

ROMANIAN ROMANI RESISTANCE TO GENOCIDE IN THE MATRIX OF THE *ȚIGAN* OTHER

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This article is an exploration of Romanian Romani resistance to the Holocaust in Romania through Romani engagement with the field of their oppression – the matrix of the *Țigan* other. Far from being a simple case of negative stereotypes exaggerated and applied in the form of a name, the name *Țigan* has been used by elite and subaltern ethnic Romanians since the 15th century to project a gamut of necessarily paradoxical stereotypical characteristics anxiously articulated as antithetical to Romanian ethnonational identity onto the bodies of Romani people in Romania. This paper traces the historical formation of the *Țigan* other, and how the *Țigan* identity functioned not only to create, maintain and police an economically valuable slave class, but a social class of Roma as *Țigani* vital as the internal other against which different Romanian social groups articulated their own identities.

A discussion of historical sources of Romani resistance to slavery, social persecution and genocide in World War II, must therefore take place through the matrix of the persecution of Romani individuals as *Țigani*. Indeed, documentary evidence written by Roma in the genocide of 1942-45 showcases the relentless discursive strategies that victims used to negotiate the gauntlet of stereotypes (of *Țigan* identity) that everyday Romanians wielded to justify the deportation and murder of Romani Romanians.

The purpose of this essay is twofold: to begin reading Romani resistance to Romanian persecution in the Romanian archives, and to draw attention to the importance of the location of interpellation of Romani peoples as various kinds of others in societies and times. In this way, I speak about Roma as an heterogeneous self-identifying ethnic group, *Țigani* as the dynamic phantasmatic projection constituted by stereotypes of otherness to and of the modern Romanian nation. The word *Gypsy* means radically different things in Australia, England and America, so to translate Roma or *Țigan* as *Gypsy* erases the specific meaning of the text. Reading the matrix of the *Țigan* other as the site for dynamic reproduction, containment and resistance, requires

that scholars pay attention to how people identify and name themselves, and how they respond to the names enunciated by others. Of course self-identifying Romani individuals can also use the word *Țigan* to refer to themselves and others, a reflection of the function of the term *Țigan* as a location for the interaction of historically developed identities. Choosing one name or another is itself a political act, and in this paper I choose to not choose for others, but to trace how individuals have claimed their own names as a vital survival strategy.

The enslavement of Romani communities in Romania and the making of *Țigani*

Romani individuals in Romania exist in historical sources as the property of *boiers* (landowners), state administrators and the clergy, where they are called “*Țigani*.” The first archival evidence of Roma in the Romanian principality of Wallachia is the record of 40 *sălașe* (families) given to Voivod Dan I in 1385 from Vladislav I, a Serbian landowner.¹ Until 1699 (when Transylvania came under the administration of the Hapsburg empire), all Roma who entered the Romanian principalities of Transylvania, Wallachia or Moldova were captured and made slaves of the state; and after 1699 this practice continued in Wallachia and Moldova and was modified somewhat in Transylvania. The state could retain slaves for their own use, or sell them to *boiers* or monasteries. Slaves were called *sclavi*, *robi*, or *Țigani*.² Other ethnic groups were also

¹ *Documenta Romaniae Historica B*, Țara Românească I, Edited by P.P. Panaitescu and Damaschin Mioc, Academia Republicii Socialiste România, Secția de Științe Istorice, Bucharest 1966 pp.19-22.

² The word *Țigan* (plural: *Țigani*) derives from the word *Tsiganoi* which was widely used in the Byzantine period to name Romani populations that moved west with the Ottoman forces. Roma have consistently called themselves thus as an ethnic group, and are a heterogeneous dynamic

slaves, such as a small percentage of Tartars, but these groups were freed by the end of the 15th century, and only Roma remained slaves.³ The term *Țigan* came to conflate the legal and social position of slaves with ethnic Roma. To be a slave was to be considered an ethnic *Țigan*. There was no such thing as a free *Țigan*, or a free Rom. Romanians did not recognize or interpellate Roma as anything other than *Țigani*, *sclavi* and *robi*.

Romani slaves called *Țigani* were vital to the Romanian economy, in which they provided the trades of their traditional family groups. The Fierari were metalsmiths, making tools and equipment for farming, Lautari musicians provided entertainment for village fairs and weddings (for those who could afford them), the Ursari entertained with their tamed bears, and other *Țigani* worked as horse trainers and traders, gold panners and goldsmiths (Aurari), traders of small items, domestic workers, agricultural laborers and cleaners. Though the archives of landowners, clergy and administrators constantly record the actions of their chattel, the vast majority of Romanian historiography fails to mention the hundreds of thousands of Roma who existed in Romanian society as *Țigani*. Henri Stahl's famous history and sociology of Romanian peasantry and agriculture mentions only once that monasteries "exploited ... gypsy [*sic*] slaves," while Keith Hitchins lists the varied roles and the "economic burdens" that were expected of "gypsies [*sic*] ... belonging to" monasteries and landowners, but does not discuss the place of these "social outcasts ... foreign in customs, mentality and appearance" in relation to other Romanian social groups or beyond these few sentences.⁴

As with slavery elsewhere, *Țigani* were not a pre-existing community of slaves, but were *created* in a detailed legal and social system; Romanians constituted the *Țigan* as slave within an entire system of racial and social stereotypes to

justify violent enslavement. The pervasive institutional and social stereotyping of the *Țigan* as the lowest social category and requiring enslavement, *especially* as they played a vital economic role in society, functioned to create a common group within the social hierarchy against which all other social and ethnic groups in the Romanian principalities, including the indentured Romanian peasants, could articulate themselves as superior (as free, white, Christian and, later, European). Landowners (when talking to the peasants) and peasants (when talking of themselves) articulated themselves as moral, obedient, and attached to the land – in contrast to the *Țigani* who would supposedly roam the land and refuse to work at all if not for their (thus rationalized) enslavement. The *Țigan* as inferior other used to work the land was a vital identity against which the peasants could articulate themselves as *of* the land – a differentiation that served not only the esteem of the peasant classes, but also their supervising land owners who benefited from the *Țigani* as the group that all Romanian classes could police to the periphery together.

As with the constructed stereotypical "Sambo" identity in the nineteenth century North American South that Stanley Elkin describes, so too was the stereotypical *Țigan* considered "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration."⁵ These necessarily contradictory stereotypes functioned as links in a chain, discursively containing any Romani individual's actions or physical signification of Romani culture.⁶ Romani resistance to slavery was relentless, but as the projection of the *Țigan* other is powered by

community of groups within that umbrella ethnic term.

³ Viorel Achim *Țigani în istoria României* Editura Enciclopedia, Bucharest 1998 p.33.

⁴ Quotations taken from Henri H. Stahl *Traditional Romanian village communities: The transition from the communal to the capitalist mode of production in the Danube region* Translated Daniel Chirot and Holley Coulter Chirot, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980; p.142 and Keith Hitchins *The Romanians 1774-1866* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996; p.72.

⁵ Stanley M. Elkins *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* University of Chicago Press, second edition, Chicago and London 1968; p.82.

⁶ In post-socialist Romania the argument that Roma is a word *Țigani* created to deliberately associate their supposedly uncivilized ways with the European civilization of Romania is a containment of even the right of Romani Romanians to name themselves. See Woodcock "Romania and Europe: Roma, Rroma and *Țigani* as sites for the contestation of ethnonational identities" *Patterns of Prejudice* Issue 5, Vo.41 November 2007.

anxiety of the Romanian identity, such as anxiety concerning the ability and right of Romanians masters to maintain control of slaves, Romani resistance was met with an increased anxiety and an increase in control through a strengthening of the stereotypes of the *Țigan*.

Slave owners, for example, often incorporated slave acts of resistance into the constitutive discourse of slaves as primitive and lazy and thus requiring control and enslavement. Romanian slave owner diaries discursively construct the refusal of slaves to work and running away as characteristics of the stereotypical *Țigan*. In the Secul monastery, the clergy had such problems with their *Țigan* slaves repeatedly failing to go to work that they made them sign statements pledging “to cause no trouble to the saints of the monastery through either words or acts of dissembling.”⁷ The monastery scribes wrote that *Țigan* absenteeism occurred because slaves simply “decided to go somewhere else,” despite the penalties and punishments for this behavior. The question of what kind of evidence of relentless Romani resistance these archives thus contain is a question that demands greater theoretical depth and archival breadth than can be undertaken here. What is noteworthy is that the master’s project of making slaves from human beings he bought and sold as property is one in which he engages with the problem of their inability/refusal to labor through the very matrix of constructed *Țigan* identity he has scaffolded with his own anxiety. The *Țigan* identity is heavily invested with and powered by all the anxieties and energies of maintaining a social hierarchy and economic system where a few rule an impoverished many. The tethering of *Țigan* stereotypes to real Romani bodies was thus an anxious, fraught, and ambivalent exercise which was as boundless as the possibility of ever totally containing and controlling other individuals, especially those forced to live in slavery.

Laughter, anxiety and resistance

The *Țigan* other was also the site through which subaltern Romanian peasant anxieties of class and social status were articulated and subverted. In popular jokes collected by village

schoolteachers in the nineteenth century, for example, Romanian peasants presented *Țigan* protagonists in character sketches reconstructing everyday social hierarchies of clergy and landowners against the peasants. In these projections of the *Țigan* other, the *Țigan* protagonist is endowed with the stereotypical characteristics (naïveté, cunning, laziness) that enable them to resist, rebel and gain the upper hand against the same social groups that oppress the peasant (joke-telling) classes.

Jokes thus trouble the categories of society by playing on the irresolvable tension that stereotypical fixed *Țigan* identities are in fact not fixed, and these jokes are powered by the dynamic desires of other subaltern classes to slip the shackles of their own social interpellation.

One joke, for example, places a *Țigan* and a clergyman inside the home of an innocent absent Romanian peasant:

A *Țigan* and a priest entered the house of a Romanian peasant where they had seen smoke coming from the chimney. The fire was burning but there was no one in the house; looking around they discovered a roasted pig on the spit.

“Oh what a fat piglet!” said the *Țigan*, walking around the fire, “what a fat piglet and there’s no one here to see us!”

”But what kind of thoughts are these, *Țigan*?” asked the priest, who wanted the pig all for himself.

“What thoughts do I have, father? My thought would be to leave the spit for your holiness and to get the piglet for myself.”

“Don’t touch it, *Țigan*, for, I cross my heart, whatever you do to that piglet I am going to do to you!”

“Oh, then if this is your intention, be careful not to break your promise father!” said the *Țigan*.

A second later the *Țigan* stuck his finger under the piglet’s tail and then licked his finger.

“Now your holiness should do to me that which I did to the piglet!”

“Phew!” The priest spat, “damn crow, how he tricked me!”

⁷ Cicanci O. “Aspecte din viața robilor de la Mânăstirea Secul în veacurile XVIIIXVIII” pp.81-90 in Vasile Ionescu (Ed.) *Țan Rromano: studii despre Rromii anul III nr 4-5*, Bucharest, 1999/2000; p.86.

And he left the house and the pig to the *Țigan*.⁸

In another joke, the *Țigan* protagonist is invited into the master's house for dinner because the master is in a happy mood:

The *Țigan*, when he saw he was being treated like a high guest, that he was welcome at his master's table, thought the heavens had come down to him and soon he began to think that he was even better than his master! He began to deliver toasts in honor of the master, and in honor of the 'little masters' and in the end he even began to talk to his master about various things, as if he was talking to his brother. But at a certain point the master got angry:

"Listen, damn crow, pay attention, you've become too talkative and you almost look down on me, who do you think you're talking to? Some mate of yours from when you were guarding the pigs? Do you think we have guarded pigs together?"

"Oh no!" the *Țigan* answered, "No master, bless you; you have been guarding them all by yourself!"⁹

In all these jokes, the *Țigan* character connives, survives, and succeeds through acting stupid. Part of this projected stupidity is the inability of the *Țigan* to tell a sophisticated lie, he interacts with a raw honesty and plays on not only words and actions, but on telling the truth, *laying bare* the structures of arbitrary power that lead to him being called to account for his time, his hunger, and his right to speak back to the master.

⁸ Jokes collected in Muntenia and Moldova, published in the *Calendar pentru basme, balade, cîntece populare, tradițiuni, povești, păcălituri, ghicitori* Bucharest, 1877. Cited in Sabina-Cornelia Stroescu (ed.) *Snoava Populară Românească* Editură Minerva, Bucharest 1975; pp.135-136.

⁹ Cited in Stroescu p.157. From *Gazeta țăranilor* printed in Bucharest, distributed in Mușetești-Argeș 1892-1899.

In directly engaging with this role of being called to answer as *Țigan*, the character illuminates the demands of the other social characters – the role of the landowner to demand subservience and work, and the hypocritical behavior of the priest who masks his own desires and dishonesty. In this stark depiction of social relations, the *Țigan* character throws into question any moral or logical reasons for the social hierarchy.

The *Țigan* character in every joke is in fact an individual interpellated by his co-protagonists as *Țigan*, and the individual responds by "playing" *Țigan*, by inhabiting the stereotypical identity of being stupid, lazy, conniving and uncivilized as a ruse to achieve his own ends, to avoid work or outwit a priest of dubious intention. In these jokes, the individual named *Țigan* ruptures the totalizing knowledge of the other performed in the stereotype, foregrounding the fear that the other, the *Țigan*, is not "really" as stupid/clumsy/enslaved as the landowners and clergy suppose. In the final joke, the *Țigan* vacates the subject position of *Țigan* and chooses to answer to the absurdly inferior category of pig when the landowner asks "have we guarded the pigs together?" In claiming the most radical position of inferiority and answering that the master has been guarding the pigs by himself, the protagonist steps outside the master-slave relationship that is the site of engagement, leaving the master with the distinct feeling that he alone is the only one who believes that he controls the *Țigani* and that they work for his gain. This short anecdote thrills the audience with the scenario of a *Țigan* who simply forgets to keep up the pretence of performing himself as such, thus collapsing the power of the master through vacating the position of his slave, and leaving unspoken the question of what the *Țigani* are really doing if not answering to the master or the pigs.

Romanian peasants labored under the socio-economic oppression of landowners and clergy, and thus in these jokes present themselves as the innocent and hard-working bystanders to conflicts between these groups and the projected *Țigan* other. These jokes projected Romanian peasant fantasies of resistance onto the *Țigan* other, enabling good Romanian peasants to perform and enjoy their displaced critique of their own subject position in social hierarchy as hardworking, honest and *of* the land. The titillation of the humor was that these jokes also played on the unsettling likelihood that Romani individuals interpellated as *Țigani* in everyday life were, like

the joke-tellers and the fictional protagonists, in fact passing as stereotypical *Țigani* in order to subvert their social position as slaves – a cause for anxiety among Romanian peasants for whom slaves remained the one group against which they could articulate themselves as free and honest workers. While we cannot claim to know the conscious choices of Romani slaves to resist their enslavement as *Țigani* through slave owner diaries or peasant jokes, these sources index the widespread awareness of anxiety about Romani resistance to enslavement as *Țigani* in both *boier* and peasant Romanian society. When Roma did resist slavery, slave owners reconfigured and thus contained their actions in stereotypical discourses of the *Țigan* other, specifically as stereotypical *Țigani* – people who could be forced laborers on the land but never people *of* the land. Romanian peasants, oppressed in the same society and stereotyped as naïve and innocent, also used the projected *Țigan* other as slave as the character through which they could embody their own fantasies of resistance and fears about their place in Romanian society. Romani resistance to Romanian persecution could only be fought from within the very matrix in which they existed in the dominant discourse – that of the *Țigan* other – and so this is the location where the historian needs to look for traces of resistance.

Romani resistance to genocide in World War Two

When the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova united in 1859, Romanian politicians consecrated Romania as a humanist European nation through the “un-enslaving” (*dezrobirea*) of *Țigani*, after which Romani Romanians continued to be socially identified and policed as *Țigani*. Romanian statesmen consciously educated Romanian-speaking peasants as to their ethnonational identity by explaining in theatre and art that the right to European national status was evidenced by precisely their ability to extend un-enslavement to *Țigani*. In order to build the modern Romanian state, therefore, *Țigani* remained a vital inferior and non-Romanian other against which peasants were now asked to articulate their own right to be interpellated as democratic European citizens. After the Treaty of Trianon (1920) institutionalized Romania’s annexation of Transylvania, the prime anxieties of Romanian ethnic identity were focused on Hungarians, Jews and Communist threats, but significant energy continued to be directed into

interpellating and marginalizing *Țigani* as a socio-economic group.¹⁰

As Irina Livezeanu and Maria Bucur-Deckard have outlined in detail, the anxieties of the enlarged Romanian state manifest in the ethnonationalist buffering of social institutions and discourse.¹¹ Hungarians were discursively constructed as irredentist threats to Romania’s very existence, and traditional anti-Semitism meshed with new anxieties about the lack of urban Romanian elites and the threat of Bolshevism in the East to make life increasingly difficult for the community of more than 700,000 Jews in Romania.¹² Romani Romanians remained vital to Romanian ethnonational identity in the interwar period as stereotypical *Țigani*. Considered to be an internal (non-externally aligned) group of non-Romanians, *Țigani* were the radical others of ethnic Romanians; they were stereotyped as nomadic (in contrast to Romanian peasants of the land), and as lazy and immoral. In the same period, however, numerous Romani Unions were formed that recognized use of the term Roma as a rejection of the stereotypical identification of Romanian Roma as *Țigani*, and they fought to dispel the damaging stereotypical image of Roma by forming professional unions, arguing for improved social and living conditions, and through encouraging public performances of mass baptisms.¹³ The Romanian authorities primarily

¹⁰ For Romanian and Hungarian police reports concerning complaints of residents in villages and cities across Romania between 1919 and 1944 against *Țigani* as nomadic, dirty, criminal and non-Romanian, see the documents collected in Lucian Nastasa and Andrea Varga (eds) *Minoritati Ethnoculturale Marturii documentare: Țigani din Romania (1919-1944)* Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, Cluj Napoca 2001.

¹¹ See Irina Livezeanu *Cultural politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, nation building & ethnic struggle, 1918-1930* Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1995 and Maria Bucur *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2002.

¹² According to the 1930 census, Jews constituted 4% of the Romanian population with 728 115 individuals. See Livezeanu p.10 citing Institutul Central de Statistică *Anuarul statistic României 1937 și 1938* pp.58-61.

¹³ See Susan Williams “The “Civilized Trap” of Modernity and Romanian Roma, 1918-1934” in this issue.

considered these organizations and their public meetings an inconvenience.¹⁴ While Romanians continued to negatively stereotype Roma and police Romani communities into a peripheral position in society, they were not targeted by Romanian fascist groups as victims of physical violence in the same extreme ways that Jews were in the 1930s. It is important to note, however, that the *Țigan* identity to which Roma remained tethered in discourse was also increasingly located in biology with the popularization of eugenic discourse. The strengthened perception of ethnic characteristics as biologically inalienable played an important role when Romanians decided who to persecute in the Holocaust – as even those Roma who did not display the symptoms of stereotypical *Țigan* identity could be deported as biologically *Țigan*.

Violent pro-Romanian fascism led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the Iron Guard gained strength at both elite and subaltern levels of Romanian society in the 1930s, to be contained and continued under the dictatorship of Ion Antonescu in September 1940. Hitler supported Antonescu, who participated in the invasion of the Soviet Union and led the campaign to take Odessa in June 1941.¹⁵ The deportation of approximately 120,000 Romanian Jews and more than 24,000 Romanian Roma to Transnistria, an annexed zone between the Nistru and Bug rivers in the Ukraine which was under Romanian control between August 1941 and January 1944, was at the order of Antonescu himself, rather than part of Hitler's "final solution." I estimate that more than 30,000 Romani Romanians were deported to Transnistria as "*Țigani*" in World War II.¹⁶ Antonescu's intent to destroy parts of the Romani community as *Țigani*, through their deportation, forced labor, and murder in Transnistria, was implemented by

members of the Romanian government, military, and police force. Approximately 6,000 Romani Romanian deportees survived, but many of the Roma who found themselves persecuted as *Țigani* fought hard and loud against this forced identification, leaving a clear paper trail in the archives. Romani Romanians physically resisted deportation from their hometowns, and escaped from ghettos in Transnistria. They also resisted by writing letters to the Romanian authorities. These actions of resistance engaged with and contested Romanian authority at the site of the *Țigan* other, deconstructing and refuting the stereotypical constructions of *Țigani* as nomadic and dangerous that had been the rhetorical terms applied in the selection of Romani victims for deportation.

Despite the scant nature of studies of the deportations of Roma as *Țigani* to Transnistria, and the absolute lack of reference thus far to the vast documentation of Romani resistance to this persecution, archival sources are rich. My work here draws on files that remain named "*Țigani*-deportations" or simply "*Țigani*" in regional and national Romanian state archives. The archives holding files related to the deportations include the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, the military police, the Romanian Council of Ministers, the Romanian Intelligence Service, and local level municipality and Gendarmerie archives at every regional office.¹⁷ There are also dossiers concerning the Romanian deportations held in what are now Ukrainian and Moldovan archives (in the cities where the Transnistrian ghettos and camps were administered).¹⁸ Historians Viorel

¹⁴ Police were primarily concerned about public rallies and crowd control with these organizations. See documents collected in Nastasa and Varga 2001.

¹⁵ For a study of the relationship between Antonescu and Hitler see Dennis Deletant *Hitler's forgotten ally: Ion Antonescu and his regime, Romania 1940-44* Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2006.

¹⁶ This is my estimate counting the 24,000 names listed as deported in convoys and on trains in 1942, and the thousands of recorded re-deportations and staggered deportations that continued to occur until late 1944.

¹⁷ It is important to note that in Romania, as in other European countries, Romani communities interpellated as *Țigani*, *Zigeuner*, *Cigányok*, and other stereotypical identities, were the priority of criminal police and military police units, primarily organized at the local level and in co-ordination with the local government administrations who would use local criminal police forces to deal with any civil complaints or requests of Romani communities.

¹⁸ Many of the holdings of the Bucharest and Odessa central archives of these organizations are also held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Local archives in cities around Romania hold different documents and are rich and easily accessible collections. Sources on the pogroms committed against Roma by retreating Hungarian Romanian police, citizens and administrators in

Achim and Radu Ioanid have cited some of these archival sources. There can no longer be any justification for historians to claim that they do not have sources for the genocide of Roma in Romania between 1942 and 1944, nor for historians to fail to verify the claims that the aforementioned scholars have made in their published interpretations of the events.

Antonescu's order to deport all "nomadic" and all "non-nomadic dangerous *Țigani*" caused confusion among military police throughout the country. "In line with the general order to remove all parasitical and disorderly elements," it read, "Marshall Ion Antonescu orders – through this act – that all groups of nomadic *Țigani* from the whole country be sent to Transnistria."¹⁹ Gendarmes identified groups of Caldarari, Fierari and other Romani families who were beginning their summer work season of travel as *Țigani* and deported them to Transnistria in convoys traveling on foot.²⁰ The identification of Roma who traveled for work as a nomadic group, perceived as a burden to their host community, was an established stereotype.²¹ These individuals often owned property and animals in villages where their families had lived for generations, and traveled on established routes between markets and fairs with their trades, or working as agricultural laborers, in the summer. Their property was nationalized at the time of deportation in many cases, and simply taken over or stolen by Romanian inhabitants in other cases.²²

Transylvania are also available in local Transylvanian archives and in the central archives of the Romanian Intelligence Service of 1945 and 1946.

¹⁹ Regional Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie at the Central National Historic Archives (ANIC) Dosar 258, f.4. 1942, end of May, Order from the President of the Council of Ministers, the Military Cabinet, to the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie.

²⁰ The Romanian Gendarmerie were the military police, and had stations at all levels throughout Romania and Transnistria.

²¹ For examples from just one archive see the letters to the Mayor of Cluj Napoca held in the Archive of the Mayor of the Municipality in Cluj, Dosar 20187/1935, f.1-2.

²² Deletant wrongly states that the property of Roma was not Romanianized as it was with Jews (2006 p.187). The order from The National Center for Romanianization to the "General

On June 1, 1942, 11,441 Romani Romanians identified as "nomadic *Țigani*" were assembled across Romania and marched on foot under armed guard to Transnistria.²³

Local gendarmes conducted the census of non-nomadic *Țigani* with the first census of "nomadic *Țigani*" in May 1942. The wording of the decree specifically ordered a census of

sedentary nomads (especially those who, being non-nomadic, are convicts, recidivists, or have no means of existence or precise occupation from which to live honestly through work, and thus constitute a burden and a danger to public order).²⁴

Most gendarmerie branches simply replied, "we don't have any *Țigani* like this" to the Council of Ministers. Indeed, while nomadic *Țigani* had been identified from among the ethnic Roma who were traveling and working seasonally, the concept of non-nomadic *Țigani* did not equate with a pre-existing group that could be easily defined and deported. The Council of Ministers ordered the General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie to resolve the lackluster performances of its regional offices, and requested (on July 25, 1942) another census of "all sedentary *Țigani* who have had prior convictions, are recidivists, or live without a means of existence."²⁵ Gendarmerie that still reported they had no such *Țigani* in their

Administrators of the Goods Entered in the State Patrimony" (commanding local authorities to organize and Romanianize the immobile goods of non-nomadic *Țigan* deportees) is even reprinted in Viorel Achim (Ed.) *Documente Privind Deportarea Țiganilor in Transnistria* Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 2004 p.158-160. In my personal experience, the vast majority of cases can be verified by checking local property registries and municipality files named "Țigani" in 1942 and 1943. Many of the soldiers who returned from the front to find their families deported as *Țigani* also found local Romanians now owned their property.²³ The figure is from the government count of nomadic *Țigani* who entered Transnistria as a result of these marches. General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, ANIC (henceforth IGJ), Dosar 126/1942, f.204-205, 203.

²⁴ 17 May, 1942 Regional Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie ANIC, Dosar 258, f.6-6v.

²⁵ ANIC, Direcția Generală a Poliției (henceforth DGP), Dosar 188/1942, f.48-48v.

jurisdiction received telephone orders again on August 4 of the same year. Finally, on August 15, 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie telephoned every regional branch with the order to return the censuses of “convicted, *dangerous*, etc. *Țigani*” (emphasis added) by the following day.²⁶

In the archives of the local gendarmerie, there is evidence that this series of requests for longer lists of non-nomadic *Țigani* prompted intense activity and confusion on the ground. It was not simply a matter of deporting everyone of Romani ethnicity, certain occupations, or color of skin, though all of these things could signify *Țigan*. There were dark-skinned Romani Romanians who were, by their behavior, in no way able to be socially considered *Țigani*. Likewise, there were non-Romani Romanians who were disparagingly referred to as “*Țigani*” because of their renowned laziness, dirtiness, and what were considered un-Romanian lifestyles; these Romanians could not be deported as *Țigani* because they were racially incapable of *being Țigani*. Individual groups of gendarmes discussed among themselves how to find the people to fit the category of deportation.

In the first place, gendarmes usually trawled prison release lists for anyone they knew as *Țigan* who had been convicted of a crime. Although the ethnicity of convicts was not usually recorded, gendarmes worked in their own local communities and knew which families were considered *Țigani*. In the lists they compiled of the sedentary/non-nomadic *Țigani*, the column beside the names of all the family members to be deported was entitled “observations” or “motive for deportation.” The vast majority of those with previous convictions before the law had been in prison for just a few months, or had been fined for petty theft. One man from Cernauți was listed to be deported because he had been “active in a communist organization.”²⁷

In the city of Buzau, gendarmes held a morning meeting to discuss how they would identify *Țigani* for deportation, and then set off to explore the “*Țigan* area” around the local market place. They decided to list all *Țigani* who had untidy courtyards for deportation.²⁸ In Botosani, the local gendarmes added 155 people “to be

deported because they don’t have certain means of existence ... they go from *Țigan* to *Țigan* to work, then spend all they earn on food and drink.”²⁹ Likewise in the city of Roman, the column entitled “motives for deportation” included descriptions such as “he sits in the pub all day.”³⁰ In Rimnicu Sărat, the chief of the gendarmes, Ilie Ionescu, had a particular obsession with deporting “*Țigan*” women who lived with men they were not legally married to – referred to as “concubinage.” In response to the pleas of a father whose daughter he had deported, Ionescu wrote that she could not return to Romania because “she had lived as a concubine with different men, floating between the most dubious of them.”³¹ Major I. Peschir, the Commander of Timiș-Torontal Gendarmerie in Timișoara, argued for “cleansing the Romanian race of *Țigani*,” in line with nationalist intellectual and media discourses of racial hygiene prevalent at the time.³²

In one of the Bucharest gendarmerie, the census of non-nomadic *Țigani* was entitled “stable *Țigani* who have been convicted of crimes, are recidivist, etc.,” but the list was primarily constituted by Romani individuals who were listed as war invalids, children, concubines, workers, Lautari (musicians), flower sellers, vagabonds, and even a small shop owner.³³ The list of another Bucharest gendarmerie uses “dubious occupation” as a catch-all category in the column entitled “motive of deportation.”³⁴ Many Bucharest gendarmes simply left the “observation/motive for deportation” column blank, or wrote “no occupation.” Yet in these very documents from Bucharest, the column listing property is often filled with at least a cow or sheep, and regularly with houses. It is clear from that these groups had

²⁹ USHMM, IGJ Dosar/Reel 23 p.353 Legiunea Botoșani, Inspectoratul Jandarmerie Iași.

³⁰ USHMM, IGJ Dosar/Reel 23 p.389.

³¹ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1148/9.

³² While eugenic arguments had become popular amongst certain academics in the interwar period (see Bucur 2000), it was rare for Gendarmes to articulate ethnic cleansing in the terms that Major Peschir did. Inspectorate Jandarm Timis- Torontal, Dosar 27 1942 Doc.1.

³³ USHMM IGJ Reel 23, Dosar 290/1942

“Prefectura Poliției Capitalei” Doc. 471-474.

³⁴ USHMM IGJ Reel 23, Dosar 290/1942 Doc. 490. Legiune Jandarmerie Vlasca, Inspectoratul Jand.Bucuresti.

²⁶ ANIC, DGP, Dosar 188/1942, f.211.

²⁷ USHMM, IGJ Reel 23 (collected tables of *Țigani* censuses) Doc. 408.

²⁸ Prefectura Judetului Buzau, Dosar Nr. 26/1942 “Privitor pe Țigani nomazi” file 39. 6 May, 1942.

not been convicted of any crimes, and they lived a sedentary lifestyle in houses with a few animals in the suburbs of Bucharest, and therefore they could not technically fit the category “of dubious occupation.” This is until we consider, of course, that simply being interpellated as *Țigan* made the semblance of a respectable Romanian lifestyle an unacceptable parody of racial and social organization, powered by the anxiety of Romanian ethnonational identity that the *Țigani* other be recognizable as such. The ad hoc application of the concept of non-nomadic *Țigani* shows that the category did not simply refer to a recognizable and pre-identified group. The terms on which such a category was to be applied, on the contrary, were developed in regional variations when local gendarmes responded to pressure from above; they invoked and applied historically developed and contextualized stereotypes of what it meant to be *Țigan*.³⁵ The historical meaning of stereotypes locating nomadism in the *Țigan* body is of course symptomatic of anxiety to control the movement of Romani slaves, and had been continually used in discursive construction of *Țigani* since the end of slavery.

Once in Transnistria, Romanians deported as *Țigani* were treated differently to Romanians deported as Jews.³⁶ Local police reported that there was no organized labor, and inadequate provision of food, clothing, and shelter for *Țigani*. Romani deportees could sometimes visit local villages and search for provisions. The lack of food, labor and shelter for *Țigani* (in comparison with Jewish Romanian deportees) made such trips all the more vital to survival. In this way, the stereotypical *Țigan* other as nomadic, uncontrollable, and reluctant to work honestly was re-created by the conditions in Transnistria. Indeed, the Gendarmerie of Balta reported in 1943 that “*Țigani* ... can’t be accommodated, they don’t understand that they need to work for food. They run from the collective (where they have been put)

³⁵ While Achim takes the slow response of police as a sign of anti-racism on their parts, I think it is important to study how they decided who to deport and how; very many more Romanians implemented Antonescu’s decree for genocide – and enthusiastically – than the handful who complained, a tiny minority who risked nothing to resist, even according to the sources Achim highlights.

³⁶ See Dennis Deletant “Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2004, pp. 1-26

preferring to beg and travel around the villages, and in some places they are stealing. They are very difficult to supervise.”³⁷ As the war progressed, Roma who had survived the winter of 1942-3 despite starvation, lack of clothing and housing, and typhus epidemics, were described by the same Gendarmerie at Balta as “aggressive bands of *Țigani*,”³⁸ despite other photographic and oral history evidence that people in these communities were weak, dying, desperate and isolated.³⁹ As one of the Romani Romanian deportees, Luca Moldovan, wrote to the Governor of Odessa in December 1942, “I have a home and land in my town of origin, I was not homeless and I didn’t need to be sent to this region, where I am without a house to stay in while I am stuck here.”⁴⁰ As the Romanian authorities had made nomadic *Țigani* of Romani seasonal workers by forcing them to walk to their deaths in Transnistria, so too did the decision not to provide Roma with food, shelter, and work in Transnistria make them homeless, unemployed and impoverished, fulfilling the stereotypical signifiers of the *Țigan* in the process of their (thus justified) murders.

There is significant evidence that Romani Romanian deportees actively engaged with

³⁷ Gendarmerie Balta Bulletin Informative RG 25.002 Romanian National Archives PCM file 78/43 Point 10 “*Țigani*.”

³⁴ Balta, August 1943 Point 12.

³⁹ All Transnistrian Gendarmerie included reports on the living conditions and labor impact of the deportees in their areas of jurisdiction. The reports can be found in chronological order in both the central Bucharest archives and in the local Transnistrian Gendarmerie archives. For oral histories see Michelle Kelso’s film *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies during WWII* (2005), Peter Weber “Eyewitness testimonies as source of a historical analysis of the deportations to Transnistria (1941- 1943)” *Étude Balkaniques*, No. 4 2004, and Ștefan Ionescu “The Boom of testimonies after communism – the voices of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Romania 1989-2005” *Studia Hebraica* Vol. 5 2005. There are also an increasing number of transcribed oral histories of Roma survivors available in the USHMM, and at local Holocaust studies and Romani history NGOs in Romania.

⁴⁰ 7 December 1942, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 754.

stereotypes of being primitive nomadic *Țigani* to escape. Between August 6 and 27 of 1942, for example, before the first winter, 209 “*Țigani*” were caught in the Commune of Razdelnaia, Transnistria.⁴¹ The police report states that these *Țigani* all had forged travel documents. Reports of large-scale organized physical escapes, with and without forged documents, continued throughout the war period, and the archived reports of police officers interrogated for not noticing these movements often state that Romani escapees “masqueraded” as vagabonds.⁴² A *Țigan*, according to the stereotype, departs, wanders, loiters, and even “vagabonds” like a vagabond, but remains *Țigan*, an inalienable identity located in the body. A vagabond, on the other hand, was stereotypically ethnic Romanian, and thus not *Țigan*, nor fixed to the state of being a vagabond. The vagabond had much greater social mobility than the *Țigan*, evident in the ways Romanian police allowed people they identified as vagabonds to travel without tickets and permits in wartime, as opposed to the restrictions they applied to *Țigani*. Romani Romanians thus took advantage of the discursive slippage between *Țigani* and vagabonds and performed themselves as ethnic Romanian vagabonds in order to escape, highlighting a sophisticated intimacy with strategies for living through interpellation as *Țigani*.

Roma write back

The letters that Romani Romanian deportees and their families wrote to the Romanian authorities requesting the return of their families demonstrate how Roma strategically engaged with the stereotypes constitutive of the *Țigan* other through which they were interpellated and deported in 1942. Even illiterate Romani petitioners identified and employed scribes to write their letters to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to the General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie, to local police stations, and directly to Antonescu himself. This attests to the understanding Romani Romanians had of how

bureaucracy worked; often petitioners lodged letters at various ministries in succession, creating a constant stream of investigations of an individual or family case, and enabling the petitioner to avoid arrest himself. Ministries forwarded petitions to all relevant police stations to verify claims of property ownership and good standing, and police were required to justify their decisions. The narratives in the letters can be ascertained as dictated by the authors in most cases, as all the letters differ greatly in terms of discourses used, even among letters written in the one hand for multiple people. The discourses employed in the letters reflect the different classes, regional locations and trades of the Romani petitioners, but more than these parts, the letters show how different Romani people chose to engage with and refute their interpellation as *Țigani*.

As an overview statement, Romani petitioners all understood that they were being interpellated and persecuted as *Țigani*, though which exact aspect of the negative stereotypical identity was as unclear to deportees as to the police who interpreted the orders for deportations of nomadic/sedentary or dangerous *Țigani*.⁴³ Only one out of 68 petitioners argued directly that he was not *Țigan*. The vast majority strategically avoided refuting the very existence of the stereotypical *Țigan* identity, instead focusing on contesting and disproving stereotypical signifiers of *Țigan* identity, such as being non-Romanian in ethnicity and citizenship, being irreligious, nomadic, lazy, or criminal in behavior. In this way, petitioners engaged with the very discursive construction within which they were being persecuted, accepting interpellation as *Țigani* in order to attempt to untangle and contest the application of various links within the chain of stereotypes constitutive of the *Țigan* other. This discursive agility was a skill developed through everyday necessity for Romani Romanians living within Romanian society policed as its marginal *Țigani* other, as part of heterogeneous Romani community practices and identities.

Petitioners did not often extrapolate what they considered the reason for their or their families’ deportation, and some did not even mention the fact that they were deported as *Țigani*.

⁴¹ 13 September 1943 Romanian National Archives, Președenția Consiliului de Miniștri Cabinet, Dosar 443/1942 Doc.209.

⁴² For references to Romani escapes and ‘vagabonding’ see the Informative Bulletins produced by local Gendarmerie in Transnistria such as in Dosar 78/1943 of the Romanian National Archives Președenția Consiliului de Miniștri Cabinet.

⁴³ Note that this is an overview of the letters, representative of the letters I have found. The discourses employed by individuals vary over time and as government decrees regarding deportations change, or awareness of them spreads.

A common strategy was to state that one's family was deported because they were of *Țigan* origin, ethnic origin, or "people" (*neam*), and to follow this statement with a declaration of commitment to the Romanian nation, evidenced by a range of factors contradicting stereotypical *Țigan* behavior. One soldier, Dumitru Neagu, argued that he was "*Țigan* of truly Romanian blood,"⁴⁴ and described his deported nephew as "of *Țigan* origin, Romanian nationality, who knows the trade of the commerce of bird selling."⁴⁵ Ioan Stoica, petitioning to bring his parents "back to their natal village where they work and where they gave birth to and raised me" from Transnistria where they had been deported "because they were of the *Țigan* people," signed himself off as a "Romanianized *Țigan* of the Romanian people, not of the nomadic peoples."⁴⁶ Indeed, letter writers in December 1942 knew that the first group to be deported had been those declared "nomadic," and this was a primary distinction repeated in the petitions. Constantin Mota argued for the repatriation of his wife and three small children after the first wave of deportations by stating that she was "not of the nomadic nation," but that she owned property.⁴⁷

The letters demonstrate the inability of Romani Romanians to access information about top level bureaucratic decisions and to know precisely which stereotypes to refute, and thus simultaneously demonstrate the breadth and nature of stereotypes constitutive of the *Țigan* other that petitioners chose to address. An acting Gendarme whose extended family was deported "as *Țigani*," for example, wrote the following:

My father fought in the World War 1916-1918, he has property in Crasnica, he had no reason to steal or to live by theft, he lived only by agricultural work. After discussions with the local authorities I think the deportation was an error. Please send him home, we are not nomads and don't live through petty theft, I am a soldier active in the military for my fatherland.

⁴⁴ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 725.

⁴⁵ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1166.

⁴⁶ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 985.

⁴⁷ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 989.

Visan Dumitru.⁴⁸

These references to having fought for Romania in World War I, owning property, not stealing, and working in agriculture directly contest the stereotypes of the *Țigan* as unwilling to sacrifice for the Romanian nation, as homeless, nomadic and criminal, and as not being hard workers in the same way as Romanian peasants who work the land. Many of the Romani families that traveled for work and who were deported as nomadic *Țigani* also employed these discourses in order to refute their persecution on the grounds of being ethnic *Țigani*. For example, the earliest petitions were written in December 1942 by the heads of 14 families deported as nomadic *Țigani* from Constanța. These letters are rare in that they share the same pattern and the same unique simplicity in self-identification as *Țigani* combined with the stereotypes they refute (that they lack religion, national allegiance, property and diligence). The following is an example dictated by Ion Stefan Florea:

Dear Governor

Together with the ten members of my family I was evacuated from Tandarei, Ialomita county, because we are *Țigani*.

Today I ask permission in Odessa to go back to my country.

Sir Governor, I fought in the last war, I own property and land in Ialomita, I am a worker of the land and I am still eligible to fight for this war, so I ask your permission to return to the village of my birth.

Our brothers and children have fought for the Holy Cross and for Justice, and in the name of the Saints and the cross and of humanity we ask your justice in giving authorization to me and my 10 family members to cross the river Nistru.

Wishing you a long life,
Ion Stefan Florea

⁴⁸ USHMM, IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1196.

Ion D. Paun also petitioned for the return of his family deported as nomadic *Țigani* by stressing the nature of the agricultural work they did, their long history living in the region, and his status as a war veteran:

Ion D. Paun 13 February, 1943.

Dear Minister,

On the 15th of September 1942, my family were coming home from agricultural work in Tandarei, and were stopped on the road by gendarmes and included in the convoy of nomadic *Țigani*, and deported to Cavaliopca, Oceaov county, Transnistria.

This was a mistake, because my family are not nomads, but have lived in Ialomita for generations, working as useful and established tradesmen. On the other hand, I cannot work anymore due to injuries from the war, thus please repatriate them, as a passionate people caught up in a momentary mistake, without any cases against them, and known as having only acted for good in society.

Thanking you, and please receive my respect and trust for this consideration.

Ion D. Paun⁴⁹

Dumitru Marin wrote many letters from Bucharest throughout the war petitioning for the return of his extended family. His letters are eloquent and mobilize a range of discourses of Romanian citizenship and nationalism. He begins the letters with lists of the family members he wants returned, the work they do and the property they own in Bucharest, before concluding with a direct contestation of the terms of interpellation and persecution of “*Țigani*”:

My relatives are serious people, honest, workers and home owners, not one has any criminal record against them ... In this family there were people in whose veins flowed the coagulated blood of the holy greater Romania.

Even though I am of *Țigan* origin, I have lived my whole life a Romanian life, and we identified with the obligations and aspirations of the Romanian people (*neam*). No blame, no reproach, against any one of these banished from their property and their beloved country can justify their deportation to a foreign land. I ask you respectfully with all my soul to remember that in the Great War there were *Țigan* soldiers of *Țigan* origin and you have seen with how much generosity they gave their blood for our country – because they do not have any other.⁵⁰

His reference to “Greater Romania” reflects the anxious interwar identity of united Romania, and he is a unique letter writer in making a clear distinction between “*Țigan*” as an “origin” and as a way of life. Dumitru Marin never clarifies what exactly it means to be “of *Țigan* origin” if one’s blood, citizenship and national allegiance is Romanian, but this is exactly the point that he is making; to be of “*Țigani* origin” is to be recognized as the historically articulated *Țigan* other in Romania, a group which cannot exist outside of this society. The *Țigan*, that is, does not exist in any other country in the same historically developed and bound context as in Romania.

Marin’s presentation of the participation of “*Țigani*” soldiers in World War I as evidence that *Țigani* were part of the Romanian nation and people drew on broader social and state discourses of nation, sacrifice, and masculinity that were emphasized to mobilize troops for World War II. As troops came home from the Eastern front in 1943 and 1944, those Romani Romanians amongst them who found their families had been deported while they were at the front wrote angry and bewildered letters to the authorities. These soldiers often articulated the injustice of risking their lives for the fatherland, while their families had been deported from their homes. Mihai Szolosi came home wounded in 1943 and found his mother and four brothers had been sent to Transnistria. His letter states that his mother “owned two houses, never went from village to village begging, and

⁴⁹ USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 905.

⁵⁰ Dumitru Marin, 29 December 1942, USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 899.

had never occasioned the intervention of the local authorities in the family.” He requested permission to bring his family back home in order for him to “return to the front knowing my family remain in the land of our forefathers.”⁵¹ Ravica Rafilea wrote that she and her family had been deported because they were “of ethnic origin *Țigan*,” but that this deportation was “unjust and illegal” as her son-in-law was “a soldier fighting at the front for the rights of the people and the country.”⁵² Another soldier, Ludi Calderar, framed his experience in ideological solidarity with the Romanian nation in stating that he “fought 17 months against bolshevism at the front” and then arrived home to find his parents deported to Transnistria.⁵³

The laws to deport *Țigani* also specified that those without legal marriages were to be treated as if married, highlighting that it was common knowledge that families of Romani Romanians were often structured outside of the Romanian legal system. In the process of deportation, however, police often identified Romani women as *Țigani* because they lacked formal marriage certificates, and were thus named “concubines” and considered immoral and promiscuous. Romani women named *Țigan* were often deported with their children as unmarried and promiscuous because their partners were in the army, at work, or, tragically, because they were out shopping or seeking medical attention in the same place and time as police were out seeking deportees. One man’s petition for the return of his wife and children included a promise to be legally married upon her return. Likewise, Vasile and Teca Covaci from Acmaru in Alba County refuted their persecution as stereotypical *Țigani* by specifying that their four deported children were legitimate and well-loved.

We are Roma, and thus legally married and these are all our legitimate children. We are not nomadic Roma, we are Fierari, with property and a household and we move for work, to earn a living. At the time they were taken we were at work and the children were mistakenly taken with the other Roma. We hope that you understand our pain as

parents remaining without our children, and give permission for them to return.⁵⁴

The petitioners here refer to themselves as Roma, and stress that their familial structure is the same as Romanians (marriage, legitimacy). They also stake a claim for the validity of their lifestyle as property owners who travel for work, and replace the term “nomadic *Țigani*” with “nomadic Roma.” This discursive attempt to replace the government’s category with their self-identification as Roma and Fierari, a respectable tradition within the Romani community, is an attempt to superimpose the ordered social hierarchy internal to Romani communities onto the Romanian stereotypical conflation of all Romani groups as *Țigani*. But this discursive shift also tethers Romani cultural signifiers to the *Țigan* other.

After much paper work and investigation between various regions, the gendarmerie reported that this entire family had been deported to Transnistria, and the father (Vasile Covaci) had escaped, returned to his hometown to make the petition, and continued to live on the run. A search warrant was released for his arrest and he was re-deported to Transnistria in April 1943. Vasile Covaci was thus acutely aware of different ways of engaging with and avoiding the Romanian authorities. The petitioner chose to stress the discourses of familial legitimacy in the letter, yet knew that he would be treated as a *Țigan* regardless, and hence he lived on the run. The strategies he used to avoid detention while traveling between central and regional ministries and police stations, where he represented his own case, shed light on how Romani petitioners used stereotypes of *Țigani* and vagabonds in order to avoid detection as Transnistrian escapees.

Romanian police responses to the attempts of petitioners to refute negative stereotypes, however, highlight the power of the *Țigan* other as a totalizing and fixed identity that recaptures facts and contestations of stereotypes, containing and reconfiguring them in stereotypical discourse to serve the Romanian ethnonational self-identity. Gendarmes constantly use the words “*the Țigan*” before the names of petitioners, embedding the stereotypical interpellation in their term of address even as they went through the motions of considering the evidence before them.

⁵¹ USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1013.

⁵² USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1030.

⁵³ USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1082.

⁵⁴ 27 January, 1943 USHMM IGJ Dosar 86/1942-43 (59/1942) Doc. 1096.

The police replies demonstrate the way that the *Țigan* other was located in Romani bodies through a vast range of factors, *Țigani* remained *Țigan* regardless of what property they owned or occupation they worked precisely because only ethnic Romanians can claim to know the inalienable characteristics of *Țigan* identity. Responses to letters such as we have read also included comments that the petitioner was reputed to be friendly with thieves, or spent all their time in the pub, or that their trade was not required in the village – there were other people providing this skill. In these replies the gendarmes showcase the range of facets and thus the function of the *Țigan* other – projected from within the anxieties of everyday discourses of Romanian ethnonational identity, the *Țigan* identity can be tethered to bodies through a gamut of contradictory signifiers, in this case mobilized by Romanian authorities who openly considered the very fact that they had to respond to these petitions an insult to their important business. This was a project to buttress ethnic Romanian masculine authority.

In the jokes that peasants told about *Țigani* protagonists, the individuals depicted ‘played’ *Țigan* in order to escape and resist their social place through strategic use of the same stereotypes that were used to police Roma into the peripheral social position of *Țigani*. In the responses of Romanian gendarmes to the requests for repatriation, the *Țigan* remains *Țigan*, despite the attempts of petitioners to refute specific negative stereotypes, as only the Romanian can ‘know’ the *Țigan* other. The construction of knowledge of the *Țigan* as a stable identity is precarious because no Romani individual can be fixed across time in a single stereotypical identity, and in this way the anxiety that powers the construction of the *Țigan* as other is the same anxiety that powers knowledge of their escape and thus the refusal of Romanians to engage with any contestations of identity in the matrix of the *Țigan* as knowledge.

Finally, further insights into how Romani Romanians deported to Transnistria articulated their persecution as racial hatred manifest in the name *Țigan* can be found in letters written by the General Union of Roma to regional police stations in 1947 and 1948. Having re-formed after the war, the General Union of Roma supported the petitions of Romani Romanian survivors of Transnistria who wanted permission to travel home (they were immediately put under state arrest and into forced labor). The Union had an office in Bucharest, and

they responded to the continuing discursive interpellation of Roma as “*Țigani* – elements dangerous to public order”⁵⁵ in language that refused to engage with the traditional stereotypical discursive construction of *Țigani*. For example, one letter stated that “in reference to the stabilization of nomadic Roma and other categories of Roma who were deported to Transnistria due to racial hatred, such as the Calderari and Spoitori, we ask you to approve their permanent settlement in Rimnicu Sarat.”⁵⁶ The Union signed their documents with “long live the popular Romanian republic” and thus demonstrate an acute awareness of politically expedient political affiliations, but this language of calling racial hatred against Roma by its name does not come from Romanian socialist party discourse. In fact, the Union was disbanded in 1948 with the socialist decree that “co-inhabiting national minorities,” did not include Roma as an ethnic group.

This window into a post-genocidal Romani articulation of what had happened in Transnistria as “racial hatred” highlights that a strong network of Romani Romanians consciously identified the word *Țigan* as an identity projected from within Romanian ethnonationalist discourse that was in turn tethered to Romani bodies in order to identify and persecute the embodied others of Romanian society. The Romani Romanians at the General Union of Roma after the war actively rejected the identification of Roma as stereotypical *Țigani* even as they answered to their discursive interpellation as such in order to consciously demand a non-racist society.

Reading Romani resistance

The history of Romani Romanian strategic resistance through engagement with the stereotypes of the *Țigan* is as long as the history of Romanian state and social persecution of Romani peoples. For historians of Romani resistance, the word *Țigan* also carries a long history of Gadge refusal to recognize that Romani individuals and communities have a right to choose their own names, embracing the discursive agility of self-

⁵⁵ In the words of just one policeman from Rimnicu Sarat, Plot. Major Stafn C. Burcea, July 25 1947. Buzau. Dosar Legiunea de Jandarmu Rm Sarat Dosar 7/1942-1948 “Țigani Nomazi” Doc. 640.

⁵⁶ Buzau Archives Dosar “Țigani” Doc. 726, 25 September 1948.

identity. Regarding the past, scholars need to be aware of how the matrix of the *Țigan* as projected other has been developed and invoked throughout history, and is also the field of engagement and resistance for Romani Romanians. Translating *Țigan* as “Gypsy” or “Roma” elides, conflates, and erases entire systems of complex meaning, and it is in these choices of self-appellation in historical sources that Romani resistance can be read.

This article explores Romani resistance to persecution through strategic engagement with the field of their oppression, the matrix of the *Țigan* other. The *Țigan* in Romania is a historically developed stereotypical matrix that has been used to contain and police Romani Romanians as internal others to Romanian ethnonational identity in different ways. The *Țigan* other has served different purposes in different periods of Romanian social and political history, but the word itself as name invokes the gamut of violent meanings that have been used to interpellate Romani Romanians as slaves, and as victims of genocide, in recent history.

The purpose of writing this history of resistance is to explore how Romani Romanians identified the stereotypes of the *Țigani* other and contested them point by point in discourse that resonated with that used by Romanian authorities in various locations, as well as to understand how Romanian discourses of the *Țigan* other were wielded by Romanian authorities in order to contain the agency of Romani individuals. Romani petitioners knew not only the discourse that was used to persecute them, but could access and engage with the hierarchical system that produced it. These letters were a strategic part of wider survival strategies that were enacted at the level of the *Țigan* other as the site of persecution.

I hope that this article also raises questions about the ways in which European and non-European scholars perpetuate the function of the *Țigan/Roma/Gypsy* other through our willingness to accept and explain away silence, or scholarship that does not rigorously engage with the available historical sources. I was shocked to find such a wealth of archival sources about Roma in the Holocaust, including sources written by the victims, and a study of why these sources are still not consulted (such as Deletant 2006, see footnote 21) or how they are interpreted through contemporary racist overtones without general outrage, is required. Roma were deported to ghettos and forced to labor, starve and struggle to survive alongside Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

As Jews were persecuted under the pejorative stereotypical name *Jidani* (translated by Randolph L. Braham as “kikes”), Roma were persecuted as *Țigani*. Scholarly exploration of how groups of victims were identified, racialized and murdered in the Holocaust requires that we understand the ways these parallel persecutions functioned for the perpetrators, and functioned uniquely according to the specific historical meaning of these names.

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