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### ***TRIBAL IDEOLOGY – THE TRUTH BEHIND THE GYPSIES’ ANCESTRAL LAWS***

**Keywords:** *gypsy; tribe; laws; truth; stereotypes; self-image; hetero-image.*

**Abstract:** *The paper sets out to analyse the gypsy’s representation in literature as a tribal member. For a gypsy, the tribe functions as a social nexus, symbolizing the unity of a race of wanderers who have always roamed the world and lived on the fringes of society. The tribe represents the social family, encompassing small units of separate families linked together by a common past and a shared culture and traditions. Furthermore, the tribal identity reveals the truth of lineage and of racial belonging, linking an individual to a group with whom s/he shares common physical and psychological traits, and also a common set of values. I am discussing here the gypsy image and the image of the enslaved tribe as it is reflected in the Romanian epos Țiganiada (1875) by Ioan Budai-Deleanu and in the Victorian dramatic poem The Spanish Gypsy (1868) by George Eliot. In both works, the gypsy’s tribal identity appears as a cultural construct and as a racial sign, reflecting the non-gypsy’s mentality and also the ideological truth behind the ethnic identity. Due to a long history of oppression and constant subjection to prejudices and also because of ancestral laws and old truths embedded in the gypsy’s traditional heritage, this ethnic group continues to be both a source of fascination (the Romantic perspective) and of distrust and suspicion (the Racialist perspective). And that is why the identity of the gypsy has often been misrepresented, showing the non-gypsy’s negative hetero-image and consequently a stereotypical truth about the gypsy race.*

The main argument of this paper is that the Roma people are not only a peripheral ethnic group, but also a social division in the Victorian or Wallachian/Moldavian societies, consisting of members linked by a common ethos and by a spiritual bond of friendship and brotherhood. And even though writers seem to be more or less focused on the racial sign, casting light upon stereotyped characters, in the background there is also the representation of the gypsy’s social organization, i.e. the tribe. Within a tribe, tradition is very important, bestowing a sense of individuality and authenticity upon the group members who as a whole live according to ancestral customs, passed down from generation to generation. Within this close network, the ‘self’ is always in connection with the ‘other’. Lyotard discusses in a similar way the meaning of the ‘self’ concept in relation with the others. People live together, form alliances and families, and each stands at “nodal points of specific communication circuits” (Lyotard 15). In other words, the identity of a tribal representative could be reduced to the following depositions: ‘I am like

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them, i.e. I am similar to them as we share the same ethnicity and race' and 'I think like them, i.e. I share the same culture, ideology, and way of viewing life.' However, it may happen that an individual is brought into the tribe and initiated into its customs and traditions by links of marriage or friendly affiliation. In this case, the tribal identity does not coincide with ethnic/racial belonging. Here we can only talk of a common set of values, embraced by the one who wants to come and live among the tribesmen.

To live among a tribe means to accept the rules imposed by a leader or a patriarch. He is the one who watches over the people in the tribe, presiding over them and imposing social prerogatives. This is a sort of statal organization since the tribe can be thought of in terms of a micro state, having an ideology of its own and also political functions. Politics refers to governance and the patriarch of the tribe governs his people according to ancestral laws, which can be different from the social laws of the host nation where the tribe has momentarily or permanently settled. Moreover, there is this tendency of attributing a patriarchal status to society, whereas nature is viewed as matrilineal (cf. Campbell 85). My aim is to analyse the tribal ideology from a literary point of view, having as reference the 19<sup>th</sup> century works which depict the tribal gipsy universe. Of course, in literature the Romantic influence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary canon may represent the gipsy camp in an idyllic way, but I will also focus on real accounts about the life in a gipsy camp, using either historical documents or actual confessions of gypsies who lived during that period.

I have chosen the gipsy tribes because in Romania and in the United Kingdom they have been and still are a problem that the authorities have been facing for a long time, handling this social inconvenience either with negligence or from a wrong angle by racializing and mistreating an ethnic group, which is different from the locals. The gypsies are thought to have arrived in Europe somewhere around the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Donald Kenrick in his *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies* comes up with the chronology of the gypsies' historically attested wanderings throughout Europe. Thus, in Romania, the first recorded transaction of gipsy slaves dates from 1385. In 1425, gypsies are reported in Zaragoza, Spain, and in 1514 this ethnic group is first mentioned in England (Kenrick XX-XXI). Ronald Lee estimates too the arrival of the Roma in the British Isles in 1500 and he claims that there have been some Byzantine references about the "athinggánoi" or "atsingáni" – terms which he translates as coming from Greek where "a" means "not" and "thingano" (I touch), i.e. "touch me not for I am pure"(Lee in Glajar 20). This Byzantine reference appears too in the works of other gypsiologists. In her study "Consecințele Istoriei Asupra Imaginii de Sine", Delia Grigore traces the etymology of the word "țigan" up to the time of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>1</sup> Around the year of 1050, the emperor Constantin Monomachus was hit by plague and sick to death he asked the help of the

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<sup>1</sup> In present days Romania, gypsies are called "țigan" (singular) and "țigani" (plural) which is a pejorative reference to an ethnic minority that won the much desired freedom from slavery in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, but unfortunately, the gypsies are still enslaved by prejudiced and racist attitudes. Gypsies call themselves "Romani/Romany" or "Roma", and since the 20<sup>th</sup> century these have been the correct terms when referring to the gypsies.

Samaritan people who were descendants of Simeon the Magician. The Samaritans were also known as “athingani”.<sup>2</sup>For the gypsies, this term came to be known as “țigan”, reflecting the historical reality of slavery and thus, as Delia Grigore observes, the meaning of the word first shows the gypsy identity as a pagan and heretic individual (according to the Greek etymology) and secondly the social identity of an outcast, since the slave was ontologically excluded from society and only appropriated as object of property (cf. Grigore 18). In a way this double edged identity confers to the gypsy an outstanding position in the literary pantheon. The gypsy character is located outside religion and God, having been stereotypically transformed into a religious taboo, and also he/she is outside society’s circle, at the periphery and never fully integrated into the life rhythm of the non-gypsy majority.

When discussing the tribal ideology, we have first of all the social reality, the gypsies as individuals, historically attested and socially encountered. In terms of their relations to the non-gypsy, the gypsies actually made possible the representation of the peripheral world as a dynamic community that interacts with the non-gypsy society without losing its traditions and individuality, whereas the non-gypsies were always shaped by civilization and modernity. If literature often places the gypsy under the sign of the wandering stranger, laying emphasis on the gypsy’s refusal to settle down into a community of people, rather choosing to live in their tribal community, it is because the world of periphery is an enactment of the belief that the world of the periphery is a mysterious scape inhabited by characters that always try to cross over into the centre. The periphery would be symbolically represented as the edge of a world full of bustle and movement, whereas the margins move clock-wise around the centre. And in this clock-wise movement, the gypsy caravans roll the wheels of fate, journeying in and out of a world that regards the Roma with both fascination and suspicion, fearing the evil eye of these dark wanderers.

In this paper I set out to discuss the gypsy image and the image of the enslaved tribe as it is reflected in the Romanian epos *Țiganiada* (1875) by Ioan Budai-Deleanu and in the Victorian dramatic poem *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868) by George Eliot, as well as in George Borrow’s semiautobiographical novels, *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857). In these literary works, the gypsy’s tribal identity appears as a cultural construct and as a racial sign, reflecting the non-gypsy’s mentality and also the ideology behind the ethnic identity. And Joep Leerssen explains “the notion of mentality” as an important tool in imagology for “the doxa of national identity” (Leerssen 364). But the gypsies tend to keep a low profile, their doxa of ethnic identity being shrouded in mystery. Because of a long history of oppression and constant subjection to prejudices and also because of ancestral laws and old truths embedded in the gypsy’s traditional heritage, this ethnic group continues to be both a source of fascination (the Romantic perspective) and of distrust and suspicion. Of course, the latter attitude derives from a lack of knowledge

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<sup>2</sup> Delia Grigore’s understanding of the concepts of *Athinganoy* or *Athinganos* differs from Ronald Lee’s. In Delia Grigore’s research, it is still a Greek term but this time, the meaning is “untouchable/impure”, i.e. “touch him [the gypsy] not for he is impure.” And it seems this is the right translation as regards the historical context.

since the gypsies don't like to reveal much about themselves. For example, Ronald Lee emphasizes the secluded quality of the gipsy culture which borrows elements from "the Indian caste system". According to this culture, the non-gypsies, who were considered impure, were constantly kept at arm's length, an act which only led to the increase of suspicion and animosity among the non-gypsies (c.f. Ronald Lee in Glajar 5). And that is why the identity of the gypsy has often been misrepresented, showing the non-gipsy's negative hetero-image and consequently a stereotype of the gipsy race.

Literature offers different pictures of the gipsy camps or tribes, according to the authorial vision and according to the social reality that inspired the process of writing. In *Țiganiada*, the gipsy camp may seem disorganized and without an imposing patriarchal figure because in the Principalities of Romania, gypsies had no freedom. They were slaves and their main duty was to obey their masters, not the patriarch. Moreover, the boyars and the voivodes, and even the church, took care to dissipate any attempt of gipsy unity by crushing their spirits and self-esteem. They were mistreated and used for special purposes and if they misbehaved they were severely punished. Rather than being considered human beings, they were treated as material objects. Of course, one way or another, the gypsies managed to preserve their identity and traditions and if we remember the scene of the gipsy parade before the eyes of Vlad the Impaler, we actually notice that each gipsy belongs to a caste which is led by a chief or a leading figure and each gipsy formation is distinctly marked by a specific trade and fighting utensils:

Argintarii, de inele și ținte făcători ...  
 Căldărarii mari de stat să iviră;  
 Toți căciulați, cu barbe afumate. ...  
 Fierarii cu ale sale baroase,  
 Arzători de cărbuni și zgură. ...  
 Lingurarii cu săcuri pe spate;  
 Toți bine îmbrăcați, cu barbe rase ...  
 Aurarii, cea mai aleasă  
 Ordie din țigănia toată ...  
 lăietii, goletii [they are almost naked and backward]. (Deleanu, *Țiganiada* 37-44) <sup>3</sup>

If the Wallachian army presents itself as a unitary formation, the gypsies offer an interesting insight into their collective mentality. Yes, they are slaves. They have no rights and are considered the property of boyars, voivodes, and even the church. But they assert their own identity as a sign of difference and belongingness. Difference from the non-gipsy majority and belongingness to a tribe. Not to Vlad the Impaler's army, but to the tribe where each group serves as a complement within the tribal organization. And when the gypsies fight at the end of the epos, each

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<sup>3</sup>"The silversmiths, creators of rings and spikes .../The tall coppersmiths appeared/All wearing caps and smoked beards .../The ironsmiths with their sledge hammers,/Burners of coals and cinder .../The spoon makers holding axes on their backs;/All well dressed and shaved .../The goldsmiths, the most special/Tribe of all the gipsy nation .../The prodigal gypsies .../The almost naked vagabonds" – my translation.

trying to impose his opinion whether a democracy, republic or monarchy would suit the gypsy nation better, thus following the non-gypsy's statal organization, it is only to outline that the tribal institution should never be transformed into what it is not and shall never be. Ion Budai-Deleanu indirectly conveys the idea to the readers that the gypsy camp can never be a democracy where the power is illusorily concentrated in the hands of the people, neither can it be a republic where power is held by both people and their elected president nor a monarchy whose monarch might turn into a tyrant. The gypsy camp is a tribal formation where power is symbolically concentrated in the figure of the patriarch and where each tribal representative is linked to one another through laws of spiritual blood. Within the tribe all gypsies are brothers and sisters and that is why the tribe is ruled by a patriarch who is a sign of fatherhood. The patriarch is the symbolic father of his tribe, not a ruler but a tutor, not a president but an opener of paths and shepherd of his flock of sheep (a metaphorical way of referring to the gypsy people).

The enslaved gypsy tribe also appears in Victorian literature. We encounter a strong masculine figure of the gypsy patriarch in George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy*. Zarca is the father par excellence for his tribe, the Zincali, and the menacing other for the Spaniards. Linda Hutcheon tells us that the concept of otherness implies "binarity, hierarchy, and supplementarity" (Hutcheon 65). Binarity or the pairs of opposites is a feature that Joseph Campbell also links to the other. Thus, the self couldn't exist without the other ("Out of one comes two"). And this state of things shifts from "the consciousness of identity to the consciousness of participation in duality" (Campbell 43). Eliot constructs Zarca as both a godlike version of a gypsy in chains and tatters and as an antagonistic force that opposes Don Silva's hopes and dreams of love. He is credited with having worked for the Moors and still being in their service. For the Zincali, he embodies all the qualities of a leader and spiritual father, and even though the Spaniards may have put him in chains, his proud gaze, the fierceness of his eyes and his stiff posture, all combine into a fascinating portrayal of a man larger than life at whom even the Spaniards look with wonder and awe. To Fedalma and Don Silva, he is the messenger of a new change of fate. And above all he enhances all the Romance of the gypsy lord, an image that is often projected about the Romany patriarchs:

Where Roma were not slaves or serfs, they existed in numerous subdivisions, often defined by occupation of the group as a whole, by geographical location, or by some other factor .... Leadership of these groups was centered on the 'big man', variously called "Rrom Baro", "bulabasha", and "shero-Rrom" ... Big men were often referred to as "Gypsy Kings" to the outside world, which gave rise to a mythological belief in Gypsy Royalty among outsiders. (Lee in Glajar 8)

In George Borrow's *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, the patriarchal figure is embodied by Jasper Petulengro who befriends and spiritually binds himself to Lavengro, whom he considers a brother. Jasper is a jovial man who doesn't take life seriously and who tries to enjoy the beauty of each moment. To Lavengro, this idle attitude seems queer because Lavengro is a scholar and would like to induce the same love of knowledge in Jasper as well, but the latter rejects any attempt at this "cultural-colonization", letting Lavengro understand that a gypsy is happier and

feels more blissful among his people, his tribe with whom he shares a sacred connection, something a non-gypsy could not fully comprehend. And this might be the reason why Lavengro always refused to permanently settle down among the Petulengro tribe. He must have felt that being a tribesman means full commitment to the needs of each brother and sister, a commitment impossible from an artist and scholar who needed to travel the world in order to know it. Still, through Lavengro's eyes, we see Jasper Petulengro who acknowledges his descentance from the pharaohs of Egypt, a confession that deepens the belief in the gypsy nobility, an idea which contributed to the birth of a myth I shall further analyse.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Myth of the Gipsy Lord**

According to Campbell, a myth is a song played by the imagination on the inspiring strings of all the energies located in the human body (cf. Campbell 26). As regards the gypsies, there have been accounts of "the existence of an aristocracy within the culture, who ruled over their 'subjects'" (Saul 231). Liégeois claims that the Gipsy Lord or the king of the gypsies has no nobility of blood, being rather an imaginative construct which the non-gypsies have created under the influence of the gypsies themselves who misled the gaje into believing in a romanticized gypsy life.<sup>5</sup> He even goes as far as to suggest that the Roma have no leader at all, at least not formally. However, this political "power-construct" that lies at the core of the Gipsy Lord myth allows the so called noble gypsies to entertain relationships and socialize with the non-gipsy nobility (cf. Saul 232).

As I have already mentioned, on Wallachian and Moldavian territories, gypsies lived as slaves until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was no myth of the Gipsy Lord, just the reality of the gypsy tribes who were serving the boyars and the voivodes. However, there is also the pressing issue of a practice often met during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania. Radu Rosetti discusses this aspect in *Țigăncușa de la Ietac* (1839) when he explains why gypsy girls came to be sexually exploited. The boyars couldn't find bed mates among the upper classes because back then these affairs were not approved by society. The encounters between men and women were so rare and if a gentlewoman proved unfaithful to her husband, she would face the mockery of the entire community. The maidens as well were allowed to spend time only in the society of old relatives or close cousins. Under these circumstances, the boyars were forced to seek pleasure among the gypsy slaves. This habit of interracial intercourse led to many bastards of mixed blood and unusual beauty, unlike the

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<sup>4</sup> Lavengro: 'Pharaoh lived in Egypt.'

Jasper: 'So did we once, brother.'

Lavengro: 'And you left it?'

Jasper: 'My fathers did, brother!'

Lavengro: 'And why did they come here?'

Jasper: 'They had their reasons, brother!' (Borrow, *Lavengro* 60)

<sup>5</sup> The same idea appears at Grellmann who tells us that "when the Gypsies first arrived in Europe, they had leaders and chiefs to conduct the various tribes in their migrations ... Krantz and Munster mention counts, and knights, among the Gypsies ... it was merely a ridiculous imitation of what they had seen and admired among civilised people" (Grellmann 72-3).



primitive gipsies who can be found among the gipsy bear leaders (ursari), the spoon makers (lingurari) and the coppersmiths (cădărari). So, apart from interracial intercourse, with or without noble blood, this ethnic group is considered to be one of the oldest minority historically attested in Romania (cf. Solomovici IV), and this grants the gipsy the identity of a Romanian Gypsy, if not the title of a Gipsy Lord.

Now, what can be said about the situation of the gipsy in the British Isles? Nineteenth century society, predominantly industrial, saw in this ethnic group the representation of freedom, and I am talking here not about a negative freedom that would give a human being the right to overindulge himself/herself in debauchery, but a freedom that would minimize the costs of civilization, i.e. freedom from the responsibilities and cares of living an urban life, and above all the freedom of self-creation, of inventing new identities, new masks, even noble titles such as the Gipsy Lord rank:

The Gypsies came to be seen as natural allies in the face of ‘modernization’: to the Romantic imagination they carried an aura, not just of medieval mystery and foreignness, but also of a golden age of naturally noble relations between individuals, families, tribes, animals, nature and God. To the Right they came to represent the feudal order as the lost ideal of social relationships, ripped apart by the ascendant bourgeois capitalism: ‘conservative medievalism’. For the Left, the romanticization of the Gypsies represented them as primitives, a reminder of a supposed pre-authoritarian communism: ‘the noble savage showing up the deficiencies of a corrupt society’. (Hobsbawn, 1998, qtd. in Saul 238)

Therefore we have two facets of the same gipsy image. The Romantics associate the gipsy with medieval mystery. He/she could be either a lost knight or damsel in distress or someone of noble birth, stolen from his/her cradle and brought into a different culture.<sup>6</sup> This belief allows the circulation of the Gipsy Lord myth. And at the same time, the gipsy is the primitive stranger, different from the local majority. For example, there is this gipsy image, the prototype of the Roma, that we find in one of George Borrow’s works. He talks about the original gypsies whom he calls “tatchey Romany” and who belong to “the old sacred black race” (Borrow, *Romano Lavo-Lil* 9). These gypsies are the real ones who live in the open and never set foot either in a house to sleep in or in a church to pray and who would rather curse their children if the latter buried their remains in a graveyard. Here we have the real image of a free folk who have constituted themselves into a pagan and ancestral tribe where the laws of blood and tradition govern an existence that is linked to nature. And as Borrow outlines, the real essence of “gypsism” or the true significance of being a gipsy lies in the refusal to settle down and obeying the laws of the gentiles. The gypsies have to wander, gain their existence by trading, cheating or stealing from the non-gipsy other (cf. Borrow, *Romano Lavo-Lil* 181).

Of course, lord or no lord, the gipsy is first of all the other, but the other who is also a human being with a mind and soul of his own. Taine talks about the

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<sup>6</sup> See Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) the scene where Nelly Dean tries to lift Heathcliff’s spirit by making him imagine he has mysterious origins that would never put him in inferiority to Edgar Linton (60).

invisible man, i.e. the soul. It is the man we first acknowledge linguistically via the spoken word. At the same time it is the man we see moving or passing by. We observe his clothes, his deeds, his expressions and try to reach out what is underneath this all. This inner man found within the outer one is the genuine embodiment of the real man (Taine, 4). So before going deeper into the myth of the Gypsy Lord, I want first to submit to your attention the inner gypsy, invisible to the naked eye. The tribal leader is first of all an ethnic icon and role model for the other members of the tribe. What he speaks is considered sacred because he speaks with the community's best interests at heart, as a father does. Where he goes, the tribe follows, and his physiognomy imposes respect not only among the tribesmen, but also to the non-gypsy others who live in a society where power equals success, and a successful man is equally admired and feared. But this is the outer man, the myth of the Gypsy Lord embodied in the figure of the patriarch. The inner man is just like the brothers and sisters he presides over. He is vulnerable and strong, he despairs and hopes, he loves and hates. In other words, underneath the glamour of a fabricated image, behind the ethos of a myth about racism and ethnicity, we discover humanity and the condition of a single man on whose shoulders presses the burden of watching over a community that sometimes may be quarrelsome and prone to mischief. Despite all this, he has to show justice and understanding, and to avoid the interference of the non-gypsies' Court of Law, the patriarch has to reinforce the ancestral judgment of a race that has always set itself apart. And this is the ideology not only of a gypsy tribe, but of every minority that wants to preserve its authenticity and also to last in the chaotic modern world where racism and prejudiced attitude threaten to dissolve the true identity of the peripheral individuals. And at the end of the day, we are still left with "two chief works of human association", i.e. according to Taine's classification, the family and the state:

What forms the state but a sentiment of obedience, by which the many unite under the authority of a chief? And what forms the family but the sentiment of obedience, by which wife and children act under the direction of a father and husband? The family is a natural state, primitive and restrained as the state is an artificial family ulterior and expanded. (Taine 15)

As we have seen from the excerpt above, authority is crucial in both cases, in running a state and in running a household. The mythical figure of the imposing ruler, whose strength and vigor of character leads his followers to victory or to a better life originates from the latent instinct we all have to be assured of our safety and to trust that someone else whose superior judgment will make him/her see things clearly, will secure for us the comfort we need. Moreover, the mythical image of the gypsy lord is influenced by this human desire to seek a hero or a noble savage in each nation, ethnic minority or even our closest society. Human beings need myths and people to turn into heroes or simply to look up to when the social reality shows so many negative examples of man's life on earth.

If the gypsy is the hero of marginalization and persecution by the non-gypsy others, he is still the hero of a mysterious race. Moreover, George Borrow conceals the gypsies behind the sonorous myth of a mysterious language. Borrow observed the gypsy blood cult, as he has come to no harm among the gypsies because they



thought him one of their own, belonging to their tribe. Talking about gypsy law, Borrow names three big laws:

Separate not from the husbands.

Be faithful to the husbands.

Pay your debts to the husbands. (Borrow, *The Zinicali* 27)

The fathers or brothers form and hold together the tribe. Symbolically, they are complementary links in a social tribal network. That is why strength lies in unity and not division. If they sleep in tents and not in houses it is because they want to delineate the sacred and pure spaces from those made impure by human residue, not because they are primitive and savage. As regards religion, they have a god whom they call Devla, but their ardent faith is shown in the loyal love to their brothers and in the respect towards the patriarch. Superstitious and proud, they display both fear when faced with the mysteries of life and reverence towards the sacred laws of fate. The concept of metempsychosis is totally rejected by them since after having lived so scorned and under such burdens, they refuse to believe they will return to experience again the pains of such an existence: “We have been wicked and miserable enough in this life – they said – why should we live again?” (Borrow, *The Zinicali* 186). But as long as they live, they walk the roads of fiction as proud and undaunted, as if they were conscious of a nobility purer and truer than the one established by royal decrees or social laws. And many contradictory images of the gypsy race have contributed to the myth of a people as mysterious and romantic as the moon that always changes its faces, from a crescent to fullness. Despite stereotypes, prejudices, and clichés, the mirage of the Gypsy Lord may have been influenced by the imagination, as well as by its negative-image (the gypsy as a villain).

### **The Patriarchal Law in George Borrow’s Semiautobiographical Works and in George Eliot’s *The Spanish Gypsy***

Jennifer Uglow sees the narrative world of Eliot’s novels as a fictional space “where biological destiny, patriarchal law and ingrained social assumptions seem to combine in a web of constraint” (Uglow 250). In *The Spanish Gypsy*, the image of the patriarch is constructed within the historical context of fifteenth century Spain. In that period, the Spanish Empire was extending and it constituted a great power, hence the Spanish pride and belief in a national supremacy. Stanley Payne asserts that there are two images of Spain. First, we have the image of an Empire that oozed respect and power. The military force was both looked up to in admiration and also feared, whereas the literature and culture were held in great esteem. Despite all this, we also have the negative image of Spain, i.e. “the Black Legend Stereotype of cruelty, fanaticism, and lust for power and destruction (Payne 5). And we also have two representations of the gypsy character. First, there is the enslaved ethnic minority. I am talking here about the collective character, the Zinicali tribe, where each gypsy is amassed into one group. And then we have the patriarch who stands apart and fights against his condition of slavery. We see here the larger than life

gipsy who has a strong will and a passionate heart. Zarca's passion lies in the fierce love for his Zincali and in his excessive pride in being the patriarch of a tribe of outcasts. He is demonized by the Spaniards to whom he is the enemy, the spy in the service of the Moors (at that time the Spanish Empire was fighting against the Moors), whereas Zarca sees himself as the savior of the gypsy tribe. If to the Spaniards, Zarca's uncontrolled passion may seem violent and was regarded as a bad omen, interfering with the Spanish social order, for Zarca, his passion becomes the essential force that sets in motion the act of freeing his Zincali. Even in chains, Zarca walks as if the iron shackles couldn't contain him for long, and when he sees Fedalma, he instantly recognizes his long lost daughter. When Zarca unveils the truth to Fedalma and proclaims her the heiress of a tribal legacy, he will cause her spiritual death as an engaged Spanish noblewoman about to marry a Spaniard. And this is the moment Zarca's patriarch representation ominously resonates against the background of the peaceful life Fedalma has lived till then, and which now is shattered by a destiny that has been announced to her by the larger-than life patriarch of the Zincali, who professes "the Gypsies' faith" and introduces the idea of a gipsy code of honour:

Oh, it is a faith  
 Taught by no priest, but by their beating hearts:  
 Faith to each other: the fidelity  
 Of fellow-wanderers in a desert place  
 Who share the same thirst, and therefore share  
 The scanty water: the fidelity  
 Of men whose pulses leap with kindred fire,  
 Who in the flash of eyes, the clasp of hands,  
 The speech that even in lying tells the truth  
 Of heritage inevitable as birth,  
 Nay, in the silent bodily presence feel  
 The mystic stirring of a common life  
 Which makes the many one: fidelity  
 To the consecrating oath our sponsor Fate  
 Made through our infant breath when we were born  
 The fellow-heirs of that small island, Life,  
 Where we must dig and sow and reap with brothers. (Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy* 122)

The gypsy faith is an existential signifier. Zarca couldn't conceive life without faith in the Zincali, in his ancestors, and most important, faith to his Zincali, and in the mission of freeing his brothers. His is the ideology of a true born leader and patriarch. And when a character such as Zarca is faced with the Spaniards, the outcome cannot but lead to a lively display of wills and power, for example the scene where Zarca tells Fedalma that she is born an eagle that is meant to spread its wings and fly away from the parrots that surround it. Here we have the animal transfer employed by the gypsy self-image, meant to outline the superiority of the gypsy tribe and the inferiority of the others. This image differs from the Spaniard's hetero-image expressed by Blasco when he associates the gypsies with cattle, fit only for labour and menial work.

In *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, George Borrow follows the trajectory of a Victorian adventurer and linguist who invigorates his identity by becoming a gypsy by affiliation. Lavengro is the narrator who unfolds the successions of the events, and centers his attention not upon the gypsy life as one may think, but upon the gypsy experience. He is the Victorian who was dark, i.e. he transgresses his own racial features. Embracing the gypsy lifestyle, Lavengro becomes an internal focaliser. He is there, in the midst of the events. If he hadn't become a gypsy, the story would have lacked authenticity, and thus would have turned inconsistent and shallow. Lavengro's gypsy experience is chronologically traced, from childhood to maturity, thus implying that the study of a race, and consequently the linguistic study, should begin early in life and be carried on till old age. Lavengro is a scholar and a scholar who keeps learning forever, as Confucius strongly outlined that a man's life is an eternal school. And that is why, in George Borrow's works, the portrait of the gypsy is also linguistically made against the background of the gypsy life. The costumes and traditions of a wandering race are founded verbally in interesting discussions between Lavengro and Jasper Petulengro. The spoken word, i.e. the Logos, shapes and reshapes the world of the phenomena, and above all it gives luster and meaning to the hidden world of the Self.

If Jasper Petulengro may seem to lack an imposing patriarchal attitude, it is because the character was inspired from real life, the model being the gypsy Petulengro whom Borrow met in his wanderings. And the real flesh and blood Petulengro was first of all a friend to Borrow and then a leader and patriarch, whereas, Zarca whom George Eliot created as a Romantic hero, a Promethean figure, was closer to myth than reality. Petulengro's real aim is that of all gypsies no matter where they live, in the midst of nature where each vibration and change brings with it the supreme bliss of eternity: "There's the wind on the heath, brother; if I could only feel that, I would gladly live forever" (Borrow, *Lavengro* 89).

### **"The Unclassifiable" Gypsy Tribesmen of *Țiganiada***

In *Țiganiada*, Ion Budai-Deleanu displays an entire gallery of gypsy portraits. We are talking here about an epos which alludes to the gypsy fate, an allegory of the situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanians. The author brings the gypsy tribes upon the narrative scene of his long epos and shows them to the reader. We should bear in mind that when Deleanu wrote *Țiganiada* (1800-1812), the gypsies were not the only ones who were suffering at the hand of the boyars. The gypsies were slaves but there were also the peasants (serfs) who had no land of their own. Therefore, Deleanu's gypsies are a sign of historical awareness, the writer pointing his finger towards the flaws in his society:

*The Gypsies' Camp* is more than a simple 'game', as the author himself called it. It is a writing with marked political connotations. The epic includes an entire debate about the best Gypsy social structure which also alludes to other social structures. It is an almost encoded text and a discussion on it from the perspective of the Enlightenment and even of the French Revolution ... the notion of gypsies 'covers the others as well', as Budai Deleanu said, gypsies are actually the Romanians. It is

a metaphor, an attempt of placing a larger category into abyss [mise-en-abyme]. (Monica Chiorpec, “The Gypsies’ Camp, Radio România Internațional)<sup>7</sup>

The writer couldn’t directly announce his political intentions since he was writing a comic epos, and consequently he had to respect the canons of epic poems. Thus, he chose to penetrate within the boundaries of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Wallachia where gypsies were the loyal subjects of Vlad Țepeș (also known as Vlad the Impaler), a bloody and merciless Voivode. Vlad Țepeș stands for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century boyar who exercised his power of oppression over those who couldn’t defend themselves, whether they were gypsies or Wallachians. In this manner, Budai-Deleanu’s succession of events parallels the 19<sup>th</sup> century succession of events, following the laws of cause and effect, the gypsies being narrative surrogates for the condition of the Romanian people and thus a sign of the ‘unclassifiable’, since they conceal the allegorical status of the national majority. The fact that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Principalities and in Transylvania, there were still human beings, such as the serfs, who lived close to slavery, caused Ion Budai-Deleanu to write an epos about gypsies. Consequently, *Țiganiada* turns out to be the effect of a troubled situation which had begun many centuries before and it was still a problem at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the author was writing his epos.

Allegorical or racialized, classifiable or unclassifiable, the gypsy character tells the story of the peripheral ethnic minority, one that constantly intrigues and captures the non-gypsy’s attention. In his dissertation, Grellmann states that gypsies haven’t changed throughout history and consequently, he classifies them into a homogenous racial structure that have preserved the unique and interesting gypsism that makes the non-gypsies find always something new and surprising in the Roma people (cf. Grellmann I). And the fact that in the Romanian Principalities, gypsies constituted a homogenous group of slaves made Ion Budai-Deleanu want to dig deeper into this social problem.

For Ion Budai-Deleanu (1760-1820) whose literary tradition starts with the Transylvanian School, which was an expression of the Romanian Enlightenment, culture means a revival of the past – thus, ideologically similar to the Victorians’ cult of the past. He advocates the classical culture of heroic historical reconfiguration, at the same time building mock heroic characters, i.e. the gallery of gypsy figures who fight the Ottomans and debate on an ideal gypsy state. Approaching the gypsy character from a structural point of view, we notice that he is both a sign and a signifier. Gypsiness is the signifier of dark and untamed humanity, i.e. that part of the unconscious which always threatens to surface into the plane of the conscious mind. On the other hand, the sign “gypsy” is a racial configuration of the peripheral, pointing towards the “unclassifiable”, i.e. “those who cannot enter the system of distribution, in short, the residual, the irreducible, the unclassifiable, the inassimilable” (Foucault 53).

The desire for ethnical unity becomes a motif in Budai-Deleanu’s *Țiganiada*. When the gypsies express their desire of settling somewhere, they give voice to the wandering and despised race which now wishes for a home and identity

<sup>7</sup> www.rri.ro>the\_gypsies\_camp-2537175 – “The Gypsies’ Camp” – 2015- 10-05, 13:48:00

assertion. The gypsies have seen the model of a stable society and they wish to abide by the norms of the epoch. We are no longer discussing the culture of nature which the nomadic peoples have so far adopted. The gypsies dream of being assimilated into the culture of their home country, not as tools and objects, but as fellow creatures:

Părăsindu-și viața pribeagă ...  
Să nu mai îmble din țară în țară,  
Nici să mai fie altora de ocară! (Deleanu, *Țiganiada* 25)<sup>8</sup>

The gypsies discuss the foundations of the gypsy nation, which should solely comprise the gypsy race. Thus they both adopt the existential culture of the Wallachian society, and at the same time they nurture their traditional culture. Nevertheless, the common surroundings locate in space and at the same time the gypsies and the Romanians, and that is why one of the gypsies claims that the best way of being fully integrated into the Wallachian society is a complete cultural makeover that should promote full equality:

Să him toți depreună  
Țărani sau boieri făr' osăbire;  
Asta-i rânduiala ha mai bună!  
Toți avem ahălași trup și fire. (Deleanu, *Țiganiada* 287)<sup>9</sup>

The gypsy camp wants equality and freedom not for one individual in particular, but for the entire tribe, thus national identity and spiritual and social freedom represent the only wealth or possession the Roma treasure and aspire to. Similarly, Konrad Bercovici presents the gypsies as free people, without material attachments. They do not know nor cherish the concept of "possession" (Bercovici 2). Their entire culture is based on detachment from the worldly affairs that involve acquiring as many possessions as possible. However, there is power in not allowing the material world to control you, and the gypsies know that those "who have nothing own everything without possessing anything" (Bercovici 2). Possessions limit, whereas not having material ties or not being land bound brings freedom, and that is an important reason why gypsies are so different from the English Victorian or the Wallachian/Moldavian other:

For hundreds of years the Gypsies have lived beside us – in the Orient and in the Occident ... What we know about them compared with what they know about us is like but a drop of water in the vast ocean. They do not live as we do because they do not consider our manner of living good enough for them ... There is more joy and more happiness, there is more poetry and deep emotion in a Gypsy camp of three ragged tents than in the largest city of our civilized world. (Bercovici 1)

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<sup>8</sup>“Leaving behind their wandering life .../They ought not to travel from country to country/ Neither should they be the scorn of all the others!” – my translation.

<sup>9</sup>“We should all be together/Peasants or boyars without discrimination/This is the best social division!/We all have the same body and temperament.” – my translation.

## **Real Life Gypsy Tribes**

Gypsiologists have been analysing a gypsy's lifestyle for many years, trying to capture the authentic panorama and perspectives of a camp's or tribe's ideology. They all agree on one point. Gypsies are or have been wanderers, nomads, but due to the restrictions of setting a camp at the periphery of a city, they were forced into a culture different than their traditions and customs. However, family plays a crucial part. We can describe it like this. Symbolically, a family is a cell that grows and multiplies and sustains the ideological organism of a tribal community, and each member of the family or tribe plays a definite role:

Traveller men and women have a different life. Men have wonderful lives, they come and go as they please and they have food handed to them. Men meet in the open air; when they meet at the fair, they don't have to know one another because you always know someone's breed [family]. – Aunt Linda, Gypsy elder (Lane 3).

Within the tribe, family provides a sense of security. A gypsy is safe among his kin where the non-gypsy's racist attitude can no longer reach him/her. Family signifies a symbolic weapon against discrimination and persecution because in a family, each member belongs without putting any special effort into making himself/herself liked by the others. This is perhaps the true meaning of family: You are loved for who you are and not for who you should be. This truth is also valid as regards the tribe. The patriarch loves his tribesmen because they spiritually belong to him. Each gypsy is first a child to love and tend to, then a brother or a sister to look after and offer support to: "Family is always around to give you help if you need it, we don't have much from outside, but we look after ourselves" – Aunt Mary, Gypsy elder (Lane 10). Sadly, we seldom encounter this attitude in the neighbourhoods or small non-gypsy communities where each is for himself/herself.

Let us hear another Gypsy elder for whom the tribe, i.e. her people, means the family and the support she needs in times of sorrow and pain:

Even if I did not have any family, our people would always be there to support me...I never met no Gypsy that was lonely; all I can say that it is a lovely life. I have not known one gaje who has come to live with the Gypsies and then gone back to the gaje life.<sup>10</sup> – Aunt Julie, Gypsy elder (Lane 10)

We understand from the excerpt above that this life of unity and brotherly love appeals to the non-gypsy as well. Of course, a tribal life is not utterly harmonious (see the quarrels in Ion Budai-Deleanu's *Țiganiada*), but if we put all these arguments aside (which appear in every family, though), we are left with a minority ready to sacrifice for anyone of their members. If you remember the musketeers' ruling principle, "One for all and all for one", you will be surprised to find out that sometimes the world of fiction is a gate towards a better existence that could be met in reality as well.

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<sup>10</sup> "Gaje" is the Romany word for non-gypsy, i.e. a person who doesn't live in a gypsy community and who is of a different race and ethnicity.



As a conclusion, I want to submit an interesting idea to your attention. Tzvetan Todorov divides man's life on earth into three stages. The first stage is the cosmic existence where animated matter confers a material identity. Next, there is the animal level where man has a human being identity, and the last stage is the social one (cf. Todorov: 2001, 52).<sup>11</sup>Analysing the human diversity, Tzvetan Todorov reached the conclusion that physical differences determine the cultural differences and moreover, the group with whom the individual associates either by birth or social rights plays a decisive part in his/her behavioural evolution (cf. Todorov: 1999, 141). The gypsy character's existence also has three stages. First, there is the fictional stage, where he/she is the object of the writer's imagination. Then, we have the narrative/lyrical/dramatic stage where the gypsy becomes the subject, the animated character of a narrative, poem or drama. And then, we have the social stage where the literary gypsy reflects the condition of his prejudiced and stereotyped real life model. Also, another major issue in analysing Romany culture is that the cultural framework "presents itself in a predominantly gadzo environment" (Saul 1). Thus, characters are constructions of an empirical reality. The writers, acting as cultural and literary agents, constantly shape their 'paper people' according to the human categories encountered in society. In literature new interesting worlds are thus brought to life, new societies that reverberate within the society of the reading public and consequently, the 'paper people' cannot exist outside the society of their creators (this is the literary tribe, the writer imposing his patriarchal ideology of creative writing). The characters seem to act, to think, and to set in motion patterns of behaviour, but all their actions are emulations or echoes of a writer's representation of social people and sometimes they are representations of people expected to appear in the narrative by the reader who needs to be assured that the characters are as close to reality as possible or even far better or worse than the empirical individuals.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Todorov, "man lives perhaps first of all in his skin, but he does not begin to exist except through the gaze of others, and ... each of us is born twice, in nature and in society" (Todorov, *Life in Common* 54).

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