

# Romani Liberation

A Northern Perspective on  
Emancipatory Struggles and Progress

JAN SELLING



# Romani Liberation

# Critical ROMANI Studies Book Series

## SERIES EDITORS

Angéla Kóczé

Central European University

Márton Rövid

Central European University

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Colin Clark

University of the West of Scotland

Margareta Matache

Harvard University

Jan Selling

Södertörn University

Annabel Tremlett

University of Portsmouth

This book series aims to bring together emerging new interdisciplinary scholarship by Romani and non-Romani critical scholars within and outside of Romani Studies. The series galvanizes cross-dialogues between various regions, disciplines, ideas, approaches, and methodologies to expand the spatial-temporal and conceptual realm of critical Romani Studies. The book series critically examines the intersectional racialization of Roma as well as different forms of deep-rooted patterns of structural racial/classed/gendered exclusions, oppressions, and inequalities.

# **Romani Liberation**

A Northern Perspective on  
Emancipatory Struggles and Progress

JAN SELLING

With a Foreword by Nicoleta Bitu and  
Afterwords by Soraya Post and Hans Caldaras



**Central European University Press**

Budapest–Vienna–New York

© 2022 Jan Selling  
English translation © 2022 Dana Schlitter

Originally published in Swedish as  
*Frigörelsen: Romers och resandes emancipation i Sverige och andra länder*  
(Carlsson Bokförlag, 2020).

Published in 2022 by  
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Nádor utca 9, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary  
Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000  
E-mail: [ceupress@press.ceu.edu](mailto:ceupress@press.ceu.edu)  
Website: [www.ceupress.com](http://www.ceupress.com)

Translated by Dana Schlitter

Cover and book design by Sebastian Stachowski



This work is licensed under  
a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0  
International License.

An electronic version of this book is freely available thanks to the support of the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies through the Publications Committee at Södertörn University, Stockholm.

ISBN 978-963-386-451-7 (hardback)  
ISBN 978-963-386-452-4 (ebook)  
ISSN 2786-2925

#### LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Selling, Jan, author.

Title: Romani liberation : a northern perspective on emancipatory struggles  
and progress / Jan Selling.

Other titles: Frigörelsen. English | Northern perspective on emancipatory  
struggles and progress

Description: Budapest ; New York : Central European University Press, 2022.

| Series: Critical Romani studies book series, 2786-2925 ; vol. 2 |

“Originally published in Swedish as “Frigörelsen: Romers och resandes  
emancipation i Sverige och andra länder” (Carlsson Bokförlag, 2020).”

| Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022010325 (print) | LCCN 2022010326 (ebook) | ISBN  
9789633864517 (hardback) | ISBN 9789633864524 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Romanies--Political activity--Sweden. | Romanies--Civil  
rights--Sweden. | Sweden--Ethnic relations. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE /  
Race & Ethnic Relations | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Minority Studies

Classification: LCC DX245 .S45313 2022 (print) | LCC DX245 (ebook) | DDC  
305.8914/970485--dc23/eng/20220401

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022010325>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022010326>

# Contents

<b>Foreword by Nicoleta Bitu</b>	vii
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	xi
<b>Introduction</b>	1
State of the Art	3
Outline	10
 <b>Part I</b>	
<b>Historical Perspectives</b>	
 <b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>International Perspective: The Long Road to Liberation</b>	15
India's Forgotten Children?	15
Anatolia, a Romani Melting Pot	17
Early Emancipation and Slavery	18
Persecution and Protective Letters of Safe Conduct	19
"Equal Citizens of the Soviet Union"	21
Resistance During Nazi Rule	23
1940s: Fragments of Early Activism	28
1950s: The Paris Milieu and Legal Emancipation	30
1960s: Internationalization and Extra-Parliamentary Struggle	32
1970s: World Romani Congress, German Sinti, and Norwegian Travelers	34
1980s: Demands for Historical Justice and Invoking the Holocaust	36
1990s: The Fall of the Wall, Desegregation, Feminism, and the European Agenda	39
2000s: Minority Rights, Refugees, and the Begging Issue	43
2010s: Acknowledging Antigypsyism, LGBTQ Inclusion, and Pan-European Identity Building	46
 <b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Romani Politics for Historical Justice and the Fight Against Antigypsyism</b>	51
Historical Justice	53
Official Apologies and Recognition	59
Restitution, Reparations, and Compensation	64
Romani Extra-Parliamentary Interventions Against Antigypsyism	74
 <b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Decolonizing Romani Studies</b>	83
Scientific Racism, Philoziganism, Gypsylorism, and Antigypsyism	87
Challenging Antigypsyist Hegemony through Interventions	90

Romani Intellectuals Enter the Scene .....	98
The Stockholm Compromise .....	100
Academic Populism: The Dr. Honoris Scandal .....	102
Concluding Remarks .....	104
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Agency, Structures, and Discourses in Romani Liberation .....</b>	<b>109</b>
The Agency Perspective .....	110
The Structural Perspective .....	117
The Discourse Perspective .....	120
<b>Part II</b>	
<b>The Swedish Experience</b>	
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Romani Emancipation in Sweden: A Historical Overview .....</b>	<b>129</b>
Historical Background .....	130
Early Romani Activism in Sweden .....	132
The Significance of Katarina Taikon .....	136
Recognition as a National Minority and Inclusion Policy .....	139
A Look Ahead .....	141
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Momentum for Romani Rights in Sweden, 2010–2016 .....</b>	<b>147</b>
White Papers, Police Registries, and the Begging Debate .....	147
The Swedish Example .....	148
Momentum Evolves .....	151
Influence of the Begging Debate .....	154
Two Steps Forward, One Step Back .....	157
<b>Closing Words</b>	
<b>Chapter 7</b>	
<b>Final Reflection .....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Afterword by Soraya Post .....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Afterword by Hans Caldaras .....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Index of Names .....</b>	<b>213</b>

# Foreword

I have known Jan Selling for many years but came closer to his work while presiding on the board of the Roma Archive, an experience I value greatly. Getting to know him better, both personally and later through his work, while at the same time having discussions within the framework of the Roma Archive, I came to understand his position better. He is one of those academics with a high capacity of self-reflection on his position, not only as a researcher but also as a white, middle-class male. We sometimes used to joke about this mixture of privileges while I was listing my intersectional dis-privileges. Knowing his wife, Solvor, longer than him, I understood why they came together and what brought and has kept them together: humanism and self-reflection on power, being some of the most wonderful aspects of their relationship.

So, the lines I write here are more about my emotions, which have developed in 30 years of activism a conscience for the recognition and acceptance of what and how we feel when we read, talk, and revendicate our history. This book brought me emotions of all kinds, including anger and sadness. As a fan of Papusza, the Polish Romani poet, I am including here some of her verses from the poem “Tears of Blood,” the story of the Holocaust, so meaningful for the work Jan has done in this book:

*.... All the birds  
are praying for our children,  
so the evil people, vipers, will not kill them.  
Ah, fate!  
My unlucky luck!*

*Snow fell as thick as leaves,  
barred our way,*



*such heavy snow, it buried the cartwheels.  
One had to trample a track,  
push the carts behind the horses.*

*How many miseries and hungers!  
How many sorrows and roads!  
How many sharp stones pierced our feet!  
How many bullets flew by our ears!<sup>1</sup>*

Later, we drew closer during all the heated public debates regarding the writings of another generation of non-Romani researchers, writings which across the years, with the cooperation of Romani scholars, have contributed to the power of non-Roma in academic spheres. These kinds of academic and power attitudes towards Roma are the best expressed in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society. This power has defined who we are, what we should wear, how we should behave, and what the policies of the state should be for our “integration” and “civilization,” because we, Roma, “poor us,” are unable to say a word. Their colonial attitude toward Roma, unfortunately, still exists even today.

I, as a Romani civil rights activist, feminist, and academic, have at the same time faced the criticisms of the worlds surrounding these roles, faced with the criticism of being either a nationalist, a de-constructivist, or not being objective enough to be a real researcher, and I could go on and on with this. In reading this book, we may feel it become very personal, in a strange way. Even though I have read, used, and practiced strategic essentializing, and have contributed to the politics of memorialization and the pioneering of critical discourse studies, the lines in this book make me understand where I am and why: a Romani woman living in this century who identifies with her ancestors and their struggles. It is like a trip through my own history.

One of the aspects of my discourse is the statement that we are a people without power, who have not practiced the institutions of power, and have only recently through our own self-organization come to learn some of this. However, even though lacking access to institutionalized power, we have achieved so much! This book is like a record of the struggles for emancipation, intellectual autonomy, and decolonialization. One thought haunted me while

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Polish by Yala Korwin. <https://balticworlds.com/papusza/>.

reading the chapters on history: how Europe calls itself a modern, civilized and superior society, while having cultivated antigypsyism for centuries to the point that it has become the most accepted form of racism.

DR NICOLETA BITU,

Romani feminist activist



# Acknowledgement

This book is largely the fruit of my labor at Södertörn University, where I since 2016 have worked to develop Romani studies and create the conditions to introduce a Romani mother tongue teacher program. In 2021 we reached the significant step of establishing a department with a declared rights-based approach, which since 2022 is named Department of Critical Romani Studies. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues and students who encouraged me along the way and shared their knowledge as well as the members of our newly started Critical Romani studies and antigypsyism research colloquium for PhD candidates.

This book is also largely the fruit of my research and didactic work for the international Romani knowledge platform RomArchive (Digital Archive of the Roma). This work has led to a robust exchange of ideas and materials with the scholars Thomas Acton, Angéla Kóczé, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Adrian Marsh, Erika Thurner, Daniela Gress, Marko Stenroos, and Vidar Fagerheim Kalsås as well as with the Nordic advisors Maria Rosvoll, Malte Gasche, Miika Tervonen, Risto Blomster, Hans Caldaras, Britt-Inger Lundqvist and Fred Taikon. I would especially like to thank Nicoleta Bitu, Soraya Post, and Hans Caldaras, who inspired me in so many ways and were kind enough to share their thoughts by writing the foreword and the afterwords for this book.

I owe gratitude also to Ian Hancock, Margareta Matache, Dezső Máté, Claudia Lenz, Sunita Memetovic, Bagir Kwiek, Linda Lundqvist and Charles Westin, who in different ways have supported my undertaking. I would like to thank the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO), European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM), Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma/Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Chad Wyatt, Jean-Pierre Liégois, Erika Thurner, Angelica Ström, Anna and Birgitta Langhammer, Fred Taikon, *É Romani Glinda*, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Paul Rimmerfors, Rosario Ali Taikon,

## Acknowledgement

Solvor Mjöberg Lauritzen, Leo Selling Leukel and Folkoperan, who generously made images available for publication in this book. I would also like to thank the team of CEU Press and the publisher of the Swedish 2020 edition, Trygve Carlsson. Thanks to Brooke Ophoff for language polishing.

Thank you to Molly and my family, not least to my wife Solvor, who not only gave me the space to realize this book, but also generously shared her knowledge and sense for epistemic justice.

The book's production costs have been co-funded by Södertörn University.

It is my sincere hope that this book will be useful in the quest for Romani liberation.

Stockholm, January 2022

JAN SELLING

# Introduction

Roma is an umbrella term for groups of people who share a common ancestry and language. But only to a certain extent. And not all groups normally included in this umbrella-term self-identify as Roma. With this in mind, I will initially use this umbrella term, as do most Roma activists and government authorities in Sweden and across the globe. As I proceed, I will be more differentiated with the terms I use when referring to certain peoples.

This is a book about Roma written by a non-Romani person. I have done a great deal of reflection about what this positionality means.<sup>1</sup> I have therefore taken extra care to conduct my research in dialogue with the Roma I have come into contact with during my work as a teacher, researcher, and academic activist in Romani studies since 2010. At the same time, this is a book with implications that extend beyond the Roma, as it deals with collective human problems such as liberation and social justice in the spirit of emancipatory research.

The terms emancipation and liberation are often considered synonymous. However, while there is overlap between the terms, they are not exactly interchangeable. In Marxist theory, the term-couple is sometimes called political and human emancipation. I have chosen to use both terms here because of their distinct associations. The term emancipation is often used in its most literal sense: that a certain group (for emancipation is always collective) is given the same legal and social rights as others in a society. A common understanding of the notion emphasizes emancipation as something that is given—a group is given rights thanks to the actions of other groups or structural changes in society. This has often been the case in some of the defining moments in Roma history I discuss here, such as the liberation from 500 years of slavery in Southeast Europe. However, emancipation can also be conceived of as the process and effort through which a group achieves rights. For the purposes of this book,

---

1 For an analysis on the issues from a Romani perspective, see Máté, *Generational Changes*.

the latter perspective is more useful, and the very struggle to achieve civil and social justice can be seen as emancipation. Similarly, what is meant by the term emancipatory research is that it ultimately aims to root out oppression and contribute to change, whether that is subordination due to class, ethnicity, skin color, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Liberation has a broader meaning and includes an existential dimension whereby humans realize their full potential through liberation. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre described emancipation as a necessary step towards liberation.<sup>2</sup> The concept of liberation is also a central component of the pedagogical tradition linked to Paulo Freire. According to Freire, awareness-raising is the first step in any group's struggle to achieve social justice.<sup>3</sup> He proceeded from the assumption that unjust hierarchies of power are accepted due to perceptions and norms imprinted in both oppressors and the oppressed through the church, school, mass media and other areas of culture. This is what Antonio Gramsci called cultural hegemony.<sup>4</sup> Freire ultimately inspired a religious movement among a number of South American Catholic priests in the 1960s that came to be known as liberation theology. The priests applied their religious faith to take an active role in social change and human liberation here on earth.<sup>5</sup>

The hegemony perspective is a central component of this book. Discourse is a second central concept, which I use to describe people's approaches to reality in their words and actions. My interpretation of hegemony thereby concerns the dominant discourse, the approach that is considered normal or natural. In my 2013 book, *Svensk antiziganism* (Swedish antigypsyism), I showed how the hegemony of antigypsyism developed and manifested itself in Sweden historically. Finally, I use the term "cultural memory" to describe a society's historical consciousness and collective identity. Cultural memory is always collective and can be seen as the dominant discourse in terms of historical consciousness and the identity shared within a certain group or in society at large. Who are we? Who are they? The collective memory exists in a perpetual state of change. It serves as the arena where cultural struggle plays out. Within the Roma collective, this may relate to the relationship with, and the sense of community shared with other groups. In the majority society, this may relate to the question who is to be included in notions of the national.

---

2 Lefebvre, *Marx sociologi*, chapter 5.

3 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

4 Gramsci, *En kollektiv intellektuell*.

5 Chasteen, *Latinamerikas historia*, chapter 9.

In applying this lens to Swedish culture, for example, one may ask: What is Swedishness? Has Swedishness become multicultural, or has it always been that way? We all constantly apply these mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion to the patchwork of collective identities we are part of. An individual person can be, for example, Roma, Swedish, a Stockholmer, Hammarby football supporter and a woman.

The history of antigypsyism (also known as antiziganism or anti-Roma racism) centers around the prejudices, fantasies, violence, oppression, and discriminatory practices of the majority society against people associated with the stereotype of “gypsies.” In this book, I take the opposite perspective to the research I presented in 2013, and instead discuss Romani liberation and emancipation from a historical and international perspective.

## State of the Art

In a 2018 essay, Romani author Ágnes Daróczi together with János Bársony invoke the Roma’s right to their own history: a history indelibly marked by persecution, but also by coexistence, of everyday existence, of common people, heroes, and role models. The essay serves as a call to action to Roma and non-Roma alike.<sup>6</sup>

There is a rich literature on the Romani language and culture as well as an extensive body of research that examines the different aspects of Romani life in terms of social or educational conditions. Much of this has been characterized by biased, colonial or exotifying perspectives, which manifest “epistemic violence.”<sup>7</sup> However, in recent years, emancipatory perspectives have also emerged. In my commentary on this literature in chapter 3, I note that Romani studies is in the process of being decolonized.

Yet, historians have thus far neglected themes concerning Romani political mobilization and emancipation, except as components of the bigger picture of historical antigypsyism,<sup>8</sup> or within biographical or autobiographical works. In Sweden, noteworthy works on this subject include the books of Katarina Taikon, Berith Kalander, Sofia Taikon, Lawen Mohtadi and Hans Caldaras,

6 Bársony and Daróczi, “Forbidden People.”

7 Epistemic violence can be defined as an oppressive technology that excludes under-privileged groups from knowledge production and prevents them from making themselves heard, as well as the actual contributions of knowledge to violent societal domination. Brunner, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Violence.”

8 See, e.g., Selling et al., *Antiziganism*; Achim, *Roma in Romanian History*.



and from Norway, Tore-Jarl Bielenberg.<sup>9</sup> The political struggle of Finnish Roma has been examined by Sarita Friman-Korpela and Marko Stenroos.<sup>10</sup> On the international level, existing research is dominated by the social sciences with short-term historical perspectives. The exceptions are the works of Thomas Acton, Ian Hancock, Yaron Matras and Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov.<sup>11</sup> An overview based on this research can be found online at the Council of Europe's *Factsheets on Roma History*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, these researchers are actors sitting on different sides of an intense conflict over how Romani history is to be written, which is also a common thread throughout this book. Acton and Hancock have been accused of being activists rather than scientists, while Matras and Marushiakova and Popov have been portrayed as advocates of gypsylorism and colonial perspectives on Roma.

A major recurring issue is the view of Romani identity and Romani ethnicity. According to Norwegian historian Anne Minken, research has historically been based largely on essentialism, the idea that an ethnic group is defined based on characteristics that are considered to be more or less unchanging over time. In applying this approach, it follows that the researcher assumes the right to label and catalogue ethnic groups. Historically, essentialist Romani research has swung back and forth between an approach based on ethnographic (cultural) aspects and social criteria in an attempt to define who is a "Traveler," "Gypsy Traveler," "Gypsy," "Roma," "Tater," "Romani," or a subset of these categories.<sup>13</sup> Sociologist Mihai Surdu has concluded that the ambition to create an "objective," (i.e., positivist), classification of different groups of "Gypsies" was formative for the creation of the Gypsy Lore Society and that this "classical paradigm" has up to this day been dominant, though in later decades increasingly questioned.<sup>14</sup>

As I will show in this book, essentialist views of Romani people continue to prevail today and have always played an important role in shaping the policies of the majority society. The opposite of essentialism is an approach that posits

9 Taikon, *Zigenerska*; Taikon, *Zigenare är vi*; Kalander, *Sörj inte lidandet*; Lundgren and Taikon, *Sofia Z-4515*; Caldaras, *I betraktarens ögon*; Selling, *Svensk antiziganism*; Mohtadi, *Katarina Taikon*; Bielenberg, *Romá/Sigöynere*.

10 Friman-Korpela, "Den finskromska politikens internationella förbindelser," 226–251; Stenroos, "Movement in Finland."

11 See, e.g., Acton "Transnational Movements of Roma"; Hancock, *Danger! Educated Gypsy*, 223–279; Marushiakova and Popov, *Roma Voices in History*; Marushiakova and Popov, "Nation Without a State?"

12 Wogg, Pawlata and Wiedenhofer, eds., "Institutionalisation and Emancipation." in *Factsheets on Roma History*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets>.

13 Minken, *Tatere i Norden*, 431.

14 Surdu, *Those Who Count*, 88–89.

identity and ethnicity as a dynamic process linked to cultural memories, a process in a state of perpetual transformation, shaped by human interaction and the course of history. In taking this anti-essentialist approach it follows that only an individual can decide how they are to be identified in relation to the group and that an individual can identify in myriad ways simultaneously. But this type of identification is not an arbitrary process. An individual's affiliation with a group may or may not be accepted.

However, essentialism is not always exclusively a colonial perspective adopted by outsiders. Not unlike the nationalists of the majority society, ethnic groups can choose to streamline cultural expressions and the depiction of their origins in order to clearly define who is included in the group. This approach, sometimes called "strategic essentialism" can be an effective political tool, as it creates a sense of cohesion within the group and identifies the group to the outside world as a force with the right to self-determination.<sup>15</sup> Romani nationalism is an issue that often appears in the historiography of Romani emancipation and liberation, though in the case of the Roma, this does not necessarily mean aspiring to secure a geographical homeland. However, this strategy is controversial, even among Romani activists.

Ethnologist Ioana Bunescu contends that Romani ethnopolitics tend to be closely linked to the everyday routines and practices of Roma—separatism and solidarity within the group—but de-emphasizes the perhaps equally dominant strategy of seeking interaction with and belonging in major society.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, the shared identity that unites Romani people across national borders is perhaps the greatest resource for the Romani civil rights movement.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, an overly narrow Romani identity can be seen as internalized gypsylorism. The British social work researcher, Brian Belton, identifies as "Gypsy," but believes that "The notion of a permanent and unchanging Gypsy identity is, as such, related much more to the thinking of the 'dark ages' than it is to post-enlightened thought; it is in fact regressive."<sup>18</sup> Another objection to strategic essentialism is that it can lead to divisions between different Romani groups. In addition, a certain balancing act is needed to combine the perspective of a "national minority," as in the name of the Central Council of

15 Ryder, *Sites of Resistance*, 125. The concept of "strategic essentialism" was established in 1985 by the Indian postcolonial, feminist philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Grosz, "Criticism". Spivak would later warn that the term can easily be misused if it is only used as a descriptive theory rather than a temporary, liberating practice. Hjorth, *Förtvivlade läsningar*, 50–54.

16 Bunescu, *Roma in Europe*, 71.

17 McGarry, *Who Speaks for Roma?* 141.

18 Belton, "Knowing Gypsies," 42.

German Sinti and Roma (also, the term “Swedish Roma” is not exactly suitable, because it only applies to one of the Romani groups in Sweden) and the perspective “transnational minority,” as in “Europe’s largest ethnic minority,” “World Romani Congress,” and so forth. Political scientist Martin Kovats is among those who most strongly questioned Romani nationalism. According to Kovats, it is not a question of emancipatory ideology but of the manipulation of a vulnerable group by Romani elites.<sup>19</sup>

However, others argue that Romani ethno-political mobilization may very well cope with all these challenges. According to Ian Hancock, it is a matter of understanding history as the basis for a political community of interest that interconnects and respects cultural differences within the Romani collective.<sup>20</sup> British Romani theologian and artist Damian le Bas argued that Romani identity should not be defined according to cultural similarities, or having origins in India, but on the basis of the common experience of the diaspora.<sup>21</sup> Belgian political scientist Peter Vermeersch contends that the young, educated internet-savvy generation of Romani activists is successfully reshaping notions of what a Romani identity can be. He argues that, in this way, new political alliances have been formed, and activism has turned more towards the political sphere. He sees examples of this shift in the international youth network TernYpe and in the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO).<sup>22</sup>

Very little research has been done that compares the civil rights struggle of Romani and other groups. I will provide several examples in this book to demonstrate how the African-American civil rights movement has served as an inspiration for the Romani civil rights movement, but also to show that European Romani activism has had difficulty achieving the same type of impact thus far. An important study in this area is the comparison of the Roma rights and American civil rights struggle by Felix B. Chang and Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang in 2020. By comparing developments in post 1989 Eastern Europe with the US civil rights history of the 1950s and 1960s from a legalist perspective, they highlight one of the key aspects of this book: what factors make major society do something about the emancipation of minorities. Their conclusion is that things are only put in motion when there is a “convergence of interest.”<sup>23</sup> In the 2017 volume *Realizing Roma Rights*, human rights

---

19 Kovats, “Politics of Roma Identity.”

20 Hancock, *We Are the Romani People*, 273–279; Hancock, “Keynote,” xxx.

21 Le Bas, “The Possible Implication.”

22 Vermeersch, “Roma Mobilization and Participation,” 211–212.

23 Chang and Rucker-Chang, *Roma Rights and Civil Rights*.

scholar Jacqueline Bhabha points to the African American civil rights veteran and lawyer Jack Greenberg who distilled the recipe for success in the struggle towards desegregation into three key items: legal struggle with support from fundamental rights documents, mass mobilization and strong leadership. According to Greenberg, the Romani activists in Europe have been effective on the first item, but the latter two have been missing.<sup>24</sup> The question is why.

Both within the research community and among activists, the explanation for this lack of success is often sought in Romani leadership, which has been characterized by elitism, but also in the fact that Romani too often lined up as “alibi Roma,” who were asked to legitimize projects that were not in the interests of the larger group of Roma. As a result, Romani issues continue to be controlled by the majority society’s consultants and “gypsy experts,” albeit in a modern incarnation, while the Romani have been forced to navigate systems that have themselves been the cause of the problems.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most prominent voices in the movement, the philosopher Nicolae Gheorghe, highlighted the lack of attention to these two items. He argued, for example, that the EU’s inclusion strategies for Romani were developed with only symbolic Roma participation and therefore could not be expected to represent Romani interests.<sup>26</sup> Inclusion risked becoming a new age of cultural assimilation in a neoliberal Europe. Bhabha draws attention to the fact that “much European Roma policy, within the European Commission, for example, has been prompted not by grassroots demands for justice or inclusion but by pressure from EU member states concerned about Roma migration.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Polish activist and ethnologist Andrzej Mirga criticized *The Decade of Roma Inclusion*, which was established upon the initiative of the World Bank in collaboration with the Open Society Foundation and twelve states in Eastern Europe.<sup>28</sup> Yet another answer is given in a recent dissertation of social and cultural anthropologist Marko Stenroos. He argues that if policy recommendations are not grounded in profound analyses of antigypsyism, they make Roma responsible for their own subordination and the policies will inevitably fail.<sup>29</sup>

The rise of professionalized NGOs (non-governmental organizations) has also been the subject of criticism. On the one hand, they are called into ques-

24 Bhabha, “Realizing Roma Rights,” 8.

25 Cemlyn, Ryder and Acton, eds., *Hearing the Voices*, 220–235; see also Kwiek, “Unintentional Exclusion.”

26 Vermeersch, “Roma Mobilization and Participation,” 204, note 17; Cemlyn, Ryder and Acton, eds., *Hearing the Voices*, 222.

27 Bhabha, “Realizing Roma Rights,” 4.

28 Mirga, “Roma Policy in Europe.”

29 Stenroos, *Social Orders*.

tion by authors like Marushiakova and Popov who use the derogatory term “Gypsy industry,” to scornfully state that they are run by Roma “whose sole educational and professional qualification is the Roma origin (often contested by other Roma)” with the single purpose of attracting earmarked funds.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the NGOs have been criticized for being governed according to the views of the financiers, and as such, are tools for a kind of neoliberal colonialism. According to Nidhi Trehan, this agenda has led to symbolic victories for Romani rights, while at the same time, structural discrimination has continued to increase. Trehan’s analysis paints a pessimistic picture, where Romani organizations cannot overcome the structural violence inherent in the economic system on their own. Trehan recommends long-term initiatives to strengthen autonomy locally through education, grassroots activism, and member-run local organizations.<sup>31</sup>

In his autoethnographic study, British sociologist Andrew Ryder discusses the recent Romani awakening, wherein the civil rights movement is attempting to take a new approach. Similar to Trehan, he highlights the structural antigypsyism, the racialization of poverty, which afflicted the Roma after the fall of Eastern European state socialism and the recent financial crises. The Roma have thus taken a double hit: socio-economic exclusion and they are targets of racist scapegoating. Despite this bleak depiction of the current state of affairs, Ryder sees signs of hope both in Romani grassroots activism, which often relates to concrete issues, and within academia, where critical Romani studies challenge exclusionary discourses and raise new questions for discussion. Ryder asserts that these new paths can have successful outcomes, especially if they open the door to alliances with other marginalized groups but emphasizes that it will require careful navigation to avoid familiar pitfalls such as elitism, symbolic politics, and the dominance of strategic essentialism.<sup>32</sup>

Research on antigypsyism has demonstrated the importance of addressing its historical roots, for understanding today’s structural antigypsyism and the continued normalcy of antigypsy attitudes.<sup>33</sup> For example, a guiding principle behind the Swedish authority Forum for Living History’s mission is for knowledge of history to contribute to a deeper understanding, thereby challenging scapegoating, stereotypes, and prejudices. Facts about the historical *longue duree* of Romani presence in European countries have been crucial for their

---

30 Marushiakova and Popov, “Nation Without a State.”

31 Trehan, *Human Rights Entrepreneurship*.

32 Ryder, *Sites of Resistance*, 125.

33 SOU 2010:55; Selling, *Svensk antiziganism*; Wippermann, “Longue Durée of Antiziganism.”

recognition as national minorities. Awareness of history is also a crucial component of the cultural memory for society as a whole, as well as for the collective identities of ethnic groups or other groups. Awareness of the importance of history is in fact growing, which has compelled museums and other cultural heritage institutions to become more inclusive and representative.<sup>34</sup> Above all, the politics of memorialization have proved to be a powerful source for emancipatory struggles for Roma and other colonized peoples, which I frame in this book around the notion of historical justice: struggles for recognition, apologies, material compensation, memorials and memorial days, historical rectification and awareness-raising activities.

However, with few exceptions, there is an overall lack of historical writing about the Romani people and their process of seeking liberation, emancipation and historical justice. In an effort to fill this gap, the online knowledge platform RomArchive (Digital Archive of the Roma) made a curated selection of material available on the history of the Romani civil rights movement in 2019.<sup>35</sup> RomArchive was established on the initiative of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the European Roma Cultural Foundation based in Budapest. The stated purpose of the platform is to decolonize knowledge by highlighting Romani perspectives on Romani culture, politics, and history.

The section dealing with the Romani civil rights movement was curated by Professor of Romani Studies Thomas Acton, sociologist Angéla Kóczé, anthropologist Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, and myself as a historian. Historical developments of the movement after 1945 are covered in essays on Argentina and Latin America, Finland, France, Canada and the USA, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Germany, Hungary and Austria. In addition, the section includes in-depth essays on the transnational Romani civil rights movement, migration, historical justice and the fight to counter antigypsyism, the women's movement, youth activism and de-segregation activism.

The extensive, and hitherto not comparatively analyzed body of material presented in RomArchive constitutes the most important source material in my research.

34 See, e.g., Riksanitkvarieämbetet, "Kulturen är mångfald!"

35 See [www.romarchive.eu](http://www.romarchive.eu). Note that due to copyright restrictions, RomArchive has not posted all available material on its website. Other material is made available upon request. RomArchive is managed by The Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg, Germany, [www.sintiundroma.de](http://www.sintiundroma.de).

The fundamental questions explored in this book are: What happened, when and why? What conditions favored or hindered Romani emancipation and liberation? It is beyond the scope of this book to cover all countries equally or to go in depth with organizational structures of Romani movements. Instead, I wish to highlight some crucial historical stages of success and some important protagonists. By including a more comprehensive study of the Swedish experiences, my aim is to connect the Swedish historiography with the international, thereby discussing reciprocal contexts and lessons to be learned.

I have previously published parts of my research results in Swedish and English. In this book, I have added more material, re-examined my results and put them together into a larger body of work intended for a wider international audience.

## Outline

The first part of the book explores different aspects of the international history of Romani emancipation and liberation. Chapter 1 provides a chronological perspective on important steps like the migration to Europe, the earliest examples of emancipation in medieval Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, the affirmative actions of the early Soviet Union in the 1920s, and the multifaceted Romani resistance to Nazism. The chapter then describes the Romani movement's shifting agenda and organizational forms—from the 1950s cosmopolitan Romani think tank in Paris and the issue of basic civil rights via the legendary first World Romani Congress in London on April 8, 1971, to the 2010s professionalized NGO activism on inclusion and discrimination.

Chapter 2 looks at the connection between Romani politics in different countries in relation to historical justice and the fight against antigypsyism. The analysis shows how battles around writing history became linked both with the quest for social justice and with collective Romani identity discourses. The chapter provides a thematic overview of important outcomes of the struggles: commissions of inquiry, apologies and recognitions, material compensation issues, memory politics, memorial days and physical memorials as well as giving examples of Romani extra-parliamentary interventions against antigypsyism.

Chapter 3 is based on the ideology-critical problem of how marginalizing and epistemically oppressive tendencies in Romani studies (and its historical predecessor “Gypsyiology”) can be identified and overcome. Through