

**RE-THINKING ROMA RESISTANCE  
THROUGHOUT HISTORY:  
RECOUNTING STORIES  
OF STRENGTH AND BRAVERY**



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## **Chapter 8**

# **“From Roma Slavery to World War II – Roma Resistance in Romania”**

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### **Introduction**

Roma resistance is a relatively new topic in the historiographical landscape. It marks a departure from the traditional manner in which Roma have been portrayed as “perpetual victims”, particularly in association with three major historical events: slavery in Romanian, the Holocaust and forced assimilation initiated by the Communist regime in post-war Romania.

A closer look at the above-mentioned historical periods shows that an essential element of the narrative is missing, namely the Roma position towards the institutions or regimes that exploited or oppressed them. Take, for instance, the institution of slavery. Some scholars claim that the 500-year-long period of slavery in the Romanian Principalities contributed to preserving Romani language and cultural identity in Romania. For example, Damian argues: “Here they lived under a proper juridical regime, the only place in Europe where they received a particular legislation that offered them the liberty to conserve their identity” (Damian 2018).

With regards to the Holocaust, Roma survivors are still confronted today with denial of their genocide. This is one of the main reasons I place such high value on the conservation of oral testimonies of the Roma Holocaust collected through interviews with Roma survivors. In 2007, when I started collecting interviews with Roma who survived the 1942 deportations, I did not prioritise asking them about the forms of resistance in Transnistria. Still, they always took care to mention them to me and to bring them to my attention. In this context, discussions about Roma resistance are critical since it allows the “other” side of the history to emerge.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Roma, despite the persecution they suffered in Romania, refused to be relegated to a passive role (being just “spectators of their history”). Instead, they reacted to persecution by engaging in two forms of resistance: institutional and cultural. The definition of resistance that I will use in my research has two: first, an institutional form through which Roma victims tried to seek some form of redress for the injustice suffered, and second, a cultural form through which they attempted to preserve the memory of the injustice they suffered.

Starting with a number of archival documents regarding Roma slavery, which I identified in the period 2015-2018, I will first make a brief presentation of forms of resistance during slavery in the Romanian Principalities, to demonstrate that Roma, as a people, reacted to almost every form of oppression to which they were subjected. I will use qualitative methods to examine the written (archival) and oral (interviews) sources pertaining to the period of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

## **Literature review**

In Romania, the academic discussions regarding Roma slavery are still in their early stages. Existing literature favours political and legal developments during the first half of the 19th century, particularly the abolitionist measures and emancipatory laws adopted by Moldova and Wallachia (Achim and Tomi 2010; Ionescu 2000). Studies concerning the Roma’s demographic evolution and social history in Romanian Principalities remain scarce (Mateescu 2015). One of the things most of these studies have in common is their treatment of Roma as “passive objects”. Conversely, my research attempts to restore Roma’s voices in 19th-century debates concerning the adoption of emancipation laws. More concretely, I am bringing to the readers’ attention the role of Romani slaves’ formal requests for legal emancipation in Wallachian courts in the broader struggle for resisting enslavement. Sadly, this is not a very well-known fact in Romanian historiography. Several other 19th century cases of demands for freedom made by Romani slaves in court have remained largely

1           The archival documents were transcribed from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet by Dr. Claudiu Turcitu. I would also like to thank Chiriac Bogdan for revising the English translation of the Romanian archival documents.

unresearched. Taking advantage of more recent discoveries in the Central Romanian National Archives, my article intends to address this gap in existing knowledge.

I believe such an initiative could not be more relevant and timely, given the current state of remembrance of slavery in Romania. On February 20, 2011, the Romanian Parliament voted to mark the day as a national day of commemoration to mark the abolition of Roma slavery. However, this commendable initiative has not been accompanied by wider awareness-raising efforts to ensure the dissemination of accurate information concerning this historical phenomenon. There are still several controversial, unresolved points in academic and public debates concerning this topic, for example, the frequent assimilation of slavery with other medieval forms of social and economic dependence such as indentured serfdom, which serve to minimize or even deny the damaging, long-lasting effects of slavery on the Roma population and on relations between Roma and non-Roma. In a sense, the lack of public awareness of what slavery represented perpetuates the ambiguity surrounding the concept itself. Slavery seems to have become normalized in dominant perceptions of Roma as a marginalized and excluded minority. A lack of policies to preserve the memory of slavery at the national level has weakened the intercultural dialogue between Roma and non-Roma. It has also strengthened nationalist ideas that claim that ethnic Romanians are the only inhabitants entitled to stake a historical claim on Romanian territory.

Regarding the history of Roma living in Romania, reconciliation with the past has not yet taken place. No monument of slavery has been erected in urban public spaces in Romania, even though this shameful institution lasted for five centuries and its long-term economic, social and cultural effects continue to persist.<sup>2</sup> However, a few salutary steps have taken in recent years to address this situation, most notably the inclusion of new information concerning Roma slavery and the Holocaust in the history curriculum for secondary schools.

2 See the exhibition “164 years since the abolition of Roma slavery – Oral maps from the present” organised in 2020 by “Romane Rodimata” Centre for Cultural and Social Research.



## **Institutional forms of resistance during slavery: the case of Ioana Tinculeasa Rudăreasa**

Between the late 14th and early 19th century, relations between slaves, masters and other inhabitants of the Romanian Principalities were regulated by both customary and written laws. In the eyes of the law, slaves were considered the property of their masters, be they the princes that ruled the land, rich monasteries or powerful noblemen (boyars), and represented a source of free and cheap labour. The masters' dominion also extended over the slaves' marital choices, sometimes with devastating effects. One Roma woman, Ioana Tinculeasa Rudăreasa, a determined female slave challenged her former masters' ownership claims over hers and her children's freedom in a court of law. I decided to present this particular case because I consider it representative of several other Romani slaves' efforts to challenge their masters through the legal means available to them at that time (Furtună 2019).

In 1843, against the backdrop of the emancipation of Roma slaves belonging to the Crown (state slaves), a Romani woman named Ioana Rudăreasa, a slave belonging to the Brăiloiu boyar family, filed a lawsuit against her master in hopes of gaining freedom. Born a slave of the Crown, she was forced to marry Nicolae Cincea in her youth, a slave belonging to the Brăiloiu boyar family. According to the law of the land, every wife had to assume her husband's legal status. Rudăreasa thus became a slave belonging to the Brăiloiu family. However, after the declaration of the emancipation law of 1843 in Wallachia, Rudăreasa claimed she had been born a slave of the Crown, and so the new law should extend to herself and her six children born out of the marriage with Cincea.

The trial with the Brăiloiu family lasted for more than ten years. A local tribunal (court of first instance) ruled in favour of Rudăreasa and declared her a free woman in 1845. However, the defendant (boyar Brăiloiu) contested the decision and pushed the case to be heard by an appeals court. This led to the revision of the entire case. Rudăreasa brought witnesses to court that she knew from childhood, but their testimony was dismissed as slaves did not have the right to bear testimony before a court of law. The appeals court reversed the initial ruling of the local tribunal in 1847, ruling that Rudăreasa was indeed a slave of the Brăiloiu family and thus, the law of emancipation did not extend to her. But she did not give up hope and decided, with the help of a lawyer, to present her case before the Supreme Court of Wallachia. In a

surprising turn of events, this court ruled in Rudăreasa's favour, declaring her once and for all "free from slavery". Here is an excerpt from the court decision, issued on October 13, 1858:

To the Honorable Minister of Justice,

The President of the Dâmbovița Court,

Following the honoured Minister of Justice's order no. 1671 of July 17, 1853, fulfilled by the honourable local administration's instructions by ordinance no. 4641 of July 27, the same year, which was confirmed by the provisions included in decision no. 18, hereby declares free of slavery the individuals involved in the trial. As there is no need for any further procedures, the presidency of the court respectfully submits these papers to the Ministry following the adjourning of the proceedings [...].<sup>3</sup>

In close to ten years of legal wrangling resulting in a lengthy paper trail, there is no indication of Rudăreasa's intention to ever resign in the face of her powerful boyar owner. These records (over 40 pages of hand-written documents detailing Rudăreasa's appearances in court and her repeated pleas for freedom for her and her six children are a testimony of her resolve to pursue the fight for freedom, despite overwhelming odds. Considering that the initial suit was filed in December 1843, nine months after Crown slaves had been legally emancipated (March 1843), it is clear Rudăreasa kept up with the times she lived in and took advantage of new legal opportunities to secure her freedom.

The early 19th century archives of the Ministry of Justice contain several other petitions for emancipation filed by Romani slaves, an indicator that they were attempting to use the courts of law to legally escape slavery to an extent never known before. The list of "freedom suit files" is quite long. Among them are petitions issued by Maria "the Gypsy" for the emancipation of her two children owned by Serdar Nicolae Nica; another by Ioana<sup>4</sup>, Rada's daughter

3 Central National Historical Archives of Romania, Collection Ministry of Justice, Department of Civil Justice, Inventory number, 2393, documentary no. 567, available online at <http://sclavia-romilor.gov.ro/items/show/2677> - Online database of National Centre of Roma Culture from Romania, project coordinator Adrian-Nicolae Furtună.

4 In the first half of the 19th century, no surnames were given in the Romanian Lands, the identification of persons was still made on genealogical, paternal in general, or maternal lines as in the present case, mentioning the father's or mother's first name after the first name of the person concerned.

who filed suit against Sergeant Zincă Carabuloaia; and the formal request for emancipation made by the daughter of late Musa “the Gypsy” who was owned by Teodor Văcărescu.<sup>5</sup>

These documents, stored for more than a century in improper conditions, can today be found in the repositories of the Central National Historical Archives of Romania. Often regarded as “the graveyard of memory”, these archives need to be researched in-depth to bring back to life the voices of other Romani slaves who struggled to gain their freedom. Such initiatives are likely to cast a new light on the destiny of brave men and women who, perhaps more than others, deserve posterity’s recognition.

## **Forms of resistance among Roma during the Holocaust in Romania**

Just as they had done under conditions of slavery in Romania, Roma responded to persecution and injustice with strategies of resistance during the Holocaust.

In this section, I highlight the main forms of Roma resistance, i.e., institutional and cultural, during the Holocaust in Romania. I will also discuss the forms of resistance manifested by the daring escapes from the Transnistrian camps and the forms of armed resistance in which Roma engaged. First, I will analyse institutional forms of resistance, in the form of petitions by Roma deportees or their relatives exempt from deportation, addressed to Marshal Ion Antonescu, the de facto ruler of Romania during 1940-1944. These petitions were mainly written by Roma men who had been drafted and were serving in the Romanian Army ranks and who requested the repatriation of their families. Some of these petitions were drawn up by individuals; others were filled in a group’s name (collective petitions). Second, I will discuss selected forms of cultural resistance, namely the artistic productions of Roma deported to Transnistria. I will focus primarily on several folk songs and poems that I collected during my interviews with Roma Holocaust survivors. I will also distinguish between cultural forms of resistance among sedentary and nomadic Roma.

5 Available online on <http://sclavia-romilor.gov.ro>

## **Institutional forms of Roma resistance during the Holocaust in Romania**

The analysis of petitions, a form of Romani resistance against the Antonescu regime's deportation measures during World War II, has already been discussed in other works (Chiriac 2018). The classification proposed by Chiriac takes into consideration the following criteria: 1) petitions written by those Roma who had been deported to Transnistria in 1942, seeking to have the deportation measure rescinded by the Romanian authorities; 2) petitions written by Roma men and women whose family members were deported while they were away from home, either plying their trades, visiting relatives or, in the case of some men, serving in the army; 3) petitions drafted by Roma individuals or groups who had been exempt from deportations in 1942, but still lived under the threat of being deported to Transnistria. This classification is based on the degree to which petitioners were affected by the deportation orders.

The alternative classification I suggest assigns a distinct place to the petitions sent by Romani soldiers, whose families were deported to Transnistria. I am proposing this because the said petitions, when examined through the lens of eugenic and biopolitical theories, help us acquire a deeper understanding of the racial underpinnings of the deportation policies. During that time, military service was considered "a service of honour", from which Jewish men were excluded as a result of the adoption of racial laws in Romania (August 8, 1940). This exclusion did not extend to the Roma population. Thus, the abusive deportation of Romani soldiers' families in 1942 raised a set of special problems for the central authorities in Bucharest. According to Marshal Antonescu's orders, the families of soldiers were to be exempt from deportation. However, the local authorities took advantage of the ambiguities in the original deportation orders and included some of these families in the category of "nomads" or "undesirable" Roma, thus contributing to their inclusion on the list of deportees. This misinterpretation of the central authorities' orders produced a number of problems that the system did not anticipate. Some of the principles of the state have been violated, and several special commissions were established to assess the petitions submitted by Roma claiming to have been erroneously included on the deportation lists.

Most of these petitions were addressed to Marshal Ion Antonescu, King Mihai or Queen Mother Elena. A report written by the General Inspectorate

of the Gendarmerie in December 1942 showed that 498 Roma men (war invalids, discharged soldiers or even some on active duty) were deported between June and December 1942, together with their wives and children, amounting to a total of 3,678 people.<sup>6</sup> Here is a translation of soldier Nae C. Ilie's petition to Marshal Ion Antonescu:

Dear Mister Marshal,

I, the undersigned soldier Nae C. Ilie, Contingent 1938, from the 1st Pioneers Regiment, currently residing in Craiova, Cantemir Street, Nr. 108, come to you, Your Excellency, with tears in my eyes to submit the following complaint.

I have been serving from the time the war was declared until the present day when I was discharged from the army. I participated in all the battles [on the Eastern front]. I am married with three children and have three younger brothers.

Upon my return from the front, I was surprised to find that my family was not at home. My wife had been wandering up and down the roads, starving with our young children.

My parents, namely Stan Gheorghe and his entire family had been sent to Transnistria; the circumstances being of such a nature.<sup>7</sup>

I appeal to you for clemency and request to have my parents brought back to Craiova, considering that my father was neither a robber nor a burglar, but a simple, hardworking man.

At your orders!

The undersigned, Soldier, Nae Ilie.<sup>8</sup>

The tone of this petition is reserved, calm and gentle but emphasises the injustice suffered. One fact to keep in mind is that the soldiers were addressing the supreme leader of the army. The argument advanced by these Roma soldiers was that they were loyal to the fatherland, but the homeland had not

6 ANR, fund IGJ, file no. 43/1943, vol. II, page 87 (see also V. Achim, 2004, vol. II, doc. nr. 278, p. 76- 77).

7 The petition is formulated so as not to harm the authority and decisions of Marshal Ion Antonescu towards the Roma.

8 ANR, fund DGP, file no. 191, page 98, available on-line on [www.rholo.research-center-rodimata.com](http://www.rholo.research-center-rodimata.com).

been faithful to them as their families suffered while they sacrificed their blood and lives for Romania. Advancing such an argument was a show of courage in the eyes of a dictatorial regime which sought to reduce Roma soldiers to the status of obedient fighting machines and not faithful “sons of the fatherland” who deserved the same honours as Romanian soldiers. The petitions submitted by Roma soldiers during wartime represent, as a group, a major act of resistance against a repressive regime that condemned them to hunger, cold and, eventually, death. By all intents and purpose, these petitions helped unveil the racial underpinnings of the ideology fashioned by the wartime Antonescu regime, pointing to the fact that the deportations of Roma in 1942 were based on racial rather than social criteria.

The analysis of this special case provides us with the necessary tools to examine the phenomenon of Roma deportations to Transnistria through the lens of eugenic and racial theories. By deporting Roma families who had at least one member serving in the army, the Romanian authorities reluctantly admitted that “an error” had been made. By deporting thousands of Romani wives and children while their fathers, husbands and sons were shedding their blood for the fatherland, a number of eugenic and biopolitical core principles of the wartime establishment of the Romanian state were violated.

During the Antonescu regime, the concept of “neam” (translated as “nation” in English) became the framework for redefining and rebuilding a stronger, more racially homogenous Romanian nation. “Neam” was defined as the organic relation between the individual and their fatherland, ancestral traditions, history and blood. The Antonescu regime showed a willingness to include certain groups of Roma in the Romanian nation (“neamul românesc”) mainly because the long period of slavery in the Romanian Principalities had accelerated their assimilation and intermixture with the Romanian population. A number of Romanian researchers in the field of demographics and biopolitics stressed that it was almost “impossible” to distinguish these “half-mixed Gypsies” from the mainstream Romanians. However, nomadic Roma, who had conserved many of their traditional cultural and linguistic traits and showed reluctance to marry outside their communities were labelled as “unassimilable” and were targeted for deportation measures, along with sedentary Roma categorised as extremely poor and perceived as “dangerous” on account of their so-called “propensity” to mix with ethnical Romanians. In line with these principles, all Roma men enrolled in the Romanian Army during World War II were seen as part of the Romanian nation on account of their willing-



ness to defend the fatherland.

Upon realising the extent of the problem, the Romanian authorities decided, in the first instance, to remove all nomadic Roma from the army. Moreover, a distinction needs to be made between individual and collective petitions. On the one hand, individual petitions were sent by Roma who wanted to intervene on behalf of family members on deportation lists or that had already been deported to Transnistria in 1942. Such is the case of a Roma locksmith from Călărași, who issued a petition addressed to Marshal Antonescu for the repatriation of a family member - his 88-year-old mother in law:

Dear Mister Marshal,

I, the undersigned, Grigore M. Dobre, a locksmith at the Călărași-Ialomița Depot, Plevna street Nr. 53, in the name of justice and truth and with the deepest respect, come to you with tears in my eyes to ask the following:

On September 9 this year, by order of the Călărași Police, my mother-in-law Neacșa Drăgan, aged 88, was taken from her house without prior notice and sent to Transnistria. I have no intention of opposing the measures taken by the authorities because I have always been a law-abiding person, but I consider that an injustice was committed when an 88-year-old woman was forcibly removed from her home, a woman who owns property in Călărași, who is, hence, not a beggar and who could not be of any use in Transnistria at her age, especially since she can't walk because of her old age.

Based on the above-mentioned reasons, I wholeheartedly ask you, Mr. Marshal, to issue an order to the competent authorities for the repatriation of my mother-in-law to her home, considering that in doing so, you will have done a great act of justice, knowing that she will be taken care of.

My deepest respect,

The undersigned, Grigore. N. Double.<sup>9</sup>

Archival records indicate that this petition, together with many others, was examined on a case-by-case basis by the competent authorities. The documentary trails left show that these petitions managed to bring the Romanian authorities' attention to the injustices suffered by hundreds and hundreds of

9 ANR, fund DGP, file no. 190, page 145, available on-line on [www.rholo.research-center-rodimata.com](http://www.rholo.research-center-rodimata.com).

Romani families. Through these documents, Roma soldiers and war veterans had the audacity to criticise the failings of the dictatorial Antonescu regime, exposing the abominable deeds perpetrated by the local policemen and gendarmes against them and their families. Grigore M. Dobre, in his petition, exposed such abuse when he emphasised that his elderly and ill mother-in-law, “an 88-year-old woman was forcibly removed from her home”.

With regards to collective petitions, I have identified in the archives a telling example (a proper term of reference) of Romani resistance during World War II. The document discovered is, in fact, a hand-written complaint written on a postcard by a group of Roma from Pitești, deported to the Iedorofca commune in Transnistria. The postcard was addressed to Marshal Antonescu and contained several memorable words that cast a crude light on the discrepancy between vain promises made by the local authorities prior to the deportations (the many things that “they will receive in Transnistria”) and the sad reality of life in Transnistria. The words “do not discard us like rags” illustrate the cruel and unjust treatment they received at the hands of the Antonescu regime. The following is the petition translated by myself.

Dear Mister Marshal,

Respectfully, we Gypsy owners from Pitesti, who served for the nation during the Great War, and now, during the Holy War for the enlargement of our beautiful Romania, come to you with a heart torn by grief. We did not sell out our country - we fought to keep it, and even now we still cry: let us fight! [for the fatherland] instead of being left on the fields, starving to death, with our children full of lice, beaten by the gendarmes and, without any shelter, numb from the cold. Excellency, we beseech you [in] your kindness, to adopt measures to have us returned to our homes. Keeping in mind that we have no criminal records and are honest people, do not discard us like rags. We ask you forthrightly, without any reservation, to send us into battle.

Long live, Romania! Long live His Majesty, King Mihai I! Long live His Excellency, Marshal Antonescu!

The undersigned, Gypsy owners from Pitești,  
Argeș County, Iedorofca commune, Ociakov County  
Via Odessa station.<sup>10</sup>

10 ANR, fund DGP, file no. 192/1942, page 105 – 105v, available on-line on [www.rholo.researchcenter-rodinata.com](http://www.rholo.researchcenter-rodinata.com).

The document presented here is an artefact of great importance to the collective memory of Roma deportations due to the scarcity of collective petitions sent directly from forced labour camps or villages from Transnistria. Conversely, the number of collective petitions sent by groups of Roma who lived in fear of being deported is significantly higher. The petitions sent by Roma from Moinești, a town from Bacău County, is telling. The local police force, in a curious display of “excess zeal”, decided to include virtually the entire local Roma community on the list of deportees in 1942. Fear of being deported among the anxious Roma led them to write a collective petition to the Council of Ministers, asking to be exempted from the deportation orders on account of the fact that they had completed their military duty for the country, and were loyal citizens who owned properties and businesses in Moinești.<sup>11</sup>

These two collective petitions show that Roma did not fit the role of “passive victims” and mobilised, whether in Transnistria or in Romania, to protest either despicable living conditions in the labour camps or the abuses perpetrated by the local police forces tasked with drawing up the list of Romani deportees. Despite these brave protests, Roma efforts did not usually produce immediate or concrete reactions from the authorities. Since their pleas for repatriation were not heard, many Roma resorted to other means to save their families from hunger, cold and, eventually, death, for example by escaping from Transnistrian camps.

### **Escaping from Transnistrian camps – other form of resistance during the Holocaust in Romania**

The issue of escapes created serious problems for the authorities in Transnistria, but also for those in Romania. To escape from the labour camps and secure passage across the borders, some Roma offered bribes to the train drivers and soldiers guarding them. Such an episode is presented in my book “Roma from Romania and the Holocaust: history, theory, culture” (Furtună 2018). This collection of oral testimonies includes an interview with two survivors: Dura Lențica and Stratan Valentina from Pietriș village, located in Iași County. Lențica recounted how her father escaped from the Covalevca camp and arrived at his home in Romania, where he got hold of some money and

11 National Archives of Romania, Fund: General Directorate of Police, file 189/1942, tabs 6-31

then returned to Transnistria to secure the escape of his whole family:

DURA: All of his four brothers were sent to Transnistria, including their wives and children. He was lucky. He managed to escape, and left us there, in Bug, travelling from Covalevca to Pietriș. We had an uncle living in a village near Pietriș, where he sold his cows and oxen. With the money he returned to Bug so that we too could escape, as we needed to bribe soldiers to escape through the fields.

FURTUNĂ: But how did he manage to escape from Bug?

DURA: In hiding, in the front of the train, where the locomotive was held.

FURTUNĂ: In the locomotive?

DURA: Yes, in the locomotive. He gave some money to the train driver and he hid him there. They didn't search there. That's how he got to Romania. He was almost home when the police caught him and almost beat him to death. They made him strip and struck him on his backside. Left him pale as death. He returned to us, crying, "I'm done, they murdered me!"

FURTUNĂ: But did they release him?

DURA: Yes, they did. They beat him close to death, but they released him. Father cried, "Let me go, I have kids there!" The Romanian authorities asked him, "Where?" "In that village," replied my father. "Then you better go straight there," they replied. "Yes, I will go straight there!" He responded. And they released him. He was pale as death when he reached home. He was crying by the time he arrived. But at least they didn't take his money. He brought us all the money."

Roma who escaped from the Transnistrian camps and were captured by the authorities were sent back to Transnistria; the testimony of two survivors confirming this. Lențița Dura's father returned clandestinely to Romania to obtain enough money from his relatives to ensure the return of his entire family from Transnistria. The money was needed to pay-off soldiers who were demanding higher than bribes than usual to turn a blind eye to the escape of an entire Romani family.

Apparently, the Roma who was behind this daring escape plan from the Kovaliovca camp in the Odessa region was Vasile Stratan, Dura Lențița's and Valentina Stratan's late uncle (the two sisters I interviewed). The entire family was deported from Pietriș village in former Fălciu County (nowadays in Iași County). In 2009, in an interview with Radu Alexandrina, a Roma survivor from Gulia village, Suceava County, she mentions a certain Vasile Stratan as an important figure in the Kovaliovca camp, describing him as having "a big pillow full of Romanian money" (Furtună 2015, 87). A report issued by the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie in 1944 showed that more than 35 people returned clandestinely to Pietriș village from Transnistria; Vasile

Stratan and his brothers, Dumitru Stratan and Gheorghe Stratan were mentioned in this document.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that this was a mass Roma escape from Pietriș (Dolhești) from the Kovaliovca camp. Other sources of oral history reported dozens of other cases of Roma escapees from Transnistria (V. Achim 2004, 324-327).

Iancu Zîmziana, a Holocaust survivor from Fața Luncii neighbourhood (Craiova), remembers one method for returning home was to secure blank repatriation tickets by bribing the Romanian authorities issuing them. Such tickets were not filled with the name and surname of the person whose repatriation was approved by the authorities, in order to facilitate the efforts to forge the official stamps.

### **Forms of armed resistance**

Regarding armed resistance, the historical sources regarding the deportation of Roma to Transnistria reveals only one such instance. In 1942, a group of 50-60 Roma from Preajba village attacked the gendarmes who had arrested Petre Moarte, a Roma from their community, in preparation for his deportation. Up to the present day, it is the only known case of mass revolt during the evacuations to Transnistria. Seven of the above-mentioned Roma, considered leaders of the rebellion, were arrested and deported without any other formalities to Transnistria as punishment for this “iniquity”.

### **Cultural forms of resistance among the Roma deported in Transnistria during the Holocaust in Romania**

Conserving the memory of Roma Holocaust through cultural artefacts such as poems or songs constitutes a form of resistance. Since 2007, I started collecting interviews with Roma survivors of the deportation to Transnistria, allowing me to discover different folk songs that can be interpreted as a form of cultural mnemonics regarding the Roma Holocaust in Romania.

One example of a mnemonic device that I wish to present is a poem collected from a Holocaust survivor, Kvec Bacro, deported in June 1942 on account of being a nomadic Roma. Bacro was born in 1931 in Poland in a family of no-

madic Kalderash<sup>13</sup>. After the invasion and occupation of Poland during 1939, as many as 50,000 Poles, military and civilians took refuge from the Nazi oppression in Romania. As a result, for Bacro, aged 11, Romania became his new home, but only for a short while. In June of 1942, the Romanian state decided to deport more than 25,000 nomadic and sedentary Roma to Transnistria, including Bacro and his family.

After surviving the horrors of Transnistria, Bacro became aware of the need of preserving the memories of the Roma deportees. In an act of cultural resistance, he established a museum in his home to ensure the preservation of the memory of nomadic life among the Roma, and the tragedy of the deportations to Transnistria. The ad-hoc “museum” is located in one of the rooms of his house, on the first floor. He invites his grandchildren and great-grandchildren inside his museum and recites to them this poem:

Mar Devla le'Antoneskos	May God strike Antonescu
Vi les, vi leske karaja	Him and his soldiers
Ke ov dinea ordin pe-l gava	Because he gave orders concerning the villages
Te tzirden le Romen sea	To take all the Roma nations
Le Romen le nomatza	The Roma, the nomads
Kai ci keren e armata	Who were not drafted into the ar
Nakhabghia len trjn paja	He crossed them over three water
Thaj shutea len ando-l lagărea.	And he put them in the camps

The poem starts by cursing Marshal Ion Antonescu and his acolytes because he was responsible for the deportation of the nomadic Roma. In reference to the fact that the order concerned “all the villages, the poem underlines that the life of nomadic Roma in that period was closely linked to the rural Romanian population, who generally benefited from the crafts practised by Kalderash Roma. Moreover, the poem makes a very important distinction between the deportation of the nomadic and the sedentary Roma. The latter were not deported en masse in September 1942, like the nomads were a few months before. The reference to the “three waters” refers to the rivers Prut, Dniester and Bug that nomadic Roma had to cross during the deportations. The last line of the poem can be considered as a statement against those who still deny the Roma Holocaust, stating clearly that the nomads were interned

13 The Kalderash are a nomadic sub-group of Roma who were traditionally tinsmiths who made various household objects such as cauldrons, pots and boilers for distilling alcohol.



in camps. Lastly, the poem shows the distinguishing trait of nomadic Roma was that they were not drafted in the army. In the eyes of most nomads, this was the main reasons they were targeted for deportation. It is also important to stress that these songs make the link between eugenic ideology and Roma folklore, showing that Roma understood their deportation as being based on racial as opposed to social criteria.

However, there are archival documents showing that there were many nomadic Roma serving in the Romanian Army in 1942. For example, the report no. 219,701 / 942 of the Ministry of National Defense, General Staff, Section II, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, signed by Lt. Colonel V. Nicolae, head of the section, states the following:

I am honoured to announce that the units continue to report the dissatisfaction of the concentrated nomadic Gypsies, whose families have been sent east of the Dniester.” A report written by the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie on September 5, 1942, stated that “[t]he execution of the evacuation of nomadic Gypsies in Transnistria found that among those evacuated were some families whose heads of families were at the date of evacuation mobilized on the front. [...] The evacuation of these families was done on the grounds that they lived in dwellings (sălașe), from which they did not want to separate and without the support of which they could not [have] earned their living alone.” This report recommended a series of remedial measure: “[...]collecting a statement from the families who openly consent to being colonized separately from the other nomadic Gypsies; [...] granting special material advantages, i.e. land, the possibility of living and working; [...] In this way we will see a distinction made by the state between the nomadic Gypsies fighting on the front and the others and through this recognition, the state has nothing to lose.

With regards to cultural forms of resistance among sedentary Roma, I have also collected a number of songs and poems from several Holocaust survivors. Produced by Roma who survived deportation, these forms of folklore hold a special place in my Holocaust research projects. In effect, researchers are virtually racing against time to collect as many interviews as possible from a slowly disappearing Romani population group, i.e., Holocaust survivors aged 75 or even older. Radu Ioanid was one of the first that collected interviews at the beginning of the 1990s. The interviews he published (Ioanid, Kelso and Cioabă 2009) have a higher accuracy due to the fact that the informers were closer to the tragic events that took place during World War II. For example, a survivor he interviewed during the 1990s was typically aged between 70 and 80, meaning that he or she was in his early 20s or early 30s during

the wartime deportations to Transnistria (1942-1944). Thus, the recollections of the interviewed Holocaust survivors during the 1990s were more detailed compared with the interviews I have been conducting since 2007. Despite this fact, I was able to collect from Radu Alexandrina (aged 82 in 2007), a Roma Holocaust survivor, a folk song that resumes the entire phenomena of Roma deportations through the eyes of the victims:

Foaie verde de-avărmeasă  
Sâmbătă de dimineață,  
Mi-a sosit jandarmii-n casă,  
N-a sosit ca să mai stea  
A sosit ca să ne ia  
Măi țigane: "Hai la Bug!",  
"Iaca sula, nu mă duc!",  
La Transmisia frumoasă,  
Să vă dea pământ și casă,  
Pământ, case nu ne-a dat,  
În colhozuri ne-a băgat,  
Și să vezi țigăncile cum fac  
mămăligile  
Dar să vezi rusoaicile cum își  
plâng căsuțele  
Brigadiru după noi, cu măciuca  
pusă-n mână  
Să facem robotă bună  
Să facem robotă bună

Green leaf of Gratiola  
Saturday in the morning  
The Gendarmes came into my house  
They didn't come to stay, oh  
They came to take us away, oh  
You Gypsy, come with us to Bug  
Well, look at me, I don't want to  
To the beautiful Transmission  
To receive land and houses  
Land and houses they didn't give us, oh  
To the collective farms they took us, oh  
You can see the Gypsy women, oh, How they're  
making maize porridges, oh,  
But you should see the Russian women, oh,  
How they cry after their houses, na na na  
The brigadier was after us With a club in his  
hand, oh  
So that we do a good job  
So that we do a good job

This song reflects the abruptness of the entire deportation operations in 1942. The evocation of "beautiful Transnistria" and the fact that the Roma were promised lands and houses once they arrived in Transnistria are related to the general rumour launched by certain gendarmes and village mayors to convince Roma that they were supposed to be "settled", not "deported" to Transnistria. Some Roma, particularly those in need, believed this rumour and decided to join the deportation convoys.

The next line of the poem shows how disillusioned the Roma deportees were when they were confronted with the harsh reality of life in Transnistria. Not only they did not receive land or houses, but they were forced to work in labour camps under the brutal supervision of local gendarmes. It should be noted that the Roma did not exclusively lament their cruel fate, but also

that of the local Ukrainian population who were forcefully evicted from their homes. The song ends with mentioning the harsh labour regimen to which the deportees were subjected. This song can be seen as an organic reaction to the treatment Romani deportees were subjected to, and a form of resistance in the Transnistrian camps. Compared to the forms of institutional resistance (petitions, letters, memoirs), these forms of cultural resistance manage to better capture certain aspects of the everyday difficulties experienced by Romani deportees in Transnistria.

## Conclusions

My study aimed to demonstrate that Roma, throughout much of their history, were not passive in the face of the oppression to which they were subjected. The forms of resistance developed by Roma in Romania under slavery and through to the Holocaust assumed two main forms: institutional and cultural. The use of institutional forms of resistance during slavery shows that Roma desired to acquire the same rights conferred to “free people”, while during the Holocaust they illustrate a certain desire to return to normalcy and be treated as “regular citizens”. There are no official statistics that centralised the number of freedom case trials. Similarly, we do not know the total number of petitions sent by Roma deportees and their relatives asking for repatriation or, respectively, exemption from deportation orders. What we do know is that the number of Roma petitioners is significant, and archival sources support this claim.

In addition, the official documents written by members of the wartime Antonescu regime need to be complemented by oral sources produced by Roma Holocaust survivors. Most of the official documents preserved in Romanian archives were written from the oppressors’ perspective, being totally at odds with the moving testimonies produced by Roma deportees. However, one should not overlook the difficulties raised by interviewing a Holocaust survivor almost 80 years after the deportations took place. Nonetheless, the details that might be gleaned from such interviews are indeed important for reconstructing Romani resistance acts in the camps of Transnistria. Cultural manifestations, such as songs and poems, have the role of preserving memory at the community level and constitute a form of spiritual resistance. Specific examples of songs and poems of the sedentary and nomadic Roma demon-

strate forms of Roma cultural resistance.

My essay highlighted the main forms of Roma resistance during slavery and the Holocaust. It falls to our generation to preserve and publicly promote the fact that Roma, historically, were not passive, but have always strove to preserve their dignity and freedom in the face of a system that was against them, even when faced with insurmountable odds.