

A Pattern of Thinking in Rromani Poetry

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The Roma are transborder people, originating in India, who arrived in Europe around the year 1,000 as nomadic people. They are spread all over the world, especially in Europe, South and North Americas, and Australia. Most Roma live in Europe, the population is estimated between 10 and 12 million persons.¹ The highest number of Roma in Europe live in Romania: approx. 620,000 were officially declared at the last census (2011) and between 1,800,000 to 1,850,000² and 2,500,000,³ have been identified in sociological research and European reports.⁴ To understand Rromani literature, its beginning and its evolution, there is an acute need to define and understand the pattern of thinking of the Roma, especially in what concerns the relationship with their own self.

The Roma, as members of a minority group—who are considered deviant and inferior—have the majority as a reference group—who are considered successful and representative—and for this reason they internalize the social representations of the majority about Roma

1 http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp (Council of Europe's Report, 2011).

2 http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp (Council of Europe's Report, 2010).

3 Minority Rights Group, World Directory of Minorities, London: MRG International, 1997, p. 240.

4 2003 Regular Report on Romania's progress toward accession: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2003/rr_ro_final_en.pdf

and perceive these as belonging to the Rroma themselves. While such representations are mainly negative, the self-image of the Rroma also becomes negative and their ethnic self-esteem sinks. Moreover, in considering the three egos, what Rroma believe about themselves (the actual perceived ego) is, in most cases, contrary to what they would like to be (the ideal ego) and what the Rroma believe they should be, following the wishes of those surrounding (the wanted ego), circumstances which lead to a distorted self-esteem, with crushing result. Attempts to escape from this crushing feeling are expressed, very often, by the unconscious assumption of a split, schizoid, dual ego, which conceals and falsifies its essence, to cope with the need to produce an impression suitable for the society. In other words, it develops a strategy for adjustment to the social environment where it is placed. The individual rejects or conceals his real deep identity and acts as if not himself, but someone else; the fictional ego takes the place of the authentic ego and self-identification is based on the reflective difference: *I am what the otherness believes about me, because this otherness is superior to me.*

As the main source of Rroma self-esteem's decrease, we can identify internalized social stigma, opposed to and defeating any other factors able to improve ethnic self-esteem. The legacy of an exclusive history has had decisive effects on the Rroma collective mind. The deprivation of the individual of his rights and of access to any resources for social development is leading to the loss of ethnic dignity and to the installation of self-blame and self-shame of Rroma self-esteem: "What is more to say ... we, Gypsies, are guilty for all what happen to us, if we were different, the Romanians wouldn't hate us, they have their reasons, because we are too much thieves and we don't like work or school! (...) We here, we do not count, we are different, but the others ..."5 The stigma of the Rroma identity has led to an internalization of a negative image—amplified by systematic usage of racially damaging language containing negative stereotypes toward Rroma in contemporary society as well as doubled by the inability of the Rroma elites to transform themselves into a credible, viable model for Rroma and to transmit correct and clear information

5 Vatraș [Settled] Roma, 34 years old, 10 years of school, Bucharest (interview done by Delia Grigore in 2008).

about Rroma to both the Rroma and non-Rroma population. This image has transformed the Rroma's self-esteem into self-stigma or—even worse or equally bad—a sort of self-hate, both of which are almost irreversible especially in the context of a formal monocultural education, the loss of their identity references, and of the absence of institutions capable of creating and representing a Rroma cultural model, such as the Rromani literature.

The occurrence is comparable with what Theodor Lessing calls “self-hate,” referring to the Jews: “the psychology of the Jews is nothing else but a particularly enlightening exemplification of the psychology of a suffering minority.”⁶

The result of this process of internalization of stigma has led to the construction of a strategy of survival based on a schizoid personality, which is fragile and vulnerable in the existential skidding, has led to the rejection of the authentic ego, of the deep ego, and to embracing a fictional ego, false and inadequately adjusted to the requirements and expectations of an alienating society. As deep and extended as the acculturation process becomes, ethnic self-esteem sinks, eventually converting into self-contempt.

In the context of a stigmatized ethnic identity, much-needed “integration” in a society of the other, which rejects the specificity in order to achieve the much-discussed mainstreaming—a concept which can successfully replace assimilation, without any negative connotation—becomes the ideal method to impose the self-stigma against ethnic self-esteem. But if this process were able to produce a culturally neutral and complete citizen from the perspective of observing his civil rights and obligations, it would be possible to say that the society does not lose anything because of the low self-esteem of certain of its members or groups. But experience proves that an individual with low self-esteem, no matter if it be personal or ethnic, more easily abandons not only his ethnic identity, but also his citizenship responsibilities. If the social environment is teaching you that you are good for nothing because you belong to the Rroma people, you will lose self-confidence, you will in-

6 Théodore Lessing, *La Haine de soi, le refus d'être juif* (Paris: Berg International), p. 38.

ternalize this social label, and you will not only cease any effort to prove otherwise, but, even more, you will cease to assume any responsibility, considering it as exceeding your cognitive and active abilities, and you will start to behave in a way that matches this other-applied label and to answer the negative expectations of the society by a deviant social attitude, which could also lead to crime.

Therefore, the interests of the whole society should be to make efforts for increasing the self-esteem, including the ethnic self-esteem of its members, especially focusing on stigmatized minorities such as the Rroma.

The self-esteem of each group, specifically, of a people confronted by a historically negative self-conception, as the Rroma are, can increase only if the group has the means to find itself as a group, with a deep sense of membership in common values and shared standards. To be proud of yourself you must know who you are; to know who you are you need to gather together, to take distance from others and to see what sets you apart from the others and what you have in common with others similar to you. What should a people develop in order not to fall into a slow but sure process of cultural assimilation? The answer is easy to state: their own values. How should they be cultivated? By cultural production in the mother tongue, in other words, by *literature*.

This is the historical context in which Rromani literature began and developed: more a weapon than an artistic gesture.

Rromani literature is quite young; it is less than 100 years old, so its main style is poetry. It emerged after the 1917 communist revolution in Russia, and it developed to its highest extent under the communist regime in the former Yugoslavia in the years 1950–1960, so both its birth and its most glorious age are linked with “the hope for equality and social progress”⁷ of leftist transitions. There were times when the poorest and the most excluded, among them the Rroma, were encouraged to express themselves, including through literature, to make them praise the newly installed political system.

7 Rajko Djurić, “La littérature des Roms et Sintis,” in *Études Tsiganes*, no. 4 (1991), p. 14.

Rromani literature itself glorified, during its beginnings, this newly installed political system, but we have reason enough to believe that, most of the time, it was a sincere glorification, coming from the fact that, before the communist era, the condition of the Rroma in society was extremely poor, characterized by poverty, exclusion, and open anti-Rroma racism culminating in the Holocaust, known as *Samudaripen* in the Rromani language, and, at least in the first years of the communist regimes, there were signs that the situation of the Rroma would be hugely improved by a sustained process of integration.

The Rroma hoped that they would have the chance to finally become citizens of the countries they had lived in for centuries, for which they worked and fought and to which they brought important cultural and not only cultural contributions. It is difficult to challenge the reality that, in the beginning of the communist age, the Rroma obtained not only the right, but also the means to establish and develop their own cultural and educational institutions, such as the first Rromano theater “Romen,” created in Moscow in 1931; “Nevo drom,” the first magazine published in Rromani language; a school teaching in the Rromani language opened in Užhorod; and the first alphabet book published in the Rromani language and the first radio broadcasts in the Rromani language, in Moscow, all occurred around the year 1925.

It is also true that, beyond the advantage obtained from the pure glorification of the political regime coming from the open and sincere collective soul of the Rroma, after realizing the danger such a freedom of expression given to an ethnic minority could represent, including the potential uprising of that people it might cover, communist dictators began to forbid the use of the Rromani language in cultural public institutions such as the Rromani theater and to apply a strong and extremely rigid system of censorship to Rroma cultural and educational institutions, especially the newly born Rromani literature.

For this reason, during that time, most of the themes of Rromani literature came directly from the need to prove that the writer was in complete solidarity with the political regime. Following this view we sometimes read lines like: “Ciacio drom te arakhas, / Amaro phandado kolin te putras! / Kiden murshen ai kiden zor, / Te ciaces anklias p-o ‘gor! / Amare vasta si puterde, / Nais e Devlesqe, / Ajutin amen vi’l Gaje

/ Te avas mai bahtale!” [To find the real way, / To open our heavy soul!
/ Gather men, gather power, / To really arrive to the shore! / Our arms
are open, / Thanks, God, / The Gage also help us / To be happier!]” (O
Dragano le Trumpesqo-Jevremović, “Sostar, daie, biandian man?” [Why,
mother, did you give birth to me?])⁸ or “Arakhliam o agor e dromesqo,
vi o lachipen e khamesqo, / an-o maripen e Titosa anglal ikliliam / te
na acias bithanesqo. / Iekhipen kerdiam a Titosa (...) [We found the end
of the road and the kindness of the sun, / to fight with Tito we began /
not to stay without a place of ours. / We became one with Tito (...)]” (O
Shaip Jusuf, “Resliam p-o agor e dromesqo” [We arrived at the end of
the road]).⁹

But this was only the early childhood of Rromani literature. If we
further analyze its main themes over the decades, beyond chronologies
and authorship, we are able to configure a pattern of thinking and Ro-
mani literature’s view about the world, the way it approaches the rela-
tionship of the Roma to themselves and to others. In other words, we
can define a Roma pattern of thinking, mainly because, being so young,
Rromani literature is still well linked with the collective mind and soul,
with the Romano folklore and, most of the time, Roma writers aim to
represent Roma less than to represent themselves or their own views.
Even if, for an author, who is by definition, a strong individuality, aspir-
ing to be representative for a collectivity, decreasing, or even erasing his/
her personality, it is, certainly, a mask, it is more than useful when the
writer becomes a flag carrier or the *avant-garde* of a newly born nation
in full progress of defining and expressing itself.

This is why the main themes of Rromani literature throughout time
are nomadic life, tragic history, racism, and stigmatized ethnic identity,
all surrounded by sorrow, pain, and sadness, but also by hope and high
dreams.

8 O Dragano le Trumpesqo-Jevremović, “Sostar, daie, biandian man?” in Ghe-
orghe Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească* [Collection of Texts in Ro-
mani Language] (București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, R.A.), 1995, p. 96.

9 O Shaip Jusuf, “Resliam p-o agor e dromesqo,” in *Études Tsiganes. Littéra-
ture Romani*, no. 4 (1991), p. 52.

The Roma poet asks himself “Sostar, daie, biandian man? / Sostar, Devla, rrom kerdian man? / Mashkar o them nashti jav, / Murro than kathende nashti arakhav, / Kai te jav, kai te aresav, / Musai lokhes thai cioral te phurdav. [Why, mother, did you give birth to me? / Why, God, did you make me a Rroma? / All around the world to always go, / Not to find my place anywhere, / Where to go, where to arrive, / Even to breathe I have to do it slowly and stealthy]” (O Dragano le Trumpesqo-Jevremović, “Sostar, daie, biandian man?” [Why, mother, did you give birth to me?]),¹⁰ synthetically describing, in these lines, the dramatic fate of the Rroma, permanently excluded from everywhere in the Gage’s society.

As already stated, Rromani identity is deeply stigmatized by negative stereotypes in collective memory and this is, many times, reflected in the Rroma poetry: “Shai keres but, phari buti: / ‘Rrom san!’ / Iva san shukar, godiaver: / ‘Rrom san!’ / Shai san tu o maizuralo: / ‘Rrom san!’ / Iva san baro-barvalo: / Vi atunci Rrom san! [You can do many difficult things: / ‘You are still Rrom!’ / In vain you are beautiful, clever: / ‘You are still Rrom!’ / You can be the most powerful: / ‘You are still Rrom!’ / In vain you are great, wealthy: / Even then you are still Rrom!]” (O Dorutzi Iujef, “Rrom san” [You are still Rrom]).¹¹

In Rromani poetry, nomadic life is mainly seen as having been forced upon the Rroma, as having been imposed from the outside as a curse, as a demonic tool to keep the Rroma excluded from the society: the romantic view is almost never linked to a symbol of freedom: “Tu bi limoresqo / Amen bikheresqo / (...) / Kai mai / Jikai mai / (...) / Phandlo si amenqe o devel / I phuv shargo kai ciuci si / bi khanikasqo [You without a grave / Us without a house / (...) / Where to / Till when / (...) / The sky is closed for us / The yellow earth is void / nobody’s]” (O Rajko Djurić, “Bi kheresqo bi limoresqo [Without house, without grave]).”¹² Leitmotifs of

10 O Dragano le Trumpesqo-Jevremović, “Sostar, daie, biandian man?” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 95.

11 Dorutzi Iujef, “Rrom san” = “You are still Rrom,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 66.

12 O Rajko Djurić, “Bi kheresqo bi limoresqo,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 98.

the cosmic elements “sky” and “earth” are used to increase the feeling of emptiness and of loneliness. The yellow color here symbolizes desperation and death. The absence of a house and the absence of a grave, the house for the other world, have the significance of a total exclusion of the Roma from the world of people, the absolute lack of protection. The wind is important and feared as in the Rromano folklore (“T-avel o ivend sar baro dashtil, korkores te na phurdel i balval [Let the winter be as strong as possible, only the wind not to blow],” being a symbol of uncertainty and the most powerful among the cosmic powers such as the sun and the frost: “Ta avas e balvalaqe p-o phurdipe [We are in the wind’s gust]” (O Rajko Djurić, “Bi kheresqo bi limoresqo” [Without house, without grave]).¹³

The leitmotif of the road is everywhere in Rromani poetry, and it represents the tragic fate of the Roma, the marginalization of the Roma, the loss of any point of reference, the feeling of loss itself: “Mashkar-e hasarde droma jivimnasqe [Among the roads of lost life]”¹⁴ (O Rajko Djurić, “Bi kheresqo bi limoresqo” [Without house, without grave]); “Pe-l droma le gavenqe / (...) / Pe-l droma le forenqe / (...) / Pe-l droma le kimponqe / (...) / Pe-l droma le Francuzosqe / (...) / Pe-l droma la Europaqe / (...) [On village roads / (...) / On town roads / (...) / On field roads / (...) / On French roads / (...) / On Europe’s roads / (...)”¹⁵ (O Mateo Maksimoff, “Pe-l droma” [On the roads]). There is no escape, no protection, no hope, no help. The roads are endless and empty. The nomadic life is extremely difficult, even tragic, leading to poverty, hunger, thirst, illness, even death: “Iek vurdon purano / Iek gras nasavlo / Iek familia ciori / Le staturi dopash nange / le punre melale / Le bal pharade. / (...) / Iek jukel nasavlo bokhatar / Iek familia kai merel bokhatar [An old wagon / An ill horse / A poor family / Half naked bodies. / dirty feet / Stirred hair. / (...) / A dog ill from hunger / A family dying of hunger]”¹⁶ (O Mateo Maksimoff, “Pe-l droma” [On the roads]).

13 idem

14 ibidem

15 Mateo Maksimoff, “Pe-l droma,” in: G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, pp. 82–83.

16 Mateo Maksimoff, “Pe-l droma,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 83.

The theme of racism is an obsessive one in Rromani poetry, the accent falling on the hate the non-Rroma feel for the Rroma and on the consequences of this hate—a total exclusion from society: “Iek plaka / ‘Nai slobodo te ciudes o gunoi’ / (...) / Iek plaka / ‘Nai slobodo te beshen le Rrom’ [A poster / ‘It is forbidden to throw the garbage’ / (...) / A poster / ‘It is forbidden for the Rroma to stay’]”¹⁷ (Mateo Maksimoff, “Ce shukar si!” [How beautiful it is!]); “Ande dui mie bersh o gagio e rromeh phucel: / Kon san tu, katar aveh? / O rrom phenel: / Me sem katar o mas, / ande ma hi e kokala, ande ma hi o rat, / o ogi, o volipe, o phralipe, o ciaci-pe, / o hasavipe, o roviipe, / o bahtalipe the o bibahtalipe. / (...) Tu, gageia, uladian e manushen / e pahneh pe iekh rig a e kaleh pe aver rig. [In the year two thousand the Gagio asks the Rrom: / Who are you, where do you come from? / The Rrom answers: / I have a body, / Inside of me there are bones, inside of me there is blood, / soul, will, brotherhood, truth, / loss, weeping, / good luck and bad luck. / (...) / You, the Gagio, have split the people / the white on one side and the black on the other side]”¹⁸ (O Aladin Marko Sejdić, “Ande dui mie bersh” [In the year two thousand]).

Rroma children are seen as the main victims of discrimination and exclusion, stifled by poverty, hunger and frost: “ciave bi skolaqe / ciave biloshale / ciave and-o maripen / garavde and-e peravde khera / (...) / tel-o bershind nashen prnange, / pharavde gadentzar, on izdran shilestar. [children without school / unhappy children / children at war / hidden in ruined houses / (...) / under the rain they run barefoot, / with tattered clothes, they shiver]”¹⁹ (I Nina Vinkova, “O bershind” [The rain]).

One of the most significant poems on the topic of racism is “Pe-l droma” by Mateo Maksimof, a Kalderash Rrom from Spain, who speaks about the historical injustice done to the Rroma, about extreme poverty caused by racial discrimination, about nomadism as a curse, caused by

17 Mateo Maksimoff, “Ce shukar si!” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 100.

18 Aladin Marko Sejdić, “Ande dui mie bersh,” in Marko Aladin Sejdić, *Me avav dural* [I Come from Far Away], Milano: Pubblicazioni dell’I.S.U. Università Cattolica, 2000, p. 16.

19 Nina Vinkova, “O bershind,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 116.

banishment and forced eviction, about the Roma who are begging to survive and about the murdered Roma in the past, today, and tomorrow.

«Pe-l droma le gavenqe
Iek vurdon miškil
Tzirdino katar iek gras slabo
Ci len sama so si
Le kimpuri
Le thana
Le xara
Iek vurdon miškil
Tzirdino katar iek gras slabo
Pe-l droma le gavenqe.

Pe-l droma le forenqe
Iek Roma ai lesqi familia
Tzirden.
Spiden
Jan palal
Iek vurdon miškil
Iek gras phurdino
Mai kino lestar
Uni phalia
Pe-l štar rati grinćinin
Iek vurdon purano
P-el štar droma le forosqe.

Pe-l droma le kimponqe
Le mai šukar kimpuri la lumiaqe
Kudola le Frantzuzosqe
Iek vurdon purano
Iek gras nasavlo
Iek familia ciori
Le staturi dopaš nange
le punre melale
Le bal pharade
Jan palal

Iek vurdon purano
Ai iek gras nasavlo.

Pe-l droma le Frantzuzosqe
Kai anklen
Kai xulen
Ai kai mai anklen
Iek ciori familia rromenqi
Iek gras kai manai les duxo
Iek kheroro kai phirel
Iek jukel nasavlo bokhatar
Iek familia kai merel bokhatar
Rodel pesqo xamos
Peske familiaqe ai pesqe
Grastesqe
Te na meren
Te na meren bokhatar
Pe-l droma le Frantzuzosqe.

Pe-l droma la Europaqe
Mii ai mii
Vurdona miškin
Katar le Rrom kai roden
Maren pe te avel len o traio
Pe-l droma
Pe-l gava
«Nai slobodo te bešen»
Pe-l foruri
«Nai slobodo te mangen»
Pe-l kimpuri
Feliastri si vudara phandade.

Pe o Frantzuzo
Lil baro
Ai lil čhavorenqo
Pe e Europa
Mudarde

Le berša kai nakhle
Le berša akana
Le berša kai avena
Pe-l droma la Europaqe.

Pe-l droma la lumiaqe
Milivoia ai milivoia
Vurdona miškin
Familiu bokhale
Bokhale anda sa
Anda o manro ai anda o lon
Katar o kamimos ai e vortačia
Katar o mukimos ai e mila
Milivoia ai milivoia Rrom
Gras nasavle
Čhavore phurangle
Romnia sikaven o vast
Kai roden penqo xamos
Pe-l droma la lumiaqe».²⁰

[On village roads
A wagon is moving
Pulled by a lean horse
They don't even know where they are
Fields
Places
Valleys
A wagon is moving
Pulled by a lean horse
On village roads.

On town roads
A Rroma and his family
Pull.

20 Mateo Maksimoff, "Pe-l droma," in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Ţigănească*, pp. 82–84.

Turn
Go back
A wagon is moving
A swollen horse
More tired than it
Some wagon planks
Crunch on the four wheels
An old wagon
On four town roads.

On field roads
The most beautiful fields in the world
French ones
An old wagon
An ill horse
A poor family
Half-naked bodies
Dirty feet
Stirred hair
Go back
An old wagon
And an ill horse.

On French roads
That go up
And down
And again go up
A poor Rroma family
A horse that has no longer breathe
A little house that walks
A dog ill from hunger
A family dying of hunger
Are striving for a bread
for them
and for their horse
Not to die
Not to die of hunger
On French roads.

On Europe's roads
Thousands and thousands
Wagons are moving
Because the Rroma are striving
And fighting for their life
On the roads
In the villages
«It is forbidden to stay»
In the towns
«It is forbidden to beg»
In the fields
Closed windows and doors.

In the French
Constitution
And a law for children's rights
In Europe
Killed
In the past
Today
And tomorrow
On Europe's roads.

On the world's roads
Millions and millions
Wagons are moving
Hungry families
Hungry for everything
For bread and salt
For friendship and justice
For tolerance and pity
Millions and millions of Rroma
Ill horses
Barefooted children
Begging women
They strive for their bread
On world's roads].

Directly linked to racism, the theme of the Holocaust / *Samudaripen* is also massively present in the Rromani literature as in the Rromano folklore: “Muj shuko, / iakha kale, / vusht shudre, / acipen. / Ilo cindo, / bi ogesqo, / bi lavesqo, / nanai roipen [Dry mouth, / gloomy eyes, / cold lips, / silence. / Broken heart, / soulless, / wordless, / this is not a wailing]”²¹ (O Santino Spinelli, “Auschwitz”); “Nanaj lokhes, phrala, / nanai lokhes te iertisares / (...) / Te iertis len so ciorde ciavorren, chiniarde manushen, / tasavde len, phabarde len milionentza? / (...) Odova puchipen ni del amen te sovas: / sar te iertisaras? [It is not easy, brother, / it is not easy to forgive / (...) / To forgive the ones who stole our children, who slaughtered our people, / who choked them, who burned millions of our men? / (...) This question keeps me up at night: / how to forgive them?]”²² (I Nina Vinkova, “O Iertisaripen” [Forgiveness]).

On the other side of the poetic road there is the symbol of protection, love, and kindness: the mother, but also surrounded by a tragic aura: the Rromani mother is poor, sometimes a beggar, she cries much, until her eyes are left without tears: “Amari sinia / Iasvasa khosli / Dukhasa uciardi. / (...) Dui kotora marre kale / An’dui durikane gava mangle [Our table / Full of tears / Covered with pain. / (...) / Two pieces of black bread / Begged for in two far away villages]”²³ (O Rajko Djurić, “E daiaqe iakha” [Mother’s eyes]).

Often, Rromani poetry is a wail lamenting a mother’s death, for her who died young, leaving her children alone and forever in sorrow and mourning, with a husband who also died young and with a life which was as painful as her death: “Mulia manqe mri daiorri, / sas terni [My mother died, / she was young]”²⁴ (I Elena Cerveniakova, “Mulia manqe mri daiorri” [My mother died]); “To rom mulo terno, / (...) / Po but

21 Santino Spinelli, “Auschwitz,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 128.

22 Nina Vinkova, “O Iertisaripen,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 138.

23 Rajko Djurić, “E daiaqe iakha,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 31.

24 Elena Cerveniakova, “Mulia manqe mri daiorri,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 119.

bara halian sar marro, / (...) / Dui ciave biprandime dur tutar acile, / Dui ciave ta i ceai, i tikini, / (...) / ai tu but terni nashlian [Your husband died young, / (...) / You ate too many stones for bread, / (...) / Two unmarried boys remained far away from you, / Two boys and a girl, the little one, / (...) / and you ran away from them very young]”²⁵ (I Refia Mečkavka, “Roimnasqi gili” [Wail]).

Nevertheless, in all this tragic pattern of thinking, there is still a hope for the Rroma, weak, but becoming more and more powerful: a hope to be recognized and respected as citizens of the countries in which they live, with all the civic rights coming from this status and to be recognized and respected as a nation or at least as a national minority, with all the cultural and political rights coming from this status:

- the fight for the recognition of their ethnic identity and for the destigmatization of this identity, for gaining dignity, building up ethnic self-esteem and recovering real deep values of the Rromani culture such as the Rromani language: “Amari cib rromani/ Si li iekh gugli gili! / Si li i cib gilabadi, / Gilabadi and-o gi [Our Rromani language / Is a sweet song! / Is a sung language / Sung in the soul]”²⁶ (I Nikoleta Ciuraru, “I cib rromani” [The Rromani language]);
- high respect for the elders: “Avela o dives amaro / Rromano dives barvalo / (...) But sastipen bicial e rromenqe / a mai but a puranenqe”²⁷ [Our day is coming / Our rich day / (...) / We wish health to the Rroma / but more to the elders] (O Disoran Zekir, “Avela o dives amaro” [Our day is coming]);
- love and the purity of girls at marriage, story-telling, music: “Av mantzar, ceaiorrie, odothe kai mirri dai beshel / k-amende e Rroma sarkoi riat paramisia den / Av mantzar, ma dara, me tut na mukhava

25 Refia Mečkavka, “Roimnasqi gili,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 120.

26 Nikoleta Ciuraru, “I cib rromani,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 121.

27 Disoran Zekir, “Avela o dives amaro,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 100.

/ ni bibaht, ni laj tuqe na kerava. / Sare Rroma dikhena, kana me tut anava / thai pumare lahute laciarena”²⁸ [Come with me, girl, there, where my mother lives / at our place the Rroma tell stories all night long / Come with me, girl, don’t be afraid, I am not going to leave you / or to cast bad luck or shame on you. / All the Rroma will see you when I’ll bring you there / and they’ll play their violins] (I Tera Fabianova, “Av mantzar” [Come with me]);

- happiness of a boy’s birth in the traditional patriarchal society: “Biandilo o ciavo / Savorre raduin pe kai si mursh, / o dad, i dei, / o mai but o papo ai i mami.”²⁹ [The boy was born / Everybody is happy that it is a boy, / the father, the mother, / and even more the grandfather and the grandmother] (O Demir Mustafa, “Biandilo ciavo” [The boy was born]);
- Indian origins to be proud of and the absolute need for the commitment of all Rroma to proudly assume the ethnic identity of being a Rrom: “Si amen phuv romani / I Penjabsko daiorri / (...) / Si Roma k-o dunias / po romipe kai bistren; / ‘Roma siam’ te vakeren / e lajatar na mangel. / Kide len, daiorrie / Kide len, tu, phurie / phrav tu phanle iakha / irin o cinde phaka. / Te vazden pe on upreste / e khamestar po dureste.”³⁰ [We have our Romano land / Mother Panjab / (...) / There are Roma in the world / who forget their identity; / “We are Roma” tell it / with no shame. / Gather them, mother / Gather them, old lady / open up their eyes / give them back their wings. / To raise themselves up / higher than the sun] (I Fikria Fazli, “Parne arapura” [White Arabs]);
- the positive stereotype of the magic Rromani love: “Ande-l iakha la ratiaqe / dikhau le patria la phuviaqe / sar amboldion, sar amboldion / ta putardion / ji intea o suno.”³¹ [In the night’s eyes / I see the

28 Tera Fabianova, “Av mantzar,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigăneasă*, p. 58.

29 Demir Mustafa, “Biandilo ciavo,” in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigăneasă*, p. 134.

30 Fikria Fazli, “Parne arapura,” in *Études Tsiganes. Littérature Romani*, no. 4 (1991), p. 18.

31 Luminitza Cioaba, “Riat,” in Luminitza Mihai Cioaba, *O angluno la phuveako* (Sibiu, Editura Neo Drom), 1994, p. 34.

earth's leaves / whirling, twisting around / and blowing / till there,
beyond the dream] (I Luminitza Cioaba, "Riat" [Night]);

• a world freed of racism, where equality and happiness are achieved
by everybody, Roma and non-Roma: "Dikhvav suno iekh them /
kai vi e Gage te oven Roma. / (...) va, iekh them sunenqo kai sa
janen / so lentza bariol i baht e Rromenqi."³² [I dream about a coun-
try / where the Gage become Roma / (...) / yes, a dream country
where all know / that with them Roma good luck is growing] (O Es-
lam Drudak, "Dikhvav suno iekh them" [I dream about a country]).

From tragedy to hope, from stigma to ethnic self-esteem, Rromani poetry is still a weapon fighting for Roma cultural emancipation from the spiritual slavery of being assimilated by the culture of the dominant majority and from the ethnic self-stigma coming from historical exclusion and racism; it defines a pattern of thinking representing more the collective mind and soul of the Roma and less the individual view of its writers.

Beyond universal feelings of love, hate, longing, belonging, sadness, joy, doubt, fear, and courage, and beyond the universal search for the main questions of mankind about the beginning and the end of the world, about the sense of life, about time and space, about beauty and ugliness, about divinity and humanity, about life and death—Rromani literature includes all these themes, but it is not secure enough to totally focus on these general topics without taking into account the ethnic wound of being the most excluded group of the contemporary world among the ethnic groups which live in the middle of the modern world. That is why Rromani literature is still at war for the spiritual decolonization of the Roma and for the Roma to be recognized as one of the cultured nations of the earth.

Note: *Poetry translations from Rromani into English were done by Delia Grigore.*

32 Eslam Drudak, "Dikhvav suno iekh them," in G. Sarău, *Culegere de texte în limba Țigănească*, p. 141.