ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic account of Gypsy myths and Romanies in Brazil – their cosmologies, language use, and everyday practices involving sexuality, loves, jealousies, intimate rivalries, music, and fortunetelling – based on fieldwork conducted on two subgroups in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo: the Roma and the Calon. These two subgroups retain ethnic characteristics common among other Romanies elsewhere, such as moral pollution taboos, honor and shame codification of gender roles, the preservation of their own dialects of Romanes, and disinterest in formal education. Yet they differ in their positions and self-understandings within Brazilian society. The Roma view themselves as a twice-displaced diaspora with a long history of European persecutions, whereas most Calon view themselves as native Brazilians of distant Egyptian origins. The Roma still circulate victim narratives about the Holocaust, and insist on hiding their ethnicity in Brazil fearing prejudice and discrimination. They also do not recognize the Calon as ethnic Ciganos – Gypsies in Portuguese – and avoid associating with them. This complicates the process of national recognition of Romani rights to the point where Roma representatives only include the Calon in the Cigano population census in order to receive greater government investment into their own communities. In an international context, Brazilian Romani politics remain isolated. Through intersubjective experience in fieldwork encounters, with each other and with me, this dissertation depicts how Ciganos see and experience their world, and how this world intersects with larger Brazilian national and international levels of discourse and practices.
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During fieldwork I often enjoyed hospitality and friendship. I am grateful to my interlocutors for sharing details of their lives despite cultural taboos against doing so. In order to protect them, I changed their names and some biographical details unless they insisted on being identified. I also thank fellow anthropologists Martin Fotta, Florencia Ferrari, and Márcio Vilar, as well as historian Brigitte Grossman Cairus. With them, I had the pleasure of presenting a panel on Romani studies at the 2010 Brazilian Studies Association meeting in Brasilia. I also thank anthropologist Marco Antonio da Silva Mello for meeting with me at the UFRJ Institute for Philosophy and Social Sciences in Rio de Janeiro. These scholars’ writing on Brazilian Ciganos and our discussions shaped my dissertation: it references their contributions while elaborating on different aspects.
I almost want to thank a childhood friend for saying, “I’m not a racist. But if I could, I would gather all the Ėțigani (Gypsies) in Romania, put them in a room and shoot them.” I realized then my research in Brazil could bring significant insights into ongoing discourse on Gypsies by showing a social setting where Romanies do not live in the same paradigm of widespread socio-economic marginality and hatred as in my native country and in the rest of Europe. I also thank American writer Isabel Fonseca, who first alerted me to my own subconscious racism against Ėțigani, a derogatory term we use for Gypsies in Romania. She suggests that many Romanians may have mixed Romani ancestry, as an “explanation of the fact that Romanians on the whole are darker than their Slavic neighbors” (1995: 178). I felt insulted at first reading this, as any Romanian would, not just because of her unfounded generalization, but also because of a normative mainstream antipathy towards this minority. The politically correct terms Roma/Romanies (a common self-appellation of this minority’s members) already annoys most Romanians, since in Western European media all get generalized as citizens of Romania.

It was a personal breakthrough when I set out to investigate my father’s mixed heritage. Despite finding insufficient evidence, other than a neighbor’s wink as if to say yes, to confirm this theory, my father’s ambiguous biography allowed me to befriend Romanies during fieldwork more easily. Still, I avoided elaborating on it with my own kin since most of them are prejudiced against Ėțigani, although they themselves have relatively dark skin tones. My brother still refuses to take a genetic ancestry test to look into our paternal bloodline insisting that, “it’s not valid.” He is a good brother anyway and an exemplary professor of mathematics. I thank him and my mother for being there for me through thick and thin, and I apologize for making them worry about me. This dissertation is dedicated to my father.
1. Marin Budur (1953 – 1990)
2. *Ciganos*’ presence in Brazil as registered by the population census

3. Calon gather around the fire in front of their tents
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INTRODUCTION

Gypsies/Ciganos in Brazil
Fieldwork among Ciganos: methodological considerations
Residential/social/kinship/sexual organization and lives
Myths and Romani cosmology

Gypsies/Ciganos in Brazil

This is an account of Gypsy myths as they intersect Romanies’ own cosmologies and everyday practices in Brazil, such as language use, sexuality, intimate rivalries, loves, jealousies, music, and fortunetelling. This ethnography is based on fieldwork conducted between January 2007 and November 2008 on two subgroups of Ciganos in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo: semi-nomadic Calon and sedentarized Roma. Both subgroups retain numerous ethnic-specific characteristics common among Romanies elsewhere, such as moral pollution taboos, honor and shame codification of gender roles, some preservation of their own Romanes dialects, as well as disinterest in formal education since it is perceived as a sure path toward cultural changes (acculturation) and cultural loss (assimilation).

Yet these two subgroups differ in their positions and self-understandings within Brazilian society. The Roma hide their ethnicity, fearing prejudice and discrimination, and circulate victim narratives of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, the Calon are extremely visible as quintessential, palm-reading, tent-inhabiting Ciganos. While the Roma see themselves as a thriving, secret, twice-displaced diaspora with a long history of persecutions in Europe, Calon see themselves as native Brazilians of distant Egyptian origins, surviving on the margins of society. The Roma avoid being associated with the Calon, whom they do not recognize as co-ethnics. This complicates the national Romani rights movement, which is lead by Roma representatives who only include Calon in the Cigano population census in order to receive greater government funding for their
own communities. Most Calon in Brazil continue to struggle with poverty. Nonetheless, both subgroups are shocked that some European Romanies resort to begging. New World Ciganos retain an ethnic-specific sense of dignity despite the widespread poverty and corruption of mainstream Brazil, and the isolation of Brazilian Romani politics in an international context.

Few people know much about Romanies or Gypsies in mainstream Brazil, other than popular myths about them, where “myth” takes up a variety of definitions depending on different interlocutors’ uses of the word in speech, as well as my own considerations. Often “myths” will appear in this dissertation as a narrative that is taken up as truth-based but with insufficient evidence, such as the myth of an Egyptian origin. Myths about Ciganos are popular in Brazil, including those they circulate about themselves to obstruct being “read” easily by others. Most Ciganos, Gypsies in Portuguese, are afraid to be known and potentially infiltrated by impostors, so-called Ciganos espirituais (spiritual Gypsies).

Through intersubjective experience in fieldwork encounters with each other and with me, this dissertation depicts how Ciganos see and experience their world, and how their world intersects with larger national and international levels of discourse and practice. Linguistic considerations are crucial to self-reflexive analysis and writing about “otherness.” In this dissertation I employ the terms Calon, Roma, Ciganos and Romanies, to flag pluralism within the larger diaspora. Interlocutors’ self-denominations as Calon and Roma are internal to their dialects, or rather “slanguages” – mixtures of their dialects with Portuguese that serve as ethnic identity markers. I borrow this term as suggested by professor James Boon (2001 lecture notes) as I elaborated in a previous presentation (Budur 2014). I find it useful to modify the word “slang” as defined by linguist Ronald Macaulay: “A term loosely used to describe some expressions that are used by some groups of people and not by other groups and are not part of
the standard language” (1994: 218). Chapter 2 elaborates on both formal and informal Romanes, and its role in minority rights recognition. I prefer the vernacular term rather than “Romani language.” I also use “Romanes” for the Calon, yet they say they speak Kaló, one of the Romanes dialects. However, they do not speak a dialect but rather a “slanguage” as in language use involving fragmentary expressions in their shibi (tongue) interspersed with the mainstream language, Portuguese. The word kalo also means black: “Kaló among the Spanish Gypsies, and Kalo in Finland [is a name which Romani people use for themselves, it means ‘black’ and it is an Indian word of Dravidian origin]” (Hancock 1987:14). For my interlocutors who call themselves Calon (pronounced kah-lohn with a nasal accented second syllable) this meaning persists. Their word for dark-skinned people in Brazil is kaliviri (pronounced kah-lee-vee-ree). Calon is the singular masculine form and Calin is the singular feminine form (pronounced kah-leen).

The men and women who call themselves Calon and Calins usually live in tents in tightly knit communities set up as camps (acampamentos in Portuguese). Notably, the men sometimes marry kaliviri (black) women with the condition that they acculturate into the groups’ social norms. The children resulting from such mixed marriages are also considered Calon. The rest of my interlocutors who consider themselves Ciganos and speak some variety of Romanes live in houses in less visible and more scattered communities, to use the word loosely. They call themselves Rroma in their dialect (rr- marks the guttural first syllable: ho-mah), plural from Rrom (pronounced hom) – Rom in English, which means person of Romani ethnicity, husband and man. Rromni (pronounced hom-nee) means woman of Romani ethnicity or wife, with the plural form Romnia (pronounced hom-nyiah). The masculine plural Rroma in Romanes means both people and married adults, indicating that marriage is seen as the rite of passage into adulthood. In English they are called “Romani peoples” or “Romanies” to indicate pluralism.
In this dissertation “gender” and the “honor-and-shame complex” are relevant insofar as interlocutors use them to elaborate normative structures in their social organization and lives. As Don Kulick distinguishes in his ethnography “Travestis,” there remains a divide between people’s biology and gender (1998). Most people are born as “men” or “women” according to their genitals and chromosomes unless there is an irregular situation such as XXY chromosomes instead of XX or XY, and their gender, how they think of themselves. In the case of Brazilian travestis (transvestites), they think of themselves as men but not male, and strive to align themselves with females by donning that is socially normative female dress code in Brazil, and displaying other attributes thought as feminine: silicone breasts and buttocks augmentation, long nails, as well as a so-called “heterosexual boyfriend.” Among the Romani gender division remains highly relevant in their communities, where men are segregated from women in their activities, and where notions of masculinity and femininity are elaborated along the lines of their own social structures built around the ethnic-specific notions of “honor and shame.” Because of their “gender” separation I mostly engaged with women as reflected in the ethnographic account.

Also this dissertation fails to present a more ample ethnography of Brazil, remains within the cosmopolitan, coastal spaces of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and concerns itself with how Ciganos perceived this “Brazil” as a dangerous, racialized and hyper-sexualized place against which their “honor-and-shame complex” operates – with ample evidence of ambivalence and dissent. Nonetheless, first and foremost present-day Ciganos see themselves as native Brazilians. They said, “We are Brazilians!” with earnest nationalism and a sense of belonging in Brazil. This is an ethnographic account of Brazilian-ness as much as it is about Gypsiness, although for the most part the dissertation engages a dichotomous relationship between the minority and mainstream Brazil as perceived by the interlocutors. “Race” remains relevant to them, so issues
of racism run throughout the dissertation, yet there is hardly an easy “black-versus-white” divide in Brazil even among Ciganos. Also this fragmentary account of Brazilian Romanies, due to their hesitancy to share past histories and to talk about the mule (the dead) lacks a sense of social change that could blur the dichotomy between the minority and mainstream “others” by showing them immersed within larger socio-economic and cultural dynamics, for instance in the way it shaped the relationship between Calon and Roma, and other interpersonal violences.

The Roma are found worldwide belonging to further subdivisions. They use additional self-denominations to indicate appurtenance to caste-like subgroups that historically reproduced traditional occupations, such as the Tinkers (Kalderasha) and the Moneylenders (Lovara). Other secondary group names indicate previous association with a geographical region, such as former Yugoslavia (Matchuwaya, Serbiaia). Most of my Roma interlocutors identified themselves as Matchuwaya, while a few identified as Xoraxane (Turkish Roma). Their dialects or slanguages retain inflections and borrowings that took place during prolonged stays. These subdivisions often insist they are the true Gypsies.

The first two chapters discuss different claims of authenticity. The Roma in Brazil do not recognize their ethnic commonality with Calon, and claim not to understand their chib (tongue). Yet they share with them many traditional distinctions, for example: the strong influence of kinship ties on sociality, marriage as the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and the cult of female virginity at marriage. Also both Roma and Calon in Brazil see themselves as belonging to the historically marginalized, greater diaspora of Ciganos. Both share the specificity of the worldview us-versus-them: the gage, meaning all non-ethnics (pronounced gah-je as in jealousy). Linguistically and ideologically both subgroups identify non-Ciganos as the ultimate others: gage or gadje with its variants gagio (m.sg.), gagi (f.sg.), gagia (f.pl.). Romanies
belonging to different subgroups share this distinction universally. In Brazil the Calon call non-ethnics juron, garron or gajon/gajin/gajons/gajins. Romanies of all subgroups share the belief that all non-Romanies are morally impure since they do not share the same ideological moral code or Romanija, which I discuss in chapters 3 and 4 dealing with sexuality, gender roles, honor codes and social proscriptions. My fieldwork in Brazil, a highly sexualized society, highlights increasing ambivalence and dissent toward cultural taboos particularly among the Roma.

Nonetheless, the gage persist as the ultimate other for all my interlocutors. Since Brazilian Roma keep their ethnicity secret in order to avoid discrimination similar to that experienced in Europe, national Cigano population estimates are skewed. According to the 2012 Basic Municipal Information Research conducted by the Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute, half a million Ciganos live in Brazil (Vasconcelos 2015, web). Argentinean Romani-rights activist Jorge Bernal says that activist associations estimate the population of Romani people in Brazil between 800,000 and 1,000,000. “According to UNESCO data in 1991 the Romani population of Latin America was approximately of 1,500,000 individuals, taking into account that many Rom deny their origin” (Bernal 2003:14). Chapter 1 explores criteria for Ciganidade in Brazil and the difficulties of researching people who do not wish to be known.

Nowadays Ciganos are found all over Brazil yet tend to be more visible in rural areas. Dr. Teixeira helped analyze the data provided by the MUNIC and noted that in 2011 there were 291 Romani camps identified in 21 states. The greatest concentration of Cigano camps was found in Bahia (53 camps), Minas Gerais (58 camps) and Goiás (50 camps). Counties with a population of 20-50 thousand inhabitants presented the greatest concentrations of Ciganos. Of these 291 counties that declared the presence of the Romani minority on their territories, only 40 said they worked to elaborate public policies for the promotion of Romani rights and wellbeing. What
often lacked was the authorities’ ability to show empathic involvement in Ciganos’ lives, in addition to the Roma lack of empathy for the Calon (Budur 2011d). Through my own ambivalent empathic inquiry into Romani everyday discourses and practices in Brazil, I elaborate on Brazilian Romanies’ language uses, myths, cosmologies, sexuality, honor and shame laws, concept of luck, family models of hierarchy, fortunetelling, magic, spirit possession, legality and illegality, as well as national and international minority rights movements. I elaborate only on Ciganos situated in coastal, cosmopolitan Brazil, which they perceived as a hyper-sexualized and dangerous space, meanwhile isolated from international Romani activism, which has yet to integrate Romanies in Europe.

**Fieldwork among Ciganos: methodological considerations**

In this dissertation I explore how empathy inflects understanding, reading or knowing the “other.” Jean Briggs suggests that ethnographers arrive at theorizing empathy only by wandering in the dark, struggling to understand how the others think and feel as best as possible given one’s social positioning during fieldwork (2008: 449). Similarly Douglas Hollan argues that, “the empathic work of understanding always is embedded in an intersubjective encounter that requires ongoing dialogue for its accuracy. As such, it implicates the imaginative and emotional capacities of the person to be understood as well as those of the person or persons trying to understand” (Hollan and Throop 2008: 392). I investigate “the flipside of empathy” – “the way in which people promote, allow, or hinder understanding of themselves” (392). Empathy is integral to discussing methodological concerns as well as Romani sociality, palm-reading practices and minority politics. The ability to understand “otherness” in any intersubjective interlocutory encounter gets inflected by how those involved perceive each other.
I remained ambivalently empathic with all my interlocutors. Between January 2008 and November 2009 I conducted fieldwork amongst two subgroups of Romanies in Brazil: the semi-nomadic Calon and sedentarized Roma in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Initially my goal was to reside within each Romani community for several months, yet I found it easier to reside with non-Cigano Brazilian acquaintances in shared rental apartments or in youth hostels. This way I kept my laptop and notes locked safely, while I commuted between various Romanies. My interlocutors were spread across the two urban centers and their suburbs, so fieldwork entailed extensive commutes on public transportation, which was often raided by local thieves.

In Rio de Janeiro I engaged with about 51 Roma (21 men, 20 women and 10 youths – some of whom were actually gage), and with 54 Calon living in 15 tents (15 men, 16 women, and 23 youths). In Sao Paulo I visited 37 Roma (13 men, 14 women and 10 children) and 56 Calon (18 men, 19 women, 19 youths). After establishing initial contact, I was often invited to visit their households. Occasionally I even stayed overnight in Roma houses. The Calon tents only accommodated nuclear families. I stayed in Rio for the first half-year and in Sao Paulo for the rest of my stay. Subsequently I followed up with several return visits to both field sites and sustained contact with several key interlocutors via the Internet and telephone conversations.

I have changed the names of all interlocutors to protect their anonymity, with the exception of several public figures that insisted I use their actual names. I used Cigano names encountered in other regions in order to keep their cultural specificity. I conducted taped interviews only when requested. Otherwise the very mention of a tape-recorder or camera was seen as intrusive, and I was eager not to be treated like a suspicious outsider. I mostly “hung out” with female interlocutors, due to the gender separation among Romanies – notebook and pen in hand, taking notes from time to time while engaging in language immersion and participant-
observation. Having previously studied Portuguese for six years, I became proficient within the first two months of fieldwork. Without any interpreter, I relied entirely on my own Portuguese and Romanes conversational skills. I struggled to write notes in these languages especially since my interlocutors mixed their vernacular forms in slang. My summary studies of standard Romanes certainly helped me gain access and understand intricate cultural specificities, but were not as crucial since all interlocutors spoke Portuguese. Many were suspicious when outsiders like myself understood their dialect, so I rarely spoke it in conversations. I only dared to speak Romanes, and take notes and photos when allowed. The photos used here represent mostly Ciganos of other regions, not my interlocutors. I have also changed some biographical and geographical details to maintain anonymity.

Only when requested did I take photos and use the actual names of public figures like Mio Vasite, a known Romani activist: “The first Romani organization that appeared in Latin America was established by a Brazilian-born violinist, of Serbian Romani descent - Mio Vasite in 1987, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil” (Bernal 2003, web). I easily befriended Mio, who identified as half-Rom, half-Calon. Among the Romani rights representatives in Brazil he showed the greatest empathic identification with and concern for impoverished Calon. I discuss his social integration efforts in chapter 6. Although Mio is the former president of the Romani Union in Brazil, he is publicized as the most successful Cigano violinist for his award-winning musical contributions on the national television show Explode Coração (Explode My Heart) (1995-1996).

This popular soap opera represents the current mythical framework though which the presence of Ciganos is interpreted in mainstream Brazil: as a passionate, magical, traditionally conservative ethnicity. The show elicits the audience’s empathic identification with a young Cigana named Dara who falls in love with a gagio, yet is pressured to marry within her ethnic
group. During fieldwork I asked Brazilians what they thought about Ciganos, and most of them quoted this popular show as their sole source of information on the matter. Elderly and middle-aged women were especially fond of talking about it. On the other hand, interlocutors who identified as Ciganos, such as Mirian Stanescon, another public figure, critiqued the screenplay written by Glória Perez for its lack of cultural authenticity. Other Ciganos claimed that the show divulged secrets of their culture and language. I deal with secrecy in chapter 2.

Initially I was concerned about not being able to tell Ciganos apart, since unlike in Europe everyone in Brazil seemed to have some shade of caramel-chocolate skin. To my relief, Calins were easy to find because they dressed like stereotypical Gypsies: they wore long colorful dresses reminiscent of both former European aristocracy and Indian saris. Calins were either housewives or worked as fortunetellers reading palms in public areas. They said their fashion code both maintained traditional modesty values, despite the sweltering heat, and answered their clients’ need to see, “that we are real Ciganas, to believe our palm-reading is real.” Some Calon men stood out with their wide-brimmed black hats, shirts and vests, long pants, pointed shoes, and embellished metal belt buckles. Most Calon looked tanned, with easy smiles. They sported gold teeth as well as layered gold accessories, saying it was “for luck.”

Both men and women boasted that no one dared to rob them of their gold jewelry since Brazilian gage saw them as Gypsies capable of curses and magical works. I often felt the Calon, like the Roma, circulated this self-aggrandizing myth like a longstanding inside joke: “Here in Brazil people are stupid, they believe in all kinds of things, in macumba, in Condomble, in Umbanda, so we do it all. We use the kinds of magic they want and they pay. They like it so they return.” Brazil has recently legalized fortunetelling as a socially accepted occupation, yet only Calins told fortunes in public areas. Roma women had psychic shops and never used their
ethnicity to advertise, fearing people would see the word Cigana and lose their trust. Indeed Roma women’s psychic services were more lucrative than those of Calins, who worked dressed up as Ciganas. The Roma, understandably, were more difficult to approach during fieldwork. Yet those I found initially in Rio also read palms in public parks, and did not afford an office.

Calon men, women and children stood out as ethnically identifiable Ciganos, yet most had peaceful relations with neighboring Brazilians. Their tents were on muddy grounds adjacent to gage houses in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. In Rio they had been there for over a decade, yet still considered themselves semi-nomadic. They were set apart, yet integrated in the neighborhood. Most sat outside their tents daily, drinking coffee and chatting. Women prepared breakfast. Afterwards on the days they knew would be best for fortunetelling, they went together into the city center dressed festively. Around 3:00 PM they left the city and by 6:00 PM they were home with groceries ready to prepare dinner. The nuclear families on a campsite often cooked and shared their meals with each other. Occasionally Brazilian clients would come bearing gifts of fruits, herbs, flowers and candles, asking for their fortunes to be read or for a magical spell to promote their health, love and happiness. Frequently other Calon also visited.

The Calon, like the Roma, were integrated in the local Brazilian community, and their cars, resounding with local music, added entertainment to the streets surrounding them. Most Brazilians who stopped by said Ciganos were great neighbors who always helped out in times of need, acting as moneylenders. Martin Fotta did his dissertation on the Calon in Bahia acting as local bankers despite having previously been labeled as malandros (tricksters), vagabonds, degenerates, thieves, cunning traders and child thieves (2012: 77). He offers detailed examples of such prejudice from discourses and media mentions. I will not reiterate Fotta’s work yet I will address some common myths about Ciganos, such as stealing. While Ciganos in Brazil did not
condone outright stealing as those in Europe sometimes do (Zatta and Piasere 1990), many of the Roma relied on energy obtained illegally from their neighbors’ cables. Meanwhile, Calon shared an electric line and water pipe awarded to their lot by the city administration after some pleading.

For Calon, infrastructure was generally lacking. Most still did their necessities in the bushes across a large road from them. To my surprise, most tents had a built-in area where one could take a shower. The earth beneath it was inclined strategically so that excess water would flow outside the tent and away from the common area. This detail was always factored in when building a tent, due to the high frequency of tropical rains especially during June, July and August. Infrastructure was also generally lacking within impoverished Brazilian neighborhoods. Like the gage, some Roma in Rio threw their garbage out in the dirty, shallow river behind their houses. The Calon typically left their garbage in the street to be picked up by the city trucks or burned some of it in their frequent campfires. It seemed to me that those living in tents often had more environmentally sustainable lifestyles than those living in houses.

When I introduced myself to the Calon in Rio de Janeiro and explained the scope of my ethnographic research, I was immediately invited to visit each of their fifteen tents accompanied by a herd of boisterous children who were clearly not attending school that day. Adults insisted that if children became immersed in the school culture they would lose their traditional values. Even among the wealthy Roma in Rio and Sao Paulo, children were seldom allowed to attend school for more than two-three years. Judging from their lifestyle choices in Brazil, it appears that Romani childhood socialization patterns pose serious barriers to pursuing a formal education even when poverty is not an issue (Budur 2011a). Still, Ciganos said it was now important for children to become literate before dropping out of school. Most of the elders were illiterate, and found it a handicap in current society. For instance, the illiterate elderly could not read bus signs,
and when they ventured out into the city they had difficulty returning home alone. Although literacy was considered a necessity among all Ciganos, higher education was not. Most admired my language skills, yet were wholly unimpressed by the idea of a doctorate in anthropology. There was one exception. In Rio I met Liliana, a half-Rromni, half-Calin singer, dancer teachers and fortuneteller who told me, “Finish your thesis, get your diploma, and then you’ll be free to do everything else: sing, dance, get married and have children. But you need a diploma these days so you won’t end up like us, with no money. We are not educated, so we don’t have any money.” The Gypsy music genre met little demand in Brazil, yet I was one of the numerous gagis eager to perform with Liliana dressed up as Ciganas.

In this dissertation the use of first person singular appears frequently. According to Clifford Geertz, “The most direct way to bring fieldwork as personal encounter and ethnography as reliable account together is to make the diary form, which Malinowski used to sequester his impure thoughts in scribbled Polish, into an ordered and public genre – something for the world to read” (1988: 84). Seeking to establish a voice that is both candid and academic, I will share from my experiences in the field as myself, a self that is fragmented, situated, shifting, partial, observant and participatory, changing lenses frequently between I-the-ethnographer, I-the-narrator, I-the-part-time-native and other transient selves constructed in the dynamic encounters with interlocutors: self-as-seen-by-others. Inner ruminations and biographical anecdotes will serve as data inflecting the knowledge produced both during and post fieldwork.

The Calon community in Rio had welcomed other curious outsiders on previous occasions, and asked me to film a documentary about them. Seeing that I fit somewhat in their positive image of researchers, I took numerous photos to please them, and promised to seek future opportunities to film a documentary there. These Calon were eager to make their ways of
life seem less exotic in order to fight prejudices against them. They gave me a tour of their tents, which were spacious residences that could last over ten years. Wood beams held up the walls. The roofs and walls consisted of thick plastic sheathing to protect against heavy tropical rains, one of the biggest nuisances in their lifestyle. The front part of each tent made up the kitchen, and was usually divided from the rest of the tent by plastic sheet. Each kitchen glistened with numerous copper and aluminum pots and pans, which Calins shined with pride on a daily basis as if their honor depended on it. Also if a spoon touched the ground it was thrown away immediately, the ground being considered impure or maxrimé/marime (pronounced mah-ree-meh) just like one’s feet and genitals, particularly the female genitalia.

This ethnic specific notion of impurity was less related to hygiene than a sense of morality and the danger of contagion. The community protected itself against contagion by pressuring each individual to uphold the purity rules carefully, as often documented amongst Romanies elsewhere. Anne Sutherland suggests this is precisely to prevent acculturation:

The Rom have developed an economic system that allows great flexibility and a moral system that is very inflexible. They can adapt to numerous cultural, technological and economic changes while maintaining very rigid ideas of romania and marime (inside and outside) enforced by the authority of the elders. The literature on Gypsies indicates that this combination of economic adaptability and moral or ideological solidarity is common to all Gypsy groups (1995: 9).

Due to acculturation in Brazil, I found greater nuance and ambivalence in my interlocutors’ lives than Sutherland suggests. Chapters 3 and 4 will elaborate on the Romani concept of maxrimé (contaminated) as integral to both Roma and Calon cosmologies, while also giving examples of dissent. The Roma in particular were much less dedicated to upholding moral purity rules. I had gone into fieldwork expecting greater rigidity, and found it easier to approach Romanies in both subgroups than others had forewarned. Romanies represent notoriously difficult interlocutors according to most Romologists (experts on Romani studies – see appendix A). To an extent this
is still relevant among the Roma in Brazil since they insist on their ethnic anonymity. Also the Roma and Calon share an us-versus-gage worldview, which often prevents access to their inner circles. Also as a female ethnographer I had to carefully bypass their cultural prejudices against gage women, who are considered promiscuous. Unlike myself, Romani girls drop out of school soon after gaining literacy to prepare for an arranged early marriage, brides move in with the groom’s family, have children and work as fortunetellers. Chapter 4 will elaborate on Ciganos’ gender-specific honor and shame codes as well as perceptions of gage.

In this dissertation I take into account “gender” as a significant variable during fieldwork in the intersubjective interlocution encounters. By the 1930s Margaret Mead already highlighted its significance in limiting access to certain information and in influencing how others perceive the ethnographer. As an outsider among Romanies I feared exclusion for multiple reasons, so I relied on personal relationships to help me gain access and built trust in the field. I spent most of my time with children or elderly women. I rarely conversed with men in private, over pizza for example, and when doing so they habitually checked to make sure there were no potentially gossiping onlookers.

This ethnographic account is intrinsically a partial and situated one, inflected by my personal rapports with interlocutors. As Russell Bernard reminds us, “total objectivity” is impossible: it is in itself but a myth. It seemed most unproductive to introduce myself as a single gagi woman in her mid-twenties, so for the purpose of building a closer rapport with interlocutors I introduced myself as a part-Romani woman from Romania in a relationship with a part-Romani man from the Ukraine. I was able to gain knowledge on the Romanies as well as on my then-boyfriend Eugene Hutz, lead singer of the so-called Gypsy-punk band Gogol Bordello. Without my intimate relationship with Eugene I would not have been able to gain my
interlocutors’ trust as easily. I also would not have been able to understand his multifaceted world of music production on an international scale, nor to reflect from an immersed position on relationships between Romani women and men. Eugene joining me in Brazil, when he was not touring internationally, allowed me to represent myself as committed to a man who performed Gypsy manhood in public more than any other man alive, at least at his concerts. It was a self-styled, hyperbolic, mythical Gypsy persona that he performed despite his lack of upbringing within the ethnicity. The rock-n-roll world only boosted his lust for and image of personal freedom, which Ciganos also idealized.

Eugene gained visibility among Romanies on an international scale when he performed with Madonna in London at Live Earth on July 7th, 2007. They sang a Russian-Roma tune in Romanes: Lela Pala Tute (Take Her With You). My interlocutors often knew him and showed respect when I mentioned he was my boyfriend. It did not seem to matter that Eugene and I had been raised as mainstream children in our homelands. The men would tease each other and say: “Don’t bother flirting with her, she has a better Rom than you!” Rom means a man belonging to this ethnicity, but it also means husband. Eugene was “my man” for all intents and purposes in their eyes although we were not legally married. Ciganos often said, “We don’t have marriage certificates either. When you begin to live with someone, that’s when you’re married.” In their eyes I was as good as married to him.

No one thought I was a virgin in my mid-twenties, but since I was in a relationship with a (mythical) Gypsy, my sexuality was not viewed as dangerous, at least for the most part. The relationship created a sense of order, as opposed to anxiety, in what concerned my sexuality, resonant with Mary Douglas’ analysis of dirtiness as “matter out of place” and a source of fear and disgust (1966: 2). Therefore, I was allowed to visit households and occasionally to sleep
over at Roma people’s houses. As mentioned, Calon lived in tents built to accommodate only a nuclear family, so I could not stay overnight. Eugene also visited a few households with me in Brazil. He was received like a respected guest both by Mio Vasite, former president of the Romani Union in Brazil, and by Mirian Stanescun, the activist who claims to be the “Queen of Ciganos in Brazil.” Chapter 6 will elaborate on the virulent feuding between these two political representatives, despite their common objectives. I frequently hid my alliances and affinities as necessary to safely investigate Romani lives.

In this dissertation I explore the benefits and limitations of going part-time native. As H. Russell Bernard states, other field workers also started out as participant-observers and were drawn into their interlocutors’ lives (2002: 328). For example, Kenneth Good stayed with the Yanomami in the Venezuelan Amazon for almost thirteen years and married Yarima, a key interlocutor. Marlene Dobkin de Rios married the son of a Peruvian folk healer and studied his practice. Jean Gearing married one of her principal interlocutors on the island of St. Vincent. Like these anthropologists, most phenomenologists would argue that complete immersion is required in becoming the phenomenon you study as Danny Jorgensen suggests, “Becoming the phenomenon is a participant observational strategy for penetrating into and gaining experience of a form of life. It is an objective approach insofar as it results in the accurate, detailed description of the insiders’ experience of life” (Jorgensen 1989: 63). Initially I also aimed to understand Gypsiness from a perspective similar to language immersion since it entailed overlapping processes. I found that even when committed to full immersion, one must switch back and forth between an insider’s view, which remains partial and intersubjective, and that of an analyst. Although full immersion is not always necessary, nor desirable, it was an easier endeavor for me to a certain extent since I had already experienced intense acculturation as a 14-year-old
immigrant from Romania to the United States after my mother won the green card lottery and we moved to Chicago. Going native is a prerequisite for anthropologists of immigrant background:

Does going native mean loss of objectivity? Perhaps, but not necessarily. In the industrialized countries of the West – the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, England, France, etc. – we expect immigrants to go native. We expect them to become fluent in the local language, to make sure that their children become fully acculturated, to participate in the economy and politics of the nation, and so on. // Some fully assimilated immigrants to those countries become anthropologists and no one questions whether their immigrant background produces lack of objectivity. Since total objectivity is, by definition, a myth, I’d worry more about producing credible data and strong analysis and less about whether going native is good or bad (Bernard 2002: 329).

Fieldwork was another opportunity for me to practice cultural adaptation, a skill I had acquired through the immigrant experience, previously imposed by necessity “for a better life.” This time I imagined it to be by choice, and thus in some ways liberating. The ambivalent desire to “go native” in Brazil represented a dance of dynamic self-negotiations, approximations and dissociations vis-à-vis different cultural registers, often risking transgressing as well.

Residential/social/kinship/sexual organization and lives

When I was an undergraduate student studying European Union minority politics through the Stanford-Abroad program, Romologists Jean-Pierre Liégeois in Paris and Fernando Piasere in Florence first brought to my attention that little had been written about Brazilian Romanies. According to professor Piasere, Ciganos presented a different paradigm than seen in Europe: they were rumored to have been slave-traders, instead of slaves (in Romania), socially integrated instead of aggressively marginalized, frequently wealthy instead of impoverished, not seen as a “culture of criminality” nor as outcasts by default. Since I had already become proficient in Portuguese as a hobby and found it compelling to go to Brazil in order to document Gypsiness that was not criminalized nor looked down upon as severely as in Europe. The myth of Gypsy
criminality is widely circulated by most European laymen as well as politicians, and fought against by sympathizing scholars and activists.

The documentary “Gypsy Child Thieves,” which aired on BBC News September 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2009 and on ABC News March 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2010, provides ample evidence of Romanian Romani children being forced into a life of crime by other members of their ethnic diaspora (Tipurita 2009). In this documentary, Romanian director Tipurita travels throughout Europe asking why organized crime has taken over particularly after Romania joined the EU in 2007. Romanian Gypsy children are shown being trafficked and exploited on a large scale as both thieves and beggars, due to the fact that most authorities do not punish vagrancy, nor minors for theft. In Spain we see 7-8-year-olds in packs robbing adults in front of ATM machines, something we are told is a common sight throughout Western Europe.

In Madrid we are shown similar “distraction thieves” working together to extract 200-300 euros in cash from gage much older and larger than them. As Tipurita shows, the young are relentless, pressured with violence by their adult controllers. The Spanish police say these Gitano (Romani) children make up a third of all the criminals under seventeen in Madrid. Still, authorities release the detained youths to the same adults who dominate their lives. In Italy, where Zingari (Gypsies) face a radical rise in racism, the film shows how a major police investigation found numerous enslaved children locked up in shacks like animals, and arrested several ring leaders. Yet Tipurita's two-year investigation shows some of these children stealing again later on, evidence that the police intervention was insufficient and has not saved them from a life of crime. The film shows how entire Romani families from Romania are under their controller’s thumb: pressured to steal or beg, forced to repay huge sums for having been legally brought abroad. In an attempt to trace the roots of the problem Tipurita travels to Romania, home
to the largest Romani population in the world, estimated at over one million. Next, we see an interview with Briliant, one of the most powerful leaders of the self-denominated “Romani Thieves” clan (Clanul Hoților) for whom stealing, he says, is a traditional profession passed down from generation to generation. Chief Briliant comments openly on the history of traditional crime, yet he asks the organizers of human trafficking to limit themselves, and not turn it into a cruel, greedy global enterprise. He states that it has already reached the United States and Australia, and that profits go to a few who build large villas in Romania. He warns that no one will like Gypsies anymore: “Where will we go afterwards? No one will have us.” The documentary strongly suggests that Gypsy child thieves are the victims of a “culture of crime.” It also shows societies at large abandoning them, and asks if anyone will save them.

Stealing has occasionally been a survival tactic for some historically marginalized impoverished Romanies. Yet it has grown into a generalized myth ingrained in the public image of Gypsies in Europe, increasing their stigmatization, with the consequence of turning nowadays into a reality for impoverished youths. There is a lot of documentation on European Romanies as vulnerable to human trafficking including women as sex workers. In a 2011 online article called “Breaking the Silence,” the European Roma Right Center reports:

Roma are trafficked for various purposes, including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, domestic servitude, organ trafficking, illegal adoption and forced begging. The vulnerability factors identified in this study are closely linked to those commonly associated with non-Romani trafficked persons and include structural forms of ethnic and gender discrimination, poverty and social exclusion which result in low educational achievement, high levels of unemployment, usury, growing up in State care, domestic violence and substance abuse. Gaps in law, policy and practice in the field of anti-trafficking constitute barriers to the fight against trafficking in Romani communities. Few Roma are identified by police as trafficked persons and many are reluctant to report themselves to law enforcement agencies for fear of reprisal from their traffickers or of prosecution for the conduct of criminal acts as a trafficked person (ERRC 2011, web).
The European social protection systems fail to reduce the extreme vulnerability of the few amongst the trafficked Romanies who do seek help, negatively impacting their ability to re-integrate. Thus, it leaves them highly susceptible to re-trafficking.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil remains a place where crime is associated with the impoverished darker-skinned descendants of former slaves from Africa, the youths living in favelas (squatter housing) in urban centers like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. There is considerable danger in Brazil, a country where minors get involved in gangsters’ drug-related affairs and are given guns since minors are not incarcerated. However, for the Roma and Calon life in Brazil is much more peaceful than it would be in Europe and they believe it to be so. They admit they face much less social prejudice. They are certainly not the lowest social rung there.

Brazil is where happy Ciganos live far from all the violence and prejudice plaguing the European Romanies, according to most of my interlocutors and according to Victor Vishnevsky. As a Gypsy born in communist China, Vishnevsky traveled with his Lovara Roma tribe all the way to Latin America. In his autobiography he describes the arrival to Brazil as the light at the end of the tunnel after much suffering (1999: 2). Many of my interlocutors boasted of similar peace found among Brazilian gage in contrast to their ancestors’ hardships and forced exiles.

Vishnevsky writes about how his clan first fled China and came to live with a group of Kalderasha on the former Russian territory. He considered these Kalderasha to be much more conservative than his own kin, since the women always wore traditional long dresses and would children were prohibited from attending school altogether in fear of assimilation. Vishnevsky also writes about traveling to India, and recognizing similarities between his family and the nomadic tribes he encountered between Calcutta and Bombay such as the women’s long, colorful dresses, arranged marriages, moral pollution taboos, basic Hindi words (for numbers and for
body parts) similar to their equivalents in Romanes, and so forth. Similarly, the documentary “Jaisalmer Ayo! Gateway of the Gypsies” elaborates on the common characteristics between Gypsies and several semi-nomadic Indian tribes, for example: the storytellers (Bhopa), the blacksmiths (Gadolya Lohar), the dancers (Kabelhya), the salt traders (Banjara), the snake charmers (Jogis) and the musicians (Manganiars) (dir. Ozan et al. 2004). I explore proto-Indian myths of origin and claims of authenticity in the first two chapters by addressing academic discourses in parallel to interlocutors’ oral narratives and language uses.

Like most of my interlocutors, Vishnevsky concludes that Romanies suffer from discrimination and inhospitable conditions everywhere except in Brazil. According to him fortunetelling is also common among all Romanies. Yet in Brazil this occupation is not only in high demand and often lucrative, but it is also recognized by the government as an official profession. Vishnevsky considers women’s traditional occupation similar to the role of a padre (priest in Portuguese) or psichologo (psychologist), in that it fulfills the same needs since the fortunetellers hear confessions and offer advice much like sábio (wise man). Moreover, he believes many of his people are talented musicians, sensitive souls, and love to be together to such an extent that many suffer when relatives have to go their separate ways. He concludes that “todos Ciganos gostam da musica, dança e viagens” [all Gypsies love music, dancing and traveling]. And he insists these activities are much easier to conduct in Brazil than elsewhere, and that the tropical weather permits semi-nomadism with greater ease than in colder regions.

Thus, Vishnevsky suggests Brazil is the best land for Romanies to adopt as their own, better than “mother-India,” which most do not actually think of as an ancestral homeland. His memoirs are dedicated to his children and grandchildren, hoping they will pass on these stories to future generations. He fears that his tribe will disappear, that it will suffer from mixing with the
rest of the Brazilians, who are so amicable. He proudly calls himself a “pure blood” and insists that although peaceful social relations with Brazilians are desirable, there should be no inter-marriages with them. Despite continuing taboos against intermarriages with gage, my research documents numerous such cases in Brazil, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. During fieldwork I became aware of how violent Brazil was on a daily basis, and this nuanced my take on Vishnevsky’s (and my interlocutors’) optimism about how this country is the best for Ciganos.

11. “Jaisalmer Ayo! Gateway of the Gypsies” (documentary poster)
Romanies themselves said their moral codes strive to maintain a sense of dignity and protection via community solidarity, which most Brazilians seemed to have lost. While I was chatting up a street vendor on Ipanema beach, a 15-year-old favela girl, who appeared dim-witted for her age, talked loudly with an unfocused gaze about having watched her brother be dismembered by vengeful gangsters, tied up to cars driven in opposite directions. When I visited Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio, our gang-sanctioned tour-guide allowed an 11-year-old local boy, Carlos, to walk with us as we passed by a dozen teenagers holding what looked like riffles. I know very little about guns, but these looked quite large. The boys held them at the hip pointing upwards: overt phallic extensions, a false sign of masculinity while growing up amidst poverty and corruption.

Carlos held my hand as we passed by the gang and quietly said he could not wait to grow up, become a lawyer, and get out of the neighborhood. He said in the last shoot-out with the tropa de elite (special police force), which lasted two weeks, twenty-one innocent people in his neighborhood died from stray bullets. He lamented that his peers, some younger than him, smoked marijuana on a daily basis with the older gangsters “to be maneiro (cool),” and said that minors were often given guns and drugs to carry since they could not be legally detained. Yet he added that policemen often beat favela boys in the streets as part of a long-standing stigma against them, making the young turn to the gang life for protection.

Brazilians warned me not to walk around packs of children at any time or to frequent desolate places like the beach at night: “Only tourists are dumb enough for that!” I was told to avoid displaying a cell phone by answering it or a camera by taking photos, and abstain from carrying purses, wallets and jewelry. Otherwise it meant to invite being robbed (at gunpoint). This actually happened to me once, but I managed to convince the thief, who was holding what
looked like a gun inside his jacket, that my phone was too old and not worth it. Locals told me it would be safer next time to just hand the thief all my valuables on the spot. They said they had been robbed at gunpoint several times, and made it a habit of tucking into their shorts two small piles of cash: one for the potential robber and one for their personal use. Afterwards I did as well. When I returned to New York I found it refreshing to be able to carry a purse and accessories other than made of feathers and seeds as sold on Rio’s beaches. Yet shortly, in Manhattan in broad daylight on Broadway Street, a black man clad in an overcoat swore something about my mother and swung his briefcase right across my face: pow! The first black eye I ever got. My illusion of safety shattered. This supported Brazilians’ notion that at least in their own country crime remains motivated by poverty, while in the US it baffles logic, like the mass shootings in schools directed towards a universal adversary, a boiling-over of the oddly mixing melting pot.

Growing up in Romania we rarely saw negri (black) people. When we did, they were real princes and princesses of African countries sent to study in our highly efficient universities and professional high schools. Both my parents both photographed themselves with such “exotic” colleagues. Post-communism, when we gained access to foreign television channels, dark-skinned musicians were extremely popular, and if any graced our presence in Romania they were instantly invited as guests on national shows and music videos. Romanians idealized the US as well as Brazil for their democratic values, creativity, “coolness,” and sense of freedom. Dark-skinned Brazilians were particularly sensualized after we saw “Lambada,” a 1989 music video by Kaoma, which taught little girls like me to partner up and skirt-swirl just like in the movie “Dirty Dancing.” As an immigrant to the US, at fourteen, I unwittingly fell into a widespread racialized dichotomy between “whites and blacks.” By the end of 8th grade in Chicago, I aligned myself with the lawyer’s speech at the end of “Native Son,” a 1940’s novel by Richard Wright,
in which he presents black American criminal youths as socially constructed by historical marginalization. This gave me clarity when looking back home at Romanian animosity towards “dark” Gypsies, some of which was not altogether unmotivated. A childhood friend said her girlfriend was walking down the street one day in my hometown when a Kalderashi woman slapped her cold in for no apparent reason. I reminded her that whatever others project on us is embedded in history. Both “blacks” in the Americas and Romanies in Romania still deal with post-slavery prejudices.

In Brazil the high incidence of violence in ordinary life, on the news and in conversation, represented a constant stress during fieldwork, and it certainly affected all my interlocutors’ lives. The Roma in Sao Paulo said they had lost a little girl to a stray bullet about a decade before my visit, which is why most of them had decided to live in houses. They agreed, “Tents are easy for bullets to penetrate.” Like other locals, they also avoided driving around at night. In Rio, the local administration allows for traffic lights to blink red after 10:00 PM, indicating that it is not necessary to come to a full stop. This is an official recognition of the fact that to stop at a red light means that drivers can be robbed of their cars or shot if they oppose. People credited the thieves’ gull to both poverty and the use of hard drugs. I never dared to drive in Brazil, so I constantly relied on public transportation despite admonitions that it was also dangerous.

Although most Romanies and I did not use illegal drugs, drugs were everywhere. Some thought them necessary, not simply recreational. My roommates in Rio smoked marijuana on an almost daily basis “to soothe their nerves.” One girl had just stopped volunteering at a local non-profit organization (NGO) because the French couple in charge had been stabbed to death. The culprit was a favelado viciado (slum dwelling drug-addict) paid by a man who had worked at the center for ten years and had planned the homicides as part of stealing the NGO funds. The story
was all over the news, as were many other tragic accounts. The televised news constantly interrupted the quasi-utopian world of popular soap operas with the reality of daily violence. Many Brazilians I met sought comfort in rich foods, family life, sexuality, beer and “soft” drugs.

There was an overwhelming sense that life in Brazil was cheap and carnal. Notably, the country has a very high urbanization rate where 81 in 100 citizens live in urban center (IBGE 2014, online). A street vendor once said in Rio, “in the fight for survival it is often the case that Brazilians have lost their innocence, their integrity, and their dignity. They will have to learn how to have dignity again, but this will be difficult.” I saw that rural poverty led to mass migrations, crowding the urban centers with dangerous, unsustainable illegal squatting, without any infrastructure, often eroding the bedrock to the risk of avalanching on lower neighborhoods during the rainy seasons (June-August). Sao Paulo with its suburbs alone is host to twenty-three million people, equal to the population of Romania. According to UN data, there are over six million people in Rio de Janeiro, without its suburbs, making it the second largest city in Brazil.

Foreigners who visited or who lived in Brazil admitted to sleeping with prostitutes, since prostitution was both legal and affordable in Brazil. Girls who walked alone at night said they were often mistaken for prostitutes. Bars, carnivals, samba parties, and all the local cliché distractions were abundant, meanwhile the country was afflicted by one of worst inequalities in Latin America and a network of corrupt politicians enriching themselves. I wondered why so many live-in maids were indentured for minimal pay. One Argentinean Jewish friend in Rio said, “Brazil has never risen in a bloody revolution like the rest of the Latin American countries. The same inequalities still persist since slavery. They are too sedated, too dull, and too domestic. They even call their children criança (offspring). We use that word for animals’ litter.”
Ciganos in Brazil maintain their sense of economic autonomy, honor and cultural integrity by keeping to themselves. This is an account of their camouflaged life as citizens of Brazil, their secret world amidst mainstream society. My ethnographic fieldwork about these people’s lives is partial and fragmentary, shaped by how I was largely perceived as an outsider. Many secrets of Romanies’ cosmologies had to be respected. This is why my visits to the Calon camps, for example, had their limitations. I was constantly surrounded by children there most likely as a protective measure against questioning the adults too much about their lives.

In Rio de Janeiro I engaged with a community of 54 Calon living clustered together on an abandoned lot: 15 men, 16 women, and 23 unmarried youths. They inhabited 15 tents, where each tent corresponded to a married couple or a nuclear family. Through arranged endogamous marriages each community organized itself around close blood relations, particularly between the male members of an extended family. The five elder men in the community were first cousins related on the paternal side: Lomanto, Cleito, Jefse, Jilmario, and Elioma. Among them three were brothers, Jefse, Jilmario and Elioma, sons of Fernando who had died nearly a decade before my arrival. Fernando was brother to Lomanto’s and Cleito’s fathers, Daniel and Tomas respectively, both of whom had also passed away.

Fernando had been the former chefe (chief in Portuguese), elected as the main spokesman rather than authoritative leader. The families’ male heads had selected Jefse as their chefe after Fernando died of cancer. It had been Jefse who encouraged the community to move away from Salvador, Bahia (also coastal Brazil), “away from the places where these family deaths had occurred.” Jefse had moved his remaining kinsmen to Sao Paulo about two years before my visit. Their motive for moving was mainly to avoid the spirits of the dead, the mule (pronounced moo-leh) as common among Romanies in Europe (Williams 2003: 2). The very mention of a mulo
(deceased person) was forbidden as dangerous. Nonetheless, I have provided the deceased kin’s names as a point of reference in the following list. I have separated males (left) and females (right) and marked the married couples in bold face in the lists below. The equal sign between names indicates marriage. A crossed-off equal sign means divorce. For example, Daniela, a soft-spoken, pale young woman, had separated from her abusive husband in Salvador and had returned to live in her parents’ tent (number 2) along with her 3-year-old daughter Dara. The children’s names appear below their parents’ names. Each name has a number next to it indicating the person’s age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tent 1)</th>
<th>CALON</th>
<th>CALINS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JEFSE – 52 <em>(chefe)</em></td>
<td>=</td>
<td>JILZINHA – 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had two sons that fell ill and passed away at twelve, and FABIANA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Tent 2) | JILMARIO – 48 | = | JUSIMARA – 48 |
|---------|---------------|--------------|
| Had three children: MICHEL, IAGO, DIELE, and DANIELA (adopted niece) |
| *(BETO - 23 in Salvador)* ≠ | DANIELA – 22 *(divorced)* |
| DARA – 3 |

| Tent 3) | MICHEL – 24 | = | LUANA – 18 *(kaliviri)* |
|---------|-------------|--------------|

| Tent 4) | IAGO – 22 | = | JOSILEDE – 16 |
|---------|-----------|--------------|
| IAN – 1 |

| Tent 5) | LUAN – 26 | = | DIELE – 19 |
|---------|-----------|--------------|

| Tent 6) | LOMANTO – 58 | = | LINDALVA – 54 |
|---------|--------------|--------------|
| PALOMA, MILTON, SERGIO, VINICIUS, GABRIEL, LUAN |

| Tent 7) | MILTON – 37 | = | MIRELE – 37 |
|---------|-------------|--------------|
| MARCIEL – 13 |
| MAURO – 11 |

| Tent 8) | SERGIO – 33 | = | SAMIRA – 26 |
|---------|-------------|--------------|
| SERGIIVALDO – 8 |
| SIMONE – 1 |
| SINALMA – 10 |
What has been omitted from the list above is that all *Ciganos* use both an official name (*nome legítimo* in Portuguese) for documents and a *Cigano* nickname known only to their family members and to occasional friends. I was also told that a mother calls her newborn baby by a secret *Cigano* name known only to her for the rest of the child’s life. The secrecy of this initial mother-name is believed to protect the child’s soul since one’s “true name” cannot be used in dangerous circumstances such as witchcraft. I never found out people’s secret names since all the mothers were very protective. In this dissertation I have chosen to give only *Cigano* names from other regions, but please keep in mind that all interlocutors also went by a second Brazilian name. I have also noted when individuals had rare characteristics such as blond hair. There were four blond children in this camp, which indicated their parents’ mixed ancestry with Europeans.
I found that marrying a *kaliviri* was considered acceptable amongst the Calon as long as the bride acculturated into the clans’ traditional practices, learning the dialect and fortunetelling as her primary occupation. Jorge Bernal, Argentinian Rom and key Romani-rights activist in Latin America suggests *Ciganos* occupy a similar position to citizens of African descent in the Brazilian imaginary as both mystical and marginal:

Brazil has strong African and native cultural influences, the Africans having been brought there as slaves, and both groups having old and noted mystical traditions which influence Brazilians regardless of their origin. And it is precisely from this mystical point of view, so widespread among Brazilian people, that *[Ciganos]* are normally perceived. As in other South-American countries, there is a huge lack of interest on the part of Brazilian authorities, not only regarding the Rom, but generally towards all ethnic minorities (2003:15).

Indeed I found this similarity facilitated the integration of *kaliviri* women among the Calon. Still, Calins’ marriages to *kaliviri* men’s not socially acceptable in their communities.

For any of my *Cigano* interlocutors the father must be Romani in order for the children to be considered of Romani ethnicity. The paternal bloodline is key and this worldview affects their understandings of femininity, masculinity and ethnic authenticity. While ethnic group endogamy remains a myth *Ciganos* elaborate about themselves, it is linked to a sense of origins as a distinct ethnic group that must be preserved in its “authentic purity” from contamination via marriage with non-*Ciganos*. For this reason marriages among Romanies were traditionally arranged by parents, who married their children within the same subgroup. Roma almost never married Calon in Brazil. Their myth of group endogamy however is destabilized by evidence of genetic mixing, yet it remains critical to Romanies’ self-understandings, as I elaborate in chapters 1 and 4.

The significance of female virginity at marriage is a common element in all Romani worldviews amongst all the groups of *Ciganos* I encountered in Brazil and elsewhere. Both Calon and Roma interlocutors insisted on female virginity at marriage since it appealed to them
as the main guarantee against offspring of non-Romani paternity. This entails a concept of femininity inextricably linked to motherhood. Some girls marry as young as eleven or twelve. Most drop out of school in preparation for marriage. A girl goes from taking care of her younger siblings and cousins to being a bride and soon after to having children of her own. The claim of female virginity at marriage is one that both Calon and Roma circulate about themselves, even though it may not always be true. For instance Liane, who was twenty-eight when she got married, was constantly gossiped about for having done so as “an old maid,” and was suspected of not being a virgin on her wedding day.

Motherhood as linked to the Romani idea of femininity gets inflected by the myth of virginity. After Liane gave birth to her first child the gossip stopped circulating as if motherhood had reinstated her honorability. In her essay “Stabat Mater” Julia Kristeva takes on an analysis of femininity and motherhood as formulated by various myths of the Virgin Mary (1977). Pregnant while writing, Kristeva addresses how myths of virginity historically affected concepts of femininity in society. She argues that presently we are left without a satisfactory discourse on motherhood due to the decline of religion and the cult of the Virgin, which traditionally offered a solution to what she calls “the feminine paranoia.” To an extent this reflected my anxieties.

However, I found that Kristeva’s analysis is not applicable to the experience of Romani women in Brazil who grow up with a strongly elaborated cultural discourse on the importance of female fertility, as seen in chapter 4. For most ciganas not only does the Catholic religion still offer comfort, but also the traditional ethnic-specific rules of morality resolves this kind of feminine anxiety by normalizing both motherhood and marriage at a young age. Even when older Ciganas lose their reproductive powers they take pride in counting their children and grandchildren, often boasting how they “multiplied” and thus gained the status of matriarch.
Brazilian women in general found cultural incentives towards early motherhood such as the low age of consent (fourteen) and the illegal status of abortions. Romani feminine sexuality, according to social prescriptions, remains limited to the physical reproduction of the ethnic group. Ciganas who cannot conceive are perceived as unfortunate, fallen out of grace, and often suspected of black magic or dealing with spirits of the mule (the dead). Throughout this thesis I inquire into Romani ideals of femininity as reflected by their code of morality known as maxrimé, rules which aim to ensure the reproduction of the paternal bloodline, the marker of identity. Chapter 4 elaborates on social norms and dissent.

The Calon families I encountered on the outskirts of Sao Paulo lived in a family-based community of 56 kin: 18 men, 19 women and 19 children living in 18 tents located on an abandoned suburban lot. The matriarch of this community, Dona Herante, was about sixty-five when I first met her. She had been married to Bonieke, the former chief who had passed away about four years before my visit. Bonieke had been the oldest brother of the remaining three elder men: Iago, Nabo and Carão, the current spokesman or chief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tent</th>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Spouse Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tent 1</td>
<td>CARÃO – 69 (chefé)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>JUDITE – 60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five sons: FELIPE, CLOVES, EDINALDO, ANTONIO, IVONALDO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent 2</td>
<td>FELIPE – 40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>MARCELA – 32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No children. Difficulty procreating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent 3</td>
<td>CLOVES – 33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>MARCELA – 30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CLEBE – 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IÂN – 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent 4</td>
<td>EDINALDO – 27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>NAOMI – 25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOELIA – 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent 5</td>
<td>ANTONIO – 25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>ADRIANA – 21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tent 6)  IVONALDO – 23 = EDINALMA – 26
IVOLANDO – 3 = IMACULADA – 5

Tent 7)  IAGO – 63 = LAIANA – 49
Two sons RENE and SOZEVAL and three daughters, two married off.
SIDAI - 20

Tent 8)  RENE – 30 = SORAIA – 29
JILSON - 7
AIÀ – 1

Tent 9)  SOZEVAL – 30 = SONDA – 26
SERGE – 3

Tent 10)  BONIEKE (blond, deceased) = DONA HERANTE – 65
Five children: ZENILDO, PAULO, ROBE, ANAVIE and NAEEMA

Tent 11)  JIO (deceased) = NAEEMA – 40
GABRIEL – 18 = GABRIELA - 20

Tent 12)  ZENILDO – 46 = EDIENE – 44
Two children: ROBE and ANAVIE living nearby.

Tent 13)  PAULO – 44 = NENA – 41
Daughters JOELMA and TAINA married their cousins nearby.

Tent 14)  ROBE – 27 = JOELMA – 25
AIAN – 1 (blond) = SUMAIARA – 3

Tent 15)  ANAVIE – 25 = TAINA – 23
CAROLINA – 6
SUMAIA – 3

Tent 16)  NABO – 52 = DOROSMA – 48
Three sons: EDUARDO, RONALDO, AELTO living nearby.

Tent 17)  EDUARDO – 32 = CLAUDIA – 27 (kaliviri gagi)
BENIEKE – 4 = TAINA – 8

Tent 18)  RONALDO – 28 = NOIGI – 30
GISELLE – 3
NORMELIA – 8

Tent 19)  AELTO – 22 = ALSIONE – 22
ADIEL – 1 (blond)
Similar to Calon in Rio de Janeiro, the Sao Paulo community showed a pattern where daughters typically married into another camp and moved away from their parents, in order to be under the surveillance of their mothers-in-law who ensured respect for maxrimé Romani laws. However, when sons married they remained on the same camp as their parents: they just moved into a separate tent with their bori (new bride in Romanes, pronounced boh-ree). The oldest daughter who lived in her parents’ tent was Sidai, a 20-year-old chei bari (virgin, pronounced shey bah-ree). Most daughters had married before her age and moved away near their parents-in-law, according to customs. The other two exceptions in Sao Paulo were the sisters Joelma and Taina who had married their paternal first cousins Robe and Anavie and had thus remained part of the camp in which they grew up. Zenildo their father and Paulo their uncle were brothers, sons of Bonieke. Their marriage was seen as fortunate since the daughters could enjoy their parents’ company and vice versa, plus everyone believed it to be a “stronger love when children grew up together.” I explore discourses on “unconditional love” in chapter 4 and chapter 6.

I found that Calon preferred patrilineal parallel cross-cousin marriages, which allowed daughters to remain close to their parents. According to Lévi-Strauss, the founder of French structuralism, there are two types of endogamy: one that is “true endogamy” and one that negates exogamy, which he calls “functional endogamy.” Yet he states this distinction disappears among tribes like the Bororo Indians he studied in 1936, due to “their presence in one village, their absence in another, and their possible division and subdivision into sub-clans, which enables them to elude the fixity and strict delimitation of endogamous categories” (1969: 48). Similarly I found great variety among Ciganos’ marriage preferences. Still, Calon were unlikely to marry Roma and vice-versa. They did occasionally intermARRY with non-Ciganas thus indicating flexible rules.
Calon of different extended families married their children amongst each other. When cross-cousin marriages were realized, they were not strictly on the paternal lines but also the maternal. This great degree of variability resists any single generalization. Once a mother asked me which *chavo* (boy, pronounced *shah-voh*). I liked the most, in front of all the children. I thought was an odd question, yet I answered honestly because honesty was preferred to *gage*-like diplomacy. It was common practice among the Calon to ask individuals whom they preferred in the bunch, for such preference was significant for arranged marriages.

In Rio de Janeiro the Roma “community” I frequented was scattered over several streets in a suburban neighborhood, numbering 51 people in total living in 21 houses: 21 men including 2 *gage* wedded to *Ciganas*, 20 women including 2 unwed and 2 *gagia* wedded to *Ciganos*, and 10 children and unwedded youths. Most of these Roma belonged to a larger extended family and were blood relatives. The living elders Eustakiu, Elias, Betinho and Lorenzo were siblings. Below are the residents relevant to each house whether living, relocated or deceased:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROMA</th>
<th>RROMNIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARLOS (disappeared)</td>
<td>= DINA - 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children. Difficulty procreating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVO - 70 (moved away)</td>
<td>≠ IANCA – 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One daughter RENATA (30) Ivo returned Canada and took Renata away. IANCA had lived in this house with her mother ELENA for a decade.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARIANO (remarried, deceased) ≠ ELENA (deceased)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four children: OLAVO, TATIANA, IANCA, ROSITA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLAVO – 60</td>
<td>= SORAIA – 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children: SAMIRA, BETO, JIO, all married off.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANDRO – 50 (moved away) ≠ ROSITA – 46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREGO – 25</td>
<td>LEILA – 33 (lived next-door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAMIRA – 35, LEILA – 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins, unmarried females.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
House 6) **DAMO** (deceased) = **TIA VIOLETA – 80**
Five sons MATCHO, MAURO, LAIERTI, PAULO, LORO
Five daughters RIANA, RUANA, LAIANA, LUCIA, LUCIANA

**MATCHO – 45** (widower) = **JEIZINE** (deceased)
Two children: KADU and AMANDA from this first married, married off.
= **JOANNA - 44** (second wife)

House 7) **KADU - 25** = **KATIA – 23**
DANDAS - 1 = RITA – 3

House 8) **MAURO – 49** = **JULIANA – 47**
Had two twin sons: VICTOR and BRUNO

House 9) **VICTOR – 29** = **SUZANA – 28**
LELA – 3

House 10) **BRUNO – 29** = **SARITA – 27** *(gagi)*
MICHAEL – 7

House 11) **PETRE** (deceased) = **RUANA - 40**
Had four sons: JIMMY (deceased), CARLOS, DOUGLAS, COSME at home
**CARLOS – 20** (engaged)
**DOUGLAS – 22** = **JUSSARA - 18**
**COSME – 24** = **CELIA – 22**
PINTO – 2

House 12) **CURI – 36** = **LULUDI – 32**
MAX – 5 = MINA – 6

House 13) **ELIAS – 70** = **SERINA** (deceased)
Had one adopted *kaliviri gagii* daughter MARA KALI who married off.

House 14) **EUSTAKIU – 71** = **NATASHA** (deceased)
Had two sons that also died in an accident with their mother.
≠ **ANAROSA (gagi)**
Had four daughters: LIRA, MILENA, SOLOMEA, PAMELA

House 15) **PELEKO – 50** = **LIRA – 46**
Had three daughters: PERULA, MILA, NATALIA still living at home.
MILA - 18
NATALIA - 16
**RODRIGO – 23** *(gagio)* = **PERULA – 20**
LISA – newborn
House 16) **CARLINHOS – 35 ≠ SOLOMEA** (ran away)  
**DUIO – 15**

House 17) **PAULO – 49 = PAMELA – 45**  
Had a son and three daughters all married off. Hosted Romanian Roma.

House 18) **LORENZO – 79 = NEVENKA** (deceased)  
Five children: MISHA, TOMAS, CARMELA, AILEEN, KALI

House 19) **GRISHA – 50 ≠ VIVIANA** (left with a *gagi*)  
Three children: INESSA, LEXI, ALFIE all married off.

House 20) **THIAGO – 60 (**gagio**) = KALI - 53**  
Had a son and a daughter: CORY and SAIRA married nearby.

House 21) **BETINHO – 68**

Unlike most *Ciganos* Elias, Betinho and Carlos had not been able to reproduce. Betinho had never gotten married. He lived alone with his dog and rarely walked outdoors because he was very thin and sickly. His brothers brought him food and medicine, yet the rest rarely visited him. Rumors said he was dying of AIDS and that he was *bištajštśar* (homosexual in *Romanes*, pronounced *beesh-tie-shtahr* – literally means “sits on all fours”). Also the two cousins Samira and Leila were in their thirties and still unwed. They lived together in a house, which raised suspicions over the nature of their relationship. The *Rromni* Viviana had eloped with a *sapatona gagi* (*sapatona* means lesbian in vernacular Portuguese). Homosexual relationships were considered immoral according to my interlocutors. Most also did not approve of the *gagio* Rodrigo marrying into the family and sharing his bride’s home with her two younger sisters. Several Roma households had parents living together with their wedded offspring’s families. It was thought preferable to keep a new bride under a mother-in-law’s supervision. Calon also shared this belief in the need for scrutiny of new wives, yet they used separate tents for newlyweds. In Sao Paulo I also visited 37 Roma: 13 men, 14 women, and 10 youths:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROMA</th>
<th>RROMNIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House 1) ESTELI – 59 ≠ LUANA (deceased)</td>
<td>Four children married off: CABRITO, MINU, SULTANA, SAVETA = JUSSARA (gagi) - 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children from his second marriage: RUA, IGACIO, RICARDO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 2) CABRITO - 36 = ANGELICA - 36</td>
<td>ROBY – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIANCA - 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 3) MINU – 40 = CORNELIA - 39</td>
<td>DAVID - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOFIA – 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 4) LEX – 44 = DARA – 40</td>
<td>LISA – 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA – 18 (briefly eloped)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 4) NENE – 25 = SUZI – 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 6) DIVINO – 55 = VERA - 50</td>
<td>STEVE – 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LILIAM – 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 7) MICIOLA – 10</td>
<td>MICIOLA – 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEDA - 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 7) DUIO - 39 = ALLESSANDRA - 38</td>
<td>ALLETHEIA – 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 8) ROBERTO - 37 = PAOLA - 35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARTA - 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOURDE - 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 9) PEDRO - 78 = TALITA - 75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four sons: AMERICO, BODAO, TODORO, IVANO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 10) PINTO – 58 = RAFAELA - 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four children: PINTO, LIMA, PAOLA, MARCI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 11) DERILO – 45 = NEGRITA – 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 12) BIMBAI (deceased) = IRINA – 65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 13) DRAGO - 65 ≠ CARMINA - 60</td>
<td>Two sons: HORACIO, TOMAS, TOMAIS and one daughter SIMONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House 14) HORACIO (disappeared) ≠ TANIA – 45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was often uncomfortable visiting my Romani interlocutors for multiple reasons, first of all because according to maxrimé rules I was considered morally impure and therefore contagious like all non-Romani people or gage. I was hyper-vigilant to show respect and to dress modestly. I was scared that if I ate from a plate they might throw it away or if I used a towel it would be burned. To my knowledge this never happened. I was informed that separate plates were used for gage guests, but on most occasions I shared plates that were at the common table and did not feel segregated. I was also invited into Roma homes’ and Calon tents’ private areas as a guest. I slept over at Roma houses on numerous occasions. Yet Calon tents were strictly built to fit the nuclear family and no guests. Each newlywed couple received a new tent. I seldom saw a partition between the parents’ bed and that reserved for children. In the back of a tent, behind the kitchen area, the typical Calon family slept together. I was shown tents with one or two beds, sometimes three beds to separate the children by gender. Only mosquito nets covered the beds against the potential transmission of dengue fever, vaguely obscuring sexual acts I imagined happened there.

Calon and Roma typically did not discuss sex, only its prohibitions, so I avoided direct questions that could be perceived as offensive. Sex practices, or rather the taboos around them, were clearly delineated, for example the insistence that girls marry as virgins soon after their first menses. For both genders oral sex was considered morally impure. This was particularly so because women’s genitals were considered inherently maxrimé and thus dangerous, especially during menses, making penetration taboo during this time as well. Wives were not to talk about their menses with anyone besides their husbands. I was also too ashamed to ask individuals about their particular experiences growing up next to the parental bed where presumably marital sex happened.
12. Calin mother and son in their red plastic tent avoiding the afternoon sun.

13. Calon siblings share a bed next to their parents’ bed in the family tent
14. Calin reading palms on Copacabana beach
Many words were taboo as well for Ciganos, and I aimed to be careful in making inquiries rather than being accidentally disrespectful. To utter and be heard using taboo words potentially meant to soil someone, to make them maxrimé. The phrase te xas mo mij (eat my female genitals, pronounced teh haas moh meej) was rarely if ever used to soil or insult someone, although women said this was the ultimate revenge against a man. Under the circumstances I kept silent my personal belief that oral sex is quite pleasurable for consenting women. When I slept over and showered at Roma households I was instructed not to touch my genitals with their towels and I obediently air-dried those parts. All adults were to wash their hands right after rising from bed and after each hand contact with the ground, with clothing worn below the waist, and of course any contact with genitals. Presumably sex with gag was also considered impure since gag did not obey these purity rules. Yet male promiscuity with gagia women was encouraged even among the married Calon.

Most Calon said that girls learn about sex from their husbands, who must be, therefore, a few years older and more sexually experienced than their wives. I saw that Roma and Calon boys were encouraged to seduce non-Romani girls or gagia in order to gain experience before marrying a Romani girl. Males could participate in the promiscuity happening during Carnival celebrations every February, whereas the girls and women were to stay on the campsite. Men could thus boast of being sexually experienced and ready to instruct their wives.

I once heard two elder Calins saying that girls also learned about male genitals by observing a demonstration of their function from their fathers, namely the father touching his genitals to the point of climax with the daughter watching. I was too embarrassed to ask for a more detailed explanation. When I did eventually ask about it, again it was repeated to me that both Roma and Calon have this tradition where, “the father shows his nude body to his daughter
so she may learn how it works.” This topic remains unclear. I failed to ask sufficient questions and when asked, answers were rare and curt. Nobody would disclose such personal experiences to me—the-outsider. Some denied it abruptly. Several uncomfortable experiences, including a personal death threat I received via email haunted me long-term. The death threat was a tactical authenticity claim. It came from a knife maker, half-Rom on the maternal side who was therefore not accepted by the Roma as one of them. I found it difficult to sit down and write post fieldwork, difficult to be biographical with my experiences of otherness on so many levels since wherever I went I was only partial, caught within circumstances that limited self-expression.

Most Calon and Roma interlocutors insisted that a girl growing up without a father, like me, was less desirable than one with a father for more than one reason. The father was in charge of her moral upbringing, traditionally entrusted with the moral task of preparing her for an arranged marriage and handing her off as a virgin. In due retribution for his efforts the father would typically receive a couple of thousand réais as bride-price from the father of the groom. The price varied relative to whether the girl could read fortunes lucratively or not since her earnings would contribute to her groom’s household after marriage. Girls were kept at home so parents could prevent the possibility of their eloping with a boy from school. Boys studied longer in order to help them instill respect for men. In this patriarchal cultural paradigm same-sex attraction was strictly forbidden, so I kept silent about my personal bisexual curiosity and experiences. Nevertheless, males who were attracted to same-sex partners lived quiet unmarried lives in the public eye of the community, and were often invited to social gatherings since they made great dancers in general. It was the females with same-sex lovers who were considered the worst offenders of Romani laws. I learned about self-professed lesbian Ciganas who were beaten by their fathers and brothers into resigning themselves to an arranged marriage.
Myths and Romani cosmology

This dissertation explores Gypsy myths and Cigano cosmologies in Brazil to highlight their specificities and commonalities as part of a worldwide fragmented diaspora. The online Merriam-Webster dictionary states that the word myth comes from the Greek mythos; its first known use was in 1830 and it has several definitions. Here I explore the concept of myth as an idea or story that is believed by many people but is unverifiable, “an unfounded or false notion,” and myth as an idea or story that is told by a culture to explain a practice, belief or natural occurrence, often “one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society,” as well (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2015). Therefore, I investigate myths told about Ciganos including those they tell about themselves to construct a worldview.

15. Calon showing off their festive outfits and dancing
At the intersection of *Gypsy* myths and Romani cosmologies, as in social structures or worldview, I investigate *Cigano* personhood and subjectivities in Brazil as defined through interactions amongst each other and with perceived others. I also investigate other Brazilians’ worldviews to understand what status they attribute to *Ciganos* and their ethnic-specific practices. Myths highlight aspects of ideology. As Roland Barthes suggests, myths are “frozen speech,” impenetrable by history unlike ideology (1957: 125). Myths look both general and neutral, benumbed. The meaning of a myth is both present and absent, taken for granted. One is attacked by it so as to consume it without realizing it. Myth becomes ideology when naturalized:

> We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature. We now understand why, *in the eyes of the myth-consumer*, the intention, the adhomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason (1957: 129).

As Barthes suggests, a myth is a form of speech representing a secondary order semiological system, which aims to pass from semiology to ideology. “Myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (131). This happens within its consumers, and not in the myth itself. It requires persuasion. Barthes argues that the mythmaker cannot be the myth consumer, yet my dissertation seeks to destabilize this notion and introduce greater ambivalence. I will explore cases where myths overlap ideology and agency is blurred. For example, the Egyptian origin myth is one initially popularized, and now consumed by Romanies themselves.

*Ciganos* in Brazil showed little interest in talking about the past and their history. Calon generally believed in their mythic Egyptian origins and only a few acknowledge linguistic studies pointing to India. Alonso, the 78-year-old Rom from Rio de Janeiro quoted a different myth of origin: “All Roma come from Romania, it used to be a beautiful island, but one day the great flood came and it sank, but *Ciganos* saved themselves and since then they travelled the
Several of my interlocutors believed this myth since their grandparents or great-grandparents had indeed come from Romania to South America. I will elaborate in chapter 1.

Myths aim to cause an immediate impression. Barthes argues that articulated language has mythical dispositions and offers little resistance to being taken up by myths, whether or not the mythical concepts are formulated in oral or written language. In photos for example, for the myth reader, “everything happens as if the picture naturally conjured up the concept, as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified” (130). Some Calon frequently posted photos of their dancing in festive outfits on their Facebook page, as representative of how they wish to be perceived: as a happy, lively, dancing, mystical, romantic, well-off, closely-knit people. As Barthes says, “Men do not have with myth a relationship based on truth but on uses they depoliticize according to their needs.” Ciganas in Brazil sell fortunetelling services on the premise that they themselves enjoy sustainable happiness and love. In this dissertation, I approach myths not as lies but as embedded within meanings that can be interpreted through self-reflexive analysis of intersubjective interlocution encounters during fieldwork.

I explore Cigano cultural values to highlight underlying power dynamics at various levels in society: family units, kinship ties, communities and larger segments of the often marginalized and fragmentary diaspora. Both in Brazilians’ and Romanies’ imaginaries, I noted an excessive quality to the notion of Cigano. From lavish feasts and festivities, to displays of gold accessories and gold teeth, to multilayered spreading skirts, to numerous clamorous children, to boasting via elaborate orations at formal occasions and in daily negotiations, to fortunetelling, magic and beliefs, the notion of excess pervades Romani subjectivity and personhood. Barthes explores the notion of excess within “The World of Wrestling,” a world somewhat similar to that of Ciganos in so far as it is performative and it “partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek
drama and bullfights; a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve” (1972:15).

*Ciganos* perform their social roles and wear social masks like wrestlers, with excessive gestures exploited to the limit of their meaning:

> This function of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of ancient theater, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disguising, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity, one is not ashamed of one’s suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking for tears (16).

Such grandiloquence and spectacle is found in *Ciganos’* everyday life and interlocution encounters, as frequent emotional outbursts such as joy, anger, jealousy, and debilitating melancholy. I struggled with understanding and interpreting such wide emotional registers. In chapters 3 and 4 I explore the sexual allure of the excessive Gypsy image and its effects on loves, passion and jealousy.

As a naturalized meta-language, myth itself represents “speech justified in excess” (Barthes 1957: 130). French surrealist Georges Bataille insists that the very contemplation of the erotic requires taking up a mythological representation, “the introduction of a lawless intellectual series into the world of legitimate thought” as an arduous operation “practiced without equivocation” (1985:80). The mythical “pineal eye” for Bataille represents an organ of excess and delirium, which he uses as reference to a blind spot in Western rationality. Bataille also elaborates on the concept of “freaks” or “deviations of nature” being highly seductive just like “the big toe” or feet in general particularly because the malaise and disgust inherent in their condemnation (as base) fuel their very seductiveness (23). The Gypsy figure similarly gets eroticized, despite its initial rejection as contradictory to the norm.

In considering the myths of the eroticized Gypsy, where such myths are excessive justifications of concepts already internalized, the form of inquiry struggles with containment in
an intellectual format. The ongoing struggle during fieldwork was to record, interpret and contain expressions of excess. The intersubjective aspect of “containment” during fieldwork encounters entails us “serving as a ‘container’ for the emotions of our interlocutors” (Borneman 2014: 442). As Borneman suggests, the work of containment of others is difficult, challenging and can lead to transformative thinking for the ethnographer who remains ambivalent towards all interlocutors. He argues for ethnographers to explore their “anxiety” which George Devereux (1967) first “attributed largely to problems in elicited countertransference” (Borneman 445). I also explore the problems arising due to intersubjectivity during interlocution and my inquiry into Ciganos’ lives through personal relationships. The object of inquiry was constantly mediated by how the interlocutors and I served as ‘containers’ for the anxieties and fantasies we projected on each other.

Since I was a native Romanian and believed my father’s father was Rom, my interlocutors found me similar to them in many ways although I had not been raised speaking Romanes nor taught to respect their traditions. “It’s the call of the blood,” they often said about my curiosity to learn about their culture. I was often accepted as part-Romani because I displayed similar emotional outbursts: “You laugh easily like us and you cry easily like us. You must be Cigana,” according to an elder Rom in Sao Paulo. I felt moved and teared up in response, partaking in his sense of romantic nationalism or belonging to the diaspora.

I told my interlocutors that my grandfather was probably Rom, but must have chosen not to tell anyone else due to mainstream anti-Gypsyism. During communism the government denied the presence of ethnic minorities and through forced assimilation tactics had settled most nomads (Achim 1998: 189). I grew up as an outsider to this minority, and all I had as proof was that my late grandfather’s neighbor, an old lady, nodded and winked at me as if to say yes when I
whispered in her ear: “Was my grandfather a Gypsy?” Initially I approached fieldwork looking for some kind of self-metamorphosis or “fix.” Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas argues that “the search for the transformational object in adult life” continues the relationship “to an object that signifies the experience of transformation,” where the mother is the original transformational object (1987: 16). Bollas presents the case of Peter, a man struggling with depersonalization while operating within the mythic (false) structure in which his life’s goal was to fulfill his mother’s dreams for him: “His ego-states were an utterance to mother who used them as the vocabulary of myth” (21). The mother in this case was “minimally transformational” and constantly let down by her son as she refused to tend to attend to him as a real person separate from the ambitions she projected on him. This resonates with my experience, and I fear a great deal of my transformational search was fueled by difficulties in attunement with my mother, and an absent father who I grew to idolize despite his obvious faults.

During fieldwork, transferrential relationships with mother-substitute Ciganas inflected how I viewed them as well as myself. Other interlocutors identified the story of my father’s alcoholism, depression and suicide with stories of their own troubled kin. Dina, an elderly Romnia in Rio de Janeiro, said her father had also committed suicide because his oldest sons refused to move to Brazil with him and remained in Chile. Like other interlocutors with alcoholic parents or grandparents, Dina blamed it on lingering sadness about relatives left behind during the Holocaust. Dina’s father remembered his younger sister had to be left behind in a children’s concentration camp when his parents decided to leave Europe to save the rest of the family. This decision still haunted their surviving kin although it was something they seldom talked about. In Latin America they worked and traveled with their family-owned circus, striving to be associated with joy, magic, wonder and entertainment instead of negative stereotypes.
In chapter 6, I discuss how for the last few decades Romani rights have been awarded greater significance than in the past, although international networking between European and Brazilian Romani people has yet to be explored in mutually beneficial ways. Nowadays, more funding than ever has been allotted by the European Union to its member nation-states in efforts to address ethnic specific issues of poverty, discrimination, unemployment, needs for housing, healthcare and formal education and so forth. In Europe there are over ten million Romani, representing its largest and poorest minority:

The Roma people are Europe’s largest ethnic minority. Of an estimated 10-12 million in the whole of Europe, some six million live in the EU, most of them EU citizens. Many Roma in the EU are victims of prejudice and social exclusion, despite the fact that EU countries have banned discrimination… The EU has long stressed the need for better Roma integration (see the 2010 Communication on the economic and social integration of the Roma in Europe), but more needs to be done. The European institutions and every EU country have a joint responsibility to change this (European Commission 2014, web).

Despite the measures proposed to each country, there is little accountability or progress in this respect. The ERRC online resources constantly document how prejudiced local authorities evict even legal migrants, break housing laws to produce ghettoization effects among Romanies, and force their children to attend segregated schools that reproduce social marginalization at all levels of society. Reform would have to start with the official authorities acknowledging Romanies as vulnerable outcasts or targeting them in ways ensure, not infringe, basic human rights. On April 15th 2015, the European Parliament finally passed a Resolution addressing anti-Gypsyism in Europe and recognizing the Roma Genocide during World War II (EurActiv 2015). This long-overdue recognition is an important step towards Romani social integration in Europe and worldwide. This dissertation aims to deepen an understanding of Romanies in the New World beyond the common myths, as in false propaganda (but not necessarily intended as lies), including those they circulate about themselves. In what concerns fortunetelling, this
dissertations deals less with the actual practice since I was not allowed to witness it as it happened between fortunetellers and individual clients, yet I was interested in how practitioners and others talked about it. Even in those cases where Romanies put down their own practice as a form of misleading clients, fortunetelling remained useful to both Ciganos in how they imagined themselves as apart from mainstream society and to their clients to often returned for more.

This dissertation also reflects on social change. There is something is changing with the education of women and at the same time we still see child labor, child marriage, non-education, and all this against the background of a cultural rights movement, ethnic recognition, democratic constitution, which lends itself to tension. In Brazil there is a legal constitution, a culture of rights, and Ciganos’ codes, which change and show variability. As citizens they are awarded with recognition as well as liability, so they are recognized, but there is a lingering tension between that recognition and their bypassing legal recognition through fakery and opacity of intentionality. There are various kind of agency at work in the everyday life and interpersonal relationships that destabilizes easy dichotomies between men and women, between the state and its minority, between the Calon and the Roma. On one hand Brazil is a place of discrimination, on another it there is a system of recognition in place. At the same time there is a cunning here among Ciganos, which serves at once as expressions of creativity, hybridity, resourcefulness, thus of being Brazilian. This is an account of Brazil as well since Ciganos are like a micro Brazil.
CHAPTER 1. HISTORIES OF “REAL” CIGANOS

Oral narratives about the living and the dead
Narratives of Gypsies in history
Claims of authenticity and origin
Ancestry as basis for identification
Identification and sharing
Partially “real” Romanies
Adopted children
Criteria for super-Ciganidade

Oral narratives about the living and the dead

I went to Brazil because little information was known about Brazilian Romanies, yet they were rumored to be much better off and more integrated than in Europe. According to the Council of Europe and the European Commission, “Europe’s estimated 10-12 million Roma face prejudice, intolerance, abuse and social exclusion on a daily basis. Local and regional measures are essential to improving their lives in areas such as education, employment, housing and health” (Council of Europe 2014, web). Argentinian activist Jorge Bernal estimates that the Romani population in Latin America is around one and a half million, and is most concentrated in Brazil, where a population of 800,000 to a million identify themselves as Ciganos (2003: 15). In the South American issue of the French Romology publication Études Tsiganes, Elisabeth Clanet states there are in fact between 600,000 and 1.5 million Ciganos citizens of Brazil, whereas in the rest of Portuguese-speaking world estimates are significantly smaller: 40,000-60,000 in Portugal and only 1,000 in Angola (2013: 41). Based on estimates by regional ethnic representatives as reported by the Brazilian SEPPIR or Secretary for Policies Promoting Racial Equality, there are over 500,000 Ciganos in Brazil (Arantes et al. 2013: 10). There are over 50,000 in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, approximately 300,000 Ciganos in the state of Sao Paulo, and 170,000 in the state of Rio in Brazil. Yet there is no certainty in these estimates.
Population statistics in this case are difficult because Roma *Ciganos* are reluctant to disclose their ethnicity publicly for fear of discrimination. There is racism in Brazil, yet most of it is not directed against *Ciganos*. Anne-Isabelle Lignier states that in Latin America the white and creoles have represented the socio-political and economic elite whereas the Indians, blacks, *mestis* and *mulatos* have been rejected to the lowest rungs of society, and *Ciganos* or *gitanos* have been “invisible” to mainstream societies despite their colorful clothing, which she considers another form of rejection whether conscious or unconscious (Lignier 2013: 10-11).

Although little is known about them, there are also at least 300,000 Romanies living in Argentina, 16,000 in Mexico, 10,000 in Chile, 5,000 in Columbia, and several thousand in Peru, Bolivia and Uruguay (11). In Brazil as in the rest of Latin America they have been an invisible diaspora operating in the margins of society. This can be seen in their absence from textbooks. Activists have brought more visibility to this diaspora during the last two decades. The National Gypsy Day in Brazil known as *Dia National dos Ciganos* was incorporated in the federal calendar on May 25th of 2006, and it was celebrated for the first time on May 24th of 2007. One of the most significant participants was Mirian Stanescon, the self-appointed “Queen of Roma in Brazil” and advocate for Romani rights. She selected this date in remembrance of Saint Sara *Kali* (the Black), celebrated by European Roma. Thousands gather annually for a procession of the saint’s relics at Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, in southern France on May 24th as advertised:

*A big fat Gypsy festival.* Every May, tradition and religion are celebrated in the small fishing village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue region of Provence. The site has been venerated as a holy place by the Celts, Romans, Christians and, most recently, Roma Gypsies. In the weeks preceding the festival, Gypsies flock to the village from across Europe to worship their patron saint Sara-la-Kali with music, dancing and feasting. Thousands gather to watch the church service in which the statues of Mary Jacobe and Mary Salome are revealed. The statue of Sara is then carried in a procession to the sea. In the afternoon a farewell ceremony is held in honour of the saints, the gypsies start to leave and Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer returns to its sleepy existence (ViaFrance 2015, web).
May 24th marks a time when Romani culture is validated and welcomed by the Catholic Church in this locale. At this church a small, dark-skinned, doll-like statue of Saint Sara Kali is kept underground along with the relics of the Marys, believed to be the mothers of the apostles and witnesses to the resurrection and crucifixion of Christ:

Who is Sara la Kali and how did she become embedded in the story of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer? One claim is that she was the Marys' servant who arrived with them from Palestine, but there's no mention of her in the Gospels or in the early descriptions of the pilgrimage. Another version is that she was a Gypsy woman living in the Camargue who welcomed the Marys ashore and became their first convert to Christianity, but there were no Gypsies in France until the 15th Century (Blennerhassett 2014).

The identity of Saint Sara is less important than the fact that she has been a symbol of hospitality for Romanies in this region since the end of the 19th century.

This pilgrimage represents the oldest and largest public ritual in Europe where Romanies from different countries gather to pay homage, to arrange marriages, to baptize their children and to settle scores. Yet as Faria and Perreira state, Saint Sara was also made patron of Ciganos in Brazil in 2006, yet she had been absent from their traditions (2013: 49). My interlocutors also agreed that they had not heard of this saint until the former-president Lula signed the ethnic recognition petition proposed by Mirian Stanescon. They held as their patron Nossa Senhora da Aparecida (Conceição) (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception), the principal patroness of Brazil. Still, Stanescon imported the cult of Santa Sara Kali in her quest for ethnic validation.

The narrative of Santa Sara Kali as the patron of Ciganos in Brazil was one that Lula’s administration readily consumed for lack of knowledge about the diaspora. Mirian Stanescon, a lawyer and fortuneteller, defended her case successfully before the national government representatives and got the petition signed in 2006. At that time she also gained the right to hold Gypsy feasts or festas Ciganas on the 24th day of every month and to set up a statue for Saint Sara Kali in Park of Arpoador of Rio de Janeiro.
16. Mirian Stanescon speaks of Romani rights and St. Sara Kali – Arpoador Park

17. Statue of St. Sara Kali (The Black) – Rio de Janeiro
18. Brazilian women pray while touching the cave harboring St. Sara’s statue

19. Juscelino Kubischek – part-Rom former president of Brazil (1965-1961)\(^1\)

At these “court gatherings” Mirian spreads awareness of Romani presence and contributions to society, such as dance and psychic reading. In addition she advertises her tarot card reading services and blesses attendants, encouraging them to partake in the ‘traditional’ dancing, incense burning and offerings to the statue of Saint Sara. Like a Romani Madonna, Mirian blesses and grants miracles, aligning herself with the Virgin Mary and claiming to have seen her and heard her as in a vision when she was a little girl. Thus, she blends Catholicism, Romani cosmologies and Gypsy myths.

In Brazil these kinds of festas are currently the most visible representation of Ciganidade (Gypsiness), however inaccurate and opportunistic these may be according to my interlocutors. Mirian Stanescon has also been actively fighting for restitution rights for those who suffered losses during the Holocaust, a past little acknowledged by the government at that point. At the beginning of the 20th century, her ancestors fled from Romania with a considerable amount of wealth saved in gold coins, common practice among Romanies (Stewart 1994). They arrived to Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century, after which they financed the arrival of numerous families who were fleeing the Holocaust. Without relying on government support, only on their own affluence, they built a camp for all Romani refugees on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, then-called Baixada Fulminense (Cairus 2010).

Brazilian historian Brigitte Cairus insists that although ex-president Henrique Cardoso included nomadic and sedentary Romani people in the Human Rights Program of 2002, authorities continued arresting nomadic Calon for reading fortunes, accusing them of illegal activities, which had been the case since their arrival during colonial times. This situation has improved since Lula signed the official recognition of the significance of Romani ethnicity in Brazil (Arantes et al. 2015: 8). Roma and Calon leaders from various regions were present at this
government act. However, my Roma interlocutors were reluctant to consider Calon as part of the same ethnic diaspora. Having to participate at this event together represented for them a cultural change which they both resisted and welcomed to a certain extent.

Acculturation has been an ambiguous process for the Brazilian Romanies. According to Cairus, on one hand Ciganos are excluded by the mainstream society as undesirable, while on the other hand they maintain an aura of exoticism and freedom in the Brazilian cultural imaginary, which is reflected in the literature, soap operas, and even Umbanda and Condomblé, the Afro-Brazilian religious practices. There are Cigano spirits and saints in these registers of syncretic religious beliefs, as I will discuss in chapters 5 and 6. This is one example of how much cultural influence Romani people have exerted over Brazilian culture.

Also there have been Ciganos who became part of the educated elite even at the cost of leaving their communities. According to historian Asséde Paiva, at least one Romani person surpassed prejudices and gained political significance, namely Juscelino Kubitschek who was the twenty-first president of Brazil (1956-1961). He founded the current capital Brasilia, supposedly using numerology to find the best spot on the map, and historians look back to his presidency as a “period of extraordinary achievement, almost as a golden age” (Alexander 1991: 161). Yet Kubitschek never acknowledged his ethnicity publicly (Cairus 2010). When I mentioned to my interlocutors that Juscelino Kubitschek was part-Rom, they were surprised, yet instantly understood why he would insist on keeping this personal fact private. Ethnic invisibility has acted as a shield against prejudices circulating in society in association with the Calon. Both negative and positive historical narratives of Gypsies are often mythical, as in unverifiable, for example their image as perpetual nomads who came from Egypt. Egypt as place of origin is first mentioned in Romania (1416) and in Germany (1417) (Gilsenbach 1994: 47-48).
20. Brazilian Romani and non-Romani dancers dressed as Ciganas

21. Romani trails according to various documents attesting to their arrival in Europe
Negative stereotypes of this misunderstood diaspora have often led to their persecution throughout history as well as to their further dislocations, which in turn were perceived by others as inherent nomadism. Brazilian Romologist Franz Moonen states that Ciganos came to Brazil to avoid European persecutions during different historical periods (2013: 87). He states that the Calon migration from the Iberian Peninsula predominated both before and after the 19th century, with the Portuguese colonizers, whereas the Roma arrived from the Balkan region due to poverty, starvation and being ethnically targeted (95).

These experiences have lead to Romanies’ self-alienation from others, the gadje (gadjé, gaje or gage): the Roma people in Brazil nowadays keep their ethnicity secret, while the Calon live apart in communities of clustered tents. It is taboo for Ciganos to talk about their ways of life with outsiders, so little is known about them. Our common preoccupation with the beloved dead brought Ciganos to communicate with me more candidly. Even the 76-year-old recluse Dina identified with me because her family had come from Romania, and her father had also committed suicide. Dina was a small-framed, dark-skinned elderly woman with no children, no blood relatives nearby and no animal companions. She had married into her husband’s family, yet he had disappeared two decades before my visits, with no further notice.

She never remarried, yet was prone to romantic fantasies, which she entertained by watching three soap opera episodes every evening. She said she timed her blood pressure and rheumatism pills around the commercial breaks and “dreamt the sequels at night.” Her distant relative and neighbor, the tall and lanky 50-year-old Ianca, laughed and said Dina daydreamed even about her own green-eyed 45-year old nephew, Matcho: “She stays here because she’s in love with him. It is strange she lives here alone, so far away from her own blood relatives. I guess even they don’t like her all that much.” Being away from one’s kin is anti-ethnic for
Romanies including those living in Brazil (Ferrari 2013: 94). Dina baffled them by choosing to live “all by herself” close to her husbands’ blood relatives, perhaps in the hope that one day he would return. Dina set herself apart in the neighborhood as the only Xoraxani among households of Matchuwaya Roma by saying she respected her own ancestors’ traditional ways. Despite her occasional sexually explicit talk, Dina was the only one following the *maxrimé* (pronounced *mah-ree-meh*) honor code for dressing in long skirts, a common practice in the past. She admittedly did so to cover her severely swollen legs, cellulite and varicose veins.

*Maxrimé* or *mahrime* means unclean, defiled, polluted. Its etymology comes from Greek, yet its historical background is traced to the caste system and beliefs in ritual uncleanliness rules of Romanies’ proto-Indian ancestors (Heinschink and Teichmann 2002: 1). One’s status as unclean, soiled or polluted may be temporary or permanent, and permanent social isolation is considered the worst kind of chastisement possible, worse than death. “Make your own luck!” is a heavy insult meaning one is no longer in anyone’s graces. Part-Rom Romologist Ian Hancock suggests that obeying social proscriptions learned from previous generations and staying within the community that obeys these rules leads one to having *baxt* (spiritual and physical wellbeing):

> To live properly is to abide by a set of behaviors collectively called *Romanipen, Rromipe* or *Rromanija*, and this entails maintaining spiritual balance. This Ayurvedic concept, called *karma* in India (and in Romani *kintala*, or in some dialects *kintari* or *kintujmos*) is fundamental to the Romani worldview. Such a dualistic perspective groups the universe into pairs, God and the Devil, Romanies and non-Romanies, adults and children, clean and polluted – even the stages of life are two in number: adulthood (when one is able to produce children) and, together, childhood and old age (when one is not able to produce children). // Time spent in the non-Romani world (the *jado*) drains spiritual energy or *dji*. […] One’s spiritual batteries can only be recharged by spending time in an all-Romani environment – in the normal course of events, in family homes. It is in this area of spiritual and physical wellbeing (*baxt*) that the Indian origin of our Romani people is most clearly seen (2003: 75).

As Hancock suggests, pollution taboos indicate that *bibaxt* (bad luck) is attracted even by socializing with people who are *maxrimé*, such as the *gage* (Lee 1997: 353). Having only *gage* to
socialize with is believed to drain one of life or dji. Being clean means obeying the social proscriptions as passed through oral histories down the generations, thus creating a sense of insiders and outsiders in the system of Romani codes with the gage as the ultimate outsiders.

Although Roma interlocutors in Rio imagined Dina on the edge of their community, and took great care to avoid sharing food with her, in her self-assessment she was more diligent than everyone else in obeying the honor codes of her ancestors. She always wore multilayered, multicolored ankle-long skirts with a separate top, covering her legs and separating the lower body, seen as inherently impure for a female. She also washed all her items by hand and used a bucket reserved only for her maxrimé items such as skirts and undergarments to avoid contagion with linens and so forth. She expressed disgust about other women who mixed their laundry by using washing machines. She also criticized all other Roma women who wore airy shorts or knee-length dresses in the sweltering tropical heat as well as Calin women who typically wore custom-made unicolor dresses which were long enough to cover the legs, yet did not separate the lower part of the female body from the top part. While most Roma agreed their ancestors had separated the top from the bottom clothing, few still obeyed the traditional dress code consistently outside of family reunions and celebrations.

My interlocutors’ narratives of their ancestors circulated strictly among each other, and were rarely to be shared with the gage. Dina welcomed my visits and daily chitchat, but usually kept the cultural silence pact. She avoided disclosing the details of Romani ways of life in order to respect the dead. Only once did she talk to me about her past when she showed me some old black-and-white family photographs of men with moustaches, vests and wide-brimmed hats, and Ciganas standing akimbo in pleated skirts with pride, gold coins in their braids, the full traditional regalia.
While we were having tea in her studio apartment Dina reminisced aloud with a half-smile and sunken gaze. She told me that all her grandparents came from Romania. On her mother’s side they were from the Boiashi sub-group, whereas on her father’s side they were Xoraxane (Turkish Roma). Her father and her mother were cousins, and their fathers were brothers. Their marriage was a typical endogamous marriage with preference shown to brothers arranging for their children of opposite sex to marry each other:

Both were born in Brazil, in Bahia. I am also Bahiana. My father’s family name was Stoina in Romania, but it changed to Michelle in France. My mother’s parents and their relatives ran away from Europe before she was born in the early 1900s. They lived in Chile, and they had a circus with trapeze artists, clowns, animals and everything. They travelled a lot. My parents also travelled together with the family circus. They went to Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Venezuela; they travelled all the time. Often my father left my mother alone with the youngest children and travelled with the older ones, teaching them how to work. When I was ten my father decided we should move to Brazil, but my older sister and three brothers remained in Chile. My father was very upset because they stayed behind. He took to drinking afterwards. He died when I was eleven. Heart failure, I think. I was young. When my mother died I cried and cried and cried, suffered from depression. I don’t want to remember it and suffer a second time. I don’t want to remember the past. I don’t like to talk about it, there’s no sense in that. I’m like this [her right hand touches her heart]. I suffered a lot with the death of my mother. It was a trauma for me. I became ill. She was 70 years old. I was praying to God to take me and leave my mother alive. Sometimes my older siblings come to Rio with the circus, but we are spread out: one here, one there. There isn’t that close friendship like when we were growing up together. But maybe one day they’ll come ask me to travel again with them like in the old times. I’d like that. My sister is coming today to visit me from Brasilia with her son. Her husband’s parents ran away from the Holocaust in the 1930s. They still cry about the children they left behind in the ghettos, you can talk to her about that.

Dina narrated her painful family history about some of the family fleeing from Romania before 1900 and some fleeing the World Wars only to end up in Chile working as a family circus. When her father chose to move to Brazil some of her siblings did not follow him, and this led to his despair, alcoholism and eventual death. Pride in her own clan reverberated throughout Dina’s narrative, defining how she related with others as she set herself apart. Whenever she mentioned a habit of hers, she explained it was to uphold the habits of Ciganos in her familia: “I don’t eat
like the rest. In Chile we ate mostly raw fruits and vegetables. The Roma here eat a lot of cooked meat.” She had fond memories of traveling with her family circus. Other Roma worked in the circus as well or brought cinemas and theater from village to village in Latin America (Solis 2013: 92). Magic, acrobatics, clowns, dancers, hypnotists, domesticated wild animals such as bears, and trained horses were part of their acts (102). Often they were associated with excitement, entertainment, a sense of wonder, the unexpected, the positive exotic stereotype of the trickster here appearing as the artist.

Yet the Roma in the neighborhood gossiped a lot about Dina because she seldom talked about her past. They said her father shot himself in the head in an act of suicide. Others said it could have been an accident because he was a drunk. In either case this was considered as a dishonorable act and against the Romani ways of being. Since one’s actions also affect the near kin, Dina’s reputation was also marred. Also the fact that Dina could not procreate was a sign of bibaxt (bad luck). The word baxt means “luck” or “chance” in Romanes (pronounced baht). Its etymology is rooted in Armenian and in Middle Persian, where baxt also means “fortune” or “luck” according to the Open Society Institute’s online lexical database (Romlex 2015). Romanies borrowed this word during cohabitation and formed its variants based on their own rules for suffixes and prefixes:

- **baxt** n f-a/-a- 1. luck 2. chance
- **baxtalo** adj m lucky
- **baxtasa** adv mod fortunately
- **bibaxt** n f-a/-a- misfortune
- **bibaxtalo** adj m unsuccessful

_Baxt_ is understood as payment for being honorable and in the good graces of the _mule_ (dead ancestors). Thus, obedience to social norms factors into one’s _karma_ (destiny).
Being *bibaxtali* (unlucky sg.f.) made Dina appear to have lost the graces of the *mule* for being dishonorable, thus she is considered dangerous to the moral purity of the Roma community. Some said Dina’s husband had left her because she was barren. This is considered a justified reason for divorce among *Ciganos*. No one heard from him afterwards. Others said she poisoned him because she was jealous of his affairs. A few claimed she did *macumba* to him, an Afro-Brazilian black magic that deals with evil spirits for harming others.

Everyone admitted they were too scared to eat any food Dina prepared, for fear of being contaminated or cursed. I often ate at her place although the snaggle-toothed, blue-eyed, fair eighty-year old Auntie Violeta who lived across the street advised against it:

> She used to cook and bring us platefuls every Sunday. We always threw it away. She saw we threw it in the street once and she stopped bringing it. At least now she knows she can’t poison us. I don’t even eat from the same plate she’s touched. I throw the plate away just like after the gage. This woman is evil. But she’s been living next to us for over a decade. She was married to my husband’s brother so I have to be friendly because she’s my nephews’ great-aunt. She gets lonely and comes to visit here everyday. I wonder why she doesn’t move to Brasilia to be with her blood relatives. Why is she staying here when she has no blood relatives living or dead? Her brother disappeared too, there’s no grave for him. What life is this with no blood relatives, no children, and no grandchildren? I have eighty-six offspring! At least I multiplied…

Therefore because Dina was infertile and unlucky she became socially avoided by the other *Ciganos*, rarely visited by her own kin, and often criticized by her neighbors. Matriarchs like Auntie Violeta, who said they fulfilled their duty by having children, do not fear death, but welcome it as the reunion with their beloved *mule*. Their worst fear is not death, but social isolation induced by the status of permanent disgrace, which Durkheim calls social alienation and correlates with suicide (1951: 299). Yet Dina did not consider herself socially alienated and instead imagined herself as more honorable than the rest of her Roma neighbors.

*Ciganos* associate procreation with wellbeing and good karma while interpreting the inability to bear life as evil, death-like and dangerous as if by contagion. Whereas infertility
bodes ill-luck and having fallen out of grace with the dead, children are considered always pure, unpolluted and cleansing for the parents’ *karma*, thus attracting protection from the spirit world. Children are thought to bring good luck and to keep at bay malefic forces with their careless laughter and running about. For this reason Romanies prefer to have numerous children, although nowadays this tendency has decreased among the Roma in Brazil. Dina’s childlessness inspired fear among the other Roma, who believed she communicated with malicious spirits to cast evil curses inflicting illness or even death. Ianca said one time Dina asked her for help to put a curse on her sister-in-law in a cemetery at midnight:

Dina loved her brother so much she was jealous of his wife, they were always fighting and she couldn’t go visit his house anymore. She wanted to get rid of his wife. But I was too scared to go to the cemetery at night. She was gathering dead animals’ parts that she found on the street hit by car… I’m too scared to deal with curses. Most of us are. But if anyone here does that kind of thing, it’s definitely Dina. Sometimes these curses backfire. I think that’s what happened because her sister-in-law got sick with cancer and passed away afterwards, but also her brother then just walked away and disappeared without a trace. He was heartbroken I guess. No one ever heard from him again, we don’t know if he’s alive or dead. I think Dina knows it’s her fault. Now she feels guilty and she’s completely alone. It’s her bad luck for dealing with evil. Curses work because you have to sacrifice something to get what you want. Some bad witches sacrifice animals or children to make a curse work… I went to a *rezadeira* (healer who prays) and the *gagi* said she saw a woman who talks about me behind my back, casting curses on me, and she described Dina.

I was surprised to find that Ianca trusted a *gagi* healer more than she trusted Dina, her longtime neighbor and companion when going into town to read fortunes in public parks. This is how I had first met them, working together. However, after a long time of building intimacy and trust, Ianca confessed that she believed Dina was her enemy. She admitted to being afraid “this woman is evil” just like Auntie Violeta had said. Often Ianca found food remnants thrown in front of her yard and she spat on it with disgust saying it’s probably Dina’s doing. Yet Auntie admitted in private that she had a habit of throwing Dina’s food offerings out in the street, also fearing potential curses. Among all the women who worked with tarot cards and magic Dina was the
only one rumored to work with evil spirits. Most believed this had attracted her misfortunes.

Despite their differences Dina and the rest of the Matchuwaya Roma in that neighborhood spoke Romanes together and shared their daily lives due to a decade of co-habitation as Ciganos. Their common identity as a distinct minority was built on a shared imaginary of historical persecutions by a gage world throughout their ancestors’ wanderings. In this chapter I explore how these historical narratives affect daily lives of Ciganos in Brazil.

Most Roma in Brazil had some relatives who had died or had escaped with difficulty from the Holocaust. Dina’s parents were had been born in Brazil, yet their fathers were brothers and came from France during WWII. They were five brothers in total who came to Latin America, and said their only sister Sibinca had been left behind in a Nazi camp. She had been placed in a Gypsy children’s camp, so when her parents escaped with the older boys they had to leave her behind. After WWII ended they looked for her but never found any clue as to whether she had died or survived. Auntie Violeta’s daughter-in-law, Juliana, said both her grandfathers had cut off the top half of their index fingers to avoid serving in the army. Juliana said tearfully:

They drank rum and cut their fingers off. Then they escaped by hiding on cargo boats. They wanted to go to the United States, but some of the brothers took the wrong boat and ended up in Brazil. I have relatives in the Unites States and in France, but a lot of them died during the Holocaust. Whatever family I have there must be the grandchildren, great-grandchildren, or great-great-grandchildren of those who escaped the war. The ones who remember all this were little then. My father and his brothers, they were little boys when they ran away. They took Brazilian names when they were naturalized, but back in France they were the Michelles. My grandmother’s sister lives in Argentina. There might be some Michelles in Germany too. A lot of Ciganos were carried off from France to Germany. Some stayed, some ran away, many were killed. The brothers who cut their fingers were carried off to Germany with everyone else, but they escaped. Some Michelles here married in Brazil with the Ivanovich family. The Ivanovich came from Serbia, from former Yugoslavia, also running away from the war.

In this narrative there is a significant collective remembrance of struggling to stay away from serving in the army and getting caught during the Holocaust. There were sacrifices to be made in
order to achieve such escape, for instance the men who were willing to cut their index fingers to be unable to pull a trigger, and families had to leave some of their members behind and to change their names when they arrived elsewhere. The Michelles were one of the main extended families of Roma in Brazil, with the Ivanovich being the second largest according to my interlocutors. Yet most had adopted different last names in order to blend into the mainstream local society and avoid ethnic targeting. At one point during fieldwork I was contacted by a Romologist from Serbia who was part-Roma and named Petrovich, asking me about the possibility of finding his relatives in Brazil. Although I assured him there were many Ciganos going by this last name, the scholar did not find sufficient grant money to realize his study.

Most Roma said their first-generation immigrant ancestors were terrified of being ethnically targeted even after migrating to Brazil, so they were the ones who insisted on changing the family members’ last names and on keeping their ethnicity secret. Those coming from Serbia felt a common plight with those coming from France such that their cultural and linguistic differences were set aside as they grew into a secret community of Ciganos operating outside of the gage public eye. Nelida, a Kalderashi relative of Mirian said, “Our grandparents and grandparents came from Poland during WWII and they were very afraid, traumatized. My great uncle Mika ran away from a concentration camp with another friend who was Jewish. They suffered a lot.” The experience of Roma people during the Holocaust was similar to that of Jewish people, which brought them in closer contact around those times.

Most of my Roma interlocutors had relatives who came from Europe to escape WWII by hiding illegally in cargo boats and who had initially a very hard time in Brazil. One of my key male interlocutors in Sao Paulo, a tall and thin, 40-year-old man with a sly gaze named Cabrito narrated the first immigrants’ experiences:
They were shocked to find themselves in a country that was not the United States. They didn’t know any Portuguese at all. They didn’t know how to read or write or speak with anyone. They had no legal documents. They were traveling the roads at night and hiding during the day, sleeping in tents or in the woods. Whatever gold they had they gave to policemen. My grandfather came from Serbia, he was recently married, had a 3-year old son. They went to France trying to escape, but the Nazis were capturing all Ciganos in France. In that chaos my grandfather managed to give gold to a Nazi soldier so they could run away, hiding and sleeping in the woods. Only at night could they run, run, run all night long, asking for leftovers at bakeries. They slept during the day. My grandfather always cried because he left his youngest son there in the concentration camp. He had fifteen children in Brazil, but he never forgot his son. They don’t know if he survived or if the Nazis did something to him. The police had taken the boy already, and he was imprisoned in the children’s ghetto. So the family ran away without him crying night after night.

In Cabrito’s narrative the first generation Roma migrants to Brazil barely escaped the Holocaust by running in the dark of the night, running and crying, haunted by the thoughts of children left behind to die in the Nazi camps. He said that many wandered in the wilderness as far as the Amazonian forests where they struck friendships with the indios (native Indians in Portuguese). He said Ciganos’ relationships with indios involved common banquets and bartering goods.

Several second-generation Roma families achieved a higher economic status, purchased houses and became sedentary before the others, and so they started to look down upon impoverished nomadic Ciganos. Although seldom she talked about the past, Auntie Violeta once showed me some old family photos of nomadic fortunetellers wearing coins in their braids and long dresses, saying these were the first Iovanovich who came from Serbia, her husband’s grandparents. Her white skin beamed and her crooked nose with small nostrils flared with pride. Nelu, her husband, and Ianca’s mother were siblings and had come to Brazil from Serbia when they were children. Auntie Violeta said her parents were of the Lovara tribe, born in Brazil, also descendants of Serbian Romanies, yet they were wealthier and sedentary, “They lived in houses.” Her husband Nelu was of the Matchuwaya tribe: “They were poor and nomadic.” Nelu
convinced her to elope, and her (shamed) parents refused to talk to her for a long time after.

Auntie narrated how she stood by her decision to elope although it was considered dishonorable:

At the age of fourteen I was ready to become a woman. I chose to follow Nelu and take to the road with his clan. We travelled from city to city. Every day I knocked door to door with the other Cigana reading fortunes for gage everywhere we went. I must’ve walked the length of Brazil a few times before I settled into this house here. I had a good life with my husband. We weren’t rich, but we were together all the time. I gave him many children and even adopted some he had out of wedlock. A beautiful man is of the street, you should always know that. I’ve lived well by his side. I always respected my man. We had a good life.

Although Auntie Violeta lived proudly according to her husband’s Matchuwaya tradition, this was not the tradition she had been raised into by her parents and their Lovara clan.

Auntie was now a proud, fulfilled, beloved matriarch because her maternal prowess won her the highest status as the family head after her husband Nelu died. She cried talking about him, “He was the head of the family. There is no one to occupy that place now that he died.” Auntie’s husband Nelu had also been a well-respected, handsome man. His father was born in Russia and had been equally handsome. Nelu had been a nomad for more than half of his life. He had fifteen children, ten with Auntie Violeta and five with other women, so he was cherished for spreading the Romanyia or Roma blood. Auntie said unequivocally, “Family is family, it doesn’t matter whose children are in the end. They are all of our blood and they were raised the Romani way.” Auntie had generously adopted and raised several other children, a common practice among older generations of Ciganas. Particularly because the Roma bloodline was diminished during the Holocaust, giving birth to many children became very important to survivors.

Ironically, after her parents died of old age Auntie Violeta found her birth certificate among their documents and found out she was their adopted child, not of Romani blood. Her parents had adopted her from a poor Brazilian gagi. Nevertheless, she had lived all her life assuming Romani ancestry and sharing the collective narratives Ciganos told of their past. Close
kin confirmed the story of her adoption, yet mentioned that no Roma ever brought it up or disrespected her. Everyone continued to call her Auntie since she had raised or cared for most Ciganos in her extended family. Auntie also had had ten children of their own, who in turn now had children and grandchildren. She counted eighty-six offspring at the time, including several great-grandchildren. Proudly she joked, “Pelo menos mutipliquei.” (At least I procreated). She represented a role model matriarch amongst the Roma in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo and presently still lives and reads fortunes as she has her entire life.
23. Matchuwaya Rom and Native Indians in the Amazonian forests in 1956

25. Roma men among the second-generation immigrants
26. Roma wedding among second-generation immigrants in Sao Paulo

27. Roma boy playing accordion in Rio de Janeiro
28. Roma children among second-generation immigrants to Brazil
29. Roma girl born to a wealthy first-generation immigrant family from Romania
Narratives of *Gypsies* in history

Whereas the Roma still circulate stories about their ancestors’ European origins, Calon state they are all native to Brazil. Both subgroups arrived to the New World because Europe had been inhospitable towards *Gypsies* since arrival in the 1300s:

Gypsies were the first people of color to come into Europe in large numbers - their descendants there today number about eight million. Having no country of their own, denied access to housing and schooling, they were in every sense outsiders, a fact that is having serious consequences today. During the colonial period, western European nations dealt with their "Gypsy problem" by transporting them in large numbers overseas; the Spanish shipped Gypsies to their American colonies (including Spanish Louisiana) as part of their *solución americana*; the French sent numbers to the Antilles, and the Scots, English, and Dutch to North America and the Caribbean. Cromwell shipped Romanichal Gypsies (i.e., Gypsies from Britain) as slaves to the southern plantations […] Other well-represented Romani populations in America include the Bashaldé or "musician" Gypsies who immigrated after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Xoraxaya or Muslim Gypsies from Turkey and southeastern Europe, the Lovara, a Vlax group mainly from Poland, and a number of smaller groups. There is little social contact among these various Romani populations in this country, due mainly to considerable differences in dialects of the Romani language. Since the collapse of Communism and the resulting sharp increase in ethnic nationalism, incidents of anti-Gypsyism have become common in Europe. As a result, a small but growing number of (mainly illegal) Romani immigrants are coming into the United States (Hancock 2010:1).

Hancock lists here the main motives behind Romanies’ migrations to the New World at different times throughout history: colonialism leading to their expulsion to new lands, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and fear of Ottoman invasions sending others westwards just like the World Wars, the Holocaust and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Other academics also suggest Brazil has been a refuge for Romanies from Europe at various points in history (Coelho 1892, China 1936, Campos 1999, Lamanit 2013). After the discovery of Latin America by Cabral in 1500, the Spanish, Portuguese and French migrants to the New World colonies brought with them the anti-Gypsy European prejudices. Upon arrival to the New World, a region already contaminated by prejudice due to the criminalized presence of Calon since the 16th century, the Roma rejected associating with Calon in general. To be visible as *Cigano* meant to
be vulnerable, so instead the Roma hid their ethnicity and sedentarized in order to blend in. In Portugal there is evidence of official intolerance from 1521 until 1822:

In Portugal, the first written evidence of Gypsies presence dates from 1521 - the “Auto das Ciganas”, by Gil Vicente and was represented at the court of King John III. One could say that from a first moment when gypsies were looked with curiosity, it arrived, 4 years later, to a successive period of persecution. In 1525 gypsies were forbidden to enter in the Portuguese kingdom. After verifying the failure of this measure, new laws and subsequent trials were followed. Convictions and exile resulted from them. Gypsies were deported to Africa (Angola was the first Portuguese colony that received Roma) and Brazil and therefore expanded to other continents. Throughout the rest of the 16th century and first half of the 17th, laws against gypsies were legislated. This trend has eased after 1640, for the kingdom at war needed men for the army. Many Roma enlisted. Consequently, the group's presence was tolerated, albeit with the imposition of rules. In the early 18th century measures of gypsy expulsion returned under penalty of arrest. The institution of the liberal regime came to free the gypsies from persecution. In 1822 the citizenship for gypsy people is recognized (Romaninet 2014, web).

Since the majority of Ciganos in Brazil are illiterate and disinterested in keeping written records of their ethnicity, the remaining accounts of their history belong to gage. Numerous Ciganologos (Romologists) attest to the prejudices that led to Romanies’ migrations to the New World and continuing thereafter. Calon first came from Portugal pressured to choose between jail time and deportation along with their extended families (Lamanit 2013: 33). Lamanit suggests that Ciganos arrived in Portugal from Greece via southern Italy to escape Ottoman attacks, and had the reputation of being delinquents. One of these Greeks was decreed to Brazil in 1563 for three to four years (33).

Portuguese historian Adolfo Coelho writes extensively on the Calon. He notes that when they first arrived in Spain in 1447 they were called Egyptians or gitanos before crossing into Portugal (1892: 158). The initial Greek who was said to come to the New World was most likely Cigano. Lamanit however states that Portugal received so-called gregos or Ciganos from Greece before the Spanish even used the word gitano (2013: 32). Coelho notes that Ciganos/ gitanos
were persecuted both in Spain and Portugal from where they were expelled to the colonies. Like Coelho and Lamanit, Rodrigo Teixeira cites a decree dating from 1564 according to which the first officially recognized *Cigano* arriving in Brazil was João Torres (2007: 11). Torres was allowed to end his five-year sentence in Limoeiro prison for theft by immigrating with his wife Angelica and his three sons. In fact all Ciganos found guilty of delinquency were legally bound to relocate from Portugal to the colonies until the end of 18th century (Localtelli 1981: 38).

Official colonial documents assert the presence of Ciganos in the interior of Brazil since 1686, when several families were exiled to the region of Maranhão (Mota 1981: 257). Ciganos were mentioned by clerks, priests, policemen, travellers and administrators as “perturbing the order” and as “horse thieves,” during the 19th century, and they were synonymous with dishonesty, barbarism and immorality, anti-civilization, anti-socials, superstitious, corruptors and vandals. (Teixeira 1998: 12). In this light, authorities tried only to control them, yet without any significant success.

Calon are intrinsic to Brazil’s history, yet their presence has rarely been attested in official documents other than in criminal records. Still, Calon interlocutors were rather patriotic and said Brazil was their native country. Despite their antagonistic relationship with local authorities, most said for them it was a “land of freedom.” This concept implied a repressive point of departure. Indeed some had willfully moved away from Portugal to the New World to escape the persecutions of the Inquisition. Documents attest that in 1591 Cigana Tareja Roiz, 50 years old, denounced two other Ciganas Maria Fernandes and Maria Gonçales for sorcery, and volunteered to relocate to Brazil (Lamanit 2013: 34).

Portugal had been far from hospitable to the Calon. Also since Portugal’s population was too small to physically occupy the newly conquered lands, those Ciganos condemned to
imprisonment were often freed and sent there by law to represent a colonial presence. In 1622 historian Miguel Leitão d’Andrade suggested in a virulent diatribe the deportation of all *Ciganos* to the new lands, comparing them to worms and wasps that gnaw on the entrails of Spain and Portugal, yet his opinion was not unanimously shared because in 1644 *Cigano* Jeronimo da Costa fought to the death defending Portugal in the decisive battle of Montijo, after which he was awarded a noble title in 1649, the first such case involving a *Cigano* (Lamanit 2013: 35). In fact Localtelli and Lamanit agree that upon arrival Calon men were to occupy army posts and administrative positions to render the empire certain services, as official messengers for example, and many *Ciganos* passed their positions down to new generations.

The initial colonial response to Calon was to erase their identity since they were generally thought to be too daring, too festive, and too tricky in dealings. In 1619 Felipe III, King of Spain and Portugal, set in place colonial laws that forbid practicing nomadism, fortunetelling, wearing the typical colorful dresses and speaking Romanes (Localtelli 1981: 38). The governor of Bahia in particular stated that this law forbid the language and lifestyle of these people in order to achieve their extinction as an ethnic group (Moraes 1886: 24).\(^2\) However, in Brazil the climate rendered laws difficult to enforce including those regarding *Ciganos* who simply chose to avoid surveillance by travelling inland. When these ethnic markers were decreed illegal, hiding in rural areas became the main strategy for Calon. Brazilian historian João Dornas Filho, deducing from evidence of police records, attests that *Ciganos* would form small sedentary nuclei in different points across colonial Brazil in areas bordering *gage* settlements, staying in remote rural areas to avoid as much as possible the authorities’ vigilance (1948: 20). The bulk of historical documents

\(^2\) Original quote in Portuguese: “Foram degrados os Ciganos do reino para a praça da cidade da Bahia, ordinando-se ao governador que ponha cobro a cuidado na prohibição do uso da sua lingua e giria, não permitindo que se ensine a seus filhos, a fim de obter-se a sua extincção” (Moraes 1886: 24).
attesting their presence in this repressive colonial system are the criminal records of those who were caught by the police. In some cases Ciganos were further deported from Brazil to Angola.

Calon survived as such in Brazil because of their adherence to their linguistic, moral and social traditions, while keeping these secret from the gage. Not only did they hide their language when it was decreed illegal to speak or appear as a Cigano in public, but also they typically used two names: one for official documents required by the mainstream society, and another “fantasy name” by which they are known in their own family. According to interlocutors most Ciganos still practice this act of duplicity. In addition numerous Ciganos have no identity records at all.

Usually couples did not declare their illegal early marriages, and their first few children had no birth certificates. This may have led authorities to the belief that Ciganos steal children, one of the negative stereotypes that travelled to Brazil with the colonizers. Rodrigo Corrêa Teixeira mentioned one of the first documents in which Ciganos are accused of stealing babies dating from the nineteenth century (2007: 121-122). Similarly:

In Bahia almost everybody told me that when they were little their mothers told them that Ciganos kidnapped children. Moreover, during my research at least two accusations of child theft – one from Sao Paulo and another from Minas Gerais – appeared in the media. The trope is exploited in contemporary cultural production: for instance, in a silent film from 1927, Dança, Amor e Ventura, the heroine is kidnapped by Ciganos as a child from a wealthy family; in O Indigitado, a 2001 novel by Heitor Cony, a boy is raised by non-Gypsies after a deliberate switching of babies by two Ciganas. As with other translocal attributes of Gypsies, “in each culture where it surfaces, the stereotype of the Gypsy baby thief responded to particular configurations of power and stages of national development” (Charnon-Deutsch 2004: 38). For example, in Brazil, Indians have also been accused of baby-snatching (Fotta 2012: 84-85).

The reference to Indians having been accused of “baby-snatching” illuminates how mainstream Brazilians have used this myth to demonize socially marginalized people. It was also my experience growing up in Romania to have been told by my parents: “Don’t stay out too late or the Țigani will come and steal you.” This was a genuine fear of people in Romania both during
communism and afterwards. Similarly many Brazilians I talked to said they were told the same thing while growing up, particularly those that grew up in smaller towns with visible traveling Romanies. The myth had been imported from Europe into Brazil along with the colonists. The reasons why Europeans disliked and feared Romanies are multifaceted, yet their relatively dark skin and cultural differences always factored in despite the wide range of traits. Meanwhile in Brazil their skin pigmentation registered as light in comparison with the black slaves. Initially in Europe they were associated with Muslim attacks, then used as scapegoats for accusations of paganism and sorcery, always remaining marginalized outsiders. According to Hancock:

Grellmann (1783:10) described Romanies as “black horrid men… the dark brown or olive coloured skin of the Gipsey, with their white teeth appearing between their red lips, may be a disgusting sight to an European, unaccustomed to such objects.” The Church also viewed negatively the appearance of the first Romanies because medieval Christian doctrine associated light with purity and darkness with sin. The earliest church records documenting the arrival of Romanies alluded to the swarthiness of their complexion and the inherent evil which that supposedly demonstrated” (2002: 57).

I shall later elaborate on racism in Brazil. Initially most literature came from gagio authorities describing the ‘Gypsy problem’ in stereotypical, criminal and discriminatory ways, as pretexts to persecute them for social disruptions. Only in the last few decades of the 20th century did a wave of reformists and anthropologists begin siding with the minority, suggesting it has been loathed by the gagio societies due to jealousy for their ‘culture of freedom.’ Judith Okely writes:

The threat which the Gypsies, as a minority, appear to represent to the larger society is largely ideological. They are seen to defy the dominant system of wage-labour and its demand for a fixed abode. Not surprisingly, from the first appearance of persons called or calling themselves Gypsies in Britain in the sixteenth century, the state has attempted to control, disperse, deport, convert or destroy them. […] The Gypsies have been classed as problematic because they have refused to be proletarianised, and have instead chosen to exploit self-employment and occupational and geographical flexibility. Within the larger economy they provide a variety of goods and services, many of which other persons or groups cannot or do not wish to provide (1983: 231).
Okely is one of the anthropologists who began deconstructing European intolerance of Romanies for being defiant, self-employed, geographically flexible and refusing to submit to the social norms. In this new narrative state repressions of Ciganos or Gypsies are expressions of gage’s repressed psyches and systematic intolerances. There is a necessary interdependence between Gypsies and gage self-definitions in terms of one another as an opposition, according to this narrative. In “Why do Gaujos hate Gypsies so much, anyway?” Shuinear elaborates that Gypsies as narrated by gage are an imaginary ‘other’ intrinsic to the gage (Acton 1997):

It is important to remember that what we’re talking about here are not ‘alien’ faults and problems but Gaujo’s own; therefore, the people onto whom these are projected must be clearly distinct from the Gaujo mainstream, but not utterly foreign to it: just as in cinema, the screen must be neither too close nor too distant if the image projected onto it is to remain sharply focused (27).

Romologists like Shuinear see this as a process whereby a sedentary society manifests projections on ill-known, internal outsiders who serve as mirrors of its own discontents: “[The Gypsy] is even more so rejected (or rather ‘repressed’ in the psychological sense of the term) the more he is attractive, more so prohibited as he is unachievable, bearer of an exasperating marginality due to his ambiguities” (Liégeois 1986: 281). Several academics and activists feel compelled to debunk gage prejudices by arguing that non-Romanies project their own forbidden fantasies onto the Gypsy as symbolic other: “Thus the Gypsies have been represented as lawless, amoral, unclean, and part of nature in opposition to others’ notion of culture. This study has confronted such fantasies” (Okely 1983: 232). Recent studies however demonstrate more ambivalence in narrating the gage-Gypsy dichotomy: “The settled population, who can make very little link between the romantic images of the past and the deprived and excluded images of the present, are also denied opportunities to learn about and interpret this recent history” (Acton

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3 Original quote: “[le Tsigane] est d’autant plus rejeté (on pourrait dire ‘refoulé’ au sens psychologique du terme) qu’il est attirant, d’autant plus interdit qu’il est insaisissable, porteur d’une marginalité exaspérante par ses ambiguities” (Liégeois 1986: 281).
and Hayes 2007: 19). The culprit in this new narrative is the general gage lack of knowledge about the ethnic minority. This is certainly true in Brazil where the Calon preferred to hide from authorities. Throughout history exaggerated images of Gypsy-ness account for most of the public knowledge about this minority, including the literature authorities have used in the past to explain their repressive measures (Acton and Hayes 2007: 20). Similarly the Roma kept their ethnicity secret from mainstream society in Brazil, and this lack of direct interaction exacerbated gage tendencies to stereotype them. When positive stereotypes are not encountered, negative ones become generalized and reinforced:

The social construction of the Gypsy creates a demon on whom society can pin any problem, so as to distract attention from other issues. […] The government can benefit by reducing expenditures on them, ‘it is their fault we don’t need to help them.’ They can also benefit from raising the climate of fear about ‘difference’ in order to shield their policy shifts and power struggles. The media also benefits from reinforcing old stereotypes as they sell more newspapers, and make more money. […] the traveling community would benefit from a better understanding between them and the settled community as they would face less harassment and perhaps also benefit from an increased provision of new sites and an inclusion in mainstream welfare policies such as health, education and housing (Richardson 2006: 135).

Richardson brings up a salient point: that demonizing Gypsies serves socio-political and economic goals for the state apparatus, particularly in the creation of the nation as an imagined community: “In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1991: 6). The Nazi narrative of Gypsies as deserving of genocidal obliteration just like Jews and homosexuals represents the peak of state repression for political aims. As scholars have pointed out the Church was often complicit with such persecutions for centuries both prior and during the nation-building processes:
In the wake of the theological stigma that the Jews were the killers of Christ, a series of prejudices subsequently developed, varying in function to suit changing social circumstances. According to the British historian Moore, some myth or other was continually being concocted about other undesirable groups, with or without any basis in reality, in order to identify these people as a source of social decay who deserved to be driven out of Christian society so that they then could be subjected to persecution including the appropriation of their property, their freedom, and at times even their lives. [...] The ongoing stigmatizing of Gypsies as heathens in West Europe (in combination with their foreign origin and – in part-mobile way of life) conforms admirably with the pattern of persecution just sketched, where victims were regarded as religious deviant (Willems 1997: 9).

In Europe’s nation-building processes Gypsies were the common targets of dehumanizing labels, ethnic persecution, and criminalization, thus representing valuable scapegoats – the inconvenient “other” whose notable presence must be erased. In fact most of my Roma interlocutors said they were too afraid to tell anyone their ethnicity in Brazil because of how much their ancestors had suffered in Europe. Many remembered their elders crying when they talked about how they ran away through France to escape the Holocaust. In their rush to hide on cargo ships heading for the New World most of their extended families got split up between North and South America, since they were unaware the ships were aiming for two different continents. Lorenzo, a bald, gap-toothed, yet sharp-dressed 79-year-old Rom living in Rio, said his father’s father ended up in Brazil whereas his father’s uncles ended up in the US:

They were three brothers altogether, my grandfather and my father’s uncles. They wanted to take their entire families to America, but they ended up taking different boats: one for North America and one for South America. We ended up living in Brazil, but to this day we have relatives in the US. They were upset at first, they expected there to be one big America, and now they had to live in a place with a completely strange language, Portuguese. They had no one here. The Calon they didn’t help, they were different and spoke a different dialect. Roma and Calon are not the same race. The Calon mixed with the black slaves here and they are not the same race, they’re gage.

Many elderly Roma interlocutors told me similar tales that the first generation to immigrate to this land had separated from other family members either because they had to flee Europe in haste to escape from persecutions like the Holocaust or because these relatives sailed to different
destinations like the United States. Once they arrived to Brazil the Roma found themselves strangers in a strange land. Their non-relationship with gage extended to the local Calon.

Having fled from inhospitable Europe, the Roma in Brazil committed to a cosmology of operating secretly in a gage universe while pretending to be part of the mainstream society ‘just like everyone else.’ Ciganos’ narratives of the past, though often silent, still inform their cosmology and practice of self-isolation from mainstream society. The Roma said it was against their norms to talk about their traditions or to divulge their language Romanes to non-ethnic others. In addition Ciganos have shown little interest in keeping historical records.

My interlocutors said it was taboo to talk about the past and the dead, the mule, because it could bring suffering into the present. The elderly were the gatekeepers to information about the minority’s past and they considered it their duty to shut the door on the youngsters’ preoccupation with these times long gone. As Auntie Violeta, the fair-skinned matriarch with a crooked nose and a twinkle in her blue eyes said: “We don’t talk about the past. Our people suffered too much. If we think about it we fall into depression, cry and cry.” When I mentioned that there are books about Romani history from which their children could benefit to learn, most hardly took a moment to consider that possibility as an opportunity. To my understanding literacy was considered necessary only in the past two decades, yet most Ciganos had avoided schooling in order to maintain their cultural ways safe from assimilative influences. Many of my interlocutors were illiterate and disinterested in academic narratives about their ancestors’ lives.

Most Ciganos I met in Brazil were oblivious of academic theories about their proto-Indian origins and shared a collective imaginary of historical origins in Egypt. For Ferdinand de Saussure, the imaginary becomes the signified, the concept arbitrarily symbolized by a sign (1986: 114). The term Gypsy symbolizes Egyptian roots, and this meaning became ingrained via
translation into other languages as the term *Ciganos* in Brazil now suggests. In the European imaginary these people who moved were “matter out of place,” and had to be controlled or removed (Douglas 2002). Similarly the Roma imagine their extended diaspora to have a wholeness to it with boundaries that exclude the Calon as much as the rest of the *gage*. Both Roma and Calon in Brazil said they were semi-nomadic, the most popular myth about them.

This shows how my interlocutors had internalized some of the myths others told about their diaspora into their own collective imaginary. For John Thompson, “The social imaginary ... [is] the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life” (1984: 6). Roma and Calon imagine their greater diaspora as a whole, much like a nation, and call themselves a *natzia* (nation, pronounced nazi-ah). Yet the Roma claim to be a different *natzia* than the Calon, which echoes nationalistic feelings described by Benedict Anderson. Anderson treated the nation as “an imagined political community… nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind” (1981: 4). *Ciganos* in Brazil expressed a great deal of pride in their ethnic belonging and resistance to acculturation.

Yet to an extent Romanies’ imaginaries are shaped by the *gage’s* images of them in more or less conscious ways, as in the case of mythical Egyptian origins. The *imaginary* according to Freud is aligned with the formation of the ego as mediator between the internal and the external world (Lacan 1981: 2). The *imaginary* as a Lacanian term suggests specifically an illusion and fascination with an image of the body as a coherent unity, deriving from the dual relationship between the ego and the specular or mirror image. Lacan proposes that the imaginary becomes the space in one’s psyche in which the relationship between the ego and its images is developed within *reality* or the knowable world: “The imaginary is then the world, the register, the
dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined. In this respect, \textit{imaginary} is not simply the opposite of \textit{real}: the image certainly belongs to reality […]” (Miller 1981: 280). This is an illusion of totality and coherence, yet as such it is both necessary and consequential. In their lack of oral histories of their own, \textit{Ciganos} borrowed \textit{gage} views of their ancestral origins to answer otherwise unanswerable questions about their identity, a concept which is constructed and constantly renegotiated with the guise of coherence.

The Calon I met said they had been born in Brazil for many generations. They had no oral histories having lived in Europe and suggested Egypt as a place of origin. Spanish writer José Carlos de Runa defended this hypothesis in his 1951 work “Gitanos de la Béltica” (Baltic Gypsies), whereas Voltaire considered them descendants of priests following the goddess Isis (Localtelli 1981: 31). Isis was worshipped as the patroness of nature and magic as well as the ideal mother and wife, a friend of the downtrodden, artisans, slaves and sinners, protector of the dead and of children. Indeed Romani values focus on respect for the young, the elderly and the dead, as well as on the virgin bride, carrier of the bloodline and of family honor.

30. First mentions of Romanies in Europe (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 83)
Historians have determined that some tribes left Asia Minor towards Egypt between the 10th and 11th centuries from where they continued migrating westwards across North Africa and into Spain and the rest of Europe (34). These are considered to be the ancestral trails of the Calon. The Roma on the other hand appeared in Europe as follows according to Localtelli (35):

- In Crete: 1322
- In Serbia: 1348
- In the Island of Corfu and Zagreb: 1370
- In Bohemia: 1399
- In Wallachia: 1370
- In Germany: 1414
- In Zurich: 1418
- In Brugues and Arraras: 1421
- In Zaragoza: 1425
- In Paris: 1427
- In England: 1427
- In Scotland and Russia: 1500

Romologists agree that different tribes dispersed from northern India through Persia and from there in three general directions: northwards into Russia, through Eastern Europe, and south to Egypt and on to northern Africa, from where they entered Europe through Spain. Most historical documents attesting their presence in Europe are official decrees declaring their expulsion. For example French sociologist Jean-Pierre Liégeois lists all the French laws passed for the banissement des gitains (banishment of Gypsies), dating from 1504, 1510, 1539, 1561, 1606, 1647, 1660, 1666, 1673, 1700-1716, 1720-1724, 1764, 1802-1803 as well as the laws responsible for the confiscation of caravans in the late 20th century (1983: 156-170). Under these laws, nomads were penalized for begging as well as for camping with their wagons and horses. The forms of punishment included hanging in 1510, beatings in 1539, imprisonment for up to nine years, shaved heads for the women to shame them, as well as deportation to the colonies and forced labor (158). Yet most Brazilians know little about Ciganos’ persecutions in Europe.
The *gage* authorities have told historical narratives about *Ciganos* only through a limited, criminal lens. In fact this is often still the case. Roma migrants from Eastern Europe into Western members of the EU are still being evicted from their precarious settlements. According to a United Nations article “Working for a More Inclusive Policy Towards Migrant Roma in France,” local authorities treat these migrants as nuisances that must be displaced regardless of human rights provisions:

The Ligue des Droits de l’Homme (LDH) together with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) report that a record number of over 13,000 persons have been subjected to forced evictions in the first nine months of 2013. During the evictions, the meager property of Roma migrants is often destroyed, forcing them to re-start from scratch. Children’s school attendance is interrupted as families have to move and no housing alternatives are provided. Sometimes they are driven from one municipality to another, which the Ombudsman has described as an example of “forced nomadism” (United Nations 2013).

Although the European Commission has been requesting national integration strategies for the Romanies, in countries like France and Italy the national government has little means to challenge local authorities’ actions. The UN article “The Politics of Exclusion Continue In and Around Rome” highlights the hypocrisy of local authorities in Italy:

Over a thousand residents of a much older state-sponsored “nomad camp”, Tor de Cenci, were recently moved en masse to a remote location with no access to public transport, 20 kilometers outside of Rome. Tor de Cenci camp was created in the early 2000s, in an already marginal location at the edge of Rome, with one side facing the city and the other the fields. But even that apparently wasn’t segregated and excluded enough. In the last municipal election, Sveva Belviso, now Deputy Mayor of Rome, campaigned on the promise of closing Tor de Cenci altogether and driving its residents out. The new location is in the middle of nowhere, with no public transport, just cars whizzing around on a highway. “This is really the end of the line,” laments Mr. F., a middle-aged Romani father of five who arrived in Italy during the Bosnian war, almost two decades ago. He is visibly depressed: “Why did I deserve to end up like this? I have tried so hard to succeed here. I have a job in Rome. Now I have to commute by car – and return to this horrible place, which is driving me crazy. Why should we be sentenced to live in caravans or containers just because they call us nomads?” (United Nations 2013)
Unlike the Irish Travellers or the French *Gens du Voyage* (Travellers), Bosnian Roma have been sedentary for centuries, yet had to flee from war and ethnic cleansing, and now forced expulsions are turning them nomadic, pushing them from one compulsory eviction to another. There are few cases where positive changes have been made. Where activism succeeds, local authorities still oppose integration. The UN article “Innovative Grassroots Projects for Roma Integration in the Czech Republic” documents efforts led by Indian physics teacher Sri Kumar Vishwanathan with the Roma in Ostrava:

Projects led by the organization he founded, Vzájemné So ziti (Living Together), have focused on building a whole new neighborhood of modest but nice houses by and for the Roma as well as ethnic Czechs. “The project was widely derided as an unrealistic dream,” remembers Kumar, “but the Roma defied the skeptics and became actively involved in building their houses.” The project, known as the “Coexistence Village”, was inaugurated in 2002 and remains to this day an inspiring success story. Meanwhile, however, other projects to ensure access for Roma to adequate housing have been opposed by the local authorities. In the education sector, Kumar’s organization advocated to prevent the segregation of Romani children who are being sent to special schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities. “It has been on an Ostrava case that the European Court of Human Rights has ruled against segregation of Romani children in special schools,” recalls Kumar, “but there have also been some of the most promising advances here” (United Nations 2013).

Sri Kumar struggled against the ghettoization of Roma communities and the segregation of Romani children into schools for the mentally disabled. He was also involved in a project to bring justice to Romani women who were subjected to sterilization without their knowledge when they gave birth in hospitals. However, the article states that after 14 years of service regrettably “his organization was evicted by the local authorities on 29 January 2013.” At the Conference on Roma Inclusion held at the European Parliament in Brussels, 5 December 2013, I heard most representatives reiterating the fact that local authorities in every country represent the main challenges to improving life for the Romanies both in “origin countries: Bulgaria, Czech...
Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and destination countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK” (Ghimis and Hirsh 2013:1). Thus, Europe’s historical intolerance to Romanies continues.

My interlocutors had an ambivalent relationship with their European past. While the Calon in Brazil leaned on the myth of Egyptian origins, the Roma said their first generation immigrants came from Europe primarily to find refuge in the New World. Most Roma said they came at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th because they were “too poor there in Serbia or former Yugoslavia.” Some said their relatives fled the Holocaust through France. Only Alfonso, an old Rom and distant relative of my interlocutors in Rio, told me this version with a grand toothless smile:

Originally all Roma lived in their homeland Romania. But one day came the great big flood sent by God and it drowned their land and they had to pick up their children, their wives and their belongings and take a big boat. They went all over the world until they came to Brazil and they stayed here because the weather was warm. And they’ve lived happily ever after.

This myth talks about Romania as a place of origin that has disappeared into a great big flood, a narrative of a sunken civilization from which only the Roma managed to escape, being the clever ones. The myth serves to camouflage a painful history of persecutions, poverty and social marginalization, aligning it with the Biblical story of the Great Flood. In this narrative Roma appear chosen by God, predestined to survive and to find a utopian land in Brazil. This myth is the only one I heard that did not invoke Egypt as origin.

So even though myths of Gypsies (in the sense I use the word myth) throughout history are unverifiable, they exist at the level of the imaginary both for the gage and for the Romanies and have consequences in the physical world. The imaginary becomes the internalized image of an ideal whole that is elaborated around the desire for coherence versus fragmentation. Yet throughout their migratory paths from the territories of today’s northern India to Brazil,
Romanies have diverged into different tribes such that in Brazil Roma do not even recognize local Calon as ethnically similar and part of a greater diaspora like the Brazilian government does. My Roma interlocutors suggested this breach between the two tribes occurred when the Roma first arrived in the New World to find Calon to be already locally immersed and speaking a different dialect of Romanes. Also the Roma did not want to be associated with the anti-Cigano prejudices brought from Europe and surrounding Calon since the colonial period.

My interlocutors were familiar with the European ethnic labels for them such as Țigan, tsigane, or tzigane, which have been pejoratively used throughout history meaning at times sub-human, thief, heretic, sorcerer, and slave. Their ancestors in some cases were in fact slaves in Romanian territories until as late as the 1860s and their ethnic appellation signified this social status. Hancock quotes the French publication *Magasin Pittoresque* in which an anonymous writer bought the whole situation to the attention of Western Europe, with the effect that it lead towards their liberation in 1855-1856:

In Rumania, Gypsy is always synonymous with ‘filthy animal.’ These Rumanians, who so often have words of humanity and justice on their lips! To work towards easing the degradation of these poor beings, beaten down by pain, to render them born again into the great family of mankind, to free their souls, would not only be a humanitarian act, it would be an act of justice. Where these victimized souls are concerned, the sons should be considered no less guilty than their fathers (anonymous writer, Hancock 1987: 33-34).

In December 1855 Grigore Ghica the Prince of Moldavia freed his principality’s slaves following the example of his cousin, Alexandru Ghica. Soon afterwards in February of 1856 Prince Știrbei of Wallachia also granted freedom to all slaves on his territory.

Regardless of attaining their freedom many Roma continued to live in passive or servile positions working for their previous owners, especially since they did not receive any land or restitution when they were freed. They continue to be called Țigani in Romania in a distinctly discriminatory way to this day, judging from my own observations and those of other writers:
“Romanians who are in administrative government and political positions of authority, explain the Țigani situation by referring to America. *You know, they say, the tsigani are like your Negroes: foreign, lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy and black*” (Beck 1985: 105). Since Romania has not know anything similar to the Civil Rights Movement in the US until recently, the term tsigan or Țigan, which meant “slave,” “sub-human” and “filthy animal” for nearly five centuries of slavery has remained in circulation with equally negative connotations. In other European countries they have been commonly seen as non-whites:

Because of their strange language and appearance, and their dark skin, they were believed in Christian areas to be Tatars, intruders from the lands now occupied by the Muslims. This was especially true in areas remote from Islamic contact, where the local population had no first-hand idea of what actual Tatars looked like. Even today, two of the words for 'Gypsy' in the German language are Tatar and Heiden (i.e. 'Heathen', 'non-Christian'). […] Kenrick and Puxon believe that the present-day hatred of Gypsies in Europe is a folk-memory of this first encounter, stemming from "the conviction that blackness denotes inferiority and evil [which] was well rooted in the western mind. The nearly black skins of many Gypsies marked them out to be victims of this prejudice" (1972:19). European folklore contains a number of references to the Gypsies' complexion: a Greek proverb says, "Go to the Gypsy children and choose the whitest," and in Yiddish, "The same sun that whitens the linen darkens the Gypsy," and "No washing ever whitens the black Gypsy." One word in Romani which Gypsies in some countries use as a name for themselves means 'black', and is an Indian word of ultimately Dravidian origin: Całô, among the Spanish Gypsies, and Kalo in Finland. Caucasian non-Gypsies are called Parné or Panorré "whites" in some Romani dialects, even by fair-skinned Gypsies (Hancock 2000, web).

Romanies were categorized as part of the dark side of the black-versus-white dichotomy in the European imaginary. In Brazil however this changed as they associated more and more with the European Caucasians rather than the African slaves, who have remained on the bottom rung of the social ladder to present day.

While the slaves were brought to Brazil to become forced labor, the Romanies were expelled there from Europe because they were hated. Gilberto Freyre popularized the myth that the institution of slavery was more humane in Brazil. However, he fails to account for all the
ways in which the elite’s racism perpetuated the idea of blackness as a negative stereotype (1946: xii). The national government claimed that Brazil operated as a “racial democracy” even during the period of military dictatorship, stating that discrimination, if it exists, is only a function of class, not race:

In the 1960s, racial discrimination and segregation were outlawed, although Brazil remains one of the most residentially segregated countries in the world. Brazilian academics, frequently Marxist in their orientation, studied race thoroughly as an element of dependency. They emphasize the adaptation of racism to the structural characteristics of industrial capitalism. More recently, however, Brazilians not only have become more aware of the realities of discrimination against nonwhites but have also been exposed to television programs and articles in journals such as Veja and Istoé, with stories about non-whites who have achieved success in business, public service, and the professions (Levine and Crocitti 1999:352).

Even though scholars like Florestan Fernandes, Otávio Ianni and Fernando Henrique Cardoso have researched race relations from an economic perspective in terms of relationships of dependence, racism has gained more visibility as significant in the Brazilian imaginary. The Romanies navigated these social prejudices against blackness, which allowed them to better integrate in the New World.

Still, the Roma also wished to avoid association with Calon to avoid the negative stereotypes of thievery and fraudulent sorcery, as well as police mistrust and surveillance. In a survey of public opinion about Ciganos, Localtelli identifies several prejudices currently held by the mainstream public including by highly educated people. When asked about Ciganos, most Brazilians mentioned the precarious hygiene and living conditions in tents, considering it a more primitive way of living, a more basic humanity (1981: 26). More than half of university attendants interviewed insisted on Ciganos’ great wit in all negotiations, as well as dishonesty. I found most Ciganos lived off commercial exchanges like buying objects wholesale and reselling along their semi-nomadic travels.
Roma people in Brazil do however circulate a “myth of the fourth nail” which sanctions stealing from the *gage* by reinterpreting the (easily) stolen goods as gifts from divine providence. Cabrito said that primarily the elders circulated this story, saying “*Ciganos* won the grace of God by sparing Jesus of the fourth nail, which soldiers meant to drive through his skull on the crucifix.” According to this narrative, Jesus not only condones the act of stealing, but rewards it with the “freedom” to take any found objects as gifts afterwards:

When Jesus was being crucified a *Cigano* stole the fourth nail that was meant for his head. Jesus was grateful and said that from then on *Ciganos* could travel the world and steal anything they wanted so they could survive. *Ciganos* were from then on protected by God. That’s what our grandparents told us. They said sometimes if they saw a chicken, they would take it as a gift from God to feed their starving families. The Roma in Brazil nowadays think stealing is below them, same as begging. They would never consider doing that. Only the Calon still steal chickens sometimes. But the Roma read fortunes to make money. That’s not stealing. It’s capitalism. The *gage* seek out our services and we persuade them to pay us.

I heard rumors that some fortunetellers travelled to Argentina, Spain and Portugal where they claimed they needed “all their clients’ jewelry to activate magic spells overnight. The next day *Ciganas* took a plane back to Brazil with all the jewelry. Smart ones!” old Alfonso said one afternoon, feeling particularly cheerful. I will elaborate on the “myth of the fourth nail” in chapter 6 when I discuss fortunetelling in light of assumed gift-exchanges with the divine and the sense of freedom to take from *gage*.

However, during fieldwork I never had any evidence of scamming. There was a sense of boasting among *Ciganos* about the *malandragem* (trickery) but there was more ambivalence and restraint in practice. Most still talked about it as if it were something to be amused by and proud of, akin to nationalistic pride. Cabrito himself said: “We always do this, us Roma, but we find the legal ways to do this, the loopholes. For example, we have a *gagi* who works for a medical insurance company here in Sao Paulo and she helps us use other people’s accounts.” This last
part was true. I met the Brazilian woman and she verified that she knew the Roma for a long time and they had a mutually benefiting relationship as accomplices in the medical insurance scam. She said (I guess to reassure me), “This is how Brazil functions, we always find a shortcut (jeito).” I elaborate on malandragem and jeito in chapter 5.

The ancestors’ own myths constantly informed the power dynamics between Ciganos and the gage, understood as the ultimate victimizers, the ultimate “others” from whom a profit must be made. Yet I agree with Fotta, who writes in his dissertation on Brazilian Calon that he did not encounter evidence of outright theft by Ciganos (2012: 75). Still, the figure of the Cigano as a malandro (trickster) persists to this day in Brazil, and it is one they themselves entertain.

Most of my interlocutors lived off semi-nomadic commerce. They bought wholesale objects like pens, batteries, rugs, and so forth in Sao Paulo and sold them for a greater price, either knocking from door to door or setting up a vendor’s table in a public area. Men, women and children sometimes engaged in these activities, yet Localtelli suggests that many gages believe these exchanges as well as Ciganas’ fortunetelling are illicit: 98% of people interviewed stated that Ciganos are “rich, adorned in the best gold jewelry, yet they are not honest” (26). Those that had interacted with Ciganos at festas noted the gold worn both by the men and the women. They also mentioned that while their men could dance with any of the women at the party, their women were prohibited from dancing with gage (27). At my Roma interlocutors’ festas or festive gatherings gage were seldom if ever invited.

I found that the Ciganos were keen on keeping their women and language away from the rest of society to avoid their acculturation. Renato Rosso, an ethnographer and Catholic priest who helped create the Center for Gypsy Studies in Brazil, declared that by the time they reached the New World Ciganos had been expelled, criminalized and exterminated in most European
countries (Mota 1981: 295). Renato Rosso helped create *Pastoral Dos Nomades* (Itinerant Church) for proselytizing to semi-nomadic Calon. His efforts led to making available in Brazil the first Bible translation into Romanes. Rosso advocated both literacy among *Ciganos* and the adoption of standardized Romanes.

However, most *Ciganos* in Brazil resisted linguistic standardization and imagined their own dialects and traditions as authentic and stable ideal types. But such stability is only at the level of the collective imaginary, since cultural and linguistic “traditions” are constantly elaborated upon, renegotiated and reinvented with regional variation among different tribes. In efforts to prevent acculturation, Romanies rarely continued their education beyond gaining literacy. In fact both Roma and Calon avoided formal education, which they believed would lead to acculturation. The few highly educated *Ciganos* I met were regularly excluded from their communities’ festivities such as weddings, anniversaries and wakes.

The constant factor in the Roma and Calon identity construction as *Ciganos* is their self-declared contrast to the *gage*, the non-Romani. “We are not them” remains the basic narrative through which they distinguish themselves. Brazilian sociologist Sérgio Paulo Adolfo supports this notion in his work *Roma: A Gypsy Odyssey* saying that, “this permanent non-relationship between *Ciganos* and *gage* is a defense mechanism against a world that is always hostile to the Roma” (1999: 5). It appeared to me that *Ciganos* did not find Brazilians to be as prejudiced against them as Europeans, yet still preferred to self-isolate from mainstream society.

The Roma also isolated themselves from Calon, whom they found too genetically mixed with descendants of African slaves. Most *Ciganos* arranged endogamous marriages for their children to maintain their bloodline. Non-Romani paternity meant for my interlocutors that the offspring was not considered to be a member of the ethnic community, whereas Romani
maternity is not a strict prerequisite for ethnic recognition. In Brazil if a Calon man chooses to marry a \textit{gagi} woman, even if she is \textit{kaliviri} (black), she is welcomed into his community, but she is required to acculturate and to live like the rest. This means a \textit{gagi} bride has to adopt the traditional dress code, learn to converse in Romanes, travel extensively, read fortunes for a living, and inhabit a tent. Children of such unions are considered to be members of the community by the rest of the Calon. Among the Roma paternity alone is required for ethnic membership as well.

The relationship between \textit{Ciganos} in Brazil and African slaves has been subject to debate. French painter Jean-Baptiste Debret published a series of lithographs of people in Brazil between 1834-1838, three of which depicted \textit{Ciganos} as slave traders, in particular the image entitled \textit{Interior of Ciganos House} in which three richly clothed women are eating while slaves appear in the background, one of whom is being whipped (2001). Lamanit agrees with this historical account and suggests that \textit{Ciganos} could not occupy any other position besides \textit{meirinhos} (lower court servants), \textit{andadores do rei} (king’s messengers) and slave traders, their most lucrative occupation (2013: 38). However, it is not clear on what other sources Lamanit bases this argument. Asséde Paiva is against the idea that \textit{Ciganos} were the main slave-traders in the notorious Valongo and Candeia Velha neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro (2002). While Paiva agrees that some may have been intermediary agents to buying and selling of slaves, he states they were by far not predominant in this market area in which anyone, even freed black slaves, could participate. In any case he stands assured that it was not the Romani who brought the slaves to Brazil from Africa. All my interlocutors denied such a history by stating that their ancestors would have told them stories about it had they been in fact involved in the slave trade.
Yet Martin Fotta quotes documents stating that Ciganos were illicitly involved in the slave trade and sometimes stealing slaves:

Although in the interior of Brazil Ciganos were suspected of stealing animals, the only specific cases I encountered deal with thefts of slaves, primarily within Rio de Janeiro. For instance, in 1820 Joaquim José Roiz was imprisoned suspected of having stolen and sold more than one thousand slaves to Minas and in 1836 a group of Ciganos was caught with 60 stolen slaves (Karash 1987: 54). An anonymous letter to the chief of police in 1834 states that one such Cigano gang “is protected by persons of high esteem” (Soares 1988: 86). They were also suspected of buying stolen slaves from gangs of freemen, of kidnapping freemen and turning them into slaves (Soares 1988: 78 ff), and were generally deemed responsible for the transportation of stolen slaves outside the city (Soares 1988: 87)” (Fotta 2012: 75).

Such historical narratives indicate the strong presence of anti-Romani prejudices in Brazil during the colonial period. Paiva argues that the documents which supposedly report Roma selling slaves are clearly exaggerations in the interest of those who were actually profiting, but wishing to hide it and to blame the nomadic Romanies who were already thought to cheat, lie and stealing whenever possible. These prejudices and stereotypes about the Romani inspired exaggerated reports such as those about old Ciganas walking in the midst of city streets and selling 40-50 black slave women and children.

The Romani were thought to have an irascible and violent temperament, to steal horses, to be like vampires that suck people’s fortunes, and to steal children, give them a handicap and make them beg. These stereotypes might have encouraged some to believe that a few old Roma women could possibly dominate a large group of black slaves according to Paiva. However, my interlocutors denied on all occasions their involvement in the slave trade and thought it abominable to treat any human being as a possession. As the white-haired Calin matriarch Dona Herante said: “Our religion is freedom. We would never be able to treat a human being like this! Our forefathers couldn’t even go into the army, they’d cut their shooting finger just to avoid having to do service. That’s the kind of people we are. God fearing people.” Yet evidence
suggests Calon were involved in slave trade and some even prospered and gained visibility as such in Rio de Janeiro:

In fact many *Ciganos* were successful in this branch to the point of occupying more than intermediary positions in the trafficking hierarchy. [...] José Rabello and José Luiz da Mota had their names registered in a report on the most prosperous slave traders active during 1811 and 1830. They became rich and came to emerge with considerable visibility in the Rio urban life. To the point that some members of this successful group participated in royal festivities at the Prince Regent D. João’s birthday in 1810 and the marriage of D. João’s eldest daughter. Gradually the traditional image of pariah changed substantially in Rio. But the Ciganos’ social and economic integration in the city did not dissolve the stigma that accompanied them. They were still known as thieves and slave seducers, for example (Souza and Mello 2006: 30).

In addition to the negative stereotypes circulating in colonial Brazil there was a certain romantic exoticism attached to *Ciganos* in numerous historical narratives about them. Paiva states that they were known to die so as not to betray companions, and to fight so as to protect their morals and their family. They were also believed to place a heavy emphasis on art and love. Paiva provides the following timetables that show their enslavement in present-day Romanian territories both before and during their presence in Brazil:

13th-14th Century – Roma are enslaved in the region of present-day Romania
1385 – First document to attest Roma presence in Transylvania; a letter from Voievod Dan I offering 40 families of ‘sclavi tiganesti’ or Roma slaves to the Tismana Monastery.
1864 – Abolition of slavery in the regions of present-day Romania
1500 – Discovery of the Brazilian shores by the Portuguese
1533 – First slaves arrive to Brazil
1574 – First Calon, João de Torres arrives to Brazil with his wife and children
1779 – Valongo becomes a known deposit of slaves, while Rio de Janeiro becomes an important port for Calon and Roma migration from Europe
1831 – End of Valongo
1888 – Abolition of slavery in Brazil
31. Kaliviri gagi (black non-Romani woman) in festive Cigana attire

My interlocutors had no recollection of their ancestors being involved in trading slaves, and even less knowledge of Romanies’ history of being enslaved on Romanian territories. Roma elders like white-mustached Pedro complained: “Our forefathers suffered a great deal, they were a very oppressed people, had to come all the way to Brazil and start a new life from nothing, they were dirt poor and traveling with small tents and many hungry children in the jungle here.” Present-day Roma know little of the first generation immigrants’ interactions with local gage and Calon.

It was only the gage who kept historical records of Ciganos. According to an essay published online by Franz Moonen, “Romani studies in Brazil: 1885-2010,” the first three intellectuals to pioneer this field were Mello Morais Filho, José d’Oliveira China and João Dornas Filho (2015, web). Mello Morais first published *Cancioneiro dos Ciganos* in 1881, a collection of Calon poetry in Portuguese with few words interspersed from their dialect, and in 1886 *Ciganos: Antologia de Ensaios* in which he discusses the origin and migrations of Ciganos as well as their rituals, beliefs and vocabulary. José d’Oliveira China published in 1936 *Os Ciganos do Brasil* on the origins and arrival in Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal. In 1948 João Dornas Filho published an article about Ciganos in Minas Gerais documenting primary sources from police reports in which Romanies are described as criminals under arrest for theft and murders, which are esteemed to be their cultural practices.

Historically, such popular stereotypes of Ciganos’ propensity for petty crimes increased the antagonism between the minority and local authorities or gage in general. According to Marco Antonio da Silva Mello told me that Mello Morais Filho had been unique in this sense because he studied Ciganos living in Catumbí, the largest known community in Brazil, and he was the only gajo who was ever accepted as part of the community (2004). Mello Morais’ father was a high-status police officer in Catumbí, and many Ciganos sought to ingratiate themselves
with him, bringing him lots of sweets and befriending him so that he would allow their camping sites to remain unmolested. Eventually Mello Morais gained access to their camps as the son of a well-respected gajo, and he documented the fact that several Ciganos in Catumbi became meirinhos or bailiffs, officers of the court of law, keepers of the social order:

It was as justice officials that Ciganos Calon eliminated the prejudice against their group and guaranteed their place in the Rio de Janeiro society. During the entire 19th century Ciganos Calon occupied positions well defined in the Judiciary of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Observing the genealogical trees of the group, it is surprising that in fact almost all its members occupied the function of bailiff ever since it was known as meirinho. It can be said that among the Calon the post became an object of hereditary transmission: hereditary lines can be identified in which an entire generation of sons and nephews have this line of work (Souza and Mello 2006: 29).

These Calon passed their official positions as court commissioners to their sons, operating within Brazil’s system of nepotism for such bureaucratic positions as bailiffs, auditorium porters, typists, auxiliary-typists, under-commissioners, surveillance commissioners, clerks, and other officers of justice. According to Mello some Calon in the Catumbi region of Rio de Janeiro are still typists and clerks to this day and father-son mentorship is still part of the initiation rite. I also found my Roma interlocutors to be better integrated in niche positions such as real estate, particularly in Sao Paulo, and at least three of them were formally trained as lawyers.

Ciganos’ resistance to gage power structures led some to cooperate in ways that served their collective or racial agendas. This is why Roma in the areas I studied had allowed literature professor Cristina Perreira to take their photos and collect their short stories and proverbs, “in order to portray their culture in a positive light” (1985). Also musicologist Ari Vasconcelos’ fieldwork demonstrated that Ciganos in fact had an important role in the invention of Brazil’s national rhythm, secondary only to black artists (Vianna 1999: 77). According to Vasconcelos one of the musicians frequently present at the famous Aunt Ciata’s house was Saudade, a Cigano: “Pixiguinha and João da Bahiana revealed to me that there was a group of gypsy
composers, singers and musicians who cultivated samba with true mastery and who made an important, possibly decisive, contribution to the genre” (1993:108). These ethnographic efforts confirm the importance of Romani influence in the history of Brazilian popular culture, and also complicate the narrative of Romani self-isolation by showing an intricate network of transcultural mediations in which Ciganos have been involved in despite limited ethnic visibility.

Brazilian Ciganos circulate numerous oral histories heard from grandfathers and passed on to the young, yet very few have written these histories down. Among the Calon in Catumbi, some meirinhos who became mentors for others such as Rafael Barroso da Costa Verani became known as “professors” since they prepared the other young men for entrance exams, and the Verani family came to be known as being among the officers of justice (Souza and Mello 2006: 31). Paulo Barroso da Costa Verani is the only one considered an “organic intellectual of the community,” according to professor Marco Antonio da Silva Mello: “He bought books about the Romani and set up a library. There used to be a cultural center because of him,” said Mello. Paulo Verani also wrote a document entitled Nós (Us), a manifesto he distributed among Ciganos urging them to stop being ashamed of their ethnicity. Most still did not assume their ethnicity in public for fear of discrimination, although many were already well integrated into the higher social networks in Brazil. According to Mello, when Paul Verani passed away Ciganos said, “The last person who knew us died.” In this case being an insider certainly offers the greatest insights.

As much as gage researchers have tried to pry information from them, Ciganos share few details of their lives because their ancestors suffered multiple persecutions and passed down a legacy of secrecy. However, in Brazil Calon have grown more open and friendlier than the Roma people to those interested in getting to know them. Sérgio Paulo Adolfo writes that an outsider
such as an anthropologist may successfully approach them “with a good story and a lot of honesty” (1999: 114). With a compelling story about one’s motives for entering their world, one may succeed. At first Adolfo contacted the Calín women who were reading palms at the beach just like I did in Rio on the beach of Copacabana. “After gaining courage and maturity,” he went to visit their camping site and found the Calon family “very friendly and welcoming,” not resorting to any mechanisms of resistance: “In their natural surroundings, Calon are clean, affable, cordial, different from the manner in which they present themselves to society” (122). I also had positive encounters with Ciganos although they saw me primarily as a gagi even with the nuanced story of my grandfather’s potential Romani background.

Claims of authenticity and origin

Brazilian mainstream, academic and political discourses on Ciganos condense many layered ironies implicit in the competing accounts of “real” origin, history and ethnic “authenticity.” When I refer to real Ciganos for the purpose of fieldwork, I use the term real in the Lacanian sense as that which escapes symbolization, yet structures the symbolic order by constantly erupting into and distorting it, thus having consequences in the physical world: “The lack of the lack makes the real, which emerges only there, as a cork. This cork is supported by the term of the impossible – and the little we know about the real shows its antimony to all verisimilitude” (Lacan 1998: ix). The “mirage of truth” is always present in analysis, which remains immersed in forms of “resistance” (viii). I seek no ultimate truths about Ciganos, but rather review answers to questions appearing in different registers of discourse: “Are they real Ciganos or not, do they belong or not?” I kept in italics the term Gypsies (Ciganos) throughout the dissertation to destabilize its labeling power of since it has pejorative connotations.
This chapter contrasts the political and academic reporting of an official history with my interlocutors’ own interpretations of this history. The discussion is based on ethnographic material and it places academic attempts to fix this real, or to do away with it or imagine it away, in the context of native interpretations and arguments. Romani people are the native interlocutors at least in the way I relate to them here, whereas in other chapters they appear in a more complex relationship with me as interlocutors and co-generators of ethnographic material.

Both nationally recognized subgroups of Brazilian Ciganos the Roma and the Calon claim their ancestors originated in Egypt, an image that often appears in popular culture and fictional literature (Localtelli 1981: 31). Not surprisingly some of my interlocutors also replied that their original homeland must be Egypt. As Ianca, a tall and lanky Rromni said: “They say we came from Egypt. I don’t know any better, I never went to school.” This popular gage myth of Gypsies has persisted throughout years of migrations across continents and in the New World.

Claims of authenticity conflict among the Roma and Calon in Brazil, despite the fact that political and academic discourses pool them together into one large ethnic minority known as Ciganos or Romani people. The Roma see themselves as the real Ciganos and do not consider Calon to be Ciganos like them. Meanwhile Calon believe that both themselves and the Roma are members of the greater Romani diaspora, yet they also claim a moral superiority and thus authenticity vis-à-vis the Roma. Academics believe northern India to be the origin of both clans’ ancestors and state that the term Ciganos came to be from their being labeled as heretics or Athinganoi upon their arrival in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans around 1050:

To start at the origins, namely, India, the name Rrom, used by most groups of Gypsies nowadays, most probably derives from the cast appurtenance of the original Gypsies. At a later stage, that is after their arrival in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans, around 1050 there is strong evidence to suggest that the people described in the “Life of St. George the Athonite,” as Athinganoi, Adsincani, or Adsincanoi, were in fact Gypsies. This name was originally given to Phrygian heresy and was later used in conjunction with
another Armenian Manichaean heresy, the Paulicians. [...] In a large part of Europe, this name stuck. Derivations of it are still in use in many countries: Cigan, Zigeuner, Zingari, etc. (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 3).

The name given to heretics stuck to the migrants described as performing trades common among the Romanies with different derivatives in other countries. However, another label stuck as well:

Subsequent migrations of Gypsies within Europe provided new appellations. These derive in a large part from the tales the migrants told the general population upon arrival. Gypsies said that they were “pilgrims from Little Egypt”, or even counts, vojevodes, or kings from that country. Their “Egyptian” origins gave rise to the name Gitans, Gypsies, Gitanos, etc. We have to stress that Gypsies are totally unrelated to Egypt. In fact no Roma migrated through Egypt to Europe, and the actual location of “Little Egypt” has been the subject of many speculations, but one is definite: It was not in Egypt and most probably was in Greece. // In some regions of Europe, notably in France, another name arose: Bohémiens, stemming from the travel documents that some Roma had obtained from the Bohemian king Sigismund, while in northern Europe and Scandinavia, Gypsies were and often still are called Tatare. This, in turn, derives from the first anti-Gypsy pamphlets, branding them as Ottoman spies (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 4).

According to these academics as well as numerous others some of these initial migrants to Europe claimed at times that they originated from Little Egypt, which is now considered to have been a region of Greece.

Both Roma and Calon agree that their origin is Egypt whereas most academics hypothesize India as a previous homeland. Previously researchers fell into the trap of describing the Romani people as a single uniformly identifiable ethnic group of Indian origins. Romologists now generally agree with some close version of Hancock’s theory that the so-called Ur-Roma (pre-Romani) tribes left the territories of northwestern India about one thousand years ago. The academic distinction between Romani people and the hypothetically related Ur-Roma destabilizes claims of cultural and genetic continuity with such predecessors:

So the Ur-Rroma, while not exactly dashing from Persia to Armenia, and further, have most probably remained a coherent – and rather small – group through out their pre-European history and, as we will argue, well into their European history. In any case, we are of the opinion that the true cradle of the Rroma culture and identity lies further west, in the heart of the Byzantine Empire (Tcherenkov et al. 2004: 33).
Most probably the Ur-Roma came from northwestern India from the regions of nowadays Rajasthan and Punjab, today’s Pakistan. The naming distinction between today’s Roma and the former Ur-Roma complicates and undermines the possibility of claiming cultural continuity with historical ancestors. Some Romologists do elaborate that although they may assume Indian origins to some degree, at least on a linguistic and genetic level, the same cannot be said about Roma “cultural origins” from India:

Our view on Rroma history is that Rroma, while they originated outside of Europe, in India, are nevertheless a European minority for their identity and culture owes a large part of its basis to the thousand years the Rroma have spent in Europe. Some will certainly dislike some of our conclusions; that the Rroma are not originally Rajputs, that the Rroma are the result of one and only Indian migration, that the Sinti, Cale, and Rroma are all the same, that they were not all slaves, that they did not pass through various pre-European routes, and so on. […] Many of these arguments are not solely based on history. They are also based on traditions but also on Rromanes, which, as we have already repeatedly said, shows an incredible unity among all the Rroma groups (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 9).

Academics now describe *Gypsy* as a European identity formed in relation to the rest of Europeans, willfully taken on by nomads who deceived certain European feudal lords by donning the misnomer *Egyptian/Gypsy* and claiming they came from Little Egypt. This misnomer has become heavily associated with pejorative connotations due to a long history of persecution ever since the nomads’ appearance in Europe in the mid-1300s. Therefore both academics and activists insist on using politically correct terms such as Romani people, Romanies, or Roma even though these terms may not seem relevant to some of the tribes such as the Calon in Brazil.

The term *Gypsy* in English may become increasingly censored, yet its equivalent in Portuguese, the term *Cigano*, is still widely used in Brazil in all registers of discourse. Calon identify themselves as *Ciganos* and reject the so-called politically correct terms Roma or Romani
as denoting members of a different clan of Ciganos. As for the Roma in Brazil the use of these
terms abroad to denote the whole ethnic minority internationally validates their sense of being
the authentic Ciganos unlike the Calon. After all in their dialect to say “amen sam roma” simply
means “we are people,” people who speak Romanes a certain way. Calon would say amen sam
Calon (we are black), which indicates their self-identification as non-white, non-European. To
avoid confusion in this thesis I will use the problematic term Romani people as the equivalent of
the more problematic term Gypsies, to mean all Roma and Calon as well as members of other
clans who speak or at some point spoke some dialect of Romanes. Academicians have used
language as well as shared customs and even genetics in attempting to fix this ethnic diversity as
one group traceable to India. Romologist Rena Gropper even made the now-outdated claim at
one point that genetic traces are visible:

   Although blond Gypsies do occur, they are comparatively rare except in those groups
   known to have intermarried with Europeans and those in which an extensive first-
generation intermarriage between two formerly widely separated Gypsy groups (i.e.,
different breeding isolates) has been followed by intensive inbreeding in the succeeding
filial generations. Most Gypsies tend to fall within the darker ranges of Caucasoid skin
color; hair shades ordinarily are very dark, and hair form varies from slightly wavy to
curly. Light-colored eyes are rare, as there is no evidence of an epicanthic fold. The large
aquiline nose is present in many Gypsies (Gropper 1975: 2).

Describing a real Gypsy in terms of physical traits inevitably results in a fallacious and
dangerous generalization that can motivate racial targeting. However, Romologists still claim
that the widespread traditional practice of Romani sub-group endogamy has maintained
significant genetic traces to ancient Indian ancestry. Yet to point out what a real or true Romani
person may look like only serves to reproduce vilified or eroticized stereotypes, which most
researchers today would rather debunk.

Brazilian Roma themselves say they are simply European in order to escape ethnic
targeting as experienced in Europe. Most of the grandparents still remember fleeing the
Holocaust and the long history of European persecution, and insist that their families keep their ethnicity a secret. However, these Roma have also internalized national racist values, and often boast of having fair-skinned, blue-eyed children born particularly among their third generation immigrant families. They correctly assume a partial European ancestry while insisting their origins are Egyptian. On the other hand Brazilian Calon allow their men to marry dark-skinned non-Romani women of African origins, and consider the children of these marriages to be real Calon. British Romologist Judith Okeley explains that non-Romani people often see what they expect instead of appreciating Romani diversity:

Although occasional individuals with dark hair and brown eyes might attract attention, the favoured ‘real Romanies’ are just as likely to have blue eyes and fair hair. But these facts are not ‘seen’ by the Gorgio (non Romani) observers for whom the racial theory offers a pseudo-scientific basis for social selection. ‘Real Romanies’ are those families who reflect best the observers’ preferences (Okeley 1983: 4).

Romologists insist on a significant degree of linguistic and genetic tracing to ancient Indian origins, yet they cannot say the same about Romani cultural origins.

The Indian origin narrative is complicated by critical considerations of how Romani people’s identities have been constructed through interaction with the societies among which they travelled and lived. We must engage the contingent diversity of Romani groups and remember anthropologist Alfred Kroeber’s suggestion that a large part of any culture is always borrowed: “So it comes about that a large portion of every culture was not spontaneously developed by it, but was introduced from outside into it, after which the people of the culture were no longer much concerned with about the fact of the introduction. Probably the greater part of every culture has percolated into it” (1923: 65-66). I am also concerned with the forms of cultural receptivity Kroeber calls diffusion or assimilation, as well as resistances and dislocations
in assessing the specificity of Roma and Calon in Brazil. It is useful to ask to what extent does cultural receptivity lead to integration. Unlike Kroeber, however, I avoid making generalizations. His now-outdated material on *Gypsies* echoes 1920’s harsh prejudices against *Gypsies*:

The Gypsy situation is a little different. Fundamentally, the Gypsies are an endogamous caste. They originated in India; and they show definite evidence of that fact in their blood type and in the Romany speech of which they retain remnants in addition to the language of whatever country they inhabit. In religion they are more or less professing Christians; and they specialize in certain occupations like horse-trading and tinkering. But what sets them off from the rest of the population is not so much positive cultural peculiarities as the inclination toward an uprooted and vagrant life. Their distinctness lies above all in an attitude, or orientation, which leads them to select a certain group of activities in Western civilization and to discard most of they others. They want a horse or an automobile, but not a house; silver jewelry, but not a bank account; music, but no education; and so on. In many of their attitudes they are like hobos: both elect to follow one particular vein of the many that make up our culture – the vein or line of freedom, irresponsibility, and instability. But of course hobos have no separatedness of race or speech, nor are they strictly a caste, because without women and families they lack hereditary continuity and are merely an association group constantly rerecruited by adversity or temperament. Gypsies evince definite cultural distinctiveness; only, as they neither constitute a full society nor possess a complete culture, they serve as another example of half-cultures. They certainly have an ethos all their own (1923: 87).

Kroeber’s writing is tainted by negative stereotypes that exoticize these people who moved throughout history. He compares them to homeless persons with the fallacious argument that both the homeless and the migrants choose their lifestyle of “freedom.” Kroeber also argues that endogamy preserved *Gypsies*’ genetic similarities as well as their link to Indian origins, yet this narrative has been rendered far more complex by recent genetic studies of the Romanies.

Geneticists Luba Kalaydjiea, David Gresham and Francesc Calafell collaborated on an article which found that, “Data provided by the social sciences as well as genetic research suggest that the 8-10 million Roma (Gypsies) who live in Europe today are best described as a conglomerate of genetically isolated founder populations. […] The available incomplete epidemiological data suggest a non-random distribution of disease-causing mutations among Romani groups” (Kalaydjiea et al. 2001: 1). The study aimed to help meet the specific health needs of the Roma
with prenatal and infant care. Although it suggests that Romani tribes or extended families
preserve similar genetic traits, there are differences as great or greater among Romani tribes as
between specific tribes and mainstream societies.

Genetic studies of the Romanies have been conducted for almost a century with
thousands of individuals sampled primarily across Europe. During the Third Reich period
German geneticists such as Ferdinand Sauerbruch, who designed the “genetic and medical
research” program at the Auschwitz camp, were particularly invested in studying Gypsies in
addition to Jews (Fings et al. 1997: 1). They established The Race Hygiene and Population
Biology Research Center in 1936 and provided the “scientific basis” for the “final solution,” the
annihilation of Jews and Roma in the Nazi-occupied Europe. Post-war genetic research was more
concerned with proving Romani peoples’ connection to India (Avcin 1969; Rex-Kisset al. 1973;
Sivakova 1983). Their conclusions are supported by more recent studies which show a direct link
to India: “Estimation of the genetic distances shows that Spanish Gypsies are closer to Indian
Caucasoid populations than to the Spanish non-Gypsy population. HLA data support the
proposed historical origin of this ethnic group” (de Pablo et al. 1992: 1). Mastanna and Papinha
also argue there is greater diversification among Western than Eastern-European Romanies:

Three gypsy populations from Western Europe (English, Welsh and Swedish) are
genetically distinct from the rest of the East European gypsies and the populations of
India analyzed in this investigation. Overall the genetic differentiation among these
populations is moderately high (RST = 0.029). The results also indicate the relative close
relationship among the East gypsies and the two selected nomadic populations of India.
The factors responsible for the moderate diversification of the East European gypsies
may be high rate of migration, isolation and random drift, while among the Western
gypsy populations admixture seems to be an important differentiation factor (1992: 1).
Evidence suggests that Romanies found further west present more differentiation from Eastern
European Roma, who are closer to the Indian nomads sampled. However, these studies do not
address the concerns of present-day Romanies. Instead they reflect the outsiders’ need to pin this diverse diaspora to a specific place of origin.

Myths of origins and claims of authenticity regarding this fragmented diaspora continue to circulate in different registers. As believers and non-believers engage these myths they in turn have actual effects on individuals, society and the power dynamics between competing narratives. Memory becomes a politicized subject as it is narrated by various competing voices and taken up as discourse of identity. Yet it is also interesting to note that many Ciganos and especially the Calon are uninterested in talking about the past: “When we take our personal identity for granted we are not self-conscious about the past. When identity is not in question, neither is memory” (Antze and Lambek 1996: xxi). This chapter explores how narratives are constructed, operated upon, defied or disrupted as the Gypsy/ Cigano/ Rom/ Calon identities are negotiated in Brazil through various narratives of ancestry and claims of ethnic authenticity itself an elusive concept just like identity. This is an account of romantic nationalism: my own, my interlocutors and a larger discourse of the Romani diaspora within an international context, along with Ciganos’ sense of belonging in Brazil as native Brazilians, in addition to some impostors’ pretending to belong to Ciganidade (Gypsiness) for various romanticized reasons.

**Ancestry as basis for identification**

Romani people recognize real Ciganos based on their blood ties to known ancestry. This entails identifying an individual’s parents and grandparents, extended family name, then specific clan membership, and finally the larger subgroup of Romani people or natsia to which one belongs. The question “who are you?” when delivered among Ciganos elicits the names of one’s parents, followed by the ethnic-specific terminology of self-identification, an extended family
name which is seldom disclosed to the non-Romani. *Ciganos* have often donned labels attributed to them by the *gages*. Yet among each other they have simultaneously been using ethnic terms to indicate their appurtenance. In Brazil the main Romani subgroups call themselves Roma, Calon, Sinti, and Lovara. These subgroups or *natzias/natsias* in Romanes are known to exist internationally. Subgroup members consider themselves related across continents. Brazilian Roma for example speak fondly of the Roma in Europe and in North America.

The *natsias* are further divided into clans called *vitsas*, which are largely endogamous social units and display a wide range of dialects, occupations, customs and exterior appearances. Historically Romani people often named their *vitsa* after their traditional occupation and these names persist today even though most of their customary occupations are now obsolete. For example the *Roma* subgroup includes the following *vitsas*: Kaldarara (Tinkers), Lovara (Moneylenders), Churara (Knife-makers), in addition to the Matchuwaya (Roma from former-Yugoslavia) and the Xoraxane (Turkish Roma). According to French Romologist Liégeois, an individual is encouraged to imagine a Romani world where one’s *kumpania* (extended family) or is at the epicenter, the place of authenticity, whereas closely related *kumpanias* in the same *vitsa* are next in the hierarchy and so forth, with *gages* usually placed outside the Romani world (1983: 77). Each *vitsa* traditionally claims its members as the most authentic *Ciganos*, morally superior not only over *gages* but also over other non-*gages*.

Romani people share a common basis for identification in their opposition to *gages*, while subgroups, clans and even individuals compete with each other for a superior, authentic *Ciganidade* (*Gypsiness* in Portuguese). However, Liégeois is generalizing a schematic view of the Romani. Some subgroups do not even consider each other to be culturally connected, yet researchers generally agree on their cultural unity: “the Sinti, Cale, and Rroma are all the same
[...] Many of these arguments are not solely based on history. They are also based on traditions but also on Romanes, which, as we have already repeatedly said, shows an incredible unity among all the Roma groups” (Tcherenkov et al. 2004: 9). Unlike most researchers, the Roma in Brazil do not consider Calon to be of the same ethnicity as themselves. One main reason why Roma still keep their ethnicity hidden from the mainstream public is to avoid having criminal stereotypes associated with the Calon projected onto them. Another reason is to avoid persecutions and discrimination similar those experienced in Europe, which culminated with the Nazi Holocaust in which Brazilian Roma lost family members and are still grieving their loss.

Although Calon call themselves “blacks” in their dialect (kalo means black), like the Roma, they also distinguish themselves from the kaliviri (black people of African origins), descendants of slaves, and intentionally associate themselves with Egypt instead. David Haberley argues that Brazilians see themselves as the product of multiracial national origins and as inherently sad or nostalgic for their ancient homelands, be they Africa, Portugal or the Brazilian forests (1983:1). However, my interlocutors expressed no sad longing for any other homeland, but rather said they were proud citizens of Brazil. Yet like other Brazilians, as Haberley suggests, my Calon interlocutors did say their bloodlines had been racially mixed over the centuries spent in Brazil.

While Calon admitted to having interbred with kaliviri wives, the Roma were strongly opposed to such mixing and looked down upon Calon for having done so. According to Hancock, race relationships have taken different forms in other colonial areas. For instance, “there is documentation of Gypsies being owned by freed black slaves in Jamaica, and in both Cuba and Louisiana today there are Afro-Romani populations resulting from intermarriage between freed African and Gypsy slaves” (Hancock 2010, web). However, the Roma did not
recognize Calon as ethnically similar (as Ciganos) because of their mixed marriages with freed African slaves. Indeed Calon men occasionally married kaliviri women and considered these children of mixed marriages also Calon.

My Roma interlocutors were in fact happy that they had mixed with European whites. “Their third-generation offspring often had blue eyes,” as Cabrito’s rather dark-skinned sister in law Cornelia said in her Sao Paulo home. This shows many Roma interlocutors like Cornelia had internalized racist values circulating in Europe and in Brazil. Eminent anthropologist Roberto DaMatta states that theorists such as Buckle, Couty and Agassiz as well as the white Brazilian elite feared interracial mixing and treated the mainstream population as “degenerate hybrids incapable of creating something strong or positive” (trans. mine, 1984: 40). At the same time DaMatta states that Brazil does not operate on the logic of dualism such as white-black, good-bad, right-wrong, God-Devil, married-separated, man-woman, so its racism also does not operate on binary oppositions like racism in the Anglo-Saxon systems and in South Africa (41).

In Brazil there are sundry official intermediary categories, which the term mulato fixes as an idealized type, and DaMatta suggests the government has used the mixing of races to promote the myth of racial democracy in Brazil (46). Accordin to DaMatta, Brazil operates on a system of graduation between the “superior whites” and the “inferior and poor blacks,” where ancestry as well as economic capital and one’s family name provide a set position in the social hierarchy. This seems far too monolithic and dichotomous in my experience, yet Ciganos – in particular the Roma – seemed to have internalized to some extend these kinds of racializing perceptions of mainstream Brazil, operating on these values when engaging in interpersonal disputes. Although he overgeneralizes, DaMatta’s statements are far from outdated as seen in recent events. During the 2014 World Cup, locals subjected several black soccer players to name-calling, such as
“monkey” and “go back to Africa and find a team!” In response President Dilma Rousseff, who had promised a “World Cup without racism,” tweeted: “It is unacceptable that Brazil, the country with the largest black population after Nigeria, has racism issues.” According to USA Today racism persists:

It does, and Brazilians are slowly waking up to it. Still, they are more accustomed to saying this is a country free of prejudice, and the subject is rarely discussed openly and seldom makes the news. Many hold to the myth of a "racial democracy" because the country never had laws separating the races. "The Brazilian form of racism is worse than apartheid because it works on the basis of deception," said Elisa Larkin Nascimento, director of the Afro-Brazilian Studies and Research Institute in Rio. "There is denial," she added. "Many people — particularly the ruling class — say there is no racism. With that stance, you are left with nothing to talk about." Over the last few decades, Brazil has begun to introduce affirmative-action programs, African diaspora history is being taught in schools, and a cabinet-level position has been created to deal with racial equality. "The biggest leap was to get the society to talk about racism and realize that, in fact, it does exist in Brazil," said Larkin Nascimento, who wrote the book "The Sorcery of Color: Identity, Race and Gender in Brazil." Settled by Portuguese and a mix of other Europeans, Brazil imported about 5 million slaves — 10 times more than the United States — and ended slavery in 1888. That was 25 years after the United States banned the practice (Wade 2014, web).

The myth of racial democracy persists, nonetheless, in the Brazilian imaginary and serves to silence discourse about racism and social inequality.

Denial of racism does not suffice to cover its current pervasiveness in Brazil. According to Larkin Nascimento, who is white and was born in the US but lives in Brazil, there is a strong desire for dark-skinned Brazilians to become whiter and to be considered white: “As it is commonly understood, a racist is someone who speaks of racism or mentions that someone else is black; silence is considered the nonracist attitude. A pillar of domination, silence is one of racism’s most effective devices in Brazil (Nascimento 2007: 5). Wade insists that racism-based inequalities persist, and this is significant because it seemed to me that Ciganos internalized such historical discrimination as found in mainstream Brazil:
Blacks in Brazil earn about half of what whites do, and there is only one black minister in Rousseff's cabinet. The first black justice on Brazil's supreme court — Joaquim Barbosa, who rose to chief justice — recently announced his retirement. Magazine covers seldom feature a black face, movies often feature all white casts and the very popular soap operas feature mostly white actors (2014, web).

Wade also mentions that until the abolition of slavery about 80 percent of Brazil was black. However, after abolition the government instituted a whitening policy until the middle of the 20th century when Europeans, Japanese and other light-skinned immigrants were used to advance the goal of whitening the local population. Nowadays discrimination exists in a silent exclusion of elitist venues, restaurants, hotel and sports clubs, and in the constant surveillance of policemen, whereas the rest try to “whiten” so as to avoid being excluded or targeted. This was my experience in Brazil, seeing bleached-blonde dark-skinned boys frequently on the crowded buses, and hardly any colored people on any of the national television channels. My interlocutors fondly, almost ritualistically watched soap operas every evening and it was evident that in these depictions of elite Brazilian lifestyle, dark-skinned actors were rarely cast and even then they were merely the maid or humorous servant.

The Roma prejudices against Calon echo the mainstream Brazilian disgust towards darkening one’s skin by intermixing with African descendants. However, contrary to Roma beliefs, the Calon present a wide register of features ranging from kaliviri traits to fair skin, blond hair and blue eyes, or even more exotic mixes of dark skin and blue or green eyes. “The Bluest Eye,” a novel by African-American writer Tony Morrison shows this mythical aesthetic itself to be replete with racist valuations (1970). The Roma reject Calon as real Ciganos primarily because of their intermarriage with people of African descent and mixing their ancestral bloodline. Kalo means black in both dialects, and Calon men occasionally marry kaliviri (black woman) as long as the woman agrees to wear customary dress like a proper Calin.
(woman) and to behave in ways that are deemed honorable by the subgroup’s moral code. The Roma view the reproductive union with a kaliviri as a breach of Romani authenticity. Cornelia, a wealthy Matchuwaya Rromni fortuneteller, dark caramel skin-toned, insisted:

Calon are not real Ciganos like us. The men get married to black women sometimes, so their children are half-black. How can you call someone Cigano if they look black? Besides, the Calon are very poor, not like us. They still live in tents and read palms in the street. We are more civilized than that. We have psychic reading shops and live in nice houses. Also they speak a different language than us, we understand very few words when they speak. They think they are Ciganos like us, but they are not Roma.

Most Roma, like Cornelia, disapprove of Calon dilution of ancestry, yet ironically are very proud that their nieces and nephews, third generation immigrants to Brazil, are now often born with blue and green eyes. Cornelia commented while gently caressing own her hair glistening with blond-highlights, “It shows our forefathers were the products of mixed marriages with Eastern Europeans, and now because cousins are marrying each other their children come out with blue eyes.” Ironically, their prejudice against Calon shows how Roma have internalized racist notions circulating in the Brazilian society.

Brazil represents for the Roma a place where the local social valuation of skin color allows them to claim European descent and camouflage their ethnicity. Cornelia’s 40-year-old brother-in-law, Cabrito, tall and slender with shrewd eyes and a confident smirk boasted of a great facility in communicating. He had recently become a member of the Freemasons. He commented that the Roma in Brazil all know of each other and have private gatherings, and operate very much like a secret society. He said, “Among each other Romani identity is expressed relationally first and foremost by naming one’s parents and grandparents, and this only works within a context where the immediate kin are known and recognized as clan members.” This requires a dynamic social life where all people belonging to a clan generally know each other or can ask their elders about a certain lineage. A rich social life, group-endogamy, arranged
marriages, and blood ties are all highly important elements in constructing Romani identity and so they are heavily monitored in order to maintain a sense of group appurtenance and solidarity.

Although this chapter so far depicts a simple dichotomy between Calon and Roma, between Brazil and Ciganos, between white and blacks, it only highlights some structural ways in which my interlocutors looked at their world, which in turn affected my understanding of space and relationships during fieldwork. Although racism persists in Brazil, it is not only so. I do not use the word “race” as an operative theoretical term, nor distinguish really between “whites” and “blacks.” In fact, it was my first concern that everyone in Brazil looked mixed and I would not be able to tell Ciganos apart from the rest of Brazilians. They also recognized the fact that they could easily blend in if they chose to, since in Brazil there were all kinds of people from blond (European looking) people primarily in the South, descendents of Romanians, Ukrainian, Polish, German and Russian people, to Japanese and native American, and French and African descendants. In this space of Brazilianness, all belonged and felt proudly nationalistic, pledging their allegiance to “Brazil” – the state they imagined engulfing them.

Ciganos of both subgroups first and foremost described themselves as Brazilians. The time I spend highlighting their strategies of maintaining their sense of “identity” against the mainstream society is only by choice, but I could easily spend an equal amount of time exploring all the ways in which Ciganos present themselves as Brazilians, taking up tropes that circulate in Brazil at large. Like other citizens, they are subject to historical social changes, although in my limited account I fail to give a sense of all the variations, overlapping and juxtapositions. I spend significant time on highlighting structural elements and dichotomies only to understand how these interlocutors imagine themselves in oppositions, although they remain immersed in a larger context as members, as citizens, even when they bypass their own recognition as such.
34. Young Calon boys cooling off – the boy on the right is of mixed *kaliviri* descent
35. Blond Calon girl and her brother who sports highlights in his hair
36. Blue eyes run in a Calon family – here we see the youngest girl
Identification and sharing

Social life among the Romani revolves around well-defined rules of exchange, the result of which is a great sense of community, hospitality and sharing among members, whereas non-members do not receive the same treatment. Levi-Strauss summarized exchanges between groups as 1) exchanges of goods, 2) exchanges of words and values i.e. language and diplomacy, 3) exchanges of women:

Such is the case with exchange. Its role in primitive society is essential because it embraces material objects, social values and women. But while in the case of merchandise this role has progressively diminished in importance in favor of other means of acquisition, as far as women are concerned, reciprocity has on the contrary maintained its fundamental function, on the one hand because women are the most precious possession (in chap. III we have justified the exceptional position they occupy in the primitive system of values), but above all because women are not primarily a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant; and the stimulant of the only instinct of satisfaction of which can be deferred, and consequently the only one for which, in the act of exchange, and through the awareness of reciprocity, the transformation from the stimulant to the sign can take place, and, defining by this fundamental process the transformation from nature to culture, assume the character of an institution (Levi-Strauss 1949: 62-63).

The exchanges of goods, language and women are highly regulated among the Romani to delineate the lines of delineation particularly from non-Romani and from different subgroups. Arranged marriages usually take place between members of a clan or of two clans considered to be in cultural proximity. Likewise the Romanes dialect spoken within a clan is only shared with known others. The language is kept secret from the gage. It is spoken in their presence during negotiations, yet it is not to be taught to the gage. In addition food-goods in a Romani household are open to everyone’s use within a clan. Such sharing is rarely extended to members of other subgroups, much less to the gage.

As previously mentioned, both Romani subgroups consider all non-Romani to be the ultimate outsider to the ethnic group, and even long-term relationships are usually limited to
economically profitable exchanges. The Roma in Rio and Sao Paulo only allow *gage* to visit them in their psychic reading offices and seldom in the intimacy of their own houses. The Calon I found in Brazilian urban outskirts, however, not only allowed *gage* to visit their tents, but also invited them to enjoy some tea and coffee. The dishes used for these guests were not the same as used by clan members, maintaining their separation from those considered morally impure.

Calon sometimes serve as moneylenders to *gage* in need, targeting through this socialization profitable monetary exchanges just as much as the Roma. Martin Fotta conducted fieldwork in Brazil and documented how Calon operate as financial entrepreneurs and moneylenders in his dissertation “The Bankers of the Backlands: Financialisation and the Calon Gypsies in Bahia:”

The thesis argues that the development of *Cigano* money lending is a Calon assimilation of recent changes brought about by monetization of daily life transforming the Bahian tradition of seeing them as trickster-figures. Several recent developments have increased demand for cash in the Bahian interior and small-town life is now characterized by a dense financial net of various credit/debt forms — formal and informal, novel and traditional. In this context, *Ciganos* — as-money-lenders are one of many existing credit institutions. Going beyond the ‘demand side’, the thesis explores Calon concepts and social organization of credit. It argues that money in money-lending serves both as a medium of exchange, and as a way to create an environment for Calon social reproduction. Through manipulating pragmatics of credit/debt Calon forge themselves as moral persons and create proper sociality (Fotta 2012).

For the purpose of negotiations, Calon often invite *gage* to their tents and homes as Fotta also documents. In my experience Roma generally avoid having Calon or *gages* as guests in their homes, but because Calon think of themselves as *Ciganos*, when they travel nearby and seek hospitality, they will sometimes be invited indoors and served food at the table. Liosha, a 55-year-old Rom from Rio de Janeiro who was a former butcher, light-skinned, sporting long, curly hair and a large belly bespeaking of his big appetite, said with a mix of compassion and fear:
If Calon knock on my door and they are hungry, traveling with their women and children all the way from Salvador in a group of four-five-six or even twelve, I let them into my yard and put food on the table and treat them hospitably because I am afraid of them otherwise. They are savages. Who knows what they’ll do. They usually carry knives and they aren’t afraid of using them.

Ironically Roma prejudices against Calon echoed negative stereotypes that gages tend to have against Romani people in general. Roma in Rio and Sao Paulo often admonished: “Don’t go to Calon weddings! They pull out knives on each other when they get drunk. They are savages. They are very dangerous. They’re not civilized like us.” These are more examples of how gages’ discriminative misconceptions can get picked up by members of different subgroups leading to inter-subgroup overt animosity or reluctant hospitality at best.

Calon also consider the Roma inferior in many ways, which supports their belief in the fundamental authenticity of their own Ciganidade. Suria, a petite, dark caramel-skinned Calin reading palms in Rio along the beach of Copacabana while adorned in a typical long, colorful dress, spoke of the Roma with disdain in her peering eyes:

We are all Ciganos, but the Roma think they are different from us. They are rich, they live in houses, so they think they are better than us, but we are all Ciganos. We kept more of the traditions and they know that. They send their children to school now, but we still do not, only until they learn how to read and write. We arrange our children’s marriages when they are quite young, and they get married around eleven or twelve so girls will not lose themselves and shame the entire family. But most Roma girls marry late and who knows if they are virgins by then? They don’t even wear long dresses like us! At least when clients see us, they can tell we are Ciganas. We are dressed beautifully to look the part. But the Roma look down on us because we live in tents and read palms in the street. Ha! Look at us: we are happy to live like this, we are always together, we cook together, we read fortunes together, and have big wedding parties. We don’t want to live enclosed in houses like the Gages. We are free to roam the world without any ties to any place! We walk a lot, we go wherever we want, and we eat mostly fruits and vegetables, but those rich Roma just barbeque meat all the time in their backyards until they get very fat. All they eat is meat. Not like us.

Therefore each subgroup has its own way of establishing itself as the authentic, real or morally superior Ciganos while putting down the other groups via one’s own criteria. The notion of
Romani identity is intrinsically constructed upon the dynamism of socially accepted ways of sharing food goods, words and women within the boundaries of a community. Being Romani ultimately means intensely sharing one’s life and goods with other known Romani blood relatives. Yet the value of intense daily solidarity at the level of the community is nowadays disappearing among wealthier Roma who live in isolated houses rather than in tight communities, a fact which leads the Calon to believe they represent a more authentic, morally superior Romani identity.

**Partially “real” Romanies**

Blood purity holds a high place in Romani ideology, and an individual’s claims of ethnic authenticity depend on being able to boast of bloodlines extending to honorable Romani ancestors, which require first and foremost having a Romani father. If the mother is Romani, yet she has a child with a *gagio*, she is often excluded from the community along with her child. While she may still be considered Romani by bloodline, her child is considered entirely a *gage*. Behind this strict punishment lies the basic ethnocentric assumption that *gage* people are morally impure and contagious especially in association with Romani women: “We are pure. We don’t marry *gage*, but now things are changing.” Some dissent was evident in practice.

In Brazil I met half-Romani or quarter-Romani people who often did not receive invitations to formal gatherings such as weddings and anniversary parties, yet they sometimes did visit so-called *real* Romani families. The negative consequences of exogamous marriages are both circumstantial and gender-biased:
Being considered a real member of the Romani world means you have a seat at the table. If you come to weddings and anniversaries and there is no seat for you, you know you don’t belong there. You are not welcomed. There is a lot of gossip and social exclusion for those who behave less than honorably. They are socially ignored. People whose mothers married gage are never invited to these social events, not even for a cup of coffee at Rroma people’s houses. The Rroma think that interacting with people who are not honorable is shameful just like interacting with gages. In my family, we have a good gagio family friend. He is my father’s best friend in fact. He is always visiting us for lunch and taking care of our dogs. I personally also keep close ties to half-Romani people like the boy I introduced you to who studies law. His mother is Romani. He will one day help out a lot of Romani people because he will know so much about the law, he will help us find the weak links in the system, the niches for our people. It is important to be friends with people like that. This is why I am nurturing my friendship with you too because one day you will speak as an expert on the Romani, and we need to make sure you say the right things. Unfortunately most Rroma do not see things the way I do. If I tell them you are a gagi, they will start gossiping if I'll bring you to wedding parties with me. So we have to tell them that you are a real Rromni from Romania. You need to say this! Otherwise I cannot bring you with me. They will say that you are my gagi mistress and my wife doesn’t need to be put through this (Cabrito).

Interlocutors made it clear that “who can learn from us, that is limited.” Yet even though Cabrito told me to state it as a matter of fact that I was Romani, I had to put him on hold. I couldn’t lie bluntly. I gave everyone my nuanced story:

My grandfather, even if he were a Gypsy as his neighbor claimed, must have been forced to be silent about it, under serious threat from the Romanian Communist Party which claimed all the citizens of the Romanian Republic were in fact Romanian, denying all accounts of ethnic minorities and forcing all into social inclusion and dissolution. I knew that the Party had blacklisted my grandfather, but I never knew exactly why, other than his status as a rich peasant. In exchange for moving to an empty region and helping to form a new village with his wife and about twenty-four other couples, the communists gave my grandfather land. I read that the communist bureaucracy forced most of the ethnic youth to move away from their ethnic communities, marry Romanian women, and form new villages. This was the communist way of erasing ethnic differences, of controlling sexuality and reproduction. The authorities would burn these new villages’ archives thereby physically erasing all documented traces of ethnic diversity, ensuring the birth of children that would become “purely Romanian. My grandfather’s village archive had also burned down mysteriously.

Despite the lack of substantial evidence my Roma interlocutors such as Cabrito’s brother, Minu, and his wife, Cornelia, listened with keen interest and compassion. Minu replied:
“You know, many of our parents never told anyone they were Gypsies. They came from Europe with their parents when they were little. They were escaping the Holocaust. They were so afraid. Their parents made them never tell anyone they are Gypsies because they felt people hate Gypsies so much. So we teach our children never to tell anyone as well.”

Most Roma sympathized with ease upon hearing the story of my grandfather’s silence about his ethnic background as they identified with his choice to keep his ethnicity secret. The ambiguity of Ciganos’ identities, their wanting to stay hidden, refusing to integrate, but also their being ambivalent about ethnic visibility in light of political rights recognition made my access possible in a similarly ambivalent, fragmented way. In addition, the ambiguity of historical facts, of origin stories, of my own genealogy, of my identification with them, and even of what I knew of my father, all contributed to the fact that my disclosure to interlocutors was always partial depending on whom I talked to and the circumstances of interlocution.

**Adopted children**

Despite the assumed requirement of the virtue of paternal Romani descent and bloodline, it is acceptable for infertile couples to adopt from gage, and to raise such adopted children with the belief that they are “real” Romanies. Such was the case of Auntie Violeta, an 80-year-old woman who had married Ianca’s mother’s brother, and who still lived across from Ianca along with one of her sons, Matcho. Auntie Violeta considered herself most honorable, thus a veritable Rromni (wife or woman in Romanes). As previously mentioned, Ianca told me that after Auntie’s Romani parents died, Auntie looked through their official documents and found her own birth certificate. Thus, she learned her biological parents’ names and realized that she had been adopted. By blood, she was not Romani. However, she had identified with the Romani
subjectivity her entire life until then, and she kept doing so without further equivocation. She was after all married to a veritable Rom, Carlos, Ianca’s uncle, with whom she had birthed no less than nine children: “I married and reproduced the Romani world. I have almost a hundred people in my family, all born because of me. I was faithful to my husband, read fortunes, and kept up the Romani tradition. I did my duty. Now I can just rest and enjoy myself.”

In her old age and widowhood Auntie Violeta was frequently visited by many of her descendants, whom we counted to be no less than eighty-six at the time. Although others knew Auntie Violeta’s bloodline was not Romani, no one dared to bring up the issue or to disrespect her as anything less than a true Romni matriarch. She had also adopted several children, not only those begotten by her husband with other women, but also those of impoverished neighboring gage. Yet she ironically complained that, “adopted kin forget the ones who raised them and in the end the effort is a waste.” Among Calon adoption sometimes occurred. A woman adopted her sister’s daughter when the said mother became terminally ill. In general, having more children around was considered joyful and a source of good luck.

**Criteria for super-Ciganidade**

Among all who claimed to embody Romani authenticity or super-Ciganidade, Ianca was my most eloquent, unusual and memorable interlocutor. When I first met this tall and stout 53-year-old Matchuwaya Romni, she was working in a public park near the historical center of Rio de Janeiro soliciting clients for palm readings. She welcomed the idea of sharing useful information for my research. Her enthusiasm and warmth towards me, a white-skinned Romanian gagi, struck me as both auspicious and suspicious. Knowing how reluctant most Romani people would be to open up, I was eager to foster a good relationship with her. She
quickly became the pillar of my research after she decided to host me in her house for the
duration of my research in Rio. Ianca was often cynical, honest and hilarious in her storytelling,
providing a precious critical stance on her culture and community from an insider’s perspective.

As I visited her home for months, I had little idea of how deliberately she was defying all
her relatives’ advice against it. I was seen as an intruder by most Roma, a gagi who belonged
outside their community. In her house, Ianca explained, her rules mattered above theirs, and
indeed no one dared to transgress against her because of her age and respected place among
them. She carried the weight of a life of misery for which she blamed the Roma community. Her
demeanor matched that of her dilapidated abode. The olive skin she had poked at with obsessive
aggression along many troubled years told the tale with its many deep pockmarks now dried and
scarred all over her face and body. Her sluggish long limbs and sedated insomniac eyes betrayed
depression, yet every so often she livened up with bursts of laughter between her many daily
cigarettes and small cups of coffee. Ianca believed that Romani cultural authenticity is primarily
based on the idea of non-exclusive sharing at the community level, and she mourned the fact that
nowadays well-off Roma discriminate against anyone who is poor, even against kin. Racial and
social class prejudice against the poor is common in Brazil, and it became exposed during the
2014 presidential election, as the social movements stepped up for president Dilma:

Aécio Neves from PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) provoked president Dilma
Roussef from PT (Brazilian Worker’s Party) by suggesting that her government was
“inefficient” because it did not prioritize meritocracy. [...]. The attacks on Brazil’s poorer
classes during this election period, particularly on those who receive government social
welfare programs, have been surprising. The attacks have often had a fascist demeanor,
by accusing the poorer of delaying the country’s development (Nogueira 2014).

The PSDB plea for meritocracy encouraged these prejudices to surface among crowds clamoring
against the social welfare program called Bolsa Familia. To a large extent the wealthier Roma
have internalized this Brazilian prejudice as Ianca explained:
In the past, we all used to be poor and we traveled together, so we shared all the food, even money had to be shared as well. In a *kumpania* women read fortunes together, then cooked together, and everyone shared the food. They lived in tents and there was no privacy at all. You couldn’t hide anything. Now Roma accumulate money for themselves to buy big houses and cars. But me in my poverty, I am the same old way. If Auntie Violeta comes over to my house, she can go to my fridge and take anything she wants. My sisters when they come, they take out my rice and beans, add some chicken they bought and make a meal. No one has to ask permission. That’s how it is among us. We cannot refuse each other anything. If someone is going hungry for a day, they know they can always find some food here, a cup of coffee, a cup of tea, and conversation in Romans. That’s life for us. We cannot have that if we live only among the *gages*. Gages are not like that. In the past it was better, even poor Roma could go visit the rich and be well received, but nowadays they discriminate against us. They are ashamed to sit down at the table with us. See, there is a lot more prejudice now. It used to be that we had to be considered honorable (*pakivalo*) to be real Roma, but now anyone with a big house and a car or two cars thinks he’s the king of the world. But that doesn’t make you real, you have to earn respect.

As Ianca suggested, authenticity among members requires earning *pakiv*, which means honor or respect. This is earned by following social rules believed to prevent one’s becoming *maxrimé*, a word which points to being sullied as in morally impure as opposed to lacking proper hygiene:

The Rom say that marime means being ‘rejected’ from the Rom group and being ‘dirty’ and polluted. For the moment, it is the sense of rejection that is most relevant. When a person is declared *marime* publicly, whether by a group of people (such as families in the *kumpania*) or more formally in a *kris romani* (trial), he is immediately denied commensality with other Rom. Anything he wears, touches, or uses personally is polluted (*marime*) for other Rom, and he is generally avoided in person as his *marime* condition can be passed on to others. *Marine* in the sense of ‘rejected’ from social intercourse with other Rom is the ultimate punishment in the society just as death is the ultimate punishment in other societies. For the period it lasts, *marime* is a social death (Sutherland 1975: 98).

*Maxrimé* is defined as the perceived condition of those who fail to obey the *Romaniya* or collection of Romani laws, regulations, rules or codes governing behavior. As a system of valuation the notion of *maxrimé* still creates a boundary between *Ciganos* and non-*Ciganos* in Brazil. According to Hancock, himself part Rom, “it is particularly the factor of ritual cleanliness and ritual defilement that has helped maintain Romani separateness – and as a result Romani identity – for so long” (2003: 76). These pollution taboos are reinforced by fear of actual danger.
both physical and metaphysical: “This is why an understanding of rules of purity is sound entry to comparative religion” (Douglas 1966: 7). As I mentioned previously, it is generally believed that bibaxt (bad luck) such as nasvalipen (illness) can be attracted by breaking social mores particularly when socializing with people who are polluted, i.e. gage (Carmichael 1997: 276).

All Romani people must observe cleanliness rituals, yet these rituals are dynamically negotiated and transgressed within a context of social change (Sutherland 1975: 255). Ianca observed that since Brazilian Roma have stopped traveling together and living in tents, they can now hide polluting behavior in privacy:

Nobody respects marimé rituals anymore. They’re supposed to wash the women’s clothes apart from men’s clothes because otherwise they will be polluting the men, but now they hire Gagia maids who they mix everything together in the washing machine. When people lived in tents, everyone knew you and saw what you were doing. Now who knows what people do in the privacy of their homes? Marimé doesn’t exist anymore in Brazil. Maybe the elders still care, but the young generations think such customs are old superstitions. I still respect these rules as much as I can, but few Roma do nowadays. Our grandparents grew up with the real Roma traditions.

The cultural changes highlighted by Ianca were confirmed by various conversations with wealthy Roma in both Rio and Sao Paulo, who agreed that Old World Ciganos from Europe, including their grandparents who were first generation immigrants, had observed more rigid rules of cleanliness or maxrimé. These elders had also been most respected for they spoke Romanes fluently and lived a nomadic life, traveling in closely-knit communities and sleeping in tents.

Ironically most Roma considered these signs of cultural authenticity, yet dismissed similar characteristics seen among Calon as belonging to a different, less civilized ethnicity. Sedentary Brazilian Roma consider the Old World Ciganos more real in comparison with the new generations populating the New World, primarily in the US and Latin America. As Cornelia said, “our people are changing, we are not respecting our traditions as much as our grandparents did in the past. Those who came from Romania, Yugoslavia, and Russia were more authentic than us.”
37. Some Calon in Brazil also live in houses – photo taken in Bahia

38. House dwelling Calins
Nomadism has often been romanticized as “a life of freedom” by the gage, and also continues to be romanticized by Calon as well as by sedentarized Roma like Ianca. However, Ianca also admitted that nomadism had made her youth quite difficult:

We traveled all the time. We barely had any food, no electricity, and no running water. We couldn’t wash for days. We couldn’t stop anywhere long enough for us to go to school. I never learned how to read. Most elder Roma like myself are illiterate because for a long time they traveled. My brother and my sisters learned, but I never learned. I just read palms with my mother, and we always traveled to find other clients to tell fortunes to. And when our relatives took us into their homes for a while, we always had to clean their houses in return for their hospitality. I’ve never done anything else in my life more than cleaning other people’s houses and looking after their children. It’s so embarrassing to be so poor. Even the house I live in now is not mine, it’s on my brother’s name. But it’s better to live here, alone, that to be a guest at someone else’s house.

It is ironic that nomadism is considered to be the authentic lifestyle, when it represented such hardship and it was historically an adaptation resulting from centuries-long persecution and forced displacement. The first Calon arrived to the New World to escape imprisonment in Portugal. Similarly the Roma fled to Brazil to free themselves from European discrimination and the Holocaust or Porraimos.

The nomadic lifestyle was a social construction, since all too often Romanies were expelled from European territories under threat of persecution. In light of this long history of persecution, the present-day Romani idealization of nomadism is based on cherishing those ancestors who were somehow able to escape. For instance, there were always some runaway Roma slaves who lived hidden in forests, barely clothed, perpetually starving and rebellious. They were named Netotsi and they represent figures of pride for Romanian Romani in the present day. These free Netotsi were significantly darker skinned as opposed to the slaves among whom it was not unlikely to find blond, blue-eyed offspring of slave-owners from their relations with female slaves.
This historical narrative, however, destabilizes Brazilian Roma natives’ view of their ancestors as authentic as it portrayed their forefathers from the Old World as likely products of unions with non-Romani. Children born to enslaved women in Romania, for example, were declared slaves indifferent of their paternal descent. The rule of law was such that any free man who “embraces” a slave woman “shall not be punished” (Hancock 2003: 36). Eventually administrative powers found the enslavement of mixed children unacceptable and prohibited a free-man’s sexual or marital relationship with a slave: “[…] which is entirely against the Christian faith, for not only have these people bound themselves to spend all their life with the Gypsies, but especially that their children remain forever in unchanged slavery… such a deed being hateful to God, and contrary to human nature […]” (Ghibanescu 1921: 119-120). Around the mid-nineteenth century the slaves were freed, and many migrated towards northern and southern Europe fearing authorities might change their minds:

Migrations out of the Balkans went northwest from eastern Europe into Scandinavia and beyond, and through Yugoslavia into southern and western Europe. The first of these reached Paris in 1868. From Europe, considerable numbers continued on to North and South America, especially Argentina, and until their entry into the country was forbidden in the 1880s, thousands were able to make their way to the United States […] In spite of immigration policy, numbers of Vlax-speaking Rom continued to come into the U.S., especially between the two world wars. Others have settled more recently in Australia. // Still others, after emancipation, with no money or possessions, and having nowhere to go, offered themselves for re-sale to their previous owners. (Hancock 1987: 37).

As Hancock suggests many former slaves continued to live marginalized lives, servile to their previous owners since they did not receive any land post-abolition. They continued to be called Țigani, a term which to this day reflects the prejudices founded upon nearly five centuries of slavery. According to Romanian sociologist Viorel Achim, ethnic targeting continued long after the abolition, for example they were forced to assimilate during communism (1998: 2).
Institutionalized education became compulsory, and all nomads still living in tents isolated from mainstream society were forced to work for the government and to live in subsidized residences.

After communism Roma were subject to resurgence in social discrimination and outright violence in the form of pogroms, also attested in other Eastern-European countries by the Helsinki Human Rights Watch (Vermeersch 2006: 202). Until recently Romania has not know anything resembling the Civil Rights movement in the States, and the negative connotation of the term Tigani has stubbornly persisted. Even the government’s endorsement of the politically correct term Roma may be revoked soon because in Western Europe it is often substituted with the term Romanians, turning the latter even more sharply against their undesired minority. Although Romania has the largest population of Romani people of any country, numbering somewhere between one and one and a half million Roma, some of whom no longer speak Romani, the country has so far done little to integrate this minority.

Unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, prejudice, and discrimination plague the lives of Romani people in Romania, so many seek refuge abroad. Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Center along with the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern on 3 December 2014 as they reviewed Romania’s periodic reports:

The Committee expressed concerns over a wide range of human rights issues, including continuing “widespread discrimination and social exclusion, of Roma, especially in the areas of housing, education, health and employment” as well as prevailing hostility of public opinion surrounding Roma (para 9). The Committee noted shortcomings in Romania’s National Roma Inclusion Strategy and called for more effective policies based on disaggregated statistical data on the situation of Roma (Gökçen 2014, web).

Western European countries such as France and Italy, however, have often sent such Romani migrants back to Romania as punishment for begging in the streets. Romanian Roma migrants to Brazil have met a similar fate. For example Ianca’s cousin Paulo remembered precisely how a group of twenty-six Roma had been detained by the Rio de Janeiro administrative officials:
Our daughter was walking past the detention center one day and heard voices inside the building speaking Romanes. She knew immediately that they were Roma. She went in to ask about them: the police had picked them up because they were begging in public parks. They had tourist visas, but the government wanted to send them back. So the administration had to wait for the process to finish before they could send them back. We asked the officers if we could keep them at our house because it is unfit for Roma to sit in a Gage detention room, women and children and men all mixed up. They couldn’t wash their clothes separately or cook in clean pots, so they would have been marimé if they continued to live like that. So for three weeks we hosted all twenty-six Romanian Roma men, women, and children, feeding them every day. We didn’t spare a dime, we treated them with the most respect that you can ever show to any honorable Roma. Then time was up, and they had to fly back to Romania…. But they never wrote us or called us to say if they got back okay or to thank us. We were worried about them for a long time. Not one phone call, not one letter, not even a small post card... We felt really bad. How could they leave like that? That’s not how real Roma would behave, we felt really sad.

My native interlocutors in Rio showed great hospitality and respect or pakiv towards the Romanian Roma whom they considered to be “authentically honorable.” I was the only Romanian they had met since then and they asked me to ask around and find out if their former guests were doing well: “Tell them to send us some news. We worry about them.”

My native interlocutors in Sao Paulo spoke with grief about the Romanian Roma who came to their city to make a living by begging in the streets. Cabrito, acted as a mediator for these impoverished migrants. He complained to me in private:

Romanian Ciganos are not like us. They beg in the streets when they come to Brazil because they don’t speak any Portuguese and they can’t read fortunes like us. Most of them are illiterate or largely uneducated so there is no other job they qualify for, not here and not even in Romania. But they come to Brazil thinking they can make money here and then go back. The real Roma of Sao Paulo are ashamed of them. We think it is demeaning for our ethnicity if any member is found begging in the street. Where is the honor in that? We pride ourselves for being more cunning than the gages, so how can you be proud of yourself if you beg on your knees when the gages walk by? No Roma will beg in the street in Brazil. You can go all over the country, and you won’t find not even one who does that. So Brazilian officials just send Romanian Roma back to Romania. I understand they are very poor and discriminated there, but we can’t have them staying here ruining the image of Romani people for us. It’s enough that we have to deal with the Calon who are poor and live in the wild and make Ciganos look bad. Romanian Roma will just have to learn to behave more properly if they want to get anywhere in life. They need to learn to make friends with authorities and turn things to their advantage like us.
The concern that Romanian Romani beggars may ruin Ciganos’ image in Brazilian society is pervasive amongst the local Roma. Nonetheless, anthropologist Moonen finds that so far Romologists have been unable to reduce prejudices and social marginalization of Ciganos in Europe nor in Brazil. Gypsies remain Europe’s largest and most impoverished minority, and in comparison Brazilian Ciganos consider themselves fortunate not to represent the lowest rungs in society, although they still encounter prejudices and are immersed in both positive and negative stereotype they sometimes have also internalized. These myths appear in their competing claims for authenticity, in the ambiguity of their oral histories, stories of origin and secrecy.

39. Mio Vassitch’s Cigana party and article on the topic: “Ciganos try to find their identity”
40. Kalderashi wearing traditional skirt, veil and gold coins in her braids – Romania
CHAPTER 2. ROMANI SLANGUAGES

Language, identification and access
Myths of origin and linguistic tracings
Calon and the importance of orality
Roma between literacy and orality
International Romani language website

Language, identification and access

My interlocutors in Rio and in Sao Paulo talked to me in Portuguese interspersed with a bit of Romanes, and treated me as a well-respected, if not entirely trustworthy guest. In Sao Paulo for example, Cornelia, her husband Minu, and I sat down for hours at the round table next to the large crystalline pool on the rooftop patio of their two-story villa. Green eyed, dark-skinned, bleached-blond Cornelia kept pouring us hot tea from a large silver samovar, a tradition of hospitality she explained with grandiose gestures and pride: “Our great-grandparents came from Russia through Yugoslavia, and this is how they showed pakiv. Our grandparents were just little children back then, but they remember and they taught us that this is how to show hospitality the proper way.”

Cornelia said she inherited her impressively large samovar from her parents, who imported it from Russia. Serving tea from the samovar was a token of “authentic” hospitality among the Roma. At Mio Vasite’s house in Rio there was also a Russian samovar on display just as in Mirian Stanescon’s apartment. As we sipped several cups the conversation flowed with ease. Cornelia and her family spoke a particular Vlax dialect of Romanes similar to the one I had learned in Romania. My linguistic skill enabled me to communicate with interlocutors more intimately than if I were just a gagi. I believe what also won them over was my “traditional” Cigana dance, similar to a Romanian wedding dance step, which I showed off when they put on a music tape with songs in Romanes recorded in Sao Paulo. They told me that this music was
strictly for the purpose of circulating at Roma’s festive gatherings, yet they made me a copy of it. Later I also copied the tape and offered it to my interlocutors in Rio de Janeiro as a gift. Like the language, the music in Romanes seemed secret as well.

I asked about the need for secrecy and received different answers all leading to the same conclusion. Most interlocutors replied that without being able to speak their language *Ciganos* would not be able to carry on commercial dealings as they do currently. Cornelia, a successful fortuneteller, said: “Romanes is our secret language, what we use if we want to talk about someone without them understanding us. And we use the *gage*’s language to negotiate with them. It’s a very clever way to negotiate.” As she said this she scrutinized me with her piercing yet warm and heavy-lidded dark-green eyes. Cornelia’s husband Minu, a big-bellied real-estate agent, nodded agreement. This method exoticises and obscures intentionality while discussion tactics in front of clients.

*Ciganos* in Brazil, whether they were Holocaust survivors or not, believed it necessary to hide a great deal of their lifestyle from mainstream awareness. My Calon interlocutors addressed me in Portuguese and insisted that I should not speak their dialect. In the outskirts of Sao Paulo, Dona Herante the old matriarch that boasted of having twenty grandchildren and great-grandchildren said to me firmly: “A dia nak nosso idioma!” (Don’t speak our language! – *a dia nak* means *don’t speak* in Romanes and *nosso idioma* means our language in Portuguese). The fact that she addressed me mixing her dialect with Portuguese reflects the ambivalence with which I generally was received. Since my interlocutors knew I could understand some of the words, it was easier sometimes for them to speak to me mixing their dialect with Portuguese, the way they normally spoke to each other. However, if they wanted to keep me out of the conversation, they would speak strictly their dialect-based slang in a fast, slurred way I found
impossible to follow. I also was unfortunately not allowed to tape any interviews with most interlocutors, also due to this fear of exposing their language to other *gage*.

This language surveillance is integral to identity negotiations through constant differentiation of a space of socialization that has a defined inside and outside space. As mentioned in the previous chapter Lévi-Strauss suggests sociality involves the exchange of goods, women and words (1949: 62-63). However, in Brazil Romanies made a distinct point to limit their socialization with non-Romanies so that exchanges only included merchandise and *gage* words, yet excluded Romani women, values and Romanes words. As Cigana Jordana Aristich writes, “it is forbidden to teach our language to non-Ciganos. All authentic Ciganos know this prohibition” (1995: 33 trans. mine). Like Aristich, Cigana Sally Liechocki writes, “My book talks about that which can be talked about; other things will always be a big secret for other people and should not be revealed. Non-Ciganos will have to stay ignorant about certain things” (1999: 50 trans. mine). However, Cigana Claudia Camargo de Campos suggests this must change to improve relationships with the majority society: “My people have to become aware of the enormous need that we must show who we really are. The more we hide, the more we leave room for false ideas about us” (1996: 99 trans. mine). Yet among my interlocutors all unanimously agreed that the unwritten rule about language secrecy must be respected.

Soon after my successful visit with Cornelia and Minu, his brother Cabrito said that he would bring me to several Roma weddings and birthday parties where I would get a chance to mingle, dance, and impress others with my various language skills. After all word spreads easily in such a community where oral history and gossip prevail, and speaking other languages is considered a very desirable and profitable skill. Indeed all *Ciganos* in Brazil speak Portuguese fluently although the majority are illiterate, and a few have accents that indicate their childhood
background as Spanish, Portuguese, Chilean, Argentinean, or from another region in Brazil. Many speak more than one language to target tourists as clients as well. The most daring Ciganas travel abroad for months at a time in order to read fortunes.

At wedding parties in Sao Paulo I quickly became popular as a partial-Cigana from Romania who spoke fluent English, Romanian and Portuguese, and conversational Romanian, French, Italian and Spanish. I was asked by several older Ciganas to accompany them on their travels abroad as a translator so we could read fortunes together and divvy up the profits. Although I politely declined, I became a bit of an apprentice and found it easy to communicate on a wide variety of topics that would have been kept secret otherwise. I mostly spoke Portuguese with my interlocutors, yet it was me-as-a-speaker-of-Romanes that gained trust and established a connection with these people.
42. Romani language teachers in training and me (top left) – Romania (August 2004)

43. Romani men’s *gagi* wives work as fortunetellers along with other *Ciganas* – Rio
I had studied Romanes in Romania with linguistics professor Gheorghe Sarău, and even though his standardized version differed from any vernacular I encountered in the field, it still allowed me various degrees of approximation with my interlocutors. It was more difficult to understand Calon since my standard resembled that of the Roma. In Sao Paulo, the Roma I visited daily thought of me as gagi at first and than as a distant cousin, and said I spoke better Romanes than their own children. A few elders took great pleasure in telling me stories entirely in their mother tongue, stories which were lost on the younger generations. However, these welcoming families warned me to hide my knowledge of Romanes from other Roma because they might be offended since they would perceive me as a gagi and only Ciganos should speak it. In Rio de Janeiro many spoke to each other around me in Romanes and were curious to hear me read from the textbooks I had brought from Romania, but they usually addressed me in
Portuguese to indicate that I was still considered in many ways an outsider, and that whatever I spoke reflected that I was “book-smart” but not “one of them.” In these cases establishing a personal connection eased the tension.

_Ciganos_ of all _vitsas_ marginalize the highly educated as well as half- _Ciganos_ in general because they usually prioritize the language of the majoritarian society. One such marginalized highly educated half- _Cigano_ is Nelson Pires Filho, a 55-year-old half-Romani lawyer, author and entrepreneur living in Sao Paulo. I met Nelson at his store where he sells sundry “sacred” objects such as Chinese jade bracelets and Irish good luck charms along with colorful pottery and clothing. “These objects are not sacred to me when I sell them, they become sacred when the people who buy them invest faith in them, then they carry a certain energy,” he explained calmly as Cabrito and I followed him through the store. Cabrito had brought me there specifically to meet Nelson, and the three of us sat down in a large, cozy office upstairs. The main wall was adorned with all of Nelson’s diplomas and certifications among which that of Reiki Master was most striking: “I don’t like showing them off, but people say to leave them up on the wall, it gives credibility.” I tried counting all the displayed diplomas but gave up shortly afterwards. Indeed, his struggle for legitimation in various aspects was real.

Nelson talked to me at length in Portuguese while I jotted down notes, prefacing with his impression that a people’s strength is in their roots: “Uma nação existe fortalecida no seu rais.” He knew that Roma had been enslaved in the now-Romanian territories, and believed that they had invented Romanes as a secret linguistic code to cope with slavery. I shared my view that “tradition” is continuously negotiated in the present and that Romanes is much too similar to Sankrit to be considered an entirely European invention, and he gifted me one of his books, eager to “exchange knowledge.”
Nelson along with all my interlocutors agreed that speaking Romanes is strong evidence of *Ciganidade* (Gypsiness) in Brazil. For example, *Ciganos* instantly recognized recent Roma migrants from Romania to Brazil as ethnically similar to them when they accidentally overheard them speaking a similar dialect of Romanes. Cabrito explained that language is the key for ethnic identification in lieu of official documentation: “We don’t have documents to prove we are Roma. We all speak Romanes and that’s our identifier. We’re afraid we’re losing our language if children don’t learn it from us. Nowadays children go to school and learn Portuguese and refuse to learn Romanes. Even my generation speaks interspersed with Portuguese because we don’t have our own words for many things that we want to talk about.” Although their vocabulary has been partially lost or replaced with borrowings from the mainstream language, the elders’s dialect remains a primary identifying factor for most *Ciganos* in Brazil.

Yet like Cabrito, many complained their young are not using the “mother-tongue” as much as the elders: “it is increasingly difficult for the mothers to pass it down to their children especially since nowadays they attend school and focus on learning Portuguese.” In the olden days families were more nomadic, school attendance was sparse, and the focus was on life within the community. In fact most elders are still illiterate and discourage the youth from attending school too long, fearing cultural loss.

Institutionalized education does not have to represent language loss. Professor Gheorghe Sarău standardized Romanes and created Romanian legislation dating from 2007 and 2008 for the implementation of Romani-specific courses in language and history in Romanian public schools (Sarău 2010: 26-27). Thus, the Romanian government had recently made available in qualifying public schools both the Romanes language and Romani history as optional courses for interested students. The official textbooks and bibliographic materials can be found on the
Ministry of Education and Scientific Research website. Other countries have yet to implement such minority-specific educational practices. Recently the Council of Europe declared the 5th of November as the International Romani Language Day and organized international seminars on policy development towards incorporating Roma history and language into national school curricula (International Seminar 2014, web). I will elaborate in chapter 6.

Previous seminars served as a foundation for these new developments. The seminar “A curriculum Framework for Romani” organized by the Language Policy Division in Strasbourg in May 2007 involved 10 countries. A follow-up seminar “Teaching Romani curriculum Framework for Romani and European Language Portfolio” held in Strasbourg November 2008 involved 17 countries (Council of Europe). A “Curriculum Framework for Romani” or CFR was developed to support the teaching of this minority language, supplemented by a “Handbook for Teachers” and “European Language Portfolio Models (for age groups 6-11 and 11-16).” I suggested to my interlocutors they should bring this to the attention of their national government to introduce similar courses in their local public schools. Yet most were reluctant. Cabrito, the concerned activist and minority representative, replied:

Roma here are not interested in studying Romanes in school nor from any textbook. Grandfathers teach it to grandchildren. That’s how it’s always been done. Plus we don’t want these textbooks to be available to the gage in Brazil. There are too many Gage here who pretend to be Ciganos. They want to read fortunes and be more Gypsy than us!

Cabrito thus feared the competition of non-Ciganos for Ciganidade or Gypsy-ness in the public eye. Gypsy impersonators in Brazil call themselves Ciganos espirituais or “spiritual Gypsies” as Gerreiro de Faria and Pereira state: “Among the mediums who incarnate Gypsy entities, there are those who via their link with these entities, assert a certain physical or spiritual kinship, proclaiming themselves descendants of Gypsies in a way or another” (2013: 52 trans. mine). I elaborate on alternative Gypsies in chapter 5.
These impersonators usually represent competition for Ciganas in the business of fortunetelling although they know little about the culture. My interlocutors feared that potential impersonators might use an opportunity to learn Romanes in order to pass as part of the ethnic group or to steal secrets of the trade by becoming an insider to their circles. This reveals a significant degree of insecurity in the fact that the Roma do not choose to appear as Ciganos in public so they may be outdone by “false ones.” Language access represents vulnerability, stolen identity and stolen secrets – both cultural and secrets of the trade. However, since Romanes use is weakening among youths in Brazil, parents agreed that most could benefit from learning the standard and envisioned ethnic-specific cultural centers with Romani staff rather mother tongue courses in public schools.

**Myths of origin and linguistic tracings**

Romanies in Brazil boast of a richly elaborated cosmology in which their ethnic group appeared as pure and purifying the world. In Rio de Janeiro, the old Rom Mario made a terrific narrator, his raspy voice counting numerous stories with hypnotic, lulling rhythm (paramici in Romanes, lendas in Portuguese). While he was holding little Lela, his 3-year-old granddaughter, Mario told me a myth of origin (as in a sacred story) passed from his great-grandparents. He said this myth was popular among Romanies who came from Russia:

Our people came from the Sun. We understand the mystery of the Sun, and the Fire and the Moon better than anyone. We walk all over the Earth, but we are its link to these celestial bodies. Our favorite colors are red and gold because we use our clothes as offerings to the Fire energies. We eat red apples, red grapes and dates, we love sweet-smelling flowers and fruit-bearing trees and cinnamon perfume, and we give these as offerings with the Fire of candles to purify ourselves. This is why the old Ciganos gathered around the Fire every night when they travelled with tents… Our family also did this when I was little. It was our offering to talk, to laugh and to dance together to purify the world. Our solidarity was our energy for its purification.
In this myth of origin the mystical connection of *Ciganos* to the energy of the celestial body of the Sun serves as motive behind rituals such as making offerings of candles, flowers and fruit, and of gathering around a campfire, rituals that have sometimes become obsolete for some of my sedentarized Roma interlocutors. Yet Mario’s story echoed the previous generations’ self-image as originating not from a place on earth, but rather from a transcendental place literally above the rest of humanity. It also depicted family solidarity as well as dancing as endowed with magical powers to cleanse the energies of the universe. Thus, in this cosmology being *Cigano* is being a sacred energetic being empowered to connect the mundane with the transcendental by self-purification. This leads back to the belief that time spent with one’s family recharges one’s spiritual batteries, whereas time spent with the *gage* drains them:

> Time spent in the non-Romani world (the *jado*) drains spiritual energy or *dji*. […] One’s spiritual batteries can only be recharged by spending time in an all-Romani environment – in the normal course of events, in family homes. It is in this area of spiritual and physical wellbeing (*baxt*) that the Indian origin of our Romani people is most clearly seen (Hancock 2003: 75).

Similarly when it came to speaking Romanes, my interlocutors described it as a need inherent to being *Cigano* to replenish one’s energy or otherwise feel depleted going about in the *gage* world. Ianca said, “We live now dispersed in houses scattered all over Rio. We don’t live together like our elderly did, or like I did when I was young. So we have to make daily visits to one another, to sit at the table and speak Romanes.” Other Roma also reported that not speaking *Romanes* for a few days felt oppressive. Dina the recluse said even though she was Xoraxani, she had to speak with her Matchuwaya neighbors because they were the only *Ciganos* near her: *Trebul amen te dav duma Romanes*. (We need to speak Romanes). I was sitting in Auntie’s large courtyard with Ianca and Dina, both of whom lived just across the street. This was a common occurrence since they had been neighbors for over a decade. Although I mentioned India they were oblivious of
their ancestors’ origins beyond the Balkan region of ex-Yugoslavia or Russia. Most interlocutors claimed that Egypt was their land of origin, but qualified this as a hearsay myth and not as a story their elders had passed down the generations. Ianca said, “They say we came from the Orient. I may have been an Oriental princess in a past life who knows.” I mentioned that most academics believe that Romanies’ ancestors belong to a diaspora of groups that left India’s northwest region about a thousand years ago. An exact departure date is impossible, yet the following hypothesis still stands: “The Romani people (Roma, or Gypsies) are of northern Indian origin, having moved out of that area some time between AD 800 and AD 950, migrating westwards into Europe and arriving there some time after AD 1100” (Hancock 1987: 7). Most of my Calon and Roma interlocutors felt no relationship to India and stated their predecessors originally came from Egypt, or France, or Eastern Europe, or Russia. Other Brazilians also believed Ciganos came from Egypt, a myth that had been brought to the New World along with the first Portuguese colonizers and has been popularized by fictional literature and national television to present day. Scholars nowadays suggest linguistic studies debunk this:

    Luckily for historians, Rromanes – the Gypsy language – is in itself one of the most essential tools of historical research. Migrations left linguistic traces. Rromanes contains Persian, Armenian, Greek, and Southern Slavic lexemes, from which, especially for the latter ones, one can deduce that the Rroma passed through these countries. In several places, such as in our argument against the Egyptian origins of the Rroma – a myth spread by the first Roma arriving in western Europe -, we will argue along linguistic lines that the absence of Arabic loanwords in Rromanes, except through the Turkish, shows that the Rroma were never in contact with the Arab culture. Thus, they could never have been in Egypt, at least after the seventh century, that is, after the Arab conquest of that country (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 7).

    Thus, the lack of Arabic loanwords in Romanes disproves the myth that the Roma came through the Arabic-speaking regions of Egypt. European polyglot Donald Kenrick, fluent in approximately thirty languages and able to translate from over sixty languages including six dialects of Romanes, has researched and written extensively on their history based on a linguistic
approach. He insists that the original predecessors or proto-Roma lived in the imperial city of Kannauj, in today’s Rajasthan, where Muslim raids carried out by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni between 1001 and 1027 captured slaves from “all walks of life” including “high-born individuals” which “could explain how they were so easily introduced to important and influential people such as kings, emperors and popes when they reached Europe” (Kenrick 2004: 107). However, Tcherenkov and Laedrich contest this myth of displacement according to which between 1001 and 1027, Mahmud of Ghazni, a Muslim king of a region in present-day Afghanistan, attacked India and engulfed northern Pakistan (Punjab) within his empire: “In this theory, the European Rroma are the descendants of Indian slaves that were taken during these battles and conquest, and the term Gadzo, which Rroma use to denote non-Rroma, originated in the name of the city. We will see later that this option seems highly improbable as it is in contradiction of an earlier presence of Rroma in both Armenia – documented below – and the Byzantine Empire as early as 1057 but probably much earlier” (Tcherenkov et al. 2004: 17).

Instead Tcherenkov and Laedrich suggest the original displacement took place during an earlier military occupation with the demand for importing musicians and merchants into Persia:

Concerning the Rroma, the first and oldest source – or rather anecdotal evidence – about their migration mentions that the Sassanid king Varhan V Gor (420-438) asked the Indian king Shangul to send him about 4,000 to 20,000 musicians. The classical Persian poet Firdausi (940-1020) wrote about this exodus in his epic work Shah Nameh – the book of kings, completed in 1010 – as well as about the name of these musicians: Luri. Up until now, the name of Luri has survived in Persia and in central Asia under the form Luli. In view of the trades these Luris were engaged in, it seems plausible to argue that some of these deported musicians are the origin of the Rroma outside of India. Historically, this period, the fifth century corresponds to the time where India was subjected to attacks of the “White Huns” or Hephthalites and where northwestern Indian was under Sassanid domination, explaining a possible migration or forced resettlement of the Rroma ancestors (Tcherenkov et al. 2004: 17).

Based on writings by the classical Persian poet Firdausi, the first Luri musicians were relocated from India as demanded by the invading Muslim king. Whatever the reasons for displacement,
Romologist Donald Kenrick believes linguistic tracings significantly demonstrate that, “a large number of different people migrated westwards from India, through Persia and on to the shores of the Mediterranean,” where they intermarried “forming into a people there using the name Dom, and that many then moved into Europe; their descendants are the Romany Gypsies of today” (2004: 10). Furthermore Kenrick insists on the existence of “Domari, the language of the Gypsies of the Middle East,” a language of Indian origin whose grammar, sounds and vocabulary are similar to today’s Punjabi and Rajasthani. He states:

According to scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society this is what happened. The ancestors of the Nawwar and the Romanies of Europe left Indian at the same time speaking the same language. Some of them stayed in Persia and the Middle East. The language was affected by Persian (Farsi) and Armenian in particular. Early in the twentieth century the compiler of a comprehensive grammar and dictionary of the Gypsies of Wales - John Sampson - had a simple explanation for the arrival of the Romanies in Europe. This was based on a comparison of the phonetics of Romani and Indian languages. According to Sampson, a company of the caste known as Dom left India, and spent some time in Persia and the borders of the Mediterranean. The D of Dom is a variety of ‘d’ pronounced with the tongue turned upwards typical of Indian languages). Many Dom settled in the Middle East and are known as Dom to this day. Others of the company then moved in to Armenia. Again some settled and these are known as Lom - the initial D of their name changing to L under the influence of Armenian. The rest moved into Europe where the D became R (still with tongue turned up!) and later a guttural sound - or merged with normal ‘r’ and so we have the people called the Rom or Romanies of Europe (Kenrick 2001, web).

Thus, Romanies are people who moved into Europe and lost the use of the D sound made with the tongue turned upwards which is common in Indian languages, whereas the Dom or Domari are those who remained in the region of Persia and still use this sound to this day, according to this theory which was first proposed by John Sampson. However, more recent scholars argue the Dom and the Rom left India at different times in several waves of migrations. Since Domari preserves the neuter gender for nouns whereas Romanes has only feminine and masculine, “these scholars think these Dom left India before the neuter disappeared in many though not all of the related languages in India itself. The Roma would have left later after the neuter had
disappeared” (Kenrick 2001:1). Despite disagreements on initial exodus, scholars agree there are nomadic/semi-nomadic tribes in northern India and in the Middle East who resemble European Romanies by practicing similar crafts and speaking similar languages. Kenrick rejects subsuming all such nomads under one umbrella term such as Gypsies: “A few are distantly related to Europe’s Romanies, others not at all. All have been described as ‘Gypsies’ by travelers and writers and this is a more convenient term than the word ‘peripatetic’ used by sociologists and anthropologists.

In Europe too there are groups who once traveled or still do so who are not of Indian origin such as the Woonwagenbewoners in Holland, the Karrner in Austria and the Irish Travellers” (Kenrick 2004: 82). Kenrick lists several related yet distinct tribes: 1) the Pukiwas nomads in Pakistan, 2) the Narikuravar whose “main occupation today is catching birds,” 3) the “industrial” nomads of Afghanistan who speak a dialect from north India called Inku and who call themselves Jalali, Pikraj, Shadibaz, and Vangawala, but locals call them Jat, which is a pejorative term, 4) the Banjara who “took an active part in the Second World Romany Congress in Geneva in 1978,” and 5) the Sapera or snake charmers, also known as Kalbelia who “live mainly in Rajasthan (Kenrick 76-80). Sapera dancers have visited Europe several times and are featured in Tony Gatlif’s film Lacho Drom (1993). In 1984 when the Indian High Commission invited British Gypsies to a showing of a documentary on the Sapera, the intrigued viewers immediately recognized the whistles used to call dogs, ethnic-specific whistles which had survived in their folk memory for nearly a millennium since their ancestors’ departure from today’s region of northwestern India.

Kenrick lists several other merchant nomads found in Central Asia and in the Middle East as Romani predecessors, distinguishing them from the “pastoral nomads with their sheep and
cattle” who are non-related. Some of the industrial nomadic predecessors already practiced blacksmithing and wipe-tinning during their time in Persia according to scholars. This is indicated by the fact that their language acquired from Persian “a small number of specialist words connected with trade and manufacture” such as archichi meaning lead and kotor meaning piece (Kenrick 31). Romanes has few borrowed Persian words indicating these nomads travelled relatively fast while offering their services as tinkers to local agriculturalists. Once they reached Armenia, the linguistic borrowing there became heavier, and it may have been the first crossroad where such groups from India diverged: “it probably represents the first actual crossroad since non-European Rroma, such as the Middle Eastern ones, most probably separated into two different groups during their stay in Armenia” (Tcherenkov et al. 2004: 21). The absence of latter Armenian phonetic changes dates an early exodus for both groups, around the 9th century:

Although J. Greppin does not date this phonetic change, another scholar, A. S. Garibian, notes that the passage from the phoneme L to Gh [for the barred L] started in the eighth century and was completed by the end of the tenth century. […] As an example, consider the Romanes momeli, phol, and thalik. All these words contain the phoneme L which in nowadays Armenian has changed [to being pronounced as a Gh]. Since Rromanes does not hint at these changes in its Armenian vocabulary, this points at an early departure of Rroma from Armenia, probably in the ninth century or even earlier (25).

Therefore, since Romanes lacks the change that occurred in the Armenian language, this serves as evidence that Romanies left that region before the change occurred.

Similarly linguistic borrowings from Greek indicate the Romanies’ presence in this region as the next migratory step. The next phonetic switches in Romanes most probably arose during the presence of the proto-Roma or Ur-Roma in the Byzantine Empire as indicated by heavy borrowings from Greek: “This can also easily be inferred by the wealth of Greek lexemes in Rromanes, these being largely absent from the other dialects. The first such switch is the change of an initial v to a b in European Rromanes. The second, as a further development is the
switch of the intervocal $m$ to $v$” (27-28). From there Romanes shows considerable Southern Slavic influence to various degrees reflecting the diaspora’s divergent migration paths in Europe, and despite the “homogeneous base on which all Romanes dialects are built” (31). Brazilian Roma who say that their great-grandparents came from Russia, the former Yugoslavia, Slovakia or Romania speak dialects more heavily inflected by Slavic languages than Calon dialect.

The period of time spent in Europe differs among the ancestors of present-day Brazilian Calon and Roma. Estimated dates of arrival in Europe also differ according to available historical documents. Hancock explains that their common predecessors may have been present in the Byzantine Empire before the 1300s yet locals confused them with other groups of heretics whom they called Athinganoi, which is linked to the today’s terminology such as Țigan in Romanian, tsigane in French and Cigano in Portuguese:

In the Byzantine Empire, which lasted for eleven centuries, Gypsies constituted an oppressed caste, although perhaps not as slaves. This was due in part to their having been regarded as Muslims in a Christian empire (and later as Christians, when the Ottomans occupied the region). Relationships with non-Gypsies appear in fact to have been more cordial during this period than they were to become later in Europe. Others were confused with members of the heretic sect (Hancock 1987: 10).

Upon arrival on present-day Romanian territories these Țigani were enslaved. Most likely the merchant or musician tribes were captured during military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, which inspired the use of war prisoners as forced laborers. Documents attesting their presence were found by Romanian historian Hasdeu: “[…] in the archives of a monastery in Tismana, in a part of Little Wallachia called Oltenia. One of these, bearing the date 1387 and signed by Mircea […] the Great, indicates that Gypsies had been in Wallachia for almost a century before that. Another of the documents was in the form of a receipt for some slaves given to the monastery at Prizren by the King of Serbia […] dated 1348” (Hancock 1987: 11).
The Romanian public remains largely unaware of slavery on their territories since history textbooks have been omitting this phenomenon. Nowadays Romani history is covered in public schools only as an optional course for students of this ethnicity. Recently a Romanian director, Radu Jude, covered the subject of Romani slavery in *Aferim!* (2015). Set in 1835, the film represents a harsh lesson in history. It won the 2015 Silver Berlin Bear for Best Director award, and was also presented in the Tribeca Film Festival this year. Most Romanian critics and younger audiences embraced it, while the national Orthodox Church denounced it as profane since the film depicts priests disparaging Romanies and Jews. The film is based on historical documents as evidence of mainstream society’s prejudices.

Romani interlocutors in Brazil share no collective memory of such enslavement although some believe their ancestors came from Romania and indeed use numerous words from my mother tongue. After abolition in 1864 many Țiganī travelled westwards fearing a relapse into slavery. Since the early 1500s Calon from Portugal had already been living in the New World along with the colonizers and spoke a dialect of Romanes that reflected their particular migration path and heavy Portuguese and Spanish inflections. Poverty and the World Wars along with the Holocaust motivated European Roma to leave for the Americas arriving to Brazil in several waves of migration between the late-1800s and the first half of the 1900s. These initial Roma migrants did not speak Portuguese at first, and also did not understand the local Calon dialect. In fact Romanes as a unitary language is a rather recent concept that enjoys great popularity among academics but not among the speakers of its various divergent dialects. In 1753-1754 Stefan Vályi, a student of theology in Holland brought awareness to the similarity between Romanes which he overheard spoken by a group of Roma in the street and Hindi which he was studying at the time. His efforts to demonstrate a connection to India led linguists into the study of Romani
language and history (Gropper 1975: 1). Other linguists took his lead afterwards, thus developing the field now known as Romology:

In 1782, a German, Jakob Rüdiger, showed by comparison with Sanskrit, that the Rom language has Indian roots. One year later, another German, Heinrich Grellmann of the University of Göttingen, did an extensive study of the Rroma language and deduced that the Rroma had come from India. Much later, in 1844, a fundamental work appeared *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*, The Gypsies of Europe and Asia, written by yet another German, August Friedrich Pott. Pott is the founder of modern Romologie and of Rroma linguistics (Tcherenkov and Laedrich 2004: 11-12).

Nowadays a primarily linguistic perspective becomes problematic if it is used to claim that all Roma people have Indian origins since it does not account for the divergent migratory paths and dialect formations. In the past decade Romani linguistic pluralism is enjoying more popularity among academics since dialects stubbornly remain the primary choice of their speakers despite attempts to implement educational practices in standard Romanes. Peter Bakker and Hristo Kyuchukov (2013:10) compiled a list of dialects with help from many experts in the field. The list recognizes four main groups of Romanes in Europe: Northern, Central, Balkan and Vlax along with unclassified mixed dialects:

**Northern** – A very diverse set of isolated varieties and branches. Spoken in Western, Southern and Northern Europe and also in the Baltic states, Poland, Belarus and North Russia. The dialects of Poland, the Baltic and North Russia are somewhat more closely related, and sometimes called “Northeastern”, Abruzzi and Calabrese Romani (Italy), Baltic Romani (Baltic states, Belarus), Lotfitko/Latvian Romani , Kaalo of Finland (Finland, Sweden), Polska Roma, Russian Romani/Xaladytko (Russia, Baltic states), Welsh Romani (extinct), Sinti-Manouche (Germany, France, Austria, Netherlands, Belgium, North Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Russia)

**Central** – A not so diverse group, split into a northern and a southern branch. North Central: East Slovak Romani (Slovakia, Czech Republic), West Slovak Romani , South Polish Romani (Poland), Gurvari. South Central: Romungro (Hungary), Burgenland (Austria) , Vend (West Hungary), Prekmurje (North Slovenia)

**Balkan** – The Balkan dialects are spoken in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Roumania, Bulgaria and Iran. There are three branches: North Balkan, South Balkan I and South Balkan II. North Balkan: Bugurdñi (Kosovo, Albania),
Drindari (Bulgaria), Kalajdži (Bulgaria, Turkey). South Balkan: Arli (Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece), Erli Kyrymitika/ Krim Prizren, Rumeli (extinct?), Sepecides (Greece, Turkey), Spoitor (Roumania), Ursari (Roumania, South Russia), Xoraxani

**Vlax** – The Vlax group is split in two branches, Northern Vlax (Romania, Hungary, and from there all over the world) and Southern Vlax (Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Albania). Northern Vlax: Kalderash (Roumania), Lovari (Hungary, South Poland, South Slovakia, Eastern Austria), Cerhari (Hungary), Churari. Southern Vlax: Ajia Varvara (Athens), Gurbet (Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia), Dămbazi (Kosovo, Serbia), Italian Xoraxane (Italy)

**Unclassified** – Havati/Dolenjski shares traits with Northern, Central and Balkan dialects, and deviates from all. Spoken in Northeast Italy and Slovenia.

**Mixed dialects** – The varieties spoken by the Romani-Travelers in England, Norway, Sweden and Spain are intertwined varieties, in which a variable number of Romani words are combined with the grammar of the local language. There are printed publications in the following varieties: Britain (Angloromani), Spain (Calo), Norway (Rommani), and Sweden (Rommano) (Bakker et al. 2013:10).

The Association of Gypsy Culture in Brazil – *Associação da Cultural Cigana no Brasil* – ACCB published on its website an outline of Brazilian Romanies, namely Rom, Sinti and Calon, with further subgroups and family names found in Brazil: Mineshti, Macovitch, Demitro, Jonesti, Frunkalesti, Damoni, Jonikoni, Poroni, Bedoni, Kirilesti, and so on. According to these two charts my Roma interlocutors spoke the Vlax dialects: *Northern Vlax* in the case of those with ancestors coming from Romania, like Mirian Stanescon, and *Southern Vlax* among those with ancestors coming from Serbia and the former Yugoslavia. Among Calon the dialect was unanimously *Calo* with regional differences among those who had lived longer in Bahia for example maintaining certain ways of pronunciation that told of their historical travels. Some of the Kalderasha Roma families on the chart provided by the Association of Cigana Culture in Brazil belong to other *vitsas* who derive their name from their region of ancestral origin before arriving to Brazil. For example they call themselves Moldovian *Ciganos*, Greek *Ciganos*, Hungarian *Ciganos*, and Xoraxane (Turkish *Ciganos*) like my interlocutor Dina. There are
additional Roma sub-groups present in Brazil in smaller numbers such as the Lovara – traditionally moneylenders (love means money), the Churara or knife-makers (churi means knife), and the Boyasha or circus Ciganos like Dina’s family on her father’s side. Each of these subgroups speaks its own form of Vlax dialect in Brazil. Most can understand each other easily although some of the linguistic borrowings differ. Yet most of my Roma interlocutors said they could not understand the dialects spoken by Sinti or Calon. The subgroups are indeed farther removed from each other along their migratory trails, and thus dialects differ to a greater degree.

45. Map of approximate Romani language dialects usage in Europe

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Brazilian Romanies by subgroups and their last names (ACCB website)

- ROM
  - Kalderásha
    - Serbijája (Sérvios)
    - Minéshti
      - Demítro
      - x, y, ...........
    - Márcovîch
      - x, y, ...........
    - outros
      - x, y, ...........
  - Papinéshti
  - Jonéshti
  - Frunkaléshti
  - outros
  - Moldovája (Moldávios)
    - Demóni
    - Jonikóni
    - Poróni
    - outros
  - Grekúrja (Gregos)
    - Bedóni
    - Kiritéshti
    - Shandoroní
    - outros
  - Vungrika (Húngaros)
    - Jonéshti
    - outros
    - Xoraxája ou Xoraxáné ou Horahané (Turcos)
    - outros
  - Lovára
    - ............
    - ............
  - Churára
    - ............
    - ............
  - Machwáya
    - ............
    - ............
  - Boyásha (Ciganos de Circo)
    - ............
    - ............
  - outros

- SINTI (ou MANUSH)
  - Gáchhane (Alemães)
    - etc.
  - Estrekárja (Austriacos)
    - etc.
  - Valshtikë (Franceses)
  - Piemontáleri (Piemonteses)
  - Lombardos
  - Marquigianos
  - outros

- KALÉ (ou GITANOS ou CIGANOS)
  - Catalanes
    - etc.
  - Andaluzes
  - Portugueses
Calon and the importance of orality

Calon are the most visible Ciganos in Brazil because their women, known in their dialect as Calins, usually read palms in public places such as parks, beaches and popular outdoor markets. Non-Ciganos usually do not know of their self-denomination as Calon since they present themselves only as Ciganos to outsiders. In Rio de Janeiro it did not take me long before street vendors directed me to seek them out on Copacabana beach on a Saturday afternoon because that is when they usually come to read fortunes. Unlike most Roma, Calins display their Ciganidade/Gypsiness by donning so-called traditional brightly colored dresses and by ostensibly speaking to each other in their dialect. In more than one circumstance I met these women in the public markets while they were looking for clients.

After I explained I was a researcher interested in their ways of life, the women offered to bring me to their community who lived in tents on the city outskirts. Both in Rio and in Sao Paulo the Calins were friendly once I told them that I may be part-Cigana, was born in Romania, and had struggled to learn some Romanes. They talked to me in Portuguese, and I admittedly understood little of their dialect. Only the elderly speak the Calon dialect fluently, while the younger generations speak it heavily interspersed with Portuguese. This was easy to assess since all the generations within an extended family lived together. Each tent was home to one adult couple and their unmarried children, and there were up to thirty tents clustered together forming each settlement. I visited several of these temporary settlements on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. They considered themselves semi-nomadic since every several years they moved to another region of Brazil. Over the course of many visits and conversations I was able to pick up some of the words that Calon use regularly. Below is a list of words my interlocutors used in their daily vernacular interspersed with Portuguese:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaló</th>
<th>Standard Romanes</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalão</td>
<td>Kalon</td>
<td>Cigano</td>
<td>Gypsy man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalin</td>
<td>Kalin</td>
<td>Cigana</td>
<td>Gypsy woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadjom</td>
<td>Gadjo</td>
<td>não-Cigano</td>
<td>non-Gypsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buxno</td>
<td>Gadjo</td>
<td>não-Cigano</td>
<td>non-Gypsy man, rooster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buxni</td>
<td>Gadji</td>
<td>não-Cigana</td>
<td>non-Gypsy woman, chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaxni</td>
<td>kaxni</td>
<td>galinha</td>
<td>chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rro</td>
<td>rrom</td>
<td>homen</td>
<td>man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rrui</td>
<td>rromni</td>
<td>mulher</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hermingiom</td>
<td>rrom</td>
<td>homen casado</td>
<td>married man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hermingin</td>
<td>rromni</td>
<td>mulher casada</td>
<td>married woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hermiginhar</td>
<td>kerel abia</td>
<td>casar</td>
<td>to wed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dililo</td>
<td>dilo</td>
<td>doido</td>
<td>crazy man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dilih</td>
<td>dili</td>
<td>doida</td>
<td>crazy woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dais</td>
<td>daj</td>
<td>mãe</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bato</td>
<td>dad</td>
<td>pai</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ripa</td>
<td>phen/ phej</td>
<td>irmão/ irmã</td>
<td>brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shavó</td>
<td>chavo</td>
<td>menino</td>
<td>boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chavovo</td>
<td>chavorro</td>
<td>menino pequeno</td>
<td>little boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shavin</td>
<td>chej</td>
<td>menina</td>
<td>girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shukar</td>
<td>shukar</td>
<td>bonito</td>
<td>beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>babano</td>
<td>shukar</td>
<td>bonito</td>
<td>beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pashovali</td>
<td>pakivali</td>
<td>moça virgem</td>
<td>virgin girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nashadinha</td>
<td>xasardi</td>
<td>perdida já</td>
<td>non-virgin unmarried girl, lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shej bari</td>
<td>bori</td>
<td>bori</td>
<td>bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pakiv</td>
<td>pakiv</td>
<td>pakiv</td>
<td>respect, honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noivo</td>
<td>jumutro</td>
<td>noivo</td>
<td>groom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laje</td>
<td>loshalipen</td>
<td>vergonha</td>
<td>shame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there was a non-Cigano nearby them Calon often switched to speaking their dialect.

Also they called non-Cigana women chickens: buxni or kaxni in their dialect or galinhas in Portuguese to indicate their belief that most gage women are sexually promiscuous and immoral according to the maxrimé codes. Jilzinha, the wife of chief Jefse in the Rio de Janeiro community, once exclaimed: “Elas todas são galinhas” (They’re all chickens) in reference to her husband’s mistresses. To which Jefse who was present replied, “They are not all bad. Some are intelligent women.” Jilzinha was serving him coffee during this exchange and chose to ignore his last comment. Most men had a habit of calling their wives crazy – dilili (Kalo) or doida (Portuguese) – if the wives started reprimanding them, so Jilzinha usually avoided scolding her
man. Instead she quietly motioned me away from the table to show me how their bedroom was
decorated with a dozen red pillows in the shape of hearts. Also their bed had a heart-shaped
wood headboard. Photos of them as a happy couple were spread throughout the tent.

The custom among Calon is that men are allowed to have extramarital affairs, and the
rare man who is faithful to his wife is teased as being emasculated. Luan was a young groom in
this community, 19 years old, married for three months to Diele, 18 years old. Jefse his uncle
frequently teased Luano for being faithful: “A man must be free to roam the world. She rules the
house, but she cannot rule the man. A Cigano is free! The woman has to respect the man.”
Marriage was nonetheless intrinsic to being a respected member of the Calon ethnic group. In
fact marriage was considered the rite of passage into adulthood, just like among the Roma.
Márcio Vilar wrote his dissertation on the Brazilian Calon wedding rituals documenting in detail
how these arrangements are negotiated by the parents of the young couple (2011).

*Herminginhinhar* is the Calon way of saying “to get married” and it usually entailed no legal
documents or ceremony except for that arranged by the parents of the groom and the bride, who
had sometimes been betrothed from an early age as I will elaborate in the next two chapters.
*Pashovali* is a Calon way of saying *pakivali*, which comes from *pakiv* (respect), meaning the
bride is a virgin. The father makes sure the girl is taken out of school after attending for two
grades in order to prevent her elopement with another boy before her arranged marriage take
place. Virginity is tied to respect for one’s family and the father or *dad* as well as the *dais*
(mother) or incur public shaming if their daughter is not a virgin on her wedding day. The word
*vergonha* (shame) in Portuguese translated as *laje* for Calon and as *loshalipen* in standard
Romanes. The Machuwaya Roma in Brasil only used *vergonha*. 
47. Roma children who do not speak much Romanes – Rio de Janeiro

However, Calon and Roma used the same words occasionally, for example: bori (bride), pakiv (respect, honor), chavorro/ chavovo (little boy), dais/ daj (mother), and shukar (beautiful). Thus, the Roma interlocutors’ claim that they would never be able to understand Calon is an exaggeration since in fact they had words in common although the pronunciation is slightly different. Here is a longer list that Dona Herante thought to dictate since she was bored and saw that I was not posing a threat in terms of becoming fluent in her dialect. I have also indicated in boldface words my Matchuwaya Roma interlocutors would use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaló</th>
<th>Standard Romanes</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mizheke</td>
<td>del sfato</td>
<td>fofocar</td>
<td>to gossip maliciously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pa deshuda</td>
<td>avel phari</td>
<td>pegar nênê</td>
<td>to become pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gamin</td>
<td>phari</td>
<td>gravida</td>
<td>pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per</td>
<td>per</td>
<td>barriga</td>
<td>gut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pirro</td>
<td>punro</td>
<td>pê</td>
<td>foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vais</td>
<td>vast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shushani</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kerois</td>
<td>breasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shibi</td>
<td>leg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dani</td>
<td>tongue; language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ankôn</td>
<td>teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bali</td>
<td>eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kangi</td>
<td>hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sherron</td>
<td>hair comb; hair clip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burr</td>
<td>head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lubini</td>
<td>butt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pusca</td>
<td>prostitute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eraci</td>
<td>gun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riat</td>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graxni</td>
<td>blood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>busharda</td>
<td>healing herb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kadens</td>
<td>gunfire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sunakai</td>
<td>money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ua</td>
<td>gold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaniani</td>
<td>truth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ashiân</td>
<td>lie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djukerdar</td>
<td>stupid people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maladar</td>
<td>to steal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mardar</td>
<td>to steal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kinjar</td>
<td>to kill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>esturela</td>
<td>to defecate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aruvinhar</td>
<td>to take</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>janel</td>
<td>to cry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bish tele</td>
<td>to know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pusheila</td>
<td>sit down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djuke</td>
<td>procurar, pedir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grais</td>
<td>to look for, to ask for something</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balishon</td>
<td>cachorro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gruviôn</td>
<td>horse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikav</td>
<td>pig</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shishorro</td>
<td>bull</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bracôn</td>
<td>donkey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuci</td>
<td>cat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rroja</td>
<td>lamb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuri</td>
<td>milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ashiains</td>
<td>spoon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tarakains</td>
<td>knife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shudrin</td>
<td>beans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fezoli</td>
<td>rice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>korupishu</td>
<td>meat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mais</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sharão | farfuria | prato | plate
---|---|---|---
pāi | pani | agua | water
lumara | lumina | luz | light
pozhia | caxra | barraca, tenda | tent
pirrin | piri | panela | pot
kokali | taxtaj | copo | glass
berāo | vurdon | carro | car
buda | udar | udar | door
pandeila | phandel | fechar | to close
bishteila | iskamin | cadeira | chair
shinorro | tiknorro | pequeno | small
barāo | baro | grande | big
pajugin | pato | cama | bed
purrōn | vurāto | feio | ugly
suvinhār | sovel | dormir | to sleep
niscoda | ja avri | sai! | get out!
perinhār | phirel | caminhar | to walk
angushtāo | angrustik | anel | ring
mo | kafea | café | coffee
gulāo | guglo | doce; açucar | sweet; sugar
lōn | lon | sal | salt
balivais | balo | carne para feijoada | meat for the feijoada dish
anrrō | manrro | farinha; pão | flour; bread
onrrō | anrro | ovo | egg
kokali | portocala | cóco | coconut
jeshta | nakh | nariz | nose
nakhi | kasht | madeira | wood
tarakanis | papuko | sapato | shoe
mashāo | macho | peixe | fish
kala shibi | phand i muj | cala boca | shut up!
gieimo po-khe | ja khere | vamos para casa | let's go home
avela kaiar | av te xas | vem comer | come eat
djives | divesa | dias | days
bashador | baśador | som; radio; tv | sound from the radio or TV
bashadeira | xoliavdo | pessoa que briga | someone who always fights
dadeska | pakivalo | pessoa valente | noble person
ashtardar | astarel | prender | to arrest; to catch
duve | sfānto | santo | saint
Duve Barāo | Devel | Jesus, Deus | Jesus; God
o benghi | shingalo | o diabo | the devil
jundinari | shingalo | a policia | the police
parudar | parudel | negociar; trocar | to negotiate; to exchange
a dia nak! | na monthov! | não fala! | don't speak!
Many Romanes words familiar to me in the standard format were similar to those used by Calon, and commonly used by the Roma interlocutors as well. Yet most of my interlocutors addressed me in Portuguese and insisted that I should not speak their dialect. Speaking it fluently would mean trespassing their ethnic boundaries for only “authentic” Calon were to know the dialect and adopt it as a form of self-identification. My welcome among the Calon was always in danger of being overstayed so I minimized my visibility as a speaker of Romanes and accepted to some degree my interlocutors’ insistence on the opacity of their intentionalities during fieldwork.

The opposite of opacity of intentionality is understanding it others’ intentions, emotions and thoughts, known as “theory of mind.” Premack and Woodruff’s (1978) paper on chimpanzees defined theory of mind as “an operational capacity to infer the intentions, beliefs and desires of others and to act on the basis of those inferences (Robbins and Rumsey 2008: 414). Since then, “the study of language ideology – cultural notions about the nature of language and its use – has burgeoned” in the last three decades (411). This lead to debates on the role of intentionality in communication, the role of theory of mind in people’s interactions with others, and the role of empathy “in both social life and anthropological (including linguistic anthropological) method” (412).

What my ethnography reveals is that Ciganos’ insistence on language secrecy, on the opacity of their intentions, challenge “intentionalist” accounts of meaning and communication. I often felt as though my interlocutors told certain scripted stories to avoid disclosure. “People who hold opacity doctrines often describe their approaches to the world as ones that do not involve empathy” (416). Brazilian Ciganos’ opacity doctrine was held primarily vis-à-vis the gage, non-Ciganos, towards whom a less emphatic approach was indeed preferred. This also provided challenges towards an empathic anthropological inquiry, yet I managed to find ways in
which a closer rapport could be built with elderly women and children. Six months before my visits began Dona Herante had fallen while playing with her grandchildren and had broken a hipbone, so when I met her she was still spending most of her time recuperating in bed. Despite Dona Herante’s numerous tanned wrinkles and short gray-white hair, she had a cheerful disposition, her blue eyes always smiling. Dona Herante had many gagi friends, unlike most of my Roma interlocutors. Her daughter-in-law Taina said, “she has many Brazilian friends who are like sisters to her, part of the family. And she has twenty grandchildren.” Her four sons and their wives thought my visits would distract her from boredom. They were all married with children, lived in adjacent tents and were busy most days reading palms in the center of Sao Paulo.

While entertaining Dona Herante while her daughters were working in the city, I asked her if Calon use standard Romanes words I knew. For example I asked if I could call her bibi (grandmother). She demurred saying this word was not used. She said some words her elders knew had been forgotten, for example most words indicating colors, except for riat (red, blood). I mentioned this word came from Sanskrit, and that it would be useful to make Romani history and language textbooks available to Calon in Brazil to prevent further language loss. She disagreed: “It is learned hereditarily from father to son. Ciganos don’t care about these old origins and this (textbook) language. They don’t call it Romanes but lingua Cigana (Gypsy language in Portuguese). We don’t teach it to everybody. We only speak it in the intimate life of the family or use it while negotiating.” As Dona Herante explained, before gage clients Ciganas often spoke their dialect amongst each other to appear exotic and to establish price rate. They used their dialect as a secret code of communication about their clients in order to conduct their affairs. Being able to communicate secretly was considered an advantage, since opacity of mind rendered a sense of control over discourse in fortunetelling circumstances.
Thus, while the Calon I met boasted of more friendly relationships with non-Ciganos than Roma people did, they also insisted that their language should not be made available publicly: “Our children are born knowing our language. After one or two years they begin to speak and they already know the language. You can’t teach it to people who are not part of our group, you can only talk about our customs,” declared Wilson who had been selected as the community chief or main representative. His wife Carmela nuanced his response afterwards:

Our children learn the dialect by living with us. If we were to translate it we would become quite vulnerable. But it is really a pity that many young Calon today don’t speak our language at all. Forty-fifty years ago everybody spoke it fluently. Nobody ever went to school. The children were married young by their parents, arranged marriage, they had no personal affinity or authority in the matter. Nowadays they go to school and they study more. Their mind opens so they now mix the bloodline. In the olden days the blood was pure. When a Cigana woman turned 10-12 years old, she was taken out of school by her parents so she wouldn’t live close to other student anymore because then she would start sending little notes to boys, start wanting to make love before marriage and wanting to leave the tradition. By going to school, girls will understand that Cigano does wrong things and will want to leave the tradition and perfect herself.

Most Calon, like Carmela, insisted that children learn the dialect as well as their culture from the mother, not through the introduction of Romanes textbooks in public schools. However, with the new generations going to school more than the previous generations did, there were many who complained of cultural changes, namely that the young ones do not speak the dialect as much as the elders did. Having a more “open mind” due to a longer period of education was feared as a source of acculturation, leading to a more willing mixing of the bloodline since children would be more likely to marry a non-Cigano. Carmela’s ambivalent feminist stance here highlights that new generations may not wish patriarchal values to persist, yet moral codes demand obedience.

Nowadays Romani customs still dictate that children must marry young and abandon their schooling after marriage. The groom is usually a little bit older than the bride, so boys generally get to study longer than girls, which enforces the assumption of male gender
superiority. Most children attend pre-school at age four. Girls drop out by age twelve and boys by age sixteen. One Calon studied until age twenty, but he was a rarity. Carmela underlined how each gender role involves its own responsibilities:

Girls use long dresses daily, but not at school, there they have to dress “normal.” The teachers don’t allow them to look like Ciganas in school, and the parents don’t mind. It’s up to the girls to drop out of school. No Cigana ever graduates. They get married very young. They have no interest in school. Cigana gets married, takes care of the family, of the husband, of the house and children. She wakes up at seven or eight. Makes breakfast, cleans the house. They eat around nine or ten. Afterwards she cooks lunch, takes care of life in general, push the dishes in order. She is a housewife, the boss of the house, cleans the house, the tent. Everybody must eat everyday. Men take care of their business, they negotiate, they buy and sell cars, and they even lend money. The money they make is enough to live well. They buy their wives custom-made dresses that cost 300-400 réais. A simpler dress costs 80 réais. Women read fortunes but they don’t make as much money as the men. They mainly have to take care of the family and teach the language and the traditions to their children. They have two, three, four children per family. Well nowadays they have fewer children per family because they use condoms.

Being Cigano or Cigana means performing daily tasks of taking care of the family. For a woman it means waking up to cook and clean the house, reading fortunes, taking care of the children and respecting the moral codes. As for the men, the bulk of the economic responsibility for the family falls on them, including providing the wife with expensive tailored dresses that are made in the Calon style by a gagi seamstress for 200-400 réais. The Calon men in my field sites worked primarily as moneylenders and mechanics or sold car parts or scrap metal as well as pens and other small merchandise: alarm clocks, toys, locks, tapes and CDs. As for the children it was their responsibility to learn the dialect and the proper ways of behaving as Cigano, for instance how to respect their elders. Most of the children’s time was divided between play and taking care of their younger siblings or cousins while their mothers were in town reading fortunes.

The secrecy of their language pervaded Calon everyday life such that women felt entrusted with a noble, sacred sense of duty to be the main guardians of this tradition.
Calins were delegated to teach the language to the children as well as to instill in them the same respect for language secrecy as they had learned from the elders. In addition Calins were to monitor each other always so that no woman could interact extensively with gage or with men who were not closely related to her. Dona Herante said, “Cigana is never alone, she always has her sisters and cousins even when going into town.” Florencia Ferrari in her article on Calon from Bahia suggests that not all women enjoy this lack of privacy and heightened sociality (2013). Yet Ferrari presents the case study of Renata, a Calin who chose to live in a house in Sao Paulo apart from her community. Yet even though Renata deliberately made choices defiant of Calon social proscriptions, she continued to go fortunetelling along with her female kin.

No Calins I met said they resented the lack of privacy like Renata did. Only Cabrito’s wife, Angelica, often mentioned that she avoided attending weddings and anniversary gatherings. She said she preferred to stay home rather than to socialize with everyone at these events: “There’s too much food, they all eat too much, and there’s nothing good to talk about. They just gossip a lot. They’re very uneducated people.” The nature of fofoca (gossip in Portuguese) among Romanies serves as one of the tools for social surveillance of moral codes. I further elaborate in chapters 3 and 4.

Thus, even though Angelica respected her family’s customs, she seldom felt the need to socialize with Roma from her vitsa. Instead she valued institutionalized education and insisted that her 12-year old daughter Bianca was to stay in school for as long as she liked. Bianca wanted to become a judge and she had her parents’ support. In the meantime Bianca also studied fortunetelling with her mother. Like her mother, she valued privacy and enjoyed her own bedroom. While co-sleeping was common among most Romani children, yet Angelica insisted
that her children sleep separately. Notably, Bianca was under no pressure to learn Romanes and had greater personal freedom to interact with gage children at school and afterwards.

**Roma between literacy and orality**

The necessity of speaking Romanes daily bonds most Roma of all *vitsas* in a close net of communication despite their differences. Ianca hosted me in her home despite her family’s wishes, and this allowed me to visit often with her the neighboring *Ciganos*, most of whom were Matchuwaya Roma like herself with a few exceptions, namely a Kalderash nephew and two Xoraxani or Turkish Roma women: Dina and Flor. Flor was in her late twenties, the mother of two, and was the daughter-in-law of Ianca’s notorious cousin Kali, who was ostracized for having married a non-*Cigano* and for enjoying other lovers as well. Dina was in her late sixties and had lived near Ianca and Auntie Violeta’s houses for over a decade, yet was ostracized for being Xoraxani, as previously mentioned.

However, despite their disagreements they all lived close to each other in houses scattered across three streets. Since their homes faced each other in a triangular intersection, Auntie Violeta, Dina and Ianca hardly ever went a day without visiting each other and enjoyed the complicity offered by speaking Romanes like three very close friends. Every day Dina walked over to Ianca’s and enjoyed long rehearsed conversations about the unbearable heat, old age-related health problems, misbehaving family members, the “good old days when everyone was traveling,” and how the rich Roma lived elsewhere. Here is a typical way Ianca and Dina would converse in Portuguese mixed with Romanes (in italics):

M: A madrinha tá chegando. Ci maj janav. O baiano comprou pra ele uma flota de carro... Sou tão desanimada de família, eles não dá uma casca de família. Só sabem explorar. Hoje eles vem aqui.

I: Tem uma Cigana, ela morreu com setenta e pouco anos, ela nunca casou, só morou com pai e mãe dela. O remédio de pressão abaixa muito, me dá tonteira. Tomo 30 mg.

M: Eu tomo 60 mg de manhã e tarde, sou mais velha, 76 anos.

I: When the groom saw she ran away to Sao Paulo he asked for two hundred thousand. I don’t know what she did that for. A Kalderash man, from Bahia. She talked to her father, and then she went to the city.

M: The godmother is arriving. I don’t know anymore. The Kalderashi man from Bahia bought her a fleet of cars... I’m so discouraged with the family, they don’t make a shell of a family. Only know how to travel. Today they come here.

I: There was a Cigana, she passed away at seventy-something. She never got married, just lived with her father and her mother... The blood pressure medicine lowers it a lot, gives me dizziness. I take 30 mg.

M: I take 60 mg every morning and afternoon, I’m older, 76 years old.

I had already picked up their habit of visiting Roma households everyday, although I was often unsure just how welcome my visit would be. One day Ianca said she woke up with a headache and was unable to clean her house as she did every day. After I cleaned her floors, I decided to go make soup at Dina’s place. I bought the groceries and Dina gladly did most of the cooking. She wondered why I don’t stay with her, “Do they forbid you from staying here?” Later Ianca said that Dina talked badly about me in my absence and tried to have me sent away. It was hard to understand whether I was a welcomed guest, although it often appeared so. However, their hesitancy to speak of certain topics around me always reminded me that I was seen as an outsider looking in. Even though the Roma in Rio de Janeiro never considered me a Cigana, they did not refuse to talk to me, indeed quite the contrary, possibly because there were few others to talk to when they needed to talk about each other with someone who understood. Lidia, a middle-aged Rromni living six streets away, said: “Romanes is our secret, if we want to talk about other
people, we talk in our language.” Yet when they wished to talk about each other or their own family, I was considered knowledgeable enough about their ways to make a good confidante.

Their dialects differed slightly but they understood each other well since they had lived near each other for so long. As Dina explained, “Matchuwaya are different from our people. Kalderashi too are different. My nephew is Kalderashi on his father’s side. My sister married a Kalderashi Cigano. Even their language is different, completely different. We understand each other because we’ve lived together.” For example the phrase so te keras (what can you do) is Kalderashi dialect, not Matchuwaya. Other words are similar to each other in all three dialects with slight pronunciation changes. Some examples include: agies/ avdives (today), godgi/ godi (mind), chorri/ chorr (thief; poor), nashel (to elope; to run), katar (from), shel (hundred), janel (to know), kathe (there), del duma (to speak), vou/vov (he), vof (her) among many others. This is the list of words my interlocutors provided showed similarities in their dialects (boldface):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaló</th>
<th>Xoraxanisqo</th>
<th>Kalderashi</th>
<th>Matchwaya</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cachaca</td>
<td>cachaça</td>
<td>jimbir</td>
<td>shibirea</td>
<td>sugarcane rum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maladar</td>
<td>chorel</td>
<td>chorel</td>
<td>chorel</td>
<td>to steal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khaini</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>khaini</td>
<td>khaini</td>
<td>hen/ non-Cigana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xaden</td>
<td>nashvalo</td>
<td>lowe</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasul</td>
<td>mulo</td>
<td>nashvalo</td>
<td>nashvalo</td>
<td>ill, sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mulo</td>
<td></td>
<td>mulo</td>
<td>mulo</td>
<td>dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jandinari</td>
<td></td>
<td>shingalo</td>
<td>kris</td>
<td>the police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benghi</td>
<td>beng</td>
<td>shingalo</td>
<td>benghi</td>
<td>devil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telefono</td>
<td>telèfono</td>
<td>shingalo</td>
<td>shingalo</td>
<td>telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>telèfono</td>
<td>cingalo</td>
<td>cuckold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Romanes dialects did not have words for all things my interlocutors needed to express, so neologisms or simple substitutions with Portuguese words were common. For instance the word telephone rarely had a dialectal distinction other than the neologism telèfono. Yet the Matchwaya used the word shingalo for telephone, close in pronunciation to cingalo, which meant cuckold, and shingalo, the Kalderashi word for policeman, also used to indicate the
devil. The Matchwaya said *benghi* when they meant the devil, a word also used by Calon and Xoraxane with the same intent. There were always negative associations to the word *shingalo* whether it meant cuckold, devil or policemen, highlighting some of the most feared forces in the Romani cosmology: being a man with a cheating woman, attracting misfortune from diabolic sources, or having to deal with the police. In word *devil* translates as follows (Romlex 2015):

- **bend’aripe** n m fascination, bedevilment
- **bend’engo** adj m devilish
- **bend’esko** adj m devilish
- **beng** n m devil, satan, evil spirit
- **bengeso** adj m 1. devilish, diabolic 2. evil, bad, malicious, mean, vile
- **bengořo** n m imp, little devil
- **bilačho** n m 1. devil, scamp, vagabond 2. fever, typhus
- **durkatar** n m devil, satan
- **loli bahval** n phr f 1. devilish wind 2. red wind (disease)
- **maj benga** n phr (they are) bigger/the biggest devils, (they are) more/the most mischievous, (they are) more evil
- **šingalo** n m 1. long-horned ox, young ox 2. devil 3. gendarme 4. villager 5. cuckold
- **umaľako bilačho** n phr field devil

Sometimes my interlocutors did not have words that appear in standard Romanes such as *bahval* or wind. Also they used other forms to indicate Satan such as *baro beng* (the big devil). In addition what is not mentioned in *Romlex* is that these words are typically omitted from speech, willfully avoided as taboo. As Cornelia said to me in Portuguese, “A gente não pode dizer isso. Tem que ficar queto ou dizer só coisas boas porque tudo o que você fala pode acontecer” [We cannot say this. You have to keep quiet or talk only about good things because everything you say can happen]. To say these taboo words means to invoke malefic spirits. I elaborate on such magical thinking in chapter 6.

The signifier can invoke into reality the signified according to Romani cosmology. Calon also shared this belief. Dona Herante explained that words with negative connotations like *nasol* (ill) or *mulo* (dead) are also willfully omitted from speech because to mention it meant to attract
that specific misfortune. Similarly when Auntie Violeta came for a morning visit to Ianca’s
house in Rio complaining of nightmares Ianca said that dreams with a disturbing content were to
be first told into the garbage can: “Conta primeiro pelo lixo” [First say into the trash bin]. The
magical life of words in Romani cosmology will be discussed further in chapter 5, which deals
with magical practices and beliefs.

Thus, my Calon and Roma interlocutors shared numerous words as well as beliefs about
words, although members of both sub-groups insisted that their dialects are “very different” and
mutually unintelligible. Dina said: “Xoraxane speak a certain way, Matchuwaya speaks another
way, Kaldarasha speaks another way, and maybe we understand some words here and there,


Indeed some basic words were different in the Calon dialect. For example the word chorel (to
steal) was the same across Roma dialects yet the Calon used maladar. Chor meant thief, but it
also meant poor for the Roma when used as an adjective either to indicate poverty or to show
compassion. Ianca said about her neighbor who was believed to be dying of AIDS: “Betinho, o
choro, tá sofrendo muito esses dias!” [Poor Betinho, he is suffering a lot these days!]

Chorel was considered a taboo activity by Roma people, one that only those in dire need
could denigrate themselves to do for survival. As Cornelia the wealthy Rromni fortuneteller in
Sao Paulo said: “Uma cliente da Bahia falou pra mim que os Calon de lá chorden as galinhas dos
vizinhos! Nós Roma não fazemos isto. Os Romá são muito mais valentes” [A client from Bahia
told me that Calon over there steal chickens from their neighbors. Roma people don’t do this.
Roma are a lot more honorable]. This was an additional reason used by Roma people to justify
their dislike of Calon, who were rumored by Brazilians to steal due to their poverty. Cornelia
continued: “They are making all Ciganos look bad just because they go around stealing chickens.
Why should we suffer the same prejudices? We cannot tell anyone in Brazil we are Ciganos.”

However, Cabrito’s father, 80-year old dark-skinned Esteli, used the word chorel when mentioning the first generation Roma and their struggles to survive. He spoke to me in Romanes at Cabrito’s house in Sao Paulo one afternoon when he was visiting:

My father and my mother stole a sheep here, a chicken there, so they could eat and us too the little ones. We were a big family: three sisters and eight brothers. I was the youngest one. My father would cut a sheep for all the Roma to eat, so they could live as well, and work and look for money in the city. How poor we were! Even the little boys had to sell goods to the gage like the men. We walked around all day and nothing. The gage didn’t like us. We would go home hungry, poor us! What else could we do?[^5]

In this narrative the act of stealing is one of survival, and it is done in the spirit of sharing with the community so that no one has to suffer from hunger. Several elders like Pedro and Eustakiu also volunteered oral histories of first generation Roma stealing occasionally to survive. In Sao Paulo 78-year-old Pedro sipped his coffee and wiped his white moustache with his hand as he explained during one of my afternoon visits:

At first the Roma did not speak Portuguese, so the women could not read fortunes. The men sold wholesale items traveling with their families, 6-7 families in a kumpania, looking for places with higher demand, all living in tents. Sometimes it rained a lot. It was hard times. Sometimes they made no sales at all, and came back empty handed. So one of them had to be clever and find something to eat and bring it to the camp for everyone.

Again the act of stealing appears as something done out of necessity for survival among the first-generation ancestors of Roma interlocutors. However, present-day Roma did not steal, and said they pitied the ones in Europe who were too discriminated against to find employment. Pedro said: “Those poor Ciganos in Romania and in the rest of Europe they have to beg and steal to live!” In Brazil only Calon were rumored to steal an occasional chicken for survival. None of my

interlocutors were ever accused directly by their neighbors, and therefore I assume this did not occur during their latest sedentarization. Another common trait amongst both Roma and Calon is that they called non-Ciganas “chickens” (khainia in their dialect or galinhas in Portuguese), indicating the sexual looseness believed such women demonstrated. The term was used particularly in reference to Brazilian women rather than gringas (foreign women in Portuguese) like myself. Other words like love or lowe (money) were preserved across all Roma dialects, yet were unknown to the Calon who used xaden instead or the Portuguese equivalent dinheiro. Both Calon and Xoraxane used the Portuguese word cachaca, while the Kalderashi used jimbir or shibirea for sugarcane rum, Brazilians’ favorite spirit. The list of comparisons my Roma interlocutors provided continues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>Xoraxanisqo</th>
<th>Kalderashi</th>
<th>Matchwaya</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>língua</td>
<td>chib</td>
<td>chib</td>
<td>chib</td>
<td>tongue/ language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialecto</td>
<td>xoraxanisqo</td>
<td>xoraxanes</td>
<td>xoraxanes</td>
<td>Xoraxanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigana</td>
<td>rromni</td>
<td>rromni</td>
<td>rromni</td>
<td>Gypsy woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calono</td>
<td>rrom</td>
<td>ni jekh</td>
<td>ni jekh</td>
<td>Gypsy man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nenhum</td>
<td>ja angle</td>
<td>ja angle</td>
<td>ja angle</td>
<td>not even one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vai já</td>
<td>jala-se</td>
<td>jala-se</td>
<td>jala-se</td>
<td>to go ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ir em bora</td>
<td>ja kheres</td>
<td>ja khere</td>
<td>ja kere</td>
<td>go home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vai pra casa</td>
<td>ja kheres</td>
<td>mirro dad</td>
<td>munro dad</td>
<td>my father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meu pátio</td>
<td>murro dad</td>
<td>o kham</td>
<td>o kham</td>
<td>the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o sol</td>
<td>o kham</td>
<td>ál jakha</td>
<td>ál jakha</td>
<td>the eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o olhos</td>
<td>o khan</td>
<td>i muj</td>
<td>i muj</td>
<td>the mouth/ face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a boca</td>
<td>o nakh</td>
<td>o nakh</td>
<td>o nakh</td>
<td>the nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a orelha</td>
<td>o kan</td>
<td>o kan</td>
<td>o kan</td>
<td>the ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>os dentes</td>
<td>ál danda</td>
<td>ál danda</td>
<td>ál danda</td>
<td>the teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amigo</td>
<td>amal</td>
<td>amal</td>
<td>amal</td>
<td>friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomate</td>
<td>tiziya</td>
<td>peredeis</td>
<td>paciziya</td>
<td>tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advogado</td>
<td>advogado</td>
<td>dukato</td>
<td>chibalo</td>
<td>lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Roma interlocutors did not know the Calon equivalents to these words but they knew of each other’s dialects. Dina, Ianca and Auntie Violeta were particularly easy to interview on the topic while all four of us were enjoying the shade of the grand tree in Auntie’s courtyard one
sunny afternoon. Dina explained that in her *Xoraxanisqo* dialect, which the others called *Xoraxanes*, many words or expressions were similar to her Matchuwaya and Kalderasha neighbors’ *chib* (language, tongue). These dialects shared many basic words such as those for numbers and for the parts of the body. For example *muj* means both mouth and face depending on the context in all three Roma dialects. I was puzzled when Dina said, “Lachi tuke muj!” [You have a beautiful face!] because I had learned possessive pronouns differently in standard Romanes and had expected her to say *tirri muj* in the correct form, yet all interlocutors found the standard irrelevant.

Instead of one Romani language like the standard proposed by Gheorghe Sarău, here I found multiple vernacular languages or *slanguages*, which converged with each other at times. As Gumperz suggests, “other scholars dealt with the languages of occupationally specialized minority groups, craft jargons, secret argots, and the like. In some cases, such as the Romany of the gypsies and the Yiddish of Jews, these parlances derive from foreign importations which survive as linguistic islands surrounded by other tongues” (Gumperz 2009: 67). As he suggests, I found that *Ciganos* willfully distorted their mixture of Portuguese with expressions in their dialects in order to emphasize their specificities and to provide greater opacity of intentions:

Linguistic distinctiveness may also result from seemingly intentional process of distortion. One very common form of secret language, found in a variety of tribal and complex societies, achieves unintelligibility by a process of verbal play with majority speech, in which phonetic and grammatical elements are systematically reordered. [...] Thieves’ argots, the slang of youth gangs, and the jargon of traveling performers and other occupational groups obtain similar results by assigning special meanings to common nouns, verbs, and adjectives (Gumperz 68).

Among *Ciganos* standard literacy in Romanes was undesirable particularly because it cleared away opacity. Such opacity was not just willfully designed, but also the product of linguistic acculturation and language shifts reached through cross-cultural influences. Identity and ethnic
group boundary was imagined as related to such particular influences, as Gumperz suggests happens for other speech communities with special parlances: “Individuals are accepted as members of the group to the extent that their usage conforms to the practices of the day. […] The tribal language here is somewhat akin to a secret ritual, in that it is private knowledge to be kept from outsiders, an attitude which often makes it difficult for casual investigators to collect reliable information about language distribution in such areas” (Gumpertz 70). Although during fieldwork this was mediated by the frequency of our interaction and how I struggled to fit their social norms, I blame Ciganos’ language loyalty for my sparse data on their verbal repertoires. Had I taped their language usages, I would have surely been ostracized as overly curious and dangerous to their need for secrecy.

Here I rely primarily on what other linguists have written on the subject to gain any insights. Depending on the Romani dialect, ’š’ may be pronounced as ’sh’ or a ’ch’. Yet nonetheless the words for numbers were the same regardless of the dialect. The numbers and many of the basic words are said to come directly from Sanskrit. The study “Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien,” first published in 1782, began this discussion by scientifically proving the relationship of Romani to Indian languages (Rüdiger 1990). Then in 1845 August Friedrich Pott published “Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien,” in which he attributes Romani language to the northern Indian languages, “thus holds a blood relation to the proud Sanskrit” (Pott 1845: xv). Yet Romanes is an Indo-Aryan language spoken only outside of India according to Dieter W. Halwachs (2015, web). His tree of Indo-Aryan languages includes: “Sanskrit, Prakrit, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Maharati, Panjabi, Sindhi, Romani etc.” After their exodus from today’s region of Rajasthan in northern India, the proto-Romani speakers shaped their dialects by borrowing from different mainstream populations during prolonged
cohabitation. Some basic words, such as those indicating numbers between 1 and 10, have persisted through the centuries in most Romani dialects (Hindi Numbers 2015):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Romanes</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>kanchi (can-ch)</td>
<td>śunya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>jekh (ye-kh)</td>
<td>ēk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>duj (dooy)</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>trin (treen)</td>
<td>teen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>štar (sh-tah-r)</td>
<td>chaăr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>pandž (p-ahnd-zh)</td>
<td>pānch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>šov (show)</td>
<td>cha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>efta (ef-tah)</td>
<td>saāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>oxto (ok-toh)</td>
<td>āth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>enja (en-ya)</td>
<td>nau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>deš (deh-sh)</td>
<td>das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>dešu-jekh</td>
<td>gyārah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>dešu-duj</td>
<td>bārah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>dešu-trin</td>
<td>tērah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>dešu-štar</td>
<td>chaudah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>dešu-pandž</td>
<td>pandraḥ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>dešu-šov</td>
<td>solah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>deš-efta</td>
<td>satraḥ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>deš-oxto</td>
<td>atthāraḥ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>deš-enja</td>
<td>unnis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>biš-var-deš</td>
<td>bees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers 1 through 10 look quite closely related, yet the rest of the numbers differ greatly in Hindi from what my Roma interlocutors provided. Yet linguists such as Ralph L. Turner have demonstrated the relatedness between Sanskrit, Hindi and Romani and provided ample evidence that Romani speakers lived for a long period of time in today’s northern India although they most likely came there from central Indian regions (1926). These are some phonetic similarities Turner uses as evidence in his article “The Position of Romani in Indo-Aryan:”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Romani</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ṛkṣa</td>
<td>rukh</td>
<td>rukh</td>
<td>tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rakta</td>
<td>rat</td>
<td>rata</td>
<td>blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drakṣa</td>
<td>drakh</td>
<td>dakh</td>
<td>grape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miṣṭa</td>
<td>miśto</td>
<td>mitha</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaṅkuḥ</td>
<td>bango</td>
<td>bāka</td>
<td>crooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dantah</td>
<td>dand</td>
<td>dat</td>
<td>tooth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My interlocutors used most of the words in this list, except Calon did not use *rukh* (tree, wood), but used *arvore* from Portuguese, while the Roma used *kasht* in their dialect. Roma interlocutors also used words like *drom* (road), *stadi* (hat), *xoli* (anger) and *xinel* (to defecate), which come from Greek. Thus, there are significant borrowings from other languages into these dialects. I noticed several words that sounded like Romanian from what I could determine as a native speaker of this Italic Indo-European found in the same category as French, Italian, Catalan, Portuguese, Provençal, Spanish, and Râtoromance. In bold are words my interlocutors still considered *Romanes*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Xoraxanisqo</th>
<th>Kalderashi</th>
<th>Matchwaya</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>orez</td>
<td>vorezu</td>
<td>vorezu</td>
<td>xorezu</td>
<td>rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scaun</td>
<td>varezu</td>
<td>skamin</td>
<td>libanitsa</td>
<td>chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>placintă</td>
<td>istolitza</td>
<td>siviako</td>
<td>pomana</td>
<td>cheese pastry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pomană</td>
<td>placinta</td>
<td>pomana</td>
<td>sarmá</td>
<td>funeral feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarmale</td>
<td>pomana</td>
<td>sarmália</td>
<td>sarmá</td>
<td>stuffed cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pantof</td>
<td>dolme</td>
<td>tsipeliea</td>
<td>ciarapo</td>
<td>shoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ciorap</td>
<td>ciurke</td>
<td>ciorapo</td>
<td>zaru</td>
<td>sock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zahăr</td>
<td></td>
<td>tsitei</td>
<td>macica</td>
<td>sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>măță</td>
<td></td>
<td>miițza</td>
<td>saying</td>
<td>cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plapumă</td>
<td></td>
<td>prapónu</td>
<td>organo</td>
<td>blanket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sfat</td>
<td></td>
<td>sfâto</td>
<td>svako</td>
<td>saying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>copaci</td>
<td></td>
<td>copaci</td>
<td>kasht</td>
<td>trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haide</td>
<td></td>
<td>haide</td>
<td>haide</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prostul</td>
<td></td>
<td>prostu</td>
<td>prostu</td>
<td>the idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duh, spirit</td>
<td></td>
<td>duxo</td>
<td>spirito</td>
<td>soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>și-a dat duhul</td>
<td></td>
<td>del o duxo</td>
<td>mulo</td>
<td>died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parfum</td>
<td></td>
<td>duxo</td>
<td>perfume</td>
<td>perfume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>țăntari</td>
<td></td>
<td>tsintsarea</td>
<td></td>
<td>mosquitoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>față de pernă</td>
<td></td>
<td>perina</td>
<td></td>
<td>pillowcase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lanț</td>
<td></td>
<td>lantsu</td>
<td></td>
<td>metallic necklace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ia seama</td>
<td></td>
<td>lia seama</td>
<td></td>
<td>pay attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimineața</td>
<td></td>
<td>dimineatsa</td>
<td></td>
<td>morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milos</td>
<td></td>
<td>milos</td>
<td></td>
<td>compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi-e milă</td>
<td></td>
<td>si mange mila</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel pity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore some words that were considered purely (and secretly) Romanes were commonly found in Romanian as well. The *pomana* (funeral feast, wake) was considered strictly a *Cigana* tradition, and I surprised many by explaining we also have this ritual in Romania where we cook and invite all our living kin and friends to partake in honor of the deceased. Also *placintá* (pastry stuffed with white cheese) and *sarmá* (cabbage stuffed with rice and meat) were considered traditional recipes, yet I informed them that Romanians also believe that these are part of their national cuisine. Similar recipes are widely enjoyed in the Mediterranean area. As expected, I found that among all dialects, Kalo and Xoraxanes had the least borrowings from Romanian. The Kalderashi dialect had the most Romanian words, including the vernacular for cat (*miitza*) while the Matchwaya used the word *macica*, which comes from the Hungarian equivalent *macska*.

I imagine this is what the work of linguists entails, yet find it relevant to elaborate on the etymology of Romanes dialects so as to reconstruct their ancestral trails through different regions. Thus, even though I am not a trained linguist I find it imperative to look at the words that differ between otherwise closely related dialects. Consider interlocutors’ noted differences between Kalderashi and Matchwaya words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kalderashi</th>
<th>Matchwaya</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angrustik</td>
<td>angrushtri</td>
<td>ring, wedding ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chonutu</td>
<td>chon</td>
<td>moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šimijako</td>
<td>ritsu</td>
<td>mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vurdon</td>
<td>tumolea</td>
<td>car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skafigi</td>
<td>sinia</td>
<td>table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>espenso</td>
<td>kavagi</td>
<td>jacket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draga</td>
<td>deslaga</td>
<td>earring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merav bokhatar</td>
<td>muliau bokhatar</td>
<td>I'm starving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kadia</td>
<td>gakia</td>
<td>so, this way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xaleam ciral</td>
<td>xalem mirro</td>
<td>I ate cheese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Kalderashi word *angrustik* (ring) appears on the Romlex database as also used by the dialects: Macedonian Dzambazi, Macedonian Arli, Sofia Earli, Kosovo Arli, and Gurbet Romani.
whereas most other dialects drop the final ‘–k.’ The Kalderashi form *chonutu* or *chonut* (moon) also in Crimean, Gurbet and Macedonian Arli Romani, whereas the form *chon* is common in most other Roma dialects. The Kalderashi word *šimijako* (mouse) also exists in the Banatiski Gurbet, Lovara, Gurbet, and Sremski Gurbet Romani dialects. Also *vurdon* (car) appears in Banatiski Gurbet, Lovara, Gurbet, and Gurvari Romani.

The words *draga* (dear) and *deslaga* (to untie) are Romanian, and seem to have acquired their new meaning (earring) in Romanes through second-generation immigrants in Brazil misunderstanding their elders who asked for help with taking off their accessories. The word *ciral* is *kiral* (cheese) in the Kalderashi dialect on Romlex. In this dialect we find *merel* (to die) and *kadia* (like thi, this way). Thus the words my interlocutors declared as Kalderashi do match to a great extent the Kalderashi dialect as documented by Romlex, yet their vocabulary included additional words from other dialects belonging to Southern Vlax, according to the list made by the Open Society Foundation previously quoted: “The Vlax group is split in two branches, Northern Vlax (Romania, Hungary, and from there all over the world) and Southern Vlax (Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Albania). Northern Vlax : Kalderash (Roumania), Lovari (Hungary, South Poland, South Slovakia, Eastern Austria), Cerhari (Hungary) , Churari. Southern Vlax:  Ajia Varvara (Athens), Gurbet (Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia), Dżambazi (Kosovo, Serbia) , Italian Xoraxane (Italy)” (Open Society, web).

Therefore, it is either the case that my interlocutors unwittingly quoted words from other dialects onto the Kalderasha dialect (which was not theirs), or it could be that those who called themselves speakers of Kalderashi in Brazil had become intermarried with other Roma and thus intermixed their dialects. In many cases, my interlocutors said, when the population of first generation immigrants was scarce, survivors considered marrying children among *vitsas* more
frequently than they would have if they remained in their original countries in Europe. Pedro, the white-mustachioed narrator of such immigrants’ lives said: “We were so few and so poor, we had to give our daughters to the richer Roma, and some had come from Romania, others had come from Macedonia like the Matchwaya. My father’s sisters, most of them got married into different vitsas.” Thus judging from the compilation above, those Roma in Brazil who called themselves Kaldershi spoke a mixture of different Southern Vlax dialects depending on their ancestors’ various intermarriages and borrowings. Meanwhile, the Matchwaya word kavagi (jacket) used by my interlocutors also exists in the Banatiski Gurbet dialect, the only dialect to have it, according to the Romlex. Here are more terms my interlocutors offered as Matchwaya to further test their dialect as compared to Banatiski Gurbet and Gurbet Romanes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brazilian Matchwaya</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Banatiski Gurbet</th>
<th>Gurbet Romani</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>čurano</td>
<td>turkey</td>
<td>pato, spavačo soba</td>
<td>čurano, čurkano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kreveto</td>
<td>bed</td>
<td>tepixo</td>
<td>kreveto, kerveto, krvento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xómbra</td>
<td>big rug</td>
<td>narukvica</td>
<td>tepiko, tipiko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buzle</td>
<td>bracelet</td>
<td>čerain</td>
<td>narukvica, koro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cerain</td>
<td>star</td>
<td>purum</td>
<td>čerain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purum</td>
<td>onion</td>
<td>peškiri</td>
<td>purum, purumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pishkili</td>
<td>towel</td>
<td>tašna</td>
<td>peškiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lufári</td>
<td>purse</td>
<td>coxa, suknja</td>
<td>lovengo, kisi, bukvari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visciajo</td>
<td>skirt</td>
<td>rekli</td>
<td>coxa, suknja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>čupago</td>
<td>blouse</td>
<td></td>
<td>čupago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this list only three of the words used by the Brazilian Matchwaya match words in the Banatiski Gurbet Romani, yet this proves a certain degree of similarity. Since my Matchwaya interlocutors said their predecessors came from Serbia and Macedonia, their dialect certainly is a Southern Vlax type, most likely Gurbet Romani. Still, several words in my interlocutors’ dialect did not match any in the Romlex database: xómbra (rug), which possibly comes from the Portuguese sombra (shadow). This proves there have been borrowings from mainstream Brazil.
Uncle Pedro, as everyone called him, said that the first immigrants had sometimes travelled with rugs from Europe and used them to build their first tents in the tropical colony. Rugs thus most likely became synonymous with shadow or shade due to their practical usage. As for buzle it may have come from bluza, the word for blouse in both Gurbet Romani and Romanian. The word visciajo most likely comes from the Portuguese word vestido (dress). Thus the Matchwaya Roma in Brazil spoke a dialect closely related to Gurbet Romani in Europe, including changes that reflected their lengthy stay in Brazil.

Typically Romani dialects have been divided into the Vlax (Vlach) and non-Vlax types. While my Roma interlocutors in Brazil spoke Vlax dialects, the Calon spoke non-Vlax. Linguistically Vlax dialects demonstrate significant influence from the Romanian language, the regions then called Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. The fact that Vlax-Romani dialects’ speakers far outnumber the speakers of other Romani dialects is due to the ethnic group’s enslavement in my native country, and their inability to leave these regions until the late 19th century:

Kalderash-Romani also belongs to a number of related dialects spoken by groups such as the Lovári, Machhéya, Churári, Mashári, Tsolári and others. All these dialects belong to the Vlax-Romani group, which means that the speakers evolved these dialects in Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania (and other geographical areas where the surrounding language was Romanian) over a period of many generations and then carried them by migration to other regions of central, eastern and western Europe, the Americas and elsewhere. There are an estimated three million Roma in the Americas, a large number of whom continue to speak Kalderashitska or Machwanitska and related Vlax-Romani dialects. […] Speakers of Vlax-Romani dialects far outnumber speakers of any other Romani dialect and they have the widest geographical distribution of any Romani group (Lee 2005).

In other places throughout Europe many Romanies were repeatedly displaced as the result of social discrimination and persecutions. Due to diverse migratory paths there is a great variety of dialects among Romanies, among which Vlax speakers are nonetheless predominant. In the
introduction to his textbook “Learn Romani,” professor Ronald Lee – a native Kalderash – argues: “Romani has many dialects and no standard written form” (2005, web). This is true to present day because despite various efforts to universalize a standard, the overall trend is towards linguistic pluralism owing to regional codification in the choice of graphemes and vocabulary to reflect the diverse ways in which the diaspora has borrowed from other languages into its many vernacular dialects.

This linguistic pluralism is also the official policy adopted by the Council of Europe’s Romani representatives, namely by the European Roma and Traveller Forum as stated on its website. Linguists such as Milena Hübschmannová, Dieter W. Halwachs, and Yaron Matras support this pluralistic approach. As Hymes suggests, while “some languages do not enjoy the status of a symbol crucial to group identity” they persist even when “only a few speakers of a language are left in a community” because they serve distinct functions (1962: 30). He points to seven broad functions of language: expressive (emotive), directive (conative, pragmatic, rhetorical, persuasive), poetic, contact, metalinguistic, referential, contextual (situational) (Hymes 31). The linguist is therefore not the best receiver of language, since it must be studied within its use, in the intersubjective interlocution encounters. So even when a dialect circulates only as a fragmentary slang, as spoken mixed with Portuguese by the elderly Calon in Brazil, it nonetheless serves a variety of functions within the communities’ worldview and social context. Even if Cigano children do not speak much Romanes, it remains relevant as they are inducted into the ongoing adult speech system and adult behavior.

Nonetheless, language standardization is a step towards seeking political legitimacy, as Irvine and Gal remind us, “A language is simply a dialect that has an army and a navy – so goes a well-known saying in linguistics. Although only semiserious, this dictum recognizes an
important truth: The significance of linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of a region and its observers” (2000: 35). Legitimation of a minority takes place within greater dynamics, which include a sociolinguistic process. Therefore, some linguists like Professor Sarău prescribe a purified Romani standard based on vocabulary and grammar forms that reflect the linguistic crystallizations that took place during the diaspora’s time in Anatolia between 1100 AD and the 1300s. Sarău attempted to determine which words came from Romani as spoke during that time frame, and which words were later borrowed from European societies.

This semiotic process has been recognized as iconization: “Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). Sarău has successfully written textbooks on the subject and introduced them in Romanian public schools. It is still necessary that Romani parents request that the “mother-tongue” be made available, yet once that is accomplished the government sends trained staff and free textbooks to support the introduction of Romani language and history in schools. These subjects have yearly Olympiads or national tests during which those who excel can be rewarded and offered scholarships to pursue higher education. Professor Sarău has designed a major in Indian Studies, which includes Romani studies as well, at Credis University in Bucharest.

Affirmative action legislation in Romania has improved the rate of school attendance and access to higher education among members of the Roma minority. The very courses that prepare teachers of Romani provide supplemental income for those who may not have finished high school, yet are now given a second chance by Dr. Sarău. Still the standard Romanes which aims to strengthen the minority, its political awareness and its unity in fighting for social justice remains but a myth of being the “mother-tongue,” since no one is a native speaker of this newly
written language. Yet these standardization efforts do not aim for erasure of dialects through homogenization, but rather enrichment through finding synonyms from different dialects to increase mutual intelligibility.

The textbooks of this standardized Romani language represented a dangerous tool for both my Calon and Roma interlocutors. They feared that if translated, they could fall into the wrong hands and their ethnic boundaries breached by the *gage* impersonators of Gypsy spirituality. Being highly educated was also considered a breach of ethnic identity. To become an intellectual, a doctor or a lawyer, one had to relinquish playing the part of *Cigano* by engaging in daily visits and frequent banquets and feasts. It meant to “lose a seat at the table,” to stop being invited to events, to stop being counted upon as a community member, and alas to be ignored. In his book “Ciganos – Rom – Um Povo Sem Fronteiras” [Gypsies – Roma – A People Without Borders], Nelson Pires the half-Rom intellectual I met in Sao Paulo mentions that in Brazil there are different kinds of *Ciganos* and their dialects vary depending on the origin of their ancestors: “kalderashis […] matchiwaia (Iugoslávia) horarane (Turquia), lovara, taliaias (Itália)” yet all share this particular unspoken rule of excluding those who become highly educated like himself (Pires 2005). While his mother speaks Kalderashi, Nelson does not speak any *Romanes*:

I had to go to school, learn Portuguese, do my homework, then high school, university, law school. I had to move away. I never had any time to speak Romanes at home or go on visits all the time. I never got a chance to learn. You’re also going to college, getting your degree, when do you find the time to go to all their *festas*? The intellectual ends up being isolated. No one would even call the *kris* on him if he did anything wrong. Roma treat him like just another one of the *gage*, like an outsider, even if they share the same blood. In this statement the overwhelming sense is one of alienation and loneliness. Ultimately this loneliness is one of the harshest consequences *Ciganos* associate with functioning primarily in the realm of literacy as opposed to orality. As linguist Walter J. Ong suggests, a certain degree of social isolation is intrinsic to the dynamics of textuality:
The word in its neutral, oral habitat is a part of a real, existential present. Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another real, living person or real, living persons, at a specific time in a real setting which includes always much more than mere words. Spoken words are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words. Yet words are alone in a text. Moreover, in composing a text, in ‘writing’ something, the one producing the written utterance is also alone. Writing is a solipsistic operation. I am writing a book which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I must be isolated from everyone (Ong 1982: 100).

Unlike orality, which requires a listener to be present at the same time as the utterance, written words often require the absence of other people to improve one’s focus on studying or completing a text. On the other hand the illiterate Calin matriarch Dona Herante said woefully while the two of us were having lunch in her tent: “The children now go to school every day. In the past children remained home with the elders. They never went to school. They just played all day. A child is such joy! Now I’m alone every day while my daughters are out reading fortunes.”

Elderly Roma and Calon complained of loneliness due to their children’s growing scholarization.

Although there has been a tendency to lose the dialect among the young, as Nelson suggests, blood relatedness is still less significant as an identity marker for Brazilian Romanies than the ability to speak the specific dialect that circulates within one’s particular kinship group. Similarly in the case of Auntie Violeta who was adopted by Lovara Ciganos from non-Ciganos, she had been part of her husband’s family for so long that she learned their dialect. Therefore Auntie had close relationships with his Matchuwaya family, including Ianca. Since she had lived according to social prescriptions, it did not matter that Auntie was gagi by descent.

The consequence of maintaining one’s dialect as a secret and passing it orally inter-generationally is that it reinforces prescribed patterns of orality and socialization such that some relationships become closer while others are thwarted. Where people share a dialect or speak similar dialects there is a higher degree of socialization and intimacy.
Where people speak a different dialect as in the case of Dina who spoke Xoraxanes, the relationships are distant or ambivalent, often regarded with mistrust. Ultimately what is at stake here with the insistence on linguistic secrecy is Ciganos’ sense of cultural integrity in the face of constant pressures to acculturate and to lose their ethnic particularities. Therefore, even though no Ciganos in Brazil believe illiteracy is a source of strength anymore, basic literacy is ambivalently encouraged for the new generations, while orality continues to predominate as a vehicle for cultural reproduction. At the same time learning other languages to better negotiate with gage, such as Spanish and Portuguese, is also considered imperative. This is where I fit in as a polyglot who was both considered fond of Romani people and potentially useful in dealing with foreign clients during fortunetelling. Still, most Ciganos were cautious when speaking around me. Their insistence on opacity of intentionality challenges empathic approaches to understanding them and defies efforts towards standardization as seen in Europe.

48. Esoteric store displays books, statues and dolls representing Ciganos
49. Busts of *Gypsy spirits* and mystical accounts of Romanies, Rio de Janeiro
50. First Cigana Party in Brazil: organized by Mio Vacite under the pseudonym Vassitch in order to protect his family’s ethnic anonymity, at his brother’s request – Rio de Janeiro
CHAPTER 3. SEXUALIZED CIGANOS

Sexualized Ciganos
Situation Ciganos: Brazil as a hyper-sexualized dangerous space
Ciganidade, modesty and ambivalence

Sexualized Ciganos

I found that Brazilians who circulated romanticized exotic myths about Ciganos did so in order to augment their own sexual appeal by claiming to have internalized the magical power of Gypsies through spirit possessions. These narratives of spirit possessions were consistent with the religious registers of Umbanda and Condomblé. As Brazilian historian Brigitte Cairus elaborates, Gypsy spirits like Pablo, Wladimir, Pedrovik, Esmeralda, Carmensita, Salome and Yasmin appear in the rituals of spirit possession in Umbanda category called “People of the Orient” (2010: 165). Artifacts representing these mythical entities could be easily found.

At a place called O Templo da Paloma (Paloma’s Temple) there were not only staff members available for esoteric consultation as Ciganos espirituais, but also artifacts encouraging this kind of spirituality: statues of Gypsy spirits, clothing to help one feel more open to connect with such spirits, books on Gypsy magic and numerous potions and jewelry said to invoke such powers when used. Some of the staff members gave belly dance lessons and talked at length about how by dancing like Ciganas other women could also become confident and seductive like them. I took some belly dance classes with a woman who called herself Cigana espiritual and lived off selling various forms of commodified Ciganidade (Gypsi ness). She was hardly the only one to do so in Brazil.

In Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo one could easily walk into one of the many esoteric stores called Mundo Verde (Green World) and purchase statues of these spirits. These statues or dolls are heavily ornate, decorated with “traditional dresses” and tarot cards in the case of the
females or a moustache and possibly a violin in the case of a Cigano. The production tags labeled these statues or dolls as Gypsy mythological entities with various traits such as: a mais linda (the most beautiful), festeiro (party-loving), mágia do amor (love magic), povo do Egìto (people of Egypt), violino da Rusia (Russian violinist), proteção (protection). Even the half-Rom intellectual Nelson Pires sold these exotic artifacts in his Sao Paulo store. He explained when I inquired about how he viewed them: “These are objects that become sacred for the people who purchase them. They are not sacred for me. They acquire this sacred character through the energy people invest in them with their faith, prayers, and offerings.” Mirian Stanescon had two large statues of Ciganos adorning her apartment’s entryway. She made constant oferendas (offerings) of candles, perfumes, flowers and fruits to appease them, “in order to attract good luck, health and prosperity,” she explained when I visited her with Eugene.

Eugene was particularly fascinated with these Gypsy statues boasting of hyperbolic masculinity and femininity, so much so that he purchased one to bring on tour with him as a bearer of good graces. He also brought it to the Ciganomania (Gypsy-mania) party we organized in Rio, a party that caused our temporary shaming via gossip on a particular Orkut website accusing Eugene of having sex with a girl and then ejaculating on the Romani flag at the party, and me of kissing another girl. Only the last part was true. I was accused by a half-Rom knife-maker of pretending to be Cigana and making all Ciganas look lesbian. The threat we received made me doubt the Gypsy statue’s magical protection in retrospect, except for the fact that nothing came of it. This kind of statue represents the positive stereotypes of Ciganos circulating in the mainstream Brazilian imaginary. Ciganos have been stereotyped as magical beings, seductive dancers and resilient nomads of Egyptian ancestry. However, when compared with the
rest of Brazil the Romanies I met stood out as rather conservative. For instance most Calon and Roma insisted on female virginity at marriage as central to their ethnic moral codes.

The Romani focus on virginity rests on a particular cultural elaboration of motherhood. In *Stabat Mater*, first published in 1977, Julia Kristeva explores virginity as elaborated by the Latin hymn on the agony of the Virgin Mary at the Crucifixion, which begins with the words *Stabat mater dolorosa* (Stood the mother, full of grief). Her innovative style of writing includes a *bricolage* of a poetic journal of her life as a pregnant woman and her intellectual writing of social analysis, following the cult of Mary as elaborated through different time periods and tropes. Her main concern is to point out the current decline of the cult of the Virgin and religion in general which has left the Western world without a satisfactory discourse of maternity:

“Where the cult of the Virgin traditionally offered a solution to what Kristeva calls the problem of feminine paranoia, the decline of religion has left women with nothing to put in its place” (Ed. Moi 1986: 160). Yet for most Romani women in Brazil not only does the Catholic religion still offer comfort, but also the traditional ethnic-specific rules of morality resolve this kind of feminine anxiety by normalizing both motherhood and marriage at a young age.

In fact the concept of maternity as centered on virginity in Romani cultures is quite strong as Kristeva suggests it was in Western cultures at the apex of narratives of the Virgin Mary. She states, “Christianity is doubtless the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity, to the extent that it transpires through it – and it does so incessantly – is focused on *Maternality*” (1986: 162). She elaborates that the Catholic Church imbued the image of Christ’s mother with power as early as the sixth century: “*Maria Regina* appears in imagery as early as the sixth century in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome. Interestingly enough, it is she, woman and mother, who is called upon to represent supreme earthly power. Christ is king but
neither he nor his father are pictured wearing crowns, diadems, costly paraphernalia and other external signs of abundant material goods. That opulent infringement to Christian idealism is centered on the Virgin Mother. Later, when she assumed the title of Our Lady, this will also be in analogy to the earthly power of the noble feudal lady of medieval courts” (170). Similarly Brazilian Catholics including my Calon and Roma interlocutors sought the patronage of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida/ Conceição (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception). On its website the Vatican has published a homily that John Paul II wrote in 1980 about his pilgrimage to pay homage to Aparecida:

The fruitless toil of the three fishermen in search of fish in the waters of Paraíba, in that far-off year of 1717. The unexpected discovery of the body, and then of the head, of the little ceramic image, blackened by the mud. The abundant catch that followed the discovery. The devotion, which began immediately, to Our Lady of Conception as represented by that brown statue, affectionately called the “Aparecida” (the one that appeared) (John Paul II 1980).

I was surprised to see all my interlocutors had decorated their tents and houses with numerous images of Catholic saints and in particular with images of their padroeira (patroness) Aparecida. However, many Brazilians shared this patronage of The Lady of the Immaculate Conception, carried her small brown-skinned statue with them and had her image in their homes, yet they did not feel compelled to elaborate female virginity at marriage to the same extent as Romanies did.

It was my impression that Brazilian women often get married precisely because they become pregnant. The puzzle of why early pregnancies often meant motherhood and marriage was quickly solved: condoms in Brazil are ill-manufactured and prone to breaking, while abortion is still illegal in today’s predominantly Catholic Brazil. According to the Brazilian Criminal Code: “Abortion can only be legally performed in Brazil if the pregnancy puts the life of the woman in danger or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape” (Brazilian Criminal Code 1940). This means that only the wealthy can afford the expensive illicit procedures needed to
prevent unwanted pregnancies. A report on vulnerable women in Latin America where abortions are criminalized states:

In Brazil, between 2007-2011 in Rio de Janeiro state, there were 334 police reports involving women who had illegal abortions. Court records from 2007-2010 show that 128 women were prosecuted. In one case a woman was arrested in the hospital after seeking post abortion care. She was unable to afford bail and remained handcuffed to her hospital bed for three months. This report also examines the human rights violations that occurred when police, in search of abortion law violations, raided a private family planning clinic in Mato Grosso do Sul in 2007, confiscating the medical records of more than 9,600 female patients. Four staff members at the clinic were prosecuted for participating in abortions and received prison sentences ranging from four to seven years (Kane 2013: 1).

In Brazil where Catholicism fails to instill in women a sense of sacred maternity with each pregnancy, the state apparatus steps in to instill a sense of fear, to control, survey, and punish those who get abortions and have no proof of having been raped. I learned this the hard way after finding myself pregnant while in Rio with my rock-star boyfriend, who did not hesitate to fly me to the US immediately for an early abortion since our relationship was unstable and neither one of us desired the responsibility of a child.

Most young couples in Brazil do not have that luxury and instead decide to have the baby and get married. However, there is no sense of “female paranoia” in Brazil since this most people just accept the social fact that in Brazil becoming pregnant leads to immediate motherhood. My 24-year-old caramel-skinned manicurist Natalia lived in a favela (squatter slum) with her parents and three young children and said her story was a common one. As she painted my nails she talked in a nonchalant soothing voice: “We were young, we liked each other, we dated, then I became pregnant, so we got married… We had to move into my parents’ house. But then we grew apart, we started liking other people so we separated after five years.” Often young Brazilian couples need to live within the small confines of a parental home where they can count
on additional help raising the newborn. Young single mothers also live with their parents, and can count on their support.

Therefore, in Brazil there is a strong culture of maternity and family networks that provide support towards it without elaborating the cult of virginity. On the other hand, Romani people in Brazil do venerate the cult of virginity as foundational to maternity. The regulation of female sexuality in Romani communities I observed operated based on the ethnic-specific proscription that girls marry strictly as virgins soon after experiencing their first menses so as to ensure that fertility would not lead to birthing children of non-Romani men. Gage paternity was looked down upon so much that the offspring are categorized as outsiders to the community. Ciganos considered parents responsible for their daughters to reproduce the bloodline.

Sometimes Cigano parents arranged marriages while their children were four or five, even younger, actualizing the ceremony as soon as the girl became biologically fertile. Among the Calon girls married as early as 12 years old, although it was far more common to marry between 14 and 16 for cheja (girls) and between 17-20 for chave (boys). A virgin of marrying age was called chej bari (big girl) and pakivali (honorable). A girl who lost her virginity before marriage was called nashadinha (soiled, in Kaló) and perdida já (already lost, in Portuguese). Thus, to lose one’s virginity meant to lose Romani personhood, literally “to lose oneself” through moral defilement. Virginity at marriage thus remained central in defining feminine gender roles among Ciganos.

Kristeva’s worry with Western culture does not apply to the experience of Romani women in Brazil who still grow up with a strongly elaborated cultural emphasis on the importance of female fertility, where proof of socially acceptable maternity relies on female virginity at marriage. While this minority maintains its women separate in values of moral purity
and in bloodline from the rest of Brazilians, it also tolerates the men’s sexual curiosity for non-Romani women. Grooms are not encouraged to be virgins at marriage. They are encouraged to have sexual experience with non-Ciganas, the gagia or galinhas (chickens), assumed to be morally loose and promiscuous. Thankfully, I was only considered a gagi or partial-gagi, and not a galinha.

**Situating Ciganos: Brazil as a hyper-sexualized and dangerous space**

Brazil is a highly sexualized nation in the collective imagery of both citizens and foreigners, with Rio de Janeiro as the epicenter of carefree sexuality and the coastal front as a particular attraction for both tourists and inland residents. I found cariocas (Rio locals) to be much more flirtatious than paulistas (Sao Paulo locals), and competitively proud of the unrestrained manner of their sexual pursuits. Certainly had I visited the rural inland my account of “Brazil” would sound much less monolithic. My interlocutors’ perceptions as well as my experiences in the coastal, cosmopolitan spaces in which I conducted fieldwork created this rather limited trope of Brazilianness with little account of social change. Please bear in mind this is not an accurate reflection of Brazil, but “Brazil” as I came to understand it and as most Ciganos perceived it, although they were immersed in and actively “Brazilian” themselves.

Like Ciganos, most mainstream male interlocutors suggested that they did whatever they wished with their bodies even though they also preferred being in long-term relationships. Unlike most Ciganas, most mainstream females claimed they did so as well. Brazilians I met in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo often claimed they took great efforts to hide from their main partners any acts inconsistent with their promises of monogamy: “Tudo mundo faz, mas ninguém fala” [Everybody’s doing it, but nobody talks about it]. Skillful deceit was in itself a sport.
In Sao Paulo such promiscuous tendencies were similar but subtler. Because the beaches were an hour and a half away from the city by car, many paulistas preferred to hop on a quick flight to Rio on Fridays after work under a business pretext in order to party there over the weekend, only to return Sunday night to their regular lives. Despite this ongoing “love affair” between Rio and Sao Paulo their mutual rivalry was often humorous and exacerbated by fervor-inducing soccer games, with cariocas typically being mocked for their laziness and paulistas for their odd accent and inferior charms.

In Rio, I first mistook paulistas for American tourists who spoke Portuguese badly because they back-rolled their r (as in car), like Americans do, whereas cariocas mostly used a guttural breathy h (as in hotel) instead of r like the French, bespeaking of the time when Rio was under the French occupation, a Huguenot enclave (1555-1567). The paulista lackluster abrupt d (as in dive) is sensualized as j (as in jive) after a vowel. Thus, we have Rio de Janeiro (hee-ooh jeeh jah-nei-rooh). Cariocas typically consider language as the key to seduction and take pride in their sensual accent, indulging in breathy sh sounds (instead of a simple s) and in prolonged nasal vibrations mmm as in muito bom (very good) making it sound highly suggestive of coital moaning and purposefully alluring.

Brazilians often responded to even a simple request for street directions by giving an elaborate, mellifluous answer fraught with sensual alliterations, positive imagery and compliments delivered with impressive speed and dexterity. Cariocas in particular spoke with the rehearsed confidence and self-aware musicality of a well-versed performer, often projecting their voices beyond their immediate interlocutors’ ears as if trying to engage and seduce a wider audience. Paying a compliment to one’s partner while hugging her and looking at another woman passing by was common. Even though many cariocas indulged in hyperbolically positive
statements, they did so in a fast-paced flow of words, while frequently looking up towards the sky and gesticulating as if to help visualize that unearthly beauty and serenity, with hypnotic musicality. Therefore, the impression I got was that for most *cariocas* seductive speech was a popular, competitive sport much like seduction itself, employing a wide register of flirtatious sensual tonalities many of which were borrowed from French during initial colonial influence. Brazilians in general laughed at tourists from Portugal for speaking a prosaic version of Portuguese stripped of both musicality and seductive allure.

I found the *carioca* accent pleasurable, yet frustrating to speak like local because it required a personality with a relaxed attitude towards flirtation in all casual encounters. It had nonetheless seduced me ever since I heard it on “Escrava Isaura” (*Isaura, the White Slave* – a girl’s quest to find her non-slave father). This popular Brazilian 1976-1977 soap opera aired in post-communist Romania when I was nine. That year my father passed away and all I could think of at first was how terrible that he would never know the end of the suspense-filled drama. At sixteen (on my birthday) my mother said I was old enough to find out he had committed suicide. I thought that if he had lived in tropical Brazil rather than communist Romania, he certainly would have enjoyed life. The thought crystallized when I saw a man who looked like an appropriately older version of my dad, smiling wide on a gigantic Rio street ad. This positive association helped me internalize Portuguese with greater facility. I was fluent within a month.

In Rio leisure was considered a priority not only by tourists but also by many of its residents. Those who could afford to reach the beach daily did so even for a quick swim, a walk, a jog, surfing, a cigarette or a puff of weed, kicking the ball around with friends, a beer or coconut water, a snack brought by vendors shouting out witty lines, tanning and generally partaking in a day-long comforting scenery of bikini-clad relaxation amidst the natural beauty of
a beach democratically available to both the poor and the rich. The flaunting of bodies was like an actor’s performance, done with refined, well-rehearsed movements meant to impress. For instance, women knew how to don and doff tight shorts nonchalantly while carrying on conversations, how to apply tanning oil or splash around in cool water if only for a minute to make their bodies glisten, how to gel their wet long manes bent over only to whip them back dramatically, creating dashing effervescence and eliciting compliments from men such as espetáculo! (what a show!), gostosa (delicious) or sereia do mar (mermaid) which refers to the African religious registers of Umbanda and Condomblé deity lemanjá, the water goddess also known as the Brazilian Aphrodite, an archetype with which women strive to identify.

Many Brazilians I met admitted that beneath their apparently conservative Catholic façade lies a dynamic sexuality undefined by the registers of their public personas, yet not necessarily in conflict with their wider syncretistic religious beliefs. Brazil is a highly spiritual society influenced by the Christianity of Portuguese colonizers as well as by the religious traditions of African slaves and indigenous people, the confluence of which has led to the development of a diverse array of syncretistic practices within the overarching umbrella of Brazilian Roman Catholicism. Some laughed while claiming that on Sundays after attending Mass people danced and had sex with each other in the streets. This was certainly a frequent occurrence during the weeklong Carnival festivities every February. Most Brazilians agreed that Carnival achieved its most epic proportions in Rio and also described cariocas as the most sexually active, promiscuous and best lovers.

During fieldwork in Rio I conversed with cariocas of all social strata as I spent my weekdays in the house-filled suburbs and most of my weekends in Ipanema. There I found tourist-oriented beaches, more cosmopolitan crowds, gay clubs where I could dance undisturbed
by men’s unrequited flirtation, and a safe spot for my field notes and laptop. In Ipanema I rented a room from a friend of a friend of a friend from college, a lucky move which reflected the informal “who do you know” manner of doing things in Brazil. Julia became my flat-mate and main local interlocutor, a representative though not necessarily typical promiscuous 32-year-old single mother of a 16-year-old son and self-proclaimed atheistic fan of Orixás (African divinities) like Iemanjá. Julia even quoted Nietzsche’s “Beyond Good and Evil” to rationalize her ritualized weekend quests for anonymous sex. She insisted that, “people need to make themselves happy and ultimately happiness is closely linked to good food and good sex.” Julia said she had been depressed for a year and a half after her second divorce, yet she now thrived as a single woman:

I have a ritual every weekend. I like to go out to a club or a bar with my friends. Usually I spot a guy that I like, make eye-contact and flirt with him from a distance until he comes closer, offers me a drink, we dance together, we talk. It’s a very nice feeling this phase of seduction. I make it my goal for the night to sleep with this man of my choice. Usually it works. I have my charms. I know a lot more now than when I was married. I go to his place, we have sex and then I take a cab home because after thirty it’s harder for a woman to wake up looking beautiful. Men don’t have that problem. I never tell him my real name or my phone number. This way he is my conquest and I don’t hang around the phone waiting for him to call the next day. Even if the sex was good and the man beautiful I don’t want to fall in love and become his fool. I want my life to be mine. I don’t need him to meet my friends or hang out with my son. Carioca men will always sleep around. Everyone is doing it but no one ever admits it. It’s in the air. There’s a very sexual atmosphere here in Rio. The beach and the sun make everybody want to look great and feel great. That’s why they call Rio a cidade maravilhosa (the marvelous city). No one likes compromise or hard work or commitment here. Everyone just wants to enjoy life and sex is a big part of it.

Her words echoed what most cariocas said about Rio: “There’s a very sexual atmosphere here.” The tone was always one of satisfaction when, “everyone is doing it but no one ever admits it.” Julia’s life path reflected some of the common life patterns among Brazilian women namely unplanned pregnancy leading to marriage, infidelity and divorce followed by single life and promiscuity. Just as I struggled to understand them, most local women also struggled to
understand my choice to be committed to a long-distance relationship with a non-committal touring musician. I explained that I did not expect it to lead to marriage. Meanwhile most replied they desired marriage and children.

However, many Brazilians also admitted to having been through a divorce due to sexual curiosity. Sexual dissatisfaction and infidelity were the main reasons given to justify divorce. Some suggested that this was because the marriage was motivated by an unwanted pregnancy in the first place, while others blamed parental involvement and cohabitation. Before 2011 it took one year of separation before qualifying for divorce, reason why many married people often had other lovers before legally parting ways. Since 2011, however, it is no longer necessary to wait a year or to provide a reason for separation. The legislative change increased divorce rates:

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE – in 2011 there were 351,153 registered legal suits of divorce in Brazil. The high number represents an increase of almost 46% of the occurrence of this practice in the country from 2010 to 2011. IBGE claims that the increasing number of divorces in Brazil is linked to the approval of the constitutional amendment n° 66 in 2011 and the consequent constitutional changes. The amendment altered the previous deadlines for the divorce requests. The alteration enabled, without major bureaucratic requirements, the dissolution of formal unions (The Brazil Business 2015:1).

With the new legislative changes a person married today could get a divorce in a week, whereas previously it took one year for a married couple living apart to request a process of separation and two years to obtain a divorce. What changed was the bureaucratic requirement of placing blame and obtaining proof of it. In Brazil divorce is now more common than ever despite the fact that the country remains predominantly Catholic and intolerant of women’s choice regarding pregnancy. Like numerous young women in Brazil Julia became pregnant by her boyfriend when they were both only sixteen and she decided to keep the baby. Subsequently they got married and struggled with poverty while she pursued her studies in clothing design.
Her husband’s infidelity made her “sickly jealous,” which is why the relationship ended after only two years. Julia said most men in Rio were unfaithful, and that she found it unlikely that she would ever be in a committed relationship with a Brazilian again due to her likely jealousy. She liked frequenting bars that played foreign rock music instead of those in the popular party neighborhood of Rio called Lapa, which I preferred to frequent. Julia complained: “Lapa is very heavy, all those people, that confusion. The day after I always feel very tired. Plus it’s very far and I have to find someone with a car.” Crowds of scantily clothed pedestrians roamed past each other in a loud cacophony of sounds that filled the streets. People could either pay a token amount to enter one of the venues or dance in the street while purchasing fast food and drinks from the numerous outdoor vendors. The party scene in Lapa can only be described as a spectacle of semi-nude bodies dancing, grinding, sweating, and writhing, creating a collective experience of sensual excess much like the national weeklong Carnival.

Rio is notorious as the epicenter of Brazilian party spirit and openly active sexuality, although as Alberto Carlos Almeida suggests the national atmosphere is in general a highly sexualized one: “A great number of Internet sites open the possibility for liberal sexual encounters for all tastes. Not to mention that annually the Carnival proportions to Brazilians and foreigners a spectacle of the most diverse degrees of nudity. And soap operas, for some years now, make the theme explicit by exhibiting, during decent hours, scenes that are the foreplay to explicit sex. It seems that Brazilians only think about it. (Almeida 2007: 152, trans. mine). Almeida’s quantitative data on public opinions on the subject reveals that those who inhabit

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6 Uma grande quantidade de páginas na internet abre a possibilidade de encontros sexuais liberais para todo tipo de gusto. Sem contar que, anualmente, o carnaval proporciona a brasileiros e estrangeiros um espetáculo dos mais diversos graus de nudez. E as novelas, já há alguns anos, explicitam o tema exibindo, em horário nobre, cenas que são a ante-sala do sexo explícito. Parece que o brasileiro só pensa “naquilo.” (Almeida 2007: 152).
Brazilian state capitals like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are more liberal sexually than those in the smaller localities (158). He states that what separates these populations is the significantly larger percentage of people favoring of oral sex and masturbation in the capitals. However, he suggests there was no different in terms of being against anal sex and homosexual relations: 85% stated they were against homosexuality in the capitals and 90% in the non-capital cities.

Interestingly female homosexuality in capitals was more tolerated than male homosexuality (158). I found this statistic surprising since I had seen male *travestis* in public so frequently. Despite Almeida’s evidence of a degree of sexual conservatism throughout Brazil I got the sense that in Rio especially there was overall a strongly sexual climate, as my *carioca* friends said. Yet Almeida’s evidence suggests that Brazil is predominantly uneducated and sexually intolerant of different kinds of sexual practices. Marriage and children predominate the discourse of acceptable sexuality: “Brazil is the country of daddy-and-mommy” (154). Yet from the numerous prostitutes working the streets of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and from my Brazilian interlocutors’ stories I found that promiscuous heterosexual relations between men and women were frequent, unrelated to their status as married, dating or single. Even my lesbian acquaintances in Rio who were primarily highly educated, upper-middle class young women working in the cinema industry agreed. Lili a 30-year-old milky-white-skinned producer of the Rio film festival said, “at our house parties lesbians are very promiscuous and competitive, like the rest of the *cariocas*, always looking to make new conquests despite being in committed relationships.” In Rio I occasionally frequented *La Girl* club, which opened up to *Le Boy* club next-door, and danced with numerous people who identified as gay. Most agreed that promiscuity is just as high among the same-sex lovers as amongst mainstream Brazilians.
Lapa in particular was a place of excess: numerous scantily-clad bodies enraptured by various music styles at once all pouring out of dozens of bars and clubs, a cacophony of sound competing with nearby concerts and street musicians. In these streets and venues just as the music engulfed the crowds, the people were there to consume each other as commodities, as sources of pleasure. Martha de Ulhôa Carvalho insists that antropofagia (anthropophagy) or “cultural cannibalism” is a modernist concept referring to the Brazilian ethos of absorbing everything from everywhere, and ranking it by prioritizing those elements believed superior (1995: 159). For example:

[Brazilian musicians] ritualistically capture other people’s musical traits and incorporate them into their own music, leading for example to the formation of MPB – Brazilian national music (música popular brasileira) or Brazilian alternatives to jazz – bossa nova, rock – jovem guarda, funk – baile funk, dance – balada, as well as bolero, samba, and frevo, the last of which is performed during Carnival in Northeastern cities like Recife and echoes jazz dance like Sinatra’s golden years” (Carvalho 1995: 159-160).

In Lapa what stood out the most among the competing sounds were salsa, samba, pagode - country dance, and baile funk, which represents the most vulgar and sexualized Brazilian dance to favela inhabitants’ reappropriation of American hip hop. Because this genre was considered lower class, Julia avoided it like most middle class or elite Brazilians. Hyper-sexualization also defined Brazilians’ music preferences and their ever-readiness to party. Rarely was bossa nova heard by the working classes since radio stations, television channels and street-venues monopolized the air with fast-paced music with stronger sexual appeal such as samba or pagode, a country-dance similar to lambada. Bossa nova’s more subtly sensual compilations were too expensive and only a small wealthy minority could enjoy this intellectually compelling genre in their homes.
In the places most heavily affected by poverty and gang-related violence, the shantytowns called favelas, the most popular music genre was a hyper-sexualized form of hip hop called funk carioca or simply funk. I attended several parties called baile funk in marijuana-smoke-filled warehouses of Rio where I was directed to a protected VIP section upstairs, deliberately overpriced for gringos (50 réais as opposed to 5 réais). Locals displayed with athletic prowess a rich array of erotically suggestive dance moves, which I did my best to imitate. These moves would most resemble twerking, a dance popular all over the US, once considered part of Dirty South hip hop, which also involves a low squatting stance and hip thrusting in a sexually explicit manner. Some moves required undulating transitions from standing to squatting, which radiated elegance when performed smoothly (quite an invigorating exercise!). The dance both energized and empowered its performers with a strong sense of social effervescence, like a religious ritual or a sporting event for spectators with passionate team allegiances. Performing these challenging moves seemed to me like a source of instant gratification for these marginalized youths who experienced socio-economic frustration.

Yet baile funk parties also had many critics who considered the members of such gatherings excessively vulgar, highly promiscuous, uneducated, aggressive, dark-skinned, impoverished and culturally “low-class,” reflecting Brazil’s underlying prejudices. I was often cautioned by my lighter-skinned, middle-class friends like Julia against attending baile funk parties. According to her, they were “common grounds for open-fire between different gangs.” Occasionally “orgies” were said to take place in some favelas where men danced around a circle of women who wore nothing under their mini skirts dancing bent over facing each other, unable to see the men behind them.
The dancers gyrated their hips to the sexually explicit music while supposedly engaging in unprotected intercourse, switching from partner to partner as the outer circle of men rotated around the women. These stories also claimed that women sometimes became pregnant from the dance circle or roda de funk, and that children subsequently born became the responsibility of all the young men in the neighborhood since any of them could have been the parent. Since most young men were unemployed and few could afford to become a father, it seems probable this dance ritual became, however briefly at some point, socially acceptable because of the economic necessity of sharing parenting responsibility with others. To critics, this seemed probable since many Brazilians were eager consumers in a sexual economy of bodies, a literal form of antropofagia (as in the consumption of humans).

I found that antropofagia (as in cultural cannibalism) pervaded Brazilians’ identity negotiations particularly as expressed though musical choices. The specific musical environments with which Brazilians associated in order to find potential lovers reflected how they perceived their own social position and status in society at large and worldwide. As Carvalho suggests, “Brazilian identity as expressed by musical style is connected more to how Brazilians see themselves in relation to foreign cultures than to the so-called roots of Brazilianness (their Iberian, African, and Amerindian past). As a result, the prestige of a musical genre is not assigned according to music criteria; rather, it depends on the genre’s connotations in terms of social class and hierarchy” (175). Elitist Brazilians who considered themselves intellectual upper-middle-class still revered the main MPB artists like Caetano Veloso, Milton Nascimento, Gilberto Gil and Chico Buarque de Hollanda who founded the tropicalismo musical movement in the late 1960s. These creative artists employed bricolage techniques of both foreign and folk elements played within an erudite, elaborate language “understandable to
persons of ‘culture’ and ‘good taste.’ This erudition permeates not only the composition and arranging process but also the performance style” (173). Thus, “like all kinds of Brazilian popular music, the MPB musicians incorporate foreign musical traits and emphasize the ones its constituency considers more prestigious” (174). Such cultural reappropriations involved in music production and consumption reflect larger historical power dynamics. Carvalho traces the concept of *antropofagia* back to the Indians in the New World who selected their human for the sacrifice, yet first clothed, fed him and gave him a wife so he was “whole” prior to consumption:

> The concept of *antropofagia* itself goes back to sixteenth-century native South American religious cannibalism. For the Native Brazilian Tupinambá, the physical and spiritual worlds were intermingled, and it was possible to “eat” what came from both worlds. In the Tupinambá practice of *antropofagia*, people died in revenge for an ancestor, but at the same time their death meant the birth of another self in the cannibal, who added body scarifications and a new name after the human sacrifice (Carvalho 159).

Carvalho argues that Catholic missionaries, in their catechization of Native Brazilians, transformed the Tupi concept of incorporating spiritual and physical qualities through ritual cannibalism into the Brazilian cognitive framework of the *mestizo*, the mixture of heterogeneous elements. During this colonial period the focus was on reappropriating the Native’s cultural registers and enrolling them in subservience to a white, European elite.

The MPB artists aimed to revive the “stagnant” national music scene during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) with an avant-garde revival of the *antropofagia* concept, cannibalizing other genres and engendering a new style called *tropicalismo* as an idealized musical style in Brazil. Yet far from reaching the masses in a democratic way, this music nowadays has become largely absent from society, “too expensive and only afforded by the wealthy elite,” as Julia said. For example, the musical collections of Caetano Veloso are only available in expensive music stores, not distributed to the public for easy consumption like other genres. These complex songs
are meant for attentive listening on many levels: musical skill, social criticism and witty existential ruminations.

In the mainstream forefront, on the radio and in Lapa’s venues for example, the common folk enjoy boisterous rhythmic music intended for dancing. The masses are flooded with and immerse themselves in non-elite genres, which often provoke sexual arousal. This kind of “social effervescence” penetrates both religious and non-religious spheres of society, in which religious syncretism allows multiple cultural and spiritual registers to be engulfed. As Julia’s friend Clara from Bahia said: “O dia de domingo o povo vai pra igreja católica, depois vai pra casa de Umbanda, e depois sai pra rua cantando e dançando num festival, toma cachaca e daí vem a pegação com qualquer pessoa, lá na rua” [On Sundays people go to Catholic church, then to the Umbanda house, then goes out into the street singing and dancing in a street fest, drinks some sugar cane rum and has sex with whoever it be, there in the street]. Clara said she went to an Umbanda house in Bahia where the “mother of ceremony” was possessed by Cigana spirits and read fortunes during the time she was channeling them.

In the few Umbanda and Condomblé rituals I saw, women and men of different ages formed a circle and danced with eyes closed to the rhythms of the live percussion musicians to the point of elation, mirroring subtle modalities in the music, and displaying changes in body language and utterances to indicate that a certain divine entity or spirito was being incorporated in that moment. The possessed dancers were bent over shaking until sweat was dripping from their faces, and some stripped off some of their clothing as if in involuntary gestures. After one Umbanda ritual everyone who was watching including the grigo tourists like myself were invited to drink a cup of what looked like semen, a soft white-corn meal said to aid fertility. I imagined this ritual trained lovers to get used to the thick consistency of the bodily fluid, an echo of
antropofagia. Ingesting what looked like the biological male substance of fertility during a religious ritual was reminiscent of the eating of Christ’s body (bread) and drinking His blood (wine) during the Catholic Eucharist. This act, for Catholics, serves to grant both holy benediction and forgiveness to followers and to empower them: ingesting Christ’s body makes one more Christ-like. Whereas European Catholic guilt is relieved by God’s offering of his only Son, Brazilian Catholics further embrace multifaceted African-derived deities in religious syncretism in order to draw power, energy and niches for different modes of being.

     Brazilians who are syncretically religious engage by allowing themselves to be physically possessed, thus symbolically cannibalized through an intimate encounter with a spiritually empowered other, where the other is an archetype elaborated at the level of the collective imaginary, such as the Cigano or Cigana spirit. Ciganos in these religious registers represent people who powerfully resisted pressures to acculturate throughout centuries of nomadism, joyous, resilient men and women possessing immortal powers such as magic, people who love to party and who give one the added charisma and wisdom one may desire in order to become more seductive, more efficient in achieving one’s goals, more prosperous, and so forth. The temple of Paloma outlined these attributes in various courses led on Cigana culture, magic and spiritism.

     Cigano fit into the Brazilian culture of antropofagia because they represent a trophe taken up for magical and religious purposes, exoticized as such because they are primarily seen as people of excess. French surrealist Georges Bataille elaborates on this notion in “Vision of Excess,” a collection of essays dating between 1927-1930 which embody both the form of myths and myths’ theoretical analysis, thus displacing the assumed divide between them. Bataille insists that analyzing the nature of the erotic requires adopting a mythical representation, “the introduction of a lawless intellectual series into the world of legitimate thought” as an arduous
operation “practiced without equivocation” (1985:80). He describes a mythical “pineal eye” as representing an organ of excess and delirium, like the eroticized probing wonderings of his own curious mind, and calls it the opposite of a blind spot in Western rationality.

Like the MPD artists before mentioned, Bataille here commits an act of cultural cannibalism to invent his own genre of writing, which reads like a somewhat obscene view of the universe and its origins. For instance, “Eye” beings by stating that the eye is fundamentally an organ of *cannibal delicacy*: “It seems impossible, in fact, to judge the eye using any word other than *seductive*, since nothing is more attractive in the bodies of animals and men. But extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror” (Bataille 1985: 17). Both feared and admired, gazed upon from afar, a self-imposed distance, *Ciganos* appear in the Brazilian imaginary as magically endowed, divine, powerful, beautiful and resourceful.

The figure of the *Cigano* or *Cigana* also represents an anomaly in the Brazilian imaginary: an unknown perpetual *other*, capable of provoking malaise. In the essay “The Deviations of Nature” Bataille takes up the idea of anomaly, for example the “freaks,” the circus attraction for curious eyes that swarm around it, much like the crowd attracted to a medieval public torture: “The pleasure of going to see the ‘freaks’ is today seen as a carnival pleasure, and characterizes the one who comes forward as a gawker” (53). He suggests that the physical titillation caused by the vision of deviation or excess is intrinsically erotic: “A ‘freak’ in any given fair provokes a positive impression of aggressive incongruity, a little comic, but much more a source of malaise. This malaise is, in an obscure way, tied to a profound seductiveness” (55). It is precisely the visual concreteness of the otherwise unarticulated dialectic between normal and anomaly in society that attracts, seduces, and terrifies so much. Bataille also elaborates on the concept of “freaks” or “deviations of nature” being highly seductive just like
“the big toe” or feet in general, particularly because the malaise and disgust inherent in their condemnation as base fuel their very seductiveness (23). The Gypsy figure similarly gets eroticized through its initial rejection as contradictory to the norm.

A few middle-aged carioca men, mostly musicians, admitted they claimed to be Ciganos in order to attract local women. Ciganidade was considered “exotic” and “hot.” Julia was one of many women who said they appealed to Romani tarot cards, belly dancing and the cult of spiritual Ciganidade in order to increase their sexual confidence as women (Budur 2012). When I was suffering from mild depression morbidly jealous during one of Eugene’s European tours, a carioca friend sent me to see a Reiki master who also was Cigana espiritual, Beatrice Luz. I had an abrupt emotional discharge during the otherwise soothing Reiki session: a fit of crying that seemed to come from nowhere and left just as quickly. When the hour was finished I got up from the massage table feeling refreshed, joyous and uplifted, so I returned several times over the course of following months. The sessions consisted of lying down wearing a bare minimum and holding crystals in my palms and on my belly, occasionally a blue lapis lazuli token on my throat “for self-expression.” A scarf covered my eyes while Bea spent the hour gesturing Reiki signs above my body – sacred Japanese words or rather symbols said to operate like condensed prayers to invoke divine healing energies in the universe. I asked Bea if she was using magia Cigana as well, and she said this was not the right time for it. She said she only incorporated Cigana spirits during Saint Sara Kali’s day, the 24th of each month. I went back often to Bea and always found her work soothing, although she could not say much about it, since she said she had been bound to secrecy.

I also took several courses with Julia at the Temple of Paloma in Rio, and each time she brought home new books about magic and attracting wealth, power, and prosperity to the point
where I feared being manipulated into her agenda while sharing her living space as a roommate. Julia had many secrets, personal details she said that she did not want to share. Like many single mothers I encountered Julia described having sex with different men as her right to “freedom” and “privacy” – “my own business, I don’t need to tell my friends.” Also she prioritized raising her son over seeking for a constant male companion: “Alex is the only man I need in my life. I’ve raised a beautiful son. I’ve accomplished my duty as a mother. Now I can live my life.” Several times she advised me to become a mother, to have a child with Eugene before separating and “living my life” like her: “You should have a child with your boyfriend. It’s beautiful to have a child born from your love for each other. You two will eventually separate, but you will always be in each other’s lives. After that no one will be able to hold you down. You will be unstoppable. You will just enjoy your life.” When I expressed my doubts regarding both motherhood and promiscuity, Julia firmly reasserted her views. Afterwards she excluded me when she went out with friends and kept her sexual encounters private. When my boyfriend occasionally visited and we rented the larger room in her four-bedroom apartment, I had a difficult time trusting Julia not to flirt with him. In this hyper-sexualized context I found that female friends often distrusted each other. This also may explain why so many women find their emotional buttress in motherhood and the unconditional love that children offer.

Like many Brazilian mothers, Julia taught her child by example how to pursue pleasure confidently and to explore sexuality soon after reaching the legal age. The age of consent in Brazil is fourteen as defined by Article 217-A of the Brazilian Penal Code, although a judicial precedent showed that teens who are twelve and thirteen are allowed to engage in sexual activity with partners who are five years older or less, but this has not been constitutionally formalized. Twice divorced, yet feeling sexier than ever Julia said she enjoyed having been a mother at an
early age. Now in her mid-thirties she lived in a spacious Ipanema apartment along with her 16-year-old, lanky, caramel-skinned son, and rented two rooms to students like myself. I ended up in the small bedroom disconnected from the main apartment, which was meant for the maid, a common feature in Brazilian real estate since most Brazilians in the upper-middle class have maids who live with them and only take a day off on the weekend. Julia’s maid only came by twice a week from the suburbs to cook, clean and do laundry.

Next to Alex his mother’s hourglass figure, pale skin and long, jet-black hair made her look more like a sultry girlfriend than his mother. She nonetheless maintained a motherly authority over him especially when she berated him in public: “Stop spending so much of my money!” or “When am I going to meet the girl you’re seeing?” A self-proclaimed daredevil and witch, Julia indulged in her sexual freedom without hiding the fact from her son. She would frequently ride her motorcycle off into the night and keep the adventures to herself, yet she always made sure that if she stayed out late on an escapade she would make him his favorite dessert: warm corn cake doused in chocolate syrup. He exclaimed, Delícia [Delicious]!

This single mother’s cooking ritual communicated to her son that his desire to eat sweets resembled her desire for the nightlife and that both these desires must be satisfied. She aimed to make her late night absence sweeter, yet Alex still grew anxious as soon as he saw the tantalizing chocolate-glazed carrot cake cooling off on the counter. He would ask me around midnight, “Where is my mother? What is she doing out so late?” Because I did not really know but could only assume and though it best to keep quiet, I would answer with a bewildered shrug as we indulged in the still-warm cake trying to soothe both a sweet tooth and a greater, more unsettling appetite. I did not feel an attraction towards my young housemate, but he did have a twinkle in this eye when he looked at me a few times with a malandro (trickster) half-smile.
Brazilian men are fascinated by foreign women and will often try to seduce them because they represent both exotic and convenient potential lovers. As Julia explained, “Tourists come here on vacation to relax, enjoy the beach and have fun. Sure the men here, especially the ones who live in favelas, can easily have sex with the women in their neighborhood, but it is a lot more exotic for them to seduce a gringa.” In most cases it also means seducing someone who is wealthier and who can afford to pay for meals, drinks and entertainment. Some local boys approach older tourists by paying for the first two beers and then saying they have no more money, even asking for small change so they can take the bus home at night. Whether or not the feelings or the attraction are mutual, a sexual encounter with a gringa conveniently ends with her scheduled departure from Brazil, so there is little need for the man to feel responsible for taking care of the woman’s needs. The man is then free to pursue another gringa or to return to the local women’s generous embraces, which are abundantly found.

Because consensual sex is so easily accessible locally Brazilian men rarely force themselves upon gringas but rather try to seduce them and shower them with a relaxed kind of flirtatious attention. Brazil is one of the safest places for a foreign woman traveling alone since men “typically take rejection well” according to most tourist brochures (Off to Brazil, web). It is still advisable for women to take a taxi instead of walking alone at night. Also light-skinned women like myself may be annoyed or even harassed in Northeastern Brazil where they do not blend in as well as in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Southern Brazil. Theft was a more common threat during fieldwork, yet only once did a young man corner me in a Sao Paulo bus stop at night with what seemed like a gun in his jacket. He asked for my wallet and cell phone; yet after I said that I had no wallet and my cell phone was too old for him to find a replacement charger he let me go neither robbed nor harmed. Julia marveled at my luck since she had been the victim
of armed robbery nine times, and constantly worried about rape since she had been threatened with it once at knifepoint. Rape does happen in Brazil yet it often goes unreported. Rio de Janeiro is the only state in Brazil that has instituted an annual survey of violence against women. The few incidents reported are increasingly alarming to the public, yet the protection for rape victims in the initial stages is precarious, so victims generally prefer to remain anonymous to avoid being further probed and socially stigmatized, as Ortiz states:

“The problem is both circumstantial and chronic. Policies do exist, but they are ineffective. They are insufficient to deal with the needs, even given the extent of under-reporting,” said Silva, who is a member of the State Forum against Violence against Women, which groups 30 organizations […]. Last year, 6,029 rapes were committed in the state, and 4,993 of the victims were women. This represented a 24 percent increase in the number of women raped compared to 2011 (2003: 1).

Rape is mostly experienced within the close confines of family life according to Daniela, a former lawyer with experience defending underage victims of incest in Sao Paulo. Daniela was visiting Cabrito’s family with her husband on a Saturday afternoon and while the barbeque was cooking, we sat around a table in the sunny backyard while she explained that her job for fifteen years had been to defend young victims of rape. She stated that rape is rarely reported, usually when the girl is impregnated during the incident, the one circumstance in which abortion is legal in Brazil, “but it’s still a hard case to argue for most victims and the trial only traumatizes them more.” She had recently quit her job since “it was too depressing because of so much denial both from the mothers and from the police” when rape was a case of incest by male family members:

It happens a lot more often than everyone thinks, especially when parents share their bed with their young daughters. People here in Brazil are very poor and sometimes all they have is a room, but that still doesn’t make it okay. The father ends up taking advantage of the child while the mother pretends to be asleep and basically lets this happen to keep him coming home. Wealthier men mostly take advantage of their young live-in maids, but it’s even harder for us to know what really goes on in those families. No one ever wants to report rape because they are too ashamed, people are so religious here, and the police are all men, patriarchal and corrupt. They let families take care of themselves even in the case of domestic violence. There’s very little women can do.
I wondered why would women sacrifice their girls to their husbands’ carnal desires. Daniela replied that many mothers are psychologically disturbed by jealousy of their daughters’ budding beauty as well as by their men’s infidelity and roving eye.

According to the local women Brazilian men are good lovers, the *cariocas* in particular, yet they are also often described as hypocritical, unfaithful and chauvinist. In relationships men were said to demonstrate undesirable machismo: “they treat women like they are meat or possessions, they not only cheat all the time, but they’re also the ones showing fits of jealousy and even aggression,” said coffee-skinned 24-year old Ana while hand-knitting colorful threads with lightning dexterity into elaborate dresses. I had met her in Rio when Julia suggested we should both model for Ana’s new catalogue. They both showed enthusiasm for my “exotic” Eastern European look, so I volunteered. Ana was tall, dark-skinned, determined and disciplined, dating a Spanish *gringo* whom she admired for his “manners” and “porcelain-like almost transparent white skin with visible blue veins.” Soon after he returned to Spain, Ana moved there to marry him, had children and launched her clothing line successfully.

*Gringos* represent a potential source of economic capital for Brazilians even more so than *gringas*, which makes them even more prone to risk. Most *gringos* want to have sex while they are on vacation with local women, seduced by the hyper-sexualizing narratives popular in advertisement for tourism to Brazil. Some are predatory such as the much older Italian men I saw hanging out with young local girls, while others become victims, and often the line is blurred. Brazil attracts a great deal of sex tourism because prostitution is legal for adults although inducing someone into prostitution is not. The one prostitute friend I made has become notorious through Jonathan Shaw’s autobiographical novel “Narcisa: Our Lady of Ashes” (2008). As in
daily life, in this largely biographical novel Jonathan Shaw calls himself *Cigano*. He describes in detail his experiences the young prostitute from when she was fifteen until her mid-twenties.

If Hubert Selby Jr., Charles Bukowski, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Neil Cassady, Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, the Marquis de Sade, Antonio Carlos Jobim, João Gilberto, Edward Teach, Charley Parkery, Iggy Pop, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, R. Crumb, Robert Williams, Joe Coleman, Dashiell Hammett, E.M. Cioran and all of the Three Stooges had all been involved in some greasy, shameful, evil whorehouse orgy, Jonathan Shaw would surely be its diabolical, reprobate spawn” (paperback quote by Johnny Depp).

A local journalist introduced Jonathan to Eugene as a *Cigano* from Los Angeles, son of jazz legend Artie Shaw, a former tattoo-art legend, and close friend of Johnny Depp. Jonathan and Eugene became friends since they both shared a sense of kinship with *Ciganos*, and a penchant for the rock-n-roll underworld. Like Eugene, Jonathan claimed he was *Cigano* on his mother’s side yet had similarly been raised without access to the ethnic group. Jonathan joined us when visiting Mio Vacite, the known *Cigano* violinist, and struggled to accompany their improvisations on a tambourine. He said both his parents, like most of his relatives, were talented artists, excessive people, alcoholics.

Shaw used *Ciganidade* to justify his perambulations by motorcycle across Latin America, his hopping from brothel to brothel in reckless “freedom” until he met Narcisa. A recovering alcoholic with a sexual addition, Shaw financed her drug addiction at first and eventually her recovery. In his novel and daily life he boasted being the most highly sexualized *Cigano* living in Rio. Shaw’s novel cannibalizes the cult of the Virgin, explored in detail by Kristeva, and regurgitates it as the cult of “Our Lady of Ashes” – the other dichotomy in the Brazilian imaginary: the saint and the whore. In the prologue, he idealizes Narcisa by aligning her with the “Daughter of Babylon, who is to be destroyed; happy is the man who serves you as you have served us – *Psalms 137:8*” as well as the Dakin in Tibetan myth (as in a sacred story), who
“embodies the spirit of female wrath and fury,” “She who traverses the sky,” “Sky dancer.” I tagged along several times when Eugene met with Jonathan and Narcisa, the inspiration for the titular character.

Narcisa was a drug addicted, vagrant prostitute when I first met her. She lived for bouts of time in a small hotel room in Lapa or at Jonathan’s fancy apartment where she had a habit of hiding in a wooden box like a cat. Her rail-thin, boyish, hard body often clad in mini-skirts and cropped tops betrayed her deteriorating health. Yet her energetic dancing, morose charm and sharp-tongued wit beguiled those in her company. Although Jonathan tried to marry the girl, she returned to her line of work again and again. After many Reiki sessions with Beatrice Luz, whom had I warmly recommended, Narcisa overcame her addictions, enrolled in college, wrote several collections of poetry and picked up a habit of constructing *bricolage* art works. Narcissi’s painful
history is unusual in Brazil only because of her exit from this line of work, which Jonathan assisted by gifting her a small apartment in Copacabana and offering her some financial support. Like many young girls in the rural inland of Brazil, when she was about fifteen Narcisa’s own family entrusted her to a strange man who promised to find her a job in a city. Her parents were destitute and had several younger children. Without any family for protection, she quickly found herself trapped in an illicit lifestyle on the streets that had its own vicious momentum. This happens more often than we would like to think, as evidenced by warnings against childhood prostitution posted all over Brazilian airports.

Brazil is said to have the largest population of sex workers in the world after Thailand, with official estimates rounding up to a million, not accounting for many unreported sex professionals. In “Negotiating Democracy in Brazil, The Politics of Exclusion,” Bernd Reiter calls Brazil “one of the most inequitable countries in the world” (2009: 1). Examining the legislation regulating sex work in Brazil illuminates these inequalities. As Reiter suggests, “the Brazilian political system is disconnected from the majority of its population, while a relatively small minority of Brazilians uses the political system to advance its own ends” (2). Reiter argues that the state includes those perceived as having rights that must be protected and excludes those perceived as relying on favors such as the poor and marginalized women who engage in sex work (146). These women continue to be “excluded from the benefits of full citizenship despite the fact that adult prostitution is legal.

Sex work is recognized as a professional activity in the Classificação Brasileira de Ocupações (Brazilian Classification of Occupation)” (Williams 2013: 99). Former president Lula’s administration even put together a didactic primer for the “sex professional” available on the website of the Labor and Employment Ministry since 2005. “In the Code 5198, professional
do sexo (sex professional) includes various names: garota de programa, garoto de programa, meretriz, messaline, michê, mulher da vida, prostitute, and trabalhador do sexo.” (Williams 99).

Lula’s bureaucrats assembled instructions on everything needed to have a successful career in prostitution, a primer for anyone interested in selling their bodies that teaches them step-by-step how to prepare for, negotiate, seduce and perform in sexual encounters. The content even suggests seducing men with affectionate nicknames and perfume, striptease, massages and even offering to do old bachelors’ laundry, as well as showing tenderness to those in need of loving care (CBO 2015, web). In the case of tourists the primer instructs that the sex worker be ready to accompany them in their travels. The Brazilian government facilitates sex work in order to attract revenue both from tourism and from tax-paying sex workers.

When the police arrest prostitutes in the streets they are charged with vagrancy. The Brazilian penal code only imprisons (for up to five years) those who induce others into prostitution. Blatant racism pervades these court decisions and as Williams suggests, “Since women of African descent are more likely to be read as sex workers, they are arrested, while sex workers often pass under the radar” (2013: 114). Yet the Lula legislation has helped improve working conditions for many. Also Brazil has successfully kept in check the rates of HIV and AIDS, which are no higher than in the US. The online primer insists that sex workers learn and teach courses in safe sexual practices. It even warns against using silicone-based lubricants because the petroleum ingredients can damage latex condoms thus making them less effective against STDs. Widespread poverty and legality ensure a high level of sex supply, so tourists are often glad to find numerous prostitutes walking the streets offering “oral sex for the price of a beer,” as an American gringo said, along with a wider menu of inexpensive sexual practices. Yet these eager consumers of sex work have little protection from robberies, diseases, and being
deceived by feminine-looking transvestites (*travesti*). Don Kulick’s ethnography “Travesti” documents the lives of Brazilian cross-dressing male sex workers (1998). During fieldwork in Sao Paulo I lived in a youth hostel in what I thought would be a scenic historical city center, but which turned out to be a center of both male and female prostitution. The hostel’s online advertisement made it deceptively attractive just as the government’s primer for sex work made it seem safer than in practical experience. I was grateful that many male *travestis* defended me against macho passers-by at night and shared the details of their lives with me.

The one bisexual friend I made in the neighborhood, João, a friendly young man who sold pizza and fresh juice at the corner store for a day job, said he got married at sixteen and divorced at twenty when he realized that he enjoyed sex with both men and women. He chose to cross-dress at night, yet he did not choose prostitution. He said he looked out for the runways boys between seven and fourteen years old, who were escaping abuse from their families because they had been discovered as homosexuals. He said the boys come from the small villages to the big city looking for work, and he was their pimp and “mother,” training them to become prostitutes, renting a flat for them, marking their territory, and protecting and teaching them various sexual and dance routines (*programas*). Most sex workers including the youngest described their clients as primarily married Brazilian older men and occasional *gringos* whom they often attempted to rob because “*gringos* always have more money on them.”

It was disturbing to see that so many children sold their bodies every night, especially the runaway boys from homes that were violently intolerant of their homosexual tendencies. Brazilian law punishes the prostitution of minors under eighteen according to Article 244-A of the 1990 Brazilian Statute of Child and Youth, and according to the Penal Code Articles 218-B, 227, 230, 231 and 231-A, yet these children certainly were minors. Many of them were under the
legal age for consensual sexual activity. Sexual acts with children younger than fourteen are legally defined by Article 217-A of the Brazilian Penal Code as the “rape of a vulnerable person” for which the punishment is 8 to 15 years in prison. Yet clearly these laws went unenforced. Whether male or female these children had clients almost every night they were out. They usually lived in small, overcrowded apartments with a pimp “mother” who collected a fee and who in return paid the rent, taught them how engage in sex work and even how to be aggressive with clients if necessary. Because drug trafficking involving minors usually do not result in jail time, many also sold and were consumers of drugs, or partook in gang-related activities, thus risking getting involved in even more dangerous altercations.

The cycle of violence to which impoverished marginal youth are exposed early on often ends with incarceration. Prisons in Brazil are notoriously overcrowded sites of racially motivated abuse at the hands of both fellow prisoners and the ill-trained staff. Brazil has the third largest incarcerated population of any country, after the US and China, according to the Justice National Council. In the US, “there are more black men under correctional control today than were under slavery in 1850,” quoted singer John Legend famously during the 2015 Oscar Awards from the book “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” a fervent racial critique of the modern American prison system by scholar and attorney Michelle Alexander (2010). In 2013 Katie Mulvaney, a researcher for PolitiFact, found Alexander’s statement valid:

The Census of 1850 showed that 872,924 male African-American slaves over age 15 lived in the United States at that time. (The same Census found that there were a total of 3.2 million African-American slaves of all ages, at a time when the total U.S. population, including slaves and “free coloreds,” was 23.2 million). […] “There are more African American men in prison, jail, on probation or parole than were enslaved in 1850.” Our research found that U.S. Bureau of Criminal Statistics put the number of African American men under state and federal criminal justice supervision in 2013 at about 1.68 million – 807,076 above the number of African American men enslaved in 1850 (Mulvaney 2014, web).
The so-called colorblind policy operates similarly in Brazil leading to the incarceration of colored men. Brazilian researchers Aline Yamamoto and Natália Bouças do Lago explain how the justice system bureaucrats often reinforce social prejudice particularly against impoverished black favela youths:

Of the approximately 60,000 teenagers who are subject to socio-educational measures in Brazil, around 18,000 (about 30 per cent) have been given prison sentences or are being held in prison prior to trial or sentencing and held in one of 288 internment institutes. The majority of them are males (93 per cent) between 16-17 years old (44 per cent) and are poorly educated; 53 per cent have committed an offence against property; 16 per cent have committed drug offences and less than 5 per cent have been imprisoned for homicide. […] Furthermore, the research highlights an important element which contributes to the increased use of imprisonment: the limited development of legal doctrine regarding the prosecution of crimes committed by teenagers. As a consequence, judges and prosecutors often base their decisions and sentences on subjective and extra-juridical criteria, often reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices (Yamamoto et al. 2014: 2).

These researchers argue that imprisoned adolescents are targeted unfairly by the justice system, “with social stigmas encouraging prison sentences for many teenagers who do not deserve them.” There are limited laws elaborated around adolescent criminality in Brazil which leaves jurists to base judgments on their opinions and prejudices.

I frequently witnessed the pervading prejudice against impoverished youth of color in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. In Rio this was more visible since the favelas were more closely interspersed with richer neighborhoods such as Leblon and Ipanema. The threat of robbery at gunpoint was considered so great in Rio that cars were strongly advised not to stop at intersections after 10 PM unless absolutely necessary. Streetlights blinked red all night while the flow of traffic carried on anxiously. In wealthier neighborhoods the tipsy merrymaking in bars and restaurants gave the illusion of safety while crowds of children surrounded white gringos walking by and begged for some change. These little beggars were often drug-addicted gangsters, according to local consensus and the police who made a ritual of striking them.
The streets teemed with thieves and prostitutes in all kinds of drug-induced altered states of consciousness, making urban spaces dangerous enough to forbid the wearing of valuable jewelry, purses and even sneakers. Once in Rio while I was walking on a main street, a young colored man was hit by a fast car, which simply drove off. The victim was hurled to the ground, his leg injured and his market cart full of empty crates broken and disheveled. I called a cab and took him to the nearest hospital in Ipanema, but the nurses said they could not help him. They recommended a more distant hospital in Leblon. It was hours before he was attended to in their packed emergency room. I had the uncanny sense that life was expendable here.

When gringos did not seek sexual relief from prostitutes but rather from seducing local women, the risk was a different one: unwittingly fathering a child. Many single women admitted to fantasizing about being impregnated by a tourist. Given the comparative financial stability of foreigners, these local women assumed that a gringo would be a better provider for a child than most local men. Bewildered new gringo fathers struggled to find employment in Brazil and usually returned to their native countries to pursue a career, while the new mothers often preferred to stay put and receive child support while remaining available for new sexual encounters. I found this most relevant in Rio, which attracts a considerable number of tourists through its elaboration of symbolic forms like the cariocas’ sexualized bodies, a discourse endorsed by cariocas themselves.

During my pre-fieldwork language immersion in Rio I lived with a representative if atypical single mother named Gloria and her half-German one year old girl. The baby’s father had returned to work in his homeland, yet Gloria refused to follow him since she considered Germany “too boring, cold, conservative and without any appeal.” She was proud of having seduced this blue-eyed, slender young man who always had “only a beer for dinner,” but she also
cherished her freedom to seduce other men just as much as she cherished rich foods and tanning although “the sun damages Brazilian people’s skin.” Meanwhile she admired gringos for their “beautiful, white, glowing, healthy, clean baby-like skin,” but not enough to use SPF lotions.

For Gloria, these gringos were “true conquests” yet she had no intention of settling for one that would take her away from Brazil: “Brazilians are happier than gringos, they do whatever they like, they socialize more, they joke around, they enjoy sex especially during Carnival, they love their soccer games, drinking beer at the local barzinhos, hanging out on the beach, smoking some weed every day, so life is more fun.” Gloria elaborated with gusto on the many national symbolic forms that she considered universally desirable much like the touristic brochures. Living in Ipanema meant for her being able to encounter and seduce foreigners whenever she wanted while teaching photography at a university nearby. I was shocked when she boasted that she had seduced a young Italian model while she was pregnant and still living with the German man. Some of our common, whiter and wealthier acquaintances looked down upon Gloria’s promiscuous habits and blamed her mixed African and Native-American ancestry, along with her “lower-middle class” background.

The wealthier my interlocutors were, the more difficult it was to engage them in open discussions about sexuality as women in particular risked losing their inheritance for disobeying parental expectations. Lower-middle class Brazilian women, however, often embraced the idea of promiscuity just as eagerly as the men while they did their best to hide it from their partners. One afternoon on a bus ride from Ipanema to the suburbs I asked the boisterous dark-skinned woman sitting next to me if cariocias cheat on their men. “And how!” she exclaimed. I asked, “Even married women?” She replied giddily and loudly although we were on a bus full of people during peak traffic hours:
Girl, with four-five lovers at the same time! You’d have no idea because they all have to act like saints. Men don’t know what to do with a woman who is liberated, but women know how to liberate themselves. They’ve seen men do so much in the past, now they started doing the same thing and men are getting crazy jealous because of it.

She laughed heartily then joined the loud chatter of her female coworkers sharing the bus.

Without overly generalizing her statement we can acknowledge that this type of celebratory discourse regarding female promiscuity is popular among lower and middle-class women particularly those living in coastal Brazil. However, narratives about one’s sexual exploits are not necessarily truth-based because there is also a tendency to boast and hyper-sexualize oneself in this type of competitive discourse.

Women compete with men as well as with other women in their quest for sexual satisfaction in which lovers are seen as “conquests,” yet a skillful but hypocritical denial of sexual libertinage is required to maintain long-term relations. This was relevant even for same-sex couples. A lesbian carioca at the beach explained while flirting with me:

Girls love being in a relationship, but it’s hard for them to be committed anyway. Lesbian house parties are basically just kissing each other behind closed doors. It’s all about the thrill of seduction. They’re even worse then men. They sleep around but don’t ever tell their girlfriends. I know my girlfriend must be doing some stuff on the side and she kind of knows I’m doing stuff, but we’re really good at lying. I lie really well. I would never ever admit the truth to her. It’s better to lie than to hurt the person you love.

Despite widespread promiscuity, even among lesbians, most people in relationships kept up appearances of monogamy. Therefore, their public personas bespoke of the Catholic influence on their upbringing as both men and women often engaged in long-term relationships or marriages and treated each other with tender diminutives, frequent gestures of affection and promises of monogamy. Partners frequently addressed each other as meu amor (my love). Cariocas added a particularly breathy guttural ending to amor and delivered it in a low tonality
implying both enthusiasm and sexual arousal. Evidence of that was the couples’ uninhibited, profuse public display of affection.

Among married couples of all social strata in Brazil a conservative public demeanor prevailed such that a relationamento aberto (open relationship) was not considered acceptable. A young Brazilian Jewish man named Yan said his open marriage was one of the few exceptions. He had recently married a young woman from the United States to help her obtain Brazilian citizenship. He flirted with me on Ipanema beach and explained his marriage was a special case because they were non-committed lovers: “She is back in California this month, and I’m sure she is partying and drinking with her friends, so what can I expect? She’s young. We’ve already talked about it and we won’t go into the details anymore. I get jealous sometimes if I look at her Facebook messages and I find her chatting with some guys, but I can’t really control her. I better just enjoy my few days without her.” Yan gulped down the last of his beer and anxiously tried to smile away his concern.

The fact that the woman was an American gringa is significant since Brazilians do not usually accept entering an open-relationship, according to Yan. Most Brazilians do their best to appear monogamous even if they are promiscuous despite their supposedly committed relationships. Brazilians echoed verbatim Julia’s saying: “Aquí no Brasil a clima do sexo é muito forte.” [Here in Brazil it’s a strongly sexual climate]. After hearing it so often, the expression seemed to me like their motto. In moments of loneliness, jealousy or worry many felt compelled to seek clarity through tarot card readings with Ciganas, who made it their business to find out intimate details about their clients’ personal lives although they looked down upon the gage. Both Calon and Roma women subscribed to a roster of traditional prescriptions for moral purity that aimed to regulate sexuality to ensure the reproduction of community bloodline and values.
Since Romani standards of moral purity require women to be virgins at marriage and faithful to their men, many consider non-Romani women excessively sexual and morally impure.

This was particularly the case in Rio de Janeiro where the sensual beach culture attracted all but Ciganas. Most Ciganas thought it shameful to wear the Brazilian tanga (half-cheek bikini) in public like the rest. To my surprise, cariocas found my Romanian thong swimsuit bottom too revealing. Several women approached me and said it was shameful wear that on a public beach. Also, unlike Romanians, Brazilians did not condone topless sunbathing. In some ways (ambivalently so), locals were far more conservative than I assumed. For example, when Eugene’s band came to Rio de Janeiro, despite the concert’s success, his band members complained they “couldn’t get laid.” They said the girls of Ipanema were much less promiscuous than they had hoped, insisting on a committed relationship with them, middle-aged gringo men. However, most Ciganas continued to bask in their self-righteous sense of propriety.

**Ciganidade, modesty and ambivalence**

Brazil’s natural beauty is only one of the reasons why tourists are so attracted to it, another crucial one is its strong sexual appeal. Romani people’s negative interpretation of such hyper-sexuality set them apart from the majority of Brazilian society although in practice they often violated their strict social mores themselves. Even traditional male infidelity, common among Romani men, was less tolerated in those households where the women represented the main income provider. In Sao Paulo many Roma women said fortune telling was lucrative for them and they were the main family breadwinners. These women also claimed that they would not tolerate their men having affairs. However, in private several married men implied that they were unfaithful on occasion and did not hesitate to flirt with me. At weddings and other
community gatherings the men had to stay in one half of the room while the women danced with each other in the other half of the room, a strategic gender separation meant to prevent men from flirting with women.

Affairs among married Ciganos were considered the most taboo yet some men like Cabrito said, “Ciganas are the most desirable because they are the most forbidden, and they really know how to flirt, how to seduce a man, how to drive him crazy. But they won’t cheat unless it’s for passionate love, so they’re the most difficult kind of conquest.” Flirting among married Ciganos was dangerous and could terminate a party with an explosive scandal such as a brawl among drunken men or women pulling each other’s long hair. Therefore Ciganas donned long dresses to cover their legs at all festas and even though they avidly danced amongst each other with typical undulating arms, sensual hip shaking, foot stomping and skirt waving, few couples danced together.

Ciganas of older generations or belonging to more impoverished Calon communities often thought of their men’s promiscuity as a sign of “authentic” manhood. For example Auntie Violeta had adopted the children her husband had fathered with other women, explaining with a cheerful smile that, “A beautiful man is of the street, he is not yours. My man was a real man.” Similarly Soraya, a Calin I met in Rio de Janeiro while she was reading palms on the beach of Copacabana said: “Our men are real men. Of course they sleep around. We accept it as long as it’s not with other Ciganas, only with the gagia who are just galinhas (chickens).” Her husband Genesio elaborated on the topic when I visited their camp one afternoon: “Look, Calon have affairs from time to time but we respect Ciganas, we only sleep around with Brazilian women.” All the men laughed. Feeling uncomfortable about my status as a gagi I followed Soraya inside the tent. She explained that Ciganas were traditionally taught from an early age to show the
husband *pakiv* (respect) and “unconditional love,” a task in which women took great pride.
Soraya said, “Unconditional love is something the *gagia* cannot feel or even understand, but our souls feed on that. We marry the one we have grown up with, the one we have loved all our life. There is very little divorce among us. We stick together no matter what. We have the fire in our veins and we love more than anyone.” This ideal type of “unconditional love” was unreciprocated by the men, contradicted by the general consensus that men could sleep around, an obvious case of patriarchal “gender” inequality. Again, I am using the word “gender” to flag categories contructed by the interlocutors in their ethnic-specific understanding of a dichotomy between men and women, which they align with “masculinity” and “femininity” respectively.

All *Ciganos* were instructed to avoid engaging in oral sex since their moral purity laws defined as impure any woman’s body below the waist. I did not tell any of my Romani interlocutors that I believe oral sex is crucial to intimacy nor did I recommend one of best books on the topic, “She Comes First - The Thinking Man’s Guide to Pleasuring a Woman” (Kerner 2004). Dr. Kerner argues that oral sex has been denied to women for centuries in most cultures, so he redefines it as *coreplay* rather than an optional aspect of *foreplay* when it comes to pleasuring females especially since, “I learned from my study of the pioneering sex researcher Alfred Kinsey that the typical male sustains penetrative thrusting, on average, for about two and a half minutes” (12). Given the lack of privacy in most Romani households, both houses and tents, in which often children and parents shared common sleeping quarters, I imagined it difficult conducting sexual activities at home regardless.

As previously mentioned, *Ciganos*’ taboo on discussing sexual matters, along with the prohibition of oral, anal and same-gender sexual practices, prevented my inquiry into such acts. *Ciganas* were not only opposed to oral sex, they also washed their skirts and undergarments
separately from other items of clothing, lest all be considered impure by using the same container for items touching the body below the waist with those touching the body above the waist. Some said this rule was harder to obey in households nowadays where maids did the laundry and used a single load in the machine instead of washing the items separately by hand, as Ciganas had done in the past. Most of the elders complained that ever since people lived in their own houses instead of in clustered tents sexuality was harder to regulate: “Who knows what people do now behind closed doors!” Ianca exclaimed. During fieldwork in Brazil it became imperative for me to adopt a conservative public persona when interacting with Romanies to avoid being shunned.

I attempted to understand the often-puzzling Romani values such as the female “unconditional love” for men through participant-observation, shifting between various cultural registers in a dance of approximations and distanciations during fieldwork. Right before leaving for Brazil I began dating a New York-based, Ukrainian-born, part-Rom punk-rock singer who goes by the artistic name of Eugene Hutz – Evgeny Nikolaev. The Ciganos I met easily understood the deep affection I showed for this often touring, unfaithful, charismatic so-called Gypsy. In fact my relationship kept Ciganos at bay. Most had watched Eugene sing in Romanes with Madonna at the London Live Earth show on July 7th, 2007. They discouraged each other from flirting with me because they admired his looks, talent and fame. In Brazil, Eugene befriended Ciganos easily.

My relationship with Eugene echoed Romani values and granted me a gender-specific sense of respect, honor and protection while I accessed Romani communities during fieldwork. It also shaped my understanding of “unconditional love” since the unequally-open-relationship was a novel experience for me which turned out to be a devastating form of codependence, an
addiction to the other liable to elicit frequent toxic emotions such as jealousy despite the
euphoria offered by short-lived happier times.

Ciganas were hardly immune to jealousy, ever ready to physically attack their rivals if
given an opportunity. I was warned several times at weddings not to look at any man
provocatively or dance with a man or, “his wife might jump up to slap you cold,” Ianca
exclaimed and laughed by herself. I witnessed one woman at a wedding slap another one while
she was dancing, and I was told that she was retaliating for a perceived ongoing flirtation with
her husband that the dancing lady had engaged in for some time now. Auntie Violeta herself
admitted to having beaten up many of her husband’s gagia mistresses, although she adopted five
of his children with them. So I was convinced I had to behave properly, or else face severe
repercussions.

Also one Easter Sunday when Auntie had gathered most of her family in her courtyard
for a festive barbeque, a fight ensued between two of her daughters-in-law. The fight started with
the women’s 3-year-old daughters’ exchange of insults: “My mother said your mother is a slut” -
“No, your mother is a slut” – “Mom, her mom called you a slut.” Instantly the two women began
a hair-pulling fight in the kitchen, landing on the floor until their husbands intervened. The two
brothers pulled their wives apart, then physically and verbally fought until their mother separated
them. One brother had flirted with the other’s wife, making his own susceptible to jealous bouts.
Auntie said: “these women have gone crazy, fighting like this in my yard, disrespecting my
house.” Their excessive confrontation took place right before my eyes.

A young bori tried to reassure me, “this happens frequently among the Roma, jealous
wives, they just beat each other up.” The scandal left several family members shaking anxiously
and complaining of high blood pressure. They said most Roma suffer from high blood pressure
and are highly susceptible to other people’s negative emotions, a clear case where empathic identification with others is counterproductive yet hard to prevent. Despite these spectacular bouts of jealousy, many Ciganas believed infidelity was normal for men: they excused the men and took it upon themselves to restrain other women’s behavior in a violently competitive way. The need for physical violence also revealed that Ciganas did not rely (only) on magic to retaliate. Dina was the only witch rumored to deal in macumba (black magic). The rest said they were afraid to do so because they believed in serious repercussions of inflicting harm on others.

The Roma said that to cast a harmful spell one has to give something to the evil spirit, like the soul of a child. They loved their children too much to risk having one of them fall ill after casting a spell. Dina, by virtue of being childless perhaps, was less afraid. She was rumored to have successfully cast a spell on her cheating husband, who disappeared without a trace. Ianca exclaimed: “She was the most jealous woman of all of us! She was even jealous of her sister-in-law and tried to cast a spell on her, but it went to her own brother instead. He died of cancer suddenly. Everyone knows it was her doing. Even her family doesn't want her close to them. She gives me the evil eye. Backstabber!” Dina seemed unperturbed by such gossip, and admitted she fancied her nephew Matcho. Most of my interlocutors did not discuss their sexual practices, and I kept mine largely secret from them. In Sao Paulo, Angelica, Cabrito’s wife once asked me: “How was your reunion? Did you get tired from so much loving?” Timidly, I failed to answer.

Also Cabrito had asked me in private, “You put on some weight. You must’ve been enjoying your man. Ciganas put on weight after they get married, they discover all that pleasure and they just eat and stay in bed.” Clearly my sex life was a topic of conversation between these married Roma. I was closely surveyed for any weight loss or gain, the length of my skirts or transparency of my tops, loose locks of hair, sensualized speech patterns or look of joy when a
man entered the room. This led to my constant anxiety and self-surveillance around Ciganos, an over-repression of impulses otherwise encouraged in Brazil. George Devereux explains this shift as an unconscious process:

The alienness of the culture [an anthropologist] studies, the initial incomprehensibility of its ‘demand cues’ (which, precisely because they are incomprehensible impinge directly on his unconscious), its irresistibly consequent pattern and its insistence on assigning to the anthropologist a certain status, regardless of whether he finds it ego-syntonic or ego-dystonic and regardless of whether he really understands all of its implications, inevitably mobilize neurotic and regressive reactions and impulses even in the normal anthropologist, whose culturally conditioned defenses and reactions are usually ineffective in an alien society. Moreover, precisely because each culture overtly implements certain impulses which are repressed in the anthropologist’s own culture, the role assigned to him will inevitably stimulate some of his ordinarily inhibited impulses. Whether he will then act them out, or else over-repress them, or control them in a mature manner, will depend on his insight into — and capacity to sublimate — his hidden impulses” (Devereux 2007: 243).

As Devereux suggests, there was a strong impulse for me to over-repress sexual impulses which the mainstream Brazilian society was stimulating with its normalization of hyper-sexuality.

Neurotic and regressive reactions are normal for anthropologists according to Devereux, and my experience certainly supported this theory. I felt most repressed when I was with Romani interlocutors, yet my whole time in Brazil was generally marked by that neurotic self-surveillance with a few exceptions: when alone with Eugene or with an occasional lover, usually a tourist. Once or twice a year I secretly had brief affairs that would settle the score so-to-speak so that I could keep dating Eugene without obsessing about his promiscuity. This was easiest when I lived in a youth hostel with co-ed dormitories and smaller rooms for additional privacy.

In these hostels I also met Brazilian women who were married or separated, who wanted to disappear from domestic life for a while. Amanda, my carioca friend, or rather acquaintance, also disappeared from Rio the week when she was supposed to get married. She cancelled her wedding with an American math professor although both their families had already flown into
the city for the occasion. She had enjoyed the seduction of a French chef himself recently divorced from a local woman, and had cancelled her engagement at the last minute, unwilling to give up her new lover for married life in Canada. I had kept secret my brief affair with the suave restaurant owner, so I failed to warn Amanda against him. Meanwhile, I quietly returned to my relationship with Eugene, which was more gratifying than the brief sexual exchanges I could pursue in Brazil.

52. Eugene Hutz and several Roma relatives of Mirian Stanescon – Arpoador Park, Rio
Among Ciganos I continuously tried to show modesty as much as possible in order to avoid exclusion and conflict. Often I portrayed myself as a partial Cigana from Romania. After I first met several fortunetellers in a public park in Rio de Janeiro they not only offered to help my research, but they embraced me as a daughter-like figure because of my nuanced story about my father possibly being Romani. I was welcomed to visit their communities and to spend time especially with elderly women, especially those whose husbands were long gone. Showing me maternal care gave them some relief from boredom and loneliness. Unlike some Ciganos who shunned me for being a gagi, some of these older women like Ianca shared intimate details about
Cigana culture and their personal lives. Although when we spent time together a few Ciganos circulated rumors that Ianca was sexually attracted to me, this malicious gossip of taboo same-sex attraction did not shame her into sending me away. When she told me about the rumor we laughed it off. Humor was always part of our routine. After all, Ianca was in her mid-fifties, I was half her age, and the friendship between us was more like a mother-daughter relationship. I thought it wise to keep my bisexual curiosity undisclosed along with my complicity in Eugene’s promiscuous lifestyle. Around Ciganos I usually dressed, spoke and behaved in a self-censored manner, anxious to avoid being labeled as flirtatious and dishonorable.

I adopted a more modest demeanor when I commuted between Rio’s center and the suburb called Nova Iguaçu where my Romani interlocutors lived. I would sit and sweat on crowded public transportation for over two hours wearing a long skirt even on the hottest days in preparation for my visits among Ciganos. I watched the Ipanema and Copacabana beaches slide away far behind me as the bus penetrated inland swerving dangerously fast on the curving highways. Zona Sul (South Side of Rio) disappeared along with the fancy restaurants and expensive clothing stores popular amongst the elites and tourists and protected by policemen from the threateningly close favelas illegally constructed near the attractive beaches. The bus left these cultural paradoxes of Zona Sul behind as it drew closer to the Central train station.

The hour-long train ride to the city’s periphery carried a representative sampling of the suburban middle-class residents also known as “President Lula’s people,” who commuted daily to work or study in the city and seldom got to enjoy Rio’s beaches. They were those who qualified to receive a monthly stipend for children’s school attendance, themselves products of an unfair public education system which endlessly produces a large population willing to work for minimal wages and to travel long distances daily. These people looked mellow and pleasantly
contemplative while bearing the steamy heat of the overcrowded and un-air-conditioned train wagons. Often passengers would interrupt their daydreaming to purchase snacks from hustling vendors: small candies, nuts and other instant gratifications to make the ride more enjoyable.

Contrary to tourist-targeting brochures about Brazil, these working-class *cariocas* appeared unconcerned with diet and exercise, yet did project a nonchalant lack of modesty easy to mistake with body image confidence. Evidence to the contrary is the high frequency of plastic surgery, such as breast implants, that event the poor in Brazil managed to obtain, according to Dr. Meyer, a Jewish plastic surgeon I befriended in Rio. Dr. Meyer, who had proudly just done a face-lift on his own mother “pra ela ficar bonita” [so she can be beautiful], said that a large *bunda* (buttocks) remained essential to the Brazilian aesthetic, but that in recent years breast implants were growing in popularity: “Even the poor nowadays get the surgery!” Perhaps this was a consequence of American cultural goods being imported more frequently in Brazil, such as films and television shows, which place emphasis on large breasts as desirable: the ideal hourglass figure. Ianca once took me on a visit to a *Cigana* who was married with a *gagio* and had just gotten breast augmentation. The man’s roving eye made the woman sickly jealous and insecure, Ianca said. Dr. Meyer, judging from his extensive medical experience and research on reconstructive surgery, said that a numerous women in Brazil tried to commit suicide out of jealousy inefficiently by throwing acid on themselves or setting themselves on fire. One could grasp little of such anxiety while travelling in the subway lull.

Most passengers were dressed casually and minimally, showing off their prevalent bulging bellies, cellulite or descending cleavages. Dark-skinned women often sported abundant bleached hair on their arms and legs, eliciting comments from occasional *gringos* who thought it amusing and “weird.” In fact many dark-skinned boys sported bleach-blond hair trying to imitate
a Caucasian aesthetic. When asked about the most popular national television and cinema stars most passengers agreed that being white and blond was a prerequisite for working in the media and film industry, a clear sign that racism was still very much part of their daily life in Brazil.

I was usually the only gringa on the train to the periféria (suburb) located far from the Zona Sul democratic beaches, fancy high-rise buildings and adjacent slums. After a long ride I got off the train amidst an outdoors farmers’ market, turned towards a Chinese-owned pastry shop and a McDonald’s only to wait for yet another bus that would take me through the small-pebbled streets all the way to Ianca’s neighborhood. Her Roma “community” consisted of ten scattered households, the remnants of a once much larger extended family which had interspersed, integrated or died off among gage neighboring gage for over a decade. The suburb’s heat, unmitigated by expensive air-conditioning, drew locals outdoors. Most habitually hung out in front of their houses or at the local bar drinking beer each afternoon. I was stared at as an obvious outsider mistaken for a white Brazilian girl from the south since none would believe gringas would venture to such a non-touristic place like their neighborhood.

Walking by Roma and non-Roma houses I was unable to tell them apart unless I accidentally overheard someone speaking Romanes, so I was grateful when Ianca offered to introduce me to everyone. Across from her house was Auntie Violeta’s home, a little further by the intersection was Dina’s corner studio and within minutes we could walk over to visit the others. Ianca’s metallic front gates resembled a tattered embroidery with the metal curved by numerous blows and the formerly white paint now chipping away to reveal thick rust in unappealing patterns.

The crooked gate and decaying house façade repelled less than the strange piles of food scraps that mysteriously appeared in front of Ianca’s house. She had no clue where this soupy
rice came from, but believed it to be *macumba* or black magic directed at her by Dina who was from a different *vitsa*. Ianca was Matchuwaya and so were the majority of the neighboring Roma residents. Their houses were in various states of decay matching the general view. Ianca’s metal fence itself was off its hinges, held closed only by a thin coiled wire that kept undoing itself leaving the door ajar. It provided no protection from the notorious robbers in these areas, yet Ianca did not fix it because she had “very few possessions to protect.” Her house was spacious but in shambles just like the covered courtyard. Aside from ample space I could not identify any trace of aesthetic comfort. The garden was unkempt, the walls crumbling, the outdoors wooden table was rickety and its long benches noisy when used. A smaller section of the house stood alone facing the front gate and situated at the back of the courtyard. It had once been a guest bedroom and had become an abandoned, filthy, mostly empty space. The room hid only a small round table with tarot cards and icons buried under several years of dust and cobwebs, an untouched space respectfully abandoned to the *mule*: Ianca’s deceased mother to whom the tarot had belonged.

Like most Roma houses in this neighborhood Ianca’s was reminiscent of the domestic decay described by Gabriel Garcia Marquez at the end of “One Hundred Years of Solitude” (1970). The lived-in part of the house stood adjacent to this empty storage space – a container of absence devoted to the dead. One entered either through the living room or further down through the kitchen, which sported a metal sink, a yellowing fridge, a modest oven, and a large dark-wood cabinet fit for nobility despite its age. The kitchen was home to a foot-tall green and orange parrot that could be found either on top of or inside his large cage. He was Ianca’s only companion, a gift from her cousin Matcho soon after her mother’s death some five years before. The talking bird, simply named Parrot, was fond of screaming Ianca’s name uncannily every
morning and whenever he wanted food. Ianca doted on him like a child, gave him arthritis medicine regularly, and indulged him in a diet of fresh fruit since he had fallen ill from eating other victuals. Most Roma took comfort in the company of animals and many had birds, dogs and cats that lived inside or near their houses. Auntie Violeta had fourteen canaries. Next door to Ianca lived a seldom seen, sickly loner, a distant uncle of hers, and all of the Roma said that this man’s dog was his best companion. They expected the dog to die of grief when his owner died.

The decorative items inside most Roma houses as well as the walls themselves were often in an advanced degree of decomposition, yet this did not prevent their inhabitants from carrying themselves with nonchalance. From Ianca’s kitchen one came upon the living room, which was adorned with ten stately wooden chairs upholstered with once-red velvet seating cushions and a disheveled sofa covered by an old bed sheet with images of bright sunflowers and blue skies. A large Persian-type rug had faded to near colorlessness. Roma houses typically were decorated with family photos and religious imagery, which despite the overall sense of decay were regularly cleaned. On Ianca’s walls hung several crooked framed pictures of Catholic saints and of the orixá named Iemanja, the goddess of the sea in Condomblé and Umbanda. Against an empty wall stood a large metallic frame, its loosely assembled shelves holding a small television set and sundry religious icons. Long black wires spread out to the permanently opened grated windows like a giant spider.

Ianca said that she needed all her saints for daily prayers and she insisted on keeping the windows open at all times to avoid feeling claustrophobic because she had been raised sleeping in a tent. The living room led to the bedroom where a twin bed frame was covered by a few crumbling, thin, sponge mattresses and various still-worn items of clothing half eaten by ants. A wall-to-wall closet, equally dusty and decaying, was filled with more ant-eaten items along with
a few keepsakes: letters, family photos and Ianca’s mother’s belongings. The bedroom’s grated
window looked towards the unkempt garden full of blossoming wild roses and dangling weeds.
The front fence could hardly be seen and one could glance beyond it the little bar in the street.
Ianca’s daily house cleaning involved throwing several buckets of soapy water on all the floors
and brushing the excess out onto the courtyard. Ianca would wash her almost daily, the price she
willingly paid for keeping doors and windows open all the time.

Most Roma thought Ianca’s cleaning compulsion represented both an admirable
obedience of traditional purity laws and a neurotic tendency brought on by her unusual
unmarried single life. She had once been model-like beautiful and thin, and proudly showed me
her photos to prove it. Yet she had aged badly perhaps due to a tragic life and malnourishment:
her back was covered with stress-induced acne scars and swollen nerve endings, her teeth
decaying although she did brushed them diligently, her hair whitening. Although she was not
beautiful, she was clean, dignified, imposing, humble yet queenly.

Unlike most Roma, Ianca obeyed the maxrimé laws which consider a woman’s hair
polluted just like the lower part of the body. She showered twice a day and washed her hair
outside in the sink reserved for hand-washing laundry. She allowed me to take a shower and cool
off at her house on numerous occasions. Surprisingly, I was also allowed to wash my hair while
taking a shower indoors. She even offered me one of her towels with the single admonition that I
should never use it to wipe my private parts. Wiping my hair with the towel was acceptable,
although she only washed her hair in a separate bucket outdoors since this was considered the
traditional Romani way. For similar reasons she was intolerant of beds, but allowed me to nap on
her mother’s former twin bed after purchasing my own mattress. When the mother died, she had
thrown the mattress away. Ianca slept on the living room floor on a thin sponge mattress because
she said she grew up sleeping on the ground in a tent. Ianca represented a key interlocutor for she was an expert yet an outlier in the Roma community.

Throughout the days we spent together she would openly share with me stories, either current events or things she remembered, which I dutifully wrote down. After a light brunch we usually went grocery shopping then cooked lunch, ate then cleaned the house together. Afterwards I accompanied her to the local church, to the pharmacy, to the clinic as well as on visits to other Roma in the community. Seldom did our interactions take on the formal structure of an interview, but I would often plan out a few questions. Her rebel status was evident in the way she refused to listen to other Ciganos’ protests against me and talked to me regardless of their malicious rumors. Also Ianca believed she had numerous Roma enemies, people she considered impure and never allowed to pass her rickety fence. She often said she was disappointed by the entire Roma diaspora nowadays for losing its traditions and integrity. She wished to give up her Roma life altogether and live abroad where no one would ever know her past. She rejected most Ciganos as corrupted, and this rejection fueled her personal sense of honor while contributing to her sadness and disillusion about Roma life and life in general. Her depression was marked by a sense of loss, grief and hopelessness about what life could offer for her as Cigana or for the future generations.

Ianca’s personal history embodied the Romani gender role inequalities and ethnic-specific struggles for survival. She was not quite six when her father left her mother alone with four small children. He remarried and the second wife estranged him from his first family. Ianca’s mother, an illiterate single mother of four, remained destitute surviving only through fortunetelling. The children accompanied her in public parks or knocking door-to-door, learning the trade by necessity, driven by hunger. The family of five slept altogether in a small tent and
traveled across Brazil looking for clients. Only occasionally they stayed with their wealthy house-dwelling relatives:

We traveled all the time. We barely had any food, and when our relatives took us into their homes for a while, we always cleaned their houses. I’ve never done anything else in my life more than cleaning other people’s houses and looking after their children. It’s so embarrassing to be so poor. People wondered about me: how will this girl get married if she doesn’t even have a father. Who knows what will become of her?

Female pressures for modesty and subservience increased in the context of dire poverty.

An early marriage was to ensure her honorability despite her fatherlessness and limited means. Ianca’s mother was eagerly secured her daughter’s marriage at the age of fourteen. Ianca’s first husband, who was only sixteen, turned out to be extremely violent, according to her and her kin.

After she moved in with his family, Ianca suffering domestic abuse repeatedly with no protection from her in-laws. After four months Ianca ran away leaving behind her small dowry. Her mother was once again on the lookout for a marriage arrangement, a more difficult task now since Ianca was a divorcée. So when opportunity arose in the form of a wealthy, forty-six year old Cigano from Canada, sixteen-old Ianca quickly married him. The marriage was celebrated in the community without legal documents. Legally he was still married to his first wife and had four children with her. When they tried moving to Canada together with their baby girl Renata, Ianca had difficulties obtaining a visa, so he took the baby and left Ianca. He promised to come back with a visa for her, but his promises never materialized. She had waited in vain for three decades since it was her “only hope to see Renata again.” She never saw them again. Only rarely did Renata call her on the local landline. Eventually I contacted Renata and she was set on maintaining a distance from Ianca, since she had grown up believing that Ianca abandoned her.

Ianca said, “her adopted mother and her aunts poisoned her mind against me, it’s a lost cause. All she wants from me is gifts, this is why she contacted me when she was a young woman already.”
Ianca’s life story epitomizes gendered victimization narratives. Other Ciganas said that their first husbands were also violent or drunkards or both. Patriarchal values underline the very structure of Romani moral purity laws. Like most Ciganas Ianca did not rebel against them but rather chose modesty and diligent obedience. She chose to wait for her second husband’s return in vain as if by behaving honorably she could win back the affection of this significantly older man, a father-figure who had abandoned her much like her own father had, in addition to taking her daughter away. Afterwards Ianca lived with and cared for her mother. When the phuri daj (matriarch) died of cancer, relatives pitied Ianca since it was common consensus that no Roma should live alone. As Ianca’s companion, I had an easier time being accepted by her kin.

I only understood how deeply I had subconsciously suppressed my sensuality around my interlocutors when I brought a fellow anthropology student from Princeton to visit, another Eastern European woman like myself. Unencumbered by knowledge of Romani protocols Claire delighted us with enthusiastic dancing in the middle of the street on her very first visit. I sat with Ianca and her nephew Matcho around the yellow plastic table sharing cheap Brazilian red wine. Ianca smoked and laughed from time to time. I tried to dance as well but, comparing myself to Claire, sadly realized that I had grown frigid-looking compared with her exuberance. I was all too aware that every one of my moves was heavily considered and I could not move freely, afraid of betraying my more sensual, self-indulgent dance skills. I mostly just fluttered my long skirt a little to ward off the mosquitoes, when a strange old man on crutches approached trying to flirt with me. Ianca became protective. She touched my arm and said to watch out: “Cuidado!” Sometimes when we crossed the street she would make the same mothering gesture. This mutual mother-daughter relationship with Ianca was both rewarding and repressive. Claire asked me on our way back to the city, “How can you stand it? You are so patient. You always have to
downplay your beauty and your sexuality and your dancing. I know how you love to dance!” We had danced together at the New York Gypsy Music Festival where I met Eugene and tried to impress him. I told Claire that it was not always easy doing fieldwork. This was why I had to go back to Ipanema, jog on the beach, go out sporting shorts and a tank top, occasionally go to baile funk parties or practice the samba in Lapa. I bid Claire farewell at the Central Station where we parted ways. She was heading to a favela that interested her because of the local art center: “I would much rather research an art center or a museum than live in such a difficult community.” Indeed it often felt claustrophobic, but what motivated me was a genuine curiosity about Romani lives during fieldwork, which confused previous generalizations.

I felt responsible for giving Claire a more bitter than sweet taste of the reality I had been experiencing in the previous ten months. She was so young and enthusiastic about life, still a virgin, and in many ways more vulnerable than myself to the Roma cutting jokes, tears, suffering, and opportunistic traits. When I brought her to visit my Roma interlocutors I joked with them that I would consider selling her into marriage because she was a virgin. It was a rude remark on my behalf particularly with Claire present, but the Ciganos appreciated the joke. Despite my sexual modesty around them, I shared Ciganos’ wicked sense of humor. We often exchanged remarks that mainstream gage would normally find rude.

For instance, I laughed hysterically (as in a sudden burst of emotion, pseudoneurotically) when Cabrito told me a recent story about his uncle in Brasilia: “He was really scared of doctors all his life. At sixty-five he finally went to see one. The doctor told him: You have a heart problem. He suffered a shock from the news and died (muló)!” The last word made a terrific punch line: I laughed in tears uncontrollably. Luckily, Cabrito and his children thought my reaction hilarious and shared the joke. To keep me laughing Cabrito went on, this time with
mock seriousness: “And after the old man *mulô*, a week later his son *mulô!* He was sitting in chair at his house, he leaned back, slipped, hit his head and *mulô!*” Again I laughed my heart out although the content was both tragic and true. Clearly, Cabrito and I shared a sense of comedic timing, where comedy is defined as sped-up tragedy: “Take a tragedy, speed up the movement, and you will have a comedy” goes a phrase from Romanian avant-garde playwright Eugen Ionescu (1966), taken up again by J.L. Styan in “Drama Stage and Audience” (1975). Comedy also benefits from breaching norms, titillating audiences with forbidden words especially when sprinkled with repetitions. From then on, whenever Cabrito said someone had died – *mulô!* – we giggled. I had not been invited to funerals so far, because I was a (partial) *gagi*, and I certainly could not attend any now if they amused me. Yet I was not judged for it. Even Ianca took respite from her depressive monotony with merry quips about *Ciganos*, herself or existential musings.

My Roma interlocutors giddily appreciated Claire’s visit. We mostly poked fun at her virginity as different men imagined themselves marrying her, even the elderly. The elderly women also loved her instantly. Auntie Violeta asked if she would marry one of her sons. Claire had a hearty laugh, a ready smile for everyone, and she loved to talk loudly about her own interests unlike myself. She was beautiful, uninhibited, colorful and lively, the very ideal type of a Romani virgin.

Surprisingly, Ianca offered to read Claire’s tarot cards at no charge. Technically the cards were mine. I had bought them at *Mundo Verde* (Green World) store in Ipanema. Without diplomatic restraint, Ianca told Claire what she saw in her future: “You will never love anyone but yourself because you will not accept to suffer for a man. You will want to be happy forever, you will want to travel. You’ll see, you’ll remember me.” I felt like Ianca was projecting her own pessimism about men on the reading. After delivering this negative prognosis, she asked
Claire: “Are you happy? Do you feel insecure?” which I thought cruel to ask of anyone because the questions in themselves elicit anxiety. Claire answered reluctantly that she was as happy as anyone could be, but a little insecure about studying in a prestigious anthropology department side by side with brilliant students and professors who seemed to know so much more than she did. I rushed to assure her it was normal to feel this way. I had persuaded her to attend Princeton just to have a friend.

Ianca repeated her prediction of Claire’s future, insisting she would never get married. Struggling with containment in our intersubjective exchange, I joked with mock gravity: “I like suffering! Better than never loving. It’s better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all,” a famous quote from 19th century poet Alfred Tennyson. Ianca replied she felt the same way. I asked her then, “Why is it that Roma women accept so much hurt from their men, and still keep on loving them? Is there such a thing as Roma love, something like unconditional love?” I kept translating between Portuguese and English repeating myself so Claire could also understand. Ianca thought about her life and those of other Ciganos then replied they are socialized into unequal relationships:

Some Roma women are induced into unconditional love by their family through pressure. Others develop it on their own. They end up making money only to give it to their alcoholic husbands who do nothing at all, or worse yet, who run around having affairs. I know a woman who committed suicide because her husband was cheating on her. And she was such a beautiful woman too, so happy, always smiling, always in love, and so good to everyone. She told us she danced alone in the mirror when she went home. Some women are like that, beautiful and happy and have a husband, children and all. Then all of a sudden, they can’t take life anymore. And I, who have suffered so much, stupid and ugly as I am, I’m still alive on this earth.

Ianca laughed after her last sentence, a good sample of her self-deprecating humor. Having to be induced into unconditional love through family pressure was a rather strange concept for us Eastern European girls. I had poorly negotiated my own uneven deal with Eugene willingly. My
family hardly knew about this relationship. We tried to persuade Ianca that her life was not over, that it was full of choices and possibilities. Claire said: “Don’t you think it was too early for you to get married at fourteen? If you had not married your first husband, you could have waited a while and found yourself someone you really liked. Maybe you will find another man now. You’re a free woman!” Ianca replied in a decisive tone, “Fourteen is not too young for choosing to become a woman. But fifty-three is too old to find love.” She had internalized Roma discourses on love, gender roles and age grades after all.

Claire complained after we left, “Ianca’s power is so dense and heavy.” I replied, “I know, it’s in her every gesture. In the way she smokes slowly and deliberately. It’s a sense of resignation and righteous superiority, the kind that self-sacrificing heroes show in the face of martyrdom.” Ianca had sacrificed herself all those years waiting for her husband, who never returned. I wondered what was at stake for her, what did she protect by desexualizing herself. After some thought, I saw that Ianca got to be “right” at the cost of love, intimacy and vitality. She kept operating in the heroic mode of good and evil dichotomies common in honor-and-shame societies, on which I elaborate in chapter 4. Ianca had protected her ethnic-specific sense of moral purity, and thus moral superiority, since in Romani cosmology her obedience of maxrimé rules set her above erring Roma as well as gage. She had a universal sense of right and wrong as well, treating me kindly and admonishing that other Ciganos might not do the same: “Cuidado com os roma, eles não são puros” [Careful with the Roma, they are not pure]. Ianca saw herself as a pure person, true to her traditions and true to her word, unlike most Ciganos and gage. Her modesty and integrity were claims to “authentic Ciganidade” against the hyper-sexualized background of Brazil, where most Roma kept losing their ancestors’ traditions to the point where, in some families, only the elders knew the word maxrimé.
Throughout fieldwork she asked me only once for a small, symbolic gift. Before we left I gave Ianca something she had specifically demanded: a prism with Chinese symbols for love, prosperity, friendship, success, creativity and good luck. She had said that perhaps hanging a prism in her window would keep dead spirits away, since at night she often heard or saw mule (ghosts), in particular those of her mother and her nephew who had been stabbed to death next door and brought to her house for the wake. Even in the daytime she imagined ghosts and devils outlined on the decaying patchy walls. I hoped to allay her insomniac worries with my gift. She doubted it would work since Catholic icons had already failed, but hung it anyway: “I’m willing to try though.” Claire’s visit brought out views Ianca held about gender roles that I had not previously heard.

Throughout the dissertation I rely on this particular woman’s accounts because she is both an expert insider and a critic vis-à-vis Romanies in Brazil. Her nuanced, detailed, sincere statements came out organically in conversation rather than as socially scripted. She shared with me even taboo opinions and stories due to our close rapport. With time, mutual trust and patience while struggling with containment in such intersubjective interlocution encounters, I learned that many Ciganos and Ciganas had affairs, fights, jealousies, vices, sexual curiosities, divorces, and other such bouts of rebellion that disrupted their public personas of ethnic-specific modesty. Still, most Ciganos presented themselves as pakivale (honorable in Romanes) in comparison to other Ciganos, gringos and gage and imagine themselves as modest and operating within an “honor and shame” complex in a “sexualized” mainstream Brazil of which they are a part. In chapter 4 I explore this tension between their wanting to remain different, but often acting in (ambivalent) ways similar to other Brazilians and imagining themselves as native Brazilians.
CHAPTER 4. HONOR AND SOCIAL PROSCRIPTIONS

Disrupted Romani discourses on modesty and honor taboos
Maxrimé and the “natural basis” for gender inequality
Marriage: the family model of hierarchy and discourses on “love”
Situating a theoretical analysis of Romani socialization patterns
Social pressures in the lives of men
Kriss trials and punishments for dissent
Ianca’s disillusionment with traditional gender roles and illiteracy

Disrupted Romani discourses on modesty and honor taboos

Romani cosmology divides the world between good and evil as in morally pure and impure people, spaces, objects, practices and utterances. Going into fieldwork I was concerned that both Roma and Calon would see me as a gagi gringa or non-Romani foreigner, and thus as a source of danger to their moral purity. Ample literature on the subject had instilled in me fear of rejection, so I tried my best to sound knowledgeable and respectful of my interlocutors’ values.

Most Ciganos I met shared an ideal type of Romani honorability known as Romanipen or Romanyia, the collection of laws that govern Romani cultural norms, and criticized other Ciganos for their shortcomings, competing with each other for ethnic authenticity and respect. The collection of values known as Romanipen is unwritten, yet it defines Romani identity based on concepts such as phralipen (fraternity, solidarity) between those who demonstrate pakiv (respect, honor, faith) and ujimos (purity, moral cleanliness) as regulated by appropriate demonstrations of lajipe (shame) as opposed to those in a state of maxrimé (moral impurity), not to be confused with “a physical uncleanness which can be remedied by washing” and is called melalo (dirty) (Silverman 1979: 106). The etymological roots of these words are uncertain and I will not hazard any guesswork, especially given that my interlocutors did not retain some of these words in their dialects. Yet most respected these concepts and associated them with their ancestors. Those who embraced the maxrimé code as a cultural truth lived different lives from
those who did not, such that the gage were considered impure and dangerous to Romani moral order, echoing the Hindu concept of “Untouchables.” Romani self-differentiation from gage as the ultimate “others” is said to derive from the Hindu caste system and perpetuated because of Europeans’ intolerance to them:

[…] the revived antagonistic attitude towards “gypsies” afflicted all Roma without differentiation. This outer factor helped to perpetuate the law of "jati (cast)-distinction" which is rooted in the Indian caste system. Its formal manifestations, observed by Roma until today, are still very much "Indian"-like (endogamy, prohibition of commensality, avoidance of contacts, etc.). The "jati-distinction", which in India was a distinction between different professional groups, has in the course of the Roma’s history in the diverse European environment developed into the subethnic diversity of various Roma groups (Hübenschmannová 2002, web).

This distinction has been retained in Brazil not only as a differentiation from non-os but also from other Cigano subgroups. Just as in India, Romani groups have historically been mutually complementary in an economic sense, exchanging specific products and services of their professions, while practicing endogamy and prohibiting commensality or eating at the table together. The taboo on sharing seats at the same table was mentioned as early as the 11th century by the Arab historian Al-Bírúní: “Each of the four castes when eating together, must form a group for themselves, one group not being allowed to include two men of different castes” (Schau 1989: 102). Similarly my Roma interlocutors sometimes considered themselves too pure to touch cooked food from those they saw as less pure than themselves. Dina’s food was shunned by Auntie Violeta’s entire family, as Auntie said: “This woman wont stop bringing us plates full of cooked food, but I just throw it away. We won’t touch it.” I found the comment surprisingly harsh especially since I saw the two elderly women conversing and seemingly enjoying each other’s company on an almost daily basis. Apparently the commensality prohibition was acted upon with diligence by Ciganos in Brazil. If the differences between the vitsas were not too
great, my interlocutors did accept raw or uncooked, pre-packaged food, which is also common practice between Indian castes with similar eating habits:

If the differences in eating habits between castes are not too great, someone of a "better" caste will eat kaccha khana (raw food) which the hand of the homemaker has never touched while cooking: a banana, an apple (he will peel off the skin), milk, etc. He will not eat pakka khana (cooked food). If this "lower" caste guest visits a "higher" caste home (where "clean" food is eaten), the "clean" host will throw away the plate from which the degeš has eaten. That is the way it was (and sometimes still is), even among Roma. A "clean Rom" will never accept food in the home of a degeš. If he does not know what kind of family he is visiting, he will eat "dry food" - bought in a shop. Should a "clean Rom" serve food to a degeš, he would throw away the plate afterwards. He would never again eat off such a plate. Probably anyone who has ever been in a Roma home has been invited to come to the table with the words, "Eat, eat. Don't worry. We're clean Roma" (Hübschmannová 2002, web).

The Calon I met threw away any plates of cooked food when offered by the gage. Calon only accepted from gage food items that were raw or prepackaged, such as fruit, vegetables and milk. However, the Roma discriminated both amongst each other and against the Calon. I ate at most households and did not inquire whether they threw my plate away afterwards or if they placed it in a pile reserved for the gage. Ianca was the only one who reassured me: “I am clean. Don’t worry about it. I don’t feed you from the plate I give to the kaliviri gagi who comes sometimes here begging for food. I give her that brown plate I keep on the bottom shelf. You see I give you the freshly washed dishes and cups I use everyday.” Also Auntie Violeta and Dina always fed me from the dishes they had just washed when I was at their homes, saying: “Eat, my daughter, eat” (Come, minha filha, come in Portuguese), as if I were a family member.

I often had the feeling in Brazil that Ciganos took liberties with the rules of commensality. At Cabrito’s home in Sao Paulo I ate quite frequently at the table with his children since his wife Angelica was constantly dieting and wanted me to keep the kids company. It was often the maids who cooked the food, and also there was take-out pizza at least three times per week, so I felt like Angelica was rebelling against the Romani traditional rules.
regarding cleanliness, cooking and hospitality. She said that Ciganos were generally excessive with food and that she was different from them since she abstaining from cooking and eating and frequenting traditional feasts: “Chocolate is my only temptation, I can’t give up chocolates,” but she eventually did. She boasted, “it’s been at least two years since I attended a wedding feast. I’ve lost a lot of weight and I don’t even go to a gym, of course.” She could not partake of gage activities such as exercising in a gym because Romani modesty rules prevented her interacting with gage men in public places. As a psychic, she spent most her days in her office at home. She willingly opted out of Roma social gatherings for slavas (Saint days), pomanas (funeral feasts), pakiavi (feasts of respect), birthdays, weddings, wedding anniversaries, music festivals, and other so forth even though her husband attended all these events.

Unlike Angelica most of my Roma interlocutors overindulged at these ethnic-specific events, and sported rounded bellies as evidence. They proudly said Romani foods, as passed down the generations from their ancestors, taste better than Brazilian foods. I was amused to find among their so-called “traditional foods” several Romanian recipes such as sarmale (stuffed grape leaves/ stuffed cabbage), orez (rice pilaf) and placintă/ libaniță (cheese-filled pastry) The very word pomana (funeral feast) that Roma used to indicate their “authentic” wake ritual banquet has the same meaning in the mainstream Romanian society. Similar to Romanians, Roma believed that food cooked and consumed by the living kin during this feast transcends into the spiritual world and becomes available to deceased, a gift-exchange to ease the soul’s transition. Thus, the pomana ritual represents commensality with the dead, the ultimate form of showing honorable hospitality and continued solidarity towards one’s ancestors. Irina, a distant relative of Mirian Stanescon said, “our typical dishes are sarma, rice cooked with vegetables, placinta, tea served from the samovar, typical alcoholic drinks depending where they came from
— wine, whiskey, rum, vodka — and lots of meats, fruits and vegetables, everything in abundance.” Calon had similar extended banquets for their social gatherings, but they did not use the same recipes. As a (partial) gagi, I was pleasantly surprised to often have “a seat at the table,” although never at a pomana. I only attended a few weddings and birthday festivities.

However, I engaged in conversation with interlocutors about all these rituals. Most gage were considered morally impure and thus outsiders to Romani commensality. Ciganas maintained ritual cleanliness while cooking, washing their hands beforehand, examining the utensils and pots to see if they were clean, and shining them regularly. Laundry buckets were never used for cooking and storing foods or drinking water. If a Cigana was ever seen touching her hair or blowing her nose, while cooking, her kin stopped eating her food. Ianca said to leave a spoon in the cooking pot meant to attract bad luck. She avoided doing so as well as eating others foods. To eat others’ cooked foods also meant an act of respect, consistent with gift-exchange obligations: guests must accept the food to honor the host who honors them with hospitality. The gift giving and receiving through commensality was performed excessively over lavish banquets, in a competitive cycle of honoring each other.

At these banquets the excessiveness itself represented a claim to achieve higher social status. Outside the social gatherings, guests also could visit freely expecting being invited to eat. For example, Ianca’s uncle Alonso often came to visit around lunchtime and expected a two course meal. He spent no less then two hours eating and telling stories while trying to convince me to elope with him, “With a little money, I’ll fix my car then we can drive to the jungle together. It’s so beautiful there, we will be very happy together.” Ianca was tired of having to demonstrate hospitality in his case. She often complained: “Why doesn’t he go to his son’s house? He must not have any money, poor crazy old man.”
However, it was considered disrespectful when adults did not take care of their elderly or the needy to make sure they had enough food. Yet Auntie Violeta, for example, had a very small pension and when she demanded groceries from her sons, they often took too long to deliver or they forgot altogether. She gladly accepted my gifts of milk, rice, and beans. I made gifts of groceries to my interlocutors and even offered to cook for them since I ate often at their homes. Ianca was the only one who allowed me to cook in her kitchen. Calins insisted they had to cook in the traditional way, and were particularly proud of how shiny their aluminum pots were after they finished cleaning them. As one entered a tent the kitchen area was decorated brightly with these bright tokens of ritual cleanliness: daily rituals of honorable female status performed in ordinary everyday practices.

A clean, unsullied Cigana also meant an emotionally happy one. When it came to cooking, this remained valid and part of the ritual cleanliness. In Rio de Janeiro, when young wife Natalia was seen by her mother-in-law crying while cooking she was kicked out of the kitchen. Her sadness was thought capable of spoiling the food and making others ill. Sadness, anger, whining, or depression prevented someone from cooking for others. Ianca said that after her mother’s death she was so depressed she could not even cook for herself or read fortunes. Her brother and his daughter brought her rice and beans every week and cooked for her. For five years she “survived from day to day” like this. When I started visiting, she said that I dragged her out of her melancholy a bit because we went grocery shopping, cleaned together and cooked frequently. My status as an outsider was nuanced by the fact that I improved her sense of wellbeing. I often had that effect on elderly women even among the Calins despite being gringa gagi. Also, because most had achieved the status of matriarchs, they were rather immune to the social control methods such as gossip, and they talked to me against admonitions against it.
For the most part gagia women were considered morally loose, whereas Ciganas were seen as honorable since they married as virgins. Their modesty was pivotal to Romani honorable social proscriptions, allowing women to wield a great deal of power in the social sphere:

Another important source of female power is the ritual power associated with the Gypsy taboo system in which women are the prime subjects and agents. Marime taboos concern polluted or defiling subjects, persons, food, body parts, and topics of conversation, but their overwhelming concern is with the uncleanliness of the female and her threat to male ritual cleanliness (106-107).

A wife’s fidelity and cleanliness represented the pillars of the household ensuring bloodline purity as well as moral purity, and most Ciganas took pride in the task of upholding them. Yet ambivalences existed, accounted for by the fact that newlyweds had to move into the groom’s parents’ house or community in order for the bride to be under her mother-in-law’s close watch. The mother-in-law’s role was to teach the young bori the rituals of cleanliness appropriate for an adult woman and complete her socialization.

My interlocutors unanimously agreed that being Cigano entails an ethnic-specific form of honor that is rarely extended to non-Ciganos. Pakiv (respect) must be earned by avoiding becoming maxrimé, which roughly translates as sullied in the sense of “being ‘rejected’ from the Rom as a group and being ‘dirty’ or polluted” (Sutherland 1975: 98). Anne Sutherland’s fieldwork among American Roma reveals that one is considered maxrimé during public rejection by kinsmen as well as during voluntary or involuntary time spent among the gage: “Part of the painfulness of being denied contact with one’s own people, whether it be in a jail, in a hospital, or a job, is that of being alone […] to be among a group of gage is to be alone” (99). So was the case among my interlocutors. For example, in Sao Paulo Romani lawyer Nelson Pires complained that having to study and get a higher education made him unable to be part of the Roma community. Also when a fortuneteller was arrested and detained while awaiting trial, she
became the subject of gossip because prison was considered unclean. Her kinsmen bribed officials to transfer her to her own cell, under the pretext that she was pregnant which was not true. Yet in this way she could avoid the further contagion of sharing living-quarters with *gagia*. I will elaborate on her case in the chapter on fortunetelling. Also women who married non-*Ciganos* were seldom if ever welcomed back in their communities. Often they kept away, knowing their status forbade returning. They “lost the seat at the table,” Cabrito said.

The *maxrimé* status is generally believed to be contagious such that the clean cannot interact with the unclean and must avert their eyes and ignore them in the street, in order to avoid all interaction. Sometimes *maxrimé* becomes contagious just by family association: for example Dina in Rio de Janeiro was unclean because her husband had separated from her, but also because her father was rumored to have committed suicide, another prohibited act. Sutherland states, “Suicide is also viewed as extremely shocking and incomprehensible and may result in a *marime* sentence on the family of the suicide victim” (99). Nonetheless, there were several cases of suicide, murder, drug-use and other taboo acts amidst my interlocutors’ extended families.

One woman who lived in Rio de Janeiro had committed suicide because she was jealous of her husband’s affairs. The husband should have been considered impure, yet his kin did not ostracize him. Also Auntie Violeta’s nephew, a drug-addict, was shot by *gage* gang members against her fence, yet Auntie refused to move away from her house, which was now *maxrimé*. Ianca also refused to away although the nephew had been brought to her house first, a bloody corpse to be washed and prepared for the wake. Death makes a place *maxrimé*, Ianca said but chose to stay even after her mother passed away. Eventually she her house was flooded so often it decayed altogether, and she found herself traveling weekly among different relatives’ households as an uncomfortable guest who preferred her privacy.
Ferrari’s fieldwork among the Calon in Bahia also suggests that not all of her interlocutors obeyed social norms. For instance, one woman lived alone and preferred privacy over the intense daily interactions among her kin: “I am a different kind of Cigana, I like being all alone” (2013: 64). I also met several women who lived alone instead of sharing a house with their kin as expected. For example, Dina lived alone near her husband’s kin even after his disappearance, although she was expected to move near her blood relatives. Ianca also preferred to live by herself: “I’m tired of living in other people’s houses. I need my own home and my own things so I can feel free. I used to do nothing but clean other people’s houses when we stayed with them and all we had was our tent.” Ianca’s house was actually her brother’s property, and she feared losing it. To avoid humiliation though prolonged hospitality among blood relatives, both women chose living alone.

The existence of dissent among the Romanies is confirmed by the institution of the kriss (Romani tribunal), a group of the most respected elder men which governs the community-based trial. Punishment by the kriss nowadays in Brazil most commonly takes the form of gossip, chastisement, shaming, shunning by the community, and occasional payment of monetary fines – for example in the case of a broken marriage arrangement. Sutherland suggests that, “Punishment itself is rejection from Romania. Punishment is to become marime, to be denied physical contact and social intercourse with one’s own people, to be forced to ‘live among the gage’, and to be polluted. Romania is social life; marime is social death” (102). To avoid such consequences I found there was a great need for Ciganos to constantly persuade each other of their own honorability whether or not individuals digressed from honor proscriptions in practice. During fieldwork, however, I observed a significant discrepancy between the ideology and phenomenology of honor taboos particularly among the younger Romanies.
Most elders remembered a time when honor codes were as strictly enforced, as the literature on European Romanies suggests. They complained that new generations had adopted a more relaxed attitude towards the traditional concepts of honor and shame due to acculturation. Old Eustakiu often said with regret:

Brazilian Gypsies interacted a lot with Brazilians, became friends and so took on their manner. The world is evolving, the world of Gypsies. In the olden days they travelled with tents. They only read palms and such. Then some died, others moved away. Here we don’t have that Gypsy tradition, that whole thing, at all.7

According to Eustakiu, Ciganos have interacted with non-Ciganos so much that they have lost some of their ethnic-specific customs such as living in tents. Yet most Calon continued to live in tents despite interacting significantly with non-Ciganos.

It was mostly the Roma people in Brazil who admitted acculturation, increasing perhaps because of their choice to blend into mainstream society and keep their ethnicity secret. The Calon matriarch Dona Herante complained about them, “The Roma are ashamed to show they are Ciganos. They dress like the gage and they live in houses like them. How can anyone see if they keep the house clean like they should, there’s no one around to check on them.” The reduced power of community surveillance was viewed as a sign of slacking values. In the privacy of one’s home, transparency lacked.

Acculturation amongst Roma was also evident in how some parents failed to ensure their daughters’ virginity before marriage. Both Roma and Calon in Brazil considered a girl’s virginity at marriage crucial to family honor just like Romanies elsewhere, yet Roma girls in Sao Paulo eloped with greater frequency, correlated to their higher personal income as fortunetellers.

Several girls who had lucrative psychic offices, despite their young age, eloped instead of going

through with previously arranged marriages. For example, Lisa was engaged when she eloped. She bought plane tickets for herself and the boy she had been chatting with online so they could meet up in a hotel three hours away from Sao Paulo. After three days of mysterious absence, they returned to their respective homes. To defend herself against chastisement Lisa claimed that she was still a virgin upon her return. Nevertheless, her father was summoned to pay a fine to the shamed abandoned groom, twice as much as the bride-price her father had received, which meant a total fine equivalent to the cost of a house in suburban Sao Paulo.

Lisa’s case demonstrated how wealthy Roma families enjoyed relative immunity when breaking traditional honor taboos. “The kriss ended in pizza. Again,” Cabrito said. He had just attended the kriss trial held at a local pizzeria, and was annoyed by the three-hour long inconclusive feuding between the two fathers, one arguing for an excessive monetary compensation and the other still claiming that Lisa was a virgin. Both families were wealthy. Lisa had dared to elope knowing that punishments had become affordable for those who could afford to pay a fine. Lisa’s overt defiance and minimal chastisement confirmed this trend for younger Roma. Other girls who enjoyed a steady income since the age of twelve or thirteen felt equally emboldened to rebel against elders’ traditions. Girls were not to talk to boys, not even one’s groom prior to the arranged marriage, yet most frequently chatted online with boys (even gage), stretching normative limits.

In Rio de Janeiro the caramel-skinned, black-haired, green-eyed Rromni named Kali, now fifty-five, had married a gagio after running away from domestic violence in her initial arranged marriage. At sixteen she had been married to a 17-year-old Rom who was already a violent alcoholic, like Ianca’s first husband. Nowadays Kali lived with her gagio husband and their two married children nearby, yet was shunned by the rest of the Roma. Only Perula, her cousin,
visited her from time to time. Perula lived nearby and although she was married to a Rom, she allowed her three teenage daughters to frequent baile funk parties, to wear mini skirts, to chat online, to pursue nursing and teaching degrees and to marry *gage*. Both Kali and Perula insisted that they led a Romani life and were proud of their ethnicity. They both spoke Romanes with their children and lived off fortunetelling primarily. Yet everyone else disagreed and doubted these women respected *maxrimé* rituals of cleanliness. Kali also worked part-time doing laundry for wealthier *gage* neighbors, so the Roma considered her particularly impure and contagious. When talking about her occupation, her own kin shared a sense of disgust, yet Kali was happy to be making a living. Her only regret was not being welcomed to visit her parents ever since her elopement with the *gage*. She sighed: “My father still refuses to talk to me.”

Okeley who studied Travellers in England suggests a collective sense of disgust is part of the distinct and recognizable aspects of cultural borders, “an example of continuous meaning-making in the face of a dominant encircling system with the grater political and economic power. This is inevitable, given that the Gypsies have not inhabited a separate place or geographical location, let alone a bounded political entity for centuries, if ever” (2010: 38). Michael Stewart, who studied the Vlach Romanies in Hungary, suggests that instead of believing their culture is located in a homeland such as India, Romani people actively create an alternative imagined autonomous space through commercial dealings, solidarity, commensality, and speech practices, thus by following their ethnic honor codes (1997).

The Roma, like the Calon in Brazil, constructed their sense of ethnic border through gossip and disgust. Kali was shunned as a dissident even though she spoke Romanes and made part of her living by reading fortunes. Similarly Perula’s daughters were considered acculturated, shameful and disrespectful. The oldest daughter’s marriage to a *gage* man due to pregnancy was
esteemed unacceptable. Furthermore Perula was criticized for allowing the young couple and their newborn to live in a section of their house, when tradition required them to be completely shunned. Perula herself was rumored to have had an affair in the place she had rented for reading fortunes, located two and a half hours away from her home by public transportation, which Ianca and others said was “suspiciously far.” She argued that Rio was already populated with numerous Roma fortunetellers and that each defended fiercely her territory, as I elaborate in chapter 5. Nonetheless, Ianca was convinced of Perula’s “cheating” and further commented that every Roma woman in her community had cheated at some point or another. According to several interlocutors, Solomea was the most notorious flirt, a gorgeous mother of two on whom many Ciganos had developed a crush. Solomea was rumored to have had affairs with three married Roma. When the gossip became too scandalous, she left her cheating husband and two children, and disappeared without a trace. Several Roma, mostly men, said they still loved her and longed to see her again or hear from her.

One of these admirers and former lovers, Matcho, defended Solomea and said that nobody should be pointing fingers, not even Ianca who had herself dated a gagio man some ten years before my visit. His statement undercut Ianca’s claims of strict Romani respectability since it was taboo for Ciganas to date gage men. When I met Matcho, he had been a widower for five years and lived with his mother, since all his children were married off and had children of their own. He eventually married an attractive widowed Rromni rumored to have taken to drinking with gage men. Auntie Violeta, his mother, said she had always allowed her children to be with the one they chose because she had herself eloped, so she understood what passion meant. She knew her sons were transgressing Romani norms, but did her best to protect their reputations. She did not shun any of her kin, not even when one son flirted with another son’s wife eliciting a
feud. She easily forgave them all. This made Ianca suspicious of her moral standard although the matriarch had been so devoted to her husband she even raised five of his children with other women, besides having ten of their own. Ianca believed that Auntie had had her share of affairs with *gage* men. Again, this was a case of competing claims of authenticity, yet also a sense of having been immersed long enough in the Brazilian mainstream to resemble it to a great extent.

My Roma interlocutors agreed that *Ciganas* were increasingly inclined to engage in affairs, even with married *Ciganos*. This was once considered unthinkable for a *Rromni* and punished by stoning according to the elders, yet had become the main topic of gossip in both Rio and Sao Paulo Roma communities. Accusations once hushed in private now circulated in public and elicited self-defense, thus creating a spectacle, sometimes even in front of non-Romanies. I felt this was due to a weakening of the *kriss* and of social surveillance: individuals took it upon themselves to punish and shame the accused by making the transgression public knowledge.

For instance, Ianca’s sister Rosita once yelled at her 20-year-old son in the middle of the street for a good fifteen minutes because he had insulted her saying, “You only read fortunes in Argentina to bring money for your *gage* men, you whore!” She berated him with loud vitriolic comments in both Portuguese and Romanes. He got into his car, blasted the radio to drown her out, and accelerated towards her. Rosita stood her ground yelling insults at him. The rest watched in fear for her safety. He drove past her, made a U-turn, and again accelerated and almost hit her. He stopped abruptly, leaving us all trembling with suspense. She remained unmoved, defiant and continued shouting. He backed up again and accelerated past her furiously, the radio music fading away with him in a cloud of dust. Rosita continued her rant for a while, wishing him to go away, saying she has no son, and that she sacrificed her life as a single mother to raise an ungrateful child. His father had abandoned her with two children. Ever since then Rosita had
dated *gage* men secretly, renting apartments for them, and travelling extensively to avoid community shaming. People hardly knew if she when she was in the city or not, but she frequently claimed to be abroad. Ianca regretted her sister’s affairs since Rosita often sustained these men financially, and some were actual drug-addicts. Ianca exclaimed: *Brasileiros!* (Brazilians!) – as if this summarized what was wrong with these men.

Although rebellious acts elicited scandalous gossip, Roma women’s economic security and relative urban anonymity provided them with a buffer against shaming particularly since their ethnic community was spread out across the urban landscape. In “Honor and Shame,” Peristiany highlights distinguishes between urban and rural areas in the Mediterranean on the basis of presence or absence of anonymity (1974). In rural areas people see each other and interact on a daily basis, so they are more immersed in honor and shame socialization patterns. Meanwhile, individuals who move farther away from families to work in urban centers discover they could lead their lives in anonymity and privacy. Rosita avoided her family’s contempt by travelling extensively both nationally and internationally, and by renting apartments in city centers like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Most Roma interlocutors lived in houses spread out across the city, unlike Calon who still lived in clustered tents, in communities of intense socialization patterns. Also Calon were relatively more impoverished, which factored into their reliance on traditional group solidarity and shared resources. Eustakiu, an elderly Rom said:

> In the olden days we all were equal. If you didn’t have food you just went to ask the other Roma and they gave you even the shirt off their back. We lived together and travelled together in tents, we were all the same and everyone had the decency to keep their lives clean, to obey the Romani law. Nowadays the rich Roma are just like the rest of Brazilians, they look down on the poor Roma. It’s all about the rich versus the poor now. They live in their big villas and keep the poor out. They don’t care if they break a rule because they know they can just pay the fine. But I don’t condone that. I don’t let these corrupt Roma into my house. And trust me, they are all corrupt. There isn’t a single man or woman here that hasn’t cheated on their husband or wife. I won’t have any part in that. They’re scared of me because they know that.
In tightly knit families living under greater mutual surveillance and experiencing greater economic need and solidarity, members rarely trespassed against social norms. Dissent and shunning would have meant becoming both socially and economically destitute.

Yet nowadays most Roma admitted they were becoming acculturated. They lived off lucrative fortunetelling businesses and were less likely to rely on others or to share their resources. Those who could afford to pay a fine rebelled more frequently. Also they lived in houses, so occasional transgressions often remained behind closed doors. Gossip circulated largely without proof, mythmaking at the level of the collective imaginary, yet nonetheless had real life consequences such as physical altercations and public shaming. Yet Roma interlocutors boasted their moral superiority more frequently than Calon, to cover their dissent and ambivalences. By appearing to follow honorable gender roles and intensely defending oneself against gossip, most Roma still sought social acceptance.

**Maxrimé and the “natural basis” for gender inequality**

According to maxrimé ideology women are considered inherently impure and contagious. Social proscriptions of honor and shame aim to compel female sexuality towards the continuance of the patriarchal Romani bloodline and cultural world. After a girl gets her first menstruation the lower part of her body below the waist is considered perpetually impure, along with any object that touches it, and prevention against imagined contagion normalizes many gender-segregating practices that naturalize beliefs in male superiority. The woman’s mij or genitals are considered marimé particularly during menstruation, and liable to be contagious unless she complies with ritual cleanliness in everyday practices according to Romaniya laws:
Menstruation brings a dramatic change to a girl, and she is introduced to shame (lashav) and cleanliness (marime) rules of washing and behavior. She is not allowed to sleep with her younger sisters anymore, and her clothes must be washed separately from them as well, that is, with the clothes of her mother and older sisters. She is no longer allowed to wear gage clothes (ready-made clothes from the store) but must wear Gypsy clothes consisting of a separate top and long skirts. These she must wear at least ‘in public’, i.e. in front of adult men. Her parents begin to keep a more careful watch on her and she is expected to help more in the house. She is also instructed on how to deal with her menstruation so as to keep clean personally and avoid polluting men. She must not pass in front of a man, nor show her legs, and is given a sense of shame (lashav) in her behavior towards men (Sutherland 2003: 151).

Shame is highly elaborated for women as an ethos that prescribes gender cleanliness from ritual cleansing of the body’s lower half, to cleaning the house and maintaining modesty around the men and the elderly, as mentioned in previous sections.

Among the Romanies of Brazil some of these rules exist only in the collective memory amongst the elderly and not in present-day practices; i.e. the women can now pass in front of men and do not always wear long skirts. Sometimes they wear ready-made shorts or one-piece dresses. Unwritten laws still circulate, however, within the collective imaginary to indicate what is considered uzó or morally pure versus maxrimé or morally impure Romani body politics control women’s sexuality particularly through the cult of virginity, arranged early marriages, and pressure for girls to drop out of school after achieving basic literacy so as to avoid possible internalization of gage cultural values and elopement.

Child-raising practices normalize gender inequalities regarding scholarization since girls are pressured to drop out sooner than boys in order to ensure their virginity at marriage. Both Roma and Calon said that chave (boys) are encouraged to stay in school a few years longer than chaja (girls). Also boys are encouraged to be sexually active with gagia before marriage, “so that the bride will look up to her man” (Auntie Violeta). While boys attend school a few years longer until they pass their driver’s exam and obtain their license, most Romani girls are kept under
surveillance at home where they must help with cooking, raising younger siblings and practice
fortunetelling, and preparing to enter marriage as virgin brides with the correct desirable
qualities. Eventually boys also drop out of school and begin working with their fathers and
uncles as apprentices in various businesses such as realtors and street vendors.

Parents strive to prevent acculturation, which is thought to occur primarily during school
among the *gage*. They entrust the elderly and the children’s mothers to pass down cultural values
to the new generation by teaching children to obey honor and shame laws, while emphasizing
independence from non-Romani or *gage* institutions including the institutionalized education
system and the legal system. For instance, some girls married as young as thirteen, which is
below the legal age of consent, and such young couples never declared their marriages officially
nor had a marriage certificate.

Romani cosmology does not deny that girls have sexual urges, but rather strives to
enforce that the physical expression of their sexuality leads to the honorable continuation of their
lineage through marriage. After her first menses a girl is considered ready to become a woman
through the act of marriage, the key ritual of passage into adulthood. Soon after a girl becomes
biologically fertile arrangements for her marriage are made in order to prevent elopement.
Romani marriages have been the subject of much controversy with girls often marrying under the
legal age of consent, yet these unions are still honored in the absence of legal procedure with a
religious ceremony and a festive community gathering. This was more common among Calon
who marry their children at younger ages than the Roma.

The institution of the bride-price quantifies female virginity at marriage: dissent results in
a sense of spoiled social identity and decrease in value. When Lisa was engaged, her father
received 30,000 réais from the groom’s father, the large sum showing that Lisa was a valuable
addition to her new family. The sum was thought of as compensation for Lisa’s economic contribution, which she would bring her new family through fortunetelling. It was also a token of appreciation to her father for having raised such a virtuous, beautiful and savvy daughter.

However, when Lisa eloped her father had to pay back this sum plus an additional 10,000 réais to the groom’s family for the shame incurred by her elopement and broken engagement.

As American Romologist Anne Sutherland suggests, when the bori loses social value in the eyes of the community the bride-price can be dramatically reduced or even eliminated (1975: 255). In Lisa’s case not only was the bride-price returned, but an additional fee had to be paid in order to appease the rejected groom and his kin. In addition to losing the bride-price, the father of such a rebellious bori may become an outcast himself if he continues socializing with his daughter. Stigmatization by and expulsion from their own family are additional punishments for girls who elope, who marry a gagio, who commit adultery, who divorce, or who remarry. The double standard is clear since the kriss seldom questions men who engage in similar practices.

However, I met several Romani women in both Rio and Sao Paulo who had divorced their Roma husbands, or who preferred to marry gage men instead. Those who divorced said that they refused to tolerate their husbands’ affairs and domestic abuse. For example Ianca’s first husband turned out to be violent with her when drunk although he was only seventeen, she was fourteen, and the young couple shared his parents’ house as newlyweds usually did. Domestic abuse was often condoned in males and Ianca was abandoned to his sadistic tendencies. After four months of enduring frequent physical and verbal abuse from him Ianca decided to run back to her mother, leaving her gold coins with her husband, thus divorcing him and dishonoring herself and her family. Similarly, Kali ran away from her first husband: “He beat me up, I was blue and black the whole first month we were married. My mother-in-law said I should get used
to it. I couldn't. I ran away. I married a gagio and we are still married now.” Kali also boasted of having affairs with gage men and said her husband had his affairs too, but they got along.

Mirabela, a distant relative of Mirian Stanescon, is another example of dissent and critique of Romaniya laws, patriarchal values and Romani men. I met her in a large outdoor market of Rio, reading cards and telling fortunes along with two other dark-skinned Roma women, Tania and her aging mother Irina, who like Mirian said their ancestors had come from Romania. I immediately told them of my research and the possibilities of potential part-Roma blood in both Eugene’s family and mine. When green-eyed, beautiful 40-year-old Mirabela heard I was seeing a Rom she took me aside and advised me with ardent candor not to marry Eugene:

Don’t get married to a Rom! Just get your research done and get your career, live your life. I got married young like most Romani women. You marry a Rom, you suffer his abuse, his cheating, his STD’s and you even adopt the children he had with other Gage women because he wants to raise them. You want to divorce him, but you can’t for a long time, he won’t let you, not if your parents are poor and they can’t afford to pay back the bride-price. And you can never make enough money for yourself telling fortunes because he expects you to support the family. I divorced my husband, but this is rare among the Romani. After our children got married, we parted ways and he agreed not to ask my parents for the bride-price. I had enough. Now I live like a Brazilian woman, I do anything I want, anytime, with anybody. Why let yourself depend on a man who treats you badly?

Romani social proscriptions render divorce difficult and undesirable especially for women. For a woman to divorce she must convince her parents to return the bride-price they received to her husband’s family, which is usually difficult to do because the money has been already spent. The solution in this case is for the wife to gather the money in secret if she can manage so that one day she can pay for her divorce and gain her freedom. Sometimes she will leave at her husband’s house the traditional gold coins with which she was adorned on her wedding day. The large gold coins, nowadays imported from Austria where they are custom-made for the Roma, are passed down from mother to daughter and may only be worn once in a lifetime by a virgin bride on her
wedding day to symbolize her honor. Having to sell or lose one’s gold coins is equivalent to losing honor and shaming one’s family. Mirabela’s account of divorce is rare among *Ciganos* but often necessary in cases such as Ianca’s. By leaving the marital home and returning to live with one’s parents, a woman could consider herself divorced since oftentimes an official marriage certificate was never obtained.

In these women’s narratives patriarchal values continue to limit *Ciganas*’ liberties and life style choices by their emphasis on female virginity until marriage, faithfulness, submissiveness to men and obedience towards prescribed gendered conduct in the name of family honor. In Rio de Janeiro and in Sao Paulo, particularly among Roma women I found significant evidence that they were not victims of men, but rather agents with free will and the ability to exert and negotiate their own spheres of domestic power. Sometimes it was the men who suffered because their wives had affairs. For example Solomea chose to seduce other man even though she was married and had two children. Joana, Matcho’s new wife, remained an alcoholic and a flirt even after they were married. Kadu’s wife Katia kept flirting with his cousin Mauro, and rumors said they were having an affair. Indeed Ianca accused them of flirting at her mother’s *pomana* feast, which she found most disrespectful and she forbade them both from sitting at her table afterwards.

Many Roma women enjoyed greater economic power than their husbands in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Some travelled to other countries occasionally reading fortunes, often leaving their husbands to take care of the children at home. One of Ianca’s nephews who visited from out of town had two children and had been left by his *Rromni*. The children were mostly under his mother’s care, grandma Lena. Lena was overweight and often grew tired of the boisterous boy and girl, who were excessive in their own ways, hyperactive and invasive.
The 7-year-old boy, for example, kept on leaning into my body for hugs, which I encouraged, but then quickly proceeded to handle my breasts and genitals, attacking even more enthusiastically these private parts when I tried running away, an inappropriately sexual game of hide and seek. He would also say the taboo names loudly as he grabbed these body parts: čuči (breast), mij (female genitals), bul (buttocks). I had the feeling that in some ways I represented a mother-figure, one who could offer intimacy, but at the same time by the age of seven he had learned to sexualize women and was fascinated with these particular words and parts of the female body. Lena yelled at him to stop unsuccessfully, too tired to chase him down and make him stop. That evening she asked me to adopt the two children and take them to the US, but the children winced and whined at the idea. They cuddled around their grandmother and fell asleep at Ianca’s all four of them huddled on a few blankets and a thin sponge mattress on the floor.

_Ciganas’_ sexuality is considered potentially chaos inducing for communities. This may explain why those women who choose to be sexually liberated get isolated and why they self-isolate, leaving their families including their children behind. For example Grisha’s wife Viviana left with a _sapatona_ (lesbian) _gagi_. Grisha had to raise their three children single-handedly. The rules are not the same for men. For example, Cabrito’s father Esteli boasted of having lived separate lives and of having had multiple wives at the same time: “During my first marriage with Luana, we had our four children, but I also had three children with another woman, Jussara, a _gagi_. I had two families, two wives.”

Luana had passed away, and the two had been divorced for the last five years of her life. Her health depreciated rapidly after the divorce. Cabrito and Minu, however, looked up to their father. Proudly, Minu said: “In the olden days, _Ciganos_ could do whatever they wanted. Now we have to listen to our wives, make sure they’re happy so that we can be happy.” Cornelia, one of
the most successful fortunetellers in Sao Paulo, was clear about the fact that she was the main breadwinner in their home. Her husband Mino’s occasional earnings came from the inconsistent, seldom lucrative business of real estate. Thus, economic gender role-reversal had changed the rules among the Roma leaving the men feeling less able to enjoy sexual liberties than in the past generations.

Among the Calon men more frequently enjoyed sexual freedom while their wives lived out the more submissive female social role ethnically prescribed for them. I met only one woman who divorced her physically abusive husband, Daniela, who was Jusimara’s niece. Jusimara had adopted Daniela from her own sister after her sister’s death. Daniela was twenty-two and had a 3-year-old daughter Dara with her first husband when she chose to move back in with her adoptive parents, Jilmario and Jusimara, and live in their tent. Normally a daughter of marrying age leaves her parents’ tent and is married away into the groom’s community. Daniela had returned and was unlikely to marry again because her divorce meant that she was shamed.

Normally Calon would grow suspicious of more than two adults sharing a tent, especially in the case of an unmarried woman and male kin other than her husband. The suspicions were of a sexual nature, and it was the main reason why I was never to share a tent with any Calon. Even the 20-year-old virgin Sidai was getting too old for marriage, according to the other women, and many pressured her to get engaged, get married and move out before others began to doubt her virginity. However, in Daniela’s case this did not seem to apply. By the time I visited the family they had normalized her presence and there was no malicious gossip around it. In Rio though I did find out about a Roma woman named Tania, who was said to have divorced her husband because she was found sleeping with her father-in-law. Tania now lived with her mother Irina,
both of whom were very friendly with me as soon as I approached them. Perhaps it was because most Roma shunned them, and I was not going to judge them by the standards of Romanipen.

In the meantime I did not observe or find out about Calins who married or had affairs with Ciganos nor with gage men. Among all Romanies women’s offspring with gage men are excluded like contagion from the community, so Calins avoided having children outside their ethnic group. Mary Douglas describes cultural concepts of “otherness,” “dirt,” and “danger” as “matter out of place” and as sources of anxiety about socially accepted meanings (2002). On the other hand several men had married gagi women, who were now being taught how to acculturate. For example in Rio de Janeiro Calon Michel, age twenty-four, had married Yana who was eighteen and kaliviri (black), and in Sao Paulo Cigano Eduardo was married to Claudia, twenty-seven, also kaliviri gagi. The Calon families embraced these women as their own. Yana was recently married and said she was already learning to read fortunes and to speak their shibi (dialect). Okeley suggests the same rules do not apply to men because in the Romani collective imaginary, “Gypsy men are innately pure, almost by predestination, whereas the women have to aspire to an elusive purity by good works” (1996). I also found that ethnic-specific gender politics tend to limit women’s lifestyle choices more than those of men. For example, Ciganas often adopted their husbands’ offspring with gage lovers since such children are considered Romani by blood, yet children of Ciganas with gage men remain gage.

Among Ciganos and particularly among the Calon it is the women who face greater moral obligations than men having to perform daily cleaning tasks to avoid spreading their “inherent impurity.” Ultimately the women represent guardians of the moral order in their community. This phenomenon is accounted for extensively in literature on the honor and shame complex among Mediterranean cultures (Peristiany 1974). Often these women internalize the
patriarchal discourse, naturalizing their submission within socially sanctioned patterns of gender inequality. In radical feminist Kate Millet’s argument, “it is interesting that many women do not recognize themselves as discriminated against; no better proof could be found of the totality of their conditioning” (1970: 43). Although several Roma women rebelled against the moral burden demanded by their cultural laws, disrupting the ethnic-specific pattern gender inequality, the gender bias continued to exist in the Romani imaginary as social proscriptions designed to make women subservient to the males in their extended family.

This androcentric bias is reflected in the *kriss* or Romani trial in which the judges are solely men and households must initiate issues through a male representative. As Mio Vasite said, “we will not accept the leadership of a woman, for a woman to put her skirts on our heads,” in reference to Mirian Stanescun’s self-proclaimed role as leader of the Romani Union in Brazil. This patriarchal superiority, although interrupted in practice in numerous ways, still has repercussions in individual lives at the level of family, group, and diaspora as well as national politics. In activist efforts, women like Mirian confronted gossip and opposition while seeking to become public spokespersons for their ethnic group, a point which will be elaborated upon further in chapter 6.
54. Calon siblings pose with the family aluminum pots in their tent
55. Calin pretending to ride a motorcycle – a cultural taboo
56. Roma bride and a red flag in the middle of the second wedding day festivities
57. Roma women and girls posing without males at a wedding – Sao Paulo

58. Wealthy Roma bride lavishly decorated with her dowry of gold coins – Romania

Marriage: the family model of hierarchy and discourses on “love”

Marriage occupies a central place in the process of becoming a Romani adult. Marriages are almost always arranged and endogamous among *Ciganos*. Usually parents select a spouse for their child among the other children growing up in the same *vitsa*, to strengthen existing ties of solidarity. An honorable Romani marriage is deemed so when arranged by the parents, demonstrating children’s respect for their parents as well as parents’ deference towards their own *vitsa* appurtenance. The bride, bride-price and two-day banquet represent gift exchanges between two extended families.

The wedding is elaborated around the significance of female virginity, which make her the protagonist. The fact that *Ciganos* use a Portuguese word for the groom (*noivo*) and a Romanes one for the bride (*bori*) evidences the girl’s key role during the marriage ritual. It is the boy’s father and male kin who first visit the girl’s family to ask for her in marriage. After much socially scripted (mostly Romanes) rhetoric of flattery, well wishing and negotiation for an honorably adequate bride-price, the fathers reach an oral agreement for the youngsters’ engagement or renewed it if the young had been already betrothed since an earlier age. The first day of the wedding *bori* is “kidnapped” briefly as she is seen struggling with sorrow about leaving her parental nest. In some cases, tears reveal the pain of separation from parents entailed in the obligation to move with the groom and live near the in-laws.

The *bori* wears a white wedding dress on the first day of the ceremony, symbolic of her virginity and moral purity. On the second wedding day she appears in a red dress, the color of blood, to suggest that she has lost her virginity. The two-day lavish banquet consisting of conspicuous consumption and hospitality serves to honor all present. On occasion it has been extended to three-four days, even a week-long feast during which the two uniting families
established their high social status in the larger community. “To have a seat at the table” means to be socially accepted as an honorable group member, a true Rom or Calon. Guests have to attend if invited or risk estrangement, and have to reciprocate by offering monetary gifts. On the second wedding day the bori, now a new woman (Romni), dances among the guests, greeting each of them while carrying a red pouch for collecting cash gifts, tokens of appreciation for her ethnic-specific sense of “honor.”

Throughout the marriage festivities the bori’s chest is decorated with gold coins inherited from her mother and meant to be worn only once in her life, at her wedding, then passed down to her own daughter(s). The gold coins said to attract prosperity for the newlyweds in their marriage. Close proximity to the bori so adorned is also said to bring guests “good energy.” Most wealthy Roma in Brazil have large gold coins manufactured and imported from Austria, while other Ciganos have whatever was passed down to them generationally. Ianca only had six. Many had had thirty. The largest dowry I heard about in Brazil was a hundred gold coins worn by Cornelia’s daughter in Sao Paulo. Cornelia said the dowry otherwise remained locked and could never be sold, for it meant shame and bad luck. In Romania the media covered a Roma wedding with three hundred galbeni (gold coins) and claimed these festivities cost one million euro (Andrei 2009, web). Romanian media used this as evidence when insinuating Romani theft.

Among Calon interlocutors I found that preference was given to marriages between patrilateral parallel cousins, the children of parents whose own parents are male siblings. Dennis O’Neil describes the marriage preference among the Bedouin Arabs as “patrilateral parallel cousins (father’s brother’s child),” who “traditionally determine kinship patrilineally that is, only from males to their offspring” (2015: 1). Romanies also considered women’s marriages to gage illicit, leading to non-Romani children. Moreover, Calon wanted to keep their daughters close
by, while marrying them into the groom’s family, so it helped when two brothers arranged marriages between their children. O’Neil states, “By marrying his patrilateral parallel cousin (father’s brother’s daughter), ego is marrying the closest female relative other than his mother, aunt, and sister” as shown:

![Diagram showing cross cousins vs parallel cousins]

Although I found greater flexibility among Calon and Roma marriage arrangements than this map suggests, there were nevertheless patterns of preference for marriages between brothers’ children among the Calon, in order to keep them living at the same campsite.

A bori was expected to leave her parents’ kumpania unless her groom lived there as well. I saw that the three brothers Jefse, Jilmario and Elioma combined with their cousins Lomanto and Cleito to form their kumpania and protected it by frequently trying to arrange for their children and grandchildren to marry their patrilateral parallel cousins. Otherwise as Jilzinha said, “our daughter would have to move away to join her groom and his family.” This was particularly hard for Jilzinha to imagine since her daughter Fabian was her only living child after the death of her two sons. By having a daughter marry a brother’s son, a parent could keep her on the same campgrounds, in the same kumpania, and enjoy her presence and ongoing support during daily life. For example, the Calon chefe (chief) Jefse said that his father Fernando and his wife’s father Daniel were brothers. Fernando used to be chefe before he passed away from cancer. Fernando and his brothers Daniel and Tomas had been the main elders in this kumpania,
and the next generation of males had now inherited their responsibilities: Jefse and his brothers, Jilmario and Elioma, along with their paternal cousins Lomanto and Cleito. Jilzinha was Lomanto’s younger sister. Jefse, Lomanto and Jilzinha had grown up together along with their patrilineal cousins in the same acampamento (camp site). The females among these cousins who grew up together married Calon from other acampamentos. Because she had grown up with her husband Jefse, Jilzinha said she preferred it when children grew up together before getting married, “This kind of love is the strongest. It’s from birth until death, and beyond death.” Her own daughter was now in a patrilateral parallel cousin marriage with Gabriel, and so were Luan and Diele, Paloma and Jaselio, and Elioma and Maiki.

Being promised in marriage by one’s parents as a child was so common that by the time I left this camp 17 of the 23 unmarried youths were betrothed. Five unofficial engagements (oral agreements between fathers) were made between patrilateral parallel cousins: Miguel and Jeisa, Marcelo and Roky, Sergivaldo and Andreia, Marcel and Sinalma, and Danila and Angelica. These children had been growing up together and were aware that their fathers (brothers to each other) had arranged their marriages. All the children seemed happy with their choices and demonstrated affection. Physical touching or extensive flirtation were prohibited among older children, and they were kept under close surveillance lest they elope before marriage. The general consensus was that girls were extremely adept at arousing passion with a single glance from afar, so the enforced distance between youngsters became wider the closer the wedding date grew. The verb kamel (to love) as in kamau tu (I love you) literally means “to want/to desire.” Fathers were anxious to marry their daughters as soon as the girls got their “womanly shape,” admitting their sexual appeal. Maternity was expected soon after the wedding ceremony. Only Roma said they started taking birth control pills a few years.
Among the Calon in São Paulo the preference for patrilateral parallel cousin marriages was also notable: Robe and Joelma, Anavie and Taina, Iago and Laiana, Judite and Carão, as well as the promised engagements between Clebe and Noelia, Jilson and Sumaiara, and Benieke and Sumaia although they were only four and three years old respectively. This type of marriage, according to my interlocutors, strengthens kinship ties among families that are already leading a lifestyle of solidarity, commensality and respectability. By selecting their child’s spouse from among their siblings’ offspring, parents felt reassured their choice was trustworthy. There was no better way to know if another family was honorable than through constant surveillance of their daily purity observance. It also ensured that any accumulated inheritance circulated closely.

I wondered whether group endogamy between such close blood relatives impacted the health or physical traits of new generations. Among the Calon in Rio de Janeiro there was a little girl who was mute, Judite. Her mother Fabiana told me that in other families mute and deaf children had become a more common occurrence: “There are more Calon children who are born mute, there are two more in Rio what we know, one in São Paulo and a few more in Bahia where there are lots of Calon.” Also Adreile said, “We have more blond children nowadays. Our great-grandfather was blond, but now all three of my children are blond. And Noelia’s baby is blond too!” Similarly in São Paulo Bonieke, Dona Herante’s late husband, had blond hair and two of his grandchildren were also blond: Aian and Adiel. Calon were pleased to have similar features to their ancestors such as green eyes, and especially content to say their child reminded them of a beloved dead relative. Among the Roma in Brazil, genetic reproduction among close kin also brought up rare traits like blue eyes and blond hair with increasing frequency among the new generations, as mentioned in chapter 1.
Because I did not have any children of my own, the women assumed I needed to borrow theirs in order to get used to the thought of maternity, so for many hours I was granted role of babysitter along with the older siblings. Around age ten, the girls adopted the traditional Calon dress code for females: long, custom-made, colorful dresses. It was shameful to don anything else, plus they enjoyed looking “like princesses.” The women and children wanted me do the same, yet I refused to invest 200-300 réais per dress and an additional sum for the “mandatory” gold accessories (for good luck). I did wear long skirts or dresses on a constant basis despite the tropical heat, to demonstrate modesty.

Playing “getting married” was a favorite pastime for most boys and girls, and they often took turns selecting mates for each other or practicing with their betrothed. I often had to play the game with them, and even adults played the game with me, asking: “Which is your favorite boy?” even though they were all under fourteen and I was clearly much older. I replied honestly to avoid being accused of false diplomacy like most gage. The gesture of playing the game made me feel included and this was its main purpose, as I understood from experience. Only those who belonged to the group, and occasionally visiting kin, were invited to play it. I found it particularly endearing that the children often fought over me as a companion and wanted to somehow keep me there, living with them. With them, I spent many hours playing “mommy-and-daddy” with their newborn and toddler siblings, and understood how such game playing allowed them to practice child rearing in preparation for marriage. As Dona Herante said, “by the time she is fourteen a Cigana knows how to read fortunes, how to cook and clean and take care of children, so she is ready for marriage.” Other than learning to respect their elders’ traditions, children’s main duty is to play and to bring joy. The official educational system is believed to hinder their natural propensity for play and parents generally discourage school attendance after
literacy is gained. As girls become biologically able to procreate they are encouraged to do so after a proper marriage marks their status as adults in the Romani world. The saddest ghosts are believed to be those of pubescent girls who died unmarried. They are buried in wedding gowns to appease them, so that they will not haunt the living, feeling unfulfilled.

Calon and Roma patterns of socialization for children as well as their weddings were strikingly similar. Both rented *gage* venues that were experienced in hosting *Cigano* weddings for two days morning until evening, and cooked “traditional” recipes among other Brazilian pastries, cold cuts, a wide selection of barbeque, an abundance of colorful enticing dishes. Spirits were consumed freely, and some belligerent drunks were to be expected by the evening. Although I attended two Roma weddings and a Calon wedding, I accumulated little data on them because I was admonished not to look conspicuous by taking notes or recording. I mostly introduced myself to numerous people explaining my research purposes and nuanced biography, then “sat at the table” eating copiously, listening to women gossip or talking about fortunetelling. The rest of my time there was spent dancing or watching others take turns to perform ethnic-specific dances. While individuals dances on their own instead of holding partners, some men and women danced side by side in front of the *kriss* as represented by the most respected men.

For the Roma, the word *Rrom* literally means “husband” and “man,” *Romni* means “woman/ wife,” the *Rroma* means “people/married adults,” and *Romnia* means “women/wives” which indicates that marriage is seen as the rite of passage into adulthood and actual membership to the Romani world. The ethnographic work of Márcio Vilar among the Calon in Bahia explores the wedding ceremony in detail (2011). Also Patrick Williams’ “Marriage Tsigane” based on ethnographic fieldwork among the Kalderashi in France remains the most comprehensive analysis of the marriage ritual and its symbolism (1997). My data supports these scholars’
findings that to attain the status of an adult and a member of the Romani world one must get married according to social norms. I also found that Ciganos who marry gagia are socially accepted. In these cases, wedding gatherings are much smaller and there is little or no bride-price involved. Weddings are also a small, almost private affair for those who remarry, particularly if they were previously widowed. Among Calon widows traditionally do not remarry.

Most Roma and Calon wedding banquets last two days and stress the loss of female virginity as the key event during this rite of passage into adulthood. Traditionally the groom’s mother or his older aunt checks the girl’s genitals before the wedding. The only acceptable proof of losing virginity, for most Ciganos, is seeing the bride’s bloodstained nightgown paraded by her mother-in-law and other elderly female relatives. Therefore, a ritual examination of the girl is performed both before and after the first wedding day celebrations, to ensure her virginity at marriage. But Cornelia said, “These days girls will do anything to get out of this rule. Some of them get a fresh chicken heart and stain their nightgown on the wedding night before the groom even notices anything.” Some said chicken blood was a good backup plan for the bori if being devirginized did not result in actual blood loss, a rare scenario yet nonetheless risky. Nowadays some girls prefer to have premarital gynecological exams, as Okely also reports is the case in England (1995: 65). In Lisa’s case, the girl who eloped, she was rumored to be maxrimé and “lost already” when she returned after three days claiming innocence. Her father arranged for a medical exam to establish that she was still a virgin. However, most other Roma claimed that he paid the doctor for a false statement.

After the young couple consummates the marriage at the end of the first wedding day, elderly female kin from both families pass around the bori’s bloodstained white nightgown in a ritual called “putting up the flag” as most other Romanies do worldwide and in particular in
Romania (Fonseca 1995: 130). Also an actual large red flag is paraded while the bride dances amidst the crowd, celebrating her virtue. A red apple is impaled with the flag’s pole representing abundance. Bites from the apple are said to aid fertility. The bori takes the first bite and the groom follows her example. Around mid-afternoon, the couple once again leaves the ceremony early, while the rest of the guests continue to enjoy dancing, eating, drinking and merrymaking until late evening. Often such banquets are all the ritual needed for Ciganos to consider their children married, since many of are too young for a legal marriage certificate. This was a common occurrence especially among the Calon. Most girls marry between the ages of eleven and seventeen. A girl’s virginity becomes highly controversial if she waits until her twenties or thirties to get married. Even if there is a bloodstained nightgown to parade after the couple’s first night together, the bloodstain is assumed to be the product of trickery, the bride either using a small knife or fresh chicken blood. The oldest bride I saw getting married for the first time was thirty-two and numerous guests at her wedding in Sao Paulo contested her virginity. They accused her of both lying and being greedy, marrying a rich, once-divorced, paraplegic, 44-year-old groom. Guests quietly speculated whether the groom’s genitals were functional or not.

Gossip went on although their two-day wedding party was a lavish affair with over a hundred guests and ten security guards, numerous buffet-style tables full of all kinds of victuals, an ongoing outdoor barbeque, and merriment going on for over ten hours each day, with the kriss members seated at the central table while the bride and groom along with the other guests took turns honoring them with traditional dances and elaborate toasts. In this case wealth once again made the bride immune to public reprimand and the gossip eventually subsided after the birth of their first child. A couple’s fertility was considered proper legitimation for marriage.
The other brides I witnessed were twenty years old or younger befitting social rules. Most interlocutors considered me several years older than the socially acceptable marrying age and assumed my boyfriend was my “man,” especially since obtaining a legal marriage certificate was for them an unnecessary *gagio* technicality. A man and woman are usually considered married if they are sexually intimate and live together. For marriages involving widowers it is preferred for the couple to move in together quietly instead of celebrating their wedding. In fact several Calon said they still believed a widowed woman should never remarry. However, they agreed that these days there was greater flexibility around this rule. In previous generations, Romani parents could marry the young off without their consent and while this has become increasingly rare in Brazil in the last few decades, “romantic love” is still not a prerequisite for marriage. On the contrary it is desirable that the bride and groom agree to marriage without first having fallen in love. An elder *Rromni* named Rafaela explained during her niece’s wedding in Sao Paulo that this is to prevent divorce, which is so often seen among the *gage*:

Romantic love dies after a while, which is why so many *gage* couples divorce. We don’t divorce so often because our parents arrange our marriages and most of us know our husband since we are very young. We grow up together and our parents tell us we are meant for each other early on, so we are used to the thought of spending our entire lives together. That’s a real bond.

The Romani discourse on “love” differentiates between honorable “unconditional love” and a sexualized idea of “romance” or “passion.” For example, Kali was known to be passionately in love with one of her *gage* lovers, and she talked openly about him:

He is a bus driver. He drives the bus I take into the city every morning. I make him a sandwich for lunch. I always wake up happy when I know I’m going to see him. He’s really passionate in bed. He calls me over to his house now. He’s separated from his wife. I’m crazy about him! (Kali)

Ianca said this kind of passion is mostly sexual, and Auntie Violeta agreed, yet said that her love for her husband was both passionate and unconditional: “He was a traveling *Cigano*. When he
came to my town, I knew I was ready to elope with him. It was immediate, the fire between us. And I followed him everywhere. And even when he had affairs I’d go beat up his mistresses, but I could never stop feeling that fire and that love for him. He was the only man for me.” Amongst Calins like Jelzinha who did not display jealousy, the emphasis was put on “unconditional love” defined as the long-lasting bond between family members who grow up together and marry each other. The concepts of “romance” and “passion” were seen as gagikane and believed to subside.

Both Roma and Calon believe that the gage usually marry for the wrong reasons, in pursuit of passionate sexual desires which disappear after a short period, thus ending in divorce. Romani ideology insists that arranged marriages are far more conducive to establishing a deep bond between spouses, which prevents divorce. To a certain degree Ciganas are socialized to be submissive to men as the feminist Millet suggests: “Where differences in physical strength have become immaterial through the use of arms, the female is rendered innocuous by her socialization. Before assault she is almost universally defenseless both by her physical and emotional training” (1970: 44). There is ample evidence that both Romani men and women subscribed to marital rules in order to be accepted as honorable adults.

Unmarried chave were always encouraged to be sexually experienced before marriage unlike the girls or cheja, since a certain hyper-masculinity was expected of them. While girls were kept virgins, boys had to learn to act like men prior to marriage so that, “for the girl who only knows one man, than man is like a god,” according to Auntie Violeta. Boys’ sexual encounters with gagia were encouraged since they were believed to prepare them for marriage. Still, they were not allowed to socialize in private with any Cigana prior to marriage. Some admitted that they enjoyed their sexual liberty and had postponed their weddings for “after the Carnival” in order to enjoy the weeklong promiscuity involved. Such festivities are forbidden to
all *chaja* (unmarried girls). Other young men said they had suffered because they had crushes on *Ciganas* who were already married or engaged to someone else. Minu for example could not marry the girl he liked because their parents could not come to an agreement. Others like Duiu were not allowed to see their betrothed for a whole year until their marriage date since she lived in another city. Often the young men went to weddings just so they could catch a glimpse of the *Cigana* or *chaja* they liked, but were forbidden to speak with in private.

Hence in many ways the males also experienced social proscriptions. Romani men who ended up having children with other women were still reluctant to divorce, due to family pressure. Often their wives preferred to raise these illegitimate children, like Auntie Violeta who boasted of having raised three of her husband’s offspring from *gage* women. If a man was found having an affair with a *gagi*, the matter was often forgiven depending on the wife’s disposition. “They don’t matter, they’re all chickens,” the wife of a Calon chief had said to me in reference to her husband’s lovers even though he replied that they were nice, intelligent women. Most women, however, did suffer from crises of jealousy even when resigned to maintaining their public appearance as calm and confident. On the other hand, a few wealthier Roma wives in Sao Paulo rejected the idea of their husbands cheating on them. Their men still agreed that there was no faithful husband among them with one or two exceptions whom they looked down on for being unmanly and ruled by their wives’ will.

A Romani man’s affair with another *Cigano’s* wife remains strongly taboo. *Ciganos* view a *gagi* as someone who can be easily seduced, “unlike married Romani women, who remain to be the greatest taboo and therefore the most tantalizing conquests,” according to Cabrito. The man found guilty of such an affair will usually be excluded from the community and possibly injured or killed by the jealous cuckold in a socially sanctioned act of revenge for the shame
brought upon both extended families. Such was the case of a Rom in Brasilia, a distant relative of Cabrito, who was killed by the jealous husband of his mistress. His wife and children had stepped out for a snack one evening when the man was shot twenty times and killed in his own bed. Rumor said his wife had been previously informed and had absented herself willingly.

This case showed that death still circulated as a form of punishment at the level of the collective imaginary among the Romani with dire consequences in cases of passionate jealousy. Another example of this was a woman’s suicide over her husband’s infidelity. Ianca said: “She was one of the most beautiful Ciganas, she always danced in the mirror, she put flowers in her hair, she was everyone’s darling, but she was very jealous and she killed herself.” Thus, the honorable discourse on amor Cigano (unconditional love) was occasionally challenged by explosions of passion and jealousy, manifesting in physically or verbally violent ways either against others or against oneself.

**Situating a theoretical analysis of Romani socialization patterns**

This discussion deals with considerations of the honor and shame complex from literature based primarily on Mediterranean and Japanese cultures, which revolves around themes such as social norms and deviations, kinship solidarity, gender-oriented behavior, hostility and hospitality, sense of the sacred and its meaning, and the effects of wealth and anonymity on the decline of the honor and shame complex in urbanized cultures. Peristiany defines honor as a “matter of moral conscience and a sentiment,” “a fact of repute and precedence, whether attained by virtue or birth, power, wealth, sanctity, prestige, guile, force, or simony” (1992: 5). He argues that honor must be achieved, asserted and vindicated, even when inherited, through performing socially sanctioned behaviors. According to him, “honor and shame are two poles of evaluation”
and they are used as “standard measurement” or as “the type of personality considered as representative and exemplary of a certain society” (9-10). This is also relevant to the Ciganos in Brazil who operate on a polarized scale of moral purity and impurity.

Literature strongly suggests that socialization as a child is the main factor contributing to an individual’s adherence to social rules. Norbert Elias claims that the “civilizing of behavior” consists of several changes induced from an early age such as the moderation of spontaneous impulses and emotions, “the tempering of affect,” “the extension of mental space beyond the moment of the past and future,” and establishing “the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect” (Elias 1982: 236). According to Elias the child gradually internalizes self-constraint and foresight, “like a kind of relay-station of social standards, an automatic self-supervision of his drives,” such that “a more differentiated and more stable ‘super-ego’ develops,” and the restraint is no longer at the level of consciousness (241). Yet Elias also suggests that “major and minor disturbances, revolts of one part of the person against the other, or a permanent atrophy” of the personality may occur, making it more difficult for the individual to perform social functions (242). In looking at cases of Romani “rebellion” I found that individual ambivalences were rarely resolved in instances of shamelessness since most of rebels still claimed that they were honorable even after visibly acting against norms.

From Lisa’s case one can see that shamelessness enjoys immunity from social reprisal among Brazilian Romanies under conditions of personal wealth and the anonymity of living in an interspersed urban ethnic community. Similarly Bourdieu elaborates that shamelessness is rewarded by a certain immunity from social norms, at the risk of exile and social death: “A person for whom nothing is sacred (for example, the bachelor) could dispense with the point of honor because in a certain way he would be invulnerable” (1977: 218). On the other hand
Bourdieu suggests that social norms offer people a sense of sacred meaning. This produces ambivalence in people with respect to social rules and the need for obedience:

Doubtless the true miracle produced by acts of institution resides in the fact that they succeed in convincing those individuals whom they consecrate that they are justified in existing and that their existence serves some purpose. But by a sort of curse, the essentially diacritical, differential, distinctive nature of symbolic power means that the access of one distinguished class of Being has for its inevitable counterpart the decline of the complimentary class into Nothingness, or minimal Being (88).

While following social norms can lead to a potential sense of sacred existence, it does require individuals to become completely docile bodies, mirrors of societal structures and constraints, despite the presence of individual agency, will, and ambivalent desires. Among Ciganos these individual desires and ambivalences surfaced more often when wealth and the lack of daily surveillance by the community afforded some immunity. Nevertheless, the ideology of maxrimé, with its power of sacred symbolism, designs a distinctive ethos and worldview for Romanies. With regard to honorable status, it means showing everyday the potential for shame through respect for the codes of honor, for the elders, for endogamy, as well as body-related moral purity rituals of cleanliness (Weyrauch 2001). The honor and shame literature is relevant in discussing Romani masculine honor in the form of virility, authority over the family, defending one’s reputation, and refusing to submit to humiliation.

Similarly, the literature shines light on Romani female honor which is believed to come from women’s subordination to men, honesty, loyalty, discretion, concern for one’s reputation practiced through sexual restraint, chastity or modesty in sexual matters, humility, reserve, and obedience of both social rules and to their representatives (Holy 1989). Honorable Romani behavior depends on the inscription of social rules and gendered roles on the bodies and minds of both men and women, who must strive to fulfill their society-imposed duties of family membership. Both men and women then struggle to attain these ideal modes of being and
I found that Romanies generally strive to accept their roles according to social ideals and defer to public opinion as defined by the elderly, which indicates the generational power inequality inherent in their society. According to Elias shame has its origins in the “bodily inferiority of the child in face of its parents or teachers,” a fear “of other people’s gestures of superiority” and a fear of personal degradation (292). In the adult, “the feeling of shame is a specific excitation, a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual on certain occasions by force of habit” (292).

Although Elias’ attempt to engage Freud may be reductive, it remains relevant to the discussion of Romani ethos, for Romani culture is integrated by shame rather than by guilt, and this form of integration is consistent with the prevailing Romani child-rearing practices, worldview, and high value placed on group-oriented behavior as opposed to individuality and independence. Lashaw or lajipen (shame) as elaborated by Romani codes of behavior strongly involves fear of rejection since the worst form of punishment offered by the Romani kriss (tribunal) is permanent social exclusion. According to Peristiany, “all societies have their own forms of honor and shame” which represent the ideal standards of action upon which social evaluations are based (1974: 10-11). But among Calon in Brazil this occurs with greater intensity and consequences because they live in tight communities and tend to know each other well. As Peristiany insists: “Honor and shame are the constant preoccupation of individuals in small scale, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relationships are of paramount importance and where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office”
(11). Particularly in small groups in which all persons know one another, individuals are constantly courting public opinion so they may be deemed respectable group members.

Similar patterns of honor-based socialization have also been noted amongst non-Romani tightly knit rural communities around the Mediterranean where face-to-face daily interactions among community members ensure constant surveillance and public shaming is used as punishment. However, these patterns have become steadily weaker especially in urban settings where individuals enjoy greater anonymity. Calon live in small groups and set up tents on city outskirts, display a rural, daily surveillance type of the honor and shame complex. Meanwhile the Roma of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo live in houses spread out across the urban spaces, secluded from each other, and enjoying greater anonymity within mainstream society, thus enabling more frequent dissent.

**Social pressures in the lives of men**

Romani men just like women must strive to obey honor and shame rules and occasional acts of rebellion reflect that struggle. Like girls, boys also can only gain the social status of adult group-members through marriage within their vitsa (extended family). Males who remain unmarried beyond the age of thirty are suspected of homosexuality, which is taboo, and risk being shunned from the community. In Rio de Janeiro though, there was one such man, Betinho, who never married and who was rumored to be biš-thaj-štar (gay, in Romanes), but since he kept his sexual orientation quiet, he was still well received at wedding parties because he “always dressed well” and was “an amazing dancer” according to Auntie Violeta. Betinho lived across the street from her, was now about 70-years old, alone and sickly. She said woefully, “He has been getting thinner every year, we think he may be dying of AIDS. His dog is his only
companion. Only his cousin Elias stops by his place from time to time and brings him food.” In addition to Betinho there were a few other Ciganos who never married, and who were “amazing dancers” according to Ianca, “elegant and well-mannered, slender Ciganos who dance better than most women as well as men.” The Roma communities accepted them since “they hide their personal affairs.” On the other hand a girl in Sao Paulo who was discovered in a sexually active relationship with a gagi was beaten by her father and two older brothers, and forced into an arranged marriage. “The family wanted to avoid a scandal so they married her right away,” the Brazilian gagi shared. Viviana, Grisha’s ex-wife, ran away with a sapatona (lesbian) to avoid this kind of punishment at the hands of her family. Thus, both men and women were forbidden from having same-sex partners, but there was less tolerance of female dissent in this regard.

Usually a Cigano must consent to a life largely dictated to him by his parents. He must marry the girl they select for him. In Rio 20-year-old Carlos was engaged to be married to a girl from Sao Paulo whom his parents had chosen for him instead of the Brazilian girl he liked, a girl he met though the Internet. He had considered the option of eloping, but had resigned himself to an arranged marriage: “I don't want to make a big scandal. Roma people will never change. I’ll get married like they want me to, and then I’ll live my life in the streets anyway.” By eloping with a different girl he would bring shame upon himself and his family, so he chose to obey his parents’ wishes instead. Carlos also said that it was traditional to stop attending school after obtaining a driver’s license: “For us Roma having a driver’s license is our diploma. We don't need to graduate high school. We just need to learn a trade like selling merchandise. I’ve been going around town with my uncles, learning from them.” Highly educated Roma in Brazil like Nelson Pires suffered exclusion not only because his schedule would not allow extensive socializing, but also because he became an outcast, considered to have “turned completely
“gagio” through the acquisition of a formal education. Instead of continuing their studies young men are expected to work as apprentices in the activities of their older male relatives.

Fortunetelling is considered a strictly female occupation although it is often the main source of income in a Brazilian Cigano household, which leads to a reduced role for men as income earners for their families. Whereas Romani girls often had their own source of income by the age of thirteen, boys depended on their families for economic support. A chavo may be tempted to marry outside his vitsa or outside the ethnic group altogether, but he will lose his family’s support. Usually the boy’s father pays the bride-price for the bori’s and sometime even gives them a house or a tent, in the case of the Calon. A boy that defies his parents’ wishes risks losing the chance to marry well. Yet there was one young Roma man who defied his parents and married his much older aunt, a woman who had the means to support him financially. Among Calon fortunetelling was not as lucrative, and thus not as liberating, because it was conducted in the streets instead of private oficinas (offices in Portuguese).

In addition many Roma men found themselves caught between the roles of decision-makers and spokesmen required by their cosmology and their economically disempowered status within their households. Cabrito for instance said he represented Romani rights at a national level, yet he admitted that his wife’s psychic reading office supplied the bulk of their family income: “We spend about 6,000 réais per month and Angelica is responsible for all of it. What I make occasionally with private investment sales I use for an occasional vacation or to get a new car. My parents provided us this house, but Angelica is providing our monthly income, so she is the lady of the house. I cannot upset her.” Such Roma women with a higher income than their husbands’ stated that they did not tolerate infidelity although most Ciganos like Cabrito claimed in private, “No Cigano is strictly monogamous. In Brazil people are very hot, it’s a very sexual
culture. You can just pretend to read a girl’s palm and she will feel something instantly. I used to read palms on the subways just so I could flirt when I was young. I still do sometimes.” The fortunetelling that men do is illegitimate among the Roma, and is mainly a seduction tool for the men, so it is conducted in secret without any Roma knowing. Flirtation or proof of infidelity led to scandal and even physical violence between spouses, so men confessed they tried not to violate their wives’ wishes overtly.

Increasingly, Roma men in Brazil worried that their wives would leave them. Luludi in Rio de Janeiro often threatened to leave Curi. She said: “He doesn’t work, he just eats and spends my money. That’s it! I’m going to Argentina and I’m never coming back.” Curi was significantly overweight and he was often home taking care of the children while Luludi read fortunes in the city. When Ianca started going to evening adult literacy classes at the local public school, Luludi came along even though technically she could read. Luludi said: “I just need to get out of the house. I love going to school, you can meet all kinds of people there.” Eventually Kali, her mother-in-law, spied on her and saw her kissing a fellow student, a kaliviri young man against the school fence. The two had a bitter exchange of insults, which ended with Luludi slapping Kali after which they were no longer on speaking terms. They continued to live near each other, but for the following five months Luludi vocalized her wish to open up a fortunetelling shop, move there with her two children, and leave her husband Curi. When other Roma wives experienced jealousy, they threatened to leave and stop supporting their husbands.

_Ciganos_ who had been left by their wives struggled more than others to maintain their household and raise their children. When Viviana left with her lesbian lover, Grisha had to raise three children on his own. Lorenzo had to raise five children by himself after his wife Nevenka died. These men struggled to feed their children and most Roma remembered how difficult it had
been, even though the children were grown up now. Eustakiu was another elderly man Ianca pitied, “He suffered more than anyone else here. His first wife died in a car accident with his two sons. Then he married Anarosa, a gagi, but she was cheating on him and left him to care for their four daughters together: Lira, Milena, Pamela and Solomea. And then Solomea disappeared,” the woman whom everyone including Matcho was “still in love with.” The notorious flirt Solomea had left her husband Carlinhos after he discovered she was having affairs with other Ciganos. In these parts of Rio she had been the most beautiful Rromni. After her husband began cheating on her, she started retaliating according to Ianca. Some women did not accept their husbands’ affairs and either reciprocated or left them in protest.

The men were compelled to show respect towards their wives as well as their parents and elders. Younger men had to show particular deference to older women, whose social capital grew with age and motherhood into a comparatively high honorable status. Matriarchs like Dona Herante and Auntie Violeta possessed greater status after their husbands’ death since they had become the matriarchs in their extended families. Pakiv became primarily the concern of these elder women, who were responsible for shaming the younger men and women in cases of dissent. For example when men had affairs with other Ciganas, the women were responsible for inflicting gossip and verbal injury. Men were responsible for distributing violent punishment on behalf of cuckolded husbands, including death. There was one case Ianca told me about where the man who had an affair with another Cigano’s wife was killed by the cuckold’s kin at his home. In addition a man whose daughter was discovered to be a non-virgin at marriage was also shamed for not educating her properly in the ways of the community. He was compelled to pay a considerable sum to the groom’s family. Any shameful act perpetrated by a Cigano or his kin brought stigma and dishonor upon them. Thus, Romani men often acted under constant social
pressure towards conformity even though punishments for both genders had lessened over the
last few decades and tradition judged men less harshly than women in cases of dissent.

*Kris trials and punishments for dissent*

Compared to my interlocutors their ancestors had suffered far greater punishments for
disobeying the laws of their community, similar to members of other cultures that operated on an
honor and shame system of status evaluation. For instance *Ciganas* who lost their virginity
before marriage or who committed adultery were stoned to death according to several historical
references (Kenrick 1972). In Brazil my interlocutors knew of this punishment from their great-
grandfathers, yet for them the harshest measures were shaming, the payment of fines and most
significantly social expulsion which was summarized in practical terms by Mio Vasite, the
President of the Romani Union in Brazil: “one ceases to be considered a Rom when one loses his
seat at the table,” when one is no longer invited to community gatherings such as weddings,
baptisms, anniversaries, and funerals. The loneliness associated with this state of exclusion
represented the worst punishment my interlocutors feared. To be *all alone* goes against the
Romani ethos, as Ferrari suggests, yet her data on the Calin Renata disrupts this discourse
(2013). My data on Ianca and Dina, women who preferred living unlike the rest of the Romanies,
suggests the same. In fact Ianca said she wished to go to a place far away where no one knew she
was Romani, a place where she could just be considered one of the *gage*. This demonstrates the
growth of greater flexibility regarding social isolation as the worst imaginable punishment
among the Romanies.

Physical violence remained one of the punishments feared by my interlocutors. Roma
said that Calon were more violent and quick to draw knives than the Roma were in their jealous
altercations at weddings and other such social gatherings. Irina, the elderly Rromni I met in Copacabana said: “Don't go to a Calon wedding. They get drunk and pull knives out, be careful!” Also Auntie Violeta said there were Mexican Roma who came to visit them five years before my arrival, and they were similarly “quick to draw out knives when they thought someone had done them wrong.” Among my interlocutors this kind of violence was a rare occurrence.

Domestic violence also had been more common in the past, the women said. Although several senior Romani women told me that they had suffered from domestic violence, present-day communities in Brazil rarely employ psychical violence in order to enforce social rules. This does not mean that patriarchy is not at work according to Millet, “We are not accustomed to associate patriarchy with force […] it scarcely seems to require violent implementations. Customarily, we view its brutalities in the past as exotic or ‘primitive’ customs” (1970). I have chosen to focus on other ways in which cultural norms were enforced when individuals failed to internalize them.

When matters could not be settled at the family level, the kriss-Romani was called upon. Although I was not allowed to attend any formal adjudications, male interlocutors like Cabrito described the kriss as a “Romani tribunal for settling scores.” It has been described in various ethnographic accounts as “a Gypsy Court,” “Romani trial,” “justice,” in other words, “the tribunal or hearing which is part of the internal legal system amongst Roma” (Hancock 2003). The kriss is made up solely of the most respected elder men in a community. These members of the kriss act as judges and mediators between opposing parties in privately held trials. Women are normally not allowed to participate in a trial unless they are directly involved. Men are the only ones allowed to address the justice needs of the kumpania, such that the “kumpania is the public unit of moral, social, and political behavior which comes under the authority of the kris
Romani” (Sutherland 1975: 33). The *kumpania* differs from the *vitsa*, which is a “category of kin and not a spatial grouping” (33). *Vitsas* alone do not have the authority to make decisions with regards to Romani laws since the inherent kin relations induce bias:

Any scandal that arises in the *kumpania* requires that the offender (and sometimes the offended as well) leave town. An illegitimate pregnancy, a wife who leaves her husband, a case of adultery, or any such breach of morality will result in a re-sorting of the families in the *kumpania*. A person who becomes marime (rejected) will almost certainly leave town until his case is sorted out or his sentence completed (Tong 1995).

Individuals accused of dishonorable acts would often leave their homes, travel and return when they considered it safe to do so: many never returned. For example *Cigana* Viviana left her husband for a lesbian Brazilian *gagi* and neither returned nor maintained contact, not even with her five children. Even though lesbian relationships remained taboo, many of her relatives expressed regret over Viviana’s disappearance and reminisced that she had often been a kind and generous hostess. As old Eustakiu said, “Anyone who was hungry could go to her house and find a seat at the table.” In her case there was no trial, but usually transgressions reached the *kris* and the accused must be present.

Punishment by the *kris* is viewed as *bibaxt* (bad luck) and may take the form of public shaming, stigmatization as *maxrimé* (polluted), social isolation or rejection, and a damaged reputation (Okeley 1996: 83). As previously mentioned, Romanies imagine their *baxt* (good luck) to depend on their obedience to behavioral rules, so their sense of wellbeing depends on group compliance. Pollution taboos assume that *bibaxt* such as *nasvalipen* (illness) can be attracted by socializing with people who are *maxrimé*, such as the *gage* (Salo 1990). According to Hancock, “it is particularly the factor of ritual cleanliness and ritual defilement that has helped maintain Romani separateness – and as a result Romani identity – for so long” (2003). Still, I observed dissent quite frequently during my observations among the Romanies in Brazil, in
particular among the Roma, where group ideology and social reality did not correlate. There was a great deal of flexibility and ambivalence in the Roma’s imaginaries, discourses and practices which they discussed at times as part of acculturation into mainstream social norms.

**Ianca’s disillusionment with gender roles and illiteracy**

I found Ianca’s opinions particularly relevant because she was at once insider and critic in the Romani world, in addition to being open to discussing her culture with me due to our close rapport. Ianca often expressed regret at having been born within her ethnic group because she believed Romani honor taboos offered no protection or justice for women against the men who abused them. Her father Ivo had gone unpunished for abandoning her mother with four small children. Ianca’s first husband had met no repercussion for being physically abusive towards her. Ianca said that she ran back to her mother and separated from him after enduring four months of abuse with no help from her mother-in-law. It was Ianca who incurred shaming by running away from her husband, not him. She was only fourteen, while he was sixteen. When she ran away she left her gold dowry coins at his house as payment for the shame, yet the stigma still lingered. Therefore, Ianca was stigmatized on several accounts: because she was raised without a father, because she was divorced, and because she had lost her matrilineal gold coins, which are tokens of female honor more than wealth. Four years afterwards she was asked for in marriage again even though she was no longer a virgin and had lost her family’s gold coins, tokens of female virtue passed down from mother to daughter.

Ianca had only six small coins and had to give those up. It was considered shameful to lose one’s gold coins. One could never be so poor as to sell one’s gold. This was yet another reason why many impoverished girls were stigmatized as undesirable brides. Ianca had few
options for marriage as a once-divorced woman, no longer a virgin, and she tried to be an obedient wife. She rushed to marry her second husband Ivo before realizing that he was not yet divorced from his wife in Canada, and that he would not be able to secure a visa for her.

In many ways Ivo was like a father figure to Ianca since she was half his age, appealing to her childish desire for the paternal care that had been absent during much of her childhood. She confessed to being happy with him at first: “He was handsome, he took me to fine restaurants and I thought he was a great catch.” Ivo displayed an illusion of the financial security she had never enjoyed before. Yet Ivo turned out to be a violent husband as well shortly after their marriage. Frustrated that he could not bring Ianca to Canada with him because he was still legally married to his first wife, they nevertheless tried and waited for over a year in Mexico. It was unthinkable for him to stay in South America because of his children from his first marriage. According to Ianca’s account, Ivo took out his frustration on her in the form of frequent disputes and domestic violence. She had become pregnant soon after marriage and gave birth to a baby girl. When the child was 3-months old, Ivo told Ianca to return to Brazil alone and wait for him to send her a visa for the US. That was the last time Ianca ever saw him or her daughter. In the absence of news she awaited his return. Ianca’s account reflects her sense of victimization by the men in her life. However, according to Ivo and her now-adult (estranged) daughter, when the baby was 3-months old, Ianca’s father died and she chose to go alone to his funeral, leaving the child with Ivo. The child was adopted by his first wife and grew to know her as “mother.” Ianca never remarried nor had any more children, so as to wait for him, to remain his honorable wife:

I waited for him all these years hoping he would come back to me. I was still in love with him you see, and he had never sent me any news whatsoever. I didn’t know that he had crossed the border. I didn’t know for many years. So I waited, even though he had treated me like a prostitute, used me for sex, then when my daughter was one year old, he left for the States with her and never sent me a visa. But I waited. The years passed by and I waited. I dreamt his return so often. It was my only hope to ever see my daughter again,
you see, so I waited. But only the years passed by, and my beauty went, and he never came back. He just stayed with his first wife and their four children and who knows how he raised my daughter… I feel like she resents me when she calls me on the phone so rarely, only to ask for gifts. She doesn’t understand that I am poor, and I can’t send any more gifts like when she was little. I’ve stopped reading fortunes since my mother died.

Ianca sense of shame and guilt crippled her despite having led an honorable life as much as possible. She was depressed that she did not get to raise her only daughter Renata and she believed that the women who raised her, Ivo’s first wife and his two sisters, poisoned her daughter’s mind against her. Ianca felt Renata’s resentment on the telephone and in her failure to call more than once in six months. Ianca complained that Renata wanted only gifts from her and was always dissatisfied with the little she received. She showed me a few photos of her young daughter in large skirts, looking beautiful and willful. Ianca said her daughter had rebelled:

She eloped with a Rom that her father didn’t like. She ran away with him and married against her father’s wishes. He must’ve been upset. But I can’t blame him because all his other daughters married the right way with a proper marriage, virgins. She was the only one rebelled against him. And her husband is a car thief.

Renata had denied her family the gift of her virginity and a proper marriage, bringing shame upon them. She refused her father the satisfaction of controlling her sexuality through arranging a marriage that would bring him a large bride-price and higher status. Yet Ianca doubted her daughter was happily married: “After all she married a Rom. Maybe if she would have married a gagio she would have been happier.” Ianca advised me to settle down with a nice gagio, saying that Roma men never make good husbands. There were diverse opinions on the quality of life for women as compared to men, yet most Ciganas considered themselves better off than gagia. In Brazil non-Ciganas were perceived as struggling to find a husband, and then struggling to stay married. Ianca’s disappointment with gender inequality in the Romani world was exacerbated by her economic poverty. She blamed her father for leaving her mother to care alone for five children. Wealthier Roma women like Cornelia and Angelica said that they were happily
married. Yet amongst Calon, Ciganas also described themselves as content in their marriages although they were more impoverished.

I found that what Ianca regretted most was her illiteracy and the difficulty it presented in finding employment. She felt bound by her illiteracy and her culture to the occupation of fortunetelling, which she disliked. She had stopped commuting to the city to read palms after her mother passed away, and was financially supported by her older brother. A few Brazilian women at the Catholic Church she attended encouraged her to join an adult literacy course, and she did so. She struggled with the alphabet for many months with little success. She had received even less formal education than most Roma because while growing up, her mother travelled extensively for fortunetelling, so her schooling was often disrupted. Traveling still hinders education among Calon in Brazil. Ianca resented having been born among the Roma precisely because her culture impeded gaining a formal education. To support her argument that illiteracy was very harmful, she told me the story of an old woman named Rosa-the-Blind, whose illiterate mother accidentally put acid in her daughter’s eyes, mistaking the acid for eye drops. Rosa’s sight was destroyed because the mother could not read labels.

Most elderly I met agreed with Ianca that it was common amongst older generations to be illiterate. Some admitted they themselves were still illiterate. Only Auntie Violeta and Dina knew how to read and write, and read newspapers daily. Parents’ disinterest in school was the alleged reason behind their children’s frequent school absences. The intent was to avoid girls’ possible affairs with gage boys and elopement or loss of virginity. In addition the girls were needed at home for chores and for babysitting younger siblings, domestic activities they must learn prior to marriage along with practicing the trade of fortunetelling. Once she has learned how to take care of a home, and read fortunes, a girl is considered a good bori and her worth is
measured by the bride-price when her marriage is arranged. Acquiring higher education prevents girls from being considered valuable brides, and they become suspected of having affairs with *gage*. In Rio, the Roma girls Natalia and Perula were still in school at the ages of sixteen and eighteen, since they wanted to become a nurse and a teacher respectively. But there were rumors about them that they were “going out of the tradition,” since they had disobeyed the lifestyle proscribed by Romani laws. In addition, their older sister Perula had married a *gagio*. The other Roma were scandalized that the girls’ parents allowed them to disregard so many of the honor taboos. When Luludi joined Ianca’s literacy courses further scandal ensued, making it clear that pursuing a formal education remained highly taboo for females. Many said that, “schools are only for *Ciganas* who want trouble with *gage*.” Although Luludi quit school, most shunned her.

In Brazil as elsewhere Romani cosmology emphasizes independence from *gagikane* institutions, including school, in favor of teaching strong adherence to honor and shame laws and prioritizing Romanes. The *gagio* world is associated with moral impurity and danger to the minority’s boundaries and cultural coherence. *Gagikane* (of the *gage*) institutions such as public schools are often avoided in order to resist social pressures towards cultural loss or cultural changes. While boys remain in school a few years longer, girls are kept at home to avoid their “moral corruption” and a decreased socio-economic and symbolic capital within the community. Calon and Roma stated that literacy was encouraged for both male and female children, but girls still dropped out around the age of ten. Boys continued studying until they got engaged; yet few finished high school, nor were they expected to do so. Instead they were expected to learn how to ensure their household’s income through rendering a variety of services alongside their male kin.

Primarily Romanies still pressure girls to drop out of school after achieving basic literacy in order to ensure their virginity at marriage. Recently flexibility increased around this social
prescription, due to a reduced elaboration of *maxrimê* rituals. Yet these rules still exist. They often surface at the level of regulatory discourse about right and wrong ways of carrying oneself in the Romani community. This cultural persistence is due to a combination of the ethnic minority consistently identifying schools as dangerous to moral purity and an insistence on ethnic group endogamy enforced through arranged early marriages. However, female dissent is growing more common among Brazilian Roma people, thus leading to greater ethnic anxiety about cultural loss.

60. Roma girl and woman wearing *gagikane* mini-skirt and shorts
CHAPTER 5. FORTUNETELLING AND MAGIC

Roma secrecy versus Calins’ public display of ethnic stereotypes
Tarot cards, palm readings, magic formulas and spirit possessions
Fortunetelling as a traditional female occupation and acculturation
The fourth nail: a Romani

Lawsuits and legalization in Brazil
*Ciganos espirituais* (spiritual Gypsies)

**Roma secrecy versus Calins’ public display of ethnic stereotypes**

Alongside numerous non-*Cigano* psychics and spiritists in Brazil, most *Ciganas* practice their “traditional” occupation of fortunetelling by reading palms and tarot cards, and selling magic spells, claiming to entreat a wide (local) variety of spiritual entities. I was told that every fortuneteller has her own way of doing things, and that all Ciganas have the gift for it, but some are more powerful than others. Potency did not necessarily correlate with age and experience. Ianca said she never got the hang of it. Meanwhile, some 12-years olds in Sao Paulo were making enough money to sustain a family. Most *Ciganas* refused to talk about the specifics of their trade saying that they must keep it secret for it to work. The few that did eventually share with me more details asked that I preserve their anonymity for they could suffer stigmatization and group expulsion for divulging the secrets of the trade. Although *Ciganas* allows me to accompany them at work in public areas I was not allowed to witness any private sessions they conducted with clients. This is a partial account of my intersubjective interlocution based experiences with their trade, based on how it was discussed, constructed, and circulated both by the Romanies and by other Brazilians.

The main difference I found among *Ciganas* in Brazil is that Roma women often work in private psychic reading shops, where they maintain their ethnicity secret from *gage*, while Calins
commonly work outdoors in public areas where they play up to the gage’s stereotypical image of Ciganas to advertise their fortunetelling services. They purposefully make themselves ethnically visible by donning stereotypical Gypsy clothing: long, brightly colored dresses and multilayered gold jewelry such as necklaces, long earrings, multiple rings and sundry bracelets. Proof of the charismatic power they hold over the gage is that they are not afraid of being robbed: “They don’t dare to attack us. They are afraid we will put a curse on them,” explained the good-natured Maiki, a dark-skinned, petite, sharp-featured, young Calin I often saw at Copacabana beach.

Calins often resemble the dolls of so-called espíritos ciganos (Gypsy spirits) sold at the esoteric Mundo Verde stores. Dolled up in dresses, Calins admitted fortunetelling involves a sense of role-play through their display of the Gypsy stereotype. One Saturday Maiki wore a pink ball gown to read palms for the bikini-clad gage in the sweltering heat on Copacabana. I asked if she was hot in it. She replied with serene determination:

Yes, but we have to dress up when we come here so the gage will know we are Ciganas. They want to see us in the Cigana costume to know we are authentic. A lot of it is how you look. If you look good and you wear bright colors and you shine, people trust you. The Roma don’t wear traditional dresses, they look like everyone else, and they’re fat. We stay thin because we walk a lot and we eat little meat, mostly salads, vegetables. The Roma stay home to read palms and barbeque meat all the time in their backyards. And they’re ashamed to show they’re Ciganos. We are proud to show everyone who we are and people like to see us all dressed up.

All the Calins I met worked outdoors and were easily identifiable as Ciganas. Meanwhile the Roma women often kept their ethnicity hidden from clients, even from those whom they had known most of their lives.

Some Roma had their own psychic shops adjacent to their homes especially in Sao Paulo, while others worked in public like Calins and took time-consuming public transportation from the suburbs to the central plazas of their respective towns. In Rio de Janeiro I met my first Roma interlocutors by following street vendors’ directions to where I could find fortunetellers: “near
the beaches and public parks.” Calins wore such outfits on a constant basis and stood out in the crowd as they offered to read palms or the tarot cards for those passing by. The Rromnia did not wear expensive, custom-made, brightly colored, multilayered dresses in public.

**Tarot cards, palm readings, magic formulas and spirit possessions**

After first meeting Ianca and Luludi in a Rio park where they were offering their fortunetelling services, they invited me to visit their neighborhood in the suburbs. There I asked the neighbors where I could find the homes of Ciganas and they pointed out several. It was clear their ethnicity was known. They had lived in the area for over two decades and here Roma houses spread across several streets intermixed with gage residences. The curly-haired, loud Brazilian woman who lived near Auntie Violeta worked at the nearby barzinho (small bar). One dull hot afternoon we chatted more intensely than usual possibly due to the early cervejinha (cold beer). She said she believed in Ciganas’ tarot card readings, “they have a gift for it,” and that otherwise she did not consider them any different from other Brazilians:

I have worked with Ciganos since I was twelve. I used to take care of children at Auntie Violeta’s house. It’s been more than twenty years that I’ve known them. Ciganos are Brazilians too like the rest of us. I think they think of themselves as different. I was once engaged to a Cigano, to Lili’s brother. I was thirteen. I wanted to marry him, but my father didn’t allow me. I went to weddings with Ciganas, anniversary parties, the only thing they never did is take me to work with them. I don’t know how to read cards, I never did, but I saw how they did it. One of them told me once: You only have sons, but you will have a daughter. But she will come and go. Her life will only last one year. This is exactly what happened! Fifteen days later I felt nauseous. I was pregnant. I got a beautiful little girl and everyone was happy. Then the girl died. She was just one year old. It seems like the Cigana knew. Later I had another girl who is still alive. When she was born the Cigana said: This is good luck! Some things they say really turn out true. This Cigana was Auntie Violeta.

The fortunetellers’ lives were mingled with those of their neighbors in well-established ways in this area, yet here there was little money to be made through the art of divination. Dina
explained: “Everyone here is so used to seeing us *Ciganos* facing the same problems as the rest, they don’t believe in our magic anymore. We are growing old and sick, and they see we’re just like everyone else.” Interlocutors here agreed that in the past this neighborhood had a bustling, rich Roma population, but many had died or moved away. Now only a few mostly elderly fortunetellers remained.

Auntie Violeta laughed and said: “We are toothless and wrinkled, who wants to be like us anymore? When we were young and beautiful everyone wanted to know our secret, to buy the magic potion from us.” A large part of the trade involved magic rituals or *simpatías* for health, beauty, prosperity and love, so the appearance of having these in one’s own life was crucial. Ianca laughed: “I am so poor and ugly with my coarse grey hair and torn clothes I scare the *gage* away!” Ants had invaded her house, eating holes in her clothes. Ianca also refused to dye her long grey hair on purpose. Anyways she no longer read fortunes so she feels no incentive to look attractive: “I can’t go and work in downtown Rio anymore. My feet hurt from walking all my life.” She hoped to collect an early pension fee with a fake identity card, so she struggled to look 65-years old. However she did not succeed in obtaining illegal papers so she kept waiting to age.

There was another reason why most *Ciganas* from this neighborhood commuted to the center of Rio to work: there was a real sense of competition among the fortunetellers. Ianca said: “There’s too many of us here, you can’t put up a new psychic reading shop in these parts without intruding on someone’s turf. You do that you risk getting someone angry. Then your shop is vandalized and your sign is destroyed.” Those who open up new shops must be careful not to intrude on another’s territory or they can instigate bitter squabbles and even physical attacks by their competitor’s male kin. Even relatives saw each other as rivals and constantly monitored
each other so as not to extend beyond clearly delineated streets. The business territorial division was unwritten and often up to the most clamorous families to define.

Cabrito’s sister-in-law Cornelia said that her second cousin Nuria had just opened shop on the same street as her own. She could not believe that Nuria, her junior by a decade, could be so brazen: “She never asked for my permission and I can’t believe that she would not have noticed my shop. Of course she knows I work there and it’s my street. She’s trying to steal my clients. She’s always been jealous of us.” Cornelia’s husband Minu muttered a mild excuse for Nuria’s behavior, evidently uneasy about a foreseeable confrontation with Nuria’s husband and sons. A week later, though, I was told that Nuria’s lease had been revoked because of the loud confrontations that took place at her shop. Cabrito mentioned that it had been his duty as well to assist his brother in protecting Cornelia’s turf. Since a woman marries into her husband’s family, it is up to these male kin to protect her fortunetelling business since her income supports their status or “good name.” Roma husbands serve as managers or enforcers of their wives’ trade.

Competition was more noticeable among Roma fortunetellers and their families by association than amongst the Calins who usually worked together as a group and shared profits, purchasing food goods to be shared by their entire extended family each night. Ianca said this competition was spurred on by Roma settling into individual houses instead of living in clustered tents like the Calon:

In the olden days all Roma were like that too, sharing everything they had. We travelled together, worked together and we always shared the little that we had with everyone. Now the Roma moved in houses and keep to themselves, they save their money now. They discriminate against the poor Roma. But everyone who comes into my house can go into my fridge and cook or take whatever they want. Auntie Violeta and I are still like that. Her family’s always visiting her home eating her food and sleeping over. But I wouldn’t go to her house nowadays to ask for anything. She’s old and she barely can survive from her little retirement pension. Her sons don’t even bring her food.
Anxious to have my fortune told by Auntie Violeta I visited her one late afternoon when the house was quiet, empty of the usual visiting kin. I knew Auntie ate only two meals per day plus a small croissant with milk for dinner, so I brought over fresh croissants and asked her to read my tarot. Auntie welcomed me on the front porch under the shade of an enormous old tree. Her small frame was covered in a pastel blue, buttoned down, sleeveless summer dress, her hair was pulled back in a silver pony tail, her lively blue-eyed gaze had been softened by the long day. There was a hint of lighthearted optimism in her tiny daisy earrings and three long necklaces of multicolored plastic beads. The beads in these specific colors bore significance to believers in *Condomblé* since each color stood for an *Orixá* (African divinity) that could be supplicated to promote health, happiness, and success. Her skin gleamed healthy and white with few wrinkles and freckles despite her old age. She had been a thin, attractive and in demand fortuneteller according to Ianca.

Auntie agreed to read my cards, yet first looked around the street to make sure that her rival in trade Dina was not around: “This woman is always so curious. She always snoops around here. She doesn’t want me to read your tarot cards because she wants to read them for you. Always like this.” There was a true sense of competition between the two elderly fortunetellers. They had been neighbors for twenty years since Dina had married Auntie’s brother-in-law and had moved close by. Auntie said that Dina had to be tolerated since she was a family member: “She is my grandsons’ veritable aunt.” To an outsider the two ladies looked like inseparable companions, always chatting the dull afternoons away, complaining of their aching legs and other ailments, but they always regarded each other with suspicion. I promised Auntie Violeta that I would keep our tarot reading secret and bring her a gift of coffee, oil and bread, something she said her sons had neglected to bring her for days.
Finally we went indoors and sat down on her narrow living room sofa bed. I had brought my own tarot card deck named *Baralho Cigana da Sorte* (Gypsy Lady Luck Tarot). She looked at it appreciatively and said that her own was similar, yet more torn up with use. I promised to buy her a new deck like mine the next time I went to the *Mundo Verde* (Green World), a popular chain store that sold healthy food items, naturist remedies, meditation guides as well as a vast array of esoteric items such as Chinese frogs for good luck, Japanese symbols for wellness, miniature Irish elves, *Gypsy* statues and about twenty kinds of tarot decks. The *Gypsy* tarot we used consists of thirty-six cards with archetypal imagery that come with descriptions on the instructions insert. Some of the meanings listed on the insert varied from how Auntie interpreted them since she said a card must be read in relation to the other cards that surround it. She explained: “It takes a gifted person to be able to see the relationship between the cards and the messages they convey. We *Ciganas* don’t doubt.”

The common claim fortunetellers made was that being *Cigana* inherently endowed them with the gift of divination or clairvoyant intuition. Believing in their own *dono* (the gift of clairvoyance) helped diviners trust their intuition when offering counsel or interpreting cards. However, this gift or talent was not necessarily blood-related as most *Ciganas* claimed. Calon who married *gagia* women typically had their female kin instruct their wives on how to become fortunetellers themselves.

Also Ianca had told me in private that Auntie Violeta had been adopted by Roma parents, but was of non-Romani birth herself. Auntie had only discovered this when her adoptive parents died and she found their legal documents. Auntie was not aware that I knew she was adopted and I was too embarrassed to ask her about it and thus betray Ianca’s confidence. Anyway Ianca insisted that Auntie was the most talented and honest fortuneteller around. She had also warned
me that many other Ciganas were primarily driven by the desire to make money, and often tailored tarot interpretations to instill fear in the client, mainly the fear of a curse which must be undone at an additional expense:

They’ll say you can’t get married until they do a simpatia do amor to undo the curse on your love life and they’ll ask you for money: for a trip to a river with cold water, for fruits, for flowers and candles to burn, for gold jewelry and other things like that to make the bill go up. There’s always this malandragem (trickery). I don’t like to do that to people, so I’ve been poor all my life. I don’t believe in simpatias. I learned them from my mother and from my aunts, but I never believed in them much. Ask me if I ever tried them? I never tried. Maybe I should have. Maybe I would have changed my life. The tarot, that’s another thing. I respect the tarot. But even the tarot cards can lie.

Ianca said her distrust of tarot cards and magic made her a weaker practitioner. As an ambivalent, doubt-ridden fortuneteller, Ianca had failed to accrue any wealth. Ianca’s life had been unfortunate and she identified herself as depressive. Her nihilistic perspective on most topics reflected it. Because I spent a great deal of time with her in Rio my view was strongly influenced by her. Although she was largely skeptical, Ianca agreed with other Ciganas that, for the magic ritual and tarot cards have to have a meaningful result, the fortuneteller must infuse the reading process with her own belief in the interpretation.

It seemed best advised to go to a well-versed fortuneteller like Auntie Violeta since it was said that the more one practiced tarot reading with confidence and a consistent style of interpretation, the more strongly the cards could convey messages. The cards alone were physical images without inherent significance. Although my deck of cards or baralho came with an insert explaining each card, Ciganas believed that a card could mean different things to different readers, and in function of other adjacent cards during a particular. Meaning was often assigned intuitively. Below are some general guidelines for interpreting each of the thirty-six tarot cards according to my interlocutors:
1. Horseman – indicates good news from afar or a new love interest.
2. Clover – signifies a nuisance of short duration.
3. Boat – indicates a journey, it can also mean commercial enterprise and riches.
4. House – indicates prosperity and happy settling in one’s home, domestic bliss.
5. Tree – signals good health, accomplishments to come, progress, happiness.
6. Clouds – indicate temporary worries especially if close to other negative cards.
7. Snake – denotes disgrace, betrayal, loss and hypocrisy, an unfaithful lover.
8. Coffin – illness, death; far from the personal card, means an episode of life ends.
10. Scythe – indicates cutting ties or ending a relationship, enterprise or project.
11. Whip – indicate fever or heated discussions especially among family members.
12. Birds – signify a happy trip if close to the personal card or temporary nuisances.
13. Child – shows the person is childlike, innocent, playful and friendly.
14. Fox – cautions against jealousy and ill-meaning jealous people in one’s life.
15. Bear – cautions against false friends who are envious and backstabbing.
16. Star – confirm success in all endeavors, unless surrounded by the Clouds.
17. Stork – means moving one’s residence.
18. Dog – means a faithful good friend unless surrounded by negative cards.
19. Tower – indicates hermit-like isolation, illness or old age.
20. Garden – indicates a couple enjoying each other’s company, courtship.
21. Mountain – means a great challenge to overcome through diligent effort.
22. Crossroad – means making a difficult decision to follow a certain path in life.
23. Mouse – cautions against theft, losing one’s goods or money, wastefulness.
24. Heart – indicates love, happiness, joy and harmony.
25. Ring – indicates happy marriage or divorce if surrounded by negative cards.
26. Book – signals studying or a secret, its meaning can be inferred from other cards.
27. Letter – indicates news arriving from afar, the content is shown by other cards.
28. Messenger – brings good news, represents a male person inquiring the cards.
29. Lady – brings good luck, represents a female person inquiring the cards.
30. Lilies – indicate sadness, suffering for moral values upheld, virtue and honesty.
31. Sun – indicates success if close to the personal card or sadness if located farther.
32. Moon – indicates melancholy, nostalgia, insomnia, also intuition.
33. Key – signals a good exit out of all trials and difficulties.
34. Fish – indicate riches, profitable endeavors and prosperity.
35. Anchor – signals lucrative commercial activities and stability, becoming rooted.
36. Cross – signals that this is one’s destiny, one’s challenge in life.

Auntie Violeta decided to use my deck of cards because they were new, easier and more pleasant to shuffle. I sat on the sofa facing her, excited and nervous, quietly thinking about my life as instructed. I was surprised to feel Auntie’s energy shift as if the card reading was stressful to her. As she continued I noticed her breath became more intense, sonorous, her agitation level rising, her movements acquiring a fast, sharp, almost angular quality while shuffling and dealing
with dexterity. I also noticed her sweat more profusely and her right eye spasm nervously a few times while she did the reading. She seemed beyond her normal self. It was clear to me this task was not an ordinary chore. I had seen her cook and clean with a very different kind of focus and chatty disposition many times before. She seemed in state of frenzy, not in a casual mode.

When she was finished shuffling the cards, she had me divide the deck into two piles and put the top half under the bottom so that the deck was together again. Next she searched for and set aside card 29, the Lady, as the *carta pessoal* (personal card), which would represent me. This card begins the identification process for the client, which helps clients focus on the cards as reflective of their circumstances. On top of the Lady she placed a second card chosen at random from the deck warning it symbolized my inner life. This turned out to be the Tower, and she said

61. Various *Gypsy* tarot card decks used by *Ciganas cartomantes* (*Gypsy* fortunetellers)
it suggested a state of self-isolation, bespeaking of disconnection from my family and the U.S.

Next Auntie Violeta divided the rest of the deck into four piles placing them one by one in a Catholic cross-like pattern of positions 1-2-3-4, repeating the cycle until all the cards were down. She explained the symbolism of each pile as follows:

1
“Represents your thoughts”

4
“Represents your future”

3
“What covers you/ the Present”

2
“What you must ignore”

Pile 1 represented my thoughts and concerns and had the following sequence of cards: 35, 21, 18, 24, 11, 7, 1, 33, 13. The meaning they revealed to Auntie Violeta suggested I worried a lot about having financial stability and a career, which seemed like a great challenge. The cards also showed that I had a friend and lover in my life, and also that I worried because of frequent fights due to jealousy and cheating. This reflected my relationship at the time quite accurately.

Auntie said the Snake meant traição (betrayal). She told me: “Não fica grávida, vai achar outro melhor, pra o future” [Don’t become pregnant, you will find a better man, for the future]. She did not know I had already had an abortion because I found my relationship with Eugene too unstable. She said the cards showed how I wished for a happy resolution and waited for good news so that I could be once again “like a happy child enjoying life.” I nodded agreement and she continued. I had goose bumps and felt warmth in Auntie’s presence as she talked to me like a doting grandmother. I imagined a lot of clients felt some kind of pleasant sensory response to the being engaged in conversations like this, and in magical thinking.
Pile 2 represented “what I must ignore” such as doubts and fears. The sequence of cards 25, 34, 10, 30, 28, 8, 23, 17, 12 suggested to Auntie that I should ignore stressful thoughts about marriage, breaking up, money and being robbed, moving residences and other small nuisances. Auntie advised me not to allow negative thinking to interfere with my peace and wellbeing. This pile or category implies that thoughts attract the reality they signify, and that by staying away from negative thoughts one could prevent them from actually materializing. Auntie insisted that one must learn to ignore stressful thought patterns in order to focus on one’s wellbeing.

Pile 3 represented the present. The cards were 9, 27, 3, 31, 5, 4, 22, 6 and they indicated happiness, good news, traveling, success, progress, finding a new residence, making a difficult decision and enduring fleeting worries. Again I could not disagree with Auntie’s interpretation. At this point I just wanted to believe in the tarot, both to maintain an agreeable atmosphere, and to continue basking in her comforting routine.

Pile 4 represented the future. The cards 26, 32, 15, 2, 36, 20, 14, 16, Auntie said foretold my continued studies, frequent bouts of melancholy, false friends and other mild annoyances such as jealousy. She added, however, that I was protected by “a estrela que brilha pra você” [my lucky star shining above]. I admit that her foretelling strikes me as accurate in retrospect. Although in many ways Auntie knew me well enough to “read me” without the tarot, the cards had matched her interpretation in a compelling way.

Next Auntie Violeta picked up the personal card again followed by two cards selected randomly from each of the following piles: 1, 3 and 4. She arranged these flat in a linear sequence facing up and said, “Agora vamos ver a sua estrela” [Now we will see your star]. This meant my destiny as protected by the “lucky star.” The cards 29, 33, 21, 3, 31, 32, 16 spoke to her of success at a great challenge or endeavor, happy travels, growth through self-examination,
and once again divine protection. “It’s in the stars,” Auntie said confidently. The language of the tarot cards was enigmatic, yet made me think that it could reflect something relevant. Auntie mostly warned against being mislead and robbed, something appropriate in a place like Brazil. She told me what I needed to hear, encouraging me and also acknowledging some of my daily worries. She was familiar enough with my life that nothing she said struck me as evidence of a mysterious gift of divination at that time. The tarot card imagery though did match her storytelling interpretation quite well, which seemed odd. I decided not to be skeptical because the process was far too interesting and fun. I wanted to be read like a book.

The effect of such active listening and participation was similar to that of engaging in a pleasant dream, fantasy or fairy tale fully immersed in its “reality” at the level of the imaginary, with real effects on my physical state of being. I imagined that most clients found comfort in their card readings done with Auntie as well and saw the appeal of experiencing it again and again to suspend themselves in the magical mode of thinking. Auntie followed this reading with some maternal advice. She encouraged me to get married and have children: “Us women to have children we need to organize our life, to have a husband, have a guarantee. My husband died eleven years ago. He remained but a memory. If your boyfriend is not for the future, cut this. Better now that you are young than when you are older and nobody wants you. Time is money. Don’t waste time.” Her advice revealed the Romani common sense belief that women must get married young and that their main role is to reproduce. In fact most Brazilian clients desired love and marriage and protection from cheating and jealousy.

Next Auntie Violeta shuffled the cards to do a new reading about her own daughter who was fortunetelling in Argentina. Auntie did a lightning-speed reading following the same pattern described above, yet it was over far too quickly so I could not note the exact cards. I noticed that
the Fish and the Boat came up twice, which was said to confirm their significance. Afterwards she sighed with relief and said, “I was worried about her because she didn’t call me since she left last week, but now I’m not worried anymore. The cards say she will receive lots of money from far away. She’s fine. She’s just busy making money.” Auntie looked more relaxed after doing a card reading about her daughter’s situation, which indicated that she genuinely believed in tarot.

For her, these readings represented a clairvoyant look into hidden realities. She used the cards as tools for guiding one’s life through hypocrisy and deceit, but not without a sense of predestination. She joked: “Se correr o bicho pega, se ficar o bicho come. Não tem jeito. O pior é a mentira, gente mentiroso” [If you run it gets you, if you stay it will eat you up. There’s no way around it. The worst is lying, people who lie]. The earnest tone in which she stated this, although humorous, reflected her matter-of-fact acceptance of tarot cards as accurate tools for divination or seeking the truth. I saw several other Ciganas also concerned about various issues and trying to sort them by enjoying a tarot card reading for themselves.

Auntie insisted this dono (gift) was of divine providence, a blessing of Romani people since ancient times. Like most Roma and Calon I met, she boasted that this talent inherited by Ciganos as an ethnic group is proof that they are divinely protected. Yet all my interlocutors also stated that there is a learning process involved as it is passed down among females inter-generationally. Mothers and grandmothers teach girls fortunetelling and allow them to practice from around the age of seven. First mothers explain the basic principles, then the girls join their female kin to witness them telling fortunes, and afterwards the girls begin their own divinations to supplement the family income. The first trade learned is quiromancia (palm reading), followed by cartomancia (tarot card reading) and simpatías (magic formulas). I witnessed many fortunetellers working daily alongside their unmarried daughters and their daughters-in-law. The
exceptions were among the Calon who did not allow their pregnant women, unmarried daughters or young brides to read fortunes. They considered it shameful and morally dangerous since in meant being in public areas interacting often with gage men. Roma women worked frequently in their own psychic reading shops, where they never identified themselves as Ciganas and where they did not hesitate to bring their young female kin. Auntie said that she learned alongside her mother as a little girl, and that after she ran off with her husband’s nomadic family, she read fortunes all her life, traveling knocking door to door:

I always woke up at 4 AM to cook and clean before anyone else was up. I had breakfast and lunch ready for everyone. By 8 AM I was going and-o gav with the other Ciganas. I walked and walked all my life knocking door-to-door to read fortunes. Time has come for me to settle down, but I’m bored. I want to move to Sao Paulo and set up a psychic reading shop with my daughters there. I feel like traveling again. I got the traveling bug. I want to make some money.

Auntie’s daily schedule during her working years resembled that of working Calins I met. Both in Rio de Janeiro and in Sao Paulo, Calins said that they woke up at dawn every day to cook before they sat down with everyone for breakfast, after which they left the children in the care of the older unmarried daughters and the elderly and went to read fortunes and-o gav (fortunetelling in the city) until 3PM, on a diligently obeyed schedule. Going and-o gav every morning and coming back every afternoon to cook dinner and enjoy a rich social life amidst one’s extended family was the daily schedule Ciganas enjoyed and took pride in, while boasting of their “freedom” as “self-employed nomads.”

The expression and-o gav was used both by Roma and Calon in Brazil. It literally means going “into the village” and by extension “into the city.” Metaphorically it means “fortunetelling” just like for Romanian Roma. The second term I had learned, drabarel (to read fortunes, to read) was unfamiliar to Brazilian Romani, like many other terms and phrases I had studied as standard Romanes with Professor Gheorghe Sarău. Yet the expression and-o gav still
circulated in Brazil as in Europe implying that the trade of fortunetelling still operated in the
dichotomous relationship between a gage locality and the Romani community imagining itself
on its outskirts. All Romanies in Brazil identified the clients as strictly gage, and practiced the
trade primarily for monetary gain, promoting a strictly monetary relationship with non-
Romanies. Ciganas insisted that if I read fortunes I must do so for a profit, never for free. Auntie
Violeta explained that to render the service for free meant to devalue it and to decrease their
demand and profits:

If you do it for free they will never respect it. They will forget what you told them and
they’ll say it’s not real. People believe more if they have to pay for it. Tell them you can
to adjust the price to their means. For a rich client you can say a higher price, for a poor
person you can take just a small banknote as a token of respect. Sometimes you will see a
person who needs advice and you’ll want to help them, but never do it for free, it
cheapens the trade and ruins it for all of us. Even for your little girlfriends, read them the
cards, but always ask for a little money. Tell them it’s necessary to start the process. If
they don’t believe enough to pay then they don’t believe at all, so you’re wasting your
time anyway. It only works if they believe in it.

To offer the service for free, to them, meant to lose credibility. Most took great care to increase
credibility in the Brazilian mainstream, although they reported a recent decline.

Those who read palms in the streets and public parks made less than the Rromnia who
hid their ethnic identity and worked in private psychic reading shops. Calins I met in Rio and Sao
Paulo typically worked in public parks in clusters of seven or more women, never alone, usually
offering to do palm readings rather than offering to read tarot cards. They always asked those
walking by them: “Quer ler a mão?” [Want to have a palm reading?] If you approached enough
to give them your palm they continued: “Fala seu nome” [Say your name]. If the answer were
Diana, they would continue in a formulaic manner: “Diana, com nome de Deus e da Virgem
Maria, por lado de Deus, você tem muita sorte mas tá muito invejada. Vai ser muito feliz e Deus
quer te dar paz. Amen.” [Diana, in the name of God and the Virgin Mary, you have a lot of good
luck but you are envied. You will be very happy and God wants to give you peace]. This was a well-rehearsed pitch, designed to flatter the clients, to reassure and attract them.

The art of divination as practiced by Cigana fortunetellers also relied on Catholic religious values to gain their clients’ trust. Once the client showed interest the Calin asked for a modicum of cash to begin the reading: “Five or ten réais, whatever you have in your pocket. I have to hold it under your palm to see your past, present and future. That will do.” Those who pulled out a bill barely noticed the money disappear in the Calin’s pocket. Some walked away puzzled after a brief reading or paid more for an extensive reading afterwards.

In Sao Paulo, the most successful Calon palm readers were Naomi, Marcela and Soraia. They relied heavily on their good looks, blue eyes and clear, caramel skin to attract their clients. They often donned pastel blue dresses with golden lace trimmings and radiated a sense of health and satisfaction. Beaming smiles like theirs went a long way, they said. I found this was also true for the most successful Rio Calins, cousins Maiki and Josilede. They had a way of astounding clients with their gold teeth, blue eyes and sun-kissed brown hair, often braided with ribbons that matched their dress for the day. Their female kin acknowledged their success was largely due to their personal attractiveness and radiance. Their blue eyes were exotic to Brazilians and Ciganos alike, a hint of past genetic mixing with European blood.

I witnessed these women reading palms from a respectful distance since they did not want to drive their clients away through my presence and lack of privacy. However, I did note that a monetary exchange was always necessary before the Calins began. After the initial banknote was pocketed in a custom-made inner fold at the waist of the Calin’s dress, another banknote was promptly requested to keep the reading going. Those clients who agreed typically had significant health issues or marital difficulties. Calins said that people have common
problems and that returning clients were mostly women interested in magic rituals for love. They agreed most clients tended to trust the younger, happier and more attractive Calins most in matters of health and love. A common magic ritual Calins instructed to their clients for attracting a desired person is as follows:

Cut fresh flowers and put in a new vase with three candles lit up, a crystal cup filled with water, and gold jewelry belonging to the person who wants to attract love into her life. Under the cup place a photo or lock of hair of the person you desire. The water should be from a river, not a lake. The flowers should be red or pink roses. Take a red apple and carve out your initials and his. In seven days or seven weeks or seven months you will be together if it is God’s wish. Pray to the Virgin Mary to give you this union. She is the guardian of innocent love.

*Ciganas* sometimes performed these rituals for themselves, yet few talked about them. They said that a ritual’s secrecy ensured its success. They avoided disclosing the details to me because it meant diluting the energies conjured by the magic rite. I often saw in their tents photos of Catholic saints with offerings of incense, candles, fruit, flowers, and the photos of family members. When I asked Maiki about this she replied hers were meant as an *ofrenda* (offering) and as an altar where she prayed for the health and protection of her beloved. She said most Calins keep only fresh fruit and flowers on their altars to be in the good graces of the saints to whom they prayed.

I found this was also the case for Roma, with the exception of the evangelical converts whom the others criticized for “abandoning the traditional rituals of praying to saints the Romani way.” Less popular but present in some Calon tents and Roma houses was the image or sculpture of Saint Sara Kali, believed to be of Romani background and worshipped in Les-Saints-Maries-de-la-Mer in France on May 24th each year for several decades. Both Roma and Calon I met knew of this particular saint although the elderly were less inclined to praise her like they did other Catholic saints. Some said that although she was important in Europe where she gathered
Romani peoples from numerous countries each year, Saint Sara Kali represented a new import to Brazil. Most said it was largely due to Mirian Stanescon who popularized the Romani saint.

62. Saint Sara Kali (the black) adorning a small cave in Arpoador Park – Rio de Janeiro
63. Mirian Stanesc on in her fortunetelling office – Rio de Janeiro
Thus, Mirian Stanescon actively mythologized herself as “Queen of the Roma in Brazil.” Moreover, she led monthly gatherings for her faithful clientele each 24th day of each month in the Rio de Janeiro Park of Arpoador, where she had the city administration set up a permanent statue of Saint Sara to commemorate Romani contributions to Brazilian society. Everyone was welcomed to pray and bring oferendas of incense, candles, flowers and fruit to the saint’s sculpture in this public park. On the 24th day of each month Mirian led ceremonies in which she identified herself as a psychic healer and Queen of the Romani in Brazil and gave speeches about Romani rights and culture in Brazil. Mirian also proselytized the virtues of Saint Sara and gave blessings to the attending devotees, while advertising her self-designed tarot card deck. The tarot she designed used Romanes words such as purri dai (matriarch), vurdon (wagon) and chavo (child) and explained their significance, so other Roma found offensive since they wanted their culture to be kept secret from the gage. Since her father was gagio and her husband as well, most Roma did not recognize Mirian as Cigana, yet she used her monthly services to promote her own agenda as a minority rights activist and fortuneteller.

Mirian once invited me into her luxurious apartment in Arpoador, Rio de Janeiro where I noted that like most Ciganos she also had sculptures of Cigano spirits similar to those I had seen at the Mundo Verde stores. She said that these spirits represented entities of deceased Ciganos who were popular within the registers of Umbanda and Quimbanda, Afro-Brazilian religions. The male sculptures had names such as Pablo, Vladimir, Ramirez, Juan, Petrovick, Artemio, Hiago, Igor, and Vitor, while those of Ciganas were named Esmeralda, Carme, Salome, Carmensita, Rosita, Madalena, Yasmin, Maria Dolores, Zaira, Sunakana, Sulamita, Wlavira, Iiarin, Sarita and so forth. These sculptures elaborated mythical Ciganos based on real Cigano names in Brazil. I had seen similar sculptures of archetypal Ciganos in other Calon and Roma
households and on several occasions in non-Romani homes where spirits of Ciganos were worshipped through prayers and oferendas (gifts). Their altars were often set apart with the sculptures or dolls of the Cigano spirits usually placed on vibrantly colored cloth, glistening with gold trimmings, crystals, lit candles, flowers, burning incense, and a cup of water, whiskey or wine. In Mirian’s home there were three large sculptures adorning the entrance and some had oferendas of male colognes, which she said her clients had brought. In her office, there were numerous other such sculptures and Cigana dolls covering the walls.

The charming Calin named Maiki said that saints and Ciganos spirits were always invoked to assist in magic spells. She had her own magic rituals that she shared with clients, rituals that she had learned from her mother and her grandmother. Often I saw Maiki’s clients returning happily and saying: “It worked! I did it last week and it worked!” I asked Maiki to share some of the simpatías that worked for her clients. She listed them as if for an apprentice:

To drive a mistress away from her husband, tell the client to cut a lemon in four equal parts with her own hand, put salt on them, and place the four parts at the four corners of an intersection. Another one is where you take seven teaspoons of pepper and vinegar, and pour them together in a deserted place. And then you tell them you will make your own spell at night and you need money for candles and for a chicken you will cut. But that’s just to get more money. Nobody goes to a cemetery at night anymore, that’s dangerous. But if you really want it to work you do have to cut a chicken though. Magic needs balance so you have to take a life to let another one be free. A curse can’t just be destroyed. You have to send it to an animal or to a desert far away. It’s dangerous. Some old Ciganas macumbeiras even send it onto a child, but that’s really evil. We don’t like to mess with dark forces like that. We have too many children in our family and what goes around comes around. It’s how it always works. So we don’t do the real macumba. Brazilians do that.

The idea of sacrifice is integral for some curses that aimed to cause harm described as macumba (black magic), yet most Ciganas said that they do not perform them entirely as prescribed and but only claim they do to attract superstitious clients. “People believe in macumba more so than in cartomancia,” Ianca assessed. To stay in demand and relevant with superstitious locals,
Ciganas claimed to deal in a wider register that traditionally was not their own. Brazilians’ fear when they saw macumba offerings on street corners evidenced they believed in its potency, including the potential for contagion by looking.

Even Ianca who was skeptical of esoteric practices hushed me and said to avert my eyes from the occasional macumba offering bottle lying around intersections in her neighborhood: outdoors altars with flowers, foods, beads and bloody feathers. Usually some animal sacrificed was evident. To look at it meant to invite into one’s life the evil spirits that particular macumba invoked. It meant to flirt with danger and possibly to become contaminated with the curse it symbolized. It was not enough for Ianca that we should look away, we also had to walk on the other sidewalk and maintain a respectful distance. Above all she insisted we show respect towards these powerful forces, which she was too afraid to work with herself despite her usual self-declared skepticism. Ianca maintained a cautious, ambivalent position towards the world of magic. She said she had learned numerous magical rituals commonly practiced by Roma women for their own wellbeing, but had never really tried to improve her own life through such means. This is why she was willing to talk to me about them, while other Ciganas refused to divulge this secret knowledge for fear of diluting their magical powers:

One offering for good luck is to make an offering of seven pomegranate seeds to the three saints of your liking, on the 6th day of any month. Make seven wishes for health, peace, riches, love and improvement. You have to put the seeds in your mouth, suck on them, spit them out and take three gulps of wine. Keep three of the seeds in a small pocket on your coat. Also if you see a rare banknote like an American $2 bill you must keep it in your wallet for good luck. Same with green corn, keep some kernels, it brings good luck. Keep a big pot full of rock salt and big black pepper in your home, it will keep the evil eye of jealousy away from you, and it looks pretty. Also make a patois out of three heads of garlic, saw them into your petticoat. Or sew little red strings dipped in holy water, also for protection. The Star of David if you have it around the home also brings good luck. But ask me if I do any of these things? No! I don’t do any of this. The rezadeira (Brazilian praying healer) told me they did macumba to me so I will never succeed in anything. But I didn’t believe in these things. I don’t believe.
Ianca said she never made any good luck charms or spells for protection, and added that this could also be the reason why her life never improved while Auntie Violeta enjoyed good health even as an 80-year-old. Ianca could not bring herself to believe in them even though she could recite the practices in detail and had instructed her clients to use them numerous times. Many clients had returned to thank her for successful magic spells of love and prosperity. Still, Ianca insisted they would not work for her and that her life and her entire family must be cursed because of bad karma from her past life or from her predecessors. “A woman once told me that in a past life I was a princesa leviana (promiscuous princess). That’s why I have bad karma.”

She laughed, yet she often complained of aches all over her body from headaches to gastritis to heel spurs. The nearby clinic did little to alleviate her pain because she had grown tolerant to many pills and the waiting line was so long that she rarely went for a follow-up. She found comfort in the Sunday Mass at a local evangelical church, although she declared herself Catholic, the company of church-going women and the herbal tea remedies they often gave away.

On several occasions when her pains were too severe Ianca went to a local Brazilian rezadeira (female healer in Portuguese) – from rezar (to pray) – although she was skeptical. The healer burned the leaves on a few branches and used it as incense to “smoke out the evil” from Ianca’s body in motions that resembled security guards’ body checks at airports without the actual touching. She told Ianca that if she believed in alternative forms of healing, she might enjoy more positive results. Yet Ianca remained ambivalent and ailing. On the one hand, she rejected both Romani and Brazilian spiritualism, yet on the other hand she relied on them to explain away her misfortunes as a curse. Because she saw herself as an outsider to fortunetelling practices she was willing to share with me more details than any other Cigana I met in Brazil.
One long, dull, hot summer afternoon we decided to compare our tarot card reading methods since I had been practicing on my own. I had bought my second tarot card deck from Mundo Verde, where sundry objects considered spiritual, opportune or homeopathic were sold. This particular deck was simply called \textit{Tarô Cigano}. It also came with precise instructions on how to draw and interpret the cards. Ianca took them and while shuffling she confessed her displeasure at reading tarot cards: “Cards also lie. It’s very difficult. I don’t know, it depends on the day, on the time of the day, on your thoughts and how many times you read them.” She said that using a known deck was always preferable and brought out an aging tarot that had belonged to her mother, which Ianca kept reverently in a part of her house closed to daily circulation, arranged in a semi-circle on a small, round table decorated with a pretty, but dusty icon of the Virgin Mary. “I don’t believe in the cards, but I respect them,” she drawled while shuffling slowly. Ianca proceeded to teach me a technique of card reading that she said was popular among Roma card readers. Like Auntie Violeta she also instructed me that: “One has to take out the card with the young lady on it and lay it apart to represent the client if she is a woman. If the client is a man, you take out the card with the young gentleman.” This promotes the client’s identification with the cards, facilitating their projections upon them. Then she said one divides all the cards into five piles by placing them one down per pile in order: pile 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and repeat. This was a mock demonstration:

\begin{tabular}{ccc}
  Your thoughts & 3 \\
  Past & 4 \\
  Confirmed present & 1 \\
  Future & 2 \\
  Something hidden & 5 \\
\end{tabular}
Ianca refused to do an actual reading, so she just went through the motions while she explained her technique. The cards from each pile must be laid out face up one by one in long rows as the fortuneteller interprets the story they represent. The cards’ meanings vary based on their positions, which indicate their relations to one another. A positive card can have a negative meaning if surrounded by other negative cards. Their meanings also depend on the card reader and her manner of interpreting the tarot. This confirmed what Auntie Violeta had shown me although the categories differed somewhat in this method. The fifth pile here represents “something hidden” and revealed by the cards so that the client can better understand his or her particular situation.

Another method described by Ianca was as follows: “You have to lay down the cards one by one, placing six cards in row one, then six more cards underneath row one in row two, building rows until the end of the deck.” Another method is to have the client divide the deck into two random piles and select one half. This pile is then placed down into rows of six cards like in the previous method. The reader interprets the cards based on their proximity and relationships to one another and to the personal card that represents the client. A simpler way to give a card reading is to have the client pick out seven cards. The client usually picks out the cards one by one and place them in a row face down, and then the practitioner turns the cards face up and interprets them in detail.

With any method the interpretation is up to the fortuneteller’s particular style of reading or rather of narrating a compelling story based on the open-ended symbolism of each card. The client visualizes a series of images and reacts to them. A keen fortuneteller interprets both the cards and the clients’ subtle reactions in a narrative that seeks to be compelling and resonant with the client’s self-understanding. Insights and reveries from card readings will ultimately be
profitable to the fortuneteller, Ianca said: “If she is pleased with the reading, she will go tell all her little friends and that’s how you get more clients.” Indeed many satisfied clients brought friends to both Calins and Rromnia fortunetellers working in Brazil, and they seldom paid for advertisements.

During the card reading process the fortuneteller focuses on personalizing the cards’ meanings to the client’s experiences, while building a relationship of trust. Often meanings confirm or displace the clients’ previous self-understanding in ways that permit them to perceive life differently. So fortunetellers often facilitate another way of imagining one’s life. The archetypal tarot images can have several meanings according to the place they hold or their proximity or distance from positive or negative cards. The Death card only means physical death or illness if close to the personal card. If far from the personal card it symbolizes the termination of a project or a significant episode of life, perhaps a happy exit from a difficult relationship.

The meaning gets clarified or detailed by the surrounding cards, often through several readings. Three is considered a sacred number symbolizing the Holy Trinity, and thus very important in the art of numerology. The story established through an initial card reading is backed up with further evidence such as the reoccurrence of cards during a second and third draw. Ianca acknowledged this fallacious logic with a smirk-and-wink, exclaiming: “Segredos dos Ciganos!” (Gypsy secrets!)” She explained that when seeing the same card repeat a client is more inclined to believe it as relevant to his or her life.

Ianca also confirmed the Romani secrets shared with me by a 65-year-old Roma woman named Irina reading palms outdoors in a Rio park. Irina taught me that to attract a client Ciganas often simply say a statement with which most can identify, pretending it is a reading of that person’s specific past: “Vai morrer velho, mas já escapou um perigo de morte. Um carro não te
atropelhou. Quem não fiz isso? Sempre tem esse malandragem.” [You will die old, but you already escaped death. A car didn’t run you over. Who didn’t go through that? There’s always this trickery]. Irina’s belly jiggled as she belted out a rolling laugh at the playfulness and trickery of fortunetelling – her happy mouth ajar with tooth gaps and gold caps. Irina’s parents were born in Romania and migrated to the New World as children. Irina welcomed me to join her while she worked. I helped her pass the time and bought her lunch, and in return she confided with me her secrets as to an apprentice. Yet she always took clients a few feet away and consulted them privately for over half hour with or without tarot cards.

Most strikingly during her consultations Irina’s demeanor changed from uproarious laughter and beaming health to a frenzied nervous state much like Auntie Violeta’s during my tarot reading. Although Irina wanted to come across as playfully manipulating her clients, it appeared to me that she was profoundly affected by each consultation. Afterwards she seemed fatigued, her heart racing and her breath heaving, and her daughter Tania rushed to help her walk back and sit down next to us in the shade of a tree in her folding beach chair. Whether Irina liked to admit it or not fortunetelling took a lot of her energy, and it was not just about duping gage clients, who in fact often returned beaming with satisfaction because her reading had been accurate or her magic spell had worked. Irina daydreamed about how we could work together:

You know how to read cards. Just use your intelligence and the cards. You’ll make the small talk, I’ll shuffle and draw. If you say everything right they will bring you other clients. The Ciganas from here go to Portugal to read cards. I’m telling you this is a profession where you will never go without a bit of pocket money. Tell them that you need some roses to throw in the sea or that you need some fruit for the magic to work. Invent that you need to buy these things for your spell. And there is always someone who has a problem: My husband left me. You say: This is sickness. This is macumba. That woman will never tell other people her husband has a mistress. She will be thinking about it all alone and so comes the depression. With us at least she comes to a park, she talks, we read cards, at least she gets distracted. With us she can converse just like with a therapist. I’m telling you when you get to Portugal start talking the talk. You have to be very witty otherwise you’ll end up bringing harm to yourself.
Irina said that in her sixty-five years of life she heard all the problems people can have and that they are all the same. I said I might be able to figure out what to tell women but that I would not know what to tell male clients and she dictated to me the following while I took notes: “To a man you say: I can help you with your virility and prosperity. You will have virility well into old age. And you will always make money. So women will always love you.” As she said that she laughed again, pleased with her self as if she were at the same time an innocent child and a seasoned stealthy crook. Ianca was also amused by this trickery, but said that she did not like to resort to it and imagined herself as a kind, disinterested and moral person: “Eu não faço nada por interesse.” [I don’t do anything out of interest]. Other Roma thought her a depressed and dogmatic Catholic and felt pity. Most did their best to avoid her moralizing, and rationalized that she was no saint either.

Ianca found comfort confiding in me her beliefs, even those that diverged from the norm. One evening, Ianca discredited palm readings altogether. She was reclining on the yellowing couch in her living room, smoking, looking outside through the perpetually opened window and shifting her gaze occasionally to the unsightly walls, telltale signs of her poverty. She said in a dispirited tone of resignation:

Palm reading doesn’t exist anymore. It’s just something Ciganas invent to attract clients. Card readings are different. A man once said there are lawyers and “lawyers.” You need to be tricky. It’s not enough to be Cigana, you have to have a Cigana’s malandragem. Whoever knows how to incorporate guides and spirits, who pretends well, she looks like she is working. Crazy Kali fakes it right in the middle of the street, like she’s possessed. She kills a chicken and pulls money out of people. When they see blood coming out of nowhere they believe she’s a Macumbeira.

Kali was both defiant and seductive in many ways. At first one noticed her age-defying sensuality: beaming rosy skin, long, curly black hair, piercing green eyes, red lips and generous curves visible in the tight leggings and revealing tank-tops she wore every day. She was Ianca’s
second cousin and had been ostracized by the community for having married a *gagio* after running away from her abusive first Romani husband. Most Roma shunned her and she was never invited to their weddings, anniversaries, funerals. Yet she continued to live nearby and maintained her cultural heritage primarily through the practice of fortunetelling and speaking Romanes with her children and grandchildren.

Ianca reported that her second cousin Silvia was once told by Kali she had had a spell cast on her that needed to be undone. Silvia paid Kali to undo the curse hoping to enjoy prosperity and love afterwards. Ianca said Kali treated Silvia like a *gagi* because monetary exchanges are reserved for *gage* clients even though fortunetellers also practice their trade on each other or themselves: “That shameless Kali took her money, and my cousin is still poor and alone to this day. I told my cousin: “Don’t do this, this is crazy, this doesn’t exist. But she didn’t believe me.” Besides supporting Ianca’s skepticism this example shows that some Roma also resort to magic spells.

Kali said that spirits of saints possessed her during consultations and directed her tarot readings. I frequently visited her when she was home alone or with her nephews and nieces. She oscillated between treating me as a potential client and an apprentice. One rainy afternoon she explained that her tarot method was divinely inspired (by the saints) while her palm reading practice was simply based on common sense:

I don’t place the cards. My guiding spirits place them. I incorporate my saints. I work mostly with saintly spirits when I am at home usually on weekends. When I am out on the streets I usually read palms. To read palms is easy, you take a little from your life and you tell that person something they can relate to: “You will live a long life. You will have success and peace. You sometimes have a hard time paying all the bills, you don’t have a stable job. You have good parents, but they can’t help you out. You have a hard time doing your work. Your head is always twisted. You’ve been robbed. Someone you truly loved has passed away. You had a lot of lovers, but have a hard time choosing to have just one. You want to be married, but they did black magic onto you so that you won’t be happy.” And who doesn’t have these problems? Everyone has problems in Brazil.
Kali confirmed what other fortunetellers had said: that their consultations relied largely on intuitive common sense and provided solace to people in trouble who otherwise might not find it anywhere else. Kali punctuated the end of her speech with a matter-of-fact smirk then she grew serious as she continued, “I know a gagi that has cancer. A Cigana told her it was macumba. We always say that so they pay us to do a spell, but this was not cool. Cancer is serious. Why waste someone’s money when they have a sick family member. We’ve already gone through it in our own family.” She was referring to her cousin Ana who had passed away from breast cancer four years earlier.

According to Ianca it was lucrative to combine fortunetelling with macumba or black magic because it made one’s practice more compelling in the eyes of Brazilian gage. Ianca declared with conviction: “In Rio de Janeiro and in Minas they are fanatic believers of macumba. If you put it on the table they always come by. Calins always use this.” Ianca herself did not use macumba, but admired how her deceased cousin Ana had been very successful at incorporating it into her practice:

Ana was very beautiful. Everyone wanted to talk to her. She would talk to each of her clients for two hours. Then the client would leave saying: Oh, I feel so good now! So good! And later would return with some friends. Ana went home with a pocket full of money every day. She would take the taxi from Largo do Machado until here, it was thirty réais. And she had a mansion and clothing and jewelry, she knew how to read and write, she had three cars. She thought I was very poor.

Ianca often envied other Romani women who were getting wealthy using their skills but she found fortunetelling shameless and shameful: “Ana’s mother was a shameless woman, and Ana as well. I was the only one who was too ashamed to read fortunes. My mother’s mother came from Serbia, she was reading palms, and the police arrested her and took this photo: look at the suffering on her face. Poor woman.” She felt that her mother had suffered in her life because fortunetelling was illegal. The shame and stigma of criminality stayed with her mother, so Ianca
never grew to appreciate it as a trade. She felt that having to read fortunes with her mother traveling from town to town had prevented her from attending school regularly. She was still illiterate and regretted not having an education because it limited her opportunities. Although the ladies she met at churched convinced her to attend evening adult literacy courses she struggled to learn letters and felt that it was too late for her.

Eventually I gave Ianca the money to remodel her empty spare room so that she could open up a fortunetelling shop. We had talked about working together so that I could collect data especially since most Ciganas refused to let me witness their consultations. Soon afterwards she spent the money on a plane flight to Brasilia where a young relative had suddenly become ill: a young mother of two children had mysteriously fallen into a coma and could not be revived. Ianca used the rest of the money to pay for the woman’s hospital bills, in demonstration of her solidarity and disinterest in monetary gain.

After returning to Rio Ianca seemed very impressed by the Roma women she had seen in Brasilia. According to her they were they took care of their appearances, they worked out daily and ate mostly salads, and they did very well with fortunetelling. Most of them lived in large houses and had several maids. She complained that with her looks she could never turn that kind of profit and that she had considered being a maid instead even though the Roma looked down on cleaning anything that belonged to the gage:

Other Ciganas go abroad and make good money reading fortunes. They go to Lisbon, rent a house, and make good money there. If you go to Portugal, dress well, go ask people to read cards for them, then you make a little magic spell and say you need to buy flowers and candles, and there’s your pocket money! What people want to see is a Cigana that is beautiful, well groomed, and wearing the Cigana outfit. Me, they are afraid of. I am too ugly. My sister gave me money to fix my hair. She said, “Your client was afraid of you, she ran away!” My sister used to pretend that she was receiving a spirit in the middle of the street. Brazilian people are easy to mislead but we also really enjoy misleading them. God always said, “The Cigano will be free as a bird and will have the intelligence for it!”
Despite Ianca’s disbelief in spirit possessions and magic, her statements confirm that Romani women who read fortunes basically make themselves available for those who need someone to talk to about their personal problems and who have limited access to other forms of therapy. The fortuneteller facilitates the client’s healing process through talking and guided imagery in the case of tarot cards. If the client believes that it works then it does since one’s misfortunes can be displaced and projected onto magic spells.

Magical thought, like religious thought, cannot be disproved since it is faith-based. If one believes in it, then one is operant in that mode of thinking. Psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi argues that the magical mode of thinking can be traced to the initial “childhood megalomania” or “period of magical-hallucinatory omnipotence,” the illusion of newborn children that one’s wish can materialize through one’s own thoughts:

> At the beginning of its development the new-born babe seeks to attain a state of satisfaction merely through insistent wishing (imagining), whereby it simply ignores (represses) the unsatisfying reality, picturing itself as present, on the contrary, the wished-for, but lacking, satisfaction; it attempts, therefore, to conceal without effort all its needs by means of positive and negative hallucinations (Ferenczi 1952: 213).

Development occurs by allowing new principles of mental activity to form while the mother frustrates the newborn’s wishes, such that not only what is pleasant is imagined, but also a reality which is unpleasant: “Since the child certainly has no knowledge of the real concatenation of cause and effect, or of the nurse’s existence and activity, he must feel himself in the possession of a magical capacity that can actually realize all his wishes by simply imagining the satisfaction of them” (222). Those who persist in the primary mode of thinking, like “obsessional patients” and “primitives,” are so superstitious they think their thoughts and wishes affect reality, contrary to evidence (215). To an extent Ciganas saw how magical thinking operated and they relied on heavily on flattery.
This is the basis of magical thinking: the adult experiences child-like arrested development or fixation unadulterated by considerations of reality. Ferenczi calls this regression pathological insofar as it presents unfulfilled wishes as fulfilled, yet acknowledges that some expressions of it are normative: “In the mental life of the normal the countless number of superstitious gestures, or such as are in some other way considered efficacious (gestures of cursing, blessing, praying), is a remainder of that development period of the sense of reality in which one still felt mighty enough to be able to violate the regular order of the universe” (225-226). Even the child surrounded by love meets with frustration and gives up the illusion of omnipotence, yet retains traces of it.

Objects are endowed with symbolic values, and speech symbolism gets substituted for gesture symbolism: “certain series of sounds are brought into close associative connection with definite objects and processes, and indeed gradually identified with these” (229). Among Ciganos I saw a great deal of fear around saying certain taboo words, namely a fear of invoking whatever the words meant: deceased ancestors, malefic spirits, illness and so forth. Calon wives were not to utter their husband’s name to another woman for he would be symbolically given away. Therefore, a great number of my interlocutors persisted in the primary mode of thinking or in one of its socially acceptable variations. On the same note, accent was place on faith including faith in God and in one’s identity. As Cabrito said, “we are more powerful than other people because we never doubt, we have faith.” Several interlocutors repeated this.

Clients often sought magic trabalhos or spells aim to produce desired effects such as virility, fidelity or prosperity. “How hard it is in reality to attain love that can fulfill all our wishes!” Ferenczi laments (239). Yet I witnessed many satisfied clients return to fortunetellers for additional tarot readings and spells. Of course, time to fulfillment remains an uncertain
element during a spell, and the delayed achievement of goals usually allowed Ciganas to collect their profits before results were seen. Practitioners asked for and received money and gifts upon consultations, sometimes then relocated afterwards. I saw many Ciganas just told their clients to make the magic spells at home and charged them for the detailed recipe. If the desired results were not achieved the responsibility fell on the client for having failed to complete all the steps.

An encounter with a fortuneteller encouraged clients to imagine themselves as magically empowered whereas otherwise they felt frustrated and powerless in significant areas of their lives. However, the fact that some Roma and most Calins worked in the street made people distrust their magic rituals for prosperity. A skeptical vendor who watched them work daily near his clothing boutique phrased it best: “If they’re poor enough to come read palms in the street, they can’t do magic or they would’ve helped themselves first.” The Roma also agreed that to look impoverished, unattractive or unkempt usually drove clients away. It was those Ciganas who fulfilled the clients’ expectations by “looking the part” that enjoyed the most success as fortunetellers, while competing with numerous other Brazilian psychics, witches and spiritual healers. The divinities Ciganas invoked (or at least claim to invoke) belonged to many groupings popular in Brazil ranging from Catholic saints to Exus or spirits belonging to the Afro-Brazilian religions. They said even if they did not believe in Exus like the gage, it helped to mention them in order to attract a greater clientele.

Fortunetelling as a traditional female occupation and acculturation

Most Brazilians associated Ciganos either with the ball gown-clad women they saw reading fortunes in public areas or with the traveling caravans they had seen in their childhood and the aura of wonder and magic they had felt around them from an early age. Brazilians varied
in their responses when I asked if they believed in Ciganas’ fortunetelling. It was mostly women who showed interest in this practice and several said that on occasion they had been told their fortunes with detailed accuracy. One such woman was Sonia, a middle-aged, bleached-blonde violinist with the national orchestra. We met through a common friend and as we chatted one evening over fried plantains in a lively restaurant in Rio she remembered her most remarkable encounter with a Cigano:

I was eight. I was walking home with my father when six caravans passed us by on the road. An old Cigano walked behind the caravans playing the violin. When he got near us he looked into my eyes. I had never heard such a beautiful melody before. I kept staring and he played until the end looking into my eyes. When he stopped he said I had the gift of music and he gave me his violin. He said I would become a musician. Oh, now I remember he also said I’d fall in love, have a great marriage, but my husband would die before me and I would be a widow for a long time. I got married at twenty-seven, my marriage lasted twenty-three years. My husband passed away two years ago. We had a good life together, but he went too quickly. He was right… He was right…

The widow’s eyes became tearful, but she did not hide them. She took a sip of red wine to soothe her sorrow then nodded several times as she had just realized the velho Cigano (old Gypsy man) had predicted not only her future as an accomplished musician and felicitous marriage, but also her lonely widowhood.

I was surprised to hear it was a man who had told her fortune because most of my Romani interlocutors agreed that this was traditionally a strictly female occupation. I asked the elderly about Sonia’s case and they said that in olden times some of men also had the gift of divination, yet it was always considered shameful for the men to make money by reading fortunes. The velho Cigano Sonia remembered had in fact told her fortune free of charge. Moreover he had gifted his violin to set aflame the love of music in the bright-eyed child. Everyone found his gesture commendable and like Ianca exclaimed appreciatively: “Those were the real Ciganos in the olden days!”
Most interlocutors agreed and stated that the gift of divination was much stronger amongst past generations of *Ciganos* due to the grace they earned though upholding honorable Romani values of conduct, namely the *maxrimé* rules. Recent generations were considered more acculturated. The loosening of the rigid traditional behavioral codes due to acculturation was also seen as resulting in the weakening of divinatory powers in the new generations.

Whether they believed or not in their own psychic gifts most *Ciganas* practiced fortunetelling regularly, often with lucrative results. I saw women regularly engage with their clients in palm readings, tarot card readings, and magic rituals known as *trabalhos*, *ofrendas* or *simpatías*. The word *trabalho* (job) comes from *trabalhar* (to work); *ofrenda* means offering or gift (literally a gift to divinity), and *simpatías* comes from *simpatizar* (to ingratiate), suggesting that the ritual works by conjuring, through gift offerings, a divine entity to produce desired results. Conveniently for *Ciganas*, in this gift-giving economy clients must rely on the practitioners to make the offerings for them. Therefore, throughout their days *Ciganas* kept receiving gifts (including money) from *gage* clients who wished to ingratiate the spiritual world, hence the sense of an inside joke. Some ethnically-invisible practitioners, like Angelica, felt the clients just wanted to please, “This poor *gage* has been bringing me perfume for the last ten years, and candy for the children, toys, he doesn’t know what else to bring.” It was generally the most attractive practitioners, regardless of their ethnicity, that did well.

In Sao Paulo I met several men who also claimed that they could “read fortunes” in a similar way. Cabrito insisted that like Nelson Pires the half-*Cigano* intellectual outcast, he could also read people just by looking into their eyes and that most Roma men could yet generally used this gift for other kinds of negotiations:
We don’t read palms. We read their eyes, the windows to the soul, but gage would be scared if they knew that just through their eyes we can tell that they’re thinking about, what kind of person they are. It’s a trick we use telling them that we need their palms or Exus or numerology for that. We don’t, but we need to tell them we do to gain their trust. We have to mention something they already have faith in, but we use just basic psychology. We are naturally better at reading people because we have a rich social life and it’s in our blood. We are very sensitive us Roma. And the girls learn from their mothers and practice it all their lives. It’s in our culture to do that.

Cabrito suggested was that the divination gift or talent was in fact the ability to have a keen sensibility to people. Cognitive psychologist Baron-Cohen states that theory of mind allows one to attribute thoughts, desires, and intentions to others, to predict or explain their actions, and to postulate their objectives (Baron-Cohen 1991: 234). This is an innate ability most humans have, yet different people can develop more or less effective theories of mind, since it requires social and other experiences to bring to fruition.

A related concept is empathy, described as the experiential recognition and understanding of another person’s states of mind including a person’s beliefs, desires and especially of another’s emotions, known as the ability “to put oneself in another’s shoes.” Hollan and Throop examine the problem of empathy in anthropology, such as defining, recognizing, and enacting empathic-like processes in cultural context, they introduce key theorists who unsettled the dictionary definitions of empathy (2008: 385). Some scholars suggest that both empathy and theory of mind are weaker in more individualistic cultures and amongst individuals with cognitive impairment such as people with autism or Asperger syndrome (Tine et al. 2012). Others like Briggs say that one can only arrive at an understanding of empathy from sharing positionality with others, such as children in her case, and struggling with one’s own anxiety, confusion and humiliation to make sense of social interaction (2008: 449). Similarly I reflect on intersubjective interlocutions.
Most of my Romani interlocutors agreed that an understanding of other people’s intentions, desires and thoughts was highly elaborated by their culture and helped with the fortunetelling trade. Like most practitioners, Cabrito insisted that Ciganos are culturally more adept at reading others because of sharing such intense sociality with others within their group. He added that fortunetelling is something most of them can do regardless of gender, yet if he were to make a living by reading fortunes other Roma would look down on him: “This is traditionally seen as a woman’s job. Men were to engage in other commercial activities such as metalwork, horse trading, real estate or car refurbishing and resale.” According to him most Roma men in Brazil worked as mechanics and some were even employed as such by the government. He also said that numerous men did not work at all. Some men I met owned a receipt-printing machine and found profitable ways to assist other Brazilians in shaving off company expenses into their own pockets. Cabrito described Ciganos as often resorting to malandragem (trickery, scam) whether through fortunetelling or other commercial activities, yet he also stated that this is a commonplace practice in Brazil:

They fix farm machinery for the government. This is in Brasilia. Sometimes they make a million réais. But most Ciganos in Rio and Sao Paulo don’t work at all. My brother is in real estate, but it’s slow. My cousin also works. He writes official accounting receipts for companies’ expenses, and he always rounds up the sum and gives a little profit to the heads of the company and to himself. But that’s something all Brazilians do, not just the Roma. The men have to work nowadays because Brazilians are becoming evangelical and they don’t believe as much in the tarot anymore.

Indeed it is culturally accepted in Brazil to resort to the jeitinho (knack, shortcut). Most people accept as ordinary dar un jeito (to find a way - wink wink). It is just another Brazilian way of practicing social navigation (Levine 1997). Being malandro means to be resourceful in a clever way by circumventing rules and social conventions. The malandro (bad boy, rogue, rascal, or scoundrel) “has become significant for the Brazilian national identity as a folk-hero or rather
anti-hero according to social anthropologist Roberto DaMatta and literary critic Antonio
Candido, who describe him as a lazy, charismatic and clever person challenging the social order
to profit in often-illicit yet not necessarily selfish ways (Dennison et al 2007: 22). The
malandro’s cunning savoir-faire consists in the manipulation of people or results to obtain the
best outcome the easiest way possible:

The malandro is often described as jeitinho incarnate. The concept of jeito or jeitinho
refers to a way of subverting authority, evading the law, or using one’s contacts for
personal advantage. Although similar mechanisms exist throughout the world, in Brazil
the jeitinho has become an accepted feature of everyday life, which helps to eliminate
hierarchies of ethnicity, gender or class (Dennison and Shaw 2007: 22).

The malandro is glorified as a people’s hero, a survivor of difficult circumstances with whom
everyone in Brazil identifies at some level including Ciganos. It also means someone who defies
and subverts the social order without the authorities ever suspecting it. Similarly commercial
activities as conducted by Ciganos often subtly defy gage expectations by introducing a
manipulative element for profitable gains. In fortunetelling, one trick consists of Ciganas
pretending to have premonitions by appealing to spirits in which they may not themselves
believe. Whether this manipulative gesture works for the benefit of clients depends on each
specific case, but often satisfied clients returned.

One of my interlocutors in Sao Paulo, a sophisticated, long-legged, dark-eyed Rromni
named Maia worked in an elegantly minimalist office at the front of her two-storied villa. A
crystal wind chime hung in a corner by the tall, thin opened window, and a large crystal ball
decorated the table. She spent at least one hour with each client and charged at least fifty réais.
Many of her clients returned often. Some had known her for as long as a decade. While her
husband’s family had provided them the house as a wedding-gift, it was Maia who supported the
family. Maia was extremely reserved and diplomatic. Only once did she suggest more candidly
that while she advertised herself as “psychic reader” and pretended to use a crystal ball, she
actually just used her intuition and her common sense to consult clients about their past, present
and future. She mentioned it was rather boring work since people just talked about themselves:

I don’t really need to read palms or tarot cards. I read the person. I’m a street
psychologist. I don’t have to go to school to learn this. You learn this by practicing, and
people have the same stories. You just have to let them talk. Sometimes they talk for two
hours and you spend all your time listening to them and giving advice. People are so
ignorant here in Brazil. They appreciate any advice you give. They just need a little
guidance. But most Ciganas are ignorant too. Most of them are illiterate and ill
mannered. They just want to swindle people and they say the wrong things. If you are a
good person and a patient listener, and if you are basically pure inside, you will know
what to tell people, and they will come back to you bringing gifts all the time. My
daughter Miruna is ten, but I already let her see some of my clients from time to time.
She loves school and she wants to become a judge. I told her for that she would have to
go to law school first. We are more than happy to support her if that’s what she wants! I
am not like other Ciganas. In fact I have not much in common with them at all.

Maia believed that other Ciganas did not offer good advice and were more prone to scamming
gage clients for monetary gains: “They tell the clients there’s a curse on them and charge them
200 réais or more for undoing it with a simpatia. There’s always this malandragem with them.
It’s harder to make money nowadays with this so they will try any means.” She blamed their
greed for the declining popularity of fortunetelling in Brazil. I heard other Ciganas complain of
similar issues. In Rio de Janeiro Ianca said in the past the business was much more lucrative
judging from her own experience:

There used to be around fifty Ciganas here working in the park and they could all make
money easy like water. But when I would arrive around eleven o’clock, not as early as
them, they would look at me like this: There she goes... The first person that I would
attract towards me I would send them to bring me oil or food and they would bring it.
The other Ciganas would look at me with envy and say: She just arrived and she already
has so much! The client would say: What should I do to make my man come back to me?
I’d say: Buy me some sandals. I had seen these sandals for 20 réais. And she would bring
them. Dina would get so angry, she would say it was her client in the first place. Hahaha.
The most I ever got was 500 réais. A client gave me as a gift. We always teach simpatias
for love, for house cleaning, so they find a bit of money and they bring us gifts. But
nowadays it’s getting slow. People don’t believe in us as much anymore.
Cabrito stated that the main reason why Roma men had to work nowadays was because the women’s fortunetelling was becoming less popular due to the rise of conversions. Such conversions had also increased among the Roma, rendering fortunetelling forbidden among the converts. In the larger diaspora this trend is consistent: Romanies in Europe are also becoming increasingly evangelical (Gay y Blasco 2012). Ianca admitted she no longer wished to tell fortunes after she started attending the local evangelical church along with other Brazilians.

Although I did not encounter Ciganos who identified as evangelical converts, I can confirm Cabrito’s statements as supported by what my other interlocutors said regarding this movement and by the fieldwork done by Brigitte Cairus (2010). The Romanies I encountered during fieldwork remained, like most Brazilians, immersed in a syncretic religious environment which combined Catholicism with the African-derived religions brought by slaves into religious practices like *Umbanda*, *Candomblé*, and *Macumba* as described by Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1991: 389). Because of this extremely ecumenical religious environment fortunetelling still circulated widely in Brazil especially among the lower middle-class, largely uneducated clientele, based on what my interlocutors said and what I observed.

Fortunetelling and magical rituals as practiced by Ciganas share many similarities with *macumba*. Believers in *macumba* (black magic) usually gather in a *Macumba* religious center, which is always led by a woman known as the *Macumbeira* (female spiritual leader). People request of her predictions, financial gains, a faithful spouse and so forth, for which they pay or fulfill tasks she demands such as killing a chicken so she can drink its blood, buying other food and leaving them on the side of a road for spirits to consume, and so forth. One may inflict harm upon another person by bringing the photo of that person to the center. For prosperity, one is given herbs to put in bathwater and use for bathing seven days.
Ciganas used gage beliefs to their advantage and acted like a Macumbeira, promising to grant people their request after they paid a fee or brought certain gifts. Although they claimed this was part of their repertoire, most Ciganas said that they avoided dealing with harmful spirits or animal sacrifices. The magic rituals they performed invoked Catholic saints or holy figures such as the Virgin Mary. My largely Catholic interlocutors often said their own simpatías (offerings) were only dedicated to these sacred entities, and their offerings of candles, flowers and fruit usually were accompanied by prayers for help and the expression: se Deus quiser (if it is God’s wish). Yet Ciganas attracted a larger clientele by claiming to incorporate in their repertoire some of the secret practices of Umbanda, which blends African religions with Catholicism, spiritualism and indigenous folklore, and has many branches each with its own
beliefs and practices since different waves of slaves came into Brazil from different parts of Africa. Common beliefs include a main deity or *Orixá* whose natural forces or extensions manifest as smaller deities or *Orixás*. Because slaves had to dissimulate about maintaining their original religious practices, their deities were worshiped under the names of Catholic saints with whom the *Orixás* became synchronistic as divine entities, along with spirits of deceased people that heal and offer guidance, and psychics or mediums that can communicate to ordinary mortals messages from the spiritual realms. These belief systems include reincarnation and karmic justice, the evolution of the spirit through multiple lives and the practice of charity and fraternity, and the belief in destiny that must be fulfilled. There is no absolute good or bad, yet there is the idea that whatever one does will come back in a karmic way.

In some modes of *Umbanda*, *Cigano* spirits have been incorporated among these entities praised by Brazilian *gage*. This further allows *Ciganos* to maintain their mystical hold over popular belief. Thus acculturation has been an ambiguous process for the Brazilian Romanies and their fortunetelling practices reflect this. On the one hand they are sometimes excluded by the mainstream society as undesirable, while on the other hand they maintain an aura of exoticism and freedom in the Brazilian cultural imaginary, which is reflected in literature, soap operas, and *Umbanda*, where *Ciganos* are even imagined as entities that can be conjured up through spirit possessions. This is one example of the cultural influence Romani people have exerted over Brazilian culture.

Because of Brazil’s religious syncretism and predilection to “superstition,” according to *Ciganos*, most fortunetellers I met worked regularly. Although these women said they were their families’ sole income producers, many Roma families lived in spacious two-story houses and had two or three live-in Brazilian maids. Even Auntie Violeta who lived in a more impoverished...
neighborhood of Rio had several maids that visited her once a week to help with domestic chores. Although Calins enjoyed far less prosperity they also had maids to help them with major cleaning duties such as washing the rugs that covered the floors of their tents. The poorest Romanies, according to my interlocutors, were the nomadic Calon who lived in impoverished rural areas of Brazil, whereas most *Ciganos* who had settled in Rio and particularly in Sao Paulo were considered part of the middle class or the upper-middle class.

As previously mentioned, most Roma men I met did not have regular jobs, relying on their wives’ earnings. For example, Cabrito had a freelance position as a public-relations representative for an investment firm in Sao Paulo, yet brought in only a sporadic income. He said he paid for family vacations and the occasional new car. His wife Angelica supported their daily life through fortunetelling. Overhearing us talk in the living room, Angelica walked over and said she agreed with her husband, using a gentle tone, diplomatically adding that this was common amongst Roma couples in Brazil:

Most women earn the main income in their family. They support their husband, their children and their parents-in-law. This is why a girl’s parents receive a bride-price when they give her away. It’s a compensation for the income she will not be contributing to their house afterwards. The groom’s parents also provide a house for the young couple, so the groom doesn’t have to worry about getting a steady job like the *gage*, he can just join his father and his uncles as an apprentice in commercial trades. We moved into this house on our wedding day. Cabrito networks with people, he’s great at that, and now he’s getting involved in politics, but I always pay the bills. With two children and three maids it’s about 6000 réais per month. Fortunetelling is a steady business, but only women can do it. We have the gift. But it’s getting slower for us nowadays.

Most Roma fortunetellers in Brazil agreed with Angelica’s statements and insisted they commonly earned more than their husbands, even though there were fewer clients than before. The bride-price or *dota* paid on their wedding day to their parents reflects the girls’ abilities to provide a significant income as fortunetellers.
Very few Ciganas complained about having to provide for their entire family. This was mostly because girls were socialized from a young age to become fortunetellers for this particular purpose, so they found it normal. Also they may have been too cautious of my presence to share their opinions candidly, or they genuinely believed that being the economic provider prevented their husband’s cheating. The majority of Roma women appeared satisfied with their traditional trade and their status as main provider for their family. Many said that while infidelity among Ciganos was common in the past, now it was unpalatable to most wives. This challenged the more traditional discourse on unconditional love that still circulated among the elderly. Roma men now thought twice about angering their wives because it was now women who held economic power as the main income earners. The Roma men became subordinate and even child-like in their relationships with their economically empowered wives, although their flexible schedules fit their understanding of ethic-specific “masculinity.” A young Rom said his mother had eloped with his father (her nephew) when she was thirty and he was seventeen. He said: “My mom raised my father like one of us children. It’s great, we go party together now!”

To an extent, I found the relationship between fortunetellers and their husbands similar to the nurturing relationship between the travesti (transvestite) and the “hetero” boys they pay to sit at home and play the role of the hyper-masculine boyfriend (Kulick 1998: 131). The travesti act as their boyfriends’ mother’ substitutes and derive pleasure not from sex per se, but from considering themselves capable to be perceived as a “total woman” (136). A relationship with a so-called “hetero” or masculine man reinforces the travestis’ alignment with the feminine male/female gender binary as elaborated upon in the Brazilian mainstream imaginary (127). Similarly Ciganas’ relationships with their men reinforce their cultural prescriptions for what it means to be a “total woman.” The Roma women, like the travesti, experience the power of the
giver, as Mauss concludes: “The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it” (1950: 65). Yet patriarchal values obstructed this power imbalance among the Roma. Men retained leadership as spokesmen, such as at *kriss* tribunals, even though they occupied a subordinate role in relationship with their wives, fulfilling the role of mother-substitutes and providers.

Calins said that the opposite was true for them since that they mostly relied on their husbands’ commercial endeavors for financial support. They assumed an obedient, almost child-like position vis-à-vis their men, who provided for them like a father-substitutes. Calins boasted about the dresses and gold accessories their husbands had gifted them, monetarily itemizing them in conversations. They also admitted their men’s infidelity was common-knowledge and even boasted of it, said it was proof of the men’s charisma and hyper-masculine *Cigano* traits. “Our husbands are real men!” said Nena, a toothy smile beaming across her bronze complexion. We were sitting nonchalantly on the pavement of central Sao Paulo one lazy afternoon as the crowd bustled around us in all directions. Nena and her female kin, including some girls age ten and eleven, sat down nonchalantly snacking and conversing for the greater part of their time instead of struggling to find clients and make a living. They welcomed me among them so that on days like this one I entertained and brought additional food gifts. Above all they enjoyed the feeling of “being free to go anywhere, to do as we please.” They were “free” as long as they obeyed mores.

Despite their differences, both Calon and Roma agreed that fortunetelling was a traditional female trade for them. The old *Rromni* Dina mentioned one exception to the gender specificity of fortunetelling. She had travelled extensively across Latin America with her semi-nomadic family before settling down in Rio de Janeiro. She boasted that even her male kin read fortunes for a living, in order to have a flexible lifestyle:
Ciganos don’t have a schedule for waking up, for eating or for sleeping. We are free to do what we want to do, go wherever we want to go. My whole family in Belo Horizonte works with tarot cards (cartomancia) on my mother’s side and on my father’s side. My nieces and even my nephews read cards. Most of them are cartomantes. I have over six clients coming to my house regularly, but I still go to Largo do Machado because there lots of people walk by all day long. You go where there are more people, make some money and bring it home. My nephews do it too.

So fortunetelling, a typical female trade, has also been a male occupation on occasion in the lucrative, polyglot religious environment of the New World, where unlike in Europe there are numerous gage who believe in the trade. Traditionally practiced by Romani women everywhere, fortunetelling is performed by Ciganas in Brazil who claim it as an expression of their ethnic-specific dono (gift of divination). It is also referred to as the sharpened sense of intuition (clairvoyance in English). This is explained as a gift of divine providence and something that sets Ciganos apart as a special “chosen” people.

“The Fourth Nail:” a Romani myth

The goal of fortunetelling for Ciganas is to maximize the profit extracted from clients. Ianca copiously laughed as she said, “This is a gift that Ciganas have. But some of them really have the luck to make money and others don’t like myself. But all Ciganas read fortunes everywhere, in every country.” “Why?” I asked, and she recounted a widespread Romani myth (as in an unverifiable legend) that I later learned also circulated in the United States:

They say that when Jesus was on the cross, there was a nail for his head, and a Cigano stole it. So Jesus said: This is how the Cigano will live, always stealing and never being caught. This was so ever since we appeared in the world. They say there were four nails… the blacksmith said so... This is a legend, isn’t it? My aunt used to tell me this legend, and every Cigano knows about it. Only my mother didn’t know anything. I think suffering and poverty ended everything that was good in her. She only read fortunes to put food on the table.
According to this myth, Jesus was so grateful for the petty theft of the fourth nail meant for his head that he protected all Ciganos from then on whenever they stole. In 2011 Roma film-maker George Eli made public his documentary “Searching for the Fourth Nail – An Insider Look at the Secret Life of An American Gypsy” (2011) in which he questions this myth or legend and how it influences Romani culture. Eli describes his childhood as “carefree and lawless” and takes his sons on a quest to learn about the long history of Romani persecutions. Eli questions whether the narrative of sanctioned stealing is not a form of self-deprecation at this point, an adaptation to centuries of oppression by gage, and currently a maladaptive social positioning as a self-criminalizing culture which shuns the education system and other occupational opportunities.

All Romani fortunetelling is, according to Eli, exoticized improvised storytelling, a practice developed by a historically marginalized people in order to control encounters with historically marginalizing mainstream people on which the Romanies have always depended economically. Eli suggests most fortunetellers conduct their consultations with a great sense of irony. In “Irony in Action,” Fernandez asserts that, “irony can afford political expression in circumstances where direct dissent is hard to formulate, risky, or unwise” (2001: 3). Through fortunetelling practices Romani women gain intimate knowledge of the temperament of the people among whom they live, and in whom they inspire the fear of magic as a cover for their own vulnerability as a marginalized minority (Budur 2011b). This was most noticeable among Calins who wore many layers of gold jewelry knowing it was unlikely gage would dare rob them, and who successfully convinced clients that they were suffering from magical curses.

One day 65-year-old Todoranko, joined Ianca and me for lunch and playfully complained with a toothless smile that in other countries Romani people are so clever that they steal outright from the gage: “Here in Brazil we are the most stupid Ciganos. Look in Argentina for example
one Cigano was singing for gage and the others were taking gasoline from the gage’s cars. Also they went to eat in restaurants and ran away and never paid. Malandros… So smart!”

Todoranko’s pleasure in narrating malandragem like “stealing and never getting caught” echoed the Romani myth of the fourth nail, which suggests that Romanies are divinely sanctioned to outwit the gage. Swindling persists as an idealized relationship with the gage, who are imagined as disempowered in the encounter with Ciganos – a historically marginalized minority.

However, in Brazil the Romani do not steal outright. Only once I heard Brazilians complain their chickens disappeared at night and blamed the neighboring Ciganos. Yet fortunetelling can also be understood as the art of dispossessing the gage of their goods by convincing them to give gifts in return for fortunetelling services. Ianca mused over this while talking to me as if I were her own daughter or confidante:

In Rio Ciganas don’t read fortunes, they pretend to. Maybe the old Ciganas still know how to do it, and the Calins, they also know. Well, they know how to get even your sweater off your back when it’s cold outside. The old granny you meet in the street is like that. You feel compassion for her and you want to give her even the shirt off your back. One day I met an old Cigana in the street, she didn’t know I was also Cigana. My hair was short back then so I didn’t look like a Cigana. She wanted to read my palm and I let her talk. She said: You have two lovers. I said: No, I have three! She said she didn’t want money, only my ring. Ha! I told her it was my godmother who gave it to me, and when I told her who I was related to she started swearing at me because I hadn’t told her I was Cigana. They start swearing at you if you do this to them, if you let them talk just for fun.

Ianca enjoyed the thought of fooling a fortuneteller. Had the old woman been a real clairvoyant according to her standards she would have been able to tell Ianca was Cigana and not have regarded her like a Brazilian woman with two lovers. Ianca said that most fortunetellers nowadays use the trade misleadingly in order to maximize their profits. Trickery according to De Certeau is a witty tactic, where a tactic is by definition “determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (1984: 38) and “the space of a tactic is the
space of the other” (37). In the *gage* world, *Ciganos* fight to avoid acculturation and find it appealing to resort to trickery.

Whether or not the readings are accurate is left for the clients to establish. If we regard the monetary exchange as undeserved for a false narrative, we still cannot point to the *Cigana* as responsible for social delinquency. I agree with De Certeau that the responsibility also belongs to the individuals who “buy” the narratives and to the society that fails to offer them other outlets appropriate to their needs such as therapy or more rigorous and accessible public education (1984): “Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces […] Inversely, the story is a sort of delinquency in reserve, maintained, but itself displaced and consistent [and] is alternately playful and threatening” (130). Indeed the narratives fortunetellers create during consultations are both playful and threatening, and it is up to their clients to protect themselves by determining the limits of their beliefs. Ianca had told me: “Eu respeito o tarô. Mas o tarô tambèm mente.” [I respect the tarot, but tarot cards also lie]. Her admonitions echoed in my mind throughout my fieldwork: “Cuidado com os Roma. Eles não são tão puros.” [Careful with the Roma. They are not so pure].

Many *Ciganos* commonly rationalized fortunetelling as a profitable occupation with one expression: “te traisaren vi amen” (so that we may live as well), which revealed its nature as a survival tactic against a historically inhospitable *gage* world. I asked Ianca if *Ciganas* often misled their clients on purpose, and she replied ambivalently: “Look, one time there was a woman whose palm I read. She said she had had her palm read many times and only once a *Calin* told her the truth. I do not know many *Calins*, but if this *Calin* doesn’t know how to read palms, then she knows how to steal very well!” She giggled copiously at the last scenario. Still,
Ianca believed that elderly Ciganas and particularly the Calins were far more endowed with the gift of divination than the Roma women she knew, and so more likely to give accurate readings to their clients.

Dina was regarded as the most malandra or tricky woman in the neighborhood. She was also regarded as an outsider by Ciganos because she had married into another Roma family and moved far away from her kin. She was a small, thin woman in her sixties, always dressed in long colorful skirts and shirts according to her Xoraxane vitsa’s particular customs, unlike her kin by affiliation living in this community. One day she boasted of a clever plan and solicited Ianca’s help around midnight for a questionable job:

Tomorrow we should go find that black man who is married to that white woman who went to the rezadeira and showed her below the underwear where she had an open sore. The rezadeira asked her if any of her clothes had disappeared, and the white woman said that one of her pairs of underwear went missing. The rezadeira said: They did macumba onto you. So now we know all this and we can go to the black man and read his fortune because we already know all this. He will be impressed when we tell him all this in detail. We just have to go find him. We need to make some money with this, take advantage of the situation.

Dina intended to convince the man she was clairvoyant by telling him details he could not know the healer had already shared with her. Dina never went to this man because Ianca refused to assist her, yet her initial intention was to pretend to “read” in the tarot cards personal information that was already known to her. Ianca distrusted Dina ever since she had made a macumba for her own brother to divorce, after which the brother disappeared never to be seen again:

She cut a chicken and did a trabalho in the cemetery at midnight. I didn’t go with her then either, I was too scared, but she told me about it. After that he was gone. She still doesn’t know if he is alive or dead. She must be feeling pretty guilty about that. She knows it’s her fault. Everyone suspects that. Her husband disappeared too same way. We don’t know if he’s alive or dead. And she has no children. This woman is evil. I know it. The rezadeira said she cursed me.
As Ianca said this she touched her neck and then blew on the fingers of her right hand as she rubbed together her thumb, index and middle finger. Both Roma and Calon used this gesture frequently when mentioning taboo words. Ianca said, “Blow on the fingers after you touch your neck, so it won’t give gossip. They taught me to do this since I was little. They only didn’t teach me how to make money.” The gesture was believed to prevent gossip about a particular mentioned subject, also contagion if one mentioned illness.

As previously mentioned, the general consensus was that both Dina’s brother and her husband had died because of her spells. The mere mention of it was considered fraught with danger of either an illness or a curse. She was supposedly a very jealous woman and known to meddle in other’s affairs with potent spells. Dina was perceived as wicked because she had no children and no blood relatives nearby. Unlike other Ciganas she was known to work with macumba’s destructive spirits and animal sacrifices, thus she inspired fear in the other Roma.

All Ciganos in the area regarded Dina with suspicion and no one ate the food she cooked and brought over as gifts, for fear that the food was cursed. Auntie Violeta said on several occasions, “She used to bring us food every Sunday and every Sunday I would throw it in the trash. She saw it once when I had thrown it away and she stopped bringing it by. She knows she can’t poison us now.” I was often advised to stop having dinner at her house, but I felt no need to do that. The only strange taste to her food was the lack of salt. Dina suffered from high blood pressure and ate a low sodium, vegetable-based diet.

Despite their differences Dina visited Auntie and Ianca almost daily because she lived alone and had no one else to talk to especially in Romanes since her blood relatives lived in Belo Horizonte and in Chile, where her parents used to travel with a circus when she was young. She had recently retired from reading fortunes since it involved taking a tiring two-hour trip to the
center of Rio in order to find clients in the city parks. Ianca and Dina used to go there together and work almost daily, which made it significant that Ianca understood Dina’s fortunetelling as akin to swindling, while finding her practice of *macumba* to be evil and dangerous. However, it is significant to note that Ianca discredited most fortunetellers while claiming to be the most honorable and honest of them. This practice of boasting about one’s honorability in competitive ways is common among *Ciganas*, although it was uncommon for most of them to speak of fortunetelling disparagingly.

Fortunetelling as practiced by *Ciganas* is often a group affair although each has her own clientele. It speaks of a secret language of culturally known behaviors and creates a sense of complicity among practitioners. Its role-play and game-like qualities are laden with *malandragem* on purpose and serve to manipulate the power dynamic in the encounter with the *gage*. For instance, the logic was that if enough *Ciganas* tell the client “you are cursed,” clients are more likely to end up believing it, so *Ciganas* all said it and demanded a hefty sum for the “cure.” I have been told innumerable times by Roma women all over Europe, the US and Brazil that I am cursed and will not be able to find joy and have a good marriage until the curse gets undone. I assume this line is offered to many women that *Ciganas* find older than their own desirable marrying age. Also, when I did offer a *Rromni* in Italy money for the “cure” I noticed no difference in my life, but I did not hold a grudge because the *Rromni* was a vagrant and I thought of my payment as charity.

In Brazil *Ciganas* enjoy greater popularity as fortunetellers than in Europe particularly since they adapted their repertoires to appeal to the locals’ belief in *macumba* and other Afro-religious registers. Their esoteric trade appears to be acculturated in this society, yet it still serves to maintain a certain cultural distance from the *gage*. Although it appeals to public registers of
religious practices and beliefs, *Ciganas*’ fortunetelling ultimately represents a way to avoid assimilation into the majoritarian society by maintaining a primarily monetary relationship with non-Romanies and the flexibility of self-employment. Romani culture(s) in Brazil as elsewhere thus emphasizes independence from *gage* values and institutions (like public schools) in favor of teaching strong adherence to Romani ways of life against the mainstream forces of “contagion.”

Yet even though *Ciganas* had internalized stereotypes about themselves and boast about often scamming *gage* clients, they frequently struggled with “containment” of their clients’ intentionalities, desires and emotions, and found themselves tired after a long sessions of acting as “street psychologists.” They unanimously agreed it took a great deal of wisdom and patience. Just like any talented actors, the best practitioners were the ones who were most earnest. Also, it did not seem to matter to clients whether their fortunetellers were entirely earnest. The mode of magical thinking prevailed and results were often satisfactory to those seeking these services.

**Lawsuits and legalization in Brazil**

Across centuries of migration throughout Persia, Europe and the New World, Romanies’ trade has been consistently documented as a source of contention with local authorities. In Portugal, France and most of Western Europe the art of divination was outlawed several times. Those identified as non-Christians were often persecuted in Europe, and this climaxed with burnings of “witches” and “heathens” during the 15th century through the 18th. In the colonial territory of today’s Brazil, the Portuguese authorities placed a ban on *Ciganos*’ language, traditional dress and fortunetelling in efforts to acculturate them, but this was difficult to monitor in the rural inland areas where there was less manpower to rely on. This is why Calon mainly
kept to the inland areas and avoided the urban centers along the coast. After the ban on Ciganos’
cultural expressions was lifted they continued to be stigmatized, so when new waves of Roma
migrants arrived in Brazil they sought to be ethnically invisible and to avoid being associated
with Calon since they did not want to be stigmatized as well. Ianca considered fortunetelling
shameful ever since her mother was arrested and thrown in jail for practicing it. Most documents
attesting the presence of Ciganos in Brazil belong to police criminal profiles of arrested
fortunetellers and occasional petty thieves.

Most Roma fortunetellers still keep their ethnicity secret from their clientele in order to
secure their trust. In addition they tend to work in private psychic reading shops, while most
Calins work outdoors in public areas verbally soliciting passers-by for palm and tarot card
readings. Regardless of any remaining stigma, I saw numerous clients return again and again for
such services. The trade seemed lucrative for Ciganas, particularly the Roma who were
ethnically camouflaged in mainstream society.

Often I saw clients offering Ciganas gifts they had requested in exchange for their
services. Since Brazilian law states that once received as a gift, a possession cannot be
considered stolen, this is within the bounds of the law. Yet if the gift is monetary and required in
exchange for undoing an evil curse, the argument becomes more complicated from a legal
perspective since it can be viewed as extortion. For example, in Sao Paulo a beautiful, green-
eyed, 22-year-old recently-married Romani named Suzana asked her client for one million réais
for a magic spell and was promptly arrested when the monetary exchange was about to take
place. The client had called the delegado (police delegate) to witness Suzana taking the money.
As soon as she accepted the sum in cash, equivalent to 350,000 USD, the young Rromni was
arrested, taken to the women’s ward.
News of this case spread throughout the Cigano communities in a furtive manner since it was seen as misfortunate and disgraceful. Being imprisoned with non-Romani inmates meant maxrimé contamination because of having to share so many intimate objects that had been touched by the gage. Cabrito was happy to tell me Suzana had found a way to avoid this by claiming falsely that she was pregnant. For the sake of her supposed pregnancy the authorities agreed to place her in a separate chamber until her trial ran its course. Cabrito said that her family had secured a doctor’s falsified statement as to her pregnancy, and assured me this kind of jeito was common among the Roma.

Most Ciganos blamed Suzana for making all Roma fortunetellers look suspicious. Cabrito’s nephew Mickey said: “She was too greedy. She should not have asked for so much money. And she didn’t even have her work papers done!” With a specific work card for her profession the case could have been resolved in her favor more easily. Cabrito confirmed that one could be officially recognized as a professional fortuneteller by completing a specific diploma based on government sanctioned 200-hour coursework.

He credited Romani rights activists for turning fortunetelling into a legal occupation in Brazil as of October 20th, 2002 through the work of the Association for Romani Rights in Sao Paulo, in conjunction with the Union for Romani People of Brazil based in Brasilia and the CNPIR (the National Council for Promoting Racial Equality). These associations had recruited volunteers from Romani communities all over the country and had successfully petitioned Lula’s government to finally recognize tarot card readings, palm readings, astrology, Reiki, Chinese astrology, and other esoteric activities as legal occupations. The current online register of the Brazilian Ministry of Work and Employment lists these occupations under the category “Esoteric
and paranormal” (Esotéricos e paranormais). These legal professions were indeed made official on October 20th, 2002 and listed under the following categories:

**5158-05 - Esoteric**
Kirilian Analyst, Card Reader, Cristology, Phrenology, Oracle Reader, Palm Reader, Quirology, Radioestetist, Rume, Tarology, Psychic

**5168-10 – Paranormal**
Parapsychologist

**5167 – Astrology and numerology**

In addition the Brazilian Ministry of Work and Employment describes practitioners’ duties:

“Oriental pessoas e organizações, elegem momentos e locais por meio de oráculos ou de dons de paranormalidade. Podem ministrar cursos.” [They orient people and organizations, select moments and locations through the use of oracles or through paranormal gifts. Can administer coursework]. Most Romani practitioners I met fall into the “Esoteric” category as practitioners of several activities including tarot card reading, psychic reading, palm reading and crystology. The esoteric professional is described as being permitted to practice in different areas and conditions ranging from offering services to individual persons to helping associations and companies. Practitioners can work individually or work in teams, organize outdoors fests, lead group courses and individual sessions. They can work indoors, outdoors or inside vehicles. Their schedules may be irregular and activities may be conducted in person or at a distance. Thus, most Ciganas’ fortunetelling would qualify under the governmental parameters.

However, few Ciganas took the necessary coursework to secure their carteira de trabalho (work permit) that would offer them protection in case of lawsuits. For esoteric professionals to receive an official work card as such, the government requires they complete grade school and the 200-hour coursework necessary for certification. Only for the “paranormal professionals” the government requires extra-sensory perception to be proven and developed for
many years of experience. It remains unclear how one can prove work experience in this area.

Professionals of esoteric and paranormal activities are encouraged by the government to develop qualifications such as cultivating a sense of ethics, coherence, empathy, equilibrium, critical thought, discretion, impartiality, respect for the client’s freedom of choice, patience, communication, capacity for analysis and synthesis, general culture, and the ability to interact effectively with the public. The tools listed as necessary include an office, a computer, a printer, a phone, fax, email, general media access, a Kirilian machine, a recorder, oracles, business cards and business signs.

Primarily, the legal recognition of practitioners requires them to take two years’ worth of courses in these subjects at a specialized institute in Sao Paulo in order to obtain the legal work permit. Most Romani women have yet to take these courses in order to obtain legal protection for their occupation in case of lawsuits. Cabrito said that he could arrange for Suzana to receive such a diploma from the institute without taking the courses simply by paying 200 réais to the man who prints them. He added that Roma women usually do not take any courses. Most just paid for counterfeit diplomas to obtain legal status: “They don’t need to study, they already know how to read people, and they know what to say. We are just making sure they have the legal documents in case they become involved in a lawsuit.” It was not too late for Suzana. Cabrito got her a diploma instantly. Suzana had been detained in prison for a week by then and because she successfully convinced the prison officials that she was pregnant she was given her own cell. It was important for her to avoid contamination with the gagia since they were viewed as maxrimé (impure). Cabrito said the men in Suzana’s family were calling in favors with lawyers and justices of courts to make sure the trial would turn out in her favor. Two weeks later she was released. Here we see that Romani men do not read fortunes nor incur the risks involved, yet
they act as managers and protectors in this trade often relying on the Brazilian jeitinho (networking tactics) when legal troubles occur.

The few Ciganos who pursued higher education preferred law school, as was the case with Mirian Stanescon, Brazil’s first female lawyer of Roma heritage. Cabrito’s half-gagio nephew Seronia was also studying law when I met him in Sao Paulo. His goal was to become a judge. Seronia wanted to serve the Roma so that he would be accepted as Rom although his father was gagio. He explained, “We need to find out all the ways in which we can do things legally, the ways that are most profitable to our people and our way of living.” Anthropology professor Marco Antonio da Silva Mello confirmed that other Ciganos in Rio had become policemen and lawyers for similar reason: to gain access to official channels to both protect and benefit the Roma community.

Ciganos espírituais (spiritual Gypsies)

Numerous gage, mostly women, also read fortunes and practiced magic for a living while claiming to be Ciganos espírituais (spiritual Gypsies), evidence that Ciganas’ fortunetelling was lucrative in Brazil. These esoteric practitioners claimed they had been Ciganos in a past life and they could now incorporate Cigano spirits to guide their tarot card readings, empowering them to serve as videntes (psychics). The most successful such fortuneteller in Rio de Janeiro, Paloma, was only thirty and ran a popular center for esoteric practices and store of related artifacts. She called herself a Cigana espíritual and said she read fortunes by incorporating Gypsy spirits. Like most Romani women Paloma also read her own tarot cards from time to time, yet she primarily used her practice for profit. In her center, which she called templo (temple), ten employees also held private consultations and group courses on subjects such as belly dancing and the Cigano
tarot and culture. I attended Paloma’s courses several times along with Julia, my flat mate at the
time, who had been attending as an amateur belly dancer, fortuneteller and magic practitioner.

Paloma welcomed my presence, but not my interest in her personal life. Her course on
Gypsy culture aimed to gain her clients’ interest and trust, reinforcing the impression that she had
access to Ciganos’ mystique and cosmologies. Seated in front of twenty female students, she also
mentioned she got additional knowledge from books written on the subject before going into
detail to explain each tarot card as archetypal as well as reflecting Romanies lifestyle.

For most Ciganas I met, the Horseman meant “good news often from afar,” but Paloma
took fifteen minutes to infuse it with a slew of possible meanings: seduction, determination,
traveling, movement, action related to sex and to material goods, or “God’s messenger who
indicates one must take action in order to fulfill one’s destiny.” She said the tarot card reflects
the figure of the Cigano as an empowered being, and suggests one should strive to become a
victorious person like a Cigano. The card, she said, counsels initiative, without self-doubt, to
achieve emotional self-actualization:

Do not look to the past. Be full of self-confidence. Ciganos are assured that the power of
God is in every one of them. This is what it means to have Gypsy soul. It’s to have self-
confidence. This is why the little Gypsy grows up like this. Don’t judge yourself too
much. Accept being wrong and the constant flux so that the universe favors your
conquests. This is the Gypsy magic. Make do! The Gypsy culture can exist in all human
beings. Having a Gypsy behavior means questioning, fighting, not lowering your head.
The personality is strong, firm, even stubborn, of difficult temperament. You can have a
Cigano inside yourself. I was always Cigana.

Paloma spoke confidently and radiated health and beauty, self-satisfaction, a sense of control
over her life, and an easy, bright smile, although not without some mischief in her eyes. Before
she became Paloma-the-medium, she went by her Brazilian name and had worked for a life-
insurance company selling contracts. Like a well-versed saleswoman she seduced her audience.
She played with her long golden-brown hair and large circular gold earrings. She made promises.
She preached that everyone could become *Gypsified* if they nurtured the trait of self-confidence. She was dressed in a multicolored ball gown with gold trimmings and had numerous gold accessories. If Calins could have seen her then, they would have said she dressed well for the part. She made strong competition indeed to other *Ciganas*, and they were right to think so.

Interestingly Cabrito had told me something very similar in Sao Paulo: that *Ciganos* never accept facts or obstacles to their agenda at face value, that they use wit and common sense to question circumstances and find ways of reaching their objectives in every situation, never making a compromise, never doubting, and never giving up. He also advised that if I wanted to be more like them, I should learn to trust my intuition and pursue what I truly desire instead of what others expect of me. My Reiki healer gave me the same advise without the implied message that this meant being *Gypsified*. In general, it made good advice to tell people that in order to be happy they must go for whatever might make them happy, without compromise.

Paloma also drew a parallel between *Ciganos* and other spirits familiar in Afro-Brazilian religious pantheons by further saying the Horseman mirrors the *Exú*. In *Umbanda*, *Exus* are commonly referred to as “spirits of the left,” they are more human-like in their qualities and deal with human and material matters, as opposed to “spirits of the right,” who deal with spiritual matters. Religious studies expert Diana Brown of Bard College states, “*Exus* seem to assert the power and autonomy of the individual to have and pursue his/her own self-interests, as against the interests and moral codes established by the state, civil society, and the family”*(1994)*. In *Umbanda* they are not as evil as the *Exus* from *Quimbanda*, a related Afro-Brazilian religion where these spirits are characterized as having been criminals, hustlers and vagrants in their former incarnations. According to experts *Umbanda* represents the more Europeanized traits of this religion due to its Catholic and Kardecist Spiritist influences, while *Quimbanda* focuses on
black magic and declares itself a separate religion free of such influences. In Paloma’s temple
Exus of Ciganos (Gypsy spirits) were often invoked in rituals to arrange love encounters, to bring
justice, prosperity and so forth. Paloma described them as a source of optimism since they can
help maintain the equilibrium between material and spiritual goods, remove doubts, offer
answers, aid actions and target one’s objectives, opening the roads for the dead to reach God, and
the living to go after their desires. Like the Horseman tarot card represented the Cigano spirit or
Exu which stood for adaptation, non-conformity, fighting against life’s obstacles instead of
resigning oneself to limiting circumstances, and the accomplishment of desires in the sense of
obtaining material goods, riches, sex, and moving and an improved life. Paloma’s students
accepted the notion that Ciganos are human beings empowered through their positive attitudes
and their focus on measurable objectives. She explained:

This is the magic. They work the magic twenty-five hours out of twenty-four to be sure
they succeed. You have to be prepared in order to succeed. A gagio doesn’t have the
ability to understand that. You can reach all your objectives if you know how to be ready.
The secret is to be firm. The Cigano always prepares himself to win through the
emotional level: positive attitude through the emotions. Go for what you want in life! If
the person doesn’t want to improve, the magic will not work. It needs your emotional
input.

Deceased Ciganos were easily imagined as transcended to a level of higher energetic potency
like other Exus, or like people canonized for good deeds in the Catholic collective imaginary.
Paloma said that Santa Sara Kali was an powerful Cigana, both a spirit and saint.

To drive the point further with a counter example, Paloma said she once had a student
who was so negative she refused to trust her intuition and said she still saw nothing in the tarot
cards even after a four-month apprenticeship. Magic, she added, must be performed with full
confidence and according to prescribed rules. Exus (spirits) of Ciganos are commonly offered
cigars, cachaca or whiskey, pepper, flour or palm oil in a metal or clay vase set at “male”
crossroads on red and black colored cloth at midnight on weeknights. However, she claimed she could make powerful spells at her temple because it was a sacred space. *Cigana* spirits like *Pomba Giras* (female spirits) were usually invoked with champagne or anisette, perfume, honey, palm oil, candy and flowers such as red roses also at midnight on weeknights, at “female” crossroads, or alternately at her temple. This left clients with one option only: to purchase her services, since the streets of Rio at midnight were rather dangerous. Also Paloma said her pessimistic student had let her offerings of flowers rot on her altar at home, even though she was supposed to replace them after seven days. This invited misfortune. At the temple, such negligence could be prevented, she reassured.

Paloma’s authority on the subject impressed her students and they diligently took notes as she said, “*Ciganas* brought to Europe from India *quirologia* (palm reading) and *quiromancia* (tarot card reading) since they were their traditional occupations.” The first Spanish deck had only thirty-two cards, she said, and had not yet become the Tarot as presently known. One elderly lady spoke up at this point to mention that when she visited India, a woman told her about her past lives and accurately foretold her health problems, with which she was diagnosed a decade later. Another lady asked about the meaning of destiny for *Ciganos*. Paloma said, “destiny can be opened through offerings to the spirits in an altar so they can favor the person from the astral plane onto the physical one.”

As she talked she looked away, frequently, in an indistinct direction above our gazes, touched her hair and her nose frequently and hid her palms, gestures that I was tempted to interpret as involuntary signs of lying. The touching of the nose is a hand gesture associated with deception due to the tickling sensation produced by the dilated nerve endings in the nose while lying, yet in “What Everybody is Saying: An Ex-FBI Agent’s Guide to Speed-Reading People,”
it is suggested that, “those behaviors most often mistaken for dishonesty are primarily manifestations of stress, not deception (Ekman, 1991, 187-188). That’s why I live by the motto taught to me by those who know that there is no single behavior that is indicative of deception – not one (Ekman, 1991, 162-189)” (Navarro and Karlins 2008: 208). Therefore although I took notes about people’s gestures, I remained hesitant to “diagnose” their cause, and avoided asking Paloma questions in front of her students in a confrontational way.

Paloma kept elaborating on other Cigano ideal types such as the power of women, the significance of the dead, cemeteries, children, birth, and the need to request a fee for one’s services as a psychic medium: “The medium cannot work for free because it is dangerous. She can incur a psychosomatic attack in the person who wants the spell. For free, the client will not value it and will not respect the rules.” Ciganas always insisted on charging clients a fee for divination. Insisting on a monetary exchange before the session began, both Ciganas and Paloma suggested, could prevent clients’ failed involvement and possible psychosomatic effects. Magic required belief. Also Ciganas said that any practitioner who worked for free devalued the work by driving prices down. This is why Ciganas divided territories among each other and set some commonalities between their services, like the scripted speech, standards needed to sustain a monopoly over prices. After class Paloma allowed me a few minutes of conversation away from her students/clients. I asked to what Romani vitsas her parents belonged and whether she spoke a particular dialect of Romanes. She hesitated briefly, scanned me with her gaze, then she confidently confessed she was not Cigana by blood and that her family had nothing in common with the ethnicity, yet she had found great inspiration by identifying with Ciganas, particularly after she had lost her job a few years back. She said she did not grow up near Cigano
communities, but had seen them often enough to observe how they used their intelligence to sustain themselves and their families:

I live like they do: I know how to sell. I am a born saleswoman and I am optimistic, I am certain of getting beyond circumstances. If you are pessimistic, you will materialize your doubts. You can’t let anxiety take over your life. Control yourself! I did. I pulled myself out of misery, created a business, and now I have a husband who works here with me everyday and a beautiful girl. Now I get to support my parents, they are getting older. Everything I do is for my family. I am Cigana.

Her identification with Ciganas was based on being a great saleswoman, family provider and focused on positive thinking. Paloma also identified with Ciganas’ ability to financially support their families. She was proud that she could work and produce enough income to support herself, her young daughter and her aging parents. “Family is the most important thing for Ciganos and for me as well. That’s the most beautiful thing, to be able to support them. I have a daughter. I am ready to give my gold and cash for her wellbeing. I’ve always been Cigana.” In her last statement Paloma described herself as always having embodied the Gypsy archetype as she imagined it, generalizing it as specific personality traits and socialization patterns, rather than an ethnicity or bloodline.

Among the evangelical Calins and Roma fortunetelling was now turning obsolete, resulting an a greater sense of acculturation into mainstream Brazil, to the sense of crisis of Cigana practitioners who also lamented a decrease in demand for such services. Meanwhile, Brazilians who called themselves Ciganos espírituais, like Paloma, sincerely admired (from afar) Ciganos “of Romani blood” though they remained largely ignorant of their kinship organization, gender inequalities, dialects, purity laws and historical paths. There was some tension in the way these impostors enjoyed fortunetelling and romanticized it, while Romanies enjoyed disparaging their traditional occupation by saying they were “stealing” in a sense even though they provided a ritual that worked for their clients, without the necessity for the practitioners to believe in it.
The feeling of admiration from impostors was far from mutual. Romanies discerned the primarily materialistic motives of *Ciganos espirituais* for calling themselves as such, and considered them competition in the trade. It was absurd and offensive to Romanies that *Ciganos espirituais* claimed magic powers by mythologizing themselves as incorporating *Ciganos*’ dead ancestors. This was to them nothing but false propaganda. For *Ciganos*, their cosmology revolves around their reverence towards the *mule* (dead ancestors). This reverence, according to my interlocutors, entailed upholding a pact of silence about them and about Romani traditions. Therefore, these “spiritual” impersonators were all the more offensive for talking about the *mule*. Still, both kinds of practitioners agreed that magic works if done “properly,” under the conditions of having clients believe in it and invest in it monetarily, with focused attention and energy, tending as told to the offerings of flowers, candles and such made to spirits, to supplicate their help. There was a sense of competition between them and *Ciganas* were unnerved that with the *gage* fortunetellers one could no longer control one’s territory and public image of *Ciganidade*.

Nonetheless, I was pleasantly surprised that Brazilians desired to associate themselves with *Gypsiness*. This was the complete opposite of what I had witnessed in Europe, where Romanies are continuously hated and socially marginalized, such that they represent Europe’s largest and most impoverished ethnic minority numbering over a million individuals, the majority of whom are under eighteen and highly vulnerable to human trafficking. In Brazil, I found both Calon and Roma women operating within similar ethnic-specific tropes such as fortunetelling, while overlapping with larger Brazilian tropes such as religious syncretism such that as Brazilians, *Ciganos* fared much better than they would have in Europe, a point on which all my interlocutors agreed. Fortunetelling sensitizes the women to others’ inner states, and represents a condensation of the ways in which Romanies overall approach others.
CHAPTER 6. GYPSY POLITICS AND VARIOUS SCALES OF INTERVENTION

Forums of discourse on Romani minority rights politics in Brazil
International and virtual contexts of discourse

Forums of discourse on Romani minority rights politics in Brazil

My interlocutors in Brazil felt they were all part of the greater Romani diaspora, yet most Roma did not recognize Calon as authentic Ciganos. Similar to the situation in Romania, the wealthier Roma did not wish to be associated with their impoverished brethren. Ianca suggested this was a trend in Brazil where the rich were prejudiced against the poor. She said not only were the wealthy Roma prejudiced against Calon, but also against Roma of a lower socio-economic level. She said back in the days when everyone traveled together there was a greater sense of solidarity and sharing, and that those who now afford lavish feasts seldom invite poor Roma. “If you go ask them for a cup of rice, they look at you funny,” said Ianca. “It didn’t use to be that way. Before, if you had a cup of rice, you shared it with everybody in your family. Now people live in houses and they don't want to share anymore.” I saw the impact in a wider perspective.

The idea of political unity among Ciganos remains an alien concept to most of my interlocutors. They did not necessarily feel that unity was desirable, nor possible, in these times of growing individualism and wealth accumulation. The wealthy complained that in the past, being successful never amounted to financial stability because one had to support an extended family and divvy up all profits. To be “one with the rest” meant for my interlocutors openly sharing all resources, yet this was a dying tradition among the Roma, and largely inexistent between Roma and Calon in Brazil. Cabrito said he did his best to represent Roma interests at the local and national level even though it involved associating with the Calon at least at the level of discourse on minority rights. He explained that, “if we claim that Calon are Ciganos like us, even
though they are not considered as such by the Roma, we get to appear before the government as a much larger minority. The Roma in Brazil do not wish to come out of their anonymity.” Thus, at the level of political discourse it was a tactical move to include Calon in the counting of the national population of Romanies especially since the Roma insisted on hiding their ethnicity. Cabrito also suggested that since the minority political movement in Brazil was conducted mainly by Roma representatives, they did their best to develop projects that would benefit their communities and not the Calon, who in fact were more impoverished, demonstrating need for national funding. Their lower socio-economic status was visible to all since they continued living in tents and were often deprived of access to health care:

Life is very hard for nomads; the hygiene conditions in which they live often are highly inadequate; there are periods of heavy rain to contend with, they also have many difficulties in finding new places to set up a camp, their children are not vaccinated and may be malnourished, they are exposed to all kinds of diseases, there are no municipal, state, or federal laws in their favor, and, above all, they face strong prejudice from the surrounding society – maybe much more than other already settled Rom. Like other Rom, nomadic Kalons travel mostly for reasons of economic survival. [...] They continue to frequently be arrested for going around the city late at night, for fortune-telling or for being illegally camped. Their immediate needs are for access to identity documents, schooling, birth certificates, the right to vote, and drivers’ licenses (trans. mine, Bernal 2003: 16).

In Brazil the nomadic Calon are often subjected to discrimination or painted negatively as the image of “vagrancy, thievery, scams in connection with women’s fortune-telling, fraud, witchcraft, troubles and so on” (19). Thus, when bringing up the discrimination suffered by Ciganos in Brazil, it is important to point out the continued marginalization of nomadic Calon.

Bernal estimates that the Romani population in Latin America is around one million and a half, mostly concentrated in Brazil, where a population of 800,000 to a million identify themselves as Ciganos. Cairus also states that prejudice prevents Romani people from identifying themselves as such in the population census (2010: 163). She suggests that despite
the fact that ex-president Henrique Cardoso included both nomadic and sedentary Romanies in
the Human Rights Program of 2002, authorities continued to arrest nomadic Calon for reading
fortunes, accusing them of illegal activities (2012). Therefore, in order to claim they are
suffering discrimination as a minority in Brazil, the Roma political representatives parade the
image of the Calon as Ciganos, while imagining and maintaining in practice their ethnic
separation from Calon.

65. 290 Municipalities register 290 Cigano campsites in Brazil.⁹

This feigned recognition of Calon as *Ciganos* is performed by Roma spokesmen solely in front of a bureaucratic audience for the purpose of representing *Ciganos* as a significant and needy ethnic minority in Brazil. Cabrito said, “the Roma representatives receive funding which is used primarily for developing Roma organizations and projects,” while the Calon continue living neglected and often unaware of their rights. At Mirian Stanescon’s beckoning, the government has approved printing and circulating freely a *cartilha* (primer) to raise awareness among *Ciganos* about their cultural recognition along with their citizenship rights and responsibilities: “Povo Cigano: O Direito em Suas Mãos” [*Cigano People: the Law in Your Hands*] (Stanescon 2007). In this primer, as well as in other government-oriented forums of discourse, Calon are included in the minority recognition agenda. To support the victim narrative, the primer also recognizes the suffering of Roma during the *Porraímos* (Holocaust):

Porraímos, which means literally “destruction” is a term coined by the Romani people recent efforts to describe the Nazi regime’s attempts to exterminate this ethnic group in Europe along with the Jews. The phenomenon was little studied in relation to the *Cigano* Holocaust. Perhaps this is due to the fact that *Cigana* communities in Eastern European countries were less structured and organized than others such as the Jewish community. It is believed that the number of Cigano victims of the Nazi Holocaust is between 200,000 and 800,000 people (15).

Mirian Stanescon, who was responsible for the primer, shared with me her difficulties in accessing the international websites and official European Union documents. The term *Porraímos* is lost on *Ciganos* in Brazil. It literally means the “Devouring” as some survivors called the Holocaust in their dialects, interpreting the genocide as an act of cannibalism on a large scale – a European case of *antropofагia* with an agenda of extermination, as opposed to the Brazilian penchant for mixing seemingly opposing cultural elements, known as “syncretism” (etymologically a Greek word indicating the union of Cretans against a common foe). Mirian said: “Maybe you can translate these websites for me, they are all in English, it’s hard for me to
understand,” while we were having afternoon tea in her luxurious living room, and her maid—an elderly woman who had been like a family member, helping her raise four children—prepared sandwiches. However her own foe, Frans Moonen, a Brazilian scholar and government consultant on the Romanies, said that the Nazis exterminated around 500,000 Ciganos with a minimum estimate of 250,000 although exact numbers are not available. Moonen laments that:

[...] the only victims of Nazi terror that are usually remembered so far are only the Jews and almost never Ciganos. While the literature on the Jewish Holocaust is immense, including museums and memorials especially built to remember this sad genocide, the Gypsy Holocaust has always been considered a fact of less importance” (2013: 50-51).

Moonen also mentions that in 1899 there was already a “Gypsy Information Service” set up in Munich, leading to the registration of 3,350 Romanies according to Zigeunerbuch (The Gypsy Book) a 1905 report published by Alfred Dillmann to help the police rid Germany of “the Gypsy curse.” In 1925 the state of Bavaria passed an anti-nomadism law enforcing a sedentary lifestyle, and condemning those without regular employment to two years of forced labor. In 1929 this law became nationalized in Germany (51). The next decade saw a dynamic rise of the “Central Service of Combating the Gypsy Curse,” a national organization which went extinct in 1947, but was reactivated in 1953 under similar name for an additional two and a half decades. During the Holocaust many were deported and exterminated, for example:

Of the 23,000 Ciganos imprisoned in the Auschwitz extermination camp, about 20,000 died and 3,000 were transferred to other camps. The last Ciganos of Auschwitz, exactly 2,897 of them according to the methodical German inventory, were all sent to the gas chambers on the night of 2nd of August 1944” (Moonen 2013: 53).

The information Moonen provides, as an academic consultant on Ciganos to the Brazilian government, solidifies the Roma narratives of victimization. Several other gage activists also spoke regularly on behalf of Ciganos. For example Márcia Guelpa, who goes by the exotic name Yáskara, was not born into a Romani family, yet befriended many in her neighborhood while
growing up. She considers herself a *Cigana espiritual* in the sense of sympathizer, rather than fortuneteller claiming *Ciganidade* through spirit possessions. Yáskara is knowledgeable about their cultural values and historical persecutions. Since no other women besides Mirian wish to get involved in public recognition, since *Rromnia* protect their ethnic secrecy and their trade, Guelpa was been invited to join the pioneering male Roma activists.

In 2007, with government support, Yáskara launched a project called “Mulher Cigana: entre o sonho e o realidade” (Gypsy Woman: between the dream and the reality). The project is developed with the activities of Yáskara’s non-profit organization CERCI – “Centro de Estudos e Resgate da Cultura Cigana” (Gypsy Culture Research and Rescue Center) and aims to help nomadic and semi-nomadic Calon located in Sao Paulo state. Yáskara insists that many still lack documentation, for lack of a permanent residence, preventing their access to public education and SUS – “Sistema Unico de Saúde” (Unique Health Care). Yáskara uses the CERCI Facebook page, to raise awareness on a daily basis, posting information about both national and international Romanies of all kinds of vitsas, idealistically seeking to promote a sense of solidarity and common history among *Ciganos* with compelling stories. For example, she recently stated on the status:

In may 1944 the Nazis started planning the “Final Solution” for *Ciganos* locked in Auschwitz. The initial date for liquidating the “Cigano camp” was planned for 16th of May. The camp prisoners were forced to stay put surrounded by 60 SS men. When the SS men tried to force prisoners outside their clan there was a rebellion among Cigano men, women and children armed with wood, chains and stones. Thus the SS folk had to pull back. Yet the Cigano prisoners’ resistance only got them a few extra months to live. The Nazis in reality were scared that an insurrection could spread to other parts of the camp and so planned a “Final Solution” on the 2nd of August. Under the orders of SS lider Heinrich Himmler, the prohibition to leave the clan was imposed on the night of 2nd of August in the “gypsy camp.” Despite the Ciganos’ resistance, 2,897 men, women and children were carried in trucks, taken to a gas chamber and exterminated. Their bodies were burned to pieces next to a crematorium. After liberation from the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1945 only 4 Ciganos were still alive.
Most likely quoting a USData report (2015 web), Yaskára paid homage to the tragic event which few *Ciganos* know much, consistent with their disinterest in their own history – previously mentioned. Most wish to erase negative memories, to look forward, yet the rights recognition process has been multiplying modalities of remembrance.

In Europe this memory circulates more frequently among Romanies, yet also seldom registers at the level of mainstream societies, much less as a “collective European memory” although Aline Sierp argues that such a thing is mythical (as in lacking): “It remains to be seen whether, as the EU gathers momentum, such a framework enabling the limits of purely national memory to be extended through the universalization of an ethical engagement with the past will effectively start to emerge” (2014: 33). Public knowledge of the Romani Holocaust is still absent despite official recognition both by the European Parliament and the Brazilian government.

Moonen elaborates extensively on anti-Romani legal practices, which existed throughout Europe before and during the Holocaust. Germany was not an isolated case. For example, he mentions that, “In France there were concentration camps only for Ciganos, administrated by the French authorities themselves,” adding that about 30,000 *Ciganos* were kept in these camps either for forced labor or as an initial gathering point before deportation to extermination camps in Germany or other countries (55). The fervor and cruelty of the Romanian policemen carrying out the *Gypsy* genocide during the WWII Nazi occupation shocked even the German troops.

Throughout Europe, Romanies were identified, registered, condemned to sterilization or deportation, imprisoned in concentration camps, and exterminated, yet mainstream societies know little about their persecutions. On the other hand, Moonen states, everyone knows about the Jewish Holocaust and thousands of Jews received a new homeland, Israel, while others were remunerated for their losses, yet Romanies’ persecutions are rarely taken into account:
On the contrary, many doctors and scientists who were proven to be anti-Gypsy criminals (but not anti-Semite!) were denazified, a term invented for individuals who were declared innocent of having committed crimes, racial or otherwise, although almost all of them had been part of the Nazi Party or had occupied high government posts. Many were even promoted: Robert Ritter and Eva Justin, for example” (55).

After WWII, Romanies remained undesirables in Germany and throughout Europe, and the public has little or no knowledge of their genocide.

This is also the case in Brazil, even more so because the mainstream public prefers to imagine itself as a “people without memory,” unencumbered by long histories like Europeans, and focused primarily on enjoying the present. According to Ferreira, oral histories enliven literate histories:

The valorization of oral sources of knowledge since the end of the 60s lead to the debate on the significance of history in anthropological analysis. Today myth and history are considered complimentary genres in a unique narrative style. This means that every people relies on different paradigms of thought and selects happenings in different ways, to construct its own memory of history (Ferreira 2001: 100).

Moonen and other Roma representatives rely on European documentation of persecutions in order to substitute for the local absence of public memory of the Romani genocide. Meanwhile, in Brazil I was shocked to see a renewed interest in the history of WWII and the Nazi rise to power. Hitler’s photos and swastika symbols were at almost every corner store where magazines and newspapers were sold. Numerous intricate details of the Nazi policies were constantly being brought to the public’s attention under the guise of historical documentation. It made me wonder how much of their eugenic paradigm continued to be inculcated into the Brazilian society by these publications, clearly controlled by whites of European ancestry. It was evident to my interlocutors that other Europeans had also fled to Brazil, including those of Nazi affinities who sought to escape the consequences of their involvement in WWII and the Holocaust.
The German migration to the *neue Kolonien* (New Colonies) or was active since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century according to Ellen Fensterseifer Woortmann: “Those migrants started coming to Brazil before the great migratory flux towards the USA, which attracted around 7 million Germans between 1830 and 1950. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Brazil, although less attractive than the US, was also *Wunderland*, and therefore *Wanderland*” (2002: 205). The play on the words *wunder* (miracle) and *wander* (hiking) captures the romanticized idealization of New World destinations. Yet Woortmann specifies that migration in their case was mostly due to war and famine as well as religious persecutions, and thus less a romantic *Wanderlust* and more of a *Wandermust* (206). Most migrated out of necessity.

The Brazilian government at the time was providing incentives to such immigrants since it needed to increase its workforce to substitute for the manumitted black slaves. It rewarded migration of white European couples with citizenship, 77-hectare land properties, six years free of taxation, as well as help for starting agricultural enterprises, such as tools, seeds and animals during the first eighteen months (206). Most German migrants were literate and already possessed some financial resources. In fact some migrants belonged to the German elite class. They subsequently provided additional incentives for their relatives to come to the Brazil. Woortmann gives an example of 1850’s correspondence in which a wealthy Prussian man living in the New World asks his brother’s second-born son to come marry his daughter since in Germany the second son does not inherit the house like the firstborn and typically remains a bachelor. Notably, the man stated that no one in Brazil is dignified enough: “We always try to prevent our children from becoming regular people. In Brazil … there are few people of good blood” (208). Interest in racial purity and lineage has been common amongst the German immigrants to Brazil and to this day there are entire regions in the south of the country where the
population maintains “whiteness” and ties to Europe through a perceived opposition to the “regular folk.” The Brazilian government itself insisted on “whitening” and only offered financial support to couples as opposed to individuals coming from Europe (211). The memory of preferential treatment of white immigrants has been erased from “collective knowledge.”

Meanwhile, the immigrants themselves often changed their names, for instance Justin became Justino or Justo; Schlitzer became Silister and Leefhaar, then Leffa or Leva. This was also common among Jewish migrants. For instance the first Jew in the colony, Gottlieb Siedmundus Mayer, eliminated his family name Mayer (211). Between 1819 and 1959, according to official records 5.3 million Europeans migrated to Brazil: 1.7 million Portuguese, 1.6 million Italians, 694,000 Spanish, 257,000 Germans and 127,000 Russians (Diègues Junior 1964: 26-28). Like Ciganos, most European migrants came to Brazil due to hardships in Europe and sought to forge new identities for themselves in order to blend in.

Like other immigrants to Brazil, most Roma insisted on maintaining their ethnic invisibility and genetic “purity,” and forgetting what happened before immigration (Moonen 2013: 214). This feeling of “better forget what happened in the past” pervades Brazilian migrants’ cosmologies and those of their descendants. The past was not discussed because the migration was often assumed to be irreversible. The trip by boat posed great danger, social ties with Europe had been lost, and life there had entailed economic instability. Eventually, when discussed, this voyage by the first-generation migrants became understood as an odyssey transforming one’s identity to one “without a past” as Woortman suggests, leading to “communities of amnesia” or “communities of secret” in which “if the private memory remembers, the public memory forgets” (233). This is what I also found among my Calon and Roma interlocutors: quiet preference for forgetting and disengaging from a European past,
willful rejection of the possibility of reconnecting with relatives in Europe, and disinterest in recording their ancestors’ experiences even for the purpose of minority rights recognition.

Literacy, or lack there of, also factors in. Whatever was forgotten in the German migrants’ oral histories was publicly recorded after it entered the realm of literacy, which “operates on a different mode” (Ong 1982: 15). Literacy exposes one to historical records even unwittingly sometimes, much more so than in the case of the illiterate. Still, for some literate Brazilians, literate records of history are a matter of chronology and actual facts, for others it is a matter of myth-making and one’s own oral histories are preferred. In Brazil where the native indigenous tribes are concerned, some territories have been restituted entirely based on tribesmen’s oral histories (Ferreira 2001: 102). However, Ciganos’ oral histories remain absent from public awareness (such as history textbooks) despite government recognition, since they often refuse to circulate their oral narratives.

For five centuries Ciganos have remained largely invisible, frequently treated as a problem for public safety: stigmatized, marginalized and discriminated. Achieving political unity for the purpose of Romani minority rights recognition has been a slow process in Brazil, and largely disconnected from international levels of discourse. According to activist Jorge Bernal the first Romani organization in the New World was launched in the 1920s in the United States where the cooperative E Tsoxa e Loli (the Red Skirt) was created to protect metalworking as a traditional Rom occupation (2003: 34). The first organization in Brazil was launched much later:

It wasn't until the 1980s however, that in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a Romani violinist of Serbian origin called Mio Vasite, together with others – Rom and non-Rom – created the first Romani Cultural association called CEC (Centro de Estudos Ciganos), which Mio Vasite presided. This was in accordance with the previously existing Romani organizations in Europe, though with more of a cultural character, and working within the Romani traditions and “kris” rather than independent of them. All these kinds of organizations were seen from the very beginning as strange to the Romani culture (Bernal 2003: 34).
In the 1980s there was an increase of social mobilization aimed at the recognition of people’s rights. In 1988 Brazil adopted a reformed constitution and named it “A Constituição Cidadã” (the Citizens Constitution) (Rizzini 2011: 66). Before these changes Brazil had experienced twenty years of brutal military dictatorship, so afterwards democracy manifested itself through increased institutionalization of people’s rights including for minorities. Only in 2002 did the National Directive for Human Rights in Brazil include the Ciganos as the result of the campaign conducted by Roma representative Claudio Iovanovitch as well as the Romani Union in Brazil and the Association for Preserving Cigana Culture in Curitiba.

The establishment of a national day for Ciganos represented public recognition for their contributions to Brazilian history and culture. May 24th became “Dia National dos Cigano” (National Gypsy Day), incorporated into the Brazilian calendar on May 25th 2006, and celebrated for the first time in 2007. Former president Lula honored Mirian Stanescon’s adamant petition and signed the document, marking an official recognition of the significance of Romanies in Brazil. Roma and Calon leaders from all over the country were present at this official government action.

In ensuing years the national government has aimed to improve the Ciganos’ visibility and allow for different modes of expressing their culture. Many of these activities were coordinated by SEPPIR – “Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial” (Center for Romani peoples and Public Policies) along with leaders from over thirty communities located all over Brazil belonging to different subgroups of the minority: Calon, Machuwaya, Rorrane, Sibiaia and Kalderasha. The government’s participation during the May 24th conferences for Romani Public Policies each year has been delegated to representatives from the Ministry of
Culture, of Health, of Education, of Social Development and Fighting Hunger, as well as by the Human Rights Secretary, and the Institute for National Historical and Artistic Heritage.

Most Brazilian Roma remain hesitant to partake of Romani rights politics. Stanescon declared herself “the only one who is proud to say she is Cigana in public. The rest of them are scared to. They’re cowards and they are uneducated, most of them are illiterate and they don’t know what it means to have rights.” Unlike Stanescon, who is often criticized by Ciganos in Brazil, anthropologist Francisco Moonen won the respect of the Roma Ciganos by talking about their long history of persecution, a respect comparable to that enjoyed by French ethnographer Patrick Williams, whose community access was facilitated by the fact that he married a Cigana Manouche. Moonen has admittedly stopped researching Ciganos after he became involved in a public diatribe against Stanescon, whom he accused of corrupting Romani traditions by inventing a self-serving version and aggrandizing herself as queen (1995). Some of my interlocutors also insisted that Mirian’s account about her family’s arrival in Brazil from Romania was “full of lies.” Most admired her mother for belonging to one of the wealthiest and charitable Roma families in Brazil, yet considered Mirian to be an illegitimate Cigana because of her non-Romani paternal descent and her doubtful virginity at marriage.

Mirian’s response was to argue that most Ciganos continue to show significant bias against Romani women as well as a moral bias against non-Romani women. She strove to debunk the notion that only males can be family-heads and political representatives, yet she did not repudiate patriarchal notions entirely since she insisted that she was a virgin when she married a gagio man in her early thirties. Romologist Diane Tong says we should question this Romani perception of all gage women as shameless, promiscuous, morally inferior, and unworthy of respect (1995: 335). Being deflowered before marriage remains for Ciganos in
Brazil equivalent to being rendered impure and dishonorable, and Tong suggests that we should consider whether the Romani violate human rights because “they treat half their population as inferiors for most of their lives” (335). Romologist Rena Gropper says that women are often complicit with patriarchal values, which they internalize: “By the time the women are sufficiently powerful to influence their groups, their own self-interests militate against any changes, for now they are wives of Big Men (baro, shato), mothers of adult sons, and therefore mothers-in-law commanding a corps of daughters-in-law, who must be kept compliant” (1975:176). Her statement remains relevant to this day.

Although there is a feminist segment to the Romani politics movement in Brazil as represented by Mirian Stanescon and Yaskara Guelpa, these women have had limited impact on Ciganos communities and the everyday lives of Ciganos (Budur 2011c). As Gropper suggests, I observed that older women are often the guardians of traditions and they carefully discipline girls to abandon school after gaining literacy, to marry as young virgins, to follow cleanliness rituals, and so forth. I also observed some flexibility in this respect as well as a great deal of pride in most Ciganas. As second-wave feminist Susan Bordo states, many women living in patriarchal communities do cherish, in fact, “the belief in the robustness of their own self-respect, self-confidence, and ‘purity’”(1993: 23). However, some Ciganas challenged patriarchal values.

Another example is that Stanescon proclaimed herself the Queen of Romanies in Brazil, although political representation is generally delegated to the most respected men in these ethnic communities. Only men can form the kriss (Romani tribunal), which makes the final decisions for punishments and retributions in case of elopement, adultery, and other infringements. In the fight for political rights and representation at a national level, women rarely speak for their ethnic communities. Mirian has been involved in a great polemic with the Romani Union of
Brazil, which is composed solely of male members. She is not considered to be Romani because she was born to a Romani mother and a gagio father, yet she declared herself queen, and took it upon herself to represent the minority at the federal level for minority rights protection. In Romania there have been several self-appointed Roma monarchs:

The Romani community has: An **Emperor of Roma from Everywhere**, as Iulian Rădulescu proclaimed himself. In 1997, Iulian Rădulescu announced the creation of *Cem Romengo* – the first Roma state in Târgu Jiu, in southwest Romania. According to Rădulescu, “this state has a symbolic value and does not affect the sovereignty and unity of Romania. It does not have armed forces and does not have borders.” […] A **King of Roma**. In 1992, Ioan Ciabă proclaimed himself King of Rroms at Horezu “in front of more than 10,000 Rroms” (according to his son’s declaration. His son, Florin Cioabă, succeeded him as king. An **International King of Roma**. On August 31, 2003, according to a decree issued by Emperor Iulian, Ilie Stănescu was proclaimed king. The ceremony took place in Curtea de Argeş Cathedral, the Orthodox Church where Romania’s Hohenzollern monarchs were crowned and are buried. Ilie Stănescu died in December, 2007 (SEED 2015: 10).

Although none of the above three is universally considered king or emperor, they are the Roma most covered by the media especial when it comes to scandals. In 2003 there was a scandal about Roma King Florin Cioabă’s 12-year-old daughter Ana Maria’s marriage to a 15-year-old boy. The girl stormed out of the church crying, and Baroness Emma Nicholson, the European Parliament reporter for Romania, said that such marriage was illegal and the girl should be given to foster care (10-11). Consequently the local authorities separated the young couple until the legal marriage age, although the girl was not sent into foster care. Doru-Viorel Ursu, former Interior Minister of Romania, was the bride’s godfather, which further fueled this scandal in the EU media worlds.

Here I use the term “media worlds” to reflect such things such as cultural activism and minority claims, cultural politics of nation-states, transnational circuits, the social sites of production, and the social life of technology as problematized in “Media Worlds:” “Ethnography of media expands ‘what counts’ in a variety of ways” (Abu-Lughod et al. 2002: 2). The media
representation of Romanies is often done in a distinctly derogatory, criminalizing way, and having monarchs as a point of reference has been no exception as it clashes with democratic values in the greater European context.

Yet Mirian has been positively upheld as such in local media coverage such as the Jô Suares TV program on which she appeared live in the context of Romani leader and lawyer: “the first college educated Cigana woman” in Brazil (Programa do Jô 2007). Jô asks Mirian in the beginning of the interview how one completes a diploma while travelling to which she replies that 90% of Ciganos do not travel: “Until I was ten we were nomadic. When I was eleven my grandparents built a house, their first house, in Baixada Fulminense in Nova Iguaçu, where I’m setting up an organization” (minute 4:26).

Her eldest daughter Lhuba had also become a lawyer by the age of twenty-five, and in fact all four of her children were completing their higher education, a rare accomplishment among Ciganos. Mirian says, “unfortunately among my people 90% are illiterate or it’s been even more than that, nowadays maybe only 80% are illiterate” (minute 4:55). She also laments that, “who is Cigano hides their being Cigano for fear of prejudice, and whoever is not is taking on a Ciganidade that is not theirs” (minute 6:26). Although the rest of the program deals with fortunetelling, palm reading and tea preparation rituals to satisfy the gage curiosity about the exotic side of this minority, Mirian’s closing comments mention the primer for Ciganos, created to raise awareness about political rights and responsibilities of such individuals as citizens of Brazil, like other citizens.

For over a decade, the Romani Union of Brazil has denied Mirian’s claim to speak for the community. Her appearance as leader of Ciganos on Jô’s national TV show led to even greater friction. Mio Vasite, the Union’s former president complained:
She was not elected nor appointed by anyone, she just proclaimed herself queen, and she’s not even Romani. Even if she were, who has ever heard of Romani men to accept a woman speaking for them, representing them? I will not allow for women’s leadership over our culture, for her putting a skirt over our heads... We will not do this. Romani men will never even accept the leadership of a single man: there is no king and no emperor among us. We are equal. Even as the president of the Romani Union, I was nominated to speak for the community, not to lead.

Through her own reinterpretations of Romani personhood Mirian is controversial according to the traditional patriarchal ideology on several accounts: as a certified lawyer, she is more highly educated than most Romani men; she claims ethnic identity despite having a gagio father; she also married a gagio when she was thirty-two years old and her virginity at marriage was doubtful; and last but not least she has been a woman with an active political role and a position of authority in cultural rights representation at the national level since she declared herself queen.

Both Mio and Mirian reside in Rio de Janeiro and have often indulged in public diatribes which stand as testimony to their relentless conflict. Mirian has nonetheless become a public figure frequently interviewed in magazines and on national TV shows. She even claims to have inspired the popular soap opera Explode Coração (Explode Heart, 1995-1996). Mio and his immediate family were the musicians who provided the score for this national novela das oito (eight PM soap opera) about Romani life.

People all over Brazil ritualistically watch soap operas and this is the most popular time slot. This was the 51st novela das oito, meaning many earlier soap operas instilled this tradition in Brazilian audiences. It was also successful in other countries: Bolivia, Costa Rica, Salvador, Equador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Venezuela and Romania. In Portugal the music score entitled Coração Cigano (Gypsy Heart) to which Mio’s group Encanto Cigano (Gypsy Charm) contributed many pieces like Betchári and Chei Chovorriho won the Platinum Disc award. Mio proudly showed Eugene and me this award when
we visited him in Rio. Mio said the *novela’s* story was not inspired by Mirian, but rather by his
cousin who had been interviewed by the scriptwriter Glória Perez.

The show enjoyed great popularity, yet it ended abruptly when Mirian sued Perez for
misusing her biographical information. She said her image was compromised when the heroine
Dara is revealed to have lost her virginity before marriage. Mirian fought and won her case,
aiming to defend her culturally specific honor: her claim to have been a virgin until marriage.
However, when the show ended Mio lost his most important paying gig as a musician, and
blamed Mirian for his subsequent economic instability. Meanwhile she continued to live a
lucrative life as a lawyer and a fortune-teller, reading cards for clients in her luxurious apartment
located between the beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana, a neighborhood called Arpoador. Mio,
divorced of his successful *Cigana* wife, moved into his mother’s house and lived on the second
floor. He eventually remarried, this time with a *gagi* who did her best to become acculturated and
was even featured on a second government primer about *Gypsy* culture in Brazil. Mirian quipped
that he had married a “prostitute.” I found them all equally hospitable, but took great effort to
hide from them that I was frequenting both of these feuding households.

Mirian had also published her own tarot cards replete with imagery inspired by
archetypes from Romani culture. The accompanying booklet explaining the meaning of these
social forms such as *pakiv* (respect), and has been criticized for thus revealing the secrets of
Romani life. A few non-Romanies had already published so-called *Cigano* tarot cards. Mirian
claimed her version was an authentic one. Thus, she established her authenticity in the eyes of
several *gage* clients since few other Romanies besides Mio came out of their ethnic anonymity to
contest her claims.
Despite the political fantasy of declaring herself rainha (queen in Portuguese), which suggests yet another hierarchy, Mirian seeks to destabilize the patriarchal gender imbalance. She is the first female Romani lawyer and political figure in Brazilian history, and as such she could be a positive role model for the next generation of Romani girls. However, young Ciganas are rarely if ever taught to look up to her, or to pursue higher education, a career, freedom of choice in marriage, and a political voice. Mirian remains criticized by most of Ciganos in Brazil. Her “court gatherings” on the 24\textsuperscript{rd} of each month are populated mostly by her immediate family, her two daughters and her gagia fortunetelling clients, who are eager to be blessed by none other than Mirian herself. Adorned in a queenly attire, she leads discussions on a microphone to boost her already booming voice, as she recites long odes about her ethnicity, her ancestors and Saint Sara Kali, whom few Romanies in Brazil celebrate. Ianca’s community did not care for Mirian’s claims to leadership nor for Saint Sara, although several Ciganas did admire her courage to complete higher education and to have married a gagio.

I found Mirian courteous, hospitable and open to share with me some of her experiences and to show me the wealth of evidence towards her contributions to the Romani rights movement in Brazil. Her living room had two large white couches, a dark wood table for twelve, and large glass cases covering an entire wall displaying photos from her marriage, her extended family all together, her daughters’ graduation photos, a photo of herself with President Lula, a large Russian samovar, her law school diploma and various other awards she won for working for Roma rights. Several large framed photos of her Roma ancestors lean against the wall, soon to be displayed in Mirian’s future Roma Cultural Center in Nova Iguaçu, she said. On the other wall there was a large Indian tapestry. The sofas were white with golden and silvery details, and large Persian rugs cover the floor. A glass chandelier hung royally over the spacious day room filled
with sunlight and adorned with vapory light draperies. Everything seemed nice and tidy except for a few too many folders in a pile on an armchair. Mirian apologized for this calling it “a mess.” She had just gotten out of the shower and donned a blue sundress.

I found her slightly less threatening in her home environment than out in the Arpoador Park dressed in full regalia during Santa Sara feasts. In a gesture of respect and hospitality she asked her maid, a thin, demure elderly black woman to bring us milk, fresh coffee and water from the kitchen. I did not dare mention that I was not a coffee drinker. We had agreed on a 30-minute taped interview, so we sat down on two different couches at a right angle from each other. I improvised questions and she answered in a deep baritone, smoker’s voice. I have included the entire interview to give a flavor of how dialogues went with difficult interlocutors, and how I adopted a deferential attitude:

Diana: What do you think about teaching Romanes in public schools with Romanes textbooks?
Mirian: It is only useful if you only teach it to Roma kids. Perhaps we can have some study centers for Roma people only where the elderly can speak it to children so they may learn. It would have to be Roma children only. Our language is our nation (pátria in Portuguese).

D: How does the kris work vis-à-vis the formal justice system in Brazil?
M: The kris has to check that the Roma live according to our traditions, customs, and in congruence with the national laws. If the Roma kill a non-Roma Brazilian, they would have to answer to the national laws. National laws are there for Roma to also follow them. But the problem is that Roma do not know they are citizens. I will take care of the Brazilian Roma. I am coming up with a model for a flyer about citizenship for the Roma, which can be used here in Brazil and also anywhere else in the world.

D: What made you become so determined to study in a time when it is hard for a Roma woman to disobey her family in this way?
M: I am not afraid of anything. When my mother was ten and my grandmother who was from Russia did not know how to read, they were both waiting for the bus, and my grandmother kept asking the gage which one was the right bus for them to take, but the gage didn’t want to help her. So my mother, only ten years old as she was, Lhuba is her name, she said: “Eu sou analfabeta, mas se eu tiver filhos, um vai ser doctor.” (I am illiterate, but if I will have children, one of them will be a doctor.) Lhuba Stanescon. It’s because of her that I studied and became a lawyer.

D: Are there many educated Roma here? Doctors? Lawyers? Professors?
M: Whoever made it here does not want to be identified as Cigano. They do not tell anybody. But here everybody knows that I am Cigana and I am respected.

D: When did you get married?

M: I got married when I was thirty-two years old to a non-Roma Brazilian.

D: Can I be as impolite as to ask if you were a virgin at that age? You do not have to answer. This is a very intimate question.

M: I was a virgin. I kept up my tradition. My daughters will marry as virgins also. They can marry gage if they want to. Today I am proud to say that I have one daughter already certified as a lawyer, one niece also a lawyer, another niece is a doctor. And before me everybody bows their heads, but still they gossip that I am gagiorika (on the gage team).

D: Where does the name Stanescon come from?

M: Stanescu was the name of nobles in Romania who bought Roma slaves and freed them. There is a doctoral thesis in Romania written about this family. I met the foreign minister of Romania once on his visit to Brazil and he told me about it. I’ve never been to Romania myself. The slaves who were bought by this family also received the last name Stanescu, which in Brazil they changed to Stanescon.

D: Do you feel that you are very different from most people in your family?

M: Yes, they think I am an idiot. I had to teach them quickly to respect me! Many of them do not understand my determination. The past has not passed yet. I want to leave a certain pride for my nephews, a pride to be Roma in this world. When my niece graduated from law school I cried so much, it was very moving! But for most of them, I am the worst example they can give their children. They say, “What? You want to be a doctor like Mirian?” But God gave me 1,70 meter (height) and a big voice for me to pull my people out of invisibility.

D: I am surprised by and admire very much what you do. I am also surprised that Roma in Brazil seem to have lost their musicality. Do the Roma that you know sing and play musical instruments?

M: Roma here started to play forro and samba, but nowadays they do this rather seldom. I recorded a CD with old Roma tunes where I play the accordion and three Roma men play the violins. The other Roma were shamed by our production and they also wanted to come up with a CD, but they lost the bet. Our CD was better than theirs. I’ll give you a copy to bring to Romania.

D: I know that Mio also plays the violin.

M: Mio is a strange person. He did not want to make a violin school with me. I suggested we teach violin to Roma children. But instead he said, “I want to be the only one.” I insulted him. He was really egotistical. His problem is, “if I don’t know how to read, you won’t know either.” It’s that frame of mind. At the time I was chefe de procuraria (head of the Justice Department) in Nova Iguaçu. I wanted to show that a Cigana can be a doctor and keep the Roma tradition. I am the only Cigana who does not have to take the swearing oath before the kriss. They know that I am sincere. I really hate lies (she touches her nose).

D: I know a lot of Romani activists, musicians, and intellectuals in Europe and in the US. I really think education is the way to go for the Roma. What do you think?

M: Well, outside of Brazil maybe more Roma are educated, but here 99% are illiterate.

D: I would love to see you participate in the New York Gypsy Festival, if possible.
M: Sure, but I cannot travel if I am not paid and staying in the best conditions, a five-star hotel. I don’t mind you interviewing me, you know. I like you. Sorry if I was a little aggressive on the phone. I was just shocked to hear you say you want to keep people in your research anonymous. What kind of anthropology is that? But now I understand. See there are a lot of gage taking advantage of poor, illiterate Roma and misrepresenting them. I’ve also been interviewed before. They take down notes and seem nice, but then all the gage end up turning things shitty after the interview.

D: I am not here to take advantage of anyone. The woman I just interviewed before you is also illiterate but I am proud to say that since my visits began she has started to attend evening alphabetization classes at the local school. I just want to keep my Roma communities anonymous to avoid their being easily identified by people who are displeased with what they have to say. But I can identify you as a public figure and acknowledge your achievements, which are truly wonderful. Please tell me more about your wedding, did it run according to Roma customs?

M: I was one of the most pedidas moças (requested girls). But I didn’t want to marry until I had my degree and found someone I could love. When that happened more than one thousand people came to my wedding.

D: Is there such a thing as “unconditional love” in Roma culture?

M: Na verdade as Ciganas são induzidas a amar. Eu teve o orgulho de dizer: Eu casei quem eu quero [Actually Ciganas are induced to love. I have the pride to say: I married whom I wanted.].

D: What do you think is the strength of the Roma culture compared to the rest of the Brazil?

M: In Brazilian society the seriousness of the meaning of family is already gone [já está faltando esse sentido de seriedade da família]. I want my daughters to have it and I want Roma to have it. Brazilians have really lost it.

Mirian proudly introduced me to her four children mentioning they all pursued college degrees. Her son had studied economics, while her oldest daughter had finished law school. Another son had studied marketing, and the youngest daughter who was then twenty, and was already set on going to law school. When I was at their home both her daughters greeted me briefly perhaps not remembering meeting me before in the park. I remembered them because they were both quite pretty and they danced beautifully adorned in long dresses, which looked like expensive saris.

The oldest, Lhuba, seemed a bit more serious and lighter skinned, she said she was ready for marriage but she was not dating anyone. The youngest seemed happier, she talked to me more than her sister, and she seemed to really like the idea of family: “I want to have a family, to have children. But I have to become a lawyer first like my sister and my mom.” Mirian’s
youngest son had also talked to me briefly in the park basically just to tell me that he greatly admired his mother and how hard she fought for Romani rights in Brazil. Mirian’s husband looked like a tall and dignified Rom when I met him. I could have sworn he was Rom, but he clarified the issue saying he was of Syrian descent. He also talked about Mirian as if enchanted by her and by the idea of “a serious family unit,” which Mirian was set on upholding agreeing with her as she declared in reference to the Brazilian society, “Agora liberal quer dizer libertinágem. Se perdeu a estrutura familiar. A família tem que ser séria, tem que ser respeitada” [Nowadays liberal means libertine. The family structure has been lost. The family has to be serious, has to be respected]. Her oldest son came in and greeted me formally when we had just finished the interview. He was terse, yet seemed a bit charmed by me. His mother had just told me I looked very pretty, and I was basking in the glow of believing it.

Our interaction had grown affectionate after all the mutual flattery since we both had vested interest in making the interview “go well.” However, in the short interview format I hardly had time to elaborate on all the topics we touched upon. As we wrapped up and stood near the glass cases covering the southern wall of the living-room, she showed me one of her diplomas: “Carta da Secretaria de Cultura atesta que e o primeiro tempo da Santa Sara – ponto de referencia no Brazil, na America Latina” (Letter of the Secretary of Culture attesting the first time of Saint Sara – a point of reference in Brazil, in Latin America). Then she gladly showed me the bedrooms, hers and the children’s, and her tarot card reading room, which was adorned with dozens of Cigano and Cigana dolls. I marveled at her “queen bed” complete with a bed frame of veils and gold trimmings. We took a few moments to relax on the bed since I was raving about it and she wanted me to know how cozy and luxurious it felt. Mirian was already
getting more comfortable around me perhaps because I was both intimidated and impressed by her, and she truly enjoyed talking about her own accomplishments.

She showed me a magazine article written about her, “Os segredos da Cigana Stanescon” (Secrets of Cigana Stanescon) by Aiula Eisfeld in a magazine called Machete (1999). The so-called “secrets” in the title refer to her educational path. I quickly jotted down some phrases from this article unfortunately without the exact page numbers: “Mirian questioned the traditions that condemned women in this community to submission, such as the lack of education […] we’ve never heard of a libidinous act against a woman or a child practiced by a Cigano […] There is a wrong image that Ciganos steal.” The article defends Ciganos as honorable people yet not their patriarchal values, and it upholds Mirian as a role model feminist.

Mirian retains the greatest visibility as Cigana in Brazil, as the only public descendant of a wealthy Roma family that migrated from Romania and helped others migrate to escape the Holocaust. Also she uses her education to justify her sense of superiority in comparison with other Ciganos, most of whom resist her personal influence on their families as far as I have seen during fieldwork, although they are grateful to her ancestors for their help. Still, Mirian is hardly considered Cigana, yet she uses the media to support her own authenticity claims and to declare herself against Cigano-impersonators. As the article states, “Tired of false Ciganos, Mirian Stanesco has launched her oracle at the Book Biennial in an authentic tent like those used by her ancestors.” Thus, through media support, Miriam retains greatest visibility as Cigana in Brazil although Franz Moonen has denounced her as an impostor repeatedly via scholarly diatribes, like several other minority representatives including Mio Vacite. I frequently hid my alliances and affinities to safely investigate Romani lives. The presence of Eugene, and the gossip and drama surrounding his welcome, added to my presence, and acceptance of me as ethnographer.
Most notably, Mio Vacite overlooked the drama that ensued on a social media network called *Orkut* (now obsolete) when a half-Rom *Cigano* knife-maker complained about Eugene’s *Ciganidade* and my own, yet Mio chose to side with us and declared it publically on the website. As a musician with few means of providing for his livelihood other than playing for local *gage* audiences with his family group *Encanto Cigano* (*Gypsy Enchantment*), Mio wished to align himself with Eugene and perhaps gain access to international audiences and event touring. When Eugene considered bringing his son into *Gogol Bordello*, his New York-based “*Gypsy Punk*” band, Mio was thrilled although the plans never went any further since Eugene considered Romanies excessively dramatic and “hard to deal with” on a daily basis on a tour bus. Nonetheless, aligning ourselves with Mio – as he insisted we call him – afforded us a sense of legitimation – for Eugene as *Cigano* and for me as an ethnographer.

Mio Vacite was the one *Cigano* musician of mainstream renown, and of both Calon and Roma descent, so he was the first option for a “president” when Roma representatives decided to create a *União Cigana no Brasil* (*Cigana Union in Brazil*) in 1987. His maternal grandfather was from Slavko Vuletic came from former Yugoslavia in 1930 “with his violin,” according to Mio and his website on Facebook. He talked at length about having started the “*Cigano* movement” in 1987 and founding the union in 1990. To commemorate this he threw “the first *Cigana* festa in Brazil,” where Roma women danced in public wearing the traditional dresses usually worn at ethnic-specific festivities. He said: “this was the first time we were coming out as *Ciganos* and we were ashamed and afraid of what people would think of us. My own brother, who was a judge, insisted that I organized the party under a different last name Vassitch, instead of Vacite, so that I did not give away the fact that he was *Cigano*. I was the
only one in my family who came out and assumed my ethnicity back then together with the dancers I brough on the stage.”

The media mentioned this event and subsequent one, and Mio had dutifully engraved all the scanned media articles on a CD Rom. He offered evidence of his contributions in two copies along with numerous of his band’s performances for both Eugene and me to have. He spoke with pride about having received the “Best of 2003” award from Radio Bandeirantes, and about their participation by invitation to the Khamoro Festival in Prague in 2002, where he gave a lecture and showed his off his band’s musical and dance skills “on behalf of Ciganos in Brazil.” Mio also said his group was invited to perform when Cláudia Camargo de Campos launched her book Ciganos e Suas Tradições (Ciganos and Their Traditions). On April 9th, 1999 the Cigana Union of Brazil participated in a fundraiser for Organização Feminina de Caráter Cultural e Beneficente (Cultural and Beneficent Feminine Organization). On May 27th, 1999, according to Mio, his band represented “Cigana culture” in an ethnic-specific festival at the American Football Club in Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro. On September 4th, they performed at the Country Club in Tijuca. On October 15th of the same year, Mio received a certificate acknowledging his participation in the cultural event Uma Noite da Magia Cigana (a night of Cigana magic). On November 13th, a União Cigana do Brasil (the Gypsy Union of Brazil) set up a tent on the sidewalk of Copacabana beach to raise awareness about “Cigana culture,” and numerous similar events followed to present day. Mio talked about his involvement in the Romani cultural movement in Brazil with pride, eager to leave his name in historical annals.

He insisted that Mirian Stanescon was an impostor and that the soap opera written by Glória Perez, Explode Coração, reflected his own niece’s life – Yovanca, who had later become a lawyer herself like Mirian. His whole family had been involved in the show, he said, due to the
band’s involvement in providing the musical score *Coração Cigano* (*Gypsy Heart*). This disc won a Platinum award, which Mio proudly displayed in his office in his mother’s home in Rio.

Mio discredited Mirian and credited himself for officializing *Dia National dos Ciganos* (National *Gypsy* Day), with the help of a document from Sami Jorge Haddad Abdulmacih, president of the *Câmara Municipal* in Rio de Janeiro, a local municipal administrator. This was an achievement based on *Projeto de Lei nº 189, de 1993* (Project of Law No. 189, of 1993) of Rio de Janeiro. He said Mirian simply took his idea, which had been implemented in Rio, and extended it nationally by gaining access to former president Lula and his administration. He was still upset that she had not given him any credit during this process. He called himself proudly, “the first *Cigano* who was called upon by the government to speak about human rights and racial equality on behalf of the minority,” in 1994. He was also proud that in 1988, he had inspired Aurélio Buarque de Holanda to change the pejorative term the Portuguese dictionary gave to the word *Cigano*, which Fotta discusses extensively (2012).

Through consistent practice of a musical register of *Gypsiness* in Brazil, Mio has been promoting awareness of *Ciganos* amongst other Brazilians. In addition, he has attempted to be the bridge operating between the Roma and the Calon. He recognizes all as *Ciganos* and shows great empathy towards the impoverished tent-dwellers, while insisting that nomadism must be maintained along with other traditions such as marrying children at a young age, having women tell fortunes, and even allowing *gagia* who marry *Ciganos* to practice fortunetelling as well. Both Mio Vacite and Mirian Stanescu have been actively building a sense of romantic nationalism and pride in belonging to the diaspora, and despite their ongoing feuds have achieved greater mainstream awareness of *Ciganos* as citizens with rights and responsibilities. Yet as Mirian suggests, although they are legally recognized, *Ciganos* still bypass that recognition and even
modes of legality such as obtaining legal certification for fortunetelling as an official practice.

Most Ciganos also still disregard Brazilian child labor laws and the legal age of marriage. Yet they remain immersed in Brazilianness, taking up similar tropes, and thus represent a micro Brazil as well.

International and Virtual

Gelem, gelem, lungone dromensa
Maladilem bakhale Romensa
A Romale katar tumen aven,
E tsarensa bokhale chavensa?
A Romale, A Chavale
Sasas vi man yekh bari familiya,
Mundardjas la i kali legiya
Aven mansa sa lumniake Roma,
Kai putardile e romane droma
Akana vriama, usti Rom akana,
Men khutasa misto kai kerasa
A Romale, A Chavale
Puter Devla le parne vudara
Te shai dikhav kai si me manusha
Pale ka zhav lungone dromendar
Thai ka phirav bachtale Romensa
A Rromalen, A chavalen
Opree Rroma isi vaht akana
Ajdë mança sa lumáge Roma
O kalo muj thaj e kale jakha
Kamàva len sar e kale drakha
A Rromalen, A chavalen.

I went, I went on long roads
I met happy Roma
O Roma where do you come from,
With your tents and hungry children?
O Roma, O Romani youths!
I once had a great family,
The Black Legion murdered them
Come with me Roma from all the world
For the Roma roads have opened
Now is the time, rise up Roma now,
We will rise high if we act
O Roma, O Romani youths!
Open, God, the white doors
So I can see where are my people.
Come back to walk the long roads
And walk with happy Romani
O Roma, O Romani youths!
Up, Romani! Now is the time
Come with me Roma world.
Dark faces and dark eyes,
I love them like dark grapes.
O Roma, O Romani youths!

When I sang to them “Gelem! Gelem!” most Brazilian Roma (unlike the Calon) recognized the traditional melody, yet they did not understand the lyrics I sang. New lyrics had been composed by Žarko Jovanović, a Serbian Romani musician and activist who was named Romani Culture Minister at the first International Romani Congress in London in 1971. At this event Jovanović’s version of the song became adopted as the international Romani anthem. The ballad is a lament about the Nazis’ Kali Legiya (Black Legion) having killed one’s family and
wishing for Romani unity. In this version the anthem echoes the stereotype of dark-skinned Romanies (kalo muj means black face) in comparison with the whiter European populations, but also references the dichotomy of black-white/good-evil associations as the lyrics mention the Black Legion (Kali Legiya) as responsible for the genocide and God’s heaven as guarded by parne (white) doors.

Despite such frequent discursive ambivalence, international Romani rights activism seeking to fashion itself after the African-American civil rights movement in the United States, especially in Romania. The Romanian Romani activist movement insisted on affirmative actions in the national school system. Many drew parallels between the Roma slavery in Romania until 1856 and that of African-Americans in the US until the Civil War and the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment, December 1865 (Achim 1998). In 2007 the Romanian Prime Minister Popescu-Tăriceanu approved the creation of Comisia pentru Studierea Robiei Romilor (Commission for the Study of the History and Culture of the Roma), after which this comparison was introduced in Romani history textbooks by Romani historian Petre Petcuț and taught in public schools (Ministry of Education 2015). However, unlike the US Civil Rights Movement, Romani activism’s international scope goes beyond any national borders and presents its own challenges. It has also been said that, “like Jews in the first half of the 20th century, the Romanies are stateless,” yet more socio-economically marginalized (Political Ration 2014, web).

The first International Romani Congress in 1971 had delegates from fourteen countries and approved an international Romani flag, anthem and motto Opre Roma! (Hancock 2003: 120). Also the term Rom was adopted as a self-appellation in order to do away with the old, negative connotations of pejorative misnomers such as Gypsy and Tigan. The flag of green grass and blue sky, now embellished with a 16-spoke chakra wheel, was originally conceptualized
during the 1933 conference of the *Uniunea Generala a Romilor din Romania* (General Assembly of Roma in Romania) led by Gheorghe Nicolesco in Bucharest. These pioneering efforts were stifled by the World Wars and the communist regime, yet revived internationally by a small Romani elite in the 1970s. The second Romani Congress gained support from Indian politicians who wished to establish a cultural rapport between the diaspora and their country of origin: “In the course of an international Roma festival that took place in Chandigarh, Indian Prime Minister Indira Ghandi received a Roma delegation, assuring the Roma India’s support in the presence of the United Nations” (Samer 2001, web). Yet my interlocutors found India irrelevant to them since most subscribed to the myth of Egyptian origins.

![Romani flag symbolizing green grass, blue sky, and a red wheel](image)

65. Romani flag symbolizing green grass, blue sky, and a red wheel

However there was significant interest in Brazil in the potential for restitution for the victims of the Nazi genocide. The third Roma World Congress held in 1981 demanded that the
Helsinki File be applied to Roma and Sinti people. Also the three hundred delegates demanded that the German government “recognize the Roma genocide and work out an appropriate solution to the problem of reparation […] this official recognition of the genocide was achieved in 1982. Furthermore, foundations for reparation and financing of the Sinti and Roma organisations were laid” (Samer, web). In 1986 the International Romani Union became a member of UNICEF, and continued to support recognition of the Romanies’ historical victimization, which had been previously omitted. At the fourth congress in Warsaw a Roma encyclopedia was proposed in order to counter the one-sided historical accounts written mainly by non-Romanies. At this time the standardization of Romanes was also proposed.

In the aftermath of the meeting great efforts went into developing a Romani alphabet as proposed by Marcel Courtiade, although the concept was eventually abandoned. Between 1990 and 1994, linguist Gheorghe Sarău pioneered the introduction of minority education in Romani language in Romanian public schools (Sarău 2014). In 1990 the Ministry of Education hired the first inspector concerned with Romani-specific education, which paved the way for future employment opportunities for both inspectors and teachers in this subject. In 1994 the first Romani textbook was published, based on material Sarău was using to train future teachers of Romani language and history. In the summers of 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 I spent considerable time in Romania with the activists involved in Romani politics, and also obtaining a diploma that allows me to teach the subject in Romanian schools. Still, I had not practiced Romani conversationally until I began fieldwork in Brazil where I found it had limited use amongst my interlocutors due to dissimilarities in the spoken vernacular forms, as well as my interlocutors’ resistance to sharing their language with an outsider. In addition, some did not really use Romani to converse or only used certain Romani words while speaking Portuguese.
My interlocutors in Brazil had little or no knowledge of the Romani minority political activities being conducted in Europe. For instance they did not know that *lingua Cigana* or Romani *chib* had been written in textbooks and was being taught in numerous Romanian public schools. When I told them Romanes was being standardized in Europe it shocked many of my interlocutors in Brazil. In fact it frightened them since they believed that if *gage* were to access these textbooks impostors would invade their cultural privacy. They said that Brazilians had adopted *Cigano spirits* in the registers of their African-derived religious practices of *Umbanda* and *Condomblé*, and many *gage* claimed to be *Ciganos* by virtue of possession by such spirits. If these *Ciganos espírituais* were to learn Romanes, my interlocutors feared they would not be able to prevent them from passing for *real Ciganos*. In Brazil knowledge of the language or dialect was one of the main ways of proving *Ciganidade*. Most interlocutors remained completely uninterested in importing Romani language textbooks into Brazil as a course in public schools.

Meanwhile, a few Roma activists like Cabrito, Mirian Stanescon and Mio Vasite knew of the ongoing minority rights recognition efforts in Europe and stayed engaged in the virtual networks relevant to Romani news, primarily using Romanes to bypass language barriers. Cabrito was a big fan of Romani radio and YouTube videos of Roma weddings found online. He was also helping the Romani Union in Brazil build its online presence in order to be included in this international discourse on how virtual networking could benefit the Brazilian diaspora (ACCB 2015, web). An intensive “virtual ethnography” by Marcelo Frediani who followed websites dedicated to UK Travellers for two years as well as various Yahoo, YouTube and Facebook groups reveals that “the internet can be used for protest but also that it can play a role in democratizing political debate, even for this minority which has a limited access to ICTs (2010: 258).” ICTs (information and communication technologies) have allowed the dispersed
and diverse Romani diaspora to unite on virtual forums of discussion, and to make a wealth of information readily available despite one’s geographic location. At an international level the Internet has become a central forum for discussion for both political activists and academics, who can share their most recent findings and make them available to all.

The online site “Romani Project” represents a central resource in documenting the diverse dialects as well as the history of Romani linguistics. It states that the standardization of Romanes is considered integral to greater unity in communication. The total number of Romanies in Europe amounts to 6.6 million people, although more generous estimates refer to 12 million, and about 4.6 million are estimated to speak some dialect that falls under the umbrella term Romanes or Romani (Bakker 2001: 293). Obtaining more accurate statistics remains problematic in Europe as well as in Brazil. At the First World Romani Congress in 1971, Hancock declared: “Te astaras o jekhipe amara čhibake avela o angluno phir karing amaro jekhedženengo khetanipe [To achieve the unity of our language will be the first step toward achieving our unity as a people].” (2010: 117). In this academic perspective one of the greatest obstacles to achieving political and cultural unity is the ability to communicate among the various Romanies worldwide. Obstacles to distributing a standard dialect also present themselves when considering that, “Sedentary, already literate Roma, such as predominate in Eastern European countries, will have a far better opportunity to acquire such a standardized dialect. For illiterate and nomadic Roma the task would be very much harder” (118). So even those willing to learn the purist standard form find it difficult to do so, particularly for the illiterate.

My fieldwork among the Romanies in Brazil supports the view that challenges present themselves when the only means of distributing standard Romanes is through formal education. Not only were most of the elderly Calon and Roma illiterate, but new generations only
considered having basic literacy necessary, and were not motivated to stay in school longer than a few grades. They unanimously opposed the idea of introducing their language in public schools. So the only possible way of accessing the standard would be through the Internet or a local Romani cultural center that could make available literacy courses with textbooks in Romanes/Portuguese. The political purpose of language standardization is to both facilitate self-expression and encourage multicultural education practices internationally. But standardization itself has been much debated and politicized since various graphemes and vocabularies and grammars have been proposed, each competing with the others.

The standard taught in Romania represents only one of these. Outside Romania the concept of such an alphabet has largely been rejected: “Its popular rejection is connected in part to its reliance on a set of abstract, metaphonemic symbols, such as {θ} to represent both /d/ and /t/ in the Romani nominal ending -te/-de (both written -θe in this system), {ʒ} to represent inter-dialectal variation between sounds” (Matras 2005: 8). There is no single “macrolanguage” or “grapholect” as Ong calls a standardized written dialect (1982).

The attempts at standardization have produced a series of competing versions with little success at unifying them. The first normative Romani grammar was published in Macedonia in 1980 “by Krume Kepeski and Šaip Jusuf, based on a manuscript that had already been in circulation for a decade. The grammar was based on a combination of the Arli and Džambazi dialects,” according to the “Romani Project.” The 1986 conference on ‘Romani language and culture’ in Sarajevo gathered for the first time international scholars interested in standardization.

In 1990 the first academic degree program in Romani studies was launched at Charles University in Prague by linguist Milena Hübschmannová. In 1991 a collection of Romani vocabulary used in Para-Romani variations was published, edited by Peter Bakker and Marcel
Couriade. In 1993 the “Romani Project” was launched at Graz University with government support under the direction of Dieter W. Halwachs (website launched in January 2006). Also in 1993 the First International Conference on Romani linguistics took place in Hamburg. Intense activities took place in the following decade, covered in the modern “Bibliography of Romani Linguistics” which names over 2,500 books and articles (Bakker and Matras 2003). In 2007 the Council of Europe put forth a European Language Curriculum Framework for Romani, in collaboration with linguists, teachers and activists across Europe.

Nowadays a pluralistic linguistic approach has been adopted as it best accounts for the diverse Romanes dialects spoken all over Europe. This approach allows for vernacular usage codification as found in practice by its speakers interspersing Romanes with mainstream languages. From a linguistic viewpoint Romanes can be described as a “heterogeneous cluster of varieties without any homogenizing standard” (Halwachs 2001, web). On Rombase, another didactic online Romani language resource there exist numerous dialects available for translation into other languages. This allows for greater recognition of ethnic-specific needs and insistence on identification with a particular dialect. Among the northern Vlach variety of the Matchwaya some dialects had the following occupation-derived denominations:

... name professions: Bugurdži, Čurara, Kalderaš, Lovara, Sepečides, with the meaning: "drill-makers", "sieve-makers", "tinkers", "horse-dealers", "basket-weavers".
The denominations Arli used for Kosovarian and Macedonian Roma as well as Erli for a group living in Sofia are indications of the long-lasting settled way of life of these Balkan Roma: the Turkish word yerli stands for "native". The name Gurbet derives from the Arabic word gharib "strange" which has been transmitted via Turkish (Rombase, web).

These dialects present significant differences at the level of lexicon, hence the difficulty in adopting one international Romani standard, despite various linguists’ attempts.

Some “dialects” are considered to be Para-Romani varieties of mainstream language, where little Romani vocabulary has been maintained. I call these vernacular forms slanguages,
like those of my interlocutors in Brazil who spoke primarily Portuguese. Although these speech forms are “historically derived from Romani, they are functionally akin to the diverse special lexicons of the Romani populations” (Romaninet 2014, web). The speakers of such styles of speech into which Romani vocabulary is selectively embedded still call them their own chib (language). This is the case for Calon, as Halwachs explains:

So called Para-Romani varieties are marked by brackets. These are varieties of the respective majority language with Romani lexicon and, if at all, only a few Romani structural features: Errumantxela is a variety of Basque, Caló is a variety of Spanish, Angloromani of English, Scandoromani summarises Para-Romani varieties based on various Scandinavian languages (Halwachs, web).

Calon interlocutors in Brazil did not understand most of the standard Romani I read from textbooks. They hardly spoke Kaló as a dialect apart, but rather interspersed sporadically a few words or phrases into a vernacular of mainstream Portuguese. Their slang or slanguage also served as an ethnic marker, and they insisted theirs was “the authentic Cigana language.”

Resistance to a unified language standard is not unique to Brazil: it also persists in Europe. Although the emancipation of the Romani minority as a European ethnicity has focused on developing a common Romani language as one of the primary features of a transnational identity, this has failed to the present day. “This resulted in various attempts to standardize Romani, which have more or less failed so far” (Halwachs 2012: 273). My interlocutors’ reactions to the standard Romanes was typical among Romanies elsewhere.

However, there has been some success with the standard’s introduction in formal domains. Holwachs explains: “This expansion of Romani into formal domains resulted in literate forms of Romani and inter alia also in its use on the Internet” (274). Even though it has only created visible changes online rather than in conversational forums, there have been measurable improvements from codifying standard Romanes, including increasing use on websites of
national and international Romani NGOs, international NGOs and organizations, as well as public and private Romani media. Yet Halwachs distinguishes between the various modes, styles and types by which the minority linguistic expressions enter virtual platforms of discourse.

There are no Romani monolingual websites since its speakers also speak mainstream languages, so Romani texts primarily supplement texts written in locally dominant languages and available in English which serves as the global *lingua franca*. Although most sites claim to offer translation into Romani, the language is just flagged for maintaining ethno-cultural status. According to Halwachs this multilingualism, the presence of different languages on a site, only reinforces standard Romanes’ claim to authority on the matter without using it conversationally:

Multilingualism on the internet is a static, additive phenomenon which presents dominated languages above all alongside dominant languages. Functionally this type has to be described as emblematic and symbolic. Because of its static and additive character, multilingualism on the internet is measurable or rather countable. However, the meaningfulness of such statistics remains highly questionable (2012: 272).

National websites such as *unionromani.org* (Spain), *romnews.com* (Germany), *romano-centro.org* (Austria), and *dzeno.cz* (Czech Republic) have few pages if any available in Romanes though many claim to have it available, indicated by a small green-blue flag icon which appears in the top right corner of the screen.

International websites also use English as the dominant language in addition to other major languages such as French. For example the site of the European Roma Information Office - *erio.eu* (Brussels) is exclusively available in English, although it is an NGO run by Romanies. *ERIO* promotes itself as the legitimate representation of the minority with regard to the European Parliament and European Commission. The European Roma Rights Center’s website *errc.org* (Budapest) does offer translations into Romanes as well as Russian for most of its online materials. The web presentation of the Council of Europe – *coe.int* – also translates into
Romanes pages of relevance to the minority, in addition to English and French. The site run by
the European Roma and Traveller’s Forum - ertf.org (Strasbourg) is trilingual in English, French
and standard Romanes. It provides useful links to most websites considered relevant to Romani
minority politics, thus creating a network of virtual discourse both taking into account and
affecting such politics:

Council of Europe
Council of Europe - Roma Rights
Roma-related texts adopted at the Council of Europe
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
European Court of Human Rights
ECRI - European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance
European Commission
European Parliament
Council of the European Union
EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015
European Roma Rights Centre
Roma Education Fund
Open Society Institute Roma Initiatives
Roma Virtual Network
Romnews
European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion
Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)
Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights
romanistudies.eu

In her book “The Network Inside Out,” Annelise Riles talks about “the Network’s endless
reflection on itself” based on ethnographic work on contemporary institutions and conferences
(2001). She takes up “the Network” as a trope through which institutions operate and meetings
are conducted in various spheres:

No one, it would seem, could possibly be “against” networks (whether or not they
achieve other ends), for the Network is simply a technical device for doing what one is
already doing, only in a more efficient, principled, and sophisticated way. When states
and organizations can reach consensus about nothing else, they always can agree to
“strengthen information networks.” In this sense, the Network form is the opposite of
political motive, strategy, or content. The seemingly universal appeal of networks,
furthermore, is enhanced by the fact that networks are imagined as fragile entities: they

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are easily interrupted or destroyed by the cessation of funding, the waning of commitment, the creation of an alternative network, the ineffectiveness of “links,” or the inappropriate actions of the focal points. Networks must be created, sustained, and made to expand, and this need enlists collective interest and commitment to Action (Riles:173-174).

Riles insists that the Network is to be taken as fact, whereas it is but an illusion of something that exists outside its organization, an idea previously proposed by Gunther Teubner, who argues that the Network is “not between, but beyond contract and organization” like the mythical creature “the many headed-hydra” (1993: 42). Riles points out that practices conducted under the trope of the Network reveal a desire for meaning, for instance, “As participants following the proceedings on their headsets know well, however, simultaneous translation is something of an illusion” (145). Flagging Romanes as a pure standard on these international websites also aims to reduce the anxiety derived from the fact that a network does not physically exist between these virtual forums of discussion. This myth of a Network, an illusion taken as fact, between various representatives of the Romani minority, itself mythologized as an extraterritorial nation, models itself after the assumed network existing between academics:

In its parody of social scientific analysis, moreover, the Network plays on academic sentimentality about finally having found a “people” who speak our language, who answer our questions on our own terms. It appeals to our collective fantasy about linking up with our subjects and finding in the “data” exactly what we set to find. The idea of the Network, as the term is used here and by the subjects of this study as a form that supersedes analysis and reality, might also be imagined to borrow from the reflexive turn in the social sciences – from the notion that there is no longer such a thing as dependent and independent variables, that causes and effects are all mutually constituted in an endless feedback loop (174).

This is what Halwachs suggests happens when websites use the purist standard Romani, a scholarly production stripped of vernacular asymmetries and borrowings from mainstream languages, to flag a constructed illusion of transnational solidarity. In such multilingual settings, Romanes only functions as a purist, static, literate, auxiliary language with no living history of
spoken context. It is presented in a literate written form with symbolic functions. English or other national languages serve to cover these websites’ communicative aspect, not Romanes.

In addition to these multilingual sites there are more interactive, plurilingual ones such as the Swedish Sveriges Radio with its Radio Romano program, providing Romani navigation as well as programs in the spoken language intermixed with Swedish, and occasionally with English. Halwachs describes this as an example of “integrative plurilingualism with a primarily communicative function” (279). He suggests this kind of language use is much more efficient: “Plurilingualism on the Internet is a dynamic interactive phenomenon which presents languages in their actual use. Functionally this type has to be described as integrative and communicative. Although plurilingualism on the Internet shows the actual language use, it is, above all because of its dynamic and transient character, only qualitatively describable and not countable” (Halwachs 2012: 272). A display of linguistic pluralism and flexibility is also at work among web-based enterprises such as romea.cz (Romano Vodi), dzeno.cz, and romaweb.hu (Romaweb) as well as Romanes broadcasting on radio and television, which has been often linked for downloading online, though such broadcasting remains “largely limited to local productions and a small number of hours” (Matras 2005: 15).

In plurilingualism an ornate, stylized Romanes is presented along with other languages, engaging an interactive and thus much more dynamic style of communication, although highly transient. Only dynamic, transient language use, integrative of other languages with Romanes as spoken in its various vernacular forms as opposed to a static literate standard reflects real communicative diversity available online. Matras suggests, “Pluralism thus represents the overwhelming trend on the ground, with written Romani showing regional codification with some international orientation. No unification effort will succeed in bringing dozens or even
hundreds of authors and thousands of other users of written Romani under the control of one, single authority” (2005: 11). In Brazil, my interlocutors also insisted on adherence to one’s vitsa and dialect as key to identification.

Whereas multilingualism restricts Romanes to such symbolic functions as self-identification and the expression of affiliation and solidarity, plurilingualism such as encountered in Romani-dominated online chats represents dynamic communicative behavior. In this kind of interactive language use there is no “pure” standard Romanes employed, but rather a diverse repertoire of Romani utterances intermixed with elements of all the other languages in the respective speech communities. My fieldwork in Brazil supports this observation. Interlocutors like Cabrito and Mio Vasite who had Internet access said they thoroughly enjoyed Romani radio sites, but they could not understand the written standard Romani available on European virtual forums. Cabrito said he enjoyed listening to Radio Romano because at least he understood the subject of discussion unlike on literate websites. He felt that Brazilian Romanies are isolated from the ongoing discourse on Romani rights recognition because of the language barriers. Only sites translated into Portuguese and Spanish are accessible to them.

During fieldwork I observed the younger generations making creative use of emails, text messages and chat-rooms as well as social networks like Facebook and Orkut, confirming the tendency towards pluralism and the creative use of written language. The elders blamed the Internet for corrupting the young and many said the girls were just spending their time flirting with boys, interaction that would otherwise be traditionally forbidden amongst unmarried youths. Only those who were involved with ethnic rights saw the Internet as a tool for international networking while struggling to achieve visibility and relevance on an international scale.
Language politics have long been at the foreground of Romani identity representation on many websites in the struggle to create political visibility through a unified voice speaking on behalf of the numerous small, marginalized and scattered groups without political voices of their own. Because I have not reviewed in depth all the websites relevant to Romani language and identity I rely on a study that sampled 100 websites between 2011 and 2013 (Hughes 2013). This study suggests that Roma activist organizations often “strategically propagate the concept of a Roma nation in their discourse by emphasizing unity and shared culture” (2). This nationalistic concept allows anti-Romani discrimination to be framed as racism, which is heavily legislated against, for example by the Directive on Racial Equality. Before the 1990s Romanies were not legislated for, but instead were subsumed under umbrella terms, such as Travellers. In 1993 the Council of Europe Assembly recommendation 1203 recognized the Roma as a “true European minority” (Council of Europe 1993). “The EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020,” which was issued in 2011, targets pan-European legislation aiming for greater social inclusion of this marginalized minority.

The International Romani Union has so far has been primarily organized by and focused on European members of the Romani diaspora. The IRU in fact called for the Roma to be recognized as an “a-territorial European nation” (Vermeersch 2007: 161). Organizations do not always adhere to the nationhood narrative in the fashion of the IRU, according to the comprehensive online survey (Hughes 3). For example the Council of Europe calls the Roma people a “European national minority,” placing emphasis on citizenship, so that no member organization feels threatened by the non-territorial nation narrative.

Although they desire to be included in the IRU representation, Brazilian Romanies disagree with the promulgation of Romani language and culture by the state, considering these to
be private domains, best left under the care of extended families. Like Patrick Williams suggests, they operate on the notion that the Romani language acts as a substitute for territoriality, in that it marks the boundaries of the Roma world (Williams 1984: 389). Indeed my interlocutors feared that if gage learned Romanes they could easily pass for Ciganos in Brazil, since anyone who speaks it is automatically considered Romani due to Ciganos’ faith in their own language exclusivity. Therefore Brazilian Ciganos, or rather their few activist representatives, struggle to sustain their ethnic particularities while engaging within a larger discursive network, which Matras says has “a legacy of conflicting terms and agendas” (2013: 209). Due to such a wide variety of perspectives, dialects, modes of identification and communication among representatives, most efforts to integrate Romanies in Europe and elsewhere so far have failed.

Ample documentation attests to the fact that Romanies remain Europe’s largest and most impoverished minority. The eighth Congress was held in Sibiu, Romania in April 2013, where 250 delegates from thirty-four countries attended and Florin Cioabă, self-proclaimed Romanian Roma king, was elected as the new president of the International Romani Union. At this meeting numerous concerns were raised as to the ongoing difficulties Romanies encounter both as local citizens and as migrants throughout the EU:

Since the mid-1990s, a number of European countries have devoted significant efforts to improving the living conditions of the Roma and enhancing their political, socio-economic and cultural participation. Yet, apart from some notable exceptions, many Roma still belong to the poorest, most segregated, most discriminated against and least ‘integrated’ populations in Europe, and their chances for socio-economic mobility continue to be extremely low. At the same time, some Roma have sought recourse in geographic mobility (Sigona and Vermeersch 2012: 1189).

The decades since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe has seen a great wave of Romanies migrating to Western European countries. Their presence has been mediatized and criminalized
by national legislation despite EU efforts to protect these migrants’ human rights. In order to monitor events many expert commissions were set in place:

The list of organizations who have commissioned expert reports on the situation of Roma migrants is long and includes the UNHCR, the Council of Europe, OECD, OSCE and the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency. Whereas Braham and Reyniers had emphasized primarily so-called push-factors, concentrating on what motivated Roma to leave – issues such as discrimination, marginalization and poverty – Sobotka emphasized the role of the pull-factors, such as the presence of Romani diasporas (formed between the 1950s and 1980s) in the target countries, the dependency of Western labour markets on migrant workers, the services provided to asylum seekers and, in the case of the UK only, respect toward Romani culture and children’s success in schools (Matras 23).

What motivated the migrant Roma has been the subject of debate as Matras points out. My interlocutors said they were both attracted by the possibilities of a new life in the New World, but also pressed to migrate by the poverty and discrimination experienced in Europe.

Some scholars believe in the narrative of escaping dire conditions in the country of origin, such as Romania, while other scholars believe in the narrative of seeking a better quality of life. According to Matras, “The EU report from April 2014 bitterly complaints that EU money is available that is not being claimed by the states to support Roma. It literally begs governments to beg for more money” (2014 web). Similarly my activist friends in Romania said that there is money available to develop social projects (from the EU in addition to the IMF and the World Bank), yet because “our politicians can’t steal from these funds, since they are closely monitored, local authorities have no interest in claiming the money on behalf of Roma.” Romani beggars remain a common sight.

Corruption and disinterest from local authorities continue to stifle the European Union’s efforts to improve the living conditions of Romanies and prevent mass migration and the resulting vagrancy and petty theft in Western European countries. This was the most salient
message I gathered when attending the European Parliament Conference on Roma Inclusion held in Brussels on December 5th, 2013. The few examples of good practices in Roma projects were overwhelmingly outnumbered by evidence of lack of interest and discrimination on the part of local bureaucrats. In a few cases local authorities took an interest in improving Romanies’ lives by granting them access to health care and housing, literacy courses, occupational training and job placement. For example the Director General of the Forum for Refuges in Lyon, France, Jean-François Ploquin said he took a personal interest in these issues and provided measurable results concerning the social inclusion of Romani refugees in Lyon. Yet discrimination persists:

Their fundamental human rights are threatened in many locations, and racist violence has increased since 1989, reaching an alarming rate in 2009-2010. Racism is no longer merely the purview of extremists; rather, anti-immigrant and anti-Romani sentiment is becoming more mainstream in Europe. For example, in 2008, the Italian government fingerprinted Gypsies living in camps in an effort to crack down crime; in 2009 numerous violent incidents such as fire bombings occurred in Hungary and the Czech Republic, and armed militias began patrolling “against Gypsies”; and in 2010 the French government evicted and deported Roma back to Romania and Bulgaria. All over Europe, nationalist parties are on the rise (often under the guise of populism) and the population is growing more polarized (Silverman 2012: 6).

There are numerous unemployed Romanies struggling to survive particularly in the Eastern European countries, not only because of prejudice but diminishing demand for their traditional occupations. “The bulk of the European Roma were and sometimes still are smiths, artisans, and musicians,” according to Tcherenkov and Laedrich (2004: 32). Yet many of these occupations are obsolete or are becoming obsolete due to industrialization, for example tinning for the Kalderasha and knife-making for the Churara (Grigore and Sarău 2006: 38).

Based on an ethnographic research over two decades Carol Silverman argues that although in Europe, “Roma are revered as musicians and reviled as people,” the marketing of music in the electronic media often renders the traditionally acoustic Lautari musicians now jobless as well: “Romani Routes deliberately positions the recent popularity of Gypsy music
alongside the recent refugee flow of Eastern European Roma westward, contrasting the discrimination faced by the majority of Roma with the new commercial ventures of a small group of successful Romani musicians” (2012: 4). The few that appropriate the Gypsy music genre with success often compete with and replace more traditional Romani bands, for example Eugene Hutz who plays Gypsy punk with his band and DJs a mix of Gypsy songs to mainstream crowds. This trend in music popularity is also active in the United States, yet here there is less overt discrimination due to the ethnic invisibility of most Romanies.

However, Hancock (2010) and Becerra (2006) documented discrimination in housing and employment as well as in the persistence of Gypsy Crime Units in police departments: “These detectives study suspects’ clans and often put together family trees. They contact community patriarchs, known as rombaros - big men- who sometimes turn suspects in, then bail them out. Some detectives go to Gypsy weddings and funerals to shoot photos, take down license plates and hunt for suspects” (Becerra 2006: 1). While I did not see this in Brazil, I got a sense of it in the US from my own experience working as a language translator for a New York agency.

In 2010 I was hired for FBI cases, which were often labeled with an assumed verdict, such as “Guilty of Murder for Hire.” In this case, I was asked to translate conversations between an accused Romani woman and a Rom who worked as an informant for the FBI. It seemed that both were married and having an illegitimate affair, which led to her recent abortion. She was delirious on painkillers. The Rom wanted to make his mistress say she sent a hitman to kill the doctor who let her father die in the hospital, perhaps just to get rid of her by putting her in jail.

It seems to me this is frequent among Romanies in the US. Another couple I met in New York admitted that they frequently sent each other to jail when they had bouts of jealous fights. When the wife’s father died, and the husband cheated on her during her trip to the funeral, the
wife retaliated by stabbing him once, so she spent three months in jail. Her husband had a good relationship with a police as an informat. He was also her fortunetelling manager so he shortened her sentence, and they continued their eventual marriage quarrelling about his desire for oral sex.

Another set of FBI videos from spy-cameras showed an imprisoned Rom during visiting hours talking with his wife. The FBI wanted me to confirm they were rigging bets on horse races in Texas, but I promptly ended my job as a translator and apologized that my mediocre standard Romanes did not suffice to translate reliably their dialect. I also did not want to contribute to the criminal profiling of Romanies in North America, which dates to the three Roma on Columbus’ second voyage, unwilling exiled transporters of the Spanish government, according to Hancock:

Anti-Gypsy policies towards the end of the 19th century probably derived their impetus from the increase in discrimination evident at the beginnings of Reconstruction, following the abolition of slavery in America; there are several references to Romanies as a “people of color,” *i.e.* as a visible minority, in the literature of that period; Lincoln’s successor President Andrew Johnson vetoed the right to vote for Romanies, expressing his fear that the requirements of the Civil Rights Bill were designed “to operate in favor of the colored, and against the white, race [because they] comprehend . . . the people called Kipsies as well as the entire race designated as blacks” (*Legislation for the Colored Man*, Philadelphia, Feb. 1866) (Hancock 2010, web).

The parallel between dark-skinned Romanies and African-Americans has also been made historically in the US wherever racism prevailed. During my brief experience in 2007 as an intern at PER - Project on Ethnic Relations in Princeton, I initially witnessed some US government investment in the Romani minority rights issues, albeit limited. At the center, there were about twenty reports on European member states and their failure to integrate Romanies. Within four months, the Middle East became the primary focus of attention, and PER reported losing all funding for Romani minority issues.

Meanwhile, I also witnessed Romanian Romani begging in Manhattan. I said hello in Romanes and Romanian to two women once, quickly establishing a closer rapport, and asked
them about their laminated card which read: “Many children, no job.” They confessed there was an experienced Rom who obtained a three-month visa for them and who rented an apartment to fit about twelve-sixteen people at a time, a cheap place two hours travel away from Manhattan.

The same man gave them laminated cards with compelling messages in English, and designated specific street corners or subway stations where the women were to beg sometimes accompanied by small children. The women said, “gage take pity on us and give us $5 here and there so we can make a living.” We spoke in Romanian standing on the corner of 5th Avenue and 53rd street, a place quite lucrative for begging according to their experience. They were candid and friendly and let me briefly record them for a documentary class project at Princeton.

When Romanian Roma arrived in Brazil, they offered similar narratives according to my interlocutors: “We came to escape discrimination in Romania, but also because we knew Brazil is a warm country and don't hate Roma. So we thought we could make a living here by begging.”

Paulo, a successful car-shop owner who called himself a simple, hard-working mechanic, said he hosted twenty-seven Romanian Kalderasha Roma for a month two years before my visit:

They were so poor, had no way to make money back home, and they wanted to live abroad begging for alms. They didn't know this is illegal in Brazil, poor things. I took pity on them and told the policemen to let them out of the cell because I would look after them and keep them in my house until they would be sent back home.

The group had been arrested for vagrancy in Rio de Janeiro, when Paulo’s daughter, who happened to walk by the police station, overheard them speaking in Romanes, through a window. She found their dialect unusual, yet rushed to tell her father about it because it seemed that Roma were in trouble.

Paulo, like most local Roma, had a positive relationship with local policemen, so they went to investigate matters promptly. Their demand to host and vouch for the Romanian migrants was gladly accepted, and Paulo and his wife Pamela fed and housed this impoverished
family for an entire month in their large villa. Pamela said with tears in her eyes: “They were children and elderly too, traveling such distances by boat, hungry and with nowhere to wash. I can imagine this is how our ancestors came to Brazil. Poor and hungry just like them, just trying to survive. But the Brazilian government sent them back! And we never heard from them again, not even one phone call to thank us.” Most probably these Roma could not afford to make an overseas phone call.

In Sao Paulo I heard similar stories about Romanian Roma begging in local parks, who were also apprehended by the police and deported within a month. Cabrito said: “We don't beg, us Roma, no *Cigano* begs in this country. It’s below us. But I guess in Europe life is a lot harder for them.” His wife Angelica said: “Here we read fortunes, but these poor women didn't speak Portuguese. They didn't even read fortunes back in Romania. They said no one believe in such things there anymore: They don't trust us.” Most Brazilian *Ciganos* were aware of the difficulties Romanies were experiencing in Europe, yet few showed interest in mobilizing to show solidarity and help them. Cabrito blamed such complacency on the well-off economic status of most Brazilian Roma.

Yet even amongst the more impoverished Brazilian Roma there rarely was a sense of solidarity with the European Roma. In Ianca’s neighborhood few *Ciganos* used the Internet café nearby, and it was mostly for socializing on *Facebook* or *Orkut* or to write emails from time to time, instead of Romani rights sites. The pay-per-minute system imposed a limit of ten minutes at a time, which hardly sufficed to study Romani via the available resources online.

Auntie Violeta once took a moment to consider the lives of those living in *mahalas* (slums) as she had seen in a documentary. She exclaimed: “I don't know how they live like that. We don’t have so much discrimination here in Brazil. Poor Roma!” Still, there was no initiative
to network internationally with Romanies and find relatives with the same last names, even though many said they were certain they had blood relatives in Serbia or France or Romania.

On the other hand there was general admiration for the cultural richness in terms of music and more recently films associated with the European Roma. My interlocutors mentioned having seen *Latcho Drom* by Tony Gatlif (1993), a documentary which features musicians from the Thar Desert in northern India, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, France and Spain, aiming to trace the path travelled by Romanies over the centuries. The film unfortunately stops at Spain with the *gitanos*’ flamenco and does not account for Romani presence in the New World. The documentary won an award at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival as well as the 1997 Montreal World Film Festival and 1996 National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA. I first watched it during senior year in high school, as a recent immigrant from Romania to Chicago, and its impact was haunting. Something about the music voiced my own numbing, devastating experience of being displaced at thirteen. I was initially amnesic about life as formerly known in Romania (perhaps a sign of trauma) and had remained socially alienated.

*Ciganos* also said that the music of European Roma captured their most euphoric and desperate moments aptly with an acute sensitivity to the highs and lows of the soul. Ianca said that when her mother died, she inherited a box full of tape recordings made of “traditional Romani songs from Russia and Romania.” She said, “I listened to them and cried and cried… such beautiful music and such passion… I was moved to tears thinking of all the poor people that struggled in the past and are still struggling now.” She also said after a while her cousin confiscated her tapes so she would not wallow in depression under the music’s spell. When I brought them tape recordings from Sao Paulo, the effect was similar. Both Auntie Violeta and Ianca wept at the more sorrowful ballads. However, they said among them there was no
musician. Calon responded less to Romani songs from Eastern Europe and said that their two musicians sang strictly in Portuguese to Brazilian country music of various styles (forro, pagode, sertaneja). The Romanes lyrics set to Russian melodies triggered in the Brazilian Roma’s imagination a connection to an Eastern European past as narrated by their parents and grandparents.

Imported cultural goods like movies and music gave Ciganos a sense of how Romanies lived in Europe. Auntie Violeta exclaimed with joy: “Time of the Gypsies was my favorite film! It was in Romanes” (Kusturica 1988). The film won an award and a five-minute standing ovation at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival and was the first feature to be filmed entirely in Romani language and played by Romani actors. However, the film touched on themes such as petty crime and human trafficking, and it upset activists who were concerned that it would exacerbate both exotic and negative stereotypes of Romanies in the mainstream imaginary. Hancock argues:

_Time of the Gypsies_ is one of the very few screenplays with a Romani theme which utilizes Romani actors and the Romani language. In this respect it joins company only with Tony Gatlif’s _Les Princes_ and Robert Duvall’s _Angelo My Love_. Despite this, it – predictably – relies heavily on stereotypes of mysticism and thievery, though their interpretation by the non-Romani audience differs from that of the Romanies who have seen the film (Hancock 1997: 52).

Hancock’s main criticism is that the film relies on fantasy to deal with the tragic reality of child abductions from Yugoslav Romani families by kidnappers who from 1980 were stealing children and selling them to Americans and Italians who could not adopt legally. The Romani parents of the one hundred kidnapped children were afraid to report these crimes according to Hans P. Pullmann’s 1986 article “Child Slave Trade in Yugoslavia: Gypsies (Romas) Oppression” (53). Usually it is the Roma who get stereotyped as child thieves. Yet in this case the reality was far from the stereotype, the film was more palatable to mainstream audiences.
My Roma interlocutors in Brazil thought the film was amazing, and laughed remembering the final scene in which the main character Perhan is lying dead at his wake, with gold coins on his eyes, and his son – a miniature version of his gangster father – steals them and runs. Auntie found the little boy hilarious and endearing. She talked about him with maternal pride. Hancock touches on the last scene as suggesting that one can run after the child or realize the futility of retaliation and turn to God, since the other road leads to a church:

For the Romani audience, it was a cautionary tale replete with symbolism which had immediate relevance for them. For the non-Romani audience, the same message was apparent. But without a knowledge of the Romani world view, much of the symbolism must have been interpreted simply as a part of the ‘mystery’ of the Romanies. This was reinforced by the quite unnecessary introduction by Kusturica of magical tricks, moving cans, flying forks, floating scarves and women. These things are not part of real Romani life, but they are certainly what caught the imagination of the reviewers, and what those reviewers thought belonged in a film about Romanies (55).

There are certainly elements in the film which Ciganos interpreted differently than mainstream audiences, but my interlocutors said they enjoyed getting a glimpse of Roma people’s lives in Europe so they could better understand them. For those among my interlocutors who saw the film it represented a cautionary tale since the further Perhan strayed from traditional mores, the worse his luck became ending with his death. The final scene where the road forks represents two possibilities, one of which is a return to grace, crystalized this message. Auntie Violeta for example said a lot of Roma had turned evangelical in Brazil. She listed several evangelical converts in Brasilia, Belo Horizonte, and Sao Paulo.

Evangelicalism has been internationally more relevant to the diaspora due to increasing numbers of converts among the Romanies, yet my interlocutors considered it a breach of tradition. They identified themselves as Catholic and said that evangelicals were betraying their ancestors by choosing to follow a different religion. Cabrito’s brother Minu said evangelical Romanies were abandoning their ethnicity and behaving more like the gage converts: “They are
losing the culture by having weddings and funerals with no music, no saints to pray to, no drinking and no dancing to traditional songs. What kind of Ciganos are those?” He imagined ancestors turning in their graves. My Catholic interlocutors preferred to hear “songs for the dead” performed in Romanes during the funeral processions as well as during slavas (Catholic saints’ day feasts). The evangelical prohibitions against drinking, dancing, music, and the saint worship typical of Catholic Ciganos made the latter feel that converts had lost their culture, yet some women like Cornelia acknowledged positive effects of conversion: “They live better lives now, the men stopped drinking, they don't get drunk and fight at weddings anymore, and they’re able to work more and save money, they’re wealthier now.” These positive lifestyle changes subsequent to conversion may represent the bulk of what entices Romanies to convert.

On an international scale this trend towards evangelism has been escalating among Romanies ever since the movement started in the UK and in France in the 1950s (Laurent 2014, Acton 2014). Since World War II a growing number of Roma have embraced these denominations: for the first time Romanies actually became ministers and created their own churches, missionary organizations and Romani biblical translations. There are about a thousand such churches in Spain for example, one hundred of them in Madrid alone according to Gay y Blasco (1999). While Pentecostalism helps some integrate in Western countries it exacerbates hostility in countries that see the denomination as anti-nationalistic:

The Pentecostal churches often work as bridges between Roma and non-Roma communities; they often provide a certain trust capital to their adherents which help integration into the labour and housing markets. But Pentecostalism also often constitutes yet another challenge in the interactions between Romani groups and non-Romani society. Especially in Eastern and Southern European contexts, where Orthodox or Catholic national churches play a vital role in the processes of nation building, Pentecostal and other “new churches” pose a threat to the view of a unified nation. The Romas’ inclination to turn to these churches is here easily construed as a statement against their nations (Thurfjell and Marsh 2014: 19).
Thurfjell and Marsh’s anthology delineates the complexity of conversion amongst the Romanies in Europe. Also it implies that the growing presence of Pentecostalism bothers even secular non-Romani officials interested in promoting human rights.

In Brazil I found that Roma activists themselves were provoked by the changing religions in the diaspora. Those representing minority rights at the national level identified as Catholics and were reluctant to associate themselves with the evangelical converts. This is not unique to Brazil. Johannes Ries also documents the impact of Pentecostalism on the Roma in Romania and argues that conversions are most successful when they promise either integration within mainstream society through multiethnic congregations, or the ethnic exclusivity of a Gypsy/Romani church, in the case of those who fear assimilation:

In Pentecostal cosmology ethnic differences blur and are expelled out the world of the non-converts. But in fact, a new frontier replaces ethnic boundaries: in a cosmological dichotomization mankind is divided into the secular world (non-converted sinner who are lost in the clutches of Satan) and the sacred world (faithful, saved souls who belong to the people of God). Ethnic differentiation is reconfigured as theological differentiation. The secular Roma/Gypsy is reborn as a sacred child of God. Nevertheless, there are several Pentecostal congregations in which the tranethnic discourse is challenged by the idea of a Romany/Gypsy church. Recently some Romanian Romany/Gypsy congregations split off from the Pentecostal umbrella organization Pentecostal Cult […] and founded the Romany Union led by Roma/Gypsies” (2010: 274).

Ries states that in the case of Corturari Roma (tent-Gypsies) in Romania, who were nomads until sedentarized in the early 1960s, they still make a living as coppersmiths, and are perceived as maintaining their cultural differences and respected by mainstream locals, whereas the Ţigani (Gypsies) who lost the dialect and most traditions as well as the dress-code and traditional occupations, and survive as indebted day workers on Romanian farms or beggars, are seen as a negative and dangerous element within Romanian society. By converting to Pentecostalism the marginalized Ţigani could transcend ethnic barriers to their assimilation, whereas the more
“traditional” Corturari Roma wish to maintain their claims to ethnic exclusivity and avoid being associated with the Țigani whom they also believe to be ‘inferior’:

In fact, the Țigani in Trăbșeș suffer double stigmatization, for they are stigmatized not only by Romanians but also by other Roma/Gypsies like the Corturari. Even if the Romanian Romany/Gypsy spectrum is highly heterogeneous, there are certain criteria – such as craft, costume, language or wealth – which place the different Romany/Gypsy subgroups on an internal ladder of prestige. On this ladder, the Corturari enjoy a high position and look down on most of the other Romany/Gypsy groups in the region. They are acknowledged as authentic, ‘true Gypsies’: rom (Romany: men). On the contrary, the Țigani can only occupy the lowest step of this internal ladder of prestige; they are seen as half-breeds: kherutne (Romany: house-occupants) (277).

Therefore, the Roma in Romania, like those I encountered in Brazil, discriminate among each other based on authenticity claims and economic status in the larger society. Yet in Romania it is precisely those who are still tent dwelling (most of whom now have tents adjacent to their houses) that enjoy a higher status as “authentic” Romanies. The Pentecostal movement succeeds at gaining Romani conversions because it acknowledges and engages their specific ethnic markers in a variety of ways, depending on local contexts.

Similarly, the activist movement and international discourse for Romani socio-economic integration can benefit from engaging different approaches as necessary in different contexts as well. The improvement of living conditions for members of this historically marginalized ethnicity requires different scales of interventions, where each level provides its own challenges. Some initial necessary steps include obtaining legal documents such as birth certificates for all Romanies, supporting their access to public education and health care, and raising awareness about their political rights. Also, learning a standard version of Romanes may help some procure employment now made available at national and international levels to promote minority rights. However, as summarized at a 2013 European Parliament conference I attended in Brussels, it takes local authorities’ interest to develop projects specific to the needs of local Romanies.
Animosity between subgroups remains another significant barrier to a united political movement and social integration among Romanies. Himself a member of the Freemasons, Cabrito noted: “The Gypsy ethnicity is the true Masonry. They help their brothers. The only difference is that they don’t have political or social interests, they are not philanthropic. For example they are not going to pay for Mickey to study and become a judge even though it would be in everyone’s best interest to have a Gypsy judge.” Similarly there is little interest in helping impoverished Roma internationally in a significant way because the focus remains on vitsa appurtenance as immersed within competing claims of authenticity between subgroups, and increasingly so (among the Roma), on personal accumulation of wealth.

The main issues for Ciganos are the relationships between work, gender as they see it, patriarchy, and power systems on different scales. The women’s economic empowerment through being able to be the main income provider represents resistance to patriarchal norms. The men’s work, either as car mechanics, traders of sorts, real estate, or moneylenders is less important. The men are centripetal, while it is up to the women to uphold the traditions and to educate their children according to social norms. Also the Roma unwillingness to “come out” in public as ethnically identifiable represents yet another form of resistance. Yet in Brazil, there is a tension accruing between the desire to have a structured, traditional cosmology centered around purity laws and the notion of the mule (the dead), yet this is now being lost. With the increase of evangelical conversions even the main occupation of fortunetelling is being cast aside, along with Catholic rituals around baptisms, anniversaries, weddings, saint days and funerals. In a context where the fortuneteller serves as the identity marker as making Romani women truly Romani, in the context of Brazil the sexual taboos are being lost, altered, and defied, the kriss judgment is limited to a payment of fines, and money makes “identity” flexible, unlike in casts.
67. “Cigano People: the law in your hands” – *Cartilha* (Primer)
CONCLUSIONS

My dissertation is an ethnographic account of Gypsy myths and Romani people: their cosmologies, language use and everyday practices involving sexuality, loves, jealousies, intimate rivalries, and fortunetelling, based on fieldwork conducted in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo on two subgroups: the Roma and the Calon. From January 2007 to November 2008, I engaged in participant-observation with about two hundred interlocutors: ninety Roma and one hundred and ten Calon - men, women, and children - in addition to numerous other Brazilians. Among mainstream Brazilians, few people know much about Romanies or Gypsies, other than popular myths about them – as in unverifiable narratives, overgeneralized stereotypes or false propaganda. This is because most Ciganos (Gypsies in Portuguese) are afraid to be known and potentially infiltrated by impostors, so-called spiritual Gypsies (Ciganos espírituais). The Roma in particular also keep their ethnicity anonymous in order to avoid discrimination.

Because most Ciganos remain disinterested in sharing the details of their lives with the gage (non-Gypsies), I relied on building a close rapport with about twenty interlocutors, mostly elderly women who had attained the status of matriarchs and who were relatively impervious to social means of control such as gossip. I expected to be treated like a suspicious gagi, so whenever I met Ciganos, like the fortunetellers reading palms in public parks, I immediately told them I was born in Romania and suspected that my father’s father was of Romani descent – which I did. I said that I desired to find out more about the culture particularly because of the widespread anti-Gypsy prejudice in my native country, Romania. Presenting such a nuanced autobiographical narrative created a closer rapport with Ciganos. I was often treated almost like a family member, regularly visiting homes that were inaccessible to the gage. Many interlocutors wanted from me recognition as a historically marginalized minority striving to maintain their
cultural norms. While some believed I was part-Romani, which I may be, others did not, and treated me as a *gagi*. The ambiguity of my own genealogy mirrored their own ambiguities: of historical facts, of origin stories, of wanting to stay hidden, and of flexible authenticity claims – on which I elaborate in chapter 1. This contributed to the fact that my disclosure to them as well as theirs to me (in complementary roles as part-time ethnographer or daughter-substitute) was always fragmentary depending on whom I talked to and the speech contexts. After establishing initial contact, I was often invited to visit Romani households, but mostly conversed with elderly women. *Ciganos* were spread across the two cities, including the suburbs, so fieldwork entailed long commutes on public transportation, where we were often preyed upon by local thieves.

Initially my goal was to reside within each Romani community for several months. But I found it more feasible to reside with mainstream Brazilians in shared apartments or in youth hostels. Occasionally I stayed overnight in Roma houses, but never in Calon tents, which were reserved for nuclear families. I stayed in Rio de Janeiro for the first six months and in Sao Paulo for the rest of fieldwork. I have made several return visits and I sustained contact with some key interlocutors via the Internet and telephone conversations.

I mostly “hung out” with *Ciganos*, pen and paper in hand, taking notes from time to time while engaging in language immersion and participating in their activities. I have changed all names to protect anonymity, with the exception of several public figures who insisted I use their actual names. Notably, *Ciganos* have Brazilian names as well as secret ones used only by their kin. I relied entirely on my own skills in Portuguese and Romanes, which has been shown to derive from Sanskrit, and which suggests a probable exodus from Rajasthan in today’s northwestern India. Romanes dialects have borrowings from a variety of standard languages reflecting where particular Romanies have lived for the past thousand years. My brief studies of
standard Romanes in Romania helped me gain access and understand some of their cultural specificities, but this knowledge was not crucial since everyone spoke mainly Portuguese with a few words or phrases of Romanes interspersed sporadically. I struggled to write and type accurate notes especially since Ciganos mixed the two vernaculars in their own speech, which also served as an ethnic-marker as chapter 2 elaborated. The Roma said they did not recognize Calon as co-ethnics, and rationalized it by claiming they did not understand their chib (tongue in Romanes, which is shibi for the Calon, who call their dialect kalo). Because most Ciganos were suspicious when outsiders understood their dialect, I rarely spoke it even though I was able to.

When I introduced myself to the Calon, I was immediately invited to visit their tents in the company of many children who were clearly not attending school that day. Adults insisted that if their children became immersed in the gage school culture they would lose their ethnic values. Even among the wealthy Roma, children were rarely allowed to attend school for more than two to three years, girls much less than boys. Therefore, in Brazil, even when poverty was not an issue, Romani childhood socialization patterns posed serious barriers to pursuing a formal education. However, while most of the elders remained adamantly illiterate, both Roma and Calon now said illiteracy was a handicap. For instance, an illiterate mother once poured acid in her baby’s eyes instead of eye drops resulting in blindness. Also most elderly could not read bus signs, so when they ventured into the city they had difficulty returning home alone; this was not the case for younger people.

While the Romanies I came to know did not see the value of my degree in anthropology, the Calon still took me into their intimate lives because they were eager to make themselves seem less exotic in order to fight prejudice. I observed many pollution taboos. They gave me a tour of their tents - surprisingly spacious residences that could last over ten years. Large beams
made of wood held up thick, plastic sheathing strong enough to protect against tropical rains, one of the biggest nuisances in their lifestyle. The front part of each tent made up the kitchen, hiding behind it the communal bedroom for both parents and unmarried youths. These kitchens usually glistened with numerous aluminum pots and pans, which the women cleaned with pride on a daily basis, as their honor depended on it. Also if a spoon touched the ground it was thrown away immediately, the ground being considered impure just like one’s feet and genitals, particularly the female genitalia. Oral sex remained taboo, as well as conversing on sexual topics. Even some words were taboo, and if spoken they could make one impure. The ethnic-specific notion of impurity (*maxrime*) – shared by the Roma and the Calon – was less related to hygiene than a sense of morality, similar in function to the danger of contagion of being “untouchable” in an Indian context, a cultural similarity with present-day semi-nomadic tribes in India.

So even though the Roma did not consider the Calon co-ethnics, both called themselves *Ciganos* or *Gypsies* in Portuguese, and retained numerous ethnic-specific characteristics common amongst Romanies elsewhere, such as the moral pollution taboos, the honor and shame elaborations of gender roles, some preservation of their dialects, as well as disinterest in formal education. Chapter 3 elaborated on Brazil as a hyper-sexualized and dangerous context or foil against which *Ciganidade* (or *Gypsiness*) is upheld. For example, Roma admitted to me that they started moving into houses only two decades earlier, after a stray bullet killed a little girl in Sao Paulo in her family’s tent. *Ciganos* in general considered the *gage* as prone to violence, drug addiction and promiscuity. Non-ethnic women were commonly called *galinhas* (chickens in Portuguese). In chapter 3, I elaborated on both legal and illegal sexual practices to provide a context in which *Ciganos* actually strive to maintain conservative norms, despite increasing frequency of dissent. With time and patience I learned that many *Ciganos* and *Ciganas* had
affairs, fights, jealousies, vices, sexual curiosities, divorces, and bouts of rebellion that disrupted their public disclosure of ethnic-specific modesty. Yet most presented themselves as proudly “modest” Ciganos compared to gringos (foreigners) and gage in hyper-sexualized Brazil.

In chapter 4 I investigated the concept of maxrimé (being contaminated) as integral to both Roma and Calon cosmologies, while also giving examples of dissent. The Roma in particular were much less dedicated to upholding all of the daily purification practices. For example, they remembered the elders’ taboo against washing all their clothing together (the tops with the maxrime bottoms) in one container, but they admitted they now used a common laundry machine or their maids mixed it. Most Roma and even some Calon hired gage maids to help them clean, and sometimes even cook for their families, something that was in the past highly taboo. Still there was a great sense of disgust and ambivalence, and people gossiped and sometimes refused commensality in protest. To be Romani meant to have a seat at the table, and to refuse was just as bad as to not be invited – to the lavish weddings, anniversaries and funerals. To be maxrime meant to be ignored and cast into the gage world, which was thought to bring illness or bad luck (bibaxt as opposed to baxt meaning luck) through contagion.

I had gone into fieldwork expecting greater rigidity around maxrime. Also as a female ethnographer I was keen to avoid being subject to their cultural prejudices against non-Romani women. To uphold their ethnic-specific honor, Romani girls dropped out of school soon after they became literate to work as fortunetellers and prepare for an early marriage – a ritual arranged by the couple’s fathers, and involving a bride-price exchange. After a two-day marriage during which the bride’s blood stained nightgown was paraded along with a red flag as proof of her lost virginity, the bride moved in with the groom’s family to be under the constant surveillance of her mother-in-law. Privacy remained rare and taboo, and most women worked
together, yet this was becoming less common now amongst the Roma who owned their own psychic reading offices. There was a sense of change, but not a sense of crisis.

In chapter 4 I elaborated on Ciganos’ gender-specific honor-and-shame codes as well as perceptions of gage. While male promiscuity was condoned among the Calon, Roma wives with lucrative fortunetelling businesses were the breadwinners in their families and no longer accepted their husbands’ open affairs. When I asked about love, the elderly Ciganas said were induced to love unconditionally from an early age, so that the couple learned to love each other from birth till death. Indeed divorces were rare, but more frequent for Roma women who were the breadwinner of the family and could afford to pay back their bride-price.

In chapter 5 I elaborated on fortunetelling as a traditional female occupation for Ciganos, and a legal one in Brazil, showcasing my interlocutors’ ambivalent views towards magic and trickery (malandragem in Portuguese). This notion of malandragem (trickery, cunning savoir-faire) is in fact normative in Brazil, a popular mainstream way of being resourceful, not necessarily selfish, a common Robin Hood-like practice in a corrupt society. However Ciganos boasted they could best outwit the gage, finding loopholes and networking – including with the police. Asking about fortunetelling elicited numerous stereotypes about Ciganos, including some they had internalized about themselves, such as being scam artists and thieves.

For example, according to the Roma myth of the fourth nail, which was supposedly meant for the head of Jesus on the crucifix and was stolen by a Cigano, God condones their stealing from gage as compensation for having saved Jesus from additional pain. In Brazil’s religious syncretism, Ciganas present themselves as Catholic healers who invoke magic including some from registers they admit they do not really practice, such as macumba (black magic), Condomble and Umbanda –which are popular cults among the descendants of African
slaves. It seemed that *Ciganas* who told clients what they wanted to hear, and asked for large payments (of up to one million réais) were more likely paying lip service and liable for lawsuits.

While I did not find much evidence of *Ciganos* stealing outright in Brazil, practitioners conducted their psychic activities with a sense of ironic humor when saying they were chosen people with a divine *gift* (*dono* in Portuguese). However, even *Ciganas* who considered fortunetelling a scam admittedly felt greater ambivalence towards it than they initially said, and struggled with the “containment” of others. Brazil has legalized fortunetelling, yet most *Ciganas* do not complete the two hundred hour-long coursework required for certification. *Ciganas* preferred to work without a diploma or to pay off the man who printed them in the case of a lawsuit. The *gage* women who married into Cigano communities, or who had been adopted by them, practiced the trade successfully, and many read their own tarot cards.

The image of sexualized *Gypsies* was also popular in Brazil, and often taken up by impostors or so-called *spiritual Gypsies* who claimed to have magical powers through spirit possessions by deceased *Ciganos* – the very mention of whom was taboo for Romanies. Also the spiritual *Gypsies* (*Ciganos espirituais*) represented competition in the trade of fortunetelling. The Calins who did identify as *Ciganas* in public confessed that, like these impostors, they too had to dress up for the part when fortunetelling. The women who looked beautiful, happy, healthy, and fulfilled – like “typical Gypsies – people of the Orient” – were much more in demand selling magic potions for gaining virility, love, health, happiness and prosperity. Often, elder *Ciganas* treated me as an apprentice, and said I should travel abroad with them since I spoke several languages and could translate. To show respect in their company I always wore a long, colorful skirt, despite the sweltering heat, but I refused to invest $200 in a custom-made dress like the ones they wore, although they suggested it repeatedly.
No one thought I was a virgin in my mid-twenties, so to create a sense of order, in what concerned my sexuality, as opposed to anxiety, I presented myself as engaged in a relationship with Eugene Hutz, a popular and quite famous (although mythical) “Gypsy” musician from the Ukraine and New York. He had taught Madonna a song in Romanes, which they performed together at “Live Earth” in London July 2007, so most of my interlocutors knew of him. Eugene also visited a few households with me in Brazil during my last eight months of fieldwork, whenever he was not touring in Europe or in the US. He was well received with ethnic-specific hospitality both by Mio Vasite, the former president of the Romani Union in Brazil, and by Mirian Stanescon, the lawyer and activist who mythologized herself as “Queen of Ciganos in Brazil,” despite contestations by local Romanies and scholars like Franz Moonen.

Still, Mirian retained the greatest visibility as Cigana in Brazil, as the only public descendant of a wealthy Roma family that migrated from Romania and helped others migrate to escape the Holocaust. The other key political figures like Mio Vacite criticized her involvement in Romani politics on account that “she is a female and therefore cannot be a leader.” They also despised the fact that Mirian divulged Romani values by publishing her own deck of tarot cards with ethnic-specific archetypes such as the virgin bride, despite her own marriage to a gagio man when she was thirty-two and of doubtful virginity. Also most questioned why she persuaded former president Lula to officially designate May 24th as Dia Nacional dos Ciganos – National Gypsy Day in Brazil – based on an imported cult of Saint Sara Kali revered on this day by Romanies in Europe, but not by Brazilian Ciganos.

Despite critiques, Mirian dressed as a queen and proselytized to her gage fortunetelling clients on the 24th of each month in a park of Rio de Janeiro – a ritual promoting Romani awareness while also remaining evidently self-serving. In chapter 6 I elaborated on Roma
representatives’ contributions as well as their feuds. I frequently hid my alliances and affinities to safely investigate Romani lives. The presence of Eugene, and the gossip and drama surrounding his welcome, added to my presence, and acceptance of me as ethnographer.

Despite their similarities in cultural values and even dialects, the Roma and the Calon subgroups differ in their positions and self-understandings within the Brazilian society. The Roma hide their ethnicity, fearing prejudice and discrimination, and still circulate victim narratives of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, the Calon are extremely visible as quintessential, palm-reading, tent-inhabiting Ciganos. While the Roma see themselves as a secret, twice-displaced diaspora with a long history of persecutions in Europe, the Calon see themselves as native Brazilians of distant (mythical) Egyptian origins. The Roma avoid being associated with the Calon, whom they do not consider co-ethnics. This complicates the national Romani rights movement, which is lead by Roma representatives who only include the Calon in the Cigano population census in order to receive greater government funding for their own communities. Most Calon continue to struggle with poverty in Brazil, while numerous Roma live in houses and enjoy significant wealth. Nonetheless, both subgroups were shocked when I told them that many European Romanies resort to begging. Brazilian Ciganos retain an ethnic-specific sense of dignity despite the widespread poverty and corruption they experience.

Since Brazilian Roma keep their ethnicity secret in order to avoid discrimination, minority population estimates are skewed. According to Vasconcelos, the 2012 census suggests that half a million Ciganos live in Brazil (2015, web). But Argentinean Romani-rights activist Jorge Bernal says that minority associations have estimated between eight hundred thousand and a million Romanies in Brazil, although most are afraid to disclose their ethnicity. In this dissertation I explore how empathy inflects understanding, reading or knowing the other.
investigate “the flipside of empathy,” which Hollan describes as “the way in which people promote, allow, or hinder understanding of themselves” (2008: 392). Ciganos’ insistence on their own opacity of intentionality challenges empathic approaches to understanding them and defies efforts towards language standardization. Yet the women’s confidence that they can rely solely on intuition as fortunetellers suggests they actually have a fine-tuned sensibility for understanding others’ intentionalities, desires and thoughts, perhaps due to their intense socialization with numerous kin and to being inducted into the trade early on in life and practicing it constantly as so-called “street psychologists,” while advertising it as a gift.

Myths act as frozen speech, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, a meta-language that depoliticizes and hides motivations. My dissertation questions myths about Ciganos, those held about them and those they hold about themselves, in order to reveal larger-scale power dynamics at play. Notably, the Roma in Brazil have internalized mainstream prejudices: against the poor (including their own), against kaliviri (black people), against homosexuals (biś-taj-štar) and against the Calon, whom they see as poor, primitives, thieves, savages, scary, uncivilized and black, due to the occasional mixed marriages between Calon men and kaliviri women.

This animosity developed since the eighteenth century when the Roma first arrived to Brazil, where anti-Gypsy prejudices preceded them ever since the Calon were expelled to the new world from Portugal starting in the 1500s. On the colonial territory the Calon presence was criminalized: new laws decreed illegal speaking the Kalo dialect, offering fortunetelling and wearing the traditional colorful dresses. Nonetheless, the Calon maintained their lifestyle by avoiding authorities, travelling in the rural inland to escape their reach. With native Indians, Ciganos developed friendly relations, bartering and enjoying communal feasts. Ciganos eventually established good relations with the gage and were reported to occupy small
governmental positions such as *meirinhos* (court servants). Some Calon were said to have been slave traders and moneylenders, while the Roma were enslaved for five centuries in present-day Romanian territories. Many Roma fled Europe for a better life, in several waves of migration subsequent to the abolition of their enslavement in 1856 and 1864, and during the First and Second World Wars, unwittingly reaching Brazil when they hid on boats that headed for “America.” They had expected to reach the United States like many of their kin.

Only in the past two decades has the Brazilian government acknowledged its Romani minority of three different kinds: Calon, Roma and Sinti, each with its own dialect of Romanes and specific customs. Brazilian Roma belong to several smaller sub-groups or *vitsas*: Kaldarasha, Machuwaya, Lovara, Rudari – descendent of migrants who lived in Romania and the former Yugoslavia, and Xoraxane or Rorrane – descendent of migrants from Turkey and Greece. According to local historian Rodrigo Corrêa Teixeira, the Sinti arrived to Brazil during the First and Second World Wars primarily from France and Germany (2007: 19). Although I do not deal with the Sinti in this dissertation, they are recognized as *Ciganos* by both subgroups I engaged.

Although the Brazilian government has acknowledged its Romani minority only in the past two decades, all *Ciganos* I met reported good relations with their mainstream neighbors despite having been previously labeled as *malandros* (tricksters), vagabonds, degenerates, thieves, cunning traders and child thieves, according to Martin Fotta (2012: 77). To an extent, I understood why Romanies felt it was better for them to avoid becoming easily “read” by others, yet unlike them, I was pleasantly surprised that Brazilians desired to associate themselves with *Gypsiness*. This was the complete opposite of what I had witnessed in Europe, where Romanies continue to be overtly despised, and where their social marginalization continues to this day, such that they represent Europe’s largest and most impoverished ethnic minority numbering over
a million individuals, the majority of whom are under eighteen. Only on April 15\textsuperscript{th} of this year did the European Parliament finally pass a resolution to acknowledge the Romani genocide during the Holocaust: over 600,000 were exterminated along with the Jews and homosexuals.

Much remains to be done to integrate Romanies into European social structures. In an international context, Brazilian Romanies are fortunate not to be on the lowest rungs of that society, although they remain immersed in both positive and negative myths about themselves, partially because of the smoke and mirrors they themselves engage in frequently.

Through intersubjective experience in fieldwork encounters, with each other and with me, this dissertation depicts how \textit{Ciganos} see and experience their world, and how this world intersects with larger Brazilian national and international levels of discourse and practice. In an international context, Brazilian Romani politics remain isolated and this is largely due to language barriers. Yet I began to see new possibilities as professor Gheorghe Sarău pioneered the inclusion of Romani history and language in Romanian schools as part of a minority-specific curriculum. Although my interlocutors vehemently opposed disclosing their cultural secrets in public schools, they admitted that if given the opportunity, in the form of Romani cultural centers, most children and adults would love to learn their history and even standard Romanes.

This dissertation is written in consideration of the moral dilemma whether to expose them, these people who have suffered so many persecutions historically that they have grown highly sensitive to the prying gaze of outsiders. The ethical issues are complex, and this is why on many occasions I did not inquire into Romani areas of life and worldviews that were purposefully kept away from me as a researcher. Readers may find it disappointing that I did not attend any funerals and did not see fortunetelling in action with other clients beside myself, yet this was the wish of my interlocutors. Respecting their wishes for secrecy and a certain sense of
the sacred played an integral part in my access into their intimate lives as trustworthy enough to spend ample time in their company although I was no insider.

Eventually I found several people with my last name on Facebook and these Budurs said their ancestors were Syrian from the port-city of Latakia. Some lived in a refugee community in Mersin, a city in southern Turkey, and said their grandparents who migrated to escape the military dictatorship still spoke mostly in Arabic. They said the word budur is plural for badh’r (crescent moon). In Turkish budur means this is it, as in “I don’t have a last name.” Whether or not this name indicates a Romani background, there are numerous Budurs among mainstream Romanians according to various social media. My father once conversed with some who believed we are descendents of Tartars. In Norway and Finland, Romanies were often mistaken for Tartars, perhaps because they mythologized themselves as such since Europeans already feared these ruthless barbarians invaders. However, my own geneology remains inconclusive like for most Romanies, who acknowledge their long history of mixed ancestry with Europeans despite insisting on maintaining their blood purity.

Most Ciganos insisted on group endogamy, and considered gage the ultimate others. Among the Calon I found that preference was given to marriages between patrilateral parallel cousins, the children of parents whose own parents are male siblings. The Calins I met did not recognize gender inequality in their marriages with openly promiscuous men, and refused to see a lack of empathy in male promiscuity. They normalized it boastfully saying: “Ciganos are real men!” Both Calins and Roma women typically adopted their husbands’ children with mistresses, in addition to having several children of their own, proudly “multiply” their own ethnic group, which only required paternal descent for group membership. Yet economic role-reversal among the Roma left the men afraid to upset their wives and less able to enjoy sexual liberties openly
than in the past generations. Still, most Roma men admitted to me in private that they had affairs on occasion, yet I noted a great deal of confidence in married Ciganos’ lives as a couple, bordering faith. Bourdieu suggests, social norms offer people a sense of sacred meaning.

Like psychoanalyst Ferenczi suggests, I understand this kind of faith as “magical thinking” and a regression insofar as it presents unfulfilled wishes as fulfilled (1952). Human beings frequently engage in magical thinking, which can be expressed in a variety of normative ways. Babies operate primarily on this mode of thinking, according to Ferenczi, but adults retain some of it during development: “In the mental life of the normal, the countless number of superstitious gestures, or such as are in some other way considered efficacious (gestures of cursing, blessing, praying), is a remainder of that development period of the sense of reality in which one still felt mighty enough to be able to violate the regular order of the universe” (225). Ciganos not only stimulate mainstream others to engage in the magical mode of thinking through fortunetelling, but they also regularly engage in it themselves through their myths and cosmologies, through beliefs which allow Ciganas to pursue their trade without doubting their own skills, and through respecting moral purity laws while imagining they gain good karma through honorable deeds under the constant gaze of the spirit world – their mule (ancestors). Magical thinking also partially operates here in the fragmentary evidence I bring from fieldwork in hopes to flesh out the humanity of Brazilian Romanies beyond the myths, the positive and negative stereotypes, the smoke and mirrors they themselves frequently engage.
APPENDIX A. ROMOLOGY AND EVIDENCE OF PREJUDICE

Romani studies, also known as Romology, Gypsiology, Ciganology in Portuguese or Ziganology in German, represent an interdisciplinary field of ethnic studies concerning Romani peoples in their diversity. This multi-disciplinary field draws on sociology, anthropology, linguistics and political science in focusing on this diaspora’s origins as reflected by Romani language or Romanes, as its speakers describe its dialects and the newly standardized written forms, as well as these peoples’ historical experiences of persecution, socio-political and economic oppression, cultural customs and traditions, political activism and the changing status of migrants in society. Romology began in 1763 when Stefan Valyi, a student of theology, noticed similarities between spoken Romanes and Sanskrit:

In 1763, Stefan Valyi, a Protestant student of theology at Leyden University, discovered quite by accident that there was a similarity between the Gypsy language of the Kormorn district of Hungary and the languages of the Indian subcontinent. With the aid of three Indian students from Malabar, he compiled a vocabulary list of one thousand words; these words were then read off to a group of Gypsies, who recognized almost all of them. Thus began a long series of philological investigations by such linguists as Pott (1844), Miklosisch (1872-1880), Paspati (1870), von Wlislocki (1890), and Turner (1926, 1927) that led to the conclusion that Romany is akin to modern Hindi (Gropper 1975: 1).

Romani studies began as a formal academic discipline in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, and it is primarily concerned with those living in Europe. Its key contributors include Michael Stewart, Thomas Acton, David Smith and Ian Hancock, the first Rom in the UK to pursue higher education. Professor Hancock is now creating a Romani Studies department at University of Texas in Austin.

The main publication in this field is the academic journal Romani Studies published by The Gypsy Lore Society and edited by Yaron Matras, chief of the Romani studies program at the University of Manchester. Romologists’ concerns extend across national boundaries and go beyond ethnically included sub-groups such as the Roma, Sinti, Cale, Romnichels and Ludari.
and to other groups such as the Irish Travellers and the Scottish Travellers who are ethnically different, yet also known as *Gypsies*, which is an umbrella term for nomads in the UK. The term appears in Italics in this dissertation to acknowledge its mythologizing implications. The term Romology comes from the word *Rom*, said to come from the Prakrit word *Dom* meaning *man* according to John Sampson’s ‘Dom theory’:

The ‘D’ of ‘Dom’ is a variety of ‘d’ pronounced with the tongue turned upwards typical of Indian languages. Many Dom settled in the Middle East and are known as Dom to this day. They speak a language of Indian origin and have a lifestyle similar to that of many Romany clans in Europe. The rest moved into Europe where the ‘D’ became ‘R’ (still with tongue turned up!) and later, for some clans, a guttural sound; these are the Rom or Romanies of Europe (Kenrick 2004: 8).

Sampson suggested the *Rom* came from “a comparatively low caste,” which led others to disagree and propose “etymologies other than Indian Dom such as Sanskrit *Ramta* (wandering)” (Kenrick 8). The theory that they have always been a wandering people, inherently nomadic has been disputed as well: “an analysis of the Romani vocabulary shows that its original speakers were more the ‘home-loving’ type: we find no words like cave, tent, bison, but on the contrary words like house, cow, pig, etc.” (Kochanowski 1980: 26).

The Latvian Romani scholar Jan Kochanowski (1980) and the Indian linguist W.R. Rishi (1976) put forth the so-called ‘Rajput theory’ according to which in 1192 the Rajputs were defeated by the Muslim invader Muhammed Ghori such that the defeated army split into three groups where two groups scattered in the Punjab Region and, “The third group, which called themselves Romane Chave (the sons of the god Rama), set off across Afghanistan towards Europe” (Kochanowski 1980: 27). So the initial Roma diaspora went through Afghanistan to Turkey, Greece and throughout Europe, and further on to the New World colonies along with the European colonizers. Although there is no certainty regarding their initial migrations from northern India, what is certain is that European prejudices against them date from their arrival
until present day. In the medieval period when these dark-skinned foreigners appeared, Christianity had developed the doctrine of war between light and darkness led mostly against dark skinned Oriental pagans who represented both inferiority and evil. When they appeared in Romanian territories, these migrants were enslaved, trapped into an already existing system of war prisoners developed in response to similar practices by the Ottoman Empire during its repeated attacks on the Balkan principalities.

Early documents attest to the chroniclers’ revulsion to seeing Gypsies’ dark skins. For example the monk Cornerius of Lubeck reports in 1417 about their “most ugly faces, black like those of Tartars” (Kenrick 1972:19). Later the monk Rufus of Lubeck echoed this aversion to their dark skins. European languages such as Italian and Dutch have developed the saying “black as a Gypsy” (19). Upon entering Christian Europe, the Roma realized there was significant prejudice against them, and that many European countries were persecuting the Jews, so they began fabricating the story that they were descendants from Egypt, who had enslaved the Israelites, and for this reason God had condemned them to perpetual wandering (Kochanowski 1980: 25). The story worked and the Roma came known as Gypsies derived from Egyptian. The Pope as well as Balkan voievods and kings gave them letters of protection allowing them free passage through feudal territories for a while (Duna 1985: 3). However, the Church soon disapproved of their customs and became suspicious that these were pagan infidels:

The Church did not approve of fortune telling and the Gypsy customs, morals and way of life contrasted with the non-Gypsy Europe. This was the beginning of prejudice and persecution that exists until today. During the medieval period anyone crossing the Turkish occupied lands into Europe aroused the suspicions of the Church who considered people in this region infidels and enemies of the Church. These lands were considered secular states and people coming through them were perhaps spies for the unknown enemies of the Christian faith. Gypsy people were open for attack by Christian clergy and Moslem priests alike because they did not practice one or another of the prevalent religions of that region. Because Gypsies were regarded as nonreligious people they were scorned and held in contempt by religious sects wherever they traveled (3).
Gypsies were attacked both by Christians and Moslems because they did not practice either religion. Their language was thought to be gibberish invented to fool Europeans. A document recorded a typical remark made by a Spaniard: “When I go to the market there in the corner stand the accursed Gypsies jabbering to each other in a speech I cannot understand” (Kenrick 1972: 20). They were thought as sacrilegious people, thus marking the beginning of European prejudice and persecution that persists to present day.

Initially Romani people who wanted to convert to Christianity in Europe were rejected. The Archbishop Petri of Sweden, for example, decreed in 1560: “The priest shall not concern himself with the Gypsies. He shall neither bury their corpses nor christen their children” (22). Thus, they were cast off into the illegitimate category of the European imaginary. In Romanian territories they were forced into slavery belonging to three kinds of authorities: slaves of the local landowners, slaves of the church and slaves of the government (Greenfeld 1977: 22). Anti-Gypsy laws began in 1471 in Lucerne and continued with escalating severity in: 1481 laws of Brandenburg, 1484 Spain, 1498 Freiburg Diet (Germany), 1524 Holland, 1526 Portugal, 1530 England, 1536 Denmark, 1539 France, 1540 Flanders, 1541 Scotland, 1549 Bohemia, 1557 Poland and Lithuania, and 1637 in Sweden (Kenrick 1972: 42). For instance, those who gave them alms in the 16th century were imprisoned or excommunicated. In the 17th century laws banned their traditional occupations: coppersmiths were banned from manufacturing copper utensils to protect mainstream workers from their competition in both Serbia and Hungary, whereas in Russia they were subject to extra tax levies (55). During the 19th century the Orthodox clergy in Bulgaria declared it a sin to give Gypsies alms, adding religious stigma to criminalize them.
Europeans’ intolerance created a harsh environment for Romani people in which survival meant struggling to make a legitimate living and struggling to survive sometimes in the face of outright banishment and even death. These social pressures resulted in Gypsies turning to petty crime to survive (Duna 1985: 5). This created a vicious cycle in which European myths of Gypsies as dishonest lead them to employing illegitimate means of survival, a vicious cycle that has continuous repercussions to present day. “Gypsy hunts” began in the 16th century as a sport in Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, and Germany with evidence documenting they were shot like animals. The scholar Grellman stated, “They were not always looked upon as human creatures, for at a hunting party, at one of the small German courts, a mother and her child, were shot like a couple of wild beasts” (Greenfeld 1977: 61).

A German law enacted in Aachen in 1728 called for their death two centuries prior to the Nazi Holocaust, “in order to root out this brood of rascals … whether the Gypsies resist or not, these people shall be put to death” (61). They were targeted and branded by the cutting of one ear, the left one in Moravia, and the right one in Bohemia. In England and in Romania they were herded and forced to live in the worst of conditions so they would die of starvation and cold. Marriage with Gypsies was banned throughout European history, their children were taken away and placed in institutions, and sterilization strategies were proposed prior to the Holocaust (Kenrick 1972: 56). By 1933, when the Nazi party took power in Germany, Romanies had long been a target of cultural and physical extermination throughout Europe, so many migrated to Latin America (Teixeira 2007b). In some ways Brazil is a haven for Romanies.
APPENDIX B. GLOSSARY

Athinganoi = (Greek) pagan, untouchable; root of Cigano, tsigane, zingari, zigeuner
baxt = (Romanes) good luck
baxtalo = (Romanes) lucky (m.sg) (pronounced bah-tah-loh), baxtale (m.pl.)
bibaxt = (Romanes) bad luck, misfortune (pronounced bee-bahht)
biš-taj-star = (Romanes) homosexual (pronounced beesh-tie-shtahr)
Botashi = (Romanes) Roma subgroup
bori = (Romanes) bride (pronounced bohh-ree)
Calin = (Kalo) married woman belonging to the Calon group (pronounced like kah-leen)
Calon = (Kalo) married man belonging to the Calon group (pronounced kah-lone)
Cartilha = (Portuguese) primer
cartomante = (Portuguese) tarot card reader, fortuneteller
Cavaleiro = (Portuguese) the Horseman card in the Cigano tarot deck
chavo = (Romanes) boy (pronounced shah-voh)
chibi = (Romanes) tongue; referring to own dialect of Romanes (pron. shee-bee)
chor = (Romanes) poor person; pitiful person; thief (sounds like ch- as in much –or)
chorel = (Romanes) to steal (sounds like chor –el)
Churara = (Romanes) Romani subgroup that calls itself the Knife-Makers
churi = (Romanes) knife (pronounced chu-ree)
Cigana = (Portuguese) Gypsy woman (pronounced see-gah-nah)
Cigano = (Portuguese) Gypsy man (pronounced see-gah-noo)
Cigano espiritual = (Portuguese) spiritual Gypsy; impersonators’ self-appellation
Ciganologo = (Portuguese) Romologist, expert on Romani Studies
Condomble = (Portuguese) religious register of African deities found in Brazil
dilili = (Kalo) crazy women; doida in Portuguese
dji = (Romanes) soul
dono = (Portuguese) the gift of clairvoyance; literally means gift (pron. dough-noo)
dota = (Portuguese) bride-price
favelado = (Portuguese) squatter, inhabitant of favela
festa = (Portuguese) party, usually includes food, drinking and dancing for Ciganos
fofoca = (Portuguese) gossip
gagi = (Romanes) also gagii (both pronounced gah-ee as in Jesus), non-Romani woman
gagikane = (Romanes) pertaining to non-Ciganos; of the gage (pron. gah-jee-kah-neh)
gaglio = (Romanes) also gadjo (both pronounced gah-jo as in joker), non-Romani man
galbeni = (Romanian) gold coins; dowry worn by the bride; word also used by Ciganos
galinha = (Portuguese) chicken; used by Calon as a derogatory word for non-Ciganas
Gitano = (Spanish) Gypsy, misnomer for Romani people, derived from Egyptian
Grigo = (Portuguese) (m.sg), gringa (f.sg), gringos (m.pl) Brazilians name for foreigners
Gypsy = misnomer for Romani people, derived from Egyptian
jeito = (Portuguese) jeitinho; knack; dar um jeito means to find a way, being resourceful
juron = (Kalo) what the Calon call non-ethnics
Kalderasha = (Romanes) also Kalderara, Romani subgroup that calls itself the Tinkers
kaliviri = (Kalo) person of dark skin color and African descent
kriss = (Romanes) or kris; Romani tribunal made up of several respected elder men
kumpania = (Romanes) one’s extended family
lashaw = (Romanes) shame (pronounced lah-shaw)
lajipen = (Romanes) shame (pronounced lah-jee-pen)
Lovara = (Romanes) Romani subgroup that calls itself the Moneylenders
love = (Romanes) money (pronounced lo-veh), or lowe (pronounced low-ueh)
macumba = (Portuguese) black magic practiced in Brazil, initially brought from Africa
malandragem = (Portuguese) trickery
malandro = (Portuguese) trickster
Matchuwaya = (Romanes) or Matchuwaija, Roma subgroup from former-Yugoslavia
maxrimé = (Romanes) being soiled, untouchable; perceived condition of those who fail to obey the Romani laws, regulations, rules or codes governing behavior
meirinhos = (Portuguese) lower court servants such as king’s messengers and bailiffs
melalo = (Romanes) dirty, refers to the physical state of objects considered soiled
mulo = (Romanes) dead (pronounced mooh-loh); plural form is mule (pron. mooh-leh)
Mundo Verde = (Portuguese) Green Word, a chain of esoteric stores found in Brazil
nashvalipen = (Portuguese) Green Word, a chain of esoteric stores found in Brazil
natzia = (Romanes) also natsia, nation; subgroup of the diaspora (pron. nah-tsi-ah)
Netotsi = (Romanian) Romani who escaped slavery in the Romanian territories by hiding in the woods, they were significantly darker skinned than the enslaved Romanies
nome legítimo = (Portuguese) official name, different than how Ciganos call each other
oficinas = (Portuguese) offices, used by the Roma women for practicing fortunetelling
pakiv = (Romanes) respect
pakivalo = (Romanes) respectful, honorable
paramici = (Romanes) story, myth (pronounced pah-rah-mee-chee)
phralipen = (Romanes) brotherhood, from phral (brother) (pronounced pfh-rahl-eeh-pen)
polmana = (Romanes) funeral feast
pomana = (Romanian) funeral feast; word is also used by Ciganos in Brazil
Porraimos = (standard Romanes) the Holocaust, literally means the Devouring
réais = (Portuguese) Brazilian currency
rezadeira = (Portuguese) woman who heals through prayer rituals
Romanija = (Romanes) ideological moral code shared by Romanies
Romologist = academic expert in Romani studies
Romology = field of social sciences that deals with Romani studies
Rrom = (Romanes) Cigano, man, married man; Rroma (m.pl.) men, married men
Rromni (f.sg) = (Romanes) Cigana, woman, married woman; Rromnia (f.pl.) Ciganas
sapatona = (vernacular Portuguese) lesbian, a derogatory term
Serbiaia = (Romanes) Romani sub-group from Serbia
Sinti = (Romanes) Romani sub-group from Central and Western Europe
Ţigan = (Romanian) Gypsy; much more derogatory than tsigane or tzigane (French)
Umbanda = (Portuguese) register of African-deity worship through spirit possessions
Vitsas = (Romanes) largely endogamous social units or sub-groups which display a wide range of dialects, occupations, customs and exterior appearances
Xoraxane = (Romanes) also Rrorane, Romani subgroup that calls itself the Turkish Roma
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