Paper Title: **Bringing hybridity to heterogeneity in Romani Studies**

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Abstract

A frequent criticism of the media and the public's approach to Roma minorities is that they are portrayed in homogenising terms. Academics from Romani Studies have sought to highlight the heterogeneity of Roma minorities, describing them as a diaspora forming "a mosaic of small diverse groups" (Liégeois 1986: 49-50). This article questions whether this approach is effective enough to break away from homogenising terms, focusing on an ongoing debate between anthropologist Michael Stewart and sociologists János Ladányi & Iván Szelényi. Both parties highlight heterogeneity as a fundamental aspect of Roma people (Stewart 1997, Ladányi & Szelényi 2006). Their dispute lies in whether to approach Roma as a predominantly cultural group (Stewart) or economically-deprived group (Ladányi & Szelényi). Despite their different approaches, I show how both parties can still slip into talk about 'the Gypsies' or 'the Roma' as 'a' different group of people. I argue that in order to effectively move away from homogenising terms, it is useful to use some of the theorisations of ethnicity and difference offered by certain authors from British Cultural Studies (BCS) in particular Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy.

KEY WORDS: heterogeneity, homogeneity, hybridity, British Cultural Studies, cultural, economic, approach, representation, Roma, essentialism, ethnic absolutism, Gypsy

Introduction: Re-thinking heterogeneity[1]

There is a general understanding in Romani Studies that strong, negative discourses of Roma[2] are regularly circulated in the media and amongst the public, creating an array of "images, stereotypes, and racist biases that negate Gypsies' humanity and ignore both heterogeneity and complexity in Romani culture" (Tong et al 1998: ix). Academics in contemporary Romani Studies see their job as to work against these stereotypes: from a linguistic perspective, Matras says, "descriptive linguistics can help replace stereotypical images with information, facts, and evidence" (Matras 2002: 4); anthropologist Okely found herself "acting and thinking against the romantic tradition epitomised by George Borrow, Merimée, Bizet and all the stereotypes which are significant in the dominant society's construction of Gypsies" (Okely 1992: 14); whilst Stewart says at the beginning of his monograph on the Vlach Rom in Hungary (which is looked at later in depth), "I saw one of my roles as an ethnographer as helping to dispel the prejudice that sustained the fear of the Gypsy" (Stewart 1997: 18).

Romani Studies thus sees itself as a space for anti-racist type intervention, a means of revealing a realistic picture of a heterogeneous minority. However, one of the most startling voices against the homogenisation of Roma has directed criticism at Romani Studies itself. In his book *In Search of the True Gypsy*, social historian Wim Willems argues that academics have been instrumental in building up and sustaining an image of the 'true Gypsy' through the continuing circulation of false or exaggerated representations. Willems claims that from

[2] This author takes the view that self-identification of ethnic grouping is important. However, in order to talk about wider discourses of people and practices associated with 'Gypsies' the term 'Roma' is used in recognition of its accepted use in public forums. However when the context or literature writing about uses predominantly one term, e.g. 'Vlach Rom' or 'Gypsy', then the same term will be used.

German scholar Henrich Grellmann's 1783 book that claimed an Indian origin and a deficit subculture for all Gypsies, a basic pattern was set "for ideas about Gypsies which during the following centuries we recognize recurring constantly in publications whenever the subject arises" (Willems 1997: 46).

Willems' work has opened up a critical debate in Romani Studies. Whilst some academics see his work as denying subsequent important scientific finds of the Indian origins of Roma people (e.g. Matras 2004); others see his work as deconstructing Roma identity into non-existence (e.g. Acton 2004: 113-115). What Willems' work does achieve, is to pose a challenge to Romani Studies scholars to ensure their work does not fall into the trap of constructing a false image of the 'true Gypsy'. In fact, since Willems wrote his book there have been academics from Romani Studies who have consciously worked against fixed notions of 'Roma', and this article focuses on two prime examples in-depth: Stewart's anthropological work and Ladányi & Szelényi's sociological research on Roma in Hungary.

Both Stewart and Ladányi & Szelényi's claim to move away from rigid, homogenising notions of Roma. Stewart's ethnographic monograph is on the Vlach Rom in Hungary, and one that Willems has commended himself (Willems & Lucassen 2000: 257-8). As academics and students of Romani Studies well know, Stewart's work has been highly influential at an international level and his book is taught in higher education in various countries. His work has been hailed by academics as having "opened up new horizons in our knowledge of Roma" (Szuhay 2005: 235) and credited with starting a "revolutionary change in the history of Gypsy studies" as he was "the first to discuss the life of a Gypsy community using an anthropological approach" (Prónai 2002: 77). One major thread of Stewart's work is the rather controversial proposition that Gypsies are not an 'ethnic' group in the sense of an

"inherited past", but rather "for them, identity is constructed and constantly remade in the present in relations with significant others" (Stewart 1997: 28). Stewart has argued that these identity constructions he witnessed as an anthropologist were fundamental to the secret of their survival (1997: 5). This has been taken up by other scholars who argue that 'ethnicity' is a term that restricts a heterogeneous view because it cannot cope with the variety and diversity of Roma groups (e.g. Belton 2005, Mayall 2003).

However, despite Stewart's overall acceptance and popularity in the field, there has been some criticism of his work. Rather than moving away from homogenising notions of 'the Gypsies', Hungarian sociologists Ladányi & Szelényi argue that Stewart's conceptualisation of a 'cultural Rom' serves only to create the idea of an "eternal Roma" which does not take into account historical positioning according to socio-economic status:

> There are no 'eternal Roma' who in the end always outsmart the *gadjo* [non-Roma] and find a way of survival or even success. Traditional means of survival are available only as long as tradition is preserved.
> (Ladányi & Szelényi 2003: 50) [my addition]

Ladányi & Szelényi's work, rather than focusing on 'tradition', takes a socio-historical perspective on the status and labelling of Roma minorities, putting forward the notion of 'underclass' as a suitable term to define the situation of Roma minorities today in Central and Eastern European countries. However, Stewart has come back with some criticisms of his own on Ladányi & Szelényi's work, arguing that the term 'underclass' is itself restrictive in its vagueness and lack of attention to cultural practices (2002: 140).

Whilst this article details this argument, looking for legitimacy of both criticisms in the authors' texts, the focus moves beyond positioning the critiques in terms of a classic anthropological/sociological divide. Instead, I argue that whilst both sides appear to come from contrasting standpoints, in fact, they both claim to believe in the 'heterogeneity' of Roma minorities, and both fall into the same error of slipping into homogenising talk about 'the Gypsies' that refutes their original perspective. Only close-up, detailed analyses re-visiting the original texts will convince the reader of this argument, and this is the justification for focusing on just two texts. However, this opens up the possibility and highlights the importance of reassessing approaches to ethnicity and 'Roma' in Romani Studies' literature. In this article I suggest that an unquestioned commitment to 'heterogeneity' needs to be reconsidered in Romani Studies and end the article by looking towards some theorisations of ethnicity from British Cultural Studies (BCS) that might help with this re-conceptualisation. The use of ideas from BCS is done with care, recognising the differences between the history and experiences of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, and Black and Asian minorities in the UK on whom a strand of BCS has commented (see Morley 1992: 2).

Stewart's anthropology: culture as the 'secret of Gypsy survival'

Stewart's anthropological research was carried out in the 1980s on a Roma group in Hungary, the 'Vlach Rom'. Stewart's research aim was to show "the secret of Gypsy survival" in otherwise hostile conditions in communist Hungary (1997: 5), resulting in a monograph *The Time of the Gypsies* (1997). From the start of his monograph, Stewart makes clear statements about how he views his anthropological work on Gypsies: firstly, he sees his work as specific to the group he lived with, the 'Vlach Rom', and secondly, he moves away from the view that they have an 'ethnic' identity,

> …the Rom do not have an ethnic identity. For them, identity is constructed and constantly remade in the present in relations with significant others, not something inherited from the past.
>
> (Stewart 1997: 28)

Stewart says the Rom were not rooted in an "ideology of descent and inheritance", but rather "an ideology of nurture and shared social activity" (1997: 59), and therefore finds wider assertions that Gypsies have Indian origins irrelevant (1997: 28).

In Stewart's work there are some striking ethnographic examples of how 'ordinary' Rom people experience the "construction of a sealed Rom identity" (1997: 309). One such illustration is a story Stewart tells of Vlach Rom couple, Čoro and Luludji, who try to 'better' themselves by moving out of the Vlach Rom settlement called the 'Third Class' and into a predominantly non-Roma, Hungarian area of town (1997: 82-91)[3]. But on moving to their flat on a modern housing estate, they found themselves caught up in the difficulty of "sustaining a balance between the two ways of life" (1997: 85) i.e. between their old 'Vlach Rom' life and their new 'Hungarian' life.

In their new flat, the couple became subject to regular monitoring from the Hungarian Housing Department. In reaction, the couple began to regulate their own lives along expected standards from the housing department which included keeping the house scrupulously clean; not letting their children play with other Gypsy children from the settlement; and making sure they invited their Hungarian neighbours around for socialising. However, as a consequence of these new activities, the wife Luludji began to face rumours and complaints about her

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[3] The 'Third Class' is in 'Harangos' town where Stewart carried out his fieldwork in North Eastern Hungary.

increasing lack of morals circulated by the Vlach Rom community: she no longer wore her scarf covering her hair; she was said to be greedy because of the way she decorated her new flat; she was accused of not feeding her parents-in-law pigs as much as her own parents' animals. Finally, Luludji was accused of having an affair with the man from the market. Her husband beat her "within an inch of her life" and she was ostracised by his relatives (1997: 88-90).

The story of Čoro and Luludji shows how 'Gypsy' can mean different things to different people. For the Hungarian authorities, it meant a possible (or inevitable) disorder that needed to be supervised; whilst from the Vlach Rom there was also the possibility of disorder, but this time from *not* keeping to a (gender-biased) notion of 'Vlach Rom'. Through this couple's experiences, Stewart shows how labels like 'Gypsy' may be artificially constructed, but social constructions can have real force and deeply affect the lives of people, especially women, who are constrained or struggling with these labels. This demonstrates what Willems was hoping to see in Romani studies, research that shows "flesh and blood behind the social construction of a separate Gypsy people" (Willems 1997: 309). It also fits into Stewart's overall approach to Rom identity as "constantly remade in the present in relations with significant others" (Stewart 1997: 28) and does not seem to be a formulation of Ladányi & Szelényi's 'eternal Roma'.

However, at other points in his work, Stewart appears to slip from this view of identity as a construction, and talks about the Vlach Rom as having a distinctly 'Gypsy' identity. Despite Stewart's commitment to heterogeneity, there is still a notional framing of the Vlach Rom as 'the Gypsies'. The first main way this slippage occurs is through focusing on certain Vlach Rom practices as the 'Gypsy way'. 'The Gypsy Way' is the title of Part I of his book which

contains four chapters explaining different aspects of Vlach Rom life, from work to home life.[4]. The phrase 'Gypsy way' has been used in other anthropological literature to talk about how there are Gypsy ways of doing everyday activities (see 'Gypsy way' in Liégeois 1986: 85; 'way of being' in Gay y Blasco 1999: 176; 'independent way' in Okely 1983: 77). Stewart similarly shows how Vlach Rom identity is infused into everyday activities, and continually reinforced through work, home and 'brotherhood' in everyday life (1997: 17-94).

One activity that is a big feature of Stewart's presentation of the Vlach Rom is their presence in horse markets, which Stewart calls 'Gypsy work' (1997: 141). Despite the horse trade being an activity popular with both Hungarian peasants and Vlach Rom (p.142), for the Rom this work is shown to take on special significance. Horse trading was symbolic of their way of maintaining Vlach Rom difference from 'peasants', whilst trying to get the upper hand over horse deals (p.142). Nevertheless, as Stewart begins to realise, horse markets were something that the Rom men wanted to *show* him as an anthropologist, rather than being a daily practice:

> My own attitude, it seems to me now, reflected the concerns of the Rom. They might have complained as they walked past my front door in the morning that they were going off to "suffer" again in the factory, but little other reference was made to this crucial part of their lives. The world that obsessed me and captivated my attention was that which the Rom wanted to show me: the world of horses and their owners.
>
> (Stewart 1997: 141)

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[4] 'Gypsy work' (Chapter two); 'A Place of Their Own' (Chapter three); '"We Are All Brothers Here"' (Chapter four); and 'Breaking Out' (Chapter five) (Stewart 1997: 17-94).

This shows that Stewart himself was caught up in the "world of horses", even though this was not actually a very frequent nor widespread activity - "at any one time only one-third of all households was keeping a horse" (1997: 143).

In devoting so much space to horse markets in his book (Chapters 9 and 10), Stewart is recognising horse dealing as important to the self-representations of the Rom men. However, in focusing on an activity that seems very 'Rom', he skims over other activities that were more frequent. Watching television, for example, is mentioned as an activity that occurred everyday:

> Most evenings after sitting out together, men retired to their homes with their families to watch television. On Monday nights, when there was no television in Hungary, men went into town to the cinemas.
> (Stewart 1997: 39)

Despite television-viewing being a regular activity, it is not mentioned again, except when describing New Year celebrations when families sit round the television to watch the Hungarian national anthem being played (1997: 244). Watching television is a daily activity that can also be seen across Hungary (see Frey, Benesch & Stutzer 2005: 30), and therefore might have connected the Vlach Rom to *gaźos* or Romungros in interesting ways.

This alignment to a wider discourse on 'Gypsies' is also achieved in Stewart's work by the way Stewart positions the Vlach Rom as an example of 'authentic' Gypsies. In a similar way to the above example of horse markets, Stewart does this by focusing on certain practices that link them to a wider sense of 'authentic Gypsies' and ignoring other practices that might not.

In Harangos, the town where Stewart carried out his study, only 20% of the Gypsies living in the area were Vlach Rom. The Vlach Rom lived on one settlement, the 'Third Class', whilst the Romungros lived mainly on another large settlement called the 'Chicken Plot' (1997: 34). Stewart describes how the Romungros were "despised" by the Vlach Rom (p.34). It is in his description of the Romungro Gypsies that Stewart no longer appears to be reporting Vlach Rom opinions of Romungros, but seems to be telling his own opinion:

> The Chicken Plot had none of the attractions of the Third Class. On the plot the Rom had to live next door to Hungarian-speaking Gypsies, Romungros (that is, Gypsies who did not speak Romany), whom they despised. Here no one even bothered to maintain the level of tidiness acceptable in the Third Class. Many of the houses were derelict, their doors swinging dislocatedly on their hinges. Faeces piled up in abandoned flats.
>
> (Stewart 1997: 34)

In this passage, phrases or words such as "no one even bothered", "derelict", "doors swinging dislocatedly" and "faeces piled up" are not reported as opinions of the Vlach Rom, but appear to be Stewart's own observations of the Chicken Plot. By adding his own opinion Stewart seems to justify the Vlach Rom despising the Romungros. Also, by mentioning that these people are "Gypsies who did not speak Romany" Stewart positions them as not only in a state of deprivation and desperation, but also as not speaking Romany, the symbol of Gypsy identity he otherwise emphasises as central (see 'Brothers in song', Chapter 11 pp.181-203). Stewart's text thus produces the Romungros as something 'less Gypsy' than the Vlach Rom.

The inferiority of the Romungros is consolidated when Stewart describes them as an example of a "horrible half world":

> They provided an example to the Rom of what happened when one resigned one's language and culture – with it one gave up independence and self-respect and slid into a horrible half-world that was neither Rom nor *gaźo.*
>
> (Stewart 1997: 45)

The relationship between Vlach Rom and Romungro is represented as the gap (both reported by the Vlach Rom and by Stewart) between 'authentic' Gypsies and those that are neither here nor there – stuck between 'Rom' and *gaźo*[5].

Nonetheless, despite this apparent antipathy towards Romungros, in Stewart's Chapter Three, we learn that some Vlach Rom, contrary to other references, *do* sometimes mix with Romungros:

> Some [Rom girls] hung around the Chicken Plot or houses where an older sister lived, but they ran the risk of acquiring a damaging reputation for laziness and loose behaviour.
>
> (Stewart 1997: 39) [my addition]

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[5] 'Romungros' are also mentioned in Chapter Five of Stewart's book where they are described as worse than *gaźos*: they are seen as using their Gypsy identity when it suited them as musicians, but denying it when it was no longer use to them, "They were despised by the Rom as no other group was and in their poverty held up as living proof of the idiocy of trying to build bridges between the Roma and the *gaźos"* (1997: 93). They are also described in Chapter Eight as "up the blind alley of quasi-assimilation" (p.136); in Chapter Nine we learn that if a treasured horse died in the Vlach Gypsy community, the body had to be taken to the carrion pit outside the town and burnt so that the "dirty Romungros" didn't eat it (p.269, footnote 6); and finally, in Chapter Ten, we see a Romungro musician disgusting a Vlach Gypsy by asking him for a few hairs from his horse's tail for his violin, "the Rom threatened to lay the Romungro out on the spot" (p.169).

As we learnt earlier, the Chicken Plot is where many Romungros live. So why did the young girls want to hang out there in the 'filth' that was described earlier? What was the attraction? Stewart does not explain further. This is another moment when we might have learnt of further plurality and perhaps ambiguity in the Rom identity, in which perhaps opposition to 'Romungro' could prove to be a generational trait, transient element or a discursive strategy at certain moments.

Stewart's work has contributed a great deal to the debate on how to conceptualise 'Gypsy', by firmly positioning Gypsy as a lived experience. However, a closer look at Stewart's monograph has shown that even in-depth ethnographic work can be susceptible to sustaining a fixed notion of 'the Gypsies'. Although he does not set out to show the Rom as having a 'sealed identity' (Stewart 1997: 244), by building up a picture of Vlach Rom authenticity, Stewart risks reifying the Vlach Rom culture as a prototype of what Gypsy 'should' be. Ladányi & Szelényi called this the creation of the 'eternal Roma'. We now move to looking at Ladányi & Szelényi's research on Roma populations in Hungary, to see how they offer a different approach.

Ladányi & Szelényi: sociologists of the underclass

Although Ladányi & Szelényi have criticised Stewart's approach, on the surface both parties do make similar statements about Roma identity: "Gypsy ethnicity is a social construction" (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 3); "for them [the Vlach Rom], identity is constructed" (Stewart 1997: 28). However, the major difference between their works is in the themes they foreground. Whilst the 'Vlach Rom' are the foregrounded topic in Stewart's work, Ladányi & Szelényi focus on socio-economic status and classificatory processes (2006: 3).

Ladányi and Szelényi criticise anthropologists like Stewart for reifying Roma culture, creating an image of "the eternal Roma" when issues of poverty are far more pressing (Ladányi & Szelényi 2003: 50). Their particular contribution to debates on Roma has been the introduction of the concept of 'underclass' as a means to focus attention away from the image of the 'eternal Roma' and instead highlight the severe socio-economic conditions that some Roma are currently finding themselves in, especially in Hungary. Stewart (2002) has three main criticisms of their use of underclass: it is loose, vague and has derogatory connotations (2002: 140); it exaggerates the difference of Gypsies from majority society and fails to show contingency (p.138-9); it does not attend to the cultural resources of Gypsies (pp.141-142).

One of Ladányi & Szelényi's major studies was based on a socio-economic longitudinal case-study of a village called Csenyéte in North-Eastern Hungary (from 1857 to 2000). This method particularly complements the approach recommended by Willems, the "socio-economic perspective to analyse the history of these [Gypsy] groups" [my insertion] (1997: 309). In this study, the poverty and social inclusion/exclusion of Roma and non-Roma people in Csenyéte was researched using two methods: historical archive research from 1857 to 2000; and empirical research carried out from 1989 to 2000.

The archive work, which I have summarised in Table 1 below, began with the discovery in Csenyéte of a complete set of population questionnaires from the 1857 census, and was further researched by examining: degree of residential segregation; percentage of ethnic inter-marriage; percentage of memberships to clubs; and varying access to material resources (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 45). Referring to Stewart's criticisms that the authors' use of underclass is "vague" and "loose", Table 1 shows how, in fact, the authors tie underclass to

specific historical periods and contingent to political structure (see also Ladányi & Szelényi

2006: 9).

Table 1 Summary of four major periods in the history of Csenyéte village, 1857-2000 (adapted from Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 59-74)

	Period 1: 'integration in the mid-19th century'	Period 2: 'ethnic-cleansing and increased socioeconomic exclusion' in the late 19th century - 1950'	Period 3: 'socialist assimilation policies' 1949-1970s	Period 4: 'the post-communist experience' 1980s-2000
Political system	Habsburg empire.	Inter-war regime changes. mostly authoritarian[6].	State-socialism.	Post communism/ democracy.
Childbirth in village (% of all births)	non-roma: 81.8; roma: 18.2 (1857-1900).	non-roma: 53.8; roma: 46.2 (1931-1950)	non-roma: 34; roma: 66 (1951-1988)	non-roma: 0; roma: 100. (1989-2000)
Class status of gypsy population	lower class	under-caste	lower class	underclass
Employment trends	Peasants were mostly land owners, gypsies were mostly casual workers, but some had skilled occupations e.g. blacksmith, shepherd.	Some gypsies listed as musicians. most were day labourers with skills in basket weaving and broom making, although industrialization made these skills less prestigious.	Peasants became unskilled workers. both peasant and gypsy residents were wage labourers and many worked side-by- side.	Since 1989, no individual in the community has held a regular job. by 2000, no resident under the age of 30 had ever had a job.
Residential situation	In 1857 gypsies and peasants lived in the village. jews began to leave the village[7].	A separate gypsy settlement was created at north end of village from end of 19th century.	Gypsies began to move back into the centre of the village, and peasants started to move out in 1970s.	Gypsy only residents in the village.
Infant mortality (% of all childbirths)	non-roma: 13.3 roma: 10.3 (1857-1900).	non-roma: 11.1 roma: 22.1% (1931-1950).	non-roma: 2.1 roma: 5 (1951-1988).	[no more non-roma births] roma: 2.2 (1989-2000).
Out-of-wedlock births (% of all childbirths)	non-roma: 7.8 roma: 45.4 (before 1901).	non-roma: 8.2 roma: 41.6% (1931-1950).	non-roma: 3.5 roma: 16.1 (1951-1988).	[no more non-roma births] roma: 69.8 (1989-2000).
Average age of first-time mother	non-roma: 24.3 roma: 24.2 (1891-1910).	non-roma: 24.3 roma: 22.7 (1911-1930).	non-roma: 22.2 roma: 20.5 (1931-1970).	[no more non-roma births] roma: 17.7 (post 1970).

Table 1 shows that historically, each 'period' has its own characteristics. No two periods can

be said to be similar in the categories given, and the differences between Roma and non-

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[6] 1918-1919 Hungarian Republic (liberal democracy); 1919-1920 Soviet Republic of Hungary (communism); 1920-1947 Hungarian Republic (authoritarianism).

[7] The 1857 population census showed that Csenyéte was populated by 80.6% peasants; 5% Roma, and 14.4% Jews (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 48). The population census showed that the Jewish people lived in two separate 'clusters', one of skilled workers and one of day labourers (2006: 49). By 1900 nearly all poor Jewish residents had disappeared from the village. The two Jewish families who remained were taken to Auschwitz in 1944 where they were killed. Ladányi & Szelényi could not find more information about the fate of the poor Jewish residents (2006: 187).

Roma are also not consistent. This indicates that political system, socio-economic environment and other trends play a defining role in the status of different ethnic groups. Thus Ladányi & Szelényi show the differing and sometimes comparable situations of Roma and non-Roma groups (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 58). For example, an increase in nationalism or xenophobia (periods 2 and 4) equalled a rise in segregationist policies, whilst labour shortages (in periods 1 and 3) meant more integration in terms of employment. At this point Stewart's accusations of vagueness seem unsubstantiated: in fact, Ladányi & Szelényi appear careful to only use the 'underclass' label in specific circumstances. Furthermore, whilst Stewart suggests that underclass reproduces an ideological separation of Gypsies from majority society (2002: 138), here, Ladányi & Szelényi actually emphasise that this is only occurring at present, and in fact, at various points in history, distinctions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies from varying points of view were not so drastic.

As mentioned earlier, Stewart criticises Ladányi & Szelényi for not attending to the cultural resources of Gypsies (2002: 141-142). However, I would argue that Ladányi & Szelényi not only produce a notion of 'Gypsy culture' in their work, but it is actually produced along similar lines to Stewart. As we will now go onto see, 'Gypsy culture' is portrayed as a stable set of references, a means of social bonding and thereby control. In fact, it is their view of 'Gypsy culture' that appears to deviate from their overall conclusions that ethnic boundaries are often heavily constructed and in reality 'fuzzy' (2006: 143).

In their work, Ladányi & Szelényi say that modern day problems and the formation of an 'underclass' are caused by a disintegration of Gypsy customs, "traditional mechanisms of social control and integration have broken down" (2006: 72). This view is particularly prevalent in the descriptions of their empirical research conducted by project researchers who

visited Csenyéte 3-4 times a year from 1989 to 2000, spending 2-3 days in the village for each visit, conducting unstructured interviews with residents, and carrying out surveys (2006: 31). The formation of an underclass is seen in the increasingly destructive behaviour of the residents of Csenyéte and the chaotic family structure and relations.

Ladányi & Szelényi describe the destructive behaviour of Roma as occurring in reaction to the emigration of the peasants from the 1970s (see Table 1, period 3). With the out-migration of peasants, poor Roma people had fewer customers for their services or products which meant a crisis in their economic status. The following increase in unemployment and the disintegration of the former social support system led the Roma residents of Csenyéte to became desperate. A gang culture emerged and many conflicts occurred. Houses were demolished for use of the materials as firewood and scrap metal. Theft, whilst exceptional in the past in Csenyéte, "during this period it became the rule". Ladányi & Szelényi describe the Gypsies as on a path of "self destruction" (p.94).

It is at this stage, Ladányi & Szelényi say that a 'culture of poverty' emerges and Gypsy culture disappears, "the culture of poverty […] is not Gypsy culture, but the culture of a group of poor" (p.19). Furthermore, in the absence of Gypsy culture, it is the women who appear to particularly lose their way in its absence. Although examples of gang fights and destructive tendencies of Roma men in Csenyéte are discussed, it is female sexuality that is repeatedly used as the reason for the increase in "no hoper" Roma village residents (p.92) [8]:

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[8] However, at the same time as demonising female sexuality, Ladányi & Szelényi's archival work (see Table 1) does also 'myth bust' the stereotype that Roma women are steeped in a tradition of early and prolific childbirth (see Durst 2002: 458) as the data reveals comparable ages for first time mothers between the two ethnic groups for the majority of time-periods shown.

> The jump in fertility rates, dramatic increases in out-of-wedlock births, and the plummeting age of mothers suggest that Roma in Csenyéte have been faced with new challenges […] The clearest indicators of this break down are skyrocketing fertility rates amongst the poorest households and the rapid rise in out-of-wedlock and underage births.
>
> (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 72)

The underclass is regarded as apparent in the loss of control over female sexuality ("skyrocketing fertility rates"; "underage births"; "out-of-wedlock") and birth patterns leading to a "hopeless" situation "pointless" to control with family planning (p.70).

Furthermore, the only optimism is said to be the continuing 'tradition' of extended Gypsy families:

> Perhaps the last remaining tradition is the extended family […] We do not wish to suggest that the romantic life of the eternal Gypsy is alive and well in Csenyéte. Roma families are faced with new and unprecedented challenges. The survival of the extended family is one of the last – though obviously insufficient – resources they have.
>
> (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 72)

Despite their retraction of the full endorsement of the extended family as indicative of 'the romantic life of the eternal Gypsy', the effect of such discourses is still a leaning towards a reification of a certain idea of what 'civilised' society should be: women married and giving

birth at a certain age[9], along with positioning traditional Gypsy culture as a patriarchal force that can keep women in a certain societal position[10].

In drawing on a notion of "traditional Gypsy culture" Ladányi & Szelényi appears to be drawing on a wider idea of 'Gypsy culture' beyond their text. The effect of not keeping to this traditional culture is shown as a downward spiral to an underclass formation. Gypsy traditions are shown to effectively disappear at a certain socio-economic level in this model, and so it appears that Ladányi & Szelényi want to show the desperate struggles that Gypsies face, but without putting 'Gypsy culture' in a negative light.

Stewart criticises Ladányi & Szelényi for not attending to "the cultural resources of the Roma" (2002: 141). However, in fact, as we saw earlier, Stewart himself produces a Gypsy group - the Romungros - as self-destructive and living in 'filth' because of their 'lack' of traditional Vlach Rom (Gypsy) values. Both Ladányi & Szelényi and Stewart can be seen to reify a certain type of 'good' Gypsy culture that constitutes a "valuable cultural resource" (Stewart 2002: 142), "traditional methods of social control and integration" (Ladányi & Szelényi 2006: 72). In both works, Gypsy culture is thus reified as a certain 'good prototype'.

Bringing hybridity to heterogeneity

From a detailed look at some prominent writers in Romani Studies, we can see the difficulties in writing about Roma people without referring to wider notions of 'Roma' or 'Gypsy'. The

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[9] Although I'm not suggesting Ladányi & Szelényi are intentionally using racist discourse at this point, Gilroy, a prominent voice from British Cultural Studies, notes that the tendency to demonise women's fertility patterns is inherent in racist discourses (Gilroy 2002: 255).

[10] At the same time, by showing the extended family as the positive model, Ladányi & Szelényi may be in danger of ignoring any negative effects of extended family life, for example when extended families strictly monitor and control a young mother's life. This could result in bullying or oppression, or even physical violence. As we saw in Stewart's work, in the case of the couple Čoro and Luludji, the wife Luludji was finally beaten by her husband and ostracised by her extended family (Stewart 1997: 82-90).

question is how <u>not</u> to rely on or insinuate potentially narrow concepts of 'Gypsies' when 'Gypsy' or 'Roma' is the focus of study. And how is it possible to approach 'ethnicity' so that it does not restrict what we can say, whilst acknowledging the possibility that it might still exist? This is not about denying ethnicity, but rather a re-conceptualisation, and for this it is worth turning to debates in British Cultural Studies (BCS) [11], a field which has sought to re-negotiate meanings of terms such as ethnicity and race in the UK. Here I will concentrate on a small number of representative formulations related to 'hybridity': essentialism; ethnic absolutism; anti essentialism and new ethnicities. I will look at each of these theoretical concepts in turn, showing how they could relate to the issues discussed in Romani Studies so far in the article.

Essentialism is the belief that people have a certain innate characteristic or 'essence' because of their biological or genetic make-up. British Cultural Studies (BCS) is an academic tradition that has particularly taken up debates against essentialist notions of race[12]. Eminent scholars such as Hall have criticised essentialism for ignoring or playing-down history and environment:

> The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic.
>
> (Hall 1996b: 472)

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[11] BCS emerged from the 'Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' (CCCS, also known as the 'Birmingham school'), a research centre at the University of Birmingham. It was founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart, a scholar of literary criticism who pioneered work on popular culture and British working classes in *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* 1957. In 1968 Hoggart's deputy, Stuart Hall, took over the running of the centre from 1968-1979. The Birmingham School is particularly famous for defining a 'cultural turn' in both the humanities and the social sciences and has turned out internationally recognised scholars such as Hazel Carby, Paul Gilroy and Lawrence Grossberg (Webster 2004).

[12] 'Essentialism' is now commonly referred to in social scientific literature which is overwhelmingly critical of this concept that has been "irredeemably tainted by association with racism and sexism" (Sayer 1997: 453).

In BCS it is not just biological essentialism that is shown as problematic, but also 'cultural essentialism', which has been referred to from the 1980s as the 'new racism'. Cultural essentialism is based "not on the ideas of innate biological superiority, but on the supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions" (Donald & Rattansi 1992: 2)[13]. Cultural essentialism is seen as essentialising and divisive as biological essentialism (Barker 2002: 473).

Although Hall was talking specifically of the "signifier 'black'" in a British context (Hall 1996b: 472), 'essentialism' can also be seen in the misrepresentations of Roma people. As stated in the introduction to this article, scholars from Romani studies have been very aware that their research has to both acknowledge and respond to homogenising stereotypes that portray Roma as a genetically bound, deviant group[14]:

> While such [hegemonic] images dominate public representations and limit Romani self-representation, ultimately there is also another story to tell about Roma
>
> (Lemon 2000: 2)

> All too often, Gypsies, like Jews, have been reduced to disparaging stereotypes. I wanted to liberate the Roma from these two-dimensional clichés and to present them as I knew them
>
> (Pogány 2004: 9)

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[13] Cultural essentialism as the 'new racism' is said to have emerged after 'biological' views of race were reviled after its connection to the Nazi party ideology in the early 20th century. However, the ideas of absolute differences between people was not rejected, and so the ideas turned from biology as the defining force of groups of people to culture (Barker 2002: 473).

[14] Under Nazi rule, Roma were subjected to 'essentialist' notions of race. The most prevalent and haunting images of modern-day racism against Roma people are photographs from Europe under Nazi rule, which show the measuring of facial characteristics, the taking of blood samples, and the 'de-lousing' of Roma settlements that preceded the Holocaust, in which an estimated half a million Roma people were sent to their death along with Jews and political prisoners (Kenrick & Puxon 1995, Stauber &Vago (eds.) 2007).

The concept of essentialism could therefore add to the existing discussions on the 'Gypsy stereotypes and racist biases'. However, this article has shown that even in studies that aim to move away from 'two-dimensional cliches', broad, homogenising ideas can still be slipped into (even if unintentionally). The desire to have a role in "helping to dispel the prejudice that sustained the fear of the Gypsy" (Stewart 1997: 18) may still feed into the notion of 'them' as 'something other', keeping an image of "the Gypsy". This suggests that simply being against racist, essentialising concepts may not be enough to re-negotiate the strong, homogenising image of 'the Gypsies'.

The building up of an 'alternative' picture of ethnic minorities in order to combat racism has been criticised by some BCS scholars, precisely because of its inability to escape the "narrow categories" that define minorities (Gilroy 2002: 249). Consequently, politically opposing groups end up with the same ideological standpoint. 'Ethnic absolutism' is the powerful term Gilroy uses to describe the effect that antiracism movements can have,

> ...a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable.
> (Gilroy 1993b: 65)

In this article, we have seen how scholars have also been in danger of creating a homogenous view of Roma people as (always) a separate group. Whether in terms of specific cultural practices or a specific socio-economic status in which people 'lose' their Gypsy culture, these

notions still have the potential to essentialise Roma as a group of people with an enduring set of characteristics.

Gilroy alerts us to the potential limitations of reacting to essentialist concepts, with ethnic absolutism still produced even in anti-racist formulations. This leads to the question of whether any attempt at describing or representing ethnic groups inevitably results in some kind of essentialising frame. Whilst post-colonial critics such as Spivak argue that it does (and goes on to suggest a framework of 'strategic essentialism', 1996: 51), other writers from British Cultural Studies have debated ways of talking about ethnicity that challenges or even dissipates essentialised concepts. Inspiration is offered in BCS from Hall's work on 'new ethnicities' which is seen as particularly influential both in BCS and beyond (Harris 2006: 16-18).

Hall's work on anti-essentialism is a theoretical formulation that aims to re-conceptualise ethnicity without relying on biological or cultural essentialism. Hall's famous essay on 'new ethnicities' described a new conception of ethnicity that he saw arising from cultural productions such as films by black people that embraced rather than suppressed discussions of difference:

> It seems to me that, in the various practices and discourses of black cultural production, we are beginning to see constructions of just such a new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses *difference* and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities.
>
> (Hall 1996a: 446)

23

In order to understand these new ethnic identities, Hall sees the concept of 'ethnicity' as something "not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee" (1996a: 446). Instead, it becomes a way of talking about experience. In fact, all people are "ethnically located":

> What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand the dominant notion which connects it to nation and 'race' and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery. That is to say, a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture [...] We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are.
>
> (Hall 1996a: 447)

With all people "ethnically located", the possibility is opened for people to have a voice that is not constrained by one ethnic identity. Plurality of identities becomes not just a possibility but rather recognition of how identity is lived day to day. BCS scholars have taken up this challenge and have introduced terms to describe this plurality. For examples "unfinished identities" (Gilroy 1993a: 1); "multi-accentuality" (Mercer 1994: 60); "cultural hybridity" (Morley 1996: 331). These scholars show that the plurality of identity (i.e. drawing on many influences) is not unusual, and actually could be envisaged as a kind of norm.

Roma heterogeneity and hybridity

We have seen in this article how academics from Romani studies have tackled the problem of strong, homogenising notions of Gypsies by proclaiming their heterogeneity. Both Stewart and Ladányi & Szelényi focused on one aspect of Roma – Vlach Rom or underclass, in an

attempt to show an example of the diverse range of experiences of 'Roma'. However, this did not entirely disperse the idea of Roma as a bounded group. BCS scholars offer a potential way out through concepts of plurality and hybridity. Rather than just showing Roma people in a certain group (e.g. Vlach Rom) or having diverse experiences (e.g. in an underclass formation), these concepts open up the possibility for experience to occur across groups or formations.

For example a Roma person could engage deeply with a certain Roma culture whilst also engaging in practices that might be considered 'Hungarian'. Or in day-to-day living, a Roma (or non-Roma) person might experience a range of influences that appear in different ways in different times and contexts, e.g. gender, age, group identity, professional/working identity, socio-economic status, nationality. By bringing the idea of hybridity to heterogeneity, we can leave research open to people having a myriad of identity formations depending on the context or moment.

Relating this discussion of 'new ethnicities' back to the issues discussed earlier, we can see three elements in Hall's conceptualisation that could prove useful for approaching Roma ethnicity: (a) researching non-Roma alongside Roma (b) foregrounding context; and (c) letting go of the idea of the 'good' or 'bad' Gypsy.

To elaborate further:

(a) Researching non-Roma alongside Roma

Recognising that ethnicity does not need to apply only to those deemed 'Roma' allows research that can investigate non-Roma people alongside Roma people, opening up further

possibilities of comparing and contrasting experiences of identity in the same national (and institutional or other) context.

(b) Foregrounding context

Foregrounding context means conducting a research project that does not explicitly go out to 'find the Roma' and explain what their practices are, but rather has a commitment to investigating the context in which Roma people live, or where 'Roma' may appear, with a focus on understanding moments when Roma identifications or discourses are deemed important or not.

(c) Letting go of the 'good Gypsy' /'bad Gypsy' contestation

BCS, especially in Gilroy's criticisms of anti-racism and his notion of ethnic absolutism, have warned us that attempts to rectify the wrongs of racist thinking can still result in essentialising concepts of minorities. In Romani Studies, the message we can take forward is the value of letting go of the idea that to justify research on Roma, one necessarily needs to produce evidence that directly tackles racist thinking: i.e. the replacement of the widespread notion of a 'bad' Gypsy for a 'good' or 'misunderstood' Gypsy. For this would be restricting research to producing a certain (positive/authentic) idea of 'Roma' that would not allow the full array of possibilities that a Roma person might be (or become).

The above points could be aimed at both formulating approaches to empirical research as well as encouraging a more critical awareness of Romani Studies itself. In empirical research, we may well consider how to be more accountable for the methodological choices and political stances we choose to take (see Tremlett 2009). For examples: if we are researching 'an ethnic community', how far are we making sure that the cross-cutting

class/gender/linguistic/generational (etc) identifications and structural inequalities with other communities are taken into account? If we choose to frame an account of Roma people's lives in wider terms of 'Roma and their strategies for survival', what might have been the difference if we had framed it in terms of 'international gender inequalities' or 'the post-socialist working class' or 'mass consumerism'? The contextual framing of a narrative or presentation of data is well known as being important as the data itself (see Hammersley 1992: 12-15) – so what are the consequences for wanting to 'speak out' against racist discourses against Roma through empirical research? How does it affect the methods we take and narratives we write? Our basic sensibility for a minority such as 'the Gypsies' - who are at once so iconic and symbolic - should continually reflect on who is calling whom an ethnic community and for what purpose (i.e. 'who defines who is a Gypsy?' Willems 1997: 7).

These questions can also be used to re-invigorate our critical appreciation of Romani Studies literature itself. Whilst there have been attempts in Romani Studies to compare and contrast across ethnic and socio-economic groups (see Actons & Dalphinis: 2000, Belton 2005, Durst 2002, Ladányi & Szelényi's 2006), little has been done to criticise and reinvigorate our ideas of existing influential writers. For example, what might the outcome be if we juxtaposed Okely's 1983 text on traveller-gypsies in Britain, with, say, Ramdin's *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* published a few years later (1987), or indeed Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs* (1978)? Equally, when Hancock says, "we all call ourselves Romani, we all maintain aspects of the same culture and speak (or once spoke) dialects of the same original language and we all share some of the same genetic material in our biological make up", how does that link to a post-colonial context? And how might Hancock fit into Spivak's vision of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1996: 51)? How might we contextualise Gay y Blasco's findings of upsurge in evangelicalism

27

amongst Gitanos in Spain with post 9/11 discourses on religion? What would a feminist critic make of van de Port's Serbian 'figure of the Gypsy' (1998) and how might Mayall's (2003) historical view of Gypsy representations fit in with the contemporary position of Roma amidst the rise of mass (hyper) consumption in post-socialist countries and the ongoing global financial crisis? Such critical readings and questions would make us aware of the continual flux in notions of identities and enhance our sensibilities of the wider positioning(s) of Romani Studies texts, also working towards addressing what Willems has called the "splendid isolation" of Romani Studies from other academic areas (Willems 1997: 305-306).

Conclusion

This article has highlighted concerns about conceptualising 'Roma' in contemporary Romani Studies. Willems' criticisms of historical conceptualisations have led to the question of how best to approach a label such as 'Roma'. The article has shown that even in studies that aim to move away from homogenising notions, slipping into broad talk about 'the Gypsies' is hard to avoid. Both Stewart and Ladányi & Szelényi acknowledge and criticise the widespread homogenisation of Roma minorities, yet we have seen how their approaches can still adhere to a wider notion of 'Gypsies'. This article, through using some conceptualisations from discourses on hybridity, sets up an approach to Roma minorities that is not against 'ethnicity' or 'difference' as possibilities, but nevertheless holds these concepts up for continual investigation. Bringing hybridity to the notion of heterogeneity in this context would mean to 'de-ethnicise' the debates on Roma, without losing sight of ethnicity. The theoretical ideas outlined here could be used not only in creating more innovative approaches to researching Roma minorities, but also used to reassess the literature from Romani Studies to encourage a critical awareness of the difficulties in moving away from the continual circulation of common (mis)representations of Roma.

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