

# **The Development of Roma/Gypsy/Traveller Identity during the candidacy for EU membership of the Turkish Republic.<sup>1</sup>**

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**Thomas Acton and Adrian Marsh, University of Greenwich**  
[T.A.Acton@gre.ac.uk](mailto:T.A.Acton@gre.ac.uk)                      [Adrianmarsh@mac.com](mailto:Adrianmarsh@mac.com)

A conference paper is inevitably a frustratingly brief way of reporting on a research project. As always after a period of immersion in the lives of others we come away with a deep feeling of frustration that our learning is unfinished, but that even what we have learned is too complex, too extensive, to be easily conveyed to others. The research report posted on the ESRC web-site is short enough, but even the 5,000 words we were allowed are too many to read out here – but in case you haven't seen it we'll append it to this paper.<sup>2</sup> With hindsight that, too is disappointing – so much of it is 'what you might expect' – summaries of existing knowledge and assurances of our methodological ethics, which we have to put in to anchor our work clearly in the rough seas of debate. These mean that the new empirical content is constricted; we are deeply aware that we have masses of material that we have not reported upon properly, let alone fully analysed. However, since at least one of us is here in person, the greater the chance that questioning can enable colleagues to see how their work abuts ours.

This paper, therefore has two functions: the first to set out enough of our experience to open it to questioning from this specialist Romani Studies audience (who are perhaps best placed to assess the empirical content, and chastise us where we are too speculative); the second to leap to the other end of the process and ask what our research might contribute beyond the field of Romani Studies to the general theory of identity that is not only key within the social sciences, but touches the philosophical ontology that shapes all science.

If there is one enduring and still unfolding consequence of the catastrophe of the Second World War and the subsequent implosion of European colonialism, it is the slow but gathering deconstruction of the certainties about identity, whether based on class, gender, ethnicity, race, or nation, which had marked the nineteenth century. But this abandonment of assurance in the categories of the past was in the first place moral, fuelled by revulsion at genocide and oppression. Stereotyping of various categories of people was empirically contradicted, and certain categories, such as "race", exposed as scientifically incoherent. Most of this re-thinking was attempted however, by people continuing to use the categorical method established by a

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<sup>2</sup> If only to make sure we don't take the lazy way out of just recycling lumps of it into this presentation. We were also deeply tempted to back up this paper by a powerpoint parade of photos taken by energetic younger colleagues of ourselves in picturesque discussion with Roma and Dom in tea-houses, tents and elsewhere – and we're sure a visual sociologist could make something of these – but that would also be a diversionary post-imperialist indulgence for us at this point.

Linnaean taxonomy that in harmony with Lockean empiricism, makes categorisation the foundation of all systematic descriptive knowledge, and antedates the full flowering of scientific racism. Within the social sciences this has had the consequence that the models of evolutionary biology continued to be applied to cultural development even after the discrediting of scientific racism. The prevailing model of diversity was the product of a series of divergences from a number of original points, and that inter-cultural, multi-gendered or class-transcending hybridity were the consequence of innovative disruptions of the natural order by globalising modernisation. To understand identity therefore, we thought we had to disentangle its historical roots, to construct a genealogy of its ideas. Divergence was naturalised, convergence was problematised. This has often been the case in linguistics, where the development of ‘contact languages’ has been seen as an interruption to the historical process of dialectal development, rather than arguably the catalyst for all language change.

Such a model carries with it a harvest of conceptual confusions for attempts to construct a trans-national Romani Studies that embrace particular countries or groups, to such a degree that one distinguished past president of this society, Jim Nemeth (2002) called for the effort to be abandoned. It has forced upon even linguists in Romani Studies, the recognition that ethnic and dialect groups are centred rather than bounded collectivities. Indeed, it would be harder to find a plainer statement of that than in the abstract offered for Yaron Matras’ paper later in the conference (to which we look forward eagerly), where he starts by challenging the default formulation of the European categorical tradition, of seeing “‘dialects’ entities as discrete entities, much as we tend to think of Romani groups as discrete identifiable populations.”

But we can go further to understand the way in which the metaphor of evolution skews our understanding of identity. The whole discourse of Roma/Gypsies/ Travellers is built within a family-tree approach within which these discrete populations are seen as branches, unless exceptionally they are, so to speak hybrid branches semi-grafted on, like the mixed-dialect speaking groups of Western Europe, or even independently rooted plants (the “Non-Gypsy Travellers”) growing so near the main trunk that they share in its relation to the soil, its colour and its appearance. Identity has been seen as the working out of a series of representations of this hierarchy of origins, negotiated between the people themselves and those around them who are not part of their collectivity.

The importance of the extension of European-style Romani Studies to Turkey is that this model just will not do. In many ways we can see enormous similarities between Turkey and the other countries of the Balkans, but the conception of Roma identity as being hegemonic in the construction of Gypsy politics in Turkey falls at the first fence. The Dom and the Lom cannot be reduced to footnotes to the political identity of the Roma; in all probability, on linguistic (c.f. Hancock 2004) and possible historical indications and inferences that can be drawn from mediaeval chronicles such as that of Matthew of Edessa<sup>3</sup> (1144/1162/1993) the Dom were in Anatolia before a Romani-speaking community existed in any form.

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<sup>3</sup> The mediaeval name of modern-day Urfa.

There are of course, vastly more self-identifying Roma or Romanlar (the primary self-definition) in Turkey, with estimates varying between one and five million (rising as self-identification rises) than there are Dom, where our preliminary estimate from talking to informants was around 100,000, or those groups referred to in Romani Studies literature as Lom, but locally identified as Pocha (a pejorative term used by non-Lom) of whom we think only a few thousand at most can be identified at present (this too may change in the growing self-assertion by Gypsy groups, noted in the research report at a meeting of the Romanlar National Federation in Edirne, February 2005). And within the Romani-identifying populations there are all the dimensions of overlapping ethnic, class and religious stratifications (all of it gendered in ways differing between communities and classes, of course) that we find elsewhere in the Balkans; indeed many ethnic communities straddle the borders with Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, as a result of the historical links between mubadeli or exchange populations from the 1920's. We can also see that economic/prestige hierarchies of ethnic communities exist among the Dom too; and as with the Romanlar, musician groups stand near the top of the hierarchy, though as amongst most worldly people, being filthy rich trumps (and over the longer term, appropriates) all traditional sources of status.

Therefore it is not perhaps surprising that policy-driven European Romani studies, promoted by the European Union, the Council of Europe and the European Roma Rights Centre approaches Turkey as though it were just another European country within which it can use the Romani nationalist historical account as a rallying call against continuing disadvantages.

This account, in its more progressive forms at least, is determinedly inclusive. From the coining of the phrase "Roma and Sinte" in Germany in the 1970s onwards, there have been formulations of which "Roma/Gypsies/Travellers" is only the latest, indicating the broad constituency to which international Roma/Gypsy/Traveller politics seeks to appeal, and for which European organisations would like a reliable negotiating partner. But the fact that the Sinte speak a dialect of the Romani language suggested that their "otherness" (compared to those groups who actually use the term 'Rom(a)' as an ethnonym), could be construed as an historical accident. The insistence of Sinte community leaders on the phrase "Rom and Sinte" is an understandable reaction to the somewhat ethnocentric self-conceptualisation of larger Romani communities, notably emigrant Vlach Rom communities, of themselves as bearers of a more authentic original Romani culture.

Within both academic Romani Studies and international Romani politics, variants of this inclusiveness could be extended to groups who did not speak Romani and historically denied Roma identity, such as the Beash, the Ashkale, Yenische, the Irish Travellers or the Quinqui. There are two radically different ways of doing this: the West European way saying that these non-Romani-identifying groups are non-Roma who are like Roma, and perhaps have mixed with them so their fates have become inter-twined. The East European way of suggests that these are Romani groups who have somehow lost, hidden or become ashamed of their Romani heritage and so deny it, an analysis which can gather strength from the way in which the Beash have, from outside Romani groups and over the past 100 years, had to admit that they are Roma (Acton 2000:161). Although apparently opposed to each other, these two intellectual/political strategies have in common that they take Romani identity as the

gold standard for understanding the fate of all groups in this purview. The distinctiveness of this experience of being othered/outsidered is thus in each case, linked back to the exotic Indian origins of the Roma.

The intellectually unsatisfactory nature of this post-racist (or in some cases, actually racist) suite of understandings is marked by the revolt against it of the Dutch school of historians (Willems, Lucassen and Cottaar, 1998; Willems and Lucassen, 2000) and those they have more recently influenced (for example Mayall, 2001, Belton 2004). The effectiveness of this revolt has been limited by the inability of its proponents to decide whether they are simply arguing the classical social anthropological view (that historical origins are irrelevant to the explanation of the current functioning of a society, because all current history is simply an ideological/ mythical back-projection of contemporary functional requirements), or whether they are arguing that the conventional Indian origin view of Romani history is false because they believe that they can demonstrate (historically) that it was elaborated by Grellmann in 1787, as an ideological distortion of reality, and therefore (presumably) contradicts some other more true (or at least more plausible) account of what actually happened.

If the first of these options is true then these historians should simply abandon history as a profession (or at the very least acknowledge the profound implications that the work of White 1987, and Jenkins 1995, demand of historians); but if the second is true, then they have the problem that their historical account is simply not more plausible than alternative accounts (Acton, 2004), especially those given by linguists (Matras 2002). But this does not dispose of the problem that an Indian origin cannot explain the distinctiveness of Romani experience unless we can say how, any more than the brute fact of the constant speed of light by itself provides an alternative account of the relation of an observer to physical geometry, to that offered by Newton (1687).

In Turkey there are clearly three Gypsy categories of Indian origin two of whom are not Romani. It may seem a small point that this suggests the “exotic origins” discourse (whether asserting or discounting it) cannot be used consistently to reduce the “other Travellers” or “other Gypsies” to a mere appendage or offshoot of Romani people, but it obliges us to construct an account of the Indian origins of various groups of Gypsies which is processual (c.f. Willey and Phillips, 1958), and not racial or primordial. An Indian origin does not of itself explain any Indian-ness that Gypsy groups may exhibit. We cannot just ignore the questions posed by Willems and Lucassen about the negotiated European social construction of Romani identity because we think they have given the wrong historical answers, and that their dating is out by maybe five or six centuries. If we think their answers are wrong, we are obligated to offer more plausible ones.

The extension of Gypsy politics and the Romani Studies discourse to Turkey is therefore changing the agenda of Romani historiography. In this it perhaps parallels early periods of Romani Studies/Gypsy Lore, both in the 18th century when the Grellmann paradigm-shift can be seen as part of Austro-Hungarian identity’s redefinition of itself against the Ottoman Empire (Crowe 1995: 70-74, Vermeersch 2006:47), and in the early twentieth century where from Bernard Gilliatt-Smith’s (1910-14) Bulgarian folktales and Brepohl’s (1911) Gypsy musicians, to Marushiakova and Popov’s (2001) history, Roma were again defined against the

politics left behind by a crumbling Ottoman empire. Together these experiences called forth an account of Gypsy history as determined by an Ottoman decline essentialised by orientalist assumptions, which 19th century Ottoman reformers had themselves internalised (c.f. Makdisi 2002), and over-determined by an idealised and de-historicised view of the millet system. But the stories of how Ottoman suzerainty oppressed and corrupted Romani (as well as Arumanian Vlachs, Sarakatsani people and the Balkan nations') identities (in one version, or in the contrary version, facilitated and preserved them in a way West European nation-states just can't understand), have become just so much shadow-boxing, because once we abandon essentialised accounts of Romani identity as being the key to the Gypsy experience, the seminal question becomes not how the Ottoman empire destroyed/changed/preserved Romani identity, but how Gypsy/Romani/Lom/Dom/Romanlar/Çingene/Posha<sup>4</sup> identities were/are constructed in Anatolia and the Balkans in the first place. This in turn sets new tasks for our understanding of changes during the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>5</sup>

In the political negotiations accompanying the candidature of Turkey for the European Union we can see two different understandings of historical identity – two different myths of community identity, if you like, imperfectly mapped upon each other, colliding like tectonic plates along a fault-line.

There is a mapping of a kind. In western Turkey, and Thrace (Thrace) in particular, emissaries of the West appear to find themselves on common ground, and Romani community leaders can be inspired by tales of what Gypsy politics has attempted, and even sometimes achieved in Europe and the United States. The notion is that Turkey is just another nation-state liberated by nationalism from the Ottoman Empire, and that the Turkish nation like other European nations, has its Roma/Gypsy/Traveller minorities. In fact to some extent, classical Turkish republicanism, by rooting its model of inclusive citizenship in nationalism, falls in easily with a Roma-centric model. Unless we have begun to develop an understanding of Turkey as a society of many differing minorities (the Lausanne Treaty recognised the existence of certain non-Muslim minorities, and recently the wider recognition of Muslim minorities such as the Alevi has been the case, whilst the acknowledgement of Turkey as a multi-cultural society is part-and-parcel of the Republic), and the current debates in Turkey about what constitutes Turkish identity (the notion that it is possible to be a citizen of the Republic and not be a Turk in a similar way to being Anglo-Asian or Anglo-Irish), the Rom/Dom/Lom distinction actually seems to coincide with nineteenth century ethnic divisions in Anatolia between Turks, Kurds and Armenians.

In this context, the Dom are still being identified as Kurdish Gypsies of the south-east, even by other Romanlar groups (in an interesting indication of Romanlar incorporation of Republican ideology to their own self-identity), while the Lom may be still identified with Armenians in the north-east by European and other scholarship. In neither case do the communities themselves accept such definitions, and the process of 'claiming' these groups in the way that the Armenian Patriarchate did at

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Çingene' like 'Pocha/Posha' is very much contested as a pejorative, though clearly like the latter occupies a semantic space in Turkish culture similar to the word 'Gypsy'.

<sup>5</sup> This change of historical agenda is one explanation of why Marsh has found it so hard to bring his Ph.D. work, which began in the old agenda, but helped create the new agenda, to a successful conclusion.

the 1878 Congress of Berlin (a position that has found echoes in some modern scholarship, suggesting similarities with other nationalist ideologies and irredentist populations, such as the Italians) may be an aspect of modern nation-state politics.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the Dom, inter-communal violence with Kurds in the region has been common-place (as it is occasionally in Istanbul between the Romanlar and the Kurds in the city, as the Romanlar see them as clearly oppositional to the state), demonstrating stark differences in self-perceptions and the widespread exclusion of Gypsies by all groups.

A recurrent motif of our fieldwork in the south-east as we talked with Dom individuals and families about their lives, was of relatives who for one reason or another had left for Ankara or Istanbul. Reasons included flight from involvement in conflicts of one kind or another, family break-up or feuds, including cases where Kurdish in-laws had threatened, beaten, driven away or in a few cases even murdered Dom daughter-in laws in mixed marriages. We accumulated a little list of isolated relatives whom we promised to look up in Istanbul. In every case they were living in rooms or apartments in poorer areas, usually engaged in unskilled waged labour. They did not move to any Dom community or Dom area, nor did they engage with the Kurdish community as such; rather they assumed the identity of isolated Kurds living among Turks, or eastern Turks.<sup>7</sup> In a similar pattern, the Lom who have relocated from the north-eastern region have ‘passed’ as non-Lom in western urban environments. Even when these individuals have found others and formed small communities in the cities of the Black Sea region such as Trabzon, they have refrained from articulating a Lom identity to any outside of the group for fear of discrimination. In certain situations most commonly associated with musicianship, Dom from eastern Turkey do articulate a Dom identity (such as a famous Dom musician living in up-market Etiler in Istanbul), as Gypsies from the east, but this is a very small number indeed and the Lom, musicians or otherwise have not done so to the best of our knowledge.

Until 2006, the emergent discourses of Turkish Romani Studies and Turkish Gypsy politics simply did not include the Dom or Lom. In the attached report (pp.18-20) we give brief details of two key path-breaking meetings in Edirne in April 2006 that we and our colleagues in associated projects were privileged to observe. By co-incidence, a conference sponsored by the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly, the UNDP, the Open

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<sup>6</sup> Current negotiations regarding minorities and definitions in Turkey, as part of this process are attempting on the one hand to include “Travellers of Turkish origin”, a definition that would potentially include various Türkmen groups, Kurdish pastoralists, Yörüks and others, whilst clearly excluding the majority of Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar who have been sedentary for generations and avoid the issue of “new” minorities, against the Council of Europe Delegation in Turkey’s suggestion to use the more complex and nuanced terms based upon the ERRC/HCA/EDROM research findings from the “Promoting Romani Rights in Turkey” programme, and possibly accede to activist Mustafa Aksu’s argument to reclaim the term Çingene as an umbrella term for all groups.

<sup>7</sup> There may be an articulated Dom community in Istanbul; we have learned that the easiest way to come a cropper in Romani Studies is confidently to assert something does not exist merely because one has not encountered it. There are overlapping Rom and Romanlar and ‘other Traveller’ communities in Istanbul whose paths barely cross, although, when we introduced them at meetings their awareness of the ethnic patterning of Romani communities enabled them to contextualise each other rapidly. But the Dom are not part of this context, because their identity appeared invisible in Istanbul, at least to us; there were no Dom equivalents of, say the vibrant Irish Traveller communities who have established themselves in English metropolitan centres over the past 50 years.

Society Assistance Foundation and the municipal government at the Town Hall took place at the same time in the same city as the first national gathering in a hotel of the new national Romanlar associations, at the invitation of the Council of Europe's ERTF (European Romani and Traveller Federation).

Leaving aside for the moment the almost complete lack of overlapping attendance between the two meetings<sup>8</sup>, we have concentrated both in the attached report, and at greater length in the material we have only begun to analyse, on the way in which the Westerners, coming in with a human rights agenda, collided with local Romanlar community activists and Turkish professionals, whose strategies of collective advancement are based around appealing to unrealised ideals of social inclusion within Turkish republicanism. We were able to see and have partly reported the processes of adjustment on both sides. What is less visible is the way in which this process of negotiating the terms of discourse involves a re-definition of Roma/Gypsy/Traveller identity itself. On the Turkish side of course, we can see that the foundation of formal voluntary associations to engage with the authorities in negotiation over social policy is a response by individuals to being made aware of how such voluntary associations work in Europe. The very act of studying such processes changes them.<sup>9</sup> The emergence this year of the first Dom Association of Diyarbakir was a direct consequence of the ESRC and ERRC research visits. The re-negotiation of Dom identity as a phenomenon within the spectrum of Gypsy politics in Turkey is something that has yet to happen. The presentation of the Dom and their Association in Jerusalem (Matras, 2000, Williams 2001) may be a precedent; but one from a much smaller population in a very different state.

What, however, of the European side? Observing the self-understanding of Turkish Gypsies, and Turkish society in general at this most exciting period of their history, we can see European self- conceptions stretched almost to breaking-point in contemplation of Turkish membership of the European Union. A powerful reactionary current in Europe simply wishes to abandon or truncate the vision of progressively transcending the entrenched divisions between nation-states, asserting that some clashes of identity/culture cannot be transcended, accepting the dismal prospect of an eternity of unmanaged human conflict. As in the case of the enlargement of the EU to include the central and east European states, the case of Roma/Gypsies/Travellers is a test case of the realignment of identity and community consciousness required. What Turkey may teach Europe is that coming to terms with the history of the oppression of Gypsies may require something more than present models of the recognition of a Romani ethnic minority.

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<sup>8</sup> This of course deserves more analysis than we have time to offer here.

<sup>9</sup> We are sceptical of the possibility of the ideal advocated by Star Trek fans and conservative Social Anthropologists that it is possible to study human interactions without affecting them. All human beings constantly re-evaluate their patterns of action in the light of their ever-growing knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew is thought to have died in 1144, but his work was continued by an anonymous collaborator.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Research Report RES-000-22-1652 for the ESRC (2 April 2007)**

#### **A. Background**

Four streams of enquiry came together in this research. Acton's longstanding interest in the development of Romani politics and Marsh's interest in Turkish history and society both started in their undergraduate studies. These were focused by international interest in the civil rights of Roma in the light of the candidacy of Turkey and others for membership of the European Union and the international development of Romani linguistics to transcend limitations imposed by national linguistic establishments.

Acton, involved in the beginnings of the study of racism in the 1960s, was encouraged by both A.H.Halsey and John Rex to follow practical involvement in running the Gypsy Council's first education programme with a doctorate at Nuffield College on organised Gypsy community activism. Marsh, from a settled Gypsy family, left school early to join the family business, and left that to become a playgroup leader, and was enthused by his work with Cypriot children to return as a mature student to Turkish and East European Studies at SSEES and an MA in the same field. To his dismay his MA was failed because of comments he would not retract about the position of national minorities in Turkey, and was only passed, after considerable delay, on appeal. He thereupon he took his AHRB bursary to Greenwich to re-focus his doctorate on the position of Roma under the Ottoman Empire. He was supervised by Acton who had combined academic Romani Studies with advisory roles with numerous Romani NGOs from the I.R.U. down.

When Marsh went to Istanbul to carry out archival research, he found himself spearheading the development of the first Romani Studies network. He found himself diverted from history to contemporary social issues, bringing together for seminars isolated teachers, Romani community leaders, social workers, medical personnel and academics who had not previously considered themselves to have a common interest. They were supported by Elin Strand and other workers at the Swedish Institute who extended diplomatic support against the sensitivities of state apparatuses, and sponsored the first two Romani Studies Conferences in Turkey. Publications followed, and Bilgi University invited Marsh to teach the first Romani Studies courses in Turkey.

These developments took place just before Turkey's serious candidature for EU membership led European inter- and non- governmental institutions, from the Council of Europe down, to start subjecting Turkey to the same catechisms as other candidate countries from Eastern Europe, within which questions about the situation of Roma/Gypsies/Travellers have been prominent.

#### **Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives remain as stated in the proposal. The first objective was an ethnographically informed socio-historical overview of Romani, Dom, Lom and other commercial-nomadic and marginalised social communities seen by Turks as Çingene,

comparable in its scope to those available for Central and East European countries, which would underwrite discourse analysis of current changes in perception and performance of Roman/Gypsy/traveller identity as the Turkish state and citizens advance and reflect upon their candidacy for EU membership

This, it was hoped, would throw light upon various theses of Anatolian exceptionalism, and contribute to mainstream sociological theories of the formation of social identity and stratification, of “multiple modernities”. A further important objective was the encouraging of local interdisciplinary academic Romani Study networks, and in particular preparing the ground for the systematic comparative charting of Romani dialects in Turkey.

None of these objectives have been fully met; a start has been made on all of them. An assessment of what progress has been made will be given at the end of the results section.

## **Methods**

The prime data collection methods were the synthesis of existing material, supplemented by informant interviews with Roma/Gypsy/Traveller community leaders and teachers, clerics, social workers and government officials dealing with the communities. In the event our data collection has been more extensive, and perhaps as a consequence our data analysis up till now has been less complete, than we had hoped. As well as interviews, we found we had extensive opportunities for participant and non-participant observation, most notably at the very first meeting of the National Romani Federation in Edirne, but also in many other organisations and networks and social occasions.

The project was guided by the Research Ethics Code of the University of Greenwich. Issues of confidentiality did arise, particularly at times when there was evident security interest in our activities; but we were able to conduct our research without engaging in any activities against the advice of either the Turkish or the UK authorities, although we respect the anonymity of those of our informants who are not recognisable public figures.

During the year, leaving aside the data collected by the associated project workers, Marsh and/or Acton visited some 15 different Rom or Dom districts, often several times, interviewed at greater or lesser length at least 127 different Rom/Dom individuals, at least 37 teachers, at least 41 educational or municipal officials, as well as 23 officials of other states or inter-governmental organisations.

Then the very fact that we were carrying out an official systematic academic research encouraged others to start or revive their own projects. The most important of these were:

- 1) the work of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, from which Elin Strand went on to become Director of the Roma Cultural Centre in Stockholm,
- 2) the Turkish project of the European Roma Rights Centre, which, after difficulties at Bilgi University, had to be re-organised at the offices of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly by Marsh acting as a consultant. This provided additional resources for fieldwork.

- 3) A postgraduate research project by Chandu Chodavarapu and Bertil Videt of the University of Copenhagen entitled “Organizing of Gypsy communities in Turkey – a litmus test of an ongoing democratization process”, for which Acton acted as adviser. We thank Videt for acting as the main driver, down some pretty rough roads, for fieldwork, which did not use public transport.

These projects also contributed substantially to the data supporting this report. In addition to our own, we have observational records, often of the same events and situations, from Elin Strand, Bertil Videt, Melike Karlidag, Gunnar Grut, Idaver Memedov, Özhan Önder, Emre Sahin and Gül Ozatesler. These multiple viewpoints add to the possible depth and validity of our ethnography; but in terms of an Nvivo-assisted discourse analysis we are still at the phase of formulating coding schemes and hypotheses. The preliminary analysis offered in this report should therefore be seen as a still-speculative starting point that will under-write a more rigorous interrogation of our data.

## **Results**

Our understanding of the structure of ‘Gypsy’ groups in Turkey is based on a critical reading of the literature in the light of our own fieldwork. The most balanced and complete annotated bibliography is that of Klippenstein (2003), which contains the classic ‘Gypsy-Lore’ references in several European languages as well as a wealth of Turkish ephemera. Marsh’s nearly finished Ph.D. thesis supplements this in terms of identifying Gypsy references in general historical documents, while Marsh and Strand (2005, 2006) update the contemporary social references. The archival material is supplemented by unpublished data from the British Council and ERRC research, in which Marsh participated.

The reported size of an ethnic minority population varies because ethnic identification is subjective, and depends on interests. As it has become more acceptable to be a Rom/Gypsy/Traveller, estimates of populations have mushroomed, and Turkey is no exception. Estimates jumped from few hundred thousand in the post-1945 era to perhaps a million as European organisations began to give serious consideration to Turkey’s EU candidacy. The British Council research has moved from a 2004 estimate of 2,000,000, (Marsh and Strand 2006) to estimates (derived from local authority interviews) that some 6.7% of the population of Thrace were Romani and other Travellers, and some 3% of the population of Anatolia were Romani, Dom and Lom, or other Travellers. Extrapolation of these figures might lead to total estimates of 3-6 million Roma/Gypsies/Travellers. The meaning of such estimates, however, is ambiguous and conditional.

The first important distinction to make is between popular and governmental identification of Çingenelar on the one hand, and self-identification of individuals as Romanlar, Domlar, Pocha, Abdallar or whatever. As in Europe we may find commercial-nomadic or mendicant populations who are “treated like Gypsies” even if they, other Gypsies and the state all deny that they are Gypsies, none of which pre-determines what historians may proclaim about their origins (the Abdallar are a case in point). These problems of identification cannot be resolved by definitions; they can only be dissolved by careful ethnographic presentation of the self-perception of particular communities.

The present research has made the merest beginnings. There would be scope for perhaps 200 studies of individual communities such as that of Kolukirik (2005) or Mischek's (2005) description of the seasonal headquarter alternation of Kalayci and Sepetçi Roma within a single Istanbul street. It is to be hoped, however, that as in Europe, the growth of education will lead to an interest in family history, and the documentation of communities by their own members, as has begun in Sulukule.

The traditional classification of "populations of Indian origin" in Turkey is of Roma, Dom and Lom, so classified because their languages indicate origins in different migrations. The Lom would appear to be the smallest of these populations in Turkey, perhaps as a result of being closely identified with the Armenians after 1878. Modern populations of Lom are identified usually by the term 'Pocha' [pronounced 'Posha']. Small communities in the Agri, Ani and Kars region are mostly nomadic and engaged in musicianship, recycling, agricultural labouring and some small craft production. There may be a few thousand (according to informants in Agri, Askale and Ankara). We were able to only interview a few families from this group.

The Dom are seen to be the local Çingene in Kurdish areas, where informants in Diyarkabir, Kizaltepe and Van estimate some 50-60,000 live, with perhaps another 30-40,000 having left for other parts of Turkey during the past 20-30 years. They are still linked to Dom communities in Iraq and Syria, and members of one of their traditional professions, dentistry, can be found as far south as Balochistan<sup>11</sup>. Most of our informants said they spoke the Dom language, but although we collected some words and phrases, these are not yet sufficient to make comparisons with studies of Dom language from Syria or Jerusalem. We are not aware of any serious study of the Dom language in Turkey.

As with Rom, the Dom community consisted of a number of groups often overlapping geographically. Thus Karachi and Gövende Dom exist and distinguish themselves in the town of Sanliurfa, but both speak Domanje, saying "We are not Turks, we are not Kurds, we are Dom.". The Arabic word Mitrip may be used to distinguish professional musicians, who have the highest public profile and for whom music is a crucial part of their identity. In fact in both Diyakabir and Van we met first with musician Dom, and when Marsh introduced himself as also being a Gypsy, the first polite question back was "And what instrument do you play?" This did not mean, however they were unaware of other Dom professions – the musicians introduced us to nomadic Dom (some tent-dwelling) who survived by casual agricultural labour and begging, as well as to a middle-aged Dom traditional dentist who was one of our most helpful informants, bringing us into the religious life of the Dom community. But for the musicians, their music was the core of their cultural identity.

Within this discussion of the Dom we can already see some of the complexities and ambiguities of identity. The ethnic identity is not monolithic: it is divided by occupation and by locality and by sub-group and by hierarchical social status. Dom performed their identity differently in relation to Turks and to Kurds; and the troubles in the region meant that they had faced the same hard choices about loyalties and involvement as all other citizens. They performed identity differently in the towns to

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<sup>11</sup> Data from ongoing PhD research at Greenwich by Naseer Dashti

in the countryside, where patron-client relationships with local notables were crucial to maintaining their economic niche, unless, as often, (and as in Kosovo and Bosnia) those traditional relationships had been swept away by the troubles.

Many of our (male) informants also defined their identity relative to other groups in terms of gender relations: who they would or would not take in marriage, and what their wives and daughters could and could not do. Several of our Dom informants asserted that their better protection of their women's honour made them superior to Turkish Romanlar, Kurds and Turks.

These dimensions of difference are multiplied among the Rom whose communities are far more numerous. More than 80% of those identified as Çingene in Turkey probably self-identify as Romanlar. In consequence both Roma themselves, and many of their well-wishers either use the term "Romanlar" to refer to the whole population, or treat the word "Çingene" as though it were just the Turkish translation of the term "Gypsy", although this is clearly perceived to be pejorative in the dynamics of 'in-group' and 'out-group' definitions. The term "Roma" is frequently translated as "Romanlar", although not all the political and linguistic associations of the former would hold true in the latter case. As in Europe this is sometimes resented by Gypsy/Traveller minorities who do not self-identify as Rom, and there is a move to 'reclaim' the term "Çingene" as a more authentic ethnonym by some activists such as Mustafa Aksu in Ankara. Sometimes, however, it appears these minorities may be absorbed into numerically larger Romani populations. Other terms to describe nomadic and peripatetic groups include "Çelgar" (basket-makers), "Mangosur" (garbage collectors and paper recyclers), "Deber" (usually attached to Yörük groups) with clear differences attached to status (usually expressed in terms of acceptable or unacceptable marriage alliances).

We should thus not see identity difference as simply ethnic. Some of the broadest dimensions of identity derived from territory may through migration inter-cut with dialect and religious difference. Thus the difference between "Khorakhane" and "Balamne" Roma may be simply viewed as a difference between "Turkish" and "Greek" Roma – but since some of those identified as "Greek" Roma may actually be descended from people who came to Turkey as Muslims in population exchanges after the first world war, the identification of this fault-line as coinciding with a dialect and Muslim/Orthodox difference as in Bulgaria does not hold good. Dialects that would tend to mark the speakers as Romanian or Slavic Orthodox in the rest of the Balkans do not do so in Turkey. The more settled and established individuals are, the more likely they are, if asked what kind of Rom they are, to say simply that they are "Khorakhane" Roma.

This does not mean, however that within Romani areas, differences of ethnic group identity are not crucial. In one Romani 'mahalle' in rural Thrace, we found at least 4 different Romani ethnic/dialect groups present. The teahouse owner and effective economic leader of the community identified himself as Eiris Rom, and therefore as different to his odd-job man, who reticently described himself just as Khorakhano. The odd-job-man was adjusting his pronunciation to that of the teahouse-owner; but both adapted their speech to converse with Acton trying to speak Vlach Romani. A more important difference between the odd-job man and the tea-house owner however, was that the odd-job man said his people would eat hedgehog (*kirpis*), which the

teahouse-owner said was unthinkable for Eiris Roma. They thus placed themselves on opposite sides of one of the great caste divides between Romani communities across the world. They were, however, united in looking down on the Roma living in tents and shacks on the edge of the community whom they identified in Turkish as 'Mangosur' and 'Çelgari', but who self-identified as Bulgarian Erliya Roma.<sup>12</sup> Nor was that the end of the variety. When we went shopping we had to be careful, in order not to excite jealousy or make trouble, to divide our purchases between the two shops, one of whose owners identified himself as Sepetçi (a more common term for basket-makers who are settled), and the other, more cautiously, just as Khorakhano.

From the outside, the major difference may have appeared that between Turk and Rom, marked by the spatial segregation of the Romanlar into their own settlement with a kilometre outside the town. The daily life of its inhabitants was marked by the conscious performance of a complex interaction of class and ethnic sub-group (and of course gender) identity and hierarchy, within the taken-for-granted gross segregation between them and the Turkish majority.

Seen in this way, Romani dialectical difference is often not so much a marker of ethnic-territorial distinction (though it sometimes is) as a marker of caste difference, where individuals who have multi-dialectal competence can use this to negotiate market and power relationships through varying degrees of accommodation, assertiveness and courtesy. Official relationships are marked by use of the Turkish language. A large number of Romanlar do not speak Romani or who speak a mixed '*Romanje*' of Turkish and Romani where Turkish grammar has replaced Romani.<sup>13</sup>

These traditional ways of constructing inter-group relations were apparent in the first meeting of the National Turkish Romani Federation that we observed in Edirne.

Although there have been formal Romani organisations in history, as trade guilds such as the Sepetçi, Çengi and horse-traders, female flower-sellers or local Sufi brotherhoods, community associations with a general cultural and welfare agenda have only been formed recently, starting with that in Edirne formed by Erdiñ Çekiç. This hosted the first Turkey-wide meeting of such groups on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Representatives from 10 groups were present and 5 groups sent apologies. Two further groups that had taken part in the consultation to appoint two Turkish representatives to the Council of Europe-sponsored 'European Roma and Traveller Forum' (ERTF) had however, declined to join the Federation (and have subsequently founded a second federation in Izmir). In the meantime the ERTF changed its constitution, so that instead of local associations being able to affiliate directly, only one National Federation per CoE state could affiliate.

The ERTF financed the federation's meeting to adopt new ERTF model rules, and ERTF Vice-President, Miranda Vuolasranta, a Finnish Romani, attended. Curiously enough in the very same city in the town hall on the very same weekend there was also a pioneering regional conference on social inclusion for disadvantaged minorities, concentrating on Roma, sponsored by the Helsinki Citizen's assembly, the UNDP and the Open Society Assistance Foundation (Turkey), where representatives of NGOs

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<sup>12</sup> In Bulgaria and much of former Yugoslavia, Erliya would be seen as a kind of Khorakhane, not as an identity to be distinguished from Khorakhane.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Romani "Me penav Romanes" became Romanje "Man pen Roman" (I say it in Romani).

and local authorities listed at length to a largely non-Rom audience what they were doing to help Roma. The irony of the almost total non-overlap of the two meetings was not lost on Çekiç when he briefly visited the town hall conference.

The discourse of community action put forward by Çekiç and other Rom present was rather different to the individualist Human Rights programme put forward both by NGO representatives in the town hall, and by Vuolasranta. They emphasized European help available to gain effective legal redress against abuses of state power. The Roma representatives, by contrast, emphasised the need for unity, co-operation and trying to turn the Kemalist republican ideals of social solidarity into reality. Where overseas representatives were full of stories of convictions of police officers for brutality, urging Turkish Romanlar to emulate them, the Turkish Romanlar Associations countered with stories of how they had achieved unprecedented co-operation with police – sports coaching here, and escaped prisoners surrendering with the intervention of the Romani community leadership there. Perhaps there was a certain naiveté – one police chief was praised for the generous way in which he trusted young Roma offenders to redecorate the police headquarters as part of a programme of renovation for eleven houses in the Romani mahalle – but elderly Roma had memories of Kemal Atatürk’s support for social equality for Roma, as Turks, and repeatedly disassociated themselves from the confrontational and separatist policies they associated with Kurds. They felt they had a collectivist strategy for achieving equality and social solidarity. There was some resentment at the notion such ideals had to be imported from the EU. Creating the associations, which they emphasised were open to all Roma no matter of what group, was already an exercise in negotiating social solidarity. At the end of 2007 the first Dom community association from Diyarbakir applied to join the federation. Some delegates referred to news stories about Roma persecution in Europe as evidence of the failure of confrontational strategies. Such attitudes were common among Romani community leaders wherever we went. At the same time, however, the growth of campaigns against a growing trend of evictions and destruction of historic Romani quarters such as Sulukule, (observed by Marsh) could not but have a radicalising effect.

To accommodate the Roma at the meeting who did not speak Romani, the language of business was Turkish, with simultaneous translation into English for the observers from the Council of Europe. After the meeting Vuolasranta spoke in Romani, and soon had an eager crowd of about half the delegates around her. The dynamics of this Romani conversation revealed many elements of the interplay of identities within the Romani community. Vuolasranta did not use her own dialect<sup>14</sup> but rather the developing Vlach Romani-influenced conference Romani that has emerged as the lingua franca of international Romani politics. About a quarter of the delegates understood her, - and then assisted the Khorakhani Romani speakers who could not understand her easily; but both groups tried to modify their speech to speak to her. One or two delegates were clearly trying to practice a conference Romani they were in the process of learning.

Vuolasranta began her Romani speech by a series of apologies, and thanks. She displayed traditional forms of respect, and thanked the delegates for listening to her, a woman, which was not usual in their gatherings – the only other Romani woman

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<sup>14</sup> The phonology of Kaalo Romani from Finland makes it difficult for other groups to follow.

present was Çekiç's secretary, who had not spoken. By her diplomacy and clarity in speaking Romani she clawed back a great deal of the moral ground she had lost in her guise as an interfering foreigner, and also showed she had taken on board criticism.

This was an historic encounter. But the micro-social processes of negotiating identity were recognisably those we encountered in teahouses throughout our fieldwork. There were usually Rom or Dom from more than one sub-ethnic group; multi-dialectal individuals usually emerged to facilitate conversations with us. This was not a new strategy; it was what had always been done to facilitate trade and interaction with Roma from elsewhere in the Balkans.

The clear recognition that greater understanding of Romani was valuable in its dialectal richness, as a major channel of communication with Romani communities in Europe who were developing their own strategies of dealing with inter-governmental organisations, was thus rooted in experience. This provided the basis for advocating collaboration with the Manchester University Romani Linguistic project. The new association "Romani Filologia – Istanbul" was founded in October after a long debate in the teahouse belonging to its founder Bülent Filyaz, in which he eloquently defended linguistic research against the argument that action on poverty relief should be a higher priority.

### **Aims and Objectives Revisited**

- 1) We did not achieve a complete overview of Rom/Gypsy/Traveller populations in Turkey. We did, however develop the basis for a series of overlapping matrices of ethnic, linguistic, regional and occupational differentiation within which the task of mapping communities can continue.
- 2) The effects of EU candidacy and membership on identities in the Turkish Republic are still undetermined. But our political ethnography illustrates the processes by which they are being constructed, and provides considerable material for the analysis of co-existent 'multiple modernities'
- 3) Our work continued to encourage the Romani Studies Network to operate country-wide. We did prepare the ground for collaboration of its members with the Manchester University Romani Language Project and demonstrated that both Romani and Dom languages continue to flourish in Turkey; but this preparation revealed a need for more rigour, resources and time.

### **Activities**

The initial data-gathering activities concentrated on Istanbul and Thrace. From January to March, Marsh used previous educational contacts to visit Edirne, and the Romanlar ghettos of Kagithane, Ayiz Pasha and Yenibosna in Thrace. In Istanbul itself he began contacts with Romani musicians in Dolapdere and Kustepe and Tarlabasi and Bahcelievler quarters. He also planned an April fieldwork visit to the Kurdish speaking areas where the Dom Gypsies live.

Shortly before Acton made his first visit to Turkey in April however, the latter had to be abandoned after the government temporarily forbade travel to the East. This

proved a blessing in disguise, as we went instead to Edirne to observe both the first official Regional conference on social inclusion for disadvantaged groups and the first meeting of the Romani Federation discussed above. We also visited the Ayiz Pasha mahalle, and in Istanbul, Dolapdere (including a school visit) and Kustepe, where we were able to initiate discussions about Romani language research possibilities with Bülent Filyaz.

After Acton returned to London on 19th April, Marsh continued fieldwork in various Istanbul mahalles, and Ayiz Pasha, where a Romani children's concert linked up with the observation of musical education for Roma in Dolapdere and Kustepe. An important informant was the retired imam of the Grand Bazaar, Asim Bey, a cleric, himself Romani from of the Sulukule mahalle, that became the oldest of many Romani mahalles to be targeted for urban clearance under the Urban Renewal Act 5366, provoking an unprecedented level of organised community protest which Marsh and Videt were able to observe. During this period, problems with the ERRC/HYD research project in Turkey led to Marsh being drawn into its re-organisation.

From 29<sup>th</sup> June to 19<sup>th</sup> July, Marsh visited England, for discussions with Acton in London and with Professor Yaron Matras in Manchester about the methodology of collecting linguistic data. On his return he continued to interview and observe in Edirne (the scene of apparently successful Gypsy political organisation) and Sulukule (the scene of apparently failing Gypsy politics), and to organise a fieldwork team for the ERRC. Through the latter he was able to set up a more substantial fieldwork visit to Eastern Turkey for October. Before this, however, he made a brief visit to Sweden, financed by the Swedish Institute, to report on developments in Turkey. Unfortunately, while on a private trip to Norway he had two heart attacks, and was hospitalised before being repatriated to England by his family for a brief convalescence. In October he returned to London, where he consulted with Acton and checked sources in the British Library, SOAS and SSEES, before returning to Istanbul on 9<sup>th</sup> October, whither he was followed by Acton on 20<sup>th</sup> October. On 21 October they briefed C.Kealy (cultural attaché at the British Embassy) and K.Khanna (visiting from the UK Home Office)

On 22 October a joint fieldwork team of the ESRC and ERRC projects flew to Diyarbakir, including, besides Acton, Marsh, and Videt, Idaver Memedov, a Macedonian Romani legal intern seconded from the ERRC, Gunnar Grut, a trained U.N. peacekeeper, and Özhan Önder, a Turkish postgraduate student who acted as an additional driver and translator.

We stayed in a 16<sup>th</sup> century caravanserai next to one of the main Dom living areas within the walled city. We met freely with Dom musicians in the Seyhan tea-house, which led to further social occasions, and meetings with the locally revered religious leader Sheikh Ahmed, who discussed Dom social structure (e.g. feuds and their resolution). We were taken by a Dom traditional dentist to the shrine of Ahmed's ancestor Sheikh Ibrahim in the Karacdag mountains. We also visited a free clinic, and the town hall. We made excursions to Silvan, Mardin and to Kizaltepe where musicians at a teahouse took us to a wedding, and introduced us nomad Dom whose tents and slum winter lodgings we visited. We also consulted with Dr Mazhar Bagli, a sociologist at Dicle University.

On 27 October Acton, Marsh, Videt and Önder drove to Van via Bitlis to meet with Dom, mainly musicians, and with the People's Training Centre, an adult education institute which employs two Dom as musical trainers. On 30 October we returned to Istanbul. Before Acton returned to London on 4<sup>th</sup> November we set up an initial framework with Bulent Filyaz and Melike Karlidag for systematic Romani language data collection, and also discussed research on Levender, the Romani-influenced Turkish Gay argot. Our initial attempts at rigorous data collection made us realise more fully the work this would take.

We also set out an initial framework for reporting on and writing up from this research project. During the last two months of the project, as well as starting to write up and exchange field notes, Marsh also continued to live in Istanbul and conduct field work, (including a further visits east). By the end of 2007 we had assembled a great deal of data, but our analysis was only in its early stages.

### **Outputs**

There are no published outputs as yet. Planned outputs include:

- a) An overview of this project which has been offered to the September Manchester Romani Studies Conference
- b) A paper on identity formation and maintenance with the provisional title "And what instrument do you play?"
- c) A paper on the Rom/Dom/Gypsy/Traveller issue within debates over the accession of Turkey to the EU.
- d) A book by Marsh on Turkish Romani history, primarily embodying his PhD thesis, but drawing on aspects of the present research.
- e) A book on processes of social change and development in contemporary Turkish Romani society.

### **Impacts**

The major impacts so far have been those detailed above on the Istanbul Romani Studies network and the ERRC research on human rights of Roma in Turkey.

### **Future Research Priorities**

The priorities of the researchers are to write up more of the material they have accumulated, as their other work permits. Of other initiatives mentioned above, the continuing work of the Manchester Romani Project and the planned research of Dr. Mazhar Bagli at Dicle University have the highest priority.

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