

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Between Cultural Appropriation and Ethnic Shifting: The Entangled Histories of Romani Imitation

27.-29. May 2026, Prague



Photo by Mariana Sabino

About the Conference

This conference builds on discussions of Romani racialization, belonging, and agency by focusing on identity performance and claims to authenticity. It examines how struggles over representation unfold across historical and contemporary contexts, in which Romani identity has been both stigmatized and appropriated. While some Romani individuals have been compelled to “pass” or conceal their identity, others have sought to reclaim it; meanwhile, non-Romani actors have adopted or performed Romani cultural markers through entertainment, aesthetics, spirituality, or lifestyle choices. From early modern anxieties about “counterfeit” identities to contemporary digital self-fashioning, these practices raise questions about legitimacy, recognition, and power. Bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives, the conference explores how such claims are produced and contested within broader systems of racialization, resource distribution, and citizenship. It highlights tensions between creativity and exploitation, affiliation and exclusion, and lived experience and symbolic appropriation, advancing a critical view of identity as fluid, situational, and politically charged.

Logistics

Ivana Camphuisen, Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences, camphuijsen@eu.cas.cz

I. Programme Overview

May 27, 2026 (17.00 - 18.45)

Keynote Lecture by Dalen Wakeley-Smith: American Imitation and Romani Strategic Essentialism in the 20th Century

Institute of Czech Literature, CAS

May 28, 2026 (9.00 - 17:40)

Conference: Between Cultural Appropriation and Ethnic Shifting

Vila Lanna

May 29, 2026 (17.00 - 19.00)

Discussion with: Rethinking Race in Eastern Europe

CEFRES

II. Programme

1. American Imitation and Romani Strategic Essentialism in the Early 20th Century

Institute of Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences (Na Florenci 1420/3, 110 00, Prague)

Wednesday, May 27

17.00 – 17.15 **Welcome Remarks**

17.15 – 18.45 **Opening Keynote Lecture**

Moderator: Mariana Sabino-Salazar (Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences)

A lecture by **Dalen Wakeley-Smith** (Washington University in St. Louis), titled “**‘Gypsy Madness’: American Imitation and Romani Strategic Essentialism in the Early 20th century,**” examines how non-Romani Americans produced and circulated romanticized and stereotypical images of Romani people through performance, focusing on Irving Brown’s *Gypsy Madness*. By juxtaposing these representations with the strategic activism of American Romani communities, the lecture reveals how contested performances of identity shaped evolving ideas of citizenship, belonging, and race in the United States.

2. Between Cultural Appropriation and Ethnic Shifting: The Entangled Histories of Romani Imitation

Vila Lanna (V Sadech 1/1, 160 00 Prague 6)

Thursday, May 28

8.50 – 9.00 **Registration**

9.00 – 9.10 **Welcome**

9.10 – 10.50 **Panel 1 - Ethnic Shifting, Institutional Gatekeeping, and Roma Identity Across Religious and State Structures**

Moderator: **Kateřina Čapková** (Charles University and NYU Prague)

Sonia Styrkacz - Appropriating Roma Identity: Boundaries of Authenticity, Verification of Belonging, and Challenges for the Community

Pedro Ravasio - Brazilian Romanifishing: Between Religion and Monetization

Yanush Panchenko - Romani Identity as Stigma and Resource in Ukraine

10.50 – 11.10 **Coffee Break**

11.10 – 12.50 **Panel 2 - Regimes of Romani Imitation: Sonic Mediation, Minstrelsy, and Racial Performance**

Moderator: **Ann Ostendorf** (Gonzaga University)

Cristina Hernández Casado - “Dijo que se tiene por español y no por gitano” (He said he sees himself as Spanish and not as a *Gitano*) Identity and Cultural Expressions of the Romani Community in Castile, 16th – 17th Centuries”

Miguel Ángel Vargas Rubio - From the “Gitano Question” to the “Flamenco Question”: Afición and the Making of Public Debate through Flamenco in Spain (1765–2025)

Shaun Williams - Brownface Minstrelsy, Sonic Whitewashing, and the Politics of Romani Audibility in Romanian Popular Culture

12.50 – 14.00 **Lunch**

14.00 – 15.40 **Panel 3 - From the Fetishization of the Balkan Margins to Global Commodities: Cultural Imperialism and the Nationalization of Roma Difference**

Moderator: **Yasar Abu Ghosh** (Charles University and NYU Prague)

Carol Silverman - Global Balkan “Gypsy” Music: Representation, Appropriation, and Profit

Gergely Pulay - Cultural Appropriation and the Urban Margins of the Post-Socialist European Periphery

Camila Salvatore - Narodna ‘Balkan’, but also ‘Romsko’ Kotel Roma Musicians’ Discourses on Music and Genre

15.40 – 16.00 **Coffee Break**

16.00 – 17.40 **Panel 4 - Ethical Representation and the Appropriation of Romani Identity in the Arts**

Moderator: **Karolina Válková** (Inst. of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Margaret Frohlich - The Ethical Frame and Romani Identity in *El payo -chac* and *Zambra*

Ismael Cortés - Performing the Other: Romani Identity and Cultural Extraction in *Els Zin-calós*

Tamara Moya and Lidia Merás - Passing for Romani, Claimed as White: Lola Flores’ Complex Ethnic Shifting Case

3. Rethinking Race in Eastern Europe

CEFRES (Na Florenci 1420/3, 110 00 Prague 1)

Friday, May 29

9.00 – 16.00 **Guided tour to Lety u Písku**, Memorial of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia with **Helena Sadílková**

This guided tour explores one of the most contested sites of Holocaust atrocities and their public recognition and commemoration in the Czech Republic. The memorial opened in 2024, following almost three decades of campaigning by survivors' descendants, who continue to strive for a stronger voice in the memorial's management and development. Helena Sadílková has participated in these negotiations since preparations for the current memorial began in 2018.

We will leave Vila Lanna at 9 a.m.

Optional group tour (by registration only, limited to 15 participants)

17.00 – 19.00 **Book Discussion and Reception**

Moderator: **Martin Fotta**, Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences

A conversation with **Chelsi West Ohueri** (The University of Texas at Austin) about her new book, *Encountering Race in Albania: An Ethnography of the Communist Afterlife* (Cornell University Press, 2025), followed by a small reception.

III. Conference Abstracts and Bios

Keynote Lecture abstract

Dalen Wakeley-Smith, Washington University in St. Louis

“‘Gypsy Madness’: American Imitation and Romani Strategic Essentialism in the early 20th century”

In the late 1930s, a tragedy unfolded somewhere in the Arizona desert, when a man named Irving Brown penned a fanciful stage play. Titled “Gypsy Madness,” Brown’s play was a lurid and melodramatic semi-biographical story concerning Romani people in America. This idiosyncratic drama represented the culmination of Brown’s lifetime preoccupation as an American Gypsyologist. Full of well-trodden stereotypes and romanticism, Brown’s play was likely never staged. Yet his tragedy is a telling historical artifact that captured over a century of American longing centered on “Gypsies” and endured well into the 20th century. This talk explores the ways in which non-Romani Americans like Brown understood, enacted, and circulated ideas about Romani people through essentializing mimicry, play, and performance from the early 1900s to the 1930s. At the same time, I explore the ways in which American Romani people utilized strategic essentialism to mobilize harmful representations like those found in Brown’s play to advance political claims of belonging as Americans. By juxtaposing American Romani activism during the same period as Brown’s play, I situate the origins of Romani political organization in the U.S. well before the Romani rights era of the 1970s. Weaving together archival sources about (and sometimes from) Romani people in the United States, I demonstrate the complex ways in which both American Romani identity and American identity reflected changing ideas about citizenship, belonging, and race in the 20th century in ways that are anything but tragic.

Dalen Wakeley-Smith earned his PhD in Anthropology and History from the University of Michigan. As an Assistant Professor of History at Washington University in St. Louis, he teaches courses on immigration, cultural history, and urban history in the United States. Wakeley-Smith’s current book (forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press) is titled *Gypsy Madness: American Roma in New York City, 1890-1945*, which explores the history of Roma people in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Wakeley-Smith’s previous work has been published in the *Journal of American Ethnic History* and *Critical Romani Studies*, and his current research is set to appear in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Wakeley-Smith also serves as an editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Romani History* and as a contributor to a forthcoming *Romani Atlantic* edited volume commissioned by Cambridge University Press.

Book Discussion Abstract

Chelsi West Ohueri, The University of Texas at Austin

***Encountering Race in Albania: An Ethnography of the Communist Afterlife* (Cornell University Press, 2025)**

This is the first book to interrogate race and racial logics in Albania. Chelsi West Ohueri examines how race is made, remade, produced, and reproduced through constructions of whiteness, blackness, and otherness. She argues that while race is often limited to Western processes of modernity that exclude Eastern Europe, processes of racialization are global, and the ethnography of everyday Albanian socialities makes visible how race operates. Historical and political science frameworks prevail in the study of post-Cold War East European societies, yet, as West Ohueri shows, anthropological and ethnographic approaches can equip scholars to ask questions they might otherwise not consider, illustrating how racialization is ongoing and enduring in what she terms the communist afterlife. *Encountering Race in Albania*, through the unexpected optic of Albania—a small, formerly communist country in Southeast Europe—offers significant insights into broader understandings of race in a global context.

Dr. Chelsi West Ohueri is a sociocultural anthropologist and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin with appointments in the Department of Anthropology, the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, and the Humanities, Health, and Medicine Program. Her scholarship and teaching are primarily concerned with the study of race and racialization, belonging, marginalization, and medical anthropology. She has conducted extensive ethnographic research throughout Albania and the Balkan region, as well as across Europe and in the U.S. South. She is the author of the recently published book *Encountering Race in Albania: An Ethnography of the Communist Afterlife* (Cornell University Press).

Panel Presentation Abstracts

Panel I

Katerina Čapková (Discussant)

She is a senior researcher at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. She also teaches at NYU in Prague. Her research and teaching focus on modern Jewish history in Europe, the history of Roma and Sinti, and refugee studies. Among her many publications is *Jewish and Romani Families in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, co-edited with Eliyana Adler and published by Rutgers University Press in 2021. In 2016, Čapková established the Prague Forum for Romani Histories at the Institute of Contemporary History, which she has directed ever since. Since January 2025, the Prague Forum for Romani Histories has become a research centre within the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. One of the projects Čapková currently heads is www.romatestimonies.com, a unique database of Romani and Sinti testimonies about the Second World War.

1. Sonia Styrkacz: “Appropriating Roma Identity: Boundaries of Authenticity, Verification of Belonging, and Challenges for the Community”

This presentation examines the phenomenon of non-Roma individuals (Gadje) appropriating Roma identity, with particular attention to the tensions between self-declaration and socially recognized group belonging. Drawing on theories of social identity (including Tajfel, Jenkins, and Brubaker), concepts of ethnicity as a negotiated process, and contemporary research on the performativity of identity, the paper explores why the question “who is a Roma, and who is not” remains both politically and epistemologically complex.

The analysis includes cases in which non-Roma individuals adopt elements of Roma culture or claim Roma identity for symbolic, economic, artistic, or political purposes. This phenomenon is interpreted as a form of “ethnic passing” and “symbolic ethnicity,” leading to the blurring of group boundaries and undermining internal mechanisms of verification. The presentation also discusses the difficulties faced by Roma leaders and institutions when confirming belonging: the absence of clear criteria, the diversity of Roma subgroups, historical burdens, and the risk of reproducing external stereotypes.

By referencing concrete examples of Gadje appropriating Roma identity—from cultural creators to activists and individuals seeking symbolic capital—the presentation highlights the consequences for the community: erosion of trust, dilution of cultural boundaries, representational conflicts, and the displacement of voices of those who genuinely belong to the group.

The objective of the paper is to demonstrate that verifying “who is Roma” requires not only scholarly tools but also recognition of the community’s right to self-definition and protection from appropriation. At the same time, it underscores the need for ethical, culturally sensitive research methodologies that make it possible to analyze Roma identity without reproducing marginalization.

Sonia Styrkacz is a psychologist, researcher, and educator. She is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Warsaw and in pedagogy at the University of Silesia. Her doctoral research focuses on the cultural appropriation of Roma communities and the decolonization of knowledge and social practices. She is also undergoing psychotherapeutic training in the cognitive-behavioral approach (SWPS University, Katowice). Her work lies at the intersection of education, mental health, and human rights, with a focus on children and youth from marginalized groups. She has conducted participatory research with Roma children and youth from Ukraine and implemented projects supporting refugee education and well-being. She works at the Educational Research Institute as an expert in diagnostic tools for inclusive education. As a psychologist, she has supported children, youth, and families—including Roma families—in public institutions and humanitarian settings. She is a Bergitka Roma insider and collaborates with migration and Roma research centers.

2. Pedro Ravasio: “Brazilian Romanifishing: Between Religion and Monetization”

This presentation aims to analyze the phenomenon of false Roma identities in Brazil. The methodologies involved in this research include a digital ethnography of the profiles of false Roma in Brazil and a bibliographic review of ethnicity in anthropology. This work has two main objectives. First, it seeks to categorize the multiple manifestations of Romanifishing and, second, to develop hypotheses that explain this phenomenon and its popularity, especially in Brazil. I propose dividing the phenomenon into two main manifestations: 1) identity/political Romanifishing, which is normally associated with people with Roma ancestry who grew up as gadje and are subsequently “baptized” as Roma by certain social movements. This occurs because some organizations struggle to organize Roma people, given the socioeconomic situation and the low levels of formal schooling that affect many Roma communities. Therefore, in searching for people with the training and availability to help structure the movement, these organizations end up involving such subjects. 2) Members of “Roma spirituality,” an Umbandist (Afro-Brazilian religious) cult that worships Roma entities. Its members are described as “soul Roma,” thereby decharacterizing Roma as an ethnicity. They commonly sell esoteric and palmistry-related products and services. I work with two fundamental hypotheses regarding this phenomenon. 1) The lack of information about Roma people in Brazil means that the Roma entities of Umbanda appear to be better known than the Roma ethnic group itself. 2) This phenomenon may also be linked to a culture of “identitarianism,” based on the production of identities detached from their own materiality. This seems to be related to the crisis of modern identity, which may promote identification with the oppressed, in opposition to the oppressor; with life in the community, in opposition to the way of life of large urban centers; and with spirituality, in opposition to belief in science.

Pedro Ravasio is pursuing a Master’s degree in Social Anthropology at the University of São Paulo (Brazil). His thesis is titled “Building Romanism through Social Media: A Digital Ethnography of Brazilian and American Roma Activism,” which he is going to defend in June

2026. He holds a bachelor's degree in social sciences from the same university. During his undergraduate studies, he developed a research project in Visual Anthropology. He is currently a member of CANIBAL – Global South and East Anthropology Group, which is coordinated by his advisor, João Felipe Gonçalves. His research interests include digital anthropology, political anthropology, social movements, ethnicity, and transnationalism. He has participated in several congresses and panels on Roma studies, such as the Gypsy Lore Society Congress in 2023 in São Paulo, Brazil. In addition, he presented one of the chapters of his thesis at the Mercosur Anthropology Meeting in 2025 in Salvador, Brazil (RAM).

3. Yanush Panchenko: “Romani Identity as Stigma and Resource in Ukraine”

This paper examines the bidirectional dynamics of ethnic boundary-crossing between Roma and non-Roma in contemporary Ukraine, where Romani identity functions simultaneously as both stigma and resource. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, insider observations from both Romani and activist positions, and interviews with Roma across various contexts, I analyze how people manage ethnic identification depending on the social situation and expected outcomes.

Ukrainian Roma regularly conceal their ethnicity to avoid discrimination in educational institutions, workplaces, and during internal and international migration, often presenting themselves as representatives of other nationalities. This survival strategy provides access to opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable due to anti-Romani prejudice. Conversely, non-Roma Ukrainians sometimes claim Romani identity—most often in relation to access to minority scholarships, NGO funding, and international programs, but sometimes also out of a desire to feel part of a more exotic identity. Such claims may be based on the search for distant Romani ancestors or on completely invented genealogies.

Special attention is given to Ukraine's Romani civil society sector and to the mechanisms for determining who is considered Roma—both within Romani society itself and in activist spaces.

The presentation shows the asymmetry of these processes: Roma are forced to hide their identity because of discrimination, while non-Roma can claim it for benefits. The Ukrainian case demonstrates how ethnic identity becomes a tool that is used differently depending on context and access to power.

Yanush Panchenko is a Romani ethnographer and researcher from Ukraine, affiliated with the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His research focuses on Romani traditional culture, language documentation, and the impact of war on Ukrainian Roma communities. Panchenko's work encompasses ethnographic studies of Ukrainian Romani groups and linguistic documentation of Vlaxur'a Romani dialect. He is completing the first dictionary of this dialect. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, his research has expanded to examine wartime migration patterns, forced displacement experiences in Germany, and Romani participation in military service. Beyond academic research, Panchenko co-heads the Ukrainian Center for Romani Studies and develops educational materials for Romani youth. His methodology combines ethnographic fieldwork with insider perspectives from both Romani community and

activist positionalities, providing unique insights into contemporary dynamics of ethnic identification and representation.

Panel II

Ann Ostendorf (Discussant)

She is Professor of History at Gonzaga University. She is a historian of early America with interests in cultural studies, histories of race, and the Atlantic world. Her co-edited collection (with Martin Fotta), *The Romani Atlantic*, will be published by Cambridge University Press next year. She is completing a manuscript on early American Romani history, and her Romani-related scholarship has appeared in *Romani Studies*, *Romano Dzaniben*, *Early American Studies*, *Frühneuzeit-Info*, *Critical Romani Studies*, *Maryland Historical Magazine*, and *Journal of Gypsy Studies*.

1. Cristina Hernández Casado: “‘Dijo que se tiene por español y no por gitano’ (He said he sees himself as Spanish and not as a *Gitano*) Identity and Cultural Expressions of the Romani Community in Castile, 16th–17th Centuries”

This presentation describes work in progress on issues related to identity and the artistic expressions of the Romani community in Castile during the 16th and 17th centuries, approached from two complementary perspectives. First, using documentation from the *Archivo de Villa de Madrid*, the *Archivo Histórico Regional*, and the *Archivo Capitular de Toledo*, it examines Romani dances performed during various festivities in several towns across Madrid and Toledo, and compares them with the so-called “Black dances” (“*Danzas de negros*”) documented in the same period. The aim is to determine, within this festive context, whether authentic Black dances performed by members of the Afro-descendant community were more frequent than performances by outsiders engaging in blackface, and whether authentic Romani dances performed by Romani individuals were more frequent than cultural imitations by non-Romani performers. Second, using the rich records of the *Órdenes Militares* section (originating in the *Archivo Histórico de Toledo*, now preserved in the *Archivo Histórico Nacional* in Madrid), the proposal analyses legal proceedings involving the Romani community. These sources offer information on issues related to the “*Lengua de los xitanos*,” its uses and possible appropriations (for example, for the purpose of committing theft), as well as cases in which members of this group asserted their status as “Spaniards” rather than Roma, highlighting the circumstances and motivations for doing so.

Cristina Hernández Casado holds a PhD in History and is an Assistant Professor (Profesora Ayudante Doctora) at the Complutense University of Madrid. While much of her research has focused on converso merchants and businesspeople in the Hispanic Monarchy, her recent work explores the socio-cultural history of Black and Romani communities in the Iberian Peninsula during the 16th and 17th centuries, including comparative analyses between these two groups. This research forms part of her involvement in the ERC research project BADEMS: *The Cultural*

History of the Black African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain (Grant Agreement ID: 101086104). Among her recent activities in this field, she participated as a presenter and chair at the international congress, *The Cultural Agency and Limits of Minority Groups in Early Modern Iberia: A Comparative Approach* (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 25–26 June 2025) and directed the research workshop *El estudio de comunidades negras en los archivos madrileños* (21 November 2024).

2. Miguel Ángel Vargas Rubio: “From the “Gitano Question” to the “Flamenco Question”: *Afición* and the Making of Public Debate through Flamenco in Spain (1765–2025)”

This presentation proposes a long-term genealogy of *afición* as a cultural regime that has structured public debate about Gitanos in Spain from the late 18th century to the present. Taking as its point of departure the end of the Spanish *Prisión General de Gitanos* (1749–1765)—a state project of mass imprisonment and demographic erasure—the presentation argues that the disappearance of Gitanos from public life coincided with the emergence of *afición a los gitanos*: a political and cultural fashion among elites that produced a new form of Gitano visibility without recognition. Rather than addressing the historical trauma of persecution, this regime of *afición* displaced the so-called “Gitano question” into a field of aesthetic fascination and controlled cultural access. Within this framework, practices such as the *juerga* crystallized as privileged spaces through which non-Romani elites imagined and accessed a supposedly secret Gitano world. Far from being spontaneous gatherings, these contexts operated as cultural dispositifs that organized desire, patronage, and representation. Through them, Gitano embodiment, musical practices, and forms of sociability were staged and circulated as objects of elite consumption, consolidating a narrative about Gitanos that increasingly structured the terms through which they could be publicly perceived and discussed. The second historical moment, beginning in the early 20th century, corresponds to the translation of this earlier regime of *afición* into the institutional and intellectual frameworks of modern flamenco culture. Initiatives such as the 1922 *Concurso de Cante Jondo*, promoted by Federico García Lorca and Manuel de Falla, did not simply “rediscover” a disappearing tradition but helped reframe Gitano musical practices as part of the national cultural heritage. In this process, public debate about Gitanos became increasingly mediated through flamenco itself. By tracing this historical shift—from the “Gitano question” to the “Flamenco question”—the presentation invites a reconsideration of *afición* as a regime of representation that has long mediated the relationship between Spanish society and Romani creativity, opening the possibility of imagining more equitable forms of cultural encounter, recognition, and negotiated translation with Romani artistic practices.

Miguel Ángel Vargas Rubio is a Romani art historian, theatre director, and cultural mediator from Seville. His work focuses on Romani memory, flamenco history, and critical approaches to the politics of representation surrounding Gitano creativity. Working across historical research, performance, and cultural mediation, he explores how archives, artistic practices, and public narratives shape the visibility of Romani communities in Spain. He has collaborated with Romani

cultural institutions and initiatives including Roma Theater Pralipe, RomArchive, and ERIAC, contributing through artistic and research practice to international debates on Romani representation in contemporary culture. He is currently completing a PhD in Contemporary History at Universidad Pablo de Olavide.

3. Shaun Williams: “Brownface Minstrelsy, Sonic Whitewashing, and the Politics of Romani Audibility in Romanian Popular Culture”

This paper traces practices of racial mimicry and the appropriation of Romani identities in Romania from the early 20th century to the present. Through analyses of historical sound recordings, I show how racialized mockery and mimicry gained prominence during periods of increased Romani visibility, audibility, and socioeconomic mobility. Drawing on theories of racial performance, I argue that mimicry functions as a mechanism for reasserting social hierarchies precisely when they appear most unstable. While the archetype of the “*Țigan*” as comic foil or trickster has deep roots in Romanian folklore, the virulently racist brownface minstrelsy that emerged in Romanian revue theatres of the 1910s–1940s represented a distinctly modern form of anti-Roma caricature. These satirical “*mahala* scenes”—among the first Romanian theatrical genres disseminated via sound recording—codified sonic and linguistic stereotypes that continue to shape representations of Roma in contemporary mass media. At the same time, early commercial recordings marketed as “*mahala* songs” (a euphemism for Romani music) reveal a parallel tradition of cultural appropriation and whitewashing by non-Romani performers. After 1989, these dynamics reappeared within a radically expanded media environment. The resurgence of racist parody on television and online platforms coincided with the growing prominence of Romani artists and cultural forms such as the wildly popular ethno-pop genre *manele*. The post-socialist period demonstrates both the persistence of these representational strategies and their capacity to adapt to new political, commercial, and technological contexts.

Dr. Shaun Williams is an ethnomusicologist, musician, and documentary filmmaker based in Bucharest, Romania. His doctoral dissertation in Ethnomusicology, “Singing for the Roma: *Lăutari* and the Politics of Romani Memory and Identity in Romania Under Communism and Post-Socialist Transition” (Indiana University, 2025), examines how Romani professional musicians known as *lăutari* have sustained cultural continuity and enacted subtle forms of resistance despite policies of assimilation and erasure. Williams has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Romani, Ruthenian, and Hutsul communities in Ukraine and Romania since 2010. His research interests include musical performance and identity, popular music, and minority rights.

Panel III

Yasar Abu Ghosh (Discussant)

He is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Charles University, where he served as head of the department from 2009 to 2012. He has taught as a visiting professor at Central European University in Budapest, Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. Abu Ghosh has conducted extensive field research on the Roma in Southern Bohemia, focusing on the quest for recognition, survival strategies, inter-group dynamics, and the ways governmental policies have affected this minority group. He was a co-founder of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology and has been a member of the board of experts to the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs, as well as an independent expert for the European Commission program “Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion.” He is a member of the European Association of Social Anthropologists.

1. Carol Silverman: “Global Balkan “Gypsy” Music: Representation, Appropriation, and Profit”

Since the fall of communism, Balkan “Gypsy” music has become a global phenomenon in world music contexts, but many current purveyors of this music tend to be non-Romani DJs and members of Gypsy punk and other pop and fusion bands. Through representational analysis, I explore the interplay of exoticism and authenticity in the marketing and consumption of Gypsy music. I investigate how the image and sound of the fantasy Gypsy are created, and who participates in and benefits from the popularization of Gypsy music, especially considering that the rising tide of anti-Gypsyism is sweeping Europe precisely at the time that Gypsy music has become a “hot” commodity. I examine the appropriation and consumption of Balkan Gypsy music in relation to its political and economic matrix, interrogating how music is produced and marketed, who is collaborating with whom in fusion projects, and how power relationships are implicated in these exchanges. I examine issues of ownership and compensation through case studies of DJ remixes, fusion bands, and dance clubs. At festivals, producers often frame Gypsy music events as liberal, multicultural, anti-racist experiences, even when no Roma are involved. My analysis highlights social, class, and ethnic differences among the various positionalities in this soundscape: producers, DJs, consumers, marketers, and Romani musicians. Non-Romani Goran Bregovic, for example, perhaps the highest-paid musician in this scene, has earned the wrath of many Roma. Fieldwork is based on four decades of participant observation and interviews in Western Europe, the U.S., Mexico, and the Balkans.

Carol Silverman has been involved with Balkan music and culture for over forty years as a researcher, teacher, performer, and activist. An award-winning Professor Emerita of cultural anthropology and folklore at the University of Oregon, she focuses on Balkan Romani music, festivals, cultural policy, and human rights issues. Based on fieldwork in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, New York, and Western Europe, her research analyzes the relationship among music, politics, ritual, and gender through issues of representation and appropriation. Her 2012

book *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (Oxford) won the book prize from the Society for Ethnomusicology, and her 2021 book *Balkanology* (Bloomsbury) traces the politics and artistry of Bulgarian wedding music. She works with the U.S. NGO Voice of Roma and ERIAC, is curator for Balkan music for the international digital RomArchive, and is a professional vocalist and teacher of Balkan music.

2. Gergely Pulay: “Cultural Appropriation and the Urban Margins of the Post-Socialist European Periphery”

Based on a book manuscript currently in preparation, this paper engages with the historical emergence of anxieties that the urban margins and/or the category of Roma/Gypsies came to embody in 21st century Bucharest, Romania. In post-socialist Romania, the search to identify local obstacles to the civilizing process (“Europeanization”) has taken the shape of exposing society’s “dirty laundry” by politicians, the media, and by ordinary citizens alike, a process that is conducive to the stigmatization of members of abject populations as moral outcasts and objects of disgust. In early modern Romanian intellectual history, we encounter the Roma/Gypsies as unwanted mirror images of the Romanians, symbolizing what members of the latter group deprecate in themselves or would rather abandon in the name of the civilizing process. In this case, contemporary forms of racialized difference between Roma and Romanians are continuous with earlier preoccupations. These concern the perceived similarity of structurally homologous, inferior positions occupied by these groups at different scales of inequality (local, national, and transnational). The paper aims to contribute to discussions of the conceptual and methodological frameworks for studying cultural appropriation in an Eastern European context, where majoritarian nationalism continues to appropriate and deploy claims of victimhood and self-images of historical suffering that liberal theory ascribes to the recognition struggles of minorities (such as the Roma) and other vulnerable categories.

Gergely Pulay is a research fellow at the ELTE Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Minority Studies, Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Budapest, and a volunteer at Budapest’s Open Learning Initiative (OLive). He defended his PhD in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University in 2017, and he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology between 2018 and 2020. His doctoral dissertation and future monograph constitute an urban ethnography of value, livelihood, and place-making in the “most ill-famed,” ethnically mixed Roma and non-Roma Romanian neighbourhood of Bucharest.

3. Camila Salvatore: “‘Narodna’ ‘Balkan’, but also ‘Romsko’ Kotel Roma musicians’ discourses on Music and Genre”

In this presentation, I address issues of Roma representation, drawing on my extensive fieldwork in Kotel, Bulgaria. In particular, I consider what is at stake when my interlocutors—Roma musicians from the *muzikanskata mahala* (musicians’ neighborhood) contextually employ the

labels *narodna* (folk), *Balkan*, and *Romsko* (Romani) to describe their musical practices. Initially, a brief historical overview illustrating the Bulgarian Communist Party's (BKP) assimilationist policies (1956–1989) helps contextualize the issue. At a time when Roma musicians were prevented from playing in public music that diverged from the strictly recodified and recontextualised (see Peicheva 1995) *narodna muzika* (lit. folk music), Roma became stars of *svatbarska muzika* (wedding music), a true countercultural phenomenon (Silverman, 2012). Subsequently, with the advent of *demokratiya* (democracy), this genre became—in a process of “fractal recursivity” (Gal and Irvine, 2019)—the new referent for “folk” as opposed to *calga*, a genre that is paradoxically associated both with Western capitalism and with “Oriental” Turkish and Roma dances. Today, Roma music is becoming increasingly popular, with “Gypsy” and “Balkan” being chosen by non-Roma bands as labels at international festivals. How do Roma musicians respond to these new trends in the cultural market? Which labels do they reclaim and which do they reject? By analyzing metadiscourses on performance, I seek to understand whether and how Kotel Roma musicians attempt to renegotiate (Spivak 1998; Bhabha 2012) their position in the face of changing historical contexts.

Camila Salvatore recently obtained a PhD in Sociolinguistics and General Anthropology at Université Paris Cité and Charles University Prague under the joint supervision of Cécile Canut and Yasar Abu Ghosh. The title of her dissertation was: “We Speak Clean Gypsy, I Am Pure Roma: Performing Difference through Linguistic and Artistic Practices in Kotel (Bulgaria)”. During her master's in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at the University of Turin, she conducted fieldwork in the neighborhood of Stolipinovo (Plovdiv) and collaborated with some of its inhabitants on a documentary. She recently completed an internship at CAS (Center for Advanced Study) in Sofia and is currently working on her postdoctoral proposal. She has volunteered for an ERRC (European Roma Rights Center) project detecting online hate speech, and she is an associate member of ERIAC (European Roma Institute for Art and Culture).

Panel IV

Karolina Válková (Discussant)

Her research specializes in the literary analysis of prose by Lusophone authors. In their works, she seeks points that illustrate the search for and discovery of national identity. This is often associated with the search for the personal identity of the main characters. Since 2017, Karolina has worked at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, where she teaches courses on literary theory and Lusophone literature. In 2018, she defended her dissertation entitled *The Transformation of House (An Analysis of House in 20th Century Portuguese Novels)*, which explored the conceptualization, representation, and metamorphosis of domestic space in the prose of Carlos de Oliveira, Vergílio Ferreira, and Lidia Jorge. She is the founder of the project 100 František / Jorge Listopad, which published a Czech-Portuguese collective monograph of the same name in 2021 and, in 2023, a book entitled *Jorge Listopad and František Listopad's Rosa Definitiva*, intended particularly for Portuguese readers.

1. Margaret G. Frohlich: “The Ethical Frame and Romani Identity in *El payo chac* and *Zambra*”

Two films, *El payo chac* [*The Non-Romani Jacques*] (2011, dir. Yago Leonard) and *Zambra* (2024, dir. José Sánchez Montes), engage the work and identity of photographer Jacques Leonard. His photographs from the 1950s to the 1970s create an archive of *gitano* life. The overall respect they demonstrate counters a long history of exoticizing Romani people as passive subjects available to an objectifying gaze. Leonard’s own life demonstrates the complexities of negotiating claims to Romani identity, as he is referred to as a *payo*, a *gitano*, half of each, and neither of the two, and he both claims and conceals his Romani heritage. Inhabiting the world of the cultural elite while also stepping to the side of it, able to document Romani people yet subject to the denial of his own Romani identity, Leonard did not have a simple relation to power. Despite these variations, the overall movement of Leonard’s life and work is toward an embrace of, and respect for, Romani culture. This paper explores how visual images function as more than imitations of reality in Leonard’s shift in identity and investigates the representation of Romani identity in relation to his life. I am interested in how filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha’s approach of “speaking nearby” serves as a conceptual framework for mapping how these films and Jacques Leonard’s work highlight Romani agency and create bridges of solidarity. The inner workings of how appropriation disempowers Romani people must be understood alongside ethical frames that echo Silvia Agüera’s call to “gitanizar el mundo” [“gypsyize the world”].

Margaret G. Frohlich specializes in 20th century and contemporary literature and film with a focus on the construction of national and sexual identities. She is the author of two books: *Sexual Diversity in Young Cuban Cinema* and *Framing the Margin: Nationality and Sexuality across Borders*, which won the international competition for the Victoria Urbano Monograph Prize of the Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Femenina Hispánica. Her articles have appeared in *The Journal of Language and Sexuality*, *Studies in Documentary Film*, *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas* (formerly *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*), *Letras Femeninas*, and *Romance Review*.

2. Ismael Cortés: “Performing the Other: Romani Identity and Cultural Extraction in *Els Zin-calós*.”

In pre-Civil War Barcelona, the Paral·lel—an intensely populated working-class district—served as a space where popular spectacle intersected with everyday social and political critique. Within this urban environment, classed and racialised identities were staged and made visible to publics navigating the city’s uneven geographies of labour, leisure, and exclusion. It is against this backdrop that *Els Zin-calós* (Vallmitjana, 1911) acquires critical significance, positioned at the crossroads between the performance culture of the Paral·lel and Juli Vallmitjana’s wider literary archive documenting the Gitanos of Montjuïc. Through realist prose, ethnographic fragments, and

dramatic works, Vallmitjana chronicled precarious labour, spatial dispossession and displacement, and persistent cultural misrecognition affecting Roma communities pushed to Barcelona's margins. *Els Zin-calós* becomes the most theatrically incisive extension of this archive, converting observational detail into performance and revealing the racialised and class-bound hierarchies underpinning urban modernity. Margarita Xirgu, the foremost antifascist actress of her generation, stands at the centre of this theatre play, her presence shaping how the city's social tensions were translated into performance. Dressed and made up as a Gitana, Xirgu mobilised expressive registers that exposed the workings of gendered cultural appropriation, showing how Romani aesthetics were selectively absorbed by non-Romani performers while Roma performers—men and women alike—remained excluded from comparable cultural visibility and authority.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and repetition within difference, this proposal examines how a representational space emerged through imitation that never fully aligns with its referent. This dynamic made visible how ethnicised and gendered identities could be placed onstage while real Romani communities were displaced from the very spaces where their identities were being enacted.

By reading *Els Zin-calós* alongside Vallmitjana's broader archive, this proposal shows how theatrical mimicry generated a field of cultural critique in which Romani identity was mobilised as artistic material while remaining an excluded cultural and political presence.

Ismael Cortés is the Executive Director of the Instituto de Cultura Gitana under the Ministry of Culture, Spain, and Associate Professor in the International Master's in Peace, Conflicts, and Development at the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace (UJI). He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Philosophy from the University of Granada, as well as a master's degree and a PhD in Peace, Conflicts, and Development Studies from UJI. His research has been conducted at Heidelberg University's Research Centre on Antigypsyism, the University of Nottingham's School of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, and the Romani Studies Programme at Central European University. From 2019 to 2023, he was a Member of Spain's Congress of Deputies, before serving as Senior Policy Advisor in the European Parliament. His contributions include Spain's State Pact against Antigypsyism, Penal Code reforms recognising antigypsyism, and international initiatives on tolerance and non-discrimination with the OSCE and the United Nations. He co-edited, together with Dr. Markus End, the anthology *Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe*. He serves on the Pakiv Board of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.

3. Lidia Merás and Tamara Moya: "Passing for Romani, Claimed as White: Lola Flores' Complex Ethnic Shifting Case"

Singer and actress Lola Flores (1923–1995) has been—and continues to be—an undisputed icon of Spanish national culture across nearly seven decades of media presence. Born in Jerez, an Andalusian town noted for the longstanding coexistence of Roma and Gadjé populations, and married to a Romani musician, Flores claimed in her memoirs to feel like a Roma woman "from the roots of my hair to the tips of my toes... This is evident in everything from my dancing to my

way of life” (Medina 1990, 25). Her career contributed significantly to the consolidation of the “white gypsy” trope in Spanish cinema, where for decades she portrayed the exotic, joyful, and spontaneous Roma woman who came to embody a model of “integration” (Woods Peiró 2012). Moreover, from her debut in *Martingala* (1940) to the deepfake appearance that featured her as a “decel” (dead celebrity) in a 2021 beer advertisement, her Romani origins—real or perceived—have remained a subject of public debate. While Flores adopted Romani cultural and ethnic markers associated with the “gyp*y” stereotype, even as she criticized other artists for doing the same, she was also a vocal ally of Spanish Roma and other marginalized groups, particularly queer and trans communities, and she herself faced anti-Romani discrimination. In recent years, Roma activists have acknowledged her support and embraced her as one of their own, whereas members of the majority society who admire her artistic legacy publicly assert her whiteness. Her granddaughter Alba Flores (known for *Locked Up* and *Money Heist*) has defended Lola’s Romani self-identification precisely because she chose to feel pride in identifying as Roma despite the racism of the society around her.

Lidia Merás is a film and art historian at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. She has published widely on European cinema, contemporary art, gender studies, and documentary. Since 2002, she has served as a member of the editorial staff of film the journal *Secuencias*. Before joining UAM, Merás taught at Royal Holloway (University of London), Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona), and Universidad Carlos III (Madrid). She is the coordinator of the research group DeVisiones: Discourses, Genealogies and Practices in Contemporary Visual Arts at UAM and vice-coordinator of the Master’s in Contemporary Art History and Visual Culture (UAM/UCM/Reina Sofia Museum). She currently leads the research project *DocRoma* (2020-T1/HUM-20231) on the representation of Spanish Roma in documentary films, television, and new media (docroma.org).

Tamara Moya holds a PhD in Media Research and is a member of the TECMERIN research group. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Universidad Carlos III of Madrid, where she teaches subjects related to Film Studies, Documentary and Media Technology. Her research focuses on cinema, self-representation, racialization, ethnicities, and decoloniality. She is currently conducting her research within the framework of the project “From Francoism to Democracy through Film Archives (1969-1986): Retrieving, Preserving and Disseminating” (PID2024-156778NB-I00).

Conveners

Mariana Sabino Salazar, Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences; Karolina Válová, Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences

Hosting Institutions

Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences; Prague Center for Romani Histories at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University; CEFRES - Centre français de recherche en sciences sociales, Prague

Funding acknowledgment

Supported by the Czech Academy of Sciences' Lumina Quaeruntur Fellowship - project Romani Atlantic: Transcontinental Logic of Ethno-Racial Identities (LQ300582201), Strategy AV21 - Identities in the World of Wars and Crises and the ERC project Inclusive History of EastCentral Europe: Mid-19th Century to Present (N.:101199298).

