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Beyond Borders: On the Transgressive Potential of Romani Literature(s)

1. Introduction

The Roma[1] population living in Europe are a widely dispersed people. They do not constitute just 'one people' but a mosaic of groups scattered across the world and share many features with other diasporic groups (Toninato 2009). Such great dispersion, coupled with their transnational mobility, is also mirrored in their literature, which has only recently received sustained critical attention (Hertrampf, von Hagen; Zahova, French, Hertrampf; Zahova; Hertrampf, French).

Even though the production of written literature by Roma has a history of just under a hundred years, it is important to emphasise that it does exist throughout Europe. Eloquent testimony to this is the International Romani Writers' Association (IRWA), the international association of Romani writers, founded in 2002.

Several scholars have pointed out that, given the linguistic and cultural diversity of Romani communities, it is more appropriate to refer to their literature

1 Terminological note: In this article, the term "Roma," which was introduced internationally at the first congress of the International Romani Union in 1971 and is now dominant in Romani Studies, is used as an umbrella term for all subgroups of the minority (see, for example, Hertrampf, Hagen 2020a: 9–11). Furthermore, the generic masculine form is preferred to the gendered form "Rom:nja" for reasons of better readability.

"in the plural," to reflect its inner complexity (Eder-Jordan 1999, 2005 and 2015; Blandfort; Blandfort, Hertrampf; Toninato 2014: 74, French, Hertrampf). The term 'Romani literatures,' however, can only be used with reservations in the following, as on the one hand it can contribute to the visibility of literatures that have long been located on the margins, and on the other hand it harbours the danger of creating new constructions of difference and is therefore rejected by some Roma. Here, it initially represents an auxiliary construct that aims to abolish boundaries – such as in the poet(h)ic-aesthetic approach of Blandfort, Hertrampf and von Hagen (cf. von Hagen, Blandfort; von Hagen, Hertrampf) – which is methodologically reflected upon within the framework of the aesthetics of Romani literatures. Even if literary writing is still not accepted by everyone in the Romani communities (Toninato 1999, 2014), an increasing tolerance towards literature by and about Roma in written form can be observed within the group. This development is also due to the acceptance of social change and the increasingly changing living situation of the Roma. Roma writing in majority languages like French, such as Mateo Maximoff, Alexandre Romanès, Sandra Jayat, Miguel Haler, or Coucou Doerr, who as mediators consciously cross cultural-ethnic boundaries between the surrounding society and their own community, nevertheless represent an exception and – as in other European countries – also form a socio-cultural minority within the ethnic minority.

Given that Romani literatures are a young but increasingly productive form of literary performance and, due to their transgressive nature, represent transnational forms of a world shaped by diverse migration movements, we believe it is particularly important to raise awareness of this still marginalised literature and to promote interdisciplinary research into Romani literatures. This article is intended to provide a brief insight into Romani literature and to serve as a plea for more interdisciplinary engagement with Romani literature.

Central to this are the poetic procedures that transcend media boundaries, the transversals and ruptures that these self-constructions attempt to inscribe into an existing canon on the one hand but are also designed to transcend boundaries on the other. Thus, as the following exemplary analyses show, many border-crossing and border-transcending procedures can be observed: On the one hand, an aesthetic of becoming in the sense of Braidotti explores a new search for identity in the medium of literature, which reconfigures traditional myths as well as writing against stereotypes, rewriting and recoding them (Braidotti 54). Aesthetically, too, the new forms inscribe themselves into a discourse ensemble, but at the same time transcend it through new forms of self-representation, autofictions that are also designed to transcend media (cf. von Hagen 2020, 2024).

The corpus considered in this essay includes authors from Scandinavia, Central Europe, Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, Italy who write in Romani and/or non-Romani languages, often providing their self-translation. It comprises a large variety of media and genres, including poetry, novels, autofiction, theatre plays, memoirs and graphic novels. The aim is to show the diversity of Romani literatures and to illustrate how they can be seen as world literature. They inscribe themselves in a canon of Western-orientated narratives with their heterostereotypical ideas but at the same time attempt to rewrite and subvert them.

2. Romani Literatures as Migrant Literatures

Romani mobilities have been the subject of intense anthropological and sociological research in recent years. Although there have also been conceptualisations of the phenomenon immediately after the Second World War (Joskowicz), their main historical caesura is the fall of the iron curtain (Matras; Sobotka; van Baar; Clark 2000), the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union (Fiałkowska et al. 2019), as well as the outbreak of war in Ukraine (Szewczyk et al.; Fiałkowska et al. 2024) and Brexit (Clark 2020). This research addresses diverse issues related to migration: push and pull factors for Romani migration, migration policies of countries of origin and host countries, institutional networking, migration-induced changes in cultural models of migrating groups, reactions of majority societies in host countries. This is the largest research area of contemporary Romani studies. In view of the scope of this issue, we propose to ask how migration issues are present in texts of Romani literature and culture and whether Romani literatures can be studied as a specific case of migration literatures.

In the study of Romani literatures, taking inspiration from other research areas is generally treated with caution due to the specificity of this largest European ethnic minority that is part of almost every majority society in contemporary Europe. No methodological framework developed for other communities will be adequate here. The issues of migration and diaspora in relation to Romani literatures have already been raised in Paola Toninato's *The Making of Gypsy Diasporas* (2009) and Ileana Chirila's *Migration, Romani Writers, and the Question of National Literature* (2024). Both scholars have drawn attention to the need to problematize such transfers because of the image of Roma as 'eternal nomads' that influences Romani studies. As Chirila wrote:

> Many analysts point to the fact that Roma are at home anywhere, in the sense that they share the public space with non-Roma, yet nowhere,

> since wherever they go, they are reminded of their inability to "fit-in" and be identified with a territorialised and spatially bounded culture. (Chirila 113)

Toninato, on the other hand, spoke of the reasons why the concept of diaspora has not found acceptance among Roma themselves:

> One of the main reasons why diasporic narratives failed to gain wider acceptance among the Roma so far is that these narratives bear resemblance with attempts of authorities and policymakers to mark Gypsies as 'different' and exclude them as undesired and undesirable foreigners' who in the distant past entered Europe from India. (Toninato 2009: 1)

Indeed, some Romani writers emphasise their nationality and citizenship. Ceija Stojka, for example, wrote in a poem: "Ich bin eine Wurzel / aus Österreich / eine Wurzel / die sich auch nicht umsetzen lässt / ich würde woanders ja gar nicht gedeihen"[2] (Meier-Rogan 24). Bronisława Wajs (Papusza) in a famous poem "Pchuw miry me ćchaj Tyry" (Land, I am your daughter) underlines her feeling of attachment to her homeland by referring to the colours of the Polish flag: "katylaryca / Tchem miro łoli i parni"[3] (Bronisława Wajs).

The same concerns are also shared by sociologists and anthropologists. All of the above-mentioned research on Romani migrations is carried out with the knowledge that every migratory intensification in Europe makes Romani migrants 'hyper-visible' compared to other migrant groups. This is due to the stereotype of "eternal wanderers," causing Roma to be suspected of being particularly attached to a mobile lifestyle due to a culturally determined lack of attachment to the land. Many scholars and politicians who address this problem note that a distinction needs to be made between 'Roma nomadism' and 'Roma mobility' or 'Roma migration' (Guet 77; Matras). This makes it all the more difficult to grasp the specificity of intra-European Roma migration. Roma, whether 'nomadic' or not – migrate (Acton 2010, 7) and science recognises this. As Vermeersch writes: „Although there is still concern about the Roma as migrants, they are now primarily viewed as Europe's largest transnational minority faced with the problem of socio-economic exclusion" (Vermeersch 226).

2 "I am a root / Root from Austria / A root that can't be moved / I wouldn't grow anywhere else."

3 "Poland / My country red and white."

The alleged 'nomadic' lifestyle as a key feature of the Roma was one of the most important strategies for essentialising this community in past ethnographic studies. The further away from this original cultural form the groups analysed were, the further they were from 'pure/truly Gypsy.' In the introduction to his classic 1787 dissertation *Historischer Versuch über die Zigeuner*, Heinrich Grellmann wrote:

> For the space of between three and four hundred years, they have gone wandering about, like pilgrims and strangers: they are found in eastern and western countries, as well among the rude as civilised, indolent and active people; yet they remain ever, and everywhere, what their fathers were – Gipsies. (Grellmann IX)

The attribute of a non-sedentary lifestyle was *ex cathedra* attached to the homogeneous Roma community, whereas, as historians state, for example, in the late Middle Ages and early modernity, a significant proportion of majority societies were also 'on the move' – due to natural disasters, epidemics, economic crises, wars and many other factors. Roma migrations have been presented ahistorically in older studies, as being governed by their own dynamics, independent of general historical processes. Meanwhile, the moment when the people called 'Gypsies' become visible on the map of Europe – i.e. the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries – is a time when, as a prominent historian has noted:

> The changes in the ownership structure in the countryside are pushing a large number of people out of their previous existence and into the city to find a 'place under the sun'… Masses of poor people, for whom there was no place either in the countryside or in the city, became a permanent feature of the European social landscape. (Geremek 18)

The history of Roma could therefore be successfully studied together with the history of this migrating mass of people who, at the threshold of modernity, have for various reasons lost the possibility of a settled way of life. Art historian Timea Junghaus underlines that alleged 'Romani nomadism' could be a reaction to expulsions, and survival strategy (Junghaus 2025).[4]

4 In her previous work Timea Junghaus positively valorised calling the Roma "global nomads" (Junghaus 2014).

Moreover, studies on the history of Roma often present their wandering through the cities of late medieval Europe, sometimes in analogy with the Jewish community that was said to be seeking refuge at the same time. Klaus Michael Bogdal wrote:

> Die Chroniken sind erfindungsreich… Nicht nur ein paar verschreckte oder um ihre Armenkasse besorgte deutsche Städte halten die Ankunft der Zigeuner in ihren Annalen fest. Überall in Europa reagieren die Einheimischen auf eine ähnliche Weise, als hätte man drauf gewartet, neben den Juden ein weiteres Volk vor Augen zu haben, an dessen uneuropäischer, geheimnisvoller Lebensweise sich der Abstand zur eigenen Weltordnung messen lasse. Um nur einige Orte und Länder zu nennen, aus denen Nachrichten überliefert wurden: Neben zahlreichen deutschen und Schweizer Städten von Lübeck über Augsburg bis Bern sind dies u. a. Brüssel (1420), Deventer (1420), Nijmengen (1428), Bologna und Forli (1422), Mailand (1457), Paris (1427), Barcelona (1447), Lwów (1444), Vilnus (1501) und schließlich Orte in Schottland (1505), Dänemark (1511), Schweden (1512), England (1514) und Finnland (1540).[5] (Bogdal 2011, 29)

The quoted migration route is repeated in many studies on Roma, usually without citing sources, including in studies on migration (Marushiakova, Popov). In such a frame, Roma migration appears as historically and culturally conditioned, differing from the migration of other ethnic groups (Olivera 147), which sometimes translates into local practices towards Roma (Olivera 147–151; Picker 152–165). It constitutes a kind of repetitive cliché that serves as a 'historical background' in studies on Roma communities. As Wim Willems has pointed out, all accounts of Gypsies in late medieval Europe come from two chronicler texts, Cornelius (1417) and Andreas (1424) (Willems 304). Extensive research

5 "The chronicles are full of ideas… It was not only a few frightened German towns or those worried about their poor coffers that recorded the arrival of the Gypsies in their annals. Everywhere in Europe, the locals reacted in a similar way, as if they had been waiting to see another people alongside the Jews, whose non-European, mysterious way of life could be used to measure the distance to their own world order. To name just a few places and countries from which news was passed on: In addition to numerous German and Swiss cities from Lübeck to Augsburg and Bern, these include Brussels (1420), Deventer (1420), Nijmengen (1428), Bologna and Forli (1422), Milan (1457), Paris (1427), Barcelona (1447), Lwów (1444), Vilnus (1501) and finally places in Scotland (1505), Denmark (1511), Sweden (1512), England (1514) and Finland (1540)."

on urban documents from the late 15th and early 16th centuries was carried out in the 19th century by the French historian Paul Bataillard (Bataillard 1844, 1888), and so far, no one has yet repeated it to this extent.

However, literary discourse is characterised by different rules than scientific discourse and, above all, it possesses the subversive potential of reinterpreting exoticised images. Through such re-writings, a new Roma identity discourse is created, which thematises the migration experience in different ways. In critical discourse, for example, the figure of the Roma is sometimes equated with the figure of the 'nomad' as unsealing nation-centric discourses or demonstrating the control measures applied to this group (and others) by nation-states. It is a property that brings it closer to the figure of the migrant. The authors of the introduction to the *Palgrave Handbook on Migration Literature* wrote:

> We believe that from the perspective of the materials in this handbook, the history of Europe looks… more like the history of a sedentarist ideology that has often been used to obscure the presence of nonwhite and/or mobile peoples on the continent for millennia. (Stan, Sussman 9)

Giorgio Agamben noted about the subversive potential of the Romani language, pointing out the fundamental difference between an institutionally unaffiliated argot (Romani) and a national language (Agamben). This has become a contribution to reflections on the place of Creole in comparative studies (Apter). On the other hand, the history of Roma illustrates the gradual evolution of legal measures applied to non-sedentary people in Western European countries since the 19th century: registration systems and other forms of identification, nationalisation or deportation. Using the history of people called 'Gypsies' as an example, it could be possible to trace the transformations and different variants of the European discourse towards migrants: in the Enlightenment, they were potential 'good citizens' (provided that appropriate policies and 'education' were implemented); in the 19th century, anthropological curiosities; in the first half of the 20th century, they often became a source of polluting danger. From a historical point of view, according to Ilse About, these processes developed in connection with the increased control of nation-state borders after the First World War. The figure of the 'international Gypsy,' created by the earlier discourse, who freely crosses national borders and does not identify with the nation-state, posed, in this perspective, a threat to social order and public safety and even national sovereignty. About recalled the well-known story of the stock who were to be deported from Belgium to Norway in 1934 but were eventually returned (via the lands of the Third Reich) to Belgium.

> The story of this caravan, expelled from all over the place and transported from one country to another, gave comfort to the most stereotypical representations surrounding these Western European Romani populations, qualified as an errant and nomadic people in order to justify communities' denationalisation and legitimise expulsion measures. (About 524–525)

The experience of being Roma is thus, in this perspective, parallel to the migrant experience in the sense that it is dependent on the majority society: as the authors of the introduction to the *Palgrave Handbook on Migration Literature* state, "being a migrant has more to do with being figured or imagined as one through the conventional narratives of transit, than it does with any essential quality" (Stan, Sassman 15).

Romani literature(s), like any literature produced by any other social/ethnic group, reflects and shapes the Roma migration experience. It seems that two ways of reading this literature in the context of migration can be identified: The first can thematise the diverse experiences of displacement – forced by diverse factors. Thus, this group will include both texts touching on the past of some non-settled Roma groups, often romanticising it (Papusza, Menyhert Lakatos, Leksa Manusz, Ceija Stojka, Tera Fabiánová, Usin Kerim, Karol Parno Gierlinski), as well as texts addressing contemporary migrations from Central Europe to Western Europe or the USA (Oksana Marafioti), and works written in connection with the migration of Roma from Ukraine (Balakireva et al.). By indicating these contexts, a generalisation of Roma literatures as "on the move" (Ette) literatures can be avoided.

The second group of texts would include works that creatively refer to the Roma's ascribed status as 'eternal wanderers,' 'nomads.' As Julia Blandfort notes: "writers of Romani descent are drawing on histories of actual migration that they are reinterpreting metaphorically" (Blandfort 2015). Wandering and its attributes might thus not be understood here literally, but as a poetic figure of identity and a source of creative power (Blandfort 2015). An example provides the figure of the 'camp' reinterpreted by Ethel Brooks in her essay *Reclaiming: The Camp and the Avant-Garde* (Brooks 2013). "The camp," understood as the place to live but also a place of annihilation, becomes a central figure of Roma being in Europe, as well as a transformative model, an "allegory for the recovery of Roma politics" (Junghaus 2014: 101).

Romani literature as migration literature thus has two facets: on the one hand, it ironically plays with the stereotype of the 'eternal wanderers,' without denying that the ancestors of some of the contemporary Roma led

a semi-sedentary lifestyle. As part of a non-sedentary community, they became the targets of policies aimed at sealing the borders of nation states after the First World War. As wanderers, they used to be portrayed in literary and visual texts and scientific works. Nowadays, this image is often postcolonially 'rewritten,' such as in the work of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (Kledzik 2023).

On the other hand, the Roma community is a migrant community and has a history of – largely forced – migration. In the 20th century, it includes wartime migration and post-war displacement, as well as processes related to the collapse of the Soviet sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe and the political transition. As such, it makes it possible to trace the transformations that Roma cultures have undergone under the influence of post-Cold War globalisation.

3. Roma as an 'Other' Diaspora

Migration has had a greater impact on some Roma groups than others, leading to them settling in widely scattered communities around the world while remaining distinct from the majority societies in which they live. In a sense, the Roma constitute diasporic communities characterised by strong internal heterogeneity. "The establishment of a diasporic community is not a uniform process, varying from one place to another, even within the same society and country" (Ben-Rafael 844). This is particularly true of the Roma, who have lived in scattered communities for centuries. The diversity of their subgroups is partly due to the varying degrees of assimilation into the surrounding majority society, whether voluntary or forced. This is evident in their regional and local roots in certain countries, as well as in the influence of cultural practices and the language of the respective majority culture.

The group members themselves also perceive their own otherness. On a very general level, this is revealed in the Romani saying "Roma nana jekh!"[6] (Hubschmannova et al. 11). Furthermore, internal group otherness is also emphasised by local affiliations, as exemplified by Louise "Pisla" Helmstetter (1926–2013), who explicitly refers to herself as an Alsatian – and not French – Roma in her autobiographical book *Sur ces chemins où nos pas se sont effacés* (On These Paths Where Our Footsteps Have Faded Away), published in 2012. This strong local attachment to her homeland may surprise anyone who is not familiar with the Roma, as the essentialist stereotype of the Roma as a (voluntarily) nomadic ethnic group persists in mainstream discourse, contrary to the realities of their lives.

Safran, for example, claims that the geographical dispersion of the Roma is "characteristic of their nomadic culture and the result of their refusal to be

6 "Roma are not all the same!"

sedentarised" (Safran 87). However, the majority of Roma (not only in Romania) are settled or at least live in temporary settlements (cf. Streck; Roner-Trojer 297). Looking at Roma in Romania, for example, differences in this regard are particularly evident when comparing Roma groups living on the eastern and western fringes of the Romance speaking countries. Roma in Romania speak Romanès as their mother tongue, live mostly socially excluded in precarious conditions in camps and ghetto-like settlements on the outskirts of towns, and are repeatedly forced into migration by camp clearances. Spanish *gitanos*, on the other hand, hardly speak Caló, the Spanish variety of Romanès, as their mother tongue anymore. Significant cultural characteristics of the *gitanos*, such as *flamenco*, are also considered 'typically Spanish' by the Spanish and international majority society, and many Roma, especially those who are artistically active, live as recognised, completely 'normal' Spanish citizens – which unfortunately does not mean that some of the *gitanos* are not also exposed to massive social disadvantage and discrimination.

The tendency to develop a regionally based, amalgamated hybrid identity is much more pronounced among Western European Roma than Eastern European Roma communities. Regardless of these differences, it can be said that both the external exclusion and the internal separation of Roma from the respective majority society are fundamentally a *longue durée* phenomenon: Even among Roma who appear to be assimilated and well-integrated, the feeling of otherness is expressed in the strong tendency towards othering articulated in the privacy of the ingroup, which can be seen, for example, in the fact that non-Roma, regardless of their national, ethnic or religious origin, are referred to in general terms as *gadjo* or *payo*, in Caló (cf. Hertrampf 2017a, 2017b). Despite being rooted in a particular majority culture, the sense of otherness remains. As the Spanish Roma author Núria León de Santiago notes: "I am a [Spanish] writer and also a Gitana; and apart from being a Gitana, I am a writer. For me, the two are so intertwined that it doesn't matter to me in which order they come" (Ibarz 16).

Perhaps more so than other diasporic groups, it is true that the Roma do not exist as a homogeneous ethnic group with a uniformly defined culture (as claimed, for example, by Sheffer 1: 245). Rather, they are a geographically dispersed, multicultural minority with more or less pronounced amalgamated hybrid identities (cf. Liégeois, Gheorghe 29). This diaspora experience is characterised by Hall as being precisely heterogeneous and diverse (Hall 235). With reference to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, it can be thought of as a rhizome: a network with multiple nodes where connections and exchanges between transnationally dispersed communities can take place (Deleuze, Guattari 36–37).

The concept of a transnational diaspora therefore seems particularly suitable for understanding the Roma diaspora: "the notion of transnational diaspora also includes groups – socially and culturally close to each other – that experience amalgamation in the face of prevailing culture in their new environment, from which they feel equally remote" (Ben-Rafael 844).

The Roma Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale shows that transnationality is also perceived from an internal perspective as an essential nation-forming characteristic (cf. Hattendorff). The transnational sense of belonging is also reflected in the Romani proverb "Sem Rom sam"[7] (Hubschmannova et al. 11).

Describing the Roma ethnic group in more detail and drawing on Clifford's processual concept of diaspora as a decentralised, transnational network community (Clifford 1994; 1997) makes it clear that the geographical location of origin becomes less significant and the mental and social dimensions become more important. The transnational sense of home is therefore rooted in a transnational community of solidarity. For members of such transnational diasporas, home can be anywhere in the world. As a social home, it is wherever Roma encounter other Roma groups. The spatial component of the transnational concepts of home and diaspora should therefore be understood metaphorically, as a location within networks of relationships, and primarily in social terms based on a shared framework of values and traditions. However, the sense of belonging that is essential for transnational diasporas must always be understood as 'dual homeliness' (Ben-Rafael). In relation to the Roma, this means that their attachment to their Indian homeland, which has been de-territorialised through mental construction, and their sense of belonging to a specific geographical area, combine to form a 'double homeland' with heterotopic characteristics. However, critical voices such as Kokot point out that, for most people living in diaspora, everyday interaction with their local environment is much more important for diasporic community identification than transnational networks (Kokot, 105). While it may be true that, in the everyday lives of different Roma groups, diaspora is merely a lived reality and less of a conscious concept, and that national and regional-local location and integration are much more relevant, the awareness of belonging to a transnational diaspora nevertheless emerges repeatedly and explicitly. For example, in an interview, when asked what her homeland is, the aforementioned Louise Helmstetter responds: "L'Alsace… toute le monde [sic]!" (Helmstetter: 00:04:46–00:04:47). Here, locality and transnationality merge into a diasporic dual sense of belonging.

7 "Of course we are Roma."

In summary, the Roma can be described as a transnational diaspora that is 'different' from others due to its mental connection to its origins, strong local roots, and resulting high level of intra-cultural heterogeneity (Ben-Rafael 845). Much like Foucault's heterotopias, the Roma diaspora appears to be both geographically situated and de-territorialised, essentially proving to be a mental construct.

One reason why Sheffer describes the Roma as an 'emerging' diaspora rather than a historical one lies in the blurred distinction between diaspora existence and consciousness (cf. Sheffer 60–61; Cohen 354), and in the heterostereotypical view of the Roma that deliberately ignores their politically engaged tendencies and currents reflecting on their own diaspora.

Given the historical experiences and everyday lives of Roma people, it is clear that they are a globally dispersed diasporic community. In contrast, the concept of a diasporic consciousness, constructed and propagated by institutions, is a relatively new phenomenon largely linked to the increased participation of Roma in the educational and social systems of majority societies, and the resulting desire for empowerment. Only with the spread of literature in the majority language at the beginning of the 20th century, and the subsequent emergence of a Roma elite, was an interest group able to form in the 1970s. This group, the International Romani Union, counters negative stereotypes with self-representation and consciously reflects on the diaspora. For a 'different' transnational diaspora such as Roma, the intellectualisation, conceptualisation and literary expression of diasporic life, as well as building and strengthening transnational diaspora consciousness, are essential for transnational diasporic nation-building (cf. Toninato 2009). The socio-political and educational engagement of a young generation of Roma activists who have grown in confidence over the past few years and are active on social networks, helping to build an "e-diaspora" (Diminescu), can be seen as an example of a consciously launched "Doing Roma Diaspora," as can the literary and cultural productions of Roma authors and artists. In light of the increasing shift of social and communicative interaction to virtual spaces, the e-diaspora will certainly play an increasingly important role in the development of the Roma diaspora. As Cohen notes: "A striking possibility is that e-diasporas might create new virtual homes, without the need for a territorial homeland" (Cohen, 355).

4. Linguistic and Cultural Diversity of Romani Literatures

Different Roma groups are geographically dispersed in Europe. Complex hierarchies have been constructed among the Roma based on authenticity, purity and other values to distinguish between 'us' and 'them,' insiders and outsiders.

Meanings, distinctions, performative speech and language attributed to 'race' and social and class hierarchy are produced and reproduced among Roma by dynamic processes. Practices and meanings can be analysed as affective, embodied and sensible acts which are entangled in local and trans-local social relations, places and times.

At the same time, in the current open world, migration has resulted in diffusion with many different Romani groups and linguistic varieties co-existing in the same localities. The dynamics of the everyday interaction of the Roma, be it oral or written, are affected by globalisation, new mobilities and transnational networks including social media, in-between and bridging spoken and written language. Social media are currently a popular meeting place for the Roma. In some countries like Sweden, where many Romani groups coexist, much of the intergroup interaction of the Roma takes place at school, suggesting along with other factors intergenerational variation pertaining to the communicative spaces of Roma at different ages (Viveka Sajin, p.c. 15.7.2018).

Roma have also created ethnolects of their own in different majority languages (Bořkovcová; Salo), which are frequently used in literature written by Roma (e.g. in Finland the books written by Kiba Lumberg, a famous Finnish Roma writer). These idiolects differ from mainstream majority language varieties at all levels of language: phonetics, phonology, morphosyntax, lexicon, and phraseology, occasionally making them unintelligible for majorities. Compare with Aleksi: "On niitä rankkoja kaaleita täälkii. Miekii oon ollu melkein vuuen tappouhan alasena"[8] from the Lumberg's play *Tumma ja hehkuva veri*, adaptation 2004. According to Granqvist and Viljanen, they give an impression of the special way of thinking and the richness of imagination of the Roma (Granqvist, Viljanen). At the same time, they pose challenges for anyone non-Roma attempting to translate them to another language, first from the point of view of comprehension, and second from the point of view of being able to choose a suitable register corresponding to the Romani way of expression.

Romani is one of the largest minority languages in the European Union, with over 3.5 million speakers worldwide (Matras 2002: 238; Zătreanu). It is a stateless, non-territorial minority language with little written tradition (Matras 1999: 482). Despite its functional expansion, Romani is still typically a means of oral face-to-face interaction (Matras 1999: 482), and it is largely an emblem of identity and a socio-cultural boundary marker that distinguishes Roma from the non-Roma. Romani is the key language in the intergroup interaction of Roma, in addition to national languages of the host countries and English.

8 "There are hard Roma here, too. I have been, too, for almost a year under a death threat."

The nature of Romani literature is partly characterized by the lack of an international written standard variety of Romani the Roma could resort to in their intergroup interaction. To overcome some of the difficulties in intergroup interaction, Roma have developed patterns of mutual accommodation comprising lexical and grammatical choices, which they employ to a varying extent depending on Romani groups and individual speakers' age and attitudes. Mixing, levelling and simplification of dialects occur as response to a conversational context. Koineization takes place in linguistically highly diffuse communities for example in Sweden, where some Romani dialects (such Kalderash) take over as 'standards.' Hence, the choice of the target dialect sometimes poses problems when translating to Romani.

Additional challenges are caused by differences in the structure of Romani and the source language. In case of Finnish Romani, this is evident when attempting to translate in particular factual texts from Finnish. Along with the attrition and the gradual loss of its own grammatical framework, Finnish Romani has become increasingly symbiotic with Finnish, or Para-Romani-like in some respects (Granqvist 2024). Syntax is one of the levels of the language that mostly converges with Finnish. However, Romani mostly lacks real compounds, which are very productive in Finnish. Instead of compounds, Romani tends to rely on genitive + noun phrases, which results in complex and unnatural chains of genitives in translations.

As Finnish Romani lexicon lacks many terms used in modern society, translating texts to Romani is often a demanding task which requires creating new lexemes. The documented lexicon of Finnish Romani only comprises ca. 2200–2600 roots (Granqvist, Pirttisaari): basic lexical items denoting human beings, kinship terms, body parts, bodily functions, nature, landscape and time (common to all Romani dialects, cf. Matras 2002: 25–28), and vocabulary related to agriculture. It lacks many terms needed in modern society, business, administration, education etc. To overcome this, but also aiming for language purity, the authors of teaching materials have invented a number of neologisms, in particular school terms, which have however remained *hapax legomena* in many cases: e.g. *feerengiiro* 'ruler' < *feera* 'track', *harabos* 'sharpener' < *ǩarapo* 'sharp', *khossos* 'eraser' < *khoss-* 'sweep' (instead of the Swedish and Finnish loanwords *gumma* or *kumis*), *rannos* 'pen' < *rann-* 'write' (instead of the polysemic *ranniboskiiro* 'pen; writer'), *tamlo* 'evening' < *tamlo* 'dark' (instead of the Swedish loanword *kvella*), *trystalo* 'boll' < *trystalo* 'around' (instead of *bollos*) (Granqvist 2012). Other strategies of lexical enrichment change have comprised the use of inherited resources, the use of Finnish loanwords (e.g. *ammentav-en* 'to ladePRS.2/3PL' (< Fin. *ammentaa*) *hoksa-d-as* 'to tumble-PRET-3SG' (< Fin. *hoksata*)),

or the use of loanwords from other languages (such as English, e.g. *addikt-os* 'addict-NOM.SG, *natur-es-ko* 'nature-OBL.SG-GEN, *sensor-e* 'sensor-NOM.PL') (Granqvist 2012). Interdialect contacts have constituted another method of extending the lexicon: *Diabolos* 'Devil' instead of *beng*, *shavoro* 'child' (< *čhavoro*) instead of the Germanic *kentos*, *naasti* 'is not' (< *našti*) instead of *naa/na aaȟhela* (Granqvist 2012).

5. Aesthetics of Romani Literature

Romani literatures – written in Romani or in one of the languages of the majority societies – date back to the first decades of the 20th century. Until the middle of the 20th century, writing – especially in the majority language – was still considered an unacceptable cultural approach to the majority society. Writing about the ingroup in particular was perceived as taboo and could lead to exclusion from the group (Blandfort; Toninato 2014; Eder-Jordan 1996). However, an increasing tolerance towards literature by and about Roma in written language can be observed within the groups. This development is also due to the acceptance of social change and the increasingly changing life situation of the Roma. For example, Roma writing in French, such as Sandra Jayat, Miguel Haler, Coucou Doerr, Virginie Carillo and Jean-Marie Kerwich, who consciously cross cultural-ethnic boundaries between the surrounding society and their own community as mediators, are nevertheless an exception and – as in other European countries – also form a socio-cultural minority within the ethnic minority.

The lack of attention and recognition in research with regard to Romani literatures is due, among other things, to the limited distribution of the works, which results in limited accessibility and thus visibility. In addition, Romani literatures have a wide thematic and stylistic range, many of the works can hardly be categorised into traditional genres and exhibit a strong literary transgressiveness due to their polyperspectivity, multilingualism and heterogeneity (von Hagen, Hertrampf 2020b). Closing this research gap is of central importance, especially in light of the fact that Romani literatures offer innovative perspectives on the study of 'minor literatures' and world literature precisely because of the characteristics mentioned above (von Hagen, Hertrampf 2020c).

Literary studies have only been focussing on these texts by Roma for a decade under the keyword Romani literature (Blandfort 2015; Blandfort, Hertrampf 2011; Eder-Jordan 2015). The term Romani literatures can only be used with reservations in the following, as on the one hand it can contribute to the visibility of literatures that have long been located on the margins, and on the other hand it harbours the danger of creating new constructions of difference and

is therefore rejected by some Roma. Here, it initially represents an auxiliary construct that aims to abolish boundaries, such as in the poet(h)ic-aesthetic approach of Blandfort, Hertrampf and von Hagen (cf. von Hagen, Blandfort; von Hagen, Hertrampf), and which is methodologically reflected upon within the framework of the aesthetics of Romani literatures.

Rosi Braidotti calls for a transcultural approach to reading, insofar as she attempts to overcome attributions and fixed categorisations by advocating a differentiated perspective, highlighting binary juxtapositions as a construct and speaking of a 'nomadic' philosophy of becoming, thus putting more emphasis on cultural dynamics: "The nomadic subject is shifting, partial, complex and multiple" (Braidotti 2014: 54). Aesthetically, too, the new forms of Romani literatures inscribe themselves into a discourse ensemble, but at the same time transcend it through new forms of self-representation, autofictions that are also designed to transcend media and to a multilayered (re-)writing of myths and stereotypes (cf. von Hagen 2020, 2024). Moreover, they attempt to fight against canonisation and classification, in Deleuze's understanding of the power of 'minor literatures' that are located on the margins but nevertheless make a decisive contribution to a rethinking of the concept of world literatures in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari (1975).

5.1. Romani Literatures as "Minor Literatures" or the Aesthetics of the Border

Having developed from its very beginning *across* national and linguistic borders, Romani literatures rely on a "postnational imaginary" (Appadurai 1998:166) that feeds on multiple cultural traditions. The aesthetics arising from this phenomenon actively engages with borders and shares many features with European migrant literatures (see, for example, *Gastarbeiter* literature, that is, literature by labour migrants), but with a notable difference: unlike migrants who came to Europe in the decades following the Second World War, Romani groups have been living in Europe at least since the 15th century.

Roma cultures *inherently* embody geographical and cultural mobility: in their case, migration functions not as a single, linear movement from a homeland to a host country, but as a historical praxis and a continuous strategy for preserving their way of life (Piasere 1991, 2004). This yields a number of implications: first, Roma cultures are characterized by their historical capacity to adapt and synthesize existing cultural forms through a process of bricolage and exchange (Lévi-Strauss; Okely 1996, 2010). This is underlined by anthropologists who pointed out that, among Roma, group affiliation does not merely rely on genealogical descent, but is a performative act, a continuous practice

of behaving 'in the Romani way' (*po Romane*). Acting *po Romane* includes adherence to *Romanipè* (Romani values), speaking Romanès and its varieties, participating in specific social and cultural practices, and generally maintaining boundaries with the *Gadje* (non-Roma).

As discussed earlier, the diasporic scattering of Romani communities gave rise to a significant internal linguistic variation through a continuous process of synthesis across multiple linguistic boundaries over centuries (Matras 2002). From a literary perspective, the 'border aesthetics' enacted by Roma authors operates not from a fixed centre but from a liminal position, inherently challenging the established hierarchies of literary production. As shown by Toninato (2004) and others (Blandfort, Hertrampf and von Hagen), Romani literatures are characterized by a constant mix between 'major' and 'minor' traditions: drawing on centuries-old oral cultures, their narratives interweave these traditional elements with borrowings from established literary traditions, thus transgressing the boundaries that typically demarcate canonical from 'minor literatures' (Deleuze, Guattari). Furthermore, Roma authors frequently intersperse their texts with tropes from other literary traditions, including hetero-ascribed 'Gypsy' stereotypes coming from the dominant culture, such as the above-mentioned stereotype of 'eternal wanderers'. As a matter of fact, the tendency to re-enact stereotypical representations from the majority culture has also been observed in a postcolonial context. This phenomenon occurs in situations of intercultural contact, which Mary Louise Pratt defined as "contact zones", that is "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 1992: 4). Far from leading to mere assimilation, intercultural contact often engenders socio-cultural dynamics of significant complexity, which resist reduction to binary categories (e.g. dominant vs. subaltern group). Minority groups employ diverse strategies to renegotiate cultural meaning and redirect it back towards the dominant group. Notable among these are "mimicry" (Bhabha) and "transculturation" (Pratt 1992). Consistent with this, Romani authors do not simply oppose or, conversely, merely replicate the linguistic and representational strategies of the dominant group. Instead, their writings presuppose a process of creative hybridization and reinterpretation, transcending mere mirroring that shows their character as 'minor literature' (cf. Hertrampf 2021). In fact, all three characteristics of minor literatures described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their seminal 1975 book on Franz Kafka apply to Romani literature. First, a "minor literature," Deleuze and Guattari claim, "is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language" (Deleuze, Guattari 1983: 16). French

or Spanish Romani literatures, for instance, use the language of the majority without being completely identical to national literatures. In this respect, such literature addresses that they are both in between participation, integration, and assimilation on the one hand and issues of difference, othering, and delimitation on the other; therefore, Romani literary expression is always characterized by a certain degree of cultural and linguistic deterritorialization. Second, the idea that "everything in [works of literature] is political" (Deleuze, Guattari 1983: 16) also applies to Romani literature, which, in fact, can almost always be understood as non-violent resistance and sometimes – like in the case of Spanish Roma author Helios Gómez – even as subversive rebellion against the hegemonic and discriminatory behaviour of the majority. Romani literature thus becomes an instrument of the subaltern (Spivak) in the struggle for recognition. Consciously or not, every Romani writer thus acts necessarily as a spokesperson for the minority in order to break down social boundaries of acceptance. Thus, the syncretic "border aesthetic" characteristic of Romani (minor) literatures, is not just the result of passive assimilation but constitutes a crucial, often disregarded contribution *to* European cultural forms, calling for a critical reassessment of conventional understanding of 'European' culture and memory and therefore reflects a deep engagement with the complexities of European identity.

5.2. Dealing with the Stereotype of the "Wanderer"

Rewriting dominant modes of portraying subordinated communities is one of the most distinctive features of postcolonial literature (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin). It involves reversing, reformulating, or subversively using the attributes assigned to these communities, their cultures and histories. This may pertain to entire novel plots – as in the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, which John Maxwell Coetzee reinterpreted in his own narrative, or *Jane Eyre*, for which Jean Rhys created a 'prequel' – but also to individual literary motifs, characters, or words. An example is the loaded word 'burden,' taken from Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* and later rewritten in the poetry of the Black Consciousness movement, which emerged in opposition to apartheid policies in South Africa (Pucherova 2009).

In the context of Roma communities, such rewriting draws on the model of 'true *Gypsyness*' reproduced in various forms by scientific, pseudo-scientific, and academic discourses since the 19th century. Thomas Acton traced its origin to the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in 1888 (Acton), while its academic roots go back to the Enlightenment (Willems), and in literature, even earlier (Bogdal). Among the characteristics of this model – besides Indian

origin, exotic customs, and cultural hermeticism – is the "nomadic" lifestyle (Kledzik).

An example of such a rewriting of the Roma wanderer figure can be found in the artistic projects presented in the *First Roma Pavilion* at the Venice Biennale in 2007, created by Daniel Baker, Damien and Delaine Le Bas, and others. These works address the complex relationships among Roma and Traveller groups, the politics of segregation and protection of 'nomadic' communities, and how they are perceived by majority societies (Junghaus, Székely). Another example of artistic rewriting of the visual stereotype of the wanderer is Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's *Re-Enchanting the World*, which draws on 17th-century engravings by Jacques Callot titled *Les bohèmiens en marche*. Mirga-Tas's rewriting affirms this lifestyle, stripping it of the stigma of anthropological 'type,' by adding facial features expressing emotion and colorful clothes. She also matches Callot's presentations with scenes based on the photographs from her family life (Mirga-Tas).

In contemporary Romani literature, references to the wanderer stereotype appear across various poetics. Their message, however, is most often anti-discriminatory, either highlighting the exoticising and stigmatizing nature of this cliché, or mythicising. For example, in József Holdosi's novel *Kányák* (1978), the idea of wandering is portrayed as one of the central themes to Romani mythology, and in the poetics of magical realism. In popular literature, the image of a Roma camp appears as a part of family history in the novel by Hillary Monahan *The Hollow Girl* (2017) and as a harmful stereotype in Oksana Marafioti's *American Gypsy* (2012). Finally, in the poetry of contemporary Polish Roma authors, the wanderer is a nostalgic figure of the past (e.g. Karol Gierliński, Wasyl Szmidt).

5.3. Plurilingual Character of Romani Literatures

Most Roma are multilingual by the time they reach adulthood. In many countries, Romani children learn Romani as their first language, but also a second language at the same time or at the latest when they start school, while in countries such as Finland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland younger generations do not know the language or are not as proficient as their elders. In most Romani homes, languages other than Romani are heard at least on television and radio, so that even young Romani children grow up multilingual. Romani people need the majority languages of their countries of residence, for example, when communicating with authorities and with colleagues, customers, friends, neighbours and teachers. In practice, the only Romani people who speak only Romani are children under school age. Many migrant Roma are competent in

Romani dialects, national and minority languages of their countries of origin (e.g. Albanian, Czech, Finnish, Polish, Serbian, Slovak, Turkish) and varieties spoken in the host country.

The nature of the Romani language throughout Europe is primarily oral. For a long time, the majority of Roma could neither read nor write. Even today, not all texts published in Romani have a real readership, but the most important function of written Romani is symbolic: to show that Romani can be written. The best evidence of this is the Romani names of newspapers and magazines, even though their content is in the official languages of different countries. Many Roma can read and write the language they learned at school, but fewer can read and write Romani. This is one of the reasons why much of Romani writings are in majority languages, but sometimes (such as novels and autobiographies), the target audience of Romani literature are non-Roma, with no Romani competence. Some publications have been bilingual: for instance, Romani poetry has often been published in bilingual anthologies in countries such as Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia, e.g. Papusza's first collection *Pieśni Papuszy* edited by Ficowski in 1956 and *Romane poetongi antologia. Anthology of gypsy poets* edited by Poetonge, *Romani antologia* edited by Seleanu and Choli Daróczi in 1995. Some authors self-translate their texts, e.g. Ruždija-Ruso Sejdović from Montenegro, Mehmed-Meho Saćip from Kosovo, Nedjo Osman from Macedonia, and Hedina Tahirović-Sijerčić from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tahirović-Sijerčić).

Despite these constraints, Romani writing shares characteristics of Romani speech: for instance, it often involves lexical borrowing and language mixing phenomena, and code-switching is inherent also in Romani writing in majority languages. Code-switching is a practice of alternating between two or more languages, dialects, or language varieties in a conversation or interaction. It is a natural part of fluent bilingualism (Poplack). Code-switching is not always due to a lack of linguistic competence on the part of the speaker or writer, but, like prosodic features of speech, code-switching can act as a context cue that helps other interlocutors interpret the turns of others and their meanings (Gumperz; Auer).

Code-switching is a way for the speaker or writer to bring something 'extra' to his or her turn. It can be used for various reasons, including addressing specific audiences or expressing group identity but also as a stylistic device or a narrative tool. This is the case in using Romani-based ethnonyms like *kaale* 'Roma' or *gaaje* 'non-Roma' in Finnish texts. Code-switching often has different interactional functions, especially in longer cases. Compare passages from Kiba Lumberg's (2004) play *Tumma ja hehkuva veri*:

RANSSI. Ai sie kaaloholvikiero! (= mustasukkainen)[9]

and

VIKI. (tervehtii Armasta, tuoretta leskeä, joka purskahtaa itkuun) Sihko Diives. – hyvää päivää.
ROOSA. Deevelesko reitipa – Jumalan siunausta siul.
ARMAS. Joo aahtas sihko juuli…nii hyvä naine.[10]

6. Summary

The emergence of written literatures among Roma groups is a comparatively recent phenomenon, dating back to the beginning of the 20th century; however, this contrasts with their much longer established cultural presence across Europe. Struggling to accept and understand what they perceived as a radical and irreducible 'difference' vis-à-vis the sedentary majority, the non-Roma have tried to locate their cultural and ethnic origins *outside* Europe, as reflected in the numerous ethnonyms attached to Romani groups in the course of the centuries ('Egyptians,' 'Athinganoi' to name only a few). This has resulted in a number of inaccuracies and misinterpretations, ranging from the first historical accounts labelling them as nomadic 'Gypsy tribes' wandering through medieval cities, to more recent scholarly studies on contemporary intra-European migratory trajectories. In particular, a diasporic narrative mapping their migration from India has been established, which seems to confirm the idea that Roma communities belong elsewhere and are perceived as non-territorial 'pariah' groups unable (and unwilling) to 'assimilate' into mainstream society. These narratives have often resulted in scapegoating and persecution, leading to a perception of the Roma as 'helpless' victims, residues of a 'primitive,' 'illiterate' society frozen in time and doomed to extinction (Trumpener).

Drawing upon an accurate analysis of the wealth of Romani linguistic and literary practices, the essay portrays a substantially contrasting narrative, highlighting the resilient and subversive character of Romani cultures. The first instance of subversive adaptation is evident in the remarkable linguistic

9 "RANSSI. Oh you jealous!"
10 "VIKI. (greets Armas, a recent widow who bursts into tears) Sihko Diives. – have a good day.
ROOSA. Deevelesko reutipa – God's blessing to you.
ARMAS. Yeah, oh my, sihko juuli…such a good woman."

and cultural diversity within Romani communities. As mentioned above, most Roma are proficient in a number of languages: this enables them to navigate diverse linguistic codes and idiolects, employing strategies such as lexical borrowing, koineization and code-mixing. Despite the remarkable internal linguistic variation, Romanès circulates across numerous public and new media platforms. The ongoing process of linguistic mutation and adaptation within Romani languages does not hinder inter-group communication, and language remains a strong component of Romani identity.

The nature of the Romani language throughout Europe is primarily oral. Many Roma can read and write the language they learned at school, but fewer can read and write Romani. Much of Romani writings are in majority languages, sometimes the target audience of Romani literature are non-Roma. Some publications have been bilingual. Romani writing shares characteristics of Romani speech. It often involves lexical borrowing and language mixing phenomena. Code-switching is inherent also in Romani writing in majority languages.

The second type of subversive adaptation discussed here refers to Romani cultures' ability to adapt and synthesize existing cultural elements through a process of creative bricolage, resistance and re-adaptation of hetero-ascribed 'Gypsy' stereotypes. This process is particularly evident in Romani literary discourse, which has developed in a *contact zone* between Romani communities and dominant majority societies, a dynamic site of cultural and linguistic translation serving as a critical arena where essentialist categories are unmasked and deconstructed. A compelling example of this phenomenon is the subversive rewriting of the stereotype of the Roma as 'eternal wanderers,' which has been effectively exposed and challenged by Romani authors and artists through diverse and multifaceted approaches and media (visual and performing arts, film and literature).

From a theoretical perspective, the subversive potential of Romani literatures resides in their 'border aesthetics' which is characterized by a creative fusion of 'high' and 'low' literary traditions, tropes and themes. The inherently translingual and transcultural nature of Romani literatures reflects the complexities of Romani diasporic communities, while at the same time engaging with and *mediating* between the often-contentious narratives that shaped the European cultural landscape. From this perspective, the syncretic character of Romani literatures, far from leading to a passive assimilation into dominant patterns and views, enables Romani authors to reclaim their self-representations and undertake a critical dialogue with their Roma and (mainly) non-Romani readership, thus favouring the emergence of new, culturally accurate and dialogically oriented public renditions of Romani cultural identities.

Romani literatures challenge conventional literary categories. Their multilingual, polyphonic, and transgressive nature defies fixed genres, combining personal narratives, autofiction, myth re-writing, and aesthetic experimentation. These texts often simultaneously inscribe themselves within and resist existing canons, reworking dominant stereotypes and offering new perspectives on identity, belonging, and displacement.

Using a theoretical framework influenced by thinkers like Rosi Braidotti, the article advocates for a nomadic, transcultural reading approach. Braidotti's notion of the 'nomadic subject' encapsulates the shifting, fragmented, and plural identities that Romani literature explores. This approach refuses binary divisions and static identity constructs, instead emphasizing fluidity and transformation.

Despite their marginal status, Romani literatures contribute significantly to rethinking 'minor literatures' and their place in world literature. Their resistance to canonization, their aesthetic innovation and socio-political relevance position them as a critical field of inquiry that challenges Eurocentric literary norms. Ultimately, the article calls for greater scholarly attention to Romani literatures as transgressive, transformative spaces that not only reflect diasporic experience but also reshape literary and cultural boundaries.

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| Abstract

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Beyond Borders: On the Transgressive Potential of Romani Literature(s)

The article explores the evolving field of Romani literatures within a broader sociopolitical and aesthetic context, focusing particularly on its transgressive, boundary-crossing potential. It situates Romani literature within the broader framework of migration literature. While Roma mobilities have long been studied from sociological and anthropological perspectives, their literary implications remain underexplored. The article challenges traditional diaspora concepts, noting the problematic framing of Roma as "eternal nomads." Such narratives often serve to further marginalize Roma rather than to understand their lived experiences. Romani and Sinti communities, estimated at around eight million across Europe, do not represent a homogeneous group but a diasporic mosaic marked by linguistic, cultural, and geographic diversity. This heterogeneity is mirrored in their literary expressions. Though Romani written literature is a relatively recent phenomenon – emerging in the past century – it is a growing and increasingly significant field.

Keywords: Romani literature; migration literature; multilingual literature; minority literature

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