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**RACISM AGAINST GYPSIES IN TURKISH AND AMERICAN FILMS**

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**MA Thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Romani people dispersed worldwide after they left India about a thousand years ago. Since they do not have a state that can protect their rights and act on behalf of them, they have encountered nothing but maltreatment throughout history. Some scholars give the estimated number of the Romani people living in the world as twelve million.

For many centuries Romani have been craving recognition, the admittance of their existence. Romanies are one of the fringe-groups that has been subjected to severe racism. This project analyzes the racist depiction of Romani people in two Turkish and American films. Cinema was selected as the main subject because cinema has an enormous impact on the masses. The reason why this project uses Turkish and American films, and analyzes the condition of Romanies in these films, is that both countries have many similarities in handling the Romani issue. The mainstream society of both countries has the same approach, attitudes, thoughts, and prejudices against these people.

Roma have a unique lifestyle, which is an exclusionary one as well. Hence, nowhere have they been regarded as a people who should be given equal rights. This project aims to depict how the unreal image of the Roma has been exploited in film and how the wrongly constructed concept of them caused these people to suffer for centuries.

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## **Introduction**

“Men (are) by Nature all free, equal and independent.” Upon reading this statement one wishes that they applied to all people in the world regardless of their race or ethnicity. However, what has been the norm exercised for centuries is quite the opposite. Humanity has seen nothing but slavery, inequality and persecution. Human dignity has suffered quite a deal from the absence of basic human rights for certain peoples who have been continually subjected to racism. Robert W.Fuller in “Common decency and human dignity demand that no one be denied a realistic chance to start well in life, or to start over”<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, not everybody is offered opportunities on a silver plate. Some are born luckier, and they enjoy the privileges life offers them. Those who are born wealthy, those who belong to groups of people who are not designated as inferior by the rest of the society can be counted among the lucky ones. The rest, on the other hand, are doomed to start life as runner-ups. Barriers have already been erected when they first open their eyes to this world.

People need to be recognized, they want to contribute in order to feel that they are needed, worthy and that their contribution is appreciated. Fuller writes, “When I see you seeing me, I feel that I exist. When I see you seeing me see you, we exist”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Somebodies and Nobodies, p.117.

<sup>2</sup> Somebodies and Nobodies, p.46.

The wish for existence could not have been explained more plainly. For centuries Romani people have been craving recognition, the admittance of their existence. Romanies are one of the very fringe-groups that has been subjected to severe racism. As a result of racism in society, there is also a racist approach in the depiction of Romani people in some films. They are generally superficially depicted, and there is no thorough research into their culture. There are deeply ingrained misconceptions about Romanies, and some films do nothing but reinforce them. The audience already has a set picture of the Romani people in their minds. The constant depiction of them as criminals and thieves is really distressing and it negatively affects the Romani people themselves. They are robbed of their identity and self-esteem. Hancock argues that the non-Romani have an indistinct understanding of the Romani identity, which unfortunately results in prejudice (*Antigypsyism and the Popular Image of the Gypsy*).

He states many reasons for this, among which are color prejudice and exclusionary characteristic of the Romani culture which avoids contact with the non-Romanies as much as possible.

Hancock states that the mainstream society has notions of immorality and lawlessness and it projects these notions upon the Romani people. These notions also define the boundaries of the mainstream society.

The Romani people have no homeland to speak for their rights, so this makes them an easy target for the mainstream because they can not fight back and seek justice.

Their mental image, partly negative and partly romantic but mostly inaccurate, stems from a Romani identity that has become so institutionalized in Western tradition that it has become part of Western cultural heritage. The racism directed at Romani populations is intrinsically a part of that heritage and therefore is not recognized for what it is". (*The Struggle for Control of Identity*, Hancock)

In the same essay Hancock argues that the identity of the Romani people has been in the hands of the non-Romani specialists, politicians and academics. The ideas of those have defined the Roma and nourished the negative images of them.

He writes that the non-Romani folklorists and antropologists prefer to pick the traits of the Roma that appeal to them while ignoring other important positive traits.

Generally, those which seem to them more attractive and exotic are chosen. The Romani identity has always been under the control of the dominant power. Because Roma have neither territorial nor economic power, they are left with almost no chance to control their own image (Hancock). The image of the Roma is so embedded within the mainstream that the Romanies are studied through the filter of this wrong image. There has been an exclusion of the Romani people from education and there have always been obstacles that have hindered their integration in the mainstream (Hancock).

These created an identity where the Romani people have always been described as illiterate, uneducated and uncivilized. The Romani people, unfortunately, have no control over their identity, and they have been made to carry an identity which has been completely constructed under the supervision of the non-Romanies, who tend to ignore the real Romani character and build everything around the invented image of the Romanies. The identity imposed upon the Romani people made it also easy for the



mainstream society to label and designate them as outsiders. The following sentences are helpful in understanding the construction of identity.

“ One of the surest ways to confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is not” (Takaki).

The reason why Romanies have been viewed as scapegoats is because the Romani culture is perceived as a counterculture and seen as a threat to the established order (Kephart). This is the main reason for the prejudice that exists against the Romanies.

There are three different approaches concerning the identity of the Romani people. One defines Romanies as European, the other as Asian, the last as both. The reason why they are considered to be Europeans is due to the dense population of them in Europe (Hancock). However, scholars like Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe agree on the point that the Roma are a global population (Hancock).

Identity problem is an important issue, however, the hardships Romani people have to face in every day life, unfortunately, does not give them the chance to contemplate about how to construct and regain their true identity. Financial, health, education, employment, housing problems which is a part of their lives outweigh the problem concerning identity (Hancock).

The identity so wrongly constructed and ingrained in society also causes to racist approaches. This project analyzes the racist depiction of Romani people in two Turkish and American films. Cinema was selected as the main subject because cinema has an enormous impact on the masses. It has the power to manipulate people's thoughts, with the constant bombarding of images; it can make them think the way it intends them to.

Cinema can become a perfect weapon in the hands of those who have ill-will. It is a very powerful medium to communicate messages and impose ideas. Bazin describes the significant impact of cinema as; Through the contents of the image and the resources of montage, the cinema has at its disposal a whole arsenal of means whereby to impose its interpretation of an event on the spectator<sup>3</sup>.

The camera through whose eyes we witness what is going on on the screen, presents everything from its own point of view (Bazin). The camera has the power to manipulate and has the privilege to present events from its own standpoint. In the representation of the Romani people in films we see that the camera usually prefers a reductionist simplification. In films made about the Romanies an exposure of negative images and stereotypes are viewed.

The films selected here will be the medium to show how Romanies have been depicted. In the book *Problems of Art*, Susanne.K.Langer describes a work of art as “an outward showing of inward nature, an objective presentation of subjective reality”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Film Theory and Criticism, p.46.

<sup>4</sup> *Problems of Art*, 9.

Art expresses its creators' ideas, and it shows the inward nature, and the creator's subjective approach. However, it cannot be claimed that it has an objective presentation all the time, especially when it comes to film.

The subjective feelings and beliefs of its creator in a film may not always express reality, which might be molded and deconstructed so that it gives a completely different picture of the actual one. This is the case with Romani people: in films we get a one-dimensional and unrealistic picture of them. The presentation most generally displays the subjective and hostile feelings of the creator.

People have easier access to films than other works of art. People do not necessarily go to the cinema to see a film. They can watch them at home as well, and I believe film, as art to be closer to people. Not everyone might go to the museum to see a statue or painting or may be interested in dance. However, film exceeds all the other arts. It reaches everyone, those who can not afford going to the movies, can watch a film on television at home. Thus, it has a wider impact, and as a medium can mold the thoughts of the people. The use of Romani people in films is usually superficial, and since film has the power to reach everyone, the wrong images become deeply embedded within society.

For centuries Romani people have been taken as 'nobodies'. Almost every country they have entered has aimed to isolate them from the rest of the society. Since they were seen as trouble-makers, authorities insisted on keeping them disconnected from the world they were surrounded by. The reasons to why these people have been

seen as trouble-makers are explained in Chapter 1, which is about the history of Romani people.

Romanies and non-Romanies live very close to each other. Yet their interaction is very limited. Neither of them has the intention to get to know each other, because the mind of both groups is filled with negative images about the other.

This attitude widens the gap between these two groups. Romani people have a rich culture that deserves to be analyzed. This project aims to cast light on the culture and the misrepresentation of Romanies in both Turkish and American films. The reason why this project uses Turkish and American films, and analyzes the condition of Romanies in these films, is that both countries have many similarities in handling the Romani issue. When analyzing these films, I realized that the mainstream society of both countries has the same approach, attitudes, thoughts, and prejudices against these people. The mainstream society of both countries thinks less of the Romani people, in the eyes of both societies these people are unreliable, they are thieves, they are lazy and parasites. They both share the thought that Romanies are more prone to commit crimes. These deeply ingrained misconceptions shared by both countries are displayed in the four films selected for this project. Another striking similarity between America and Turkey is that they consider the Romani people to be the least worthy among the other minority groups in their country. Both Turkey and America are countries where many ethnic minority groups come and live together.

There are many minority groups living in Turkey. These are the Kurds, the Roma, Bosnian population, Arabs, the Circassians, the Laz, ethnic Bulgarians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Syriacs, and Alevis (Kaya, Baldwin).

This clash of many different cultures, and cultural diversity is actually a component that enriches the nation. However, there is usually a tendency to suppress the diverse qualities of these groups in order to eliminate and minimize the different characteristics of these people.

Turkey has a restricted application of the term “minority”. Turkey denies minority rights to all groups except the Armenians, Greeks and the Jews (Kaya, Baldwin).

For many years Turkey has failed to recognize most of the minorities within its borders. Indeed, authorities have attempted to “Turkify” many of the minorities such as the Greeks and the Kurds (Kaya, Baldwin).

America is also an ethnically diverse country like Turkey. The book *Ethnic Families in America* edited by Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein categorizes the ethnic minorities in the U.S. The Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans and the white ethnics constitute the largest minority groups in America.

The diverse culture of the many different ethnic minority groups in both Turkey and America undeniably add many colors to the host countries. However, the impact and superiority of these countries is felt in every sphere of the society. It is the dominant culture that controls the privileges, has the power, and makes the decisions. Diversity is not completely internalized in either of the countries, and in both ethnic minorities sometimes suffer due to their difference.

Almost all of the minority groups encounter difficulties on a daily basis. Nonetheless, the condition of the Romani people is much tougher. Lack of power on the part of the Romanies is viewed within the society.

The dominant power has even control over the name this group carries. Gypsy is the widely used name when referring to these people. Since some Romani activists are against the use of the word 'Gypsy' because of its pejorative connotations, the word 'Roma' is widely used instead. Ian Hancock tells that Romani people live everywhere in Europe, throughout North and South America, in some parts of Africa and America, and these people call themselves Romani. Their culture and the language they speak separates them from the rest of the people. While these people refer to themselves with the name Romani, the people that surround them use other names to refer to them. Some of these names these people use are 'Gypsies', 'Zigeuner', 'Gitanos', 'Heiden', 'Cigani' and many others.

However, two of the names gained popularity; these are 'Tsingani' and 'Egyptian'. Words such as Cingano, Cikan, Zigeuner and Çingene derived from the word 'Tsingani' which comes from Byzantine Greek (Hancock).

This was a name given to the Romanies during the Byzantine period and bears meanings such as "don't touch" or "hands of people" (Hancock).

The name 'Gypsy' is widely known whereas the name 'Romani' is known by fewer people. Hancock himself prefers to use the word Romani instead of Gypsy throughout his book. For his preference he states two reasons. The first reason why he

refuses to use the name ‘Gypsy’ is because it is a name given to these people by outsiders. He states that this name is based on a mistaken assumption about the Romani people’s true identity. He says that they are not Egyptians because the word ‘Gypsy’ derived from the word ‘Egyptian’.

The second reason is that the words’ equivalents in the other languages bear negative meanings, and upon hearing them, causes people to conjure up inaccurate images in their minds based on stereotypes.

Romani language has Indo-Aryan origin (Partin) and ‘Rom’ means ‘man.’ The word ‘Romani’, on the other hand, is the adjective form of the noun ‘Roma’, as in ‘Romani’ people. In Turkish Romani people are given various names as well; however, the most widely used ones are ‘Çingene’ and ‘Roman’. Besides ‘Çingene’ and ‘Roman’, Gypsies in Turkey are also called ‘Kıpti’, ‘Esmer Vatandaş’ (brunette citizen), ‘Mırtıp’, ‘Koçer,’ ‘Arabacı’, ‘Sepetçi’ etc. Most of the names imply the jobs performed by them and some of them have pejorative connotations. The majority prefer to be called ‘Roman’ instead of ‘Çingene’ because of the belittling meanings the latter implies. The word ‘Çingene’ has a lot of negative connotations. When the word ‘Çingene’ is pronounced, it is immediately connected with unlawful deeds. At first place people think of theft, begging, dirty tents and shabby appearance. Some of the proverbs about Romani people in Turkish are “Çingene çalar Kürt oynar”. (The Gypsy plays and the Kurt dances) which is a proverb one uses when he sees a place that is really very messy, “Çingeneye beylik vermişler önce babasını kesmiş”. (The Gypsy was given a status, a title, the first thing he did after acquiring it was to cut his own father, means that the Gypsy is inclined to abuse his power) “ Çingene çıt çıt, arkası bit bit, bir dilim ekmek,

kapı kapı gezmek” (Gypsies have fleas and they go from door to door begging for a slice of bread). All these proverbs show the prejudice against the Romanies that is deeply entrenched in the Turkish society. Parents even threaten their children by telling them stories about Romani people. If children do not want to be given to the Romani people they should behave well. Turkish people since their childhood have been exposed to these negative stereotypes of Romanies. Nonetheless, the negative traits that are attributed to them can actually be traced in every society.

Ian Hancock says: ...Cannibalism, baby-stealing, lack of responsibility, cunning, laziness, lust, an inborn musical ability, so go the traditional attributes. And many of these traits are to be found among Romanies; but so they are among all human groups (“Romance vs.Reality: Popular Notions of the Gypsy”).

Romani people dispersed worldwide after they left India about a thousand years ago. Since they do not have a state that can protect their rights and act on behalf of them, they have encountered nothing but maltreatment throughout history. They are a closely-knit communal people. The estimated number of the Romani people living in the world as twelve million (Hancock, Simib).

However, different sources give different figures. The reason for variance in numbers is that Romanies are often not demographically counted, so the exact number of the population can not be given. Andrei Simib in his his essay called “Gypsies” writes that the highest population is found in the Balkans, but there are also Romanies living in Western Europe, Central Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and the U.S.

They are almost everywhere in the world. Nonetheless, everywhere they live they are still strangers like they were in the past. In the essay called “A Brief History of



the Roma” (Patrin), it says that the Roma are divided into three populations based on language. As mentioned before the Romani language, which has many spoken dialects, is of Indo-Aryan origin. The nations are the Domari (Dom) of the Middle East and Eastern Europe, The Lomavren (Lom) of Central Europe, and the Romani (Rom) of Western Europe.

Andrei Simib says:“Gypsies are fragmented into groups sometimes referred to as nations or tribes, generally defined by geographic area of settlement or recent origin”.

In his article he says that different Romani tribes are divided into clans, and these clans are made up of a number of families who are related to each other by common ancestry or who have a common history. Clans have leaders; however, these leaders are nominally in charge of the tribe. They are sometimes being referred to as ‘king’ or ‘queen’. These given titles do not represent a political leadership, but they have just been given in order to indicate respect.

There is a diversity in Roma customs and traditions since different Roma nations inhabit different countries. However, there is a cultural bond between the Roma people which is maintained to hold them together, regardless of where they are. In the essay called “Romani Customs and Tradition” it says that though Roma populations show a different growth in different places, they have something in common. All of the Roma populations try to stay away from the non-Roma populations. Different groups of Roma perform different occupations. For instance, among the Dom there are musicians, slaughters and janitors. The Lowara, on the other hand, are traditionally known as horse-traders. While the Roma perform many different jobs, there are some conditions

the jobs have to meet in order to be performed by the Romani people. One condition is that the job must enable the Roma to travel freely. The other is that it should allow the least possible contact with the non-Roma. An important thing about Romanies is that, despite the fact that they are surrounded by different cultures and societies who differ from them strongly, they somehow, in a surprising way have managed to preserve many traits of their identity.

Romani people prefer to stay outside of mainstream society, but when they adapt, they do it in their own manner such as borrowing motifs of music from the host country. Romani people have a pollution code they call 'marimé'. Marimé bears two meanings, not only does it refer to the state of pollution but also to the sentence of expulsion from the Romani community for having violated the rules related to purity or any unacceptable behaviour or crime. There is a strict border line between what is 'pure' and what is 'impure' in the Romani culture (Hancock).

The reason why Romanies have an exclusionary culture and why they avoid getting into contact with the non-Romani people is because they believe that the non-Romani people are not clean. In Romani culture the borders of the Romani and non-Romani are very clearly defined. The idea of contamination is both very interesting and ironic.

Romani people are often viewed as dirty, and this is mostly shown as the reason why non-Romanies avoid coming into contact with Romanies. It is interesting because non-Romanies have been living with this misconception about Romanies for years. It is

ironic because both groups try to avoid each other for the same reason. Mary Douglas in her Book *Purity and Danger* says of pollution: ...

Pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone<sup>5</sup>.

This quote clearly describes the situation of Romanies and non-Romanies. For each group getting into contact with each other means 'danger'. Trying to stay away from each other is of utmost importance. To be clean has a lot of meanings for both groups. It is related to hygiene, aesthetics, purity, label, acceptance, and recognition (Douglas). So both groups believe that the other lacks these traits and thinks less of the other. Romani people also have stereotypes of non-Romanies. They believe that the non-Romani people are not reliable, that they do not have any respect towards their elderly and that they allow their pets to sleep on their beds, which is completely unacceptable according to marimé.

Both cultures, the Romani and non-Romani believe that they will preserve their own culture and avoid corruption by avoiding the other. It is not only the non-Romanies that develop stereotypes, there are also stereotypes developed about them. These stereotypes about non-Romanies also cause Romani people to stay away from the non Romani population. Romanies also have a justice system which they designed themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> *Purity and Danger*, 14.

In the essay called “Romani Custom and Traditions” (Partin) the Roma law is described. According to the description:

1. Roma law acts as a cohesive force serving to protect Roma interests, rights, traditions, and ethnic distinctions.
2. Roma law is more democratic than any other law because it does not discriminate against individuals without financial or other influence.
3. Roma law has maintained its basic form, even though older methods of punishment have given way largely to banishment or social ostracism.

The kris is a formal tribunal (Fraser). If a law is broken, the kris is in charge. There are judges in the kris, its decisions are definite and must be obeyed. The kris particularly relies on sanctions such as fines, corporal punishment and banishment. It was established to solve criminal, moral, civil and religious problems. In the Roma community there are neither police nor prison. There is no ‘law enforcement’ as it is the case in the gajikano (non-Romani) world. However, there are sometimes exceptional situations the kris can not handle, in which case they make use of the gajikano penal system. If such a situation occurs, and the kris can not enforce any judgement, it may ask the gajikano authorities to arrest the defendant. The harshest punishment for the Romani people is marime or the exclusion from the Roma community. In legal sense the term means that the wrong doer is socially rejected. It is thought to be a social death, since all of the wrong doer’s ties with his community are broken.

Another important characteristic of the Romanies is that they attach a lot of importance to the family. The elderly have an important place in the family, and they are highly respected. Romani culture is patriarchial; however, a woman's place in the family rises with the number of children she has.

Daughter –in-laws, called 'boria', have to do the hardest work in the house. In the house nobody calls them by their names, they are just called boria (Fonseca). It is their duty to keep the house, clothes and themselves clean.

Isabel Fonseca in her book *Bury Me Standing* writes that women do not complain about the hard work, but instead are glad that they have defined roles in the house. Marriages are mostly arranged by families. In the past families were the ones who made the decision, but now they do ask for the consent of their children. The tradition of paying a bride-price also still exists in some of the Roma groups.

The Romani and non-Romani population live very close to each other; however, both groups avoid a close rapport. From the very start Romanies have occupied a marginal position in society and non-Romanies have approached them with suspicion. There are of course many reasons to this. For centuries Romani people have had to bear the mostly negative images that were created by the non-Romani people and thus have to suffer due to its bad effects. The solution to the Romani problem according to the authorities was to expel them. This remains to be a short-term solution, however, and leaves Romanies with no choice at all. There are reasons to why these people are always on the move. Local laws in many areas forbade Romani people to stop, and after they reached Europe they became subject to legislation that constantly kept them on the

move, which labeled these people as vagabonds (Hancock). They are either expelled or relegated to the worst districts of a city. People migrate with the hope of finding a better place to live, a place where they can live in peace without being discriminated against and looked down upon.

However, the constant migration of the nomadic Romanies has brought them nothing but hardship. Hancock says that travelling is a part of the Romani peoples' history and adds that the 'travelling gypsy' stereotype bears some truth. However, he says, "Remember that there is no 'genetic' disposition to travel; it is solely the result of circumstances"<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, it is merely the existence, the Romani people's presence that makes the non-Romanies feel uncomfortable. Non-Romanies want them to be out of their sight, so as a result of this, they are constantly forced to move from place to place (Fonseca).

Although Romanies have experienced nothing but hardship all their lives, one can not help being surprised how these people hold on to life. Their desire and courage to survive in this hostile world deserves respect. Ian Hancock's description of the Romani people helps to have an insight of the true characteristics of the Romani people. Hancock says: ...

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<sup>6</sup> We are the Romani People, p.101.

We are, after all, a people who have never started a war, who have never tried to take over a foreign government and who have never been an economic or political threat to anyone. In fact, if anything typifies us as a people, it is our desire to keep to ourselves<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 32.

### **Race, Racism , Discrimination, Stereotypes and Identity**

Race, racism, discrimination and stereotyping have always been an important issue for the Romani people, and they have long suffered due to their effects. Racism is very common and every country is racist to a certain degree. It exists even in the countries who claim to be the most democratic. Many even deny the existence of racism in their country.

Romanies are unfortunately one of the peoples who have been subjected to racism in the most severe way. Racism against these people has given way to antigypsyism which still continues to exist in many countries. The reason antagonism towards Romani people runs so high, is in part, because they do not have a state or homeland that can stand up and fight for their rights. Although there are some activists, or people who attach a lot of importance to the fight for the rights of these people, the results of their efforts do not seem to be satisfactory. No matter how hard they try to alert people to injustice, the authorities' preference is mainly to remain deaf. In order to understand what Romani people have been through for centuries, it is necessary to define racism first. The definition of racism will also be helpful in evaluating its material consequences.

Ian Hancock defines racism as ' the belief in the superiority of a particular race'. In this sense, according to racism there are different races, and each of these races has a different value. Thus, groups of people have been categorized and ranked according to their races. This categorization is made by those who hold the power.



In the book called *Colored Pictures* the psychologist Na'im Akbar makes a remarkable assessment about how power relations work:

...One of the consequences of oppression is the loss of control over the projection of those images. As you begin to lose control of those images, then usually the oppressor, or the power holder, creates images consistent with their objectives. And their objective, of course, is usually one to keep the powerless powerless, and to keep themselves powerful<sup>8</sup>.

This makes clear that race is not always about self-definition, which also underlies the important point that it is socially constructed. Race is neither a prescription from God nor from Nature. It implies hierarchy in the social scale. Race is imposed and not chosen. It ranks the individual and places him somewhere in the social scale where he is doomed to remain.

An "Otherness" is created that is completely in contrast with the superior 'Self', which constantly highlights its superiority while bombarding the 'Other' with messages that it is incomplete in many ways. So the 'Other' is presented with a distorted image of himself, which has of course a huge negative impact on his identity formation and the way he perceives himself. In a racist society there is a tendency to freeze 'the 'Others' into roles in order to strengthen its own place and thereby to feel safe.

Racism shows itself in different ways and has important subcategories. Among these are individual racism, Institutional racism and cultural racism.

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<sup>8</sup> *Colored Pictures*, p.14.

In individual racism, individuals support the beliefs, attitudes and the actions that maintain the continuity of racism. Individual racism can occur at an unconscious level, or it can be either passive or active. An example to this type of racism could be telling a racist joke.

In institutional racism there are policies and practices which operate for the advantages of those who are not labelled as belonging to a lower race. The advantages granted to this group are seen to be their natural rights.

An example to this type of racism is to determine what type of information, either positive or negative should be published in the media about people engaged in events that are newsworthy.

In a racist society some groups are automatically disadvantaged, racism places those in power over the powerless while the former have easier access to jobs, education, health care, the latter have to struggle and strive even for those basic rights.

The last example is cultural racism which attaches importance to the 'white' race while labelling those of color as the 'other'. Cultural racism tends to denigrate people of color and stereotypes them. Although in Turkey there is not a deeply ingrained racism based on color, there are expressions that especially denigrate some groups due to their skin color. An example to this could be calling the Romanians "esmer vatandaş" (brunette citizen). In the U.S. skin color is very determining in all fractions of the society. There is strong racism on the basis of color. People with white skin have much easier access to jobs and education than those with non-white skin.

The above given types of racism all show its exclusionary characteristics. In the essay called “Stereotyping and Racism in Film”, stereotype is defined as ‘ a set image’.

...When applied to people stereotyping refers to the forming an instant or fixed picture of a group of people, usually based on false or incomplete information. Stereotypes ignore the fact that no two human beings are identical. Stereotypes are often negative.

Racism does not accept the idea of ‘ two people are not identical’. That is, racism claims that people of the same race are ‘identical’. All people belonging to the same race have the same characteristics according to this view. The notion that certain races are genetically inclined to commit crime, or are less intelligent also stems from the above mentioned idea.

This deeply embedded belief in society causes all the members of a group to be labelled. Dimitra Petrova in her essay “Racial Discrimination and the Rights of Minority Cultures” writes:

It is true that *individuals* are victims of discrimination, but they are discriminated against not because of their unique individuality, having a name and a face, but because they are members of a certain more or less negatively perceived group. Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, and so on is a violation of someone’s *individual* right to equality of treatment but one is victimized in one’s capacity as a group member. Therefore, the concept of discrimination is based on a preconceptual assumption of membership in a group. Discrimination implies a group<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> *individuals*, p.67.

In her book *Bury Me Standing* Isabel Fonseca makes a similar statement. She says that a Romani man was accused of robbery and assault, but he was the only member in the family who had a job. He would be sentenced to a year in prison; however, he could not risk losing his job since he was the bread-winner of the family. So the family offered a younger brother to be punished instead of him. Fonseca says that such things happen often in the Balkans, she says that shame and responsibility are felt as a group.

Fonseca: “The practice proves the degree to which, for the authorities, Gypsies are all alike: any of them will do<sup>10</sup>.”

In the essay “A Brief History of the Roma” (Patrin), the Roma are described as a distinct ethnic minority. At this point it is important to stress the difference between the words ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. According to Banton, in race there is a categorization of people whereas in ethnicity there is an identification with a certain group. Banton claims that ethnicity is much more related with the identification of ‘us’ whereas racism is related with the categorization of ‘them’. Banton’s views clearly state the fact that ethnicity is something people identify themselves with, while race is something that the others impose on people.

Race is the way people are perceived by others. Since people do not have control over other people’s perceptions they do have control over their race. In ethnicity there is a sense of membership, a sense of belonging which is why people identify themselves with ethnicity positively. The members of an ethnic group share the same values, they

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<sup>10</sup> *Bury Me Standing*, p.32.

have a common history. Ethnicity embraces values and traits that the ethnic group is content to possess and to identify with; on the other hand, race does not have the same features as ethnicity. Ethnicity is something people want to hold on to and to protect. Karla Holloway argues that:

Race is a simplistic, political distinction that can support stereotype and prejudice. Ethnicity, on the other hand, evolved through a complex association of linguistic, national, cultural and historical identities that affirm all of the shifting forces and hierarchies of modern life but that are also continuously affirmed, created and embraced by those who are ethnic. It is an issue of agency. Ethnicity is a self-determined and defined construction. Race is a politically conferred and simplistic abstraction that is easily co-opted into systems of abuse and domination.

So someone's 'ethnic identity' is the identity the person is born into this world. It is about a person's belonging to a group who shares values such as history, language, culture and tradition. Ethnic identity is real and while race is fictitious.

The Romani people are a group of people who have fallen prey to the negative effects of racism all around the world. The United States and Turkey are also among the countries where the Romani people have become the victims of racism. Racism is deeply ingrained in the United States.

America suffers from the bad effects of racism, though it works hard to educate the public about its harms, it still has a long way to go. Racism is in the minds of the

people, the image of the target group can not be eradicated overnight just by passing a law.

In Turkey there is generally no racism on the basis of color, whereas color is a significant concept in discriminating people in many other countries. . In Turkey racism is more directed toward ethnicity.

Some ethnic groups such as the Kurds, are considered to be divisive and separatists so racism is more directed to such groups. Consequently, the widespread belief that every society is racist to a certain degree applies to Turkey as well. Turks are known to be proud of their history and their past.

Turkey is a nationalistic country and racism and nationalism can not be considered separately. A country which is that nationalistic can not avoid being racist. There is a similarity between racism and nationalism.

...nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents, and by implication, it draws boundaries vis-a-vis others, who thereby become outsiders. The distinguishing mark of nationalism is by definition its relationship to the state. A nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries...(Hylland)

The most important feature of both racism and nationalism is that both highlight their territories and stress the existence of “them” and “us”. Both racism and nationalism are about exclusion. They tend to exclude those whom they believe to be different.

There are many minorities living in Turkey, yet surprisingly Romani people are not counted among them. According to the feasibility study report called “Reaching the Romanlar”, the idea of accepting the Romani people as a minority group is strongly rejected by Turkey.

In the same report a quote is given from the telegram by a Turkish member of Parliament. In the telegram it says: “The Gypsies will never be acknowledged as a minority in Turkey’(they) can only be considered a minority in other parts of the world”.

Turkish society contains elements from every nationality of the Ottoman Empire. Many Turks have Yugoslav, Grek, Armenian, Laz, Kurdish, Albanian, Hungarian, Polish, Circassian, Georgian, Azeri, Russian or German ancestors. Turkey strongly endorses the concept of constitutional citizenship, which is not based on ethnicity.

The acceptance of ethnic identity is considered to put the freedom of the nation in jeopardy, since some ethnic groups are believed to have an intention to separate the country. Mustafa Aksu who is a Romani writes:

We as Turkish citizens do not have any claims for another homeland, we do not need another country or flag. We want our ethnic identity to be respected, we do not want any discrimination, and we want action on behalf of inclusion<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Türkiye’de Çingene Olmak, s.12.

Despite the rejection of their ethnic identity Adrian Marsh, who is of Anglo-Romani origin and a PhD candidate of Greenwich University's Romani Studies programme, says that there is no great hate followed by violence towards the Romanies in Turkish society. However, the existence of racism shows itself in many places, and the prejudice society carries are reflected towards Romanies in many ways.

It is not always choice labor that Roma perform in Turkey. Unfortunately, they do not have the chance to have access to better jobs with a better paid salary. Those who happen to be lucky enough to get a job at a firm, usually do not reveal their ethnic identity in order not to jeopardize their job. Most Roma collect recycable trash and sell it for a living. Some, especially those who live in the Kuştepe district, sell flowers.

On the web page "Hürriyetim" there is a report on Romanies and it contains examples which show the existence of racism and discrimination in Turkey.

A Romani applies for a job in a textile company, the firm accepts him and tells him to get his documents ready. When he comes back with his papers, the employer sees that he is living in Kuştepe and asks him if he is a Romani. When he says that he is, the employer says that he can not hire him.

Governments constantly claim that they are not racist and that discrimination does not exist in their countries. They tend to claim that everyone in their country enjoys the same rights and opportunities, and that everyone is equal in front of the law.



Nonetheless, there are various cases that prove quite the opposite. Romani people are not interested in minority rights at all, what they really want is to have better living conditions. Prejudices as such are deeply rooted, and cause ethnic minorities to be excluded from the mainstream society. Preconceptions cause animosity and as a result of misunderstandings by both Romanies and non-Romanies they become entangled in a series of conflicts. Of course, there are negative examples in every group, but the whole group should not be held responsible because of some negative examples. Each member of a group should be treated and evaluated individually.

Here we see that Romanies are identified by their race, they are seen as racial beings rather than as individuals<sup>12</sup>.

The social exclusion Romanies are subjected to is really heartbreaking. As Teo van Boven has mentioned it in his essay called “Discrimination and Human Rights Law”<sup>13</sup> “...the victims of entrenched racism have been suffering in deep silence and their voices found no echo and hardly led to national or international concern”.

To be in ‘deep silence’ is a quality that only Romanies have. Although they have fallen prey to hostile attitudes for centuries, become victims of persisting prejudice and although their rights have been violated, they did not choose to fight back. All they expect from the rest of the people they are surrounded by is recognition and peace, they want to become visible.

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<sup>12</sup> Colored Pictures, p.14

In his book *Somebodies and Nobodies* Robert W.Fuller says that if someone is invisible, he is a nobody. On the other hand, if someone is visible he will be recognised.

The problem with the Romani people is invisibility, since they have been living among us for many centuries they deserve to be seen and to be recognized.

## Film Theory

There are many things cinema offers to its audience. It creates reality, it can draw attention to people, objects, events and happenings. One of the pleasures cinema offers to the viewer is scopophilia (Mulvey). People derive pleasure from looking itself. In scopophilia, people are taken as objects and become the target of a curious and controlling gaze (Mulvey). When Mulvey is talking about the 'gaze' she means the gaze directed to women by both the audience and the male protagonist.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*<sup>13</sup>.

The patriarchal order passifies the female and reduces her to the object position. The idea of the female as being sexual, erotic, weak is already embedded within the public mind. Thus, what it does here is to speak to the public mind. The patriarchal society is satisfied with the depiction of the female and with the image that fits the one in his imagination. The female has no control over the constructed images that somehow represent her. The gaze issue could be applied to anything or anyone that is being controlled and targeted as well. There is a parallel between the passive female and the suppressed Romani people. Both are passified, made the target of suppression and are under constant control.

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<sup>13</sup> Film and Theory, p. 487

The male dominated society controls the female whereas the mainstream society controls the Romani people. The identity of both in films are constructed, distorted and molded the way how they want to be perceived by society. There is a public image of the Romani people, they are wild, they are thieves, they are exotic, and Romani men are a threat to the non-Romani women, Romani women are inviting, cheerful, deceitful, and they wear colorful clothes. These are the notions of the public mind about the Romani people. What cinema does in most movies made about the Romanies is to perpetuate the ingrained misconceptions. Some movie treatments have reduced Romanies at utmost degree in terms of identity in the popular consciousness (Churchill).

Mary Anne Staniszewski in *Believing is Seeing* writes

“...works of Art, therefore act as lenses of our culture, making more clearly visible what we see and what it is presumed we want to see”<sup>14</sup>.

Films are lenses of our culture, so they reflect the mood of the culture wherein they are produced. And the viewer is presented something he is presumed to expect.

Kaja Silverman in *The Subject of Semiotics* talks about the limited view the camera presents. The camera displays only half of the circle. It leaves an unexplored area. There is a technical stricture that hinders the camera from displaying the complete circle.

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<sup>14</sup> *Believing is Seeing*, p.151.

Thus, there is a limitation to the viewing eye. The camera decides about what to show and what not. Almost in every film Romanies are depicted, they become the object of another's gaze. This shows their position on the social scale, it implies the inferiority of their social position (Browne). Churchill claims that native identity is crushed under the heel of Euroamerican representation. The Romani identity is crushed as well, and Romani reality is not presented with an objective point of view.

The reason to this is that the majority of the viewers of these films are non-Romanies who do not bear much interest to the Romani culture.

Cinema has the power to manipulate reality. It is persuasive in character (Benjamin). It speaks to the masses and thus has the potency to influence the viewer. Cinema outweighs all the other mediums of communication, and the messages it conveys have a much deeper impact on the masses than any other means of communication, it has the advantage of reaching a higher number of people than any other arts.

The role of cinema is not merely to teach us about what to wear, fashion and how to look. It carries deeper messages than that. Cinema teaches us how to think about issues such as race, gender, class, ethnicity and politics. In the introduction part of the book *Movies and American Society* edited by Steven J. Ross, he writes:

...seeing union workers depicted over and over again as stupid rather than intelligent and as violent rather than peaceful (i.e. a conservative versus a liberal discourse) undoubtedly affects the ways in which those unfamiliar with labor organizations are bound to think about them<sup>15</sup>.

In the same book it is stated that the images and ideologies presented on the screen can have an impact on our views of the past, the present and the future. According to this statement cinema serves not only to entertain but also to communicate political messages. Cinema is used both to communicate and to shape the ideas of the public. In the book *Movies and the American Society* it says:

Unlike newspapers, movies reached a genuinely mass audience that cut across class, gender, race, religion, age, geography, and political affiliation. 'The tremendous propaganda power of the hundred thousand projectors,' radical filmmaker William Kruse proclaimed in October 1924, 'outshines all the newspapers, magazines, pulpits, lectures, platforms, and public libraries put together'<sup>16</sup>.

Consequently, cinema has a much stronger impact on our way of thinking than the things which were taught us at school and the messages conveyed by cinema are easier internalized. The following quote helps to understand how effective cinema is:

...Unlike a book, longtime Pennsylvania movie censor Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer remarked in 1922, a movie sinks into the consciousness without turning the page. It is presented in a vivid, impressive form, a form which all but the smallest child can unmistakably understand (1).

An important point raised in the book is that movies are much more influential in Matters where we are the least equipped. People who have almost no contact with radicals, marginals, feminists, gays, lesbians, African Americans, Latinos and some

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<sup>15</sup> *Movies and American Society*, p.10.

minority groups in their daily lives are most likely to be influenced by what they see on the screen because the exposure of various images again and again causes the audience to conjure up an idea about something they do not have much information about. The images projected on the screen might have little connection with reality and worse they might be a total distortion of the real subject.

Nonetheless, the viewer who has not had any contact with the real subject before, might fall into the mistake of taking the constructed image for real. Here the viewer is filled and bombarded with images that do not bear much relation to reality. Benjamin argues that film watching is an active mode, and definitely an attentive one. The attentive viewer inhales the messages and images presented. As a result of this, people start to rely on stereotypes.

In *Fantasies of the Master Race: Categories of Stereotyping of American Indians in Film*, Ward Churchill writes about the stereotypes used about the Indians in films. Churchill's ideas about the use of stereotypes could be applied to the Romanies as well. He claims that the commercial US cinema is racist on all levels when it comes to the depiction of American Indians in film. At this point he claims that it is the impact of literature both fictional and non-fictional upon which most of the scripts written generally rely. Literature is significant for film. Many films take their subjects from books, even if not directly, they somehow inspire the scriptwriter. The films except one chosen and analyzed for this project are based on books as well. The depiction of Romani people in literature is most generally biased, so this is reflected in film as well.

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<sup>16</sup> *Movies and the American Society*, p.3.

For instance, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* is wild, dark, cruel, aloof and he has no past, nobody really knows where he comes from and he does not have much contact with his surrounding, nobody really wants him around. The situation of Romanies is personified in Heathcliff. Romani people are dark, they are wild, live close to nature, they avoid coming into contact with their surrounding, they have no homeland, nobody for a very long time was sure where Romanies came from, and nobody wants them around.

Romanies most generally are portrayed in films devoid of all the cultural values and groundings. Churchill says: “There is no cinematic recognition whatsoever of a white-free and autonomous native past”<sup>17</sup>. Churchill means that it is the point of view of the whites that is taken for granted while making a film about Indians. The same counts for the Romani people, it is the view of the non-Romanies that counts when making a film about them. Consequently, a one-sided picture is displayed, and the widespread misconceptions concerning Romanies remain intact.

Cinema is a part of the system; so it can sometimes help to perpetuate the wrongs of the system. The subject of racism, for example, is a recurrent subject in many films. Turkish society, as previously mentioned, claims not to be racist at all. “Racism does not exist within our territory” is the point emphasized by many.

Yet, in some films we see that especially Romani characters are the target of insults. Their place outside the mainstream society is constantly highlighted. The system

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<sup>17</sup> Film and Theory, p.698.



denigrates them and cinema pinpoints this by showing only a one-sided picture of the Romani people.

This project aims to discuss Romanies in film, and this ethnic group has been misunderstood for centuries due to misrepresentation in literature, cinema and the press. There are deeply rooted stereotypes of Romanies and all the media, cinema and books generally tend to perpetuate these stereotypes rather than help to eradicate them.

Undoubtedly a person who has never encountered a Romani in his whole life, will most probably have to rely on the picture displayed on the screen. So cinema has the power to present a distorted picture of a people, and the 'created reality' replaces reality which is actually there somewhere outside. Monique Jucquois-Delpierre in her essay called "Cultural Stereotypes in Film" says about film, ...Because it can record distances between people... I do not think there is another art form capable of showing what there is between people, the air thickness between them, what unifies and separates them...' Do movies show communication or absence of communication?

The films that this project discusses show the distance between the Romani and non-Romani clearly. The films disclose the thick air between these two groups and the lack of communication.

Jucquois-Delpierre's essay, describes the power of stereotypes quite plainly:...

We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine things before we experience them. And these preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception.

A similar idea is being stressed by Ian Hancock in his essay called “The Origin and Function of the Gypsy Image in Children’s Literature”,

Our prejudices start being formed early in life, and in large part derive from how human groups are represented in the media and in the literature to which we begin to be exposed as children.

In this project films are used as a means to show the deeply embedded racism against Romanies nourished by stereotypes. The cinematic approach in all the films selected are the same; to enforce misconceptions.

## **Chapter 1**

### **HISTORY OF GYPSIES**

The Romanies who are worldwide known as ‘Roma’ are a distinct ethnic minority (Hancock). Although there are many speculations about their history scholars have been certain since the 18<sup>th</sup> century that they are originally from India. However, the reason for their migration is not exactly known. Their history is actually the history of human struggle. A struggle for pride, recognition and acceptance. They have been experiencing prejudice and discrimination since their first encounter with the gadje (‘gadje’ (plural), ‘gadjo’ (singular) which in the Romani language means ‘non-Gypsy’).

The arrival of Romanies in Europe was at the end of the 13th century (Hancock). Since then they have been enslaved, outlawed, hunted, tortured, murdered and made the target of oppression and hate. They have been blamed for witchcraft, the kidnapping of children and even cannibalism. There are various reasons to why they have always been regarded as trouble-makers and why antigypsyism is very common.

Hancock argues that antigypsyism is the consequence of a combination of historical aspects. The first Romani people in Europe were thought to have a connection with the Asiatic invaders and with Islam. As a result of this, Europeans regarded them as enemies from the very beginning. The Church had a great impact on creating and sustaining antigypsyism for centuries as well. The dark skin color of the Romani people has also been a reason why they were despised. In the medieval Christian doctrine, light

was associated with purity whereas darkness was associated with sin. The western mind was occupied with the thought that blackness indicated inferiority and evil.

Hancock in his book *We are the Romani People* says:

The early Romanies' identity as non-white, heathen outsiders became incorporated into Christian European folklore, which only served to institutionalise and encourage the prejudice against them<sup>18</sup>.

The Europeans accused Romanies of forging the nails which were used to crucify Jesus (Hancock). There was a belief that the original sin of the Romanies was to deny shelter to Mary and baby Jesus while they were fleeing from King Herod of Egypt.

The preconceptions against Romanies both hindered them from staying in one place and forced them to move constantly. Particularly, in medieval Germany, Romanies were thought to be spies for the Turks (Hancock). The Nazis made the same claim about them.

Hancock continues by saying that traditional European societies attach great importance to the idea of a homeland and national territory. He writes:

A home means stability and permanence: it means being part of a community, where your neighbors recognise you and know exactly where you fit into their social structure. Outsiders meet none of these criteria and, being an unknown quantity, poses a potential threat<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> *We are the Romani People*, p.57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.55.

All of the reasons mentioned above and many others have caused and still do cause Romani people to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Their own preference for having an exclusionary culture is also an important reason that reinforces the preconceptions about them. The preconceptions about Romani people caused the Europeans to take some very severe measures against these people shortly after their entrance into Europe. Europeans introduced very tough laws in order to control the movement of Romani people. They also passed laws that concerned the treatment of them. So the first anti-Romani laws were passed in 1417 in Germany, and these laws were followed by some other forty-eight laws which were also passed during the next three centuries (Hancock).

In 1568 Pope Pius V expelled them from the domain of the Holy Roman Church, and in 1721 Emperor Karl VI ordered the annihilation of Romanies throughout the country. Romanies who crossed into Bohemia in the year of 1740 were ordered to be killed, and in 1782 about 200 Romanies were both tortured and killed of cannibalism under false pretences (Hancock).

In Spain, Hungary and colonial Brazil Romanies were not even allowed to call themselves Romani or to speak their language, and in England and Finland it was against the law to be born a Romani. Besides encountering harsh treatments in many places, Romanies were also enslaved.

...Romanies by the early 1300s were being included in parcels of property given as gifts or as payment by one owner to another, as well as to the monasteries...But slavery as we think of it today, called *robie* in Romanian, emerged later out of the increasingly strict measures taken by the landowners,

aristocracy and the monasteries to prevent their Romani labour force from leaving the principalities...<sup>20</sup>.

There is some historical information that a great number of Gypsies entered Bulgarian lands in the 14th century during the time of the Ottoman Empire (Partin).

When the Romani people first entered the Balkans, the Balkans were technologically not advanced. When the Balkans, which was an agricultural society at the beginning, started to become a market-based economy, they started to rely on the Romanies' artisan skills. The Romanies were first made into serfs; however, slavery as it is understood today came later. Landowners, the aristocracy and the monasteries, who were worried that the Romani workforce would leave their principalities, took very strict measures to hinder this (Hancock). This concern caused the enslavement of the Romani people which lasted many centuries until it was finally abolished in 1864 in Romania (Hancock).

In the middle of the 19th century the principalities started to be affected by the social and economic changes of the time. In America and South Eastern Europe, mechanization which was the result of the Industrial Revolution and which was more efficient than traditional manual workforce made it harder to keep slaves. Slavery started to be seen as something cruel and ruthless. As a result of this, the idea of abolition of slavery was introduced in the 1830s in Romania by students returning from abroad (Partin).

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<sup>20</sup> We are the Romani people, p.18.

Nevertheless, small landowners who were not able to afford mechanization still had to depend on the slave workforce. They were strictly against the abolition of slavery. Thus, it took some time until slavery could finally be completely abolished in 1864 in Romania.

...The same spread of Islam towards Europe also caused the movement of the Romani people up from the Byzantine Empire (now Turkey) into the Balkans, by about AD1250. Here, a good portion, perhaps half, of the Romanies were kept in slavery in the area which is today Romania; this enslavement was not fully abolished until the 1860s, at the same time that African slavery was abolished in the United States (Hancock).

There are different explanations concerning the situation of the Romanies during the Ottoman Empire. Hancock says that since Romanies were not Muslims, they did not have the same social status as theirs. Some of the Romanies came as attachments to the Turkish troops, and some were metalworkers, carpenters and entertainers. The enslavement of the Romani people, which lasted over 500 years, was established in the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia during the time when the Balkans were under the control of the Ottoman Empire (Hancock).

Angus Frazer presents a more positive picture of the Romani people within the Ottoman Empire:

...the Turks left the civilian population free on condition of paying taxes to the conquerors, and that was no novelty for Gypsies; and Muslim society was not usually race-or color-conscious<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> The Gypsies, p.81.

The oppression of Romanies reached its peak during World War II in Germany. Germans, in their efforts to establish the so called 'Master Race', wanted to eradicate anything or anyone who came their way or who was seen as a potential threat to taint German blood. In the Holocaust Jews and Gypsies shared the same fate.

Jews were considered to be a threat to Germans for many reasons (Hancock). Besides being a 'racial' threat, they were also seen as a political, philosophical and economic threat.

The Romanies, however, were only considered to be a racial threat. Romanies' dark, shabby and dirty appearance bore an absolute contrast to the 'shiny', 'white' and 'clean' image of Germans.

In the 1920s the persecution of Romani people increased. In 1920 they were not allowed to enter parks and public places. Hitler ordered the annihilation of the Jews together with Romanies and the communist functionaries in the Soviet Union in 1940. In the same book Hancock states that about 2,900 Romanies were gassed and cremated on 4 August 1944 at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which is now remembered as the "Zigeunernacht".

According to a report prepared by the International Organization for Migration, about 1,5 million Romanies were killed during the time when Nazis were in power (Hancock).



However, he claims that the number of those who were killed is higher than stated. Some say that half of the Romani population in Nazi-occupied Europe was killed, and that this was the worst tragedy these people had to face (Hancock).

Romani people endured hardships in different parts of the world in the past and they still do today. The United States and Turkey are two other countries where Romanies are continuously reminded that they are the “others.”

According to the report “ Reaching the Romanlar ” there are about 2 million Romani people living in Turkey. On the web page “ Hürriyetim ” there are the results of some research concerning the Romani people living in Turkey.

There are three different branches of Romanies living in Turkey, and these are the ‘Dom’, ‘Lom’ and ‘Rom’ (Hürriyetim). The Dom live in the Southeast in small groups. The Lom live in Ağrı and Van. The Rom migrated from India to Anatolia and Europe. The Rom in Sulukule have been living there since 1050.

In the report “ Reaching the Romanlar ”, the meaning of the statement “ Türkiye’de altmışaltıbuçuk millet var ” is explained and commented by the Swedish ethnographer Ingvar Svanberg. According to this statement there are sixty-six and a half nationalities living in Turkey (the correct form of the statement is seventy-two and a half). The ethnographer Svanberg suggests that the Gypsies are meant to be “ half ” nationality.

This mirrors the situation Romani people are subjected to (Reaching the Romanlar). This situation is described as the “ as if ” situation. The report explains that Romanies are expected to function within the Turkish society “as if” they were citizens sharing equal rights together with the rest. Nonetheless, the real situation is far from equality. The reality is that the Romanies are treated as “ half ” citizens.

Tara Bedard, who is a researcher and News Editor at the ERRC (European Roma Rights Center) based in Budapest, Hungary, came to Istanbul in 2003 to conduct a research on the situation of Romani people. The ERRC, established in 1996, is an international public interest law organization engaged in a range of activities which aim to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma.

What she observed was that there was a clear distinction between Romanies and non-Romanies. She states in her reasearch that there is no direct hostility shown to the Romani people; however, the boundaries are very clear. It seems that each group tries to avoid the other’s territory. She continues by saying that the Roma and Turks are reluctant to come into contact.

...It was explained to me that, while non-Roma do not outwardly display hostility or discriminatory attitudes towards Roma, there is a definite divide between Roma and non-Roma. As Mr.M.D stated, Turks and Roma do not usually have much contact. For instance, a Romani man would not enter a café owned by a Turk because he would not feel comfortable. There is racism among average people. You can feel it. I believe that many Turks regard Roma as second class citizens. Many Turks do not want their children to marry Roma. Roma here have problems finding work. When applying for jobs, if the employer finds out a person is Romani, they will not be hired for the position. It is the same with buying and renting houses (Bedard).

Romani people in Turkey mostly live in Roma dominated neighborhoods like Tophane, Kuştepe, Dolapdere, Kasımpaşa, Küçükbakkalköy, Üsküdar Selamsız, Bülbül, Gaziosmanpaşa, Gülhane and Sulukule.

There is a huge difference between the way Romanies are perceived in Europe and in Turkey (Reaching the Romanlar). In Turkey Romanies are not defined as a separate identity, and Romanies themselves do not see themselves as an ethnic minority because the Turkish society defines the “minority” concept, as something discriminatory and divisive (Reaching the Romanlar). To the contrary, in Europe ethnic minority status is regarded as an element that paves the way for integration and guarantees equal opportunities and rights.

The Romanies of Turkey occupy a less marginal position in society than those living in Europe; however, there is no difference in their financial situation (Reaching the Romanlar). Romanies in Turkey are merely perceived as a “disadvantaged group” or as highly talented musicians. However, in the international Romani movement, the trans-national identity Romanies bear is considered to be a salient feature.

“ Reaching the Romanlar ”, displays a lot of important and detailed information concerning Romanies of Turkey. The report states facts about employment, education, housing, and health of Romani people. Not only is the discrimination of Romani people obvious in almost every sphere of social life, but negative conceptions are constantly reinforced through negative stereotypes in the media, cinema, and literature.

According to this research the number of undereducated, unemployed people among Romani people is relatively high. The only sector which allows Romani people's success is music.

In the informative report "Reaching the Romanlar" there is some information about the housing problems of the Romanies. The report states that housing is not easy to acquire outside the areas which are considered to be Romani because landlords are reluctant to rent their houses to them. Many Romanies have to live in houses that are poorly constructed, small and with an inadequate bathroom. And some of them are unfortunately reduced to living in dirty tents or huts (Reaching the Romanlar).

Although there are famous and talented musicians among them, it is hard to see any Romani producers or studio directors. Examples of Romani intellectuals, teachers, lecturers or journalists are very few. In the Romani communities employment is generally poorly paid, unregulated, without social insurance and security.

Flower-selling and flower-sellers are well organized in Istanbul. This business is in the hands of Romani women. The majority of the Romani people are involved in recycling.

Romani children in general drop out of school at an early age. Most of them are not able to attend school full-time due to economic reasons, and the necessity to help the family earn money. Girls attend school less frequently than boys because either their families do not send them due to traditional reasons or because they have to stay at home and take care of the children. Few children, especially those of musicians, can go to

university. However, from then on they often start to hide their ethnic identity (Reaching the Romanlar).

There is a widespread belief that the problems Romani people face in Turkey are shared by non-Romanies as well. Romanies' problems are not considered to be uncommon, which is something that undermines the extent of their miserable situation within the Turkish society.

This reduces them to the status of only a "disadvantaged" group in Turkish society. They are seen as only another group which is less lucky than some others, and since there are many people who are poverty stricken, nobody attaches any great importance to the plight they experience for being Romanies. As a result of this approach they are both poor Turks and Romanies.

The Romanies in the United States share almost the same problems with the Romanies in Turkey and other parts of the world.

In 1992, the January 8<sup>th</sup> issue of the New York Times published the results of a public opinion poll surveying national negative attitudes to 58 different ethnic/racial American populations over a 25-year period. For the entire quarter-century, Gypsies were ranked at the very bottom (*The Origin and Current Situation of the Romani Population*, Hancock).

They had the lowest position among the other ethnic groups. Of course, there are rich and educated Romani people as well; nonetheless, the majority still remains underemployed and undereducated. One of the reasons to why this group was shown at the bottom, is that the preconceptions about them are so deeply ingrained that they can

not be easily erased. Of the seven to twelve million Romanies living in the world, approximately one million live in the United States (Hancock). The American population is largely misinformed about the Romanies. Some Americans do not even know that Romanies are real people. According to Hancock the reason for this is that the majority of Americans do not have any contact with Roma. As a result, people come to rely on the generally biased information the media tends to present them.

...most people believe us to be a population defined by how we dress and behave, a group to which anyone may belong if they adopt certain behavior. Because of this, and because of such widespread reinforcement of such an image in the media (both news and entertainment), the real situation of our people is not at all well known, and “ Gypsy” continues to be a synonym for “ thief ” (cf.the common American slang term “ gyp”, Hancock).

Romanies first arrived in the United States as indentured laborers during the colonial period. Wherever they showed up they were the target of cruel harrassment. Wordsword called them “Wild outcasts of society”<sup>22</sup>.

Romani people started to migrate largely from Russia and the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Great Depression in the 1930s most of them settled primarily in large cities on both sides of the coast. They may be found in Canada, in California, in the suburbs of New York and Chicago, in Mexico, in central America and further south, in Argentina and Cile (Patrin).More than half of the immigrants were coming from the British Isles and the arrival of the Romanies who were coming from Britain reached its peak in the 1850s.

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<sup>22</sup> King of the Gypsies, p.49.

These Romanies were calling themselves 'Romnichels.' They did not come in large numbers, and they generally came as families. They chose to settle in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

These people did many different jobs for a living: men usually did horse-trading, tinning, basket-making, and women were mostly engaged in fortune-telling and hawking. All of these groups had a different culture, language and tradition until they came to this country (The Gypsy Lore Society). These groups also tried to preserve a certain distance from each other. There were differences in social organizations like the form of marriage, internal politics and social control.

The population of Romanies today in North America dates from immigrations of 1850 and thereafter. After the First World War, there was a tightening of controls, so this ended the immigration of Roma from Europe. Different groups of Romanies that immigrated to the United States are the Romnichels, the Rom, the Ludar, Black Dutch, the Hungarian Gypsies, the Irish Travellers, and the Scottish. Romani groups may differ in customs, traditions, linguistics and occupations; however, there is one important trait which each Romani group does possess. Although they may in some ways be affected by the culture of the society they live in, they prefer to maintain a certain distance from the mainstream society. Hancock gives various reasons for the distance between the Romanies and non-Romanies. The Romani culture, Indian in origin, bears many features of the caste system, which does not allow the socializing between members belonging to different castes.

The Indian social structure did not allow contact with the civilians. The word “gadjo ” which is used to describe anybody who is not a Romani derived from the Sanskrit word “ gajjha ” which means “ civilian”. Romani culture disapproves of contact with non-Romanies, because there is a belief that non-Romanies will contaminate their world in a ritual sense. In the Romani culture there are special habits concerning the preparation of food and personal hygiene. The non-Romanies do not follow the same practices and do not have the same habits as Romanies therefore they are thought to be dangerous.

...They still remain the shyest, most nomadic, and most colorful of anybody of gypsies in the entire world. Less has been written about them than about the others, because in their constant wanderings they have remained aloof and elusive<sup>23</sup>.

They still preserve their picturesqueness even though they drive automobiles instead of horse-drawn caravans (Brown).The American Roma do not lead a completely nomadic life (Patrin). Like it is the case in many other countries, automobiles, trailers and campers have taken the place of the horses and wagons. Most Roma in the U.S. preserve their mobility, and make use of every opportunity to travel.

When there is not much work during the winter season, they rent houses and settle for this period of time. Romanies in the U.S. generally perform the same jobs as they do in Europe, and follow the same rites (Patrin). Men generally get short-term jobs, which is their own preference since they do not want to lose their independence by being bound to a full-time, stable job and to a non-Romani employer (Patrin).

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<sup>23</sup> Gypsy Fires in America, p.19.



In many countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, and Rumenia live a larger number of the Romani population; however, none of these countries has as many varied types of Romanies as America. The United States has always attracted immigrants from different countries, so it has been the case with the Romani people. The most important characteristic of the Romanies is their nomadism. Their nomadism has also a great impact on the jobs they perform (Brown).

The New World is the land of the restless, the paradise of those who refuse to stay put. Nowhere do the gypsies thrive as here. They need a country which is not too settled, so that they may camp where they please, and one which is not too thinly inhabited or too poor, since they depend on the prosperity of others for their support<sup>24</sup>.

The U.S. which in many ways speaks to the needs of the Romanies, is still not very close to suppling them with everything they need. If any constructive changes are to be made on behalf of the Romani people, the lingustic and cultural differences of these people have to be taken into consideration.

Americans both in the administration and in the general population, *must* know more about Romanies. The widespread image of the “Hollywood Gypsy” must be gotten rid of if the public is to begin to recognize the Rom are real people with very real, serious problems (Hancock).

Roma unfortunately, still remain to be the least integrated and the most repressed minority in the world. Steps are being taken by many activists all around the world for the betterment of their condition, however, it is unfortunately still a drop in the bucket.

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<sup>24</sup> Gypsy Fires in America, p.16.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1. King of the Gypsies (1978)

This chapter aims to evaluate the stereotype use and the racist approach in films made about Romanies. Within these films stereotypes have largely been used, which actually reveals the racist undertone of the movies. I selected four movies for this project. All of them will be discussed, yet, some of the scenes really need special attention and they will especially be analyzed in detail.

King of the Gypsies was directed by Frank Pierson. The film is based on the novel by Peter Maas which carries the same name. Besides many popular actors several genuine Romanies took part in the movie; however, none of them are in the central role.

We see Sterling Hayden in the role of King Zharko Stepanowicz. Hayden is the king of the Gypsies. David (Eric Roberts) is the grandson of Hayden. Rose (Susan Sarandon), David's mother, is extremely successful in the Gypsy woman role. Judd Hirsch plays Rose's evil and extremely rude husband Groffo, who falls prey to human frailty. The story is about the generation gap and conflicts arising from the misunderstandings between fathers and sons. The misunderstandings and sour relations between father and son result in rivalry and murder.

In the film we see all events of the life cycle: birth, celebration, marriage, and mourning. The film is full of the stereotypes we know about Romanies. At the very

beginning of the film we see a man dancing to Romani music, a scene which emphasizes the love of Romanies for dance and music. Then the camera moves and we see a campsite with lots of tents and cars in front of them. The camp is very crowded; it is full of women, children and men. A man is selling a horse, another stereotype, horse-dealing is known to be a job often performed by the Romanies.

From the very beginning we see that the film is completely based on preconceptions, reflecting the world of the Romanies from a biased perspective.

Ian Hancock in his essay “The Origin and Function of the Gypsy Image in Children’s Literature” says:

...People who never met a Gypsy in their lives are nevertheless able to provide a fairly detailed picture of how they think Gypsies look and how they live. Their mental image, partly negative and partly romantic but mostly inaccurate, is the result of the response to a Romani identity which has become institutionalized in the Western tradition to the extent that it has become part of its cultural heritage, and so is not recognized for what it is.

In her thesis “The Stereotype Caravan :Assessment of Stereotypes and Ideology levels used to portray Gypsies in two European feature films ”, Elena Gabor writes that according to some observers of the Romani issues, three kinds of stereotypes have generally been used in movies made about Romanies: positive stereotypes- Romanies seen as musical geniuses; negative stereotypes -as thieves and wrongdoers; and lately as victims of the non-Romani discrimination. All of the above mentioned stereotypes have been used in King of the Gypsies . There are especially two scenes where the Romanies are shown as people who live on their wits, and are thieves. Rose is a perfect thief who

is very talented in deceiving people. She wears fancy clothes, takes little Dave with her and goes to a jewellery shop.

Pretending to be someone else and disguising her true identity, she tells the salesman that she wants to buy some diamonds as a present for her mother. While Dave uses some tricks in order to draw the attention of the salesman, she steals a diamond. She makes Dave swallow it, and the salesman also being sure that she stole it, can not prove it.

Another striking scene built on stereotypes about Romanies is the scene where Rose abuses the weakness of a non-Romani woman and takes her money. Rose (Susan Sarandon) is a boojo woman, a fortune-teller. Rose tells the woman that the money she inherited from her husband is cursed, and that she has to get rid of it in order to find peace and avoid bad luck.

She tells the woman that the money must be buried in a graveyard at night and the woman must be naked while burying it. Rose is very powerful and has full control during the fortune-telling process. The woman is obviously the one in a hundred she could exploit.

This conforms to the mystical Romani image in the minds of the non-Romani. In his essay called "The Origin and Function of the Gypsy Image in Children's Literature" Hancock tells of fortune-telling:

They were people who moved around using skills and equipment that could travel with them: dealing in horses, or mending metal utensils, or fortune-telling, for example. The last gave this victimized population a small measure of power over the superstitious European peasantry, but in turn it contributed to the perception of Romanies as practitioners of the occult, and increased the fear of them.

Romanies have been the victims of gadje discrimination for centuries. They are believed to be inherently criminal, lawless, and violent. All of the following examples serve to reinforce the concept that Romanies really do possess these negative traits and are discriminated against because they have them.

Rose is a thief, Dave steals from shops, his father is a good-for-nothing who gambles, who is violent towards his wife and children, and who rejects education to the degree that he even cannot bear seeing his children in front of a gadjo school.

The book *Gypsies in the City* describes how Romanies are perceived by non-Romanies: “ Thus, stretching or breaking the law is part of the Gypsy way of life”<sup>25</sup>.

At the beginning of the film there is a disagreement between Steve and Rose’s father. Rose does not want to marry the king’s son, and Rose’s father owes money to Steve.

They consult the kris for the solution of the problem. The kris is a formal tribunal that has been established in order to solve problems. Its decisions are binding. The kris decides in favor of Rose’s father. Steve, on the other hand, does not obey the

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<sup>25</sup> *Gypsies in the City*, p.105.

decision of the kris, and takes Rose with him without her consent. Not following the kris' decision is an attitude that would undermine the kris' power. This attitude has an important consequence.

“...; but no man is a true Rom unless he upholds the kris”<sup>26</sup>. Thus, if one does not obey the kris he is not considered to be a true Romani. This scene implies that some of the Romanies do not even respect the verdict of their own judicial system and serves as an example for lawlessness.

Another important stereotype is that Romani women are constantly shown with bandanas, big earrings and multilayered colorful skirts. The film is used in order to perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Romanies. This is a matter of choice and expectation. The film is based on a best seller. It is expected to gain as much popularity as the book. The book with all the stereotypes it involves speaks to the expectations of the reader. The reader is presented with some images that match with those in his mind.

He does not want these deeply ingrained images to be distorted or deconstructed. So the film uses the stereotypes and features as well as popular actors because famous ones attract more spectators. On the other hand, using genuine Romanies might not attract as many spectators as popular film stars.

In the movie, it is actually Steve's (Hayden) actions that serve as the catalyst for the upheavels in the story. The family is an important institution for the Roma, and

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<sup>26</sup> Gropper, p.81.

Roma are expected to marry at a very early age “.... Marriage, for them, is quite definitely more than a union of husband and wife; it involves a lifetime alliance between two extended families”<sup>27</sup>. When the king one day tells the twelve-year old Dave that he wants him to get married, he runs away and does not show up for years, until one night his grandfather himself goes to see him. Dave is working in the streets as a male prostitute. Dave prefers to be in the streets and is willing to become part of the American society instead of being a part of an arranged marriage.

However, seeing his grandfather causes to some confusion in him and he sees that he can not break free from his roots completely. He goes to visit his family, whom he has not seen for years. Nonetheless, his father is not very welcoming and accuses him of rejecting his true identity.

The Gypsy society values family togetherness, respects women who have children, and complies with the decisions of the elderly. Nevertheless, David’s father, who blames his son for rejecting his roots, himself does not show any respect to his own traditions and values.

King Zharko Stepanowicz has great trust in his grandson, he wants David (Eric Roberts) to become the king after his death. As a sign of this wish, he gives his grandson a gold medallion and a ring at his deathbed. David reluctantly accepts them, yet, he does not have the least intention of becoming the king of the Gypsy tribe.

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<sup>27</sup> Gypsies in the City, p.86.

His father, upon hearing that his son was offered the title instead of him, gets extremely angry, and starts plotting the murder of his own son. Many events and conversations take place between father and son to show the bad blood between them.

At the end of the film David kills his father, and becomes the leader of his people. However, this leadership is far from the traditional one his grandfather had expected from him. Nor is his leadership openly declared at the end of the film.

The viewer gets the feeling that David will open a new road, a new page for his people.

David has a wish: Things are in a constant state of flux. He wants his people to shake off the dust from the past and wants them to leave everything behind that hinders their advancement, and conform to the changes of the time. Gypsy culture is an exclusionary culture, yet, Dave has a more open attitude than his people. He thinks that his people deserve more than they get; he wants his people to be educated, and he wants Gypsy children to go to school.

David has a reactionary character, his strong and rigid personality seems to be inherited from his grandfather. He does not accept to follow traditions blindly. That is why he chose to run away from home at a very early age and preferred to live in the streets rather than marrying someone chosen for him. "Gypsy marriage is not predicated



on romantic love, and the Rom frown against any display of affection between the husband and wife”<sup>28</sup>.

Dave prefers to be with someone whom he is in love with. According to the Romanies, any relation with non-Romanies is atypical. Dave suffers due to the conflict between two cultures. The hybrid of Romani and non-Romani is not acceptable. Nevertheless, Dave is breaking this rule by being together with an American girl. What Dave actually does is a way of survival, he feels that he needs to assimilate into the American society in order to gain acceptance and to survive.

While denigrating the Romani society and its values, the film elevates American values. David the protagonist, is very much under the influence of the American way of life. At one point he even claims to be an American. He criticizes his peoples’ backwardness and says, “You people will never change”.

His American girlfriend is completely the opposite of the Romani women in the film. She is shown as very fragile, shy, elegant, understanding, noble and calm, whereas Romani women are constantly depicted as noisy and boisterous.

The film depicts the constant struggle of the Romani and non-Romani world. The backwardness of the Romani world is continuously presented while the non-Romani world is shown as appealing and full of promises. The film shows the Romani world versus the non-Romani world. The Romani world represents bad housing, theft,

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<sup>28</sup> Gypsies in the City, p.88.

unemployment, poverty, violent man represented by Groffo, boisterous women represented by Rose, lack of education, whereas the non-Gypsy world is full of opportunities that offer jobs, financial security, education, elegant women with good manners represented by Dave's girlfriend, shortly a better life.

Dave wants to follow the call of the American dream. He strongly believes that if someone is willing to change, he can make it. Stereotypes known about Romanies were extensively used and to emphasize the idea that they are negative a Romani character was used. A Romani is made to criticize his own people. Dave constantly criticizes the Romani way of life.

In the film Ateşli Çingene, the same attitude is observed. A Romani insulted another Romani by saying, "You are even worse than a Gypsy." This carries a double message, which is that neither the Romani nor the non-Romani world is happy with the Romani world.

The perspective of the film is controlled by the mainstream society. It is the mainstream society that controls the gaze. Thus, Romanies are objectified and made the target of the gaze. The camera, which already has a limited view (Silverman), pictures Romanies in the most simplistic way. In conclusion, all the aspects in the film conform to the image in the popular mind.

## 2.2. Angelo My Love (1983)

Angelo My Love was written and directed by Robert Duvall. It is a glimpse into the life of New York Romanians. The main character of the film is Angelo Evans, who is a twelve-year-old boy. Although he is just a child, he seems to know a lot about life and has a sense of humour. He is extremely cute, clever and absolutely street-wise. In the article written about “Angelo My Love”, Duvall says that he was very much impressed by Angelo when he met him first. He says of Angelo, “I never met anyone like him before, all that precociousness.” Duvall continues, “It was strange to see an entity like that, he was so magnetic and different, just his presence, and the way he conducted himself I couldn’t get over it” (Fishman).

The plot of the movie is actually very simple. Angelo is the son of a fortune-teller. He claims that a precious ring which he believes to be his birthright was stolen by some other Romani.

The kris is formed and Angelo claims that he saw Steve Patalay Tsigonoff stealing the ring from the closet. The members of the kris listen to both of them; however, since Patalay has not been accused of theft before and because it can not be proven that he has the ring, Patalay goes free after the kris. Sure that Patalay has the ring that Angelo aims to give his girlfriend Patricia, Angelo and his brother decide to follow Patalay in order to get it back. In the end the two brothers track down Patalay and manage to get the ring back.

In the film Duvall used real Romanies and they all play fictional versions of themselves. Like every film made about Romanies this one also has a lot of music and dancing, both of which are indispensable, a wedding scene, theft and the kris, which functions as the court of justice.

The film is semidocumentary. The documentary film usually tends to persuade and to promote image. The film accomplishes this by including positive traits and stereotypes of the Romani people. Therefore, stylistically this movie could be categorized as a realistic one. It has a naturalistic visual style. It is not improvised, there is a script which is being followed, but you get the feeling from the film that you can touch the characters involved. The Romanies who took part in the movie played themselves truthfully, everything is in its natural flow. The director has given the characters a certain kind of freedom, so the characters are much more natural and authentic. They have depth. The camera is like an observer immersed into the life of these people. In the movies there are both negative and positive stereotypes. Nevertheless, Duvall has successfully balanced them. We do not have exotic and mystical characters which show the Romani identity from a one-sided picture and which only help to blur the Romani culture.

Despite its realism the film still indulges in stereotyping the Roma: Angelo and his brother selling flowers in a restaurant and having to work as children. Angelo rejects going to school although his mother sends him, and he can not read or write though he is twelve years old.

Angelo loves to be outdoors rather than spending his time at school. Romanies are often regarded as “children of nature untouched by civilization” (Hancock). Angelo rejects things, even if it is education, that put pressure on him. There is the recurrent theme of theft. Patalay, who stole the ring, also steals chickens with his wife, which is also something expected from Romanies. Angelo’s mother is a fortune-teller like most of the Romani women.

The family togetherness which is of vital importance for Romanies is successfully incorporated in the film. The Evans family holds together, there is a very strong mother figure, and the bond between the two brothers is very strong. Romanies are portrayed neither completely negatively nor positively. Duvall has maintained a balance that actually shows all the phases of life.

When Angelo tells his mother that he wants to give the ring to his girlfriend Patricia, who is an American, his mother wants him to make a choice between the Romani and non-Romani world. David in King of the Gypsies was also forced to make a choice between these two conflicting worlds. The Turkish film Ateşli Çingene, which will be discussed in the next section, also contains a scene where the protagonist is forced to make a choice between these two worlds. These scenes where the characters of the Romani world are left to make a choice between the Romani and non-Romani world constantly appear. This might have two meanings. The first reason might be to highlight the civilization and abundance of the non-Romani world. The second might be to highlight the smallness of the Romani world with its restricted opportunities compared to the non-Romani world. The huge difference between these opposing worlds causes some turmoil in the world of the protagonist. The films mostly show that

Romanies are attracted to the non-Romani world. The character starts to question the shortcomings of his own surrounding, and decides that he deserves more.

However, he is aware of the fact that he cannot exist in both worlds. Making this decision, and choosing the non-Romani world is a turning point in the life of the Romani. The Romani culture refuses to have any intimate contact with the non-Romani people. Thus, acting in favor of the non-Romani world is rejecting all the values, like *marimé* that are important to the Romanies. Maintaining a balance between the two is out of the question.

The Romani culture is an exclusionary one, Romani people aim to minimize relations with the non-Romani as much as possible. There has always been a cultural pressure to remain the same since Romanies left India, and this is the impact of the caste system (Hancock).

In the book *Romani Culture and Gypsy Identity* there is some definition about the characteristic of Romani which emphasizes the fact why they do not want to approach the non-Romani.

... the demand made by Gypsies of one another was that they constantly affirm their intention to remain a Gypsy by doing the same as each other and so levelling their unique and individual characters to a common standard<sup>29</sup>.

Du Bois talked about “two warring souls within one body”<sup>30</sup>. Here Du Bois wrote that a reconciliation between Negroness and Americanness was tried to be

maintained, which actually aimed to exclude the Negro. Americanness is in opposition to Negroness. Americanness is associated with whiteness. According to this assumption, one can not be both colored and American. They are in a constant fight. In America there is racism on the basis of color.

Gypsies have a dark skin, they are dirty, they are dishonest and lazy according to the widespread beliefs. Thus, they can not be classed as Americans because the American is defined as someone who is white, clean, hardworking and honest.

Romanies are a non-territorial people who live in others' lands, and within foreign territories they try to preserve their identity without being assimilated.

Angelo's mother is aware that it is not possible for "two warring souls to exist in the same body" because these two souls are completely different in custom, tradition and values. A synthesis, a reconciliation, does not seem to be possible at all: in order to have one the other has to be rejected or given up. It is not possible according to her to be both American and a Roma because it means the acceptance of the American culture.

The boundaries of the Romani and non-Romani world are very clear. There are various examples in the film which highlight the difference between the Romanies and non-Romanies.

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<sup>29</sup> *Romani Culture and Gypsy*, p.91.

<sup>30</sup> *Colored Pictures*, p.91.

One of them is from the scene where the kris is formed in order to listen to Angelo and Patalay. An interesting dialogue takes place between one member of the kris and Angelo. Angelo directly accuses Patalay of having committed the theft, but since he is a child, the kris does not take him seriously. One member tells him that little boys sometimes dream, and that what he saw might be a dream. However, when Angelo insists on having seen the theft, they say, "If you lie, you become a gadjo". This is a statement that shows the way Romanies think about the non-Romanies. Usually it is the Romanies who are said to be deceitful. However, from this scene we gain the knowledge that Romanies actually believe the non-Romani world to be dishonest, and another important thing is that we see that a Romani threatens a Romani child of becoming a non-Romani if he does not behave properly. For Romani people:

The non-Romani world is an evil place fraught with danger because those who inhabit it are seen, from, the Romani perspective, to have no moral or spiritual structure (Hancock).

The film does not avoid using stereotypes and some of the stereotypes attributed to Romanies are even accepted by themselves. These are, fortune-telling, or having mystical powers.

...Fortune-telling is a widespread means of income, for reasons that are easily understood: it is a tradition brought from India, it requires little or no equipment and can be done anywhere, there is a steady demand from the non-Romani public to have predictions made about the future, and it is a skill which gives Romanies a small measure of control and protection<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> We are the Romani People, p.103.



The misconceptions about Romanies are not exaggerated in the film. There is theft, there is lying to the kris, there is stealing chickens for fun. However, there is a very strong Romani character, Angelo, who believes in justice, who is honest, respects his parents and together with his brother helps an old lady, a good mother who is both loving and who at the same time is strict towards her children in order to educate them.

The film is successful in maintaining a balance between positive and negative traits which most of the films made about Romanies lack.

### 2.3. Ateşli Çingene (1969)

Ateşli Çingene is a Turkish film directed by Metin Erksan. The Turkish adjective “ateşli” means “ hot ” in English , and the word “Çingene” as mentioned before means “Gypsy.”The script was written by Bülent Oran. The script is based on actor and director Eric von Stroheim’s book *Paprika*. The film is about a very beautiful and at the same time very difficult Gypsy queen.

Türkan Şoray is in the role of the harsh and untamed Gypsy Queen Gelincik, and Ediz Hun is in the role of the romantic and talented fiddler Derbeder Ali. They are deeply in love with each other. Although Ali uses every opportunity to confess his love for her, she uses every opportunity to torture him and to make him miserable though she desperately loves him.

The film starts with a Romani tribe travelling in horse-drawn caravans. In one of the caravans there is a pregnant woman, who will later give birth to a stillborn baby.

The same night that the baby is born, Nigar Nine (Bediha Muvahhit), an old woman with mystical powers breaks into a house and kidnaps a baby girl.

This stolen child who will be raised as a Romani, is Gelincik. Together with the baby girl, Nigar Nine also steals a medallion from the house, which later will have a significant role in the happy family reunion of Gelincik and her father.

Salih the leader of the tribe is the evil doer in the film, and he is also in love with Gelincik.

Gelincik too proud to confess her love to Ali, constantly tortures him, and tries to make him jealous through Salih, although she hates him. In one scene she secretly steals Salih's watch and puts it into Ali's pocket. When Salih finds the watch in Ali's pocket, he gets extremely angry and utters words that are insulting for Romanies. "A Gypsy does not steal from another Gypsy. You are even lower than a Gypsy". The film involves many other degrading messages about Roma.

While Ali is playing the fiddle at a restaurant a man calls him and orders him to play for his fiance, Ali says that he will only play if the lady wants him to and not because he had been ordered to.

After he finishes playing, the lady, who happens to be a famous singer, admits that she was very much impressed by his playing and offers him a job. Her fiance at this point gets very jealous and in order to degrade him asks Ali what musical school he has finished. This scene implies the fact that Roma are generally not educated. Ali, who can not bear to be tortured by Gelincik anymore, decides to leave. He accepts the job offered to him by the lady at the restaurant. The singer falls in love with him and they become engaged. Nonetheless, Ali who is still desperately in love with Gelincik, leaves the singer and returns to Gelincik. Eventually all things end happily as Gelincik finds her father with the help of the medallion that she always wears, and also unites with Ali.

The world outside the poorly improvised tents is unwelcoming for the protagonists of the film. There is a clear-cut distinction between the Romani and non-Romani world. The Romanies can be directly distinguished through their costumes, speech and life-style. The singer is very well-dressed, has good manners, and uses a polite language. She has money and fame and people respect her.

Gelincik , on the other hand, is very colorfully dressed, wears big ornaments, uses slang, does not have good manners. She has no job and money. The singer travels in her expensive car whereas Gelincik travels in her horse-drawn caravan.

When Ali becomes famous as a fiddler, Gelincik goes to see him at the place where he is playing. However, she cannot get in because she does not have any money. From the very start of the film, we see that it is loaded with racist undertones and negative stereotypes. No real Romanies feature in the film. The actress, Türkan Şoray, is believed to be a real Romani; however, it has never been openly declared in the press, or mentioned in any of her interviews. It is something the public believes, but the source of the information has long been forgotten.

The film starts with a lot of caravans travelling, and we hear a cheerful song in the background. However, the music in the film is not Romani music at all. Actually, in the film there is no real Romani music. The song played at the beginning of the film is actually a song that degrades Romani way of life. In the song it says that seventy-five Romanies lie in the same bed and that they are fond of entertainment. The costumes chosen are also a revelation of the widespread stereotypes. All women in the movie are wearing long colorful skirts and multi-layered aprons. The costumes used in Ateşli

Çingene and King of the Romanies are very much the same. This shows that both in American and Turkish movies Romanies are portrayed in the same way.

They all wear big earrings, they steal, they deceive non-Romanies, there is dancing around the camp fire and music. In the film, Romanies are constantly insulted by being called “Dirty Gypsy”. The characters, even those who play the Romanies, hold xenophobic attitudes.

In one of the scenes Gelincik warns people to watch their purses and claims that Ali is a very successful pickpocket. Everything negative that has often been attributed to Romanies can be found in the film: theft, kidnapping, fortune-telling, music and dancing.

The movie underlies ethnic conflict. There are some scenes where this conflict is obviously displayed. Salih, the leader of the tribe, accuses Ali at one point of his past, and tells him that it is not known where he came from. There is a latent message that Ali may not be a Romani.

Gelincik, who is after all not a real Romani will fall in love with Ali, so he can not be a Romani because the union of a Romani and non-Romani is not something Roma or non-Roma society approves of.

Later in the film when Ali gets famous as a fiddler and starts working for a famous singer, a similar situation occurs. The singer falls in love with Ali and her

friends ask her how she could be with a Roma. Her answer is very significant. She says that Ali is not a Roma, and even if he were, this fact would make no difference to her.

Nonetheless, she contradicts herself later when Ali politely rejects her, and confesses his never-ending true love for Gelincik to her. She becomes very bitter, and sarcastically insults him by saying that he was too polite for a Roma. This scene serves as an example to show that the union of the Romani and non-Romani is not possible. Ali decides that he can not survive in this world although it is very glamorous.

He wishes to be close to Gelincik and nature. He says by pointing to himself and the campsite “this is what I am”. He misses the Romani way of life.

Thus, he could not remain a Romani, retain his Romani way of life and be a rich and famous person in the non-Romani world and be married to a non-Romani.

There are certain jobs especially done by Romanies. They can be tinkers, horse-dealers, coppersmith and musicians. These jobs are generally not done by the non-Romanies. In the film Gelincik uses these jobs as a way of insult. She is degrading these jobs and implies that these jobs do not deserve any respect. She makes fun of Ali as a musician, and stresses the point that he is a poor fiddler.

Besides all this, Romanies are believed to be very fond of jewelry. This trait has been used in three films that are the subject of this project.

In all the three films, which are King of the Gypsies, Angelo My Love, and Ateşli Çingene that have been discussed in this project so far, there is a piece of jewelry which has a great impact on the destiny of its owners. They are symbols and each carries a meaning.

In King of the Gypsies, the ring and the medallion meant rank and power, in Angelo My Love, the ring was precious and meant to be given to the loved one, and in Ateşli Çingene, the medallion functioned as something that brought the protagonist back to his roots and meant family. In this film the viewer is not presented with a realistic picture of the Romani world. It is the mainstream society that sets the rules and that decides about how those differ from itself in many ways should be called and evaluated. Many things are being told about the life-style of Romanies or about the jobs they perform. These people have customs and traditions they value, they have a culture which they respect and are proud of. Unfortunately, films, literature and media are all in the hands of the mainstream society which has a negative perspective of the Romanies.

As a result of this, with all the shallow stereotypes this film uses, it is the product of a racial bias.

#### 2.4. Ağır Roman (1997)

Ağır Roman was directed by Mustafa Altıoklar. It is based on the book by Metin Kaçan that carries the same title. The book title has a double meaning. “Ağır” is an adjective which means “heavy”, “difficult”, “serious” and “slow”, “Roman”; on the other hand, means both “novel” and also refers to the music made by the Roma. Therefore, it could be both explained as “slow Gypsy music” and “heavy (hard to read, digest) novel”. The book was groundbreaking when it was first published in 1990. It is different in many ways. It is courageous and challenging in the sense of giving a realistic depiction of the life of the Roma. It is not only the narrative that caused the book to be called a courageous novel, but also the language that was used.

The book is full of slang which makes it very difficult to understand. As is the case with every film that is based on a novel, one unfortunately does not derive the same kind of pleasure from the film as one does from the book. The film obviously lacks many details that enrich the book. Nonetheless, it still remains one of the good movies in Turkish cinema for both its script and the performance of the actors.

Ağır Roman is our first ethnic movie, and for the very first time in Turkish cinema a film has been made about the life and culture of an ethnic group<sup>32</sup>. Tarlabası is a district in Istanbul where people from different parts of Turkey come together. They have different roots and religions.

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<sup>32</sup> Sinemamızda Çöküş ve Rönesans Yılları, s.32.



Nevertheless, all the people living there are thought to be Romanies. The notion that all the people who reside there are thieves, the morally corrupt, pimps, prostitutes or homosexuals is widespread (Atilla Dorsay).

Dolapdere and Tarlabası are actually districts many perceive as dangerous. The film takes place in a street called “Kolera” in Tarlabası, a name given to it by its residents. Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium called *Vibrio cholerae*. A rapid loss of body fluids results in dehydration and shock when people are infected by it. Places with inadequate treatment of sewage and drinking water are areas where the disease more likely can spread. The lack of treatment results in death within a very short time. Kolera street is a place where many things are inadequate. The people of Kolera street are reduced to living in a shabby area, the buildings are old and in a poor condition, everything is falling apart. Kolera also implies the corruption of the community that inhabits it. The reason for corruption is because of the lack of order and justice. It is a community left to their own devices where those who are stronger set the rules.

The corruption is like a dangerous disease whereby almost everyone gets infected and there is no treatment for those who get infected. It is a very mixed and cosmopolitan neighborhood:

Roma, Armenians, Jews, Muslims, Greeks, and Syrians are living there side by side. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the district permeates the film. Everything is in the extremes, but surprisingly there still is a certain kind of harmony.

The main characters of the film are Müjde Ar , Okan Bayülgen, Mustafa Uğurlu, Savaş Dinçel, Burak Sergen and Sevda Ferdağ. In the movie Romani people feature as well.

We see famous musicians like Balık Ayhan in the film. The musical talent of Roma has been exposed. There is a very impressive fight scene that takes place between Salih and Reis.

The rhythm of the darbuka played by Ayhan accompanying the fight really causes a climax, and is one of the best scenes in the movie.

The film is mainly about the change Salih (Okan Bayülgen) undergoes in order to find himself a place in the cruel streets of Dolapdere and to gain some recognition. He is the son of the owner (Savaş Dinçel) of a barber shop. Salih lives together with his parents and his brother. The family has migrated to Istanbul from Anatolia. The family members do not have a healthy relationship with each other. No one except the two brothers has a close rapport within the family. The mother (Sevda Ferdağ) has some kind of nervous breakdown, the father, not a loving father figure at all, is very aggressive and always overreacting.

Throughout the film we witness the war of the ever-opposing poles of good and evil. There are heroes and evildoers in the film. Reis (Mustafa Uğurlu), the merciless mafioso, is almost entirely responsible for all the evil taking place in Kolera. Determined to make easy-money he uses various scare tactics to make the inhabitants pay money to him. He is so greedy that he preys on everyone in Kolera without making an exception.

Everyone is intimidated by him except Arap Sado (Burak Sergen), who is the counter figure of Reis, and who acts as the modern Robin Hood by protecting the people of Kolera from Reis and his men. The unending conflict between these opposing powers, results one night in the murder of Sado, the most courageous person of Kolera.

Salih is the last to see Sado before he dies. Just before Sado dies he gives his knife to Salih.

This passing over of a knife bears a symbolic meaning. Sado has confidence in Salih and wants him to take his place and be the protector of the people of Kolera from now on. Salih, devastated by the death of Sado, who had always been a cult figure for him, takes the knife and thus, accepts Sado's last wish.

This acceptance, however, will also be the acceptance of a life for which he is unprepared and too inexperienced. The knife is like a key to the unknown. Consequently, Salih believes himself to be responsible for protecting Kolera both because he owes it to Sado and he sees himself as the saviour of the people. Besides having an enemy he has to confront, he falls deeply in love with a Greek prostitute, Tina (Müjde Ar), who is his father's tenant. Being young and too naïve his good intention for a better life and world gets crushed in the end. His frailty is overestimating himself.

Life, however, plots against him and eventually overthrows him. There are many encounters between Reis and Salih. Reis does not take him very seriously because Salih is more like a romantic hero for whom all the downtrodden are waiting to be rescued. Reis, on the other hand, is the demonic figure always with the wicked grin on his face.

When one night Salih gets arrested by the police for having murdered a man who had wounded Tina with a knife, Reis comes to Tina and lets her know that Salih will be released on one condition, she has to be with him.

Salih, worn-out for being tortured for days hardly manages to reach Tina's flat. Seeing Tina and Reis together is a painful sight to him. He leaves without saying a word. This last scene he encounters puts an end to everything he had cared and lived for. Death seems to be the last resort for the desperate Salih. He cuts his wrists on a dark street corner. Tina, seeing him dead, kills Reis and herself in her car, saying that this time it will be the bad ones to lose.

The impossible love of Salih and Tina, is the only beautiful and honest thing in the ugly world of Kolera. Theirs is actually a fairy tale with a tragic ending.

This film involves a number of stereotypes that are widely known. Crime, theft, dancing, joy, Gypsy music and musicians, a wedding scene, and a few women wearing big ornaments, are all used effectively.

There are some interesting things about the film that need to be mentioned. Mustafa Altıoklar himself appears in some scenes and narrates the story in a somehow poetic way. This narration distances the viewer from the story a bit. Altıoklar also uses some close-ups of the main characters and this is very helpful in presenting their moods. Dolapdere is one of Istanbul's cheapest districts to live in, so people emigrating from different parts of Turkey with a low or no income at all and mostly Roma take up residence there.

It is an infamous district because the majority living there are Roma, and they are believed to generate the crimes. The authorities try to keep them within a certain vicinity in order to have control of them. Thus, they are continuously being put under pressure, and the modern civilization tends to ignore the existence of these people by relegating them to districts that have squalid housing. What we see in this film is neither the constant repetition nor the negative exploitation of superficial stereotypes. In this movie we look at racism from a different angle, what we witness here is institutional racism.

People are made to live in poor conditions, and denied decent jobs, as well as basic human rights. Institutions are avoiding the pledge these people are subjected to, and turn a blind eye to social and political matters like poverty, unemployment, marginalization and discrimination. (Gabor)

This movie strikingly displays the region of the 'others' which the majority of us prefers not to enter.

## CONCLUSION

I have endeavoured to make clear some things about racism in film in my project because both racism and cinema are highly interesting subjects in my opinion. Racism in Turkey, on the other hand, is a subject that is not frequently discussed.

This project aimed to depict how the unreal image of the Roma has been exploited in film and how the wrongly constructed concept of them caused these people to suffer for centuries. Roma have a unique lifestyle, which is an exclusionary one as well. Hence, nowhere have they been regarded as a people who should be given equal rights. For the German American anthropologist Boas “equality” meant the acceptance of the actual inequalities of society but the regarding of these inequalities as different manifestations of a common humanity (Malik). Eventually, difference is so much at the heart of every society, that it weakens the opportunity to internalize equality (Malik).

What is unknown and strange to people always remains a threat and an invisible enemy because they cannot fight what they do not know. In order to keep this threat away, the non-Romanies stay away and as they stay away they never get to understand the Romani culture or even accept that they have one. Romani culture with its values, traditions and music is one of the richest cultures in the world. Reducing such a culture to poorly and shallowly constructed stereotypes is nothing but unfair.

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