² Lundberg, "Music and identity marker," 35.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Romani musicians are professionals who want to make a living out of their skills. As Joci Marton says in the European Cultural Foundation podcast on presence and representation: “The most important is to be presented in the public discussion because it makes you feel that you are seen.” It is only when the topic is part of the public discussion that the representative of the topic under discussion can begin to separate events into those that are stereotypical and those that are part of their current cultural reality. “If you fight events that stereotypically represent your culture, in the case of Romani culture, you fight all the events where you can talk about your topics,”¹⁸⁴ continuous Marton.

To answer the sub-question of what defines an inclusive and diverse event, it is not only the programming that needs to be considered. In my research, I have found that inclusive and diverse festivals also consider other members of other communities and bring together various types of representatives. I am aware that, as this is a thesis on arts and society, one might expect the conclusion to be that festivals representing someone's culture should be organised mainly by members of that culture. But, surprisingly, this has not proved to be a viable option, at least not at this point. Even though I support the idea, the above-presented cases show that the festival organised solely by the Romani family - Yagori - actually fulfils the least of the positive power structure aspects of all three festivals. The fact is that more Roma are participating and presenting at the KHAMORO festival than at Yagori, and Welcome in Tziganie is the only event out of the three that follows many of the principles of multiculturalism, sustainability and local community involvement.

Finally, my research comes to the issue of programming. Having seen the differences and coincidences between KHAMORO, Yagori and Welcome in Tziganie, and having seen that the resulting festivals are different even in the points where they coincide, I have concluded that programming does not shape representation. Essentially, it is the same music, Romani music, but its specific traits tell very different stories. For example, Welcome in Tzigane chooses to focus on musicians from the Balkans but there is a more intimate bond between performers from the region and KHAMORO, even though from the programming we would expect the opposite. In the end, it seems that what has more impact in the representation is the role the festival team has, defined by how they see, think and feel towards the culture they represent, rather than their position within it. As Paltridge says, identity is better represented and defined “also by the fact that they are recognized by other participants in our interactions with them.”¹⁸⁵ In the anecdote that opened my thesis, I quoted a

¹⁸⁴ European Cultural Foundation. “Episode 2: Presence and representation – in the park”. *European Pavilion Podcast*, January 25, 2021. Podcast, website, 48 mins.

¹⁸⁵ <https://culturalfoundation.eu/stories/the-european-pavilion-the-podcast/>.

¹⁸⁵ Paltridge, “Language,” 16.

conversation I had at KHAMORO with the double bass player Dušan Vagai, which reflects exactly what it all comes about, that it is not necessarily about the community to which the programmers belong. For Vagai, it is in the way they approach other people and their connection to the festival in the context of both their personality and their work. That is what will shape the cultural representation more than the programming. This is the sense of responsibility that I have been talking about throughout because it reflects the power of festivals to create a sense of belonging that can only last beyond the festival if it is done to the best of the culture it is made in the name of.

4.2 Recommendations for further research

There are three topics that are related to my thesis and that I find interesting, but that could use more researchers to expand on it. I have already mentioned two of them in the chapter on Romani identity. The first one is the aspect of oppression (appropriation) by one aspect and appreciation by another. How do non-Roma music fans react to Roma outside of the festivals? Are they all supporters of cultural diversity in their everyday lives or do they prefer to have the “exotic” Romani culture bounded by spatiotemporal borders? Do the festivals representing Romani culture cause that there is no other discussion about the position of Roma within society outside these cultural playpens? The second theme is the opposition or/and complementation of the historicity and contemporaneity of Romani culture and its cultural transformation. The third topic that I would like to recommend for further research is the immediate belonging to a previously unfamiliar culture: what are the aspects causing music festivals (music and festivals) to be so influential on our deepest feelings, changing of affinities and identity shifts? I would like to learn more, with greater detail on the immersivity - for example, if music festivals, because of their immersivity, can be more powerful in creating and affirming identity than other events.

There are of course dozens of other festivals representing Romani culture around Europe - from very small ones organised by fans of Romani music with having none or one Roma performing there to bigger events organised by Roma themselves which non-Roma never attend (I wrote my undergraduate thesis about a venue where only Romani audience comes), and these could be also sources of further exploration. As I mentioned above, I see those festivals where Roma and non-Roma meet in various roles as beneficial for mutual understanding between various members of society, overall. I hope that it will become clearer, both to academics and to festival programmers, that good assessment and good programming can only be achieved through an awareness of the wider context. For myself as well as for Romani culture and the issues of representation, I wish that this understanding, comprehension and respect are values that those involved in culture become

more aware of. Ultimately, culture is defined by humanity, dialogue and arts, first and foremost, and not by theories and academia on their own.

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Illustrations

Cover - An old tradition of storytelling by the fire with a modern backdrop of a popular Prague night club Fuchs2. *#Black lives matter, Roma lives matter too*. World Roma Festival KHAMORO 2023 (photo courtesy of KHAMORO festival).

p. 29 - Various posters advertising KHAMORO (courtesy of KHAMORO festival).

p.39 - Promotional materials for Welcome in Tziganie, editions of 2020 and 2023. (courtesy of Welcome in Tziganie festival).

p. 48 - Poster for Yagori's edition of 2022 (courtesy of Gypsymusic festival YAGORI).