

HUMAK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract <p>This study focuses on the experiences of Roma artists on how being Roma displays itself in their art, what their cultural identity is, and how the Roma population sees them and their art. The focus group consists of six Roma people who make, or have made their living in the arts. They are three men and three women between the ages of 37 and 69. The research material consists of discussion I had with these individuals that loosely followed the structure of a theme interview I created, as well as some magazine articles. I have also used some results from a survey conducted by The Finnish League for Human Rights (later FLHR) titled 'Roma participation and inclusion on culture services in Finland'.</p> <p>The purpose of the study is to find out how artists experience their own ethnicity and identity. Do they feel they are more artists than Roma, or are these even opposing themes? The theoretical framework of this study is loosely based on Benedict Anderson's theories on the formation of communities, as in Finland as well most Roma are deeply bonded to their communities. Artists on their part have formed a smaller community, also being a minority in the Roma community, if not such a uniform one.</p> <p>Among other things, the study reveals that being Roma/Gypsy shows in the art of all the respondents unintentionally and automatically. This result in turn would strengthen the common perception about the emotional strength and sensitivity of the Roma. There are not many studies on that topic either, and the best known of them may be Laura Ruohonen and Veijo Rantala's interview study from 1991 titled "Aito mustalainen on lämmin ihminen" ("A True Gypsy is a Warm Person"), where the topic comes up somewhat in the interviews of 15 people.</p> <p>This study also looks at how the Roma population and the main population in Finland relate to the artists and who are their supporters. The idea of community was also granted greater dimension by the interviewees.</p> <p>The second theme of my Master's programme in addition to youth work is social equality, and the Roma population is considered the most neglected ethnic and social minority in Europe – this is why I have chosen the Roma as my subject. Unlike hundreds of other studies conducted on the topic of the Roma, this thesis is not about their problems or solutions to those problems.</p>	
Keywords Community, Romany Culture, Romany art, Romany identity, Artist identity	

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1 INTRODUCTION

The target group of this study is Finnish Roma living in Finland. I chose this subject for my thesis because the Roma have traditionally been connected to perceptions that they are artistically particularly talented as musicians and dancers. There are indeed several well known and respected Roma artists and particularly musicians, but there have been very few studies of them. Studies focused on the forming of Romany and/or artist identities are also completely lacking in Finland.

In Europe the visibility of Roma musicians and artists has been much more commonplace than it has in Finland. In some countries the entire country's traditional music has been formed out of Romany music, such as flamenco in Spain and "Gypsy music" in Hungary.

Those who were at least teenagers in the Finnish main population in the 1970s will almost without exception remember among others "Hortto Kaalo", ("authentic, true Gypsy"), the most famous gypsy music group in Finland. In the last twenty years Roma authors and artists who have received more publicity have emerged alongside performing artists.

The construction of an artist's identity means forming an understanding of one's own individuality, one's own values and the goals one strives for in life. An identity gives a person a basis for instance for committing to a professional choice, a relationship, family roles as well as political and religious ideologies." (Fadjukoff 2007, 57)

Tor-Björn Hägglund writes in his article "Creativity in light of psychoanalytic research", that persons who are strongly creative have multiple senses of self, each with their own identity, primarily the separate identities of the creative self and the everyday self. This idea also seems to fit when discussing Roma artists.

The distinguished musician achieves respect and earns himself a reputation which will live for centuries, but similarly, the outstanding folk musician of loudly applauded popular performances who, rising from what may be the humblest of

origins, also refines his artistic talent to superb perfection in his kind of artistic skill and deserves not only the appreciation of his contemporaries (especially in his own country to which he has devoted his long years of noble service) but may equally expect to be kept in remembrance long after the last breath has left his lips. (Kállai, Ernő, 2002: Mátray, 1984a: 288)

Ever since I was a child I have been interested in music, but also other arts. I believe this is because on my father's side I am part of that Finnish Roma family with partly roots from Russia whose musicians are considered especially talented. Mother's side my Roma roots are from Finland. I spent a lot of time in my childhood with these relatives and also studying music myself, including studying classical guitar in a musical academy for several years in my teens and singing in some choirs. My foster mother, who is part of the main population, is an actress. Through her I became familiar with and developed an interest in theatre and stage art to some degree. It was also not insignificant that my foster grandmother was a librarian and reading was a part of everyday life. I was encouraged to read and I read a lot. Art and different forms of culture have been a natural part of my entire life. That certainly played a role in strengthening my desire to study the subject on the part of my own ethnic group.

In 2008 and 2009 I became interested in how the voices of Roma artists were being heard and in their right to take stands on societal affairs as well, because the subject was being debated in public very rabidly. A traditional and even fundamentalist idea of the Roma was being opposed by Roma artists, who were voicing their own opinions of the community's problems in public. I have always been interested in groups that are small in size but large in meaning for the whole community in question. I have followed Roma artists through my own work and studies, and also through my family, either indirectly or directly, for a few decades and in my opinion they are not sufficiently noticed inside the Roma community itself.

In Finland a few Roma have risen to the public eye who have found acceptance as artists and have appeared as such also to the general public, but I believe that there are even more Roma who consider themselves artists. The Finnish League for Human Rights (later FLHR) reported in the beginning of this year about a survey on the Roma participation and inclusion on culture services in Finland. The study was im-

plemented by distributing questionnaires with the aid of local advisory boards on Romany affairs, Romany organizations and volunteers. Some of the surveys were conducted as interviews. The survey was also available electronically online. I was a member of the study group that conducted the FLHR study. I will also use material from this study in my work.

According to the FLHR study 'Roma participation and inclusion on culture services in Finland', of the 141 respondents 24 said they were artists. However, it was not clear whether they were professional artists or if they created art as a hobby.

Two-thirds of them also reported their branch of art. 15 of them in some way worked with music, either as musicians, singers, or in multiple ways. There were also photographers, seamstresses, painters, and drawers. However, when they were asked what proportion of their income they get from art, forty-two people answered this question. Out of these 42, 79% (ca. 33) answered they got no income from their art, 14% (ca. 6) made 1-39% of their income through art, and only 7% (ca. 3) of the respondents earned over 40% of their income from art. This is not surprising in itself, that there were both professional and hobbyist artists in the group. None of them had received any kind of grant for their work. (Toivanen 2012, 25–26)

There are also some Roma characters in old Finnish films, the most famous of which is probably *Kulkurin valssi* (*Vagabond-valse*), which is a black and white Finnish film directed by Toivo Särkkä from 1941.

This study does not focus deeply on the arrival of the Roma to Finland, or other significant facts on Roma history or their customs and traditions for their own sake, but mainly in the significance they have in the interviewee's own story and how they have brought out those matters as well. This study will discuss Kalé Roma living in Finland with the communal name of Roma, or when the interviewee so desires as "Gypsies". The essential thing is that all the interviewees belong to the same group of Roma by their ethnic background.

As a note for those new to the Romany theme, it used to be that people spoke of "the dark-skinned" or "gypsies". The latter word is still commonly used particularly with the more traditional and older Roma and of course by the main population as well, even though the word "gypsy" may now not be used in public or in the media. Both of the words "dark-skinned" and "gypsy" refer to people's hair and skin colour. Today's Roma population in Finland consists of people who are not much darker than the main population. This of course is a result of there being a large amount of non-Roma, or part-Roma people in the families, as has always been the case.

I have limited this study to include authors, actors, musicians, artists, and dancers with Roma backgrounds, who make their living in the arts. I have therefore consciously left out performers of spiritual music for instance almost completely. The persons involved in the study are between 30 and 70 years of age. In some cases the same person makes their living in several different branches of the arts.

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the term "Roma" is used as an umbrella term for population groups with more or less similar cultural characteristics. These include Roma, Sinti, Traveller populations, Dom, Lom, Ashkali and Kalé populations. All these cultures have also been part of the margins of European societies for a long time. Estimates suggest there are currently 10-12 million Roma in the European Union, so the Roma make up the largest ethnic minority in the EU. Most of the Roma residing within the European Union are citizens of an EU state. (FRA)

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of the study is to find out how artists experience their own ethnicity and identity. Do they feel they are more artists than Roma, or are these even opposing themes? It is interesting to find out how people from different generations perceive themselves in relation to the Roma community. Generations also hold the significance that the societal awakening of the Roma population occurred in the 1970s and the next more visible wave of societal participation is practically still to come on the part of the Roma, except for a few independent actors.

The study is limited to involve authors, actors, musicians, artists, and dancers with Roma backgrounds, who make their living in the arts. They range in age from 30 to 70 years.

I created the themed interview questions and additional questions, dividing them into four groups as follows:

1. What does art mean to you?

When did you realize that you are artistically gifted?

Where did it all begin?

When did it become a source of livelihood for you?

What is the appeal for you?

2. What does being Roma/Gypsy mean to you?

Do you consider yourself a Roma?

Does the Roma community consider you Roma?

How does the Roma community feel about you?

Do you keep in contact with the Roma community?

3. How does being Roma/Gypsy shows/is visible in your art?

What Romany characteristics exist in your art?

Do you include them purposefully or do they automatically appear in your art?

How do the Roma react to you as an artist/a Roma?

4. What is your identity?

How do you describe your own identity?

Is it important for you?

Has your identity changed during the years/ during work/ because of work?

There have been some studies focusing on Roma identity, but I couldn't find any that look into artists from Roma backgrounds and their experiences of their identity as an artist, as a Roma, and potentially as a Roma artist.

2 FINNISH ROMA

When talking about the Finnish Roma, we are talking about the Roma belonging to the Kalé group, which includes 12000-14000 people, according to various estimates. In addition about 3000 Finnish Roma live in Sweden. Official information on ethnic groups is not uniformly collected in all EU member states – in some countries, including Finland, it is illegal to collect a register based on ethnic origins. Finnish Roma are a Finnish linguistic and cultural minority who have resided in Finland for over 500 years.

Roma live throughout the land, however most of them in the cities of Southern and Western Finland. Roma are Finnish citizens and have full citizens' rights and responsibilities. They have a strong cultural identity, but they feel very strongly that they are Finnish. As Finnish Roma they are actively involved in building Finnish society. The participation of the Roma in the Finnish wars in 1939-1945 has strongly influenced the Roma's national identification.

The Roma have maintained their language and culture for centuries, but each era has set this its own set of challenges.

The right to participate in culture and the right of the Roma to maintain and develop their own language and culture: Cultural rights are central to peoples' identity, unity, sovereignty, and sense of self. The frame of reference for this report are the rights secured in human rights agreements and the constitution:

1. A common right to culture

The right to participate in cultural life and to develop itself with no restraints from lack of means (Article 15 of the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as article 16 of the Finnish Constitution)

2. Special protection of Romany culture

The right to enjoy their own culture and maintain and develop their own culture (Article 27 of the UN's international covenant on civil and political rights and article 17.3 of the Finnish Constitution)

In the history portion of this chapter I will fairly briefly recap the history of Finnish Roma. Even though it is very interesting, it is not the main topic of this thesis. The purpose is to give some overview of the different phases of the Roma through the centuries and on things that even today in some way affect, at least in part, the attitudes, lives, and thoughts of Finns and Finnish Roma.

The Finnish government has funded an internationally significant four year project that is just reaching its conclusion, which has seen the 500 years of Finnish Roma history collected in detail into a single volume. The book will be released in the autumn of 2012. The year 2012 could for good reason be considered a year of celebration for Finnish Roma, because of their 500 years of history. As far I know, such a comprehensive study of the Roma has never been conducted anywhere in the world. It seems likely that this extensive work will inspire other countries to also conduct their own studies on the phases of their own Roma populations from even longer periods of time.

2.1 The Roma in Finland from the 16th to the 18th century

To begin the brief look into Finnish history in this thesis it is necessary to go over a few basics of Finland from the same era that Finnish Roma history began and which have had major influence in Romany history. During this era Finland has been under the rule of two major powers. First Finland was ruled over by Sweden between 1523 and 1809. After that Finland spent just over a century under Russian rule. After the October Revolution in Russia the Finnish Parliament on December 6th, 1917 ac-

cepted the declaration of independence which marked Finland's separation from Russia.

In 1512 Olaus Petri wrote that people who travel from nation to nation who are called the Tatars had arrived to the country and to Stockholm. (Pulma 2006, 20). Therefore according to studies it appears that the first Roma arrived in Finland from Sweden as early as the 16th century. Later other groups also arrived from the east, for example from Russia and the Baltic nations. This is true for the histories of many Finnish Roma families, including my own as I noted in the introduction.

The 16th century was a time with harsh legislation towards vagrant groups, particularly of foreign descent, inspired by German law. In Sweden, legislation stipulated that Roma men were to be captured and hanged. This law from 1637 was never put to practice. Roma families were rather expelled from the boroughs like other vagrants. (Nordberg 2007, 51)

The reformed church did not like the Roma, and in 1560 the clergy received a list of persons who were to be kept outside the Christian community. This meant they were not allowed to be married or buried and their children could not be baptised. This group included murderers and adulterers as well as the Tatars.

It is obvious that the attitudes of the clergy were partially influenced by the prophetic gifts of the Roma. Excluding them from Christian services made the Roma seem godless in the eyes of many. It is also noteworthy that even though the Roma were constantly accused and suspected of using magic and witchcraft, they were never accused in the witch trials of Finland or Sweden. (Pulma 2006, 21–22, 25)

In those days the livelihoods of the Roma were different from today. Some similarities are still notable, as trading and predicting the future still remain of their traditional professions. At this stage there are yet no signs of Finnish Roma who made their living with music. Roma women made their living predicting the future, fire cupping and educating the women of the main population about their methods of healing.

The professional knowledge of Roma men during the 17th and 18th centuries were mostly in horse trading and caring for horses, but there are also mentions of Roma men as boiler repairmen, glassmasters, merchants, (1681, 1781), and

needle and hair salesmen (1766). The horse care skills of the Roma were also frequently used by armies in Europe which brought a living to many Roma. (Waris-Westerberg 1984, 22, Pulma 2006, 27–28, 33).

In 1727 the legislation of 1662 was relaxed so that Roma who had settled in cities were granted protection against deportation. Then in 1748 the vagrant law was reformed with the Tatars and Roma at the centre of attention. Deportation policy ended for good about 250 years after the Roma had arrived in the country. (*Pulma 2006, 30*)

This was a short look into the times when the Roma arrived and settled in Finland.

2.2 Roma Policy in the 19th and 20th centuries

Roma policy is a very broad subject, but I will not explore that very deeply here either. I will look at the parts of it that relate to the contents of this thesis.

In 1812 the Roma begun to be sent to the work centres in Viapori (Suomenlinna) and the spinning rooms of Turku. The Roma were granted equality in the law along with other vagrants in 1883 and with Finnish independence were also granted rights as citizens. (Tanner, Lind 2009, 31) Naturally this was very significant to the Roma population living in Finland at that time.

In writings about the history of Finnish Roma, the Vyborg- born Arthus Thesleff (1871-1920), who was part Old Finland's family of statesmen, is always mentioned. Thesleff originally only had an interest in the Romany language, and later also the lives of the Roma. He conducted a series of long trips with the Roma and on his own all around Scandinavia, Russia and the Balkans. Thesleff published reports of his travels, and his opinions and ideas were even cited at the Parliament. When the Senate created a Gypsy commission in 1898, Thesleff was the obvious choice as its secretary. Later Thesleff moved away from Finland, taking the massive amount of material he had collected in Finland with him. This material was largely never published.

At this point I should also mention the so-called Walle's committee, which was a committee formed by the Senate to "investigate the Gypsy questions of our country". The Dean of Sortavala, A.G. Walle, was named as its chairman, and as mentioned, Thesleff acted as its secretary.

In 1900 the committee published a report where they described in its first part the stages and essence of the Roma people. Its conclusion was that the basis of the distinctiveness of the Roma people was its exclusion, the core of which was formed by their language. With their own language the Roma have survived through periods of persecution. The second part of the report contained an overview of the stages of the Roma in Finland and forced laws enacted here. The third and final part focused on suggestions for action. (Pulma 2006, 89 - 93)

This report I have briefly described is considered fairly significant in Finland. It is thought of as the first Romany political report of any degree complete with suggestions for action on Romany affairs. At the same time one could say that from that report the awakening of Romany policy began, along with increased interest in Romany affairs and dealing with them. The oldest Roma organization is the Gypsy Missio (today Romano Missio), which was founded in 1906 to do religious and social work among Roma.

The second Gypsy Committee, led by Paavo Multala, left the second report on Romany affairs in 1955 at the Ministry for Social Issues. The first Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs (today the Advisory Board on Romany Affairs within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs on 11.10.1956. (Pulma 2006, 175).

2.3 Romany Policy from 1960s to 2000s

Romany policy has been actively formed since the 1960s as a collaboration between organisations and both Roma and non-Roma activists. Varying reports, studies and investigations have been produced at a steady pace, some of which have never reached the public consciousness and some which have gotten the attention of the

media and possibly also awakened and even gotten the Roma population on their heels.

In 1967, the Finnish Gypsy Association/Society (today the Finnish Romany Association) was established, who can be given credit for the Roma's societal awakening, progressing Roma affairs, and increasing visibility in the media. During these remarkable years of societal awakening, Finland went to Stockholm in order to learn in both social welfare and Roma policy fields. Later, in the 1990s and 2000s, the situation has turned around and Sweden has regularly come to us to learn and our collaboration has been active and fruitful in other ways as well.

Social awakening, like in the 1960's and 1970's, has not arisen later on among the Finnish Roma, although national and local societies have been regularly established. Mostly the organizations can be divided into at least two groups: on the one hand, into spiritual and non-spiritual ones, and on the other hand, into national and local ones. This explains to some extent why different organizations have different emphases in their functions. As examples of national organizations could be given the spiritually focused societies "Elämä ja Valo" (Life and Light) and Romano Missio; whose social work should, however, not be underestimated. The aforementioned Finnish Romany Society (previous Finnish Gypsy Society/Association), Centre for Romany Arts and Nevo Roma can be given as examples of non-spiritual organizations. (Grönfors & Viljanen, 34-35)

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up a working group in December 2008, where I also had the pleasure to be a member, to draft the first Finnish National Policy on Roma. The decision to appoint the working group was based on the assignment given by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen to the Advisory Board on Romany Affairs to draft a memorandum on developing the living conditions of Roma in Finland. The Working Group's term was from 1 January to 30 September 2009.

The Policy on Roma was prepared by a broad-based working group consisting of representatives of authorities, research institutes and Roma in Finland.

The purpose of the National Policy on Roma is to enhance the equal treatment of Roma and to create the necessary conditions for the utilization and activation

of the Roma population's own resources. The essential means of implementing the Policy are mainstreaming of nondiscrimination and equality as well as the use of special measures. The essential element here is that existing legislation and social service structures create the necessary conditions for the development and mainstreaming of action enhancing the position of the Roma. The results and their permanence are linked to the efficacy of mainstreaming, as well as the results of temporary development measures and their successful adoption in the long run. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2009)

The vision of that policy programme is that according to the document, Finland will be a forerunner in 2017 in Europe in promoting the equal treatment and inclusion of the Roma population. This vision strikes me as somewhat unrealistic, for the National Policy on Roma in question is written from the perspective of what Finnish society should do to better implement equality and inclusion. In practice one has to admit that there was cause to better and deeper focus on what the Roma population themselves or together with authorities should do differently to become more available to society and to their own communities as individuals.

In addition to this, already when the document was being written by two hired people in the Advisory Board on Romany Affairs within The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, I felt that it should have clearly budgeted for expenses and presented funds for hiring educated individuals from the Roma population. These people should have been the ones who followed up, analysed, and consulted the government and municipalities on the implementation of the National Policy on Roma. In spite of the fact that I myself was a part of the working group responsible for the Finnish National Policy on Roma, I have from the start offered criticism on what I perceive as a lack of concrete action in the document.

2.4 Finnish Roma as a traditional minority

The Roma population in Finland belongs to the traditional national minorities, whose position is secured by legislation. The Roma are Finnish citizen with full civil rights

and civic duties. The Roma have a strong cultural identity, but yet they regard themselves as Finns.

In the 1995 reform of constitutional rights, the position of the Roma was for the first time secured by legislation. According to Article 6, subsection 2, of the year 2000 amended Constitution, no one shall “without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability, or other reason that concerns his or her person”. Another important reform of the constitution was the right of the Roma and the Sami to maintain and develop their own language and culture. This is also bolstered by the Decree on Children’s Daycare, which enables support for the Romany language and culture, and by the Basic Education Act, which confirms the position of the Romany language as a mother tongue. The Constitution also includes a mention of the right to maintain and develop one’s own language. It obligates the public authorities to support development of the Roma language and culture. This is a substantial support for improving the position of the Roma.

The two Council of Europe treaties, which came into force in 1998, and which have been ratified by national legislation, are important milestones in strengthening the position of the Roma in Finland. In ratifying the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages Finland identified the Romany language as a non-territorial minority language. Finland also named the Roma and the Sami as traditional national minorities in ratifying the Framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Under the ordinances of the Ministry of Labor The Office of The Ombudsman for Minorities was founded in 2002. Today The Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities is located administratively within the Ministry of the Interior. The duties of The Ombudsman are to promote good ethnic relations and to monitor the situation and rights of foreigners and ethnic minorities. (Ministry of Social and Health Affairs 2004).

I wanted to mention these things because they carry huge significance in recognizing the social status of the Roma in Finland.

2.5 Previous studies and relevance of research

There are already quite a few studies focused on the Roma population, from both universities as well as universities of applied sciences, possibly due to an increase in interest towards the Roma as a traditional Finnish minority, but also because the Roma population has become more open about itself. The standard of studies is generally high, but there are also those among them that cannot be considered of high quality. The subjects of the studies range from reports in the social- and health-care fields to studies of discrimination and participation, not to mention studies of the history of Roma populations.

The first researchers to have studied Finnish Roma have been Raino Vehmas (1961), Anna Maria Viljanen-Saira (1979) and Martti Grönfors (1981). All of them are part of the main population. Of course research on the Roma was conducted before that as well, for instance the first description of the Finnish Romany language is Christfird Ganander's *Undersökning om De så kallade Tattare eller Zigeuner, Cingari, Bohemiens, Deras härkomst, Lefnadssätt, språk m.m. Samt om, när och hwarest några satt sig ner i Swerige* from 1780. Other significant studies include Athur Thesleff's work on the Romany language and culture from the late 1800s. (Hedman, 2006). (Stenroos 2012, 18)

The identity of Roma artists has not been studied in Finland before, but there are studies for instance on the meaning and backgrounds of Romany music, politics and identity.

Of these we could mention these studies from the 2000s.

Kai Åberg & Risto Blomster (ed.), 2006. Suomen Romanimusiikki [Romany music of Finland]

Panu Pulma, 2006. Suljetut ovet. Pohjoismaista Romanipolitiikkaa 1500-luvulta EU-aikaan [Closed Doors: Nordic Romany Policy from the 16th Century to the EU Era]

Airi Markkanen, 2003. Luonnollisesti. Etnografinen tutkimus Romaninaisten elämäkulusta [Naturally – An Ethnographic Research on the Life Course of Romany Women]

As well as earlier and older studies such as :

Tuula Kopsa-Schön, 1996. Kulttuuri-identiteetin jäljillä. Suomen Romanyen kulttuuri-identiteetistä 1980-luvun alussa [Discovering the Cultural Identity: The Cultural Identity of the Finnish Roma at the Beginning of the 1980's]

Anna Maria Viljanen-Saira, 1979. Mustalaiskulttuuri ja kulttuurin muutos. Lisensiaatintyö. Helsinki: Sosiaali- ja kulttuuriantropologian laitos, Helsingin yliopisto [Gypsy culture and cultural change. Licentiate. University of Helsinki.]

According to Tuula Kopsa-Schön, in the early 1980s Finnish Roma still formed a sensitive field in research. All Roma had not looked at some of the more recent studies with approving eyes, which had created some suspicions among the Roma for instance about the ethics of gypsy studies. (Kopsa-Schön 1996, 11).

The studies conducted by Roma themselves about their own group are still rare due mostly to the fact that the population still includes few highly educated people. This has not prevented the Roma from following studies conducted on them, especially in Finland, and occasionally even controlling them, as some subjects of study, such as the Romany cultural identity and customs still feel very sensitive to many. There is still a fear among the Roma population that if they are subjects of research, they may be included in some sort of register or that their cultural customs will be used against them somewhere.

There are no studies in Finland about minorities within the Roma community. Closest to such a study (in Finnish) is my own report done with Mrs Anna Maria Viljanen from 2009, "Ai tää lastenkodin lapsi" - Inquiry into 16 Roma that lived in children's homes maintained by Gypsy Missio during 1960s to 1980s, and their placing in Roma community and in Finnish society . The report was a semi structured interview-based study, whose results for instance strengthened those ideas which have been connected to children of Roma children homes on their own Romany identity.

In Europe however the Roma have been studied eagerly and thoroughly, sometimes by sociologists, sometimes anthropologists and many others as well. According to the Finnish scientist Tuula Kopsa-Schön, the Romany closely follow studies focusing on them and if possible attempt to control them. She claims that Finnish studies of the Roma has been shadowed by an emotional label of “ethnic dynamite”, which has often made research of minorities a very sensitive subject of study. (Kopsa-Schön, 1996, 10)

I mostly agree with Kopsa-Schön, although I think the Roma population should be even more interested in studies conducted on them than they already are. The dynamite analogy is good and still apt today. There is still too often a sense of suspicion inside the Roma communities to people conducting research, and not only those that are part of the main population, as odd as that sounds.

The study of Roma and the researchers involved in it are too often over romanticised and made to seem mysterious. Michael Stewart says in his book (1997, 28) that theorising on the origins of the Roma has brought up two meaningful facts. First, the story about their Indian origins makes it possible to needlessly make Roma seem exotic and on the other hand it disregards their own views and experiences. (Stenroos 2012, 20). I have personally encountered this type of mystification and romanticising occasionally among anthropologists and officers and I find it to be an amusing phenomenon, but at the same time at its worst it can amount to spreading mistaken or controversial information about Roma.

3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is a qualitative study. According to Hirsjärvi and Huttunen's book "Introduction to Education" qualitative research strives to understand the phenomenon under examination, and this means finding out the meaning or purpose of the phenomenon, as well as gaining a comprehensive and deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In practice this often means giving room to the viewpoints and experiences of the persons being studied and researching the ideas, emotions and motives related to the phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi & Huttunen 1995, 174, 201).

I have approached and dealt with the topic of my study without hypotheses. I strive to examine the Roma artists' own sense of self both in relation to their art as well as to the Roma community. I have closely followed Roma artists for a long time and for instance noted that the artists' own perception of themselves may be very different to the Roma community's perception of them. It is also interesting to find out if the interviewees have had conflicts of identity and how Romany art presents itself to them. Has it possibly been for example a breaking down of inner group identities and control, or of maintaining control?

I strive to proceed for the material with the least possible amount of preconceptions, as to the principles of qualitative research. However, it is not possible to completely rid oneself of preconceptions and therefore it is good to be aware of them. One can then use them in the study as voiced preconceptions. One of the tasks of qualitative research is to help create new hypotheses for further quantitative study. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 19–20).

3.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is loosely based on Benedict Anderson's theories on the formation of communities, as in Finland as well most Roma are deeply bonded to their communities. Artists on their part have formed a smaller community, also being a minority in the Roma community, if not such a uniform one.

Anderson also describes what citizenship means to members of their communities in his 1991 book *Imagined Communities*, and this to me is very interesting. This very well fits into the Finnish Roma's thinking that they are Finnish first and at the same time Roma. In my experience these two concepts are generally not separated. These matters also arose in my interviewee's answers. The same themes were also pondered by Camilla Nordberg in her thesis from 1997 called *Boundaries of Citizenship – The Case of the Roma and the Finnish Nation-State*.

According to Anderson we are all aware for example of the contingency of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother-tongue, and so forth. (Anderson 1991, 10). This is surely true for many of the things

mentioned by Anderson, but right now I am reminded of the eternal conversation, both scientific and of the “coffee-table” variety, of what the roots of the Roma are and where they actually come from. This conversation seems like it will never really end, not to mention the frequently discussed topic in Finland of who is truly Roma. This latter topic I also discussed briefly with a few of my interview subjects.

3.2 Methodological framework

This research is qualitative research. We try to get more information about issues that are not well known and about issues that have not been researched earlier in Finland. As I already noted, I could not find a single previous study on my chosen subject.

Typical to qualitative analysis is inductive reasoning, where generalizations and conclusions are reached based on facts arising from the material. The material will be examined in detail and on multiple levels, bringing up meaningful themes. It does not seek to make statistical generalizations. Methods of analysis in qualitative research include discourse- or conversation analysis. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, 65, 161).

Forming a methodological framework in a qualitative study has typically been seen as a researcher-specific, creative process. The active role of the researcher is highlighted as for instance the “solver of the puzzle”, or as an “explorer” using their imagination. (Alasuutari 1994, 44–45; Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 20-21).

Researchers Jari Luomanen and Pekka Räsänen from the University of Turku Department of Sociology state in their article “On Systematicity in Qualitative Social Research”, that the actual methods of analysis are used more leaning towards the researcher's own intuition.

This fits in nicely with my own view. According to the aforementioned researchers, it is possible to pick up new material and methods as the study progresses. As a result of this, methodological principles may not become fully formed, at least in study reports. I am trying my best to ensure this does not happen to me.

4 MATERIAL USED IN THIS STUDY

For this study, interviews and conversations as well as some articles previously published about the artists are used as material. There were six interviewees, three women and three men, who consisted of artists of six different branches of art. They ranged in age from 37 to 69 and all belong from both side to the Roma population. The represented arts were literature, painting, theatre, dance, folk singing, traditional gypsy music, and classical music.

This group of interviewees are a good sample of Roma artists by both their age and gender. The number of persons interviewed is relatively small and they are all also known artists within the Roma community, and therefore I could not guarantee them anonymity. This is why I suggested to them that I would refer to them by name, or made up first names if the interviewees so request. In this case it is also likely that the Roma population at least will recognize them already based on their branch of art. However, as I read through the results in chapter 8 I decided not to use their real names and noted them by their gender and branch of art.

I have also used the new survey by The Finnish League for Human Rights' (later FLHR) on the Roma participation and inclusion on culture services in Finland from this year. It attracted 141 responses, of which 49 were electronic, 24 interviews and the rest by mail. There was an equal amount of men and women represented in the answers, evenly from all age groups. Regionally the most answers came in from Southern and Eastern Finland, the least from Central and Northern Finland. (Toivanen 2012, 3).

The FLHR survey investigated the following issues :

- a) how much do Finnish Roma use all cultural services
- b) how much do Roma use cultural services created by other Roma in Finland
- c) what is the Roma's impression of culture/Romany culture and on art/Romany art, and

d) which cultural services do Roma wish for

The FLHR study looked at all branches of art and culture. The survey investigated the use of cultural services of Roma over the age of 15 in Finland. At the same time they strived to gain information on the Roma's own wishes and needs for improving cultural services and thus further their right to their own culture. (Toivanen 2012, 3)

5 ROMA IDENTITY

I have been thinking and writing about this topic for a very long time, also in my previous studies. And I still don't know what Roma identity is. Who defines it? I think that many have tried to define it but no one has really succeeded. I also feverishly tried to find a report or paper written by a Roma in Finland on what Roma identity is. I was surprised to find my own writing, but at the same time that explains the fact there does not exist just one Roma identity.

A certain way of dressing, customs, ways of life and even looks are often associated with Roma identity, but today it also includes a lot more. Roma live so intensively in the middle of changes and development of society that finding a clearly defined, and generally accepted, Roma identity is hardly possible.

I was amused by the idea proposed in his book "Identity" by Jamaican-born Stuart Hall, who has African, Indian, Portuguese, English and Jewish roots, that before he knew anything about the theory of identity, he knew that the idea of identity is from the beginning a fiction. (Hall 1999, 11) It is a shame I hadn't run into this statement before, because the whole theme of identity seems such a central and hard to understand section in much of Roma study, and I have myself used so much time thinking about it and trying to understand it that I have thought there will never be full clarity on the issue. According to Hall identity is formed in that unstable point when the "unspoken" stories of subjectivity encounter the stories of history and culture. (Hall 1999, 11) I am convinced that Hall's idea of the formation of identity is very correct for Romany culture in particular, where stories and songs are an everyday occurrence,

in the old days even more so, and form a very important part of knowing and belonging to a community.

5.1 Roma identity as ethnic identity

All people belong to an ethnic group. Ethnicity can be an important part of a person's identity, self-knowledge and personal identity. Some people have, however, a weak or almost a non-existent ethnic identity. And in case of a double-identity, dividing lines get weak, which also sometimes causes problems and confusion. We are now approaching the topic I went through with my interviewees and will return to in more detail in the chapter "Summary of Findings". When talking about ethnicity, nationalism and national identity is sometimes also talked about, and I will return to those topics as well.

The expression "ethnicity" usually means a homogeneously understood ethnic group, or cultural minorities differing from the majority population. In Finland ethnic groups are understood to mean for instance the Sami, the Tatars and the Roma, as well as the new minorities formed by immigrants. (Clinic for Multicultural Counselling in Jyväskylä University)

In his 2012 thesis about the performance-oriented nature of Romany culture in the space between cultures, Marko Stenroos very impressively discusses the problems in formations of identity as well as ethnicity. He mentions how Royce (1982, 187-188) makes the interesting observation that a) first of all, belonging to an ethnic group and having an ethnic identity are not foregone conclusions just based on your physical heritage and that b) symbolic knowledge and communication of ethnicity is essential for belonging to a group to be possible on any level.

At this point I will still return to Hall's thought in his book "Identity" on ethnic identity, for it also reflects my own views on the subject of identity. He says it is built on the idea that all identities are placed and located in culture, language and history. (Hall 1999, 16) This fits in nicely and in that exact order into the image of Finnish Roma identity and ethnicity.

6 ROMA IDENTITY IN FINLAND

Pondering the identity of Finnish Roma is interesting, although I will again stress the fact that there are very different people within the Finnish Roma population, just as there are in any other groups and communities. I will continue to claim that there does not exist one unified Finnish Roma identity, and therefore it cannot be defined either. It also became very obvious during my interviews with Roma artists that each of them experiences their identity in very complex forms. I will return to this subject in chapter 8.

When we talk about Roma/Gypsy identity, according to British sociologist Margaret Greenfields we can see that identity is both complex and central to an individual's sense of self and their understanding of their place in the world. Greenfields also points out that the existence of cultural ideals, norms and behaviours, 'what a Gypsy or Traveller does, or does not do', often constitutes such a strong element of individual or group identity. (Greenfield 2006, 29) This idea of hers also fits well for Finnish Roma. Often when talking about the Roma we like to talk collectively about an ethnic minority, where social control is very strong in both good and bad.

In her thesis 'A case study of Gypsy/Roma identity construction in Edirne' from 2003, Selin Ceyhan states that politics is one of the identity constructions of the Gypsy/Roma community because it is also related to the concept of "citizenship". (Ceyhan 2003, 97) As Nash describes it, 'citizenship in a welfare society is not a simply a matter of formal, legal rights; it is also about material goods and possibilities they afford for social life' (Nash 2000, 195). Political participation is the Finnish Roma's weakest sector in societal participation. One reason is certainly that daily politics is not actively followed. Another reason is insufficient all-round education, due to short formal education. A third reason could be a lack of faith in one's own prospects. The fourth, but not the least important reason, is voting passivity among the community. No Roma has yet been voted into the Parliament, although some have been listed as candidates. On the municipal level, some have attained office as local councillors. Generally taken the Roma, with a few exceptions, have not been very

interested in politics before, but the interest has grown at the 2000s. (Grönfors 2006, Grönfors & Viljanen 2009, 39)

It gets even more interesting. When I conducted the report on children's homes for Roma children a few years ago, it turned out that some of the interviewees in that study clearly had a double identity; the main population, and Roma.

You could perhaps briefly summarize that identity is actually a combination of 'given' characteristics and 'earned' or 'ascribed' factors. (Greenfield 2006, 31)

I want to again remind the reader that Romany identity is for many researchers still a politically very interesting and in some ways always current topic, even though that amuses me to some degree. To quote Klimova-Alexander, you could state that Romany identity is a political project rather than a reality. (Klimova- Alexander 2005, 13)

6.1 Culture

T Culture as such is an enormous whole to discuss under its own header, which is why I will stick to a fairly short rumination on the topic, keeping in mind the subject of this study and the interview questions I have posed. Often, when talking about the culture of a group, the discussion eventually, almost inevitably turns to roots, cultural roots, and what those are like for each person.

According to Benedict Anderson, culture is not just a question of genetic heritage, language and other such factors, but also of broad cultural systems such as what type of religious and political community each person grows up in and lives in. All these factors influence a person. (Anderson, 1991, 12)

Thomas Acton has often stated in his own speeches and texts that culture is not something fixed, inherited, unchallengeable, unchanging and it is easy to agree on this also when talking about Finnish Roma.

Culture is constantly developing, enabling the self-experience of our self-realisation, reinventing as well as representing and reproducing our ethnic identities. This is as true of Gypsies as of anyone else. (Acton, Mundy 1997, 7)

All external factors, who we spend time with, how we educate and train ourselves, and of course our experiences, shape us into who we are.

6.2 Language

I will not present the history or etymology of Romany language here, but rather briefly describe the current state of the language in Finland.

Finnish researcher of Romany language Kimmo Granqvist has said that the Romany language today has mostly a symbolic stature. He is right, because there are no longer situations that would require knowledge of the Romany language. When there is no clear need for speaking it, the language may slowly disappear. (Stenroos 2012, 37). Considering this development, the efforts of some Roma activists to revive the language over the past few decades is understandable, but at the same time it is especially challenging, because there are so few people who know know the language and could therefore keep it alive by teaching and developing it.

Although the skill of spoken Romany is disappearing, there are still many Romany words mixed into the Finnish speech of the Roma. I think that this is true of Roma of all ages, who have at least in some way identified as Roma, and have some dealings with the Roma community, regardless of which part of Finland they are from.

On the other hand, it is good to acknowledge that words of Finnish have a different meaning in the semantic system of Romany speech, so their speech may be difficult to understand. The Roma may also be misunderstood because their words have been given false meaning.

7 ROMANY CULTURE AND ART IN FINLAND

Romany culture is often called a culture of human relationships, because it is primarily based on the community, family and relatives. The Romany culture can be seen to

be based on three basic norm codes: moral codes, purity codes and the respect of the old. (Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs 1981, Ollikainen 1995, 52)

In her autobiographical book *Käheä-ääninen tyttö* (Tanner&Lind 2009, 163-164), Tuula Lind talks about how gypsies generally hold tightly to their rules of cleanliness and prudishness. Men keep tabs on what women do, women may not expose their arms (nor may men), women cannot show their bare legs, or even their ankle. A younger woman and an older man can never be left alone in any circumstances. Lind says women are particularly eager to stick to the meticulous rules, which is their way of showing and using their power. (Stenroos 2012, 41)

Finland's Romany culture is then strongly and visibly based on a culture of customs, which connect to the things discussed above. I do want to bring out one more thing that seems to be built in to many of us who are a part of the Roma population, regardless of if we have grown up within the Romany culture or not. I talk about the sense of shame. I bring this up because these things also come out in Romany art, and its acceptance and visibility within the Roma community. An example of such an art form is dance, where certain movements and clothing are not considered appropriate, especially in the presence of older or very religious Roma, even though the main population finds them perfectly appropriate. This includes latin- and show dancing. At this point I should also mention the occasional nudity found in painting and theatre, which can also be experienced as inappropriate.

Shame is an emotionally powerful and negative emotion that follows from the breach of customs, taboos and norms of behaviour. Shame is experienced on the personal level, which is when it is closer to the concept of shame as understood by the main population (see Viljanen et al. 2010, 94), a feeling of embarrassment resulting from an inappropriate act. Roma experience shame for different reasons than the main population. For the Roma it follows the culture's clean/dirty dichotomy, and at the same time an age/gender division, and behavioural norms related to it. Another notable level in understanding shame is its societal dimension.

The Finnish Romany culture, mostly its customs, has already been written about quite a bit. I find a part of these writings weak, and even more harmful than beneficial to those who are not familiar with the subject. There have also been guides about Romany culture for different professional groups. Most studies about Romany customs have been conducted by persons from the main population, who have had their texts read by people within the Roma population before publication to confirm their findings, results and conclusions. I find this a good, but also a problematic practice. It has the danger of only taking into account one person's truth about a cultural topic, rather than a generally accepted action or custom within the larger Roma population.

The forms of art practised by the Roma I have interviewed in this study have almost completely been ignored by researchers in Finland thus far, with the exception of music. I will not guess the reasons for this, but will only state that as a result finding literature on the subject has been a nearly impossible task. It should of course be noted that because the Roma minority in Finland is so small, the number of Roma making their living, or at least half of their living in the arts is also very small. I have personally been employed as an expert on Romany affairs, and as an activist, and have compiled reports on the subject in Finland and in Europe since 1995, and for that reason my own reference library has been my salvation on that front.

In my experience only music of the Romany/Gypsy arts has been of interest for more than one researcher and expert for several decades, and there is a large amount of material on that topic in Finnish.

7.1 The short history and the present time of Romany artists in Finland

As detailed in the previous chapter, finding information about "Finnish Romany art" is difficult, almost impossible. Nearly everything available on the subject concerns music, so we will start there. The topic of music also includes writings on history.

In this section the purpose isn't to name and introduce all the branches of art, Romany artists, or those identifying as such in great detail, nor would that even be possible. The idea is to select some of them as examples of performers and artists in the

different arts, who for the most part are familiar to both the Roma population as well as the main population.

As a final note, I have limited the Romany artists introduced here to those who publicly identify themselves as Romany and for many of them their Romany background also shows up in their art.

Music: In 1996 Pekka Jalkanen wrote an article in "Musiikin suunta"- magazine titled "Gypsies, being gypsy, and music", which dealt in large part with the history of Romany music in Europe. According to Jalkanen, the Roma have been very accomplished above all at relaying music and at boldly combining different musical ingredients. Jalkanen talks about the significance of gypsy musicians from as far back as the 18th century, mentioning also the gypsy music born in Vienna and Budapest in those days, which was fairly western in style. He states it is a combination of Hungarian dance music (such as Czardas) and Viennese salon music. Jalkanen also states that flamenco owes a great deal to gypsy music. (Jalkanen 1996, 6-7)

In the 1800s, a gypsy sensibility of playing with gypsy images also appeared in European music. At the turn of the century exoticism and orientalism deepened people's understanding. Gypsy life was particularly investigated in the artist colonies of Paris (Jalkanen 1996, 8-9)

The book "Romany music of Finland"; edited by Kai Åberg and Risto Blomster, goes through the history of Finland's Romany music. The book talks about how societal changes in Finland showed up in Romany music as well. The emergence of Romany pop artists in the 1960s is a good example of attempts to blend into the culture of the main population.

"Toivo Kärki" had the idea of having the strong-voiced gypsy singers Taisto Tammi (Lundberg), Markus Allan (Lundberg) and Anneli Sari (Lundberg) perform wistful tango songs. (Åberg & Blomster 2006, 17)

Many of us who have followed Romany affairs for a while remember talk of a Romany man named Ferdinand Nikkinen, who as far back as the 1920s performed songs in the cafés and restaurants of Helsinki. Nikkinen studied the violin and singing at Helsinki Music Institute and he is also considered an early proponent of Gypsy Af-

fairs. At this point I should also mention Saska Åkerlund from the same era, who played violin by ear in a Hungarian style and toured the countryside with a friend who recited poetry, arranging matinees of Gypsy music. (Åberg & Blomster 2006, 17)

The Roma band from the 1960s, 70s and 80s that has reached the greatest popularity is Hortto Kaalo, whose fame will soon have lasted half a century. It was founded in 1969 by Feija Åkerlund, Marko Putkonen, Taisto Lundberg, and Heikki Nyman. Soon after Nyman moved to Sweden. Of the members, Åkerlund and Putkonen have been part of the group from the start, while Lundberg and Ellen Hagert (known as just "Ellen") have been in and out of the group. The name of the group in Romany language means "real Gypsy" or "true Roma". Hortto Kaalo releases a collection of their songs in October 2012.

Many tango performers from the Roma population have been seen over the years competing in the Tangomarkkinat in Seinäjoki as both "kings" and "princes". Among them Rainer Friman, Dimitri Sjöberg, Sebastian Ahlgren, Saska Helmikallio and Amadeus Lundberg.

At this point I also want to mention of the well-known professionals in classical music, the Sibelius Academy graduates; oboist Aale Lindgren, pianist and piano teacher Waldemar Hagert, and of the younger generations, violinist Miritza Lundberg, who has also been an experienced professional performer for over a decade. About oboist Aale Lindgren (born 1951), his musical career started very early as a boy soprano in a choir and as a soloist. At 15 he joined the musical school of the defence forces. Aale Lindgren has been the solo oboist of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra for over 30 years.

There is only one person in Finland who has had the ability, desire and opportunity to sing and record traditional Romany songs very broadly. That person is Hilja Grönfors, who was in 2005 named as a master folk singer at the 2005 Kaustinen Folk Music Festival. In 2008 Phurane Mirits, Hilja Grönfors and Latšo džinta received an Ethno Emma, awarded by Musiikkituottajat ry. Here I will also bring up the self-taught performer Jasmine Valentin (born 1976), who composes, arranges and writes lyrics for her own songs, as well as backing herself up with guitar. She represented Finland at the 1996 Eurovision song contest with the memorable tune "Niin kaunis on taivas"

(‘So beautiful is heaven’). Jasmin has been a part of a number of groups as both a singer and accompanist for more than decade, in spite of her young age.

I had earlier decided not to mention musicians of spiritual music at all in this study, because there are hundreds of them, but I will nevertheless introduce a few of them, since they do play a significant role in Romany music in certain circles. In 1970s the spiritual group Freidiba Boodos was founded. Its members included Kyösti Roth, Veijo Blomerus, Valfrid Åkerlund, Erno Enroth and Rainer Friman, who are all still music professionals and artists on their own, although the group as such no longer exists. The best known spiritual group in Finland today is Suora Lähetys, which was formed in 2007. Mertsu Lindgren, Dimitri Grönfors and Timi Järviuori sing in the group which also performs music other than gospel in beautiful harmonies.

Visual art: Of Romany artists, there is one who has been in the public eye longer than others, more than twenty years, and that artist is Kiba Lumberg (born 1956). She has also written books, created installations, written plays and a lot more. Lumberg has attracted a lot of criticism especially from the Roma population with her opinions on Finnish Roma and their culture, which has attracted even more interest from the main population on the special features of Romany cultures. She has her own gallery in Kallio, Helsinki called "Aurinkogalleria"; which acts as a work space and a showroom as well as a meeting place. He wrote the television series *Tumma ja hehkuva veri*, presented on TV2 from 1997-98, and a play of the same title, performed at the Varkaus theatre in 2004. Her first novel "Musta perhonen" ("Black Butterfly") created a buzz when it was released and in 2006 was followed by a sequel "Repaleiset siivet" ("Tattered Wings"). In the fall of 2008 the trilogy was completed with the novel "Samettiyö" ("Velvet Night"). (Grönfors & Rossi, 2010)

There are of course other painters who are part of the Roma population, such as Kari Lindgren, born in the 1970s, whose drawings have also been used as illustrations in many books and guides about the Roma. The same applies to Valfrid Åkerlund, born in the 1950s who has also worked as a graphic artist for decades now. He is also known as a spiritual musician. Many families also have talented drawers and painters and the works of these "hidden" artists can be found on the walls of many homes.

Theatre: In theatre the best known Romany artist is surely Veijo Baltzar (born 1942), who is at least as well known as an author. Baltzar's first novel *Polttava Tie* (1968) was also published the following year in Swedish as *Brännande väg*. In 1976 Baltzar founded the gypsy theatre Drom, which functioned successfully for more than a decade. The Drom Theatre created the background and roots for the now active Drom Foundation. In 2002 Baltzar founded the International Romani Writer's Association (IRWA).

In 2008 Veijo Baltzar was awarded a Mikael Agricola- medal for his 40-year career. According to publisher Tammi, Baltzar has "given a language to the Roma community and worked as a messenger between two cultures". Baltzar has publicly stated many times that he does not want to be called Romany, but specifically prefers the word gypsy. Baltzar has directed many of the plays he has written, the latest of which offer contributions to questions of multicultural society. In 2012 the President granted Veijo Baltzar the rank of Cultural Counsellor (Baltzar, Grönfors 2012)

Dance: I will start with who I believe is one of the oldest Finnish dance artists with a Romany background, Mia Vasara, about whom there is very little information even on the internet. The gypsy dance and flamenco studio La Flamme Noire started in Helsinki already in 1982, initially with a group called Gitano-Maró, who performed gypsy music, songs, and dances at festivals all over Finland and also performed at many events in the Helsinki area. Flamenco-lessons were organised from the very beginning of the studio's life. In 1987 gypsy dance lessons began alongside the flamenco. Dance teacher Mia Vasara, who in 1997 received the Ministry of Education's artist's pension for her years-long work as a performing creative dance artist, is still involved in the studio's function and today focuses on teaching gypsy dancing. (La Flamme Noire, 2012)

Of Roma men, one of the talented pioneering flamenco artists was Reima Nikkinen, who worked during the same era with Mia Vasara. He also taught flamenco in the 1970s to the 1990s. There are very few references to Nikkinen found anywhere, which is a pity, but gladly I have had several discussions with him over the years. That is fortunate because I think it is important that his work with flamenco dancing is noted in this text as well.

Of the flamenco dancers in the younger generation the best known is Sari Pikkarainen (born 1977), who has herself long been a dancer and teacher in the field. Since the 2000s there has been a lot of interest in flamenco and Anette Åkerlund, a student at Sibelius Academy, among others, has been strongly involved in flamenco dancing and singing.

There are more successful Roma dancers in the field of show dancing and standards. Of them I will only mention the Helsinki-based Taisto Berg, who has decades of experience in dance teaching and choreography. I will also mention that the daughters of the best known Finnish expatriate Romany artist Anneli Sari (born 1947), Ira and Maria, are also professional dancers.

8 DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

As material for this study I have used the theme interviews and discussions, as well as some magazine articles previously published about the artists. In addition to this I will also use some results of The Finnish League for Human Rights' (later FLHR) survey on the Roma participation and inclusion on culture services in Finland. Interestingly, some of the results introduced by FLHR in their report also came up in my interviews with the artists and in their thoughts.

Personally I find that the somewhat free discussion I had with my interviewees, loosely following the structure of my theme interview, is the material that gave me most information on what I was looking for and that I am most interested in. This is why I primarily use that material in the chapter Summary of Findings.

There were six interviewees, three women and three men, who are composed of professionals of six different branches of art. They range in age from 36-69 and all of them belong to the Roma minority from both their mother and their father's side, which was not a distribution I had pre-meditated, but rather a coincidence. The age range being so large has clearly provided extra depth and time perspective on recognising different stages of the Roma for both the interviewees as well as myself. At

the same time it has caused different and interesting levels of knowledge on history, and life experience, regardless of what era my interviewees are from. For many of them it seemed to be important and interesting that they are aware of how the Roma arrived in Finland, how they have lived here for centuries, how society has changed, and how the Roma themselves are doing today in Finland.

The arts represented are literature, painting, theatre, dance, folk singing, traditional gypsy music and classical music. Many of the artists interviewed are talented in many other fields such as languages or crafts, and some make their living in multiple forms of art.

I have spent hundreds of hours discussing art, identity and Gypsy identity over the last ten years with people in both the main population as well as Roma people, both in Finland and in Europe. There is also a lot in my own background, history, ethnicity and my whole life that relates to the topic of this study, which has also helped me access the subject.

8.1 Summary of findings

What does art mean to you?

As I started by asking what art means to the interviewee, it also got to the bottom of when art became a significant part of their life. At the same point each interviewee also talked generously about their childhood. Even though the group of interviewees is so small, it includes six completely different stories of childhood, family and artists' relationship to their art and its creation. In practice however, each of the subjects has had people in their childhood and/or youth who have seen their talent and guided them ahead, some with more determination and others a bit later and over a longer period of time.

Each of the subjects has had a strong desire since they were children or youth to create art, for two of them before they were school aged, even if no one at that stage yet recognized it as art.

”...my father created the culture, my mother taught me...” (M, literature/theatre)

”...i didn't take it as seriously as I should have and did not know about all the avenues to go down...” (F, dance)

At an older age a desire to create, to somehow change the world, became a part of their art. It became a passion and performing, showing your art, displaying it, became a natural part of it.

I have had the pleasure of knowing all of the subject for 15 to 35 years, some very well, others more superficially, but I have followed all of their art for over a decade. This has helped me note how time has somehow changed their work as well, new styles coming in, new things to paint, and how societal changes affect artists as well. Art changes and lives just as the time we live in does.

Two of my subjects, a man and a woman, have clearly taken more of a societal role that they also bring about in their art, and also like to highlight in interviews and events. These two have at times also got the Roma population on their toes. They also think of their societal participation as a very significant part of their artist identity.

What does being Roma/Gypsy mean to you?

This question is perhaps broader than it was meant to, as with some interviewees it led to very deep waters. At the same time, as I was going through our discussions, I noticed that I had inadvertently chosen three artists (1 man, 2 women), whose connection to the Roma community is fairly slight, and three (2 men, 1 woman), for whom it is regular. To me this is not problematic, but rather speaks of the reality where the rest of the Finnish Roma population also lives in.

What kind of relationship each subject has to being Roma is a multifaceted issue, as each of them talks about it in different ways. This also speaks on its part on the reality where the Roma here live. In other words, being Roma is not simple even as a concept, already because there is no official definition of it, although many in both the Roma and main populations seem to have a definition of their own. By that I mean that many seem to have a clear picture of what a Roma person should look like,

dress like, behave, do for a living, or even what type of music they should play and sing and what kind of people they should spend time with.

At this context I also asked “are you considered a Roma/Gypsy and how does the Roma community relate to you”.

“... its significance has only now grown for me, with age, with a child, hard to get a job...” (F, dance)

“...only a gypsy. Being gypsy is the greatest thing in my life...” (M, literature/theatre)

“...not really, not how being gypsy is understood. I'm not interested in whether I am liked or not, they come after non-conformists there...” (F, visual art)

“...very gypsy, others also think of me as completely gypsy, feel appreciated...” (M, musician)

At this point I want to mention the discussion on the definition of Sami that occurred this June, when the Sami Parliament announced that they want to change the legal definition of what a Sami is. They propose in their preliminary proposition that a Sami person is defined at the Sami Parliament as someone who considers themselves to be a Sami. This in turn requires that he himself, or at least one of their parents or grandparents has learned the Sami language as their first language. One can also be Sami if at least one of their parents is, or could have been registered as eligible to vote in the Sami Parliament elections. (Inarilainen 3.6.2012)

In 1990-91 Laura Huttunen and Veijo Rantala (d. 2011) gathered material for a study on the ethnic identity of Finnish Gypsies. In that interview study they talked to 15 gypsies of both genders and different age groups. At that point all of the interviewees responded that a true Gypsy is a person “with two Gypsy parents”, or “full-blooded, part of their own tribe”. Many characteristics of the gypsies were proposed as being inherited specifically through that “blood” : sentimentality, “warmth” of character, musicality, and being very social are sort of “natural” for gypsies. However, almost all of

the subjects in that study had a non-Roma in their family tree, sometimes very close to them. (Huttunen 1996, 11, 13)

I taken in these definitions of how “true” a member of a group someone is very carefully and to some degree I also think they are dangerous, at least thinking of my own group of Finnish Roma, where individuality and complexity are already things that are difficult to accept. If on top of that we start to separate who can even call themselves Roma, it would seem strange at the very least. But as I stated before, it is a complex and difficult to define issue even in this study. I will still briefly delve into it in the Future Research chapter.

How is being Roma/Gypsy visible on your art?

When I was crafting the questions for my interviews, I had thought this question could be challenging to some of the subjects, but in the end it wasn't. Signs of Romany culture were most obvious in the music of the Roma musician, the folk singer, and in the works of the author/playwright. Romany characteristics appeared in their work automatically, they do not specifically try to insert them. In their art the signs were so obvious that even someone in the main population who does not recognize the key characteristics of Romany culture would notice that this was something different that art made by a member of the main population. In this context I should perhaps add that particularly Romany folk songs and Romany music are sometimes performed in the Romany language. The virtuosity of a musician performing classical or other music may also be in its part be a factor connected to Romany art and particularly performance of Romany music, also outside of Finland. .

When it comes to the dance artist I interviewed, they agree that being Roma is visible in their art

”...there is a specific style in dancing and it comes without thinking, out of my own self”... (F, dance)

”...characteristics are dark eyes, hair, different shades, different themes, ...they are built around the theme, in the installations and paintings...Roma rarely come see my art...” (F, visual art)

"...it comes from the heart, playing music is interpreting emotions"... (M, musician)

What is your identity?

My last big questions was related to my subjects' identity and their experience of it. At this point I also thought I was on thin ice, because I didn't want to make this a study of identity, but rather consider it as a natural part of the everyday selves of these artists, who are ethnically Romany, as people.

Out of the six Roma I interviewed five said they were Gypsies, specifically using that word. Particularly the older interviewees found the word "Romany" artificial and a word that doesn't properly describe what they are. One said they are a human being, and did not think it important to categorize themselves into any ethnic group. On the other hand, none of them also connected their being an artist into an identity, at least not out loud.

According to my subjects, their identity has not particularly changed over time, although for instance when they were younger they might have had to please people in the main population more to be able to do what they wanted (M, musician)

Is it really as Stuart Hall in "Identity" says happened in Great-Britain, where

..."the set boundaries of national identity have come in question and the pressures it created on "otherness" and cultural diversity have become more visible"
(Hall 1999, 67-68)

I believe this phenomenon he describes will happen to us Roma at some point even more clearly than it will to others.

Each of the subjects said they spend a lot of time with people in the main population and for some of them they form most of their circle of friends, fans, supporters and of course the audience for their art as well. What slightly surprised me was that their Finnishness also had a bit of a role in the discussions. This could also be affected by

the fact that all of the artists I interviewed have also performed or exhibited their art abroad. To be Finnish in some way felt even more important than being broadly part of a Roma community, because even there each subject highlighted their family connection more than being part of a Roma community as a whole. Knowing the history of their own family was important for everyone as well. Of course being a part of both groups and its importance is also tied to what happens to each person, where and with whom.

Benedict Anderson writes about nationality in way that fits in here very well when he talks about European history and Kaiser Wilhelm II who proudly proclaimed himself to be the “No. 1 German”

”he implicitly conceded that he was one among many of the same kind as himself, that he had a representative function” (Anderson 1991, 85)

Another thought that arose for me about the participants of this study and their sense of community. They practically belong to at least three communities, which colour, flavour and develop their lives. These are the Finnish, Roma and artist communities.

8.2 Future research

Finland is a country that as far I can see wants to be seen in Europe in many senses, but particularly as a model country in minority affairs and democracy. I won't go into the democracy question because I could've written an entire critical study on that if I wanted to, but I do have something to say about minority affairs.

I have been actively involved with, following and even writing Finnish Romany and minority policy for almost twenty years and many things have of course changed, developed and been organised better when compared to the 1980s for instance, not to mention earlier decades. The Roma have been studied in Finland for a fairly long time and at least the number of studies, reports and even theses is very large. In spite of this I do think it may be time to move on to research new subjects.

In my opinion the most interesting, significant and necessary study of all time is the History of Finnish Roma, being published this autumn on 24.10.2012 by the Finnish Literature Society. The head researcher for the project is senior lecturer Panu Pulma, who is probably Finland's best known researcher of Romany history. One of the goals of this historical project was to gather biographical material from the shared experience of families in addition to writing a multidisciplinary presentation on the 500-year history of Finnish Roma.

I think it would be time to finally start conducting studies in Finland about what the Roma think about other subjects than just their own culture and customs. Even the study of Romany identity appears to me to have come to the end of its road. Or maybe it hasn't, and there is still something interesting to found there. But talking about the above things back and forth will not in my view lead to anything new and revolutionary, and definitely won't develop our Roma group in any way.

The Roma community is not uniform in any way, not even its customs. Although individuality and the complexity of the group is still an abhorrent reality to many, in both the Roma population as well as the main population, there should be interview- and perhaps also biographical studies conducted on the subject while people are still alive and willing to talk. Being a minority within a minority is a feared and avoided subject. There are very few reports on the subject in addition to my own children's home study and there should be more. In this context I do not refer only to the horrendous experiences of discrimination of Roma who are sexual minorities, although that on its own could provide reports hundreds of pages in length, but I also would like to see studies on the political lives of Roma activists, spiritual actors and the elderly.

In my opinion it is good for people of many professions to read about the Roma, and read other things than studies about their problems and their solutions. There is plenty of knowledge about the history and customs of Finnish Roma, they should now be made part of the information given out during the normal studies for a number of professions.

I think the voice of the Roma on today's world should be better heard and preferably so that researchers also include educated Roma themselves.

In addition it would be reasonable that there would be biographical studies made of some of these people I have also interviewed for this study, as they have all lived very eventful lives as both artists, people and as Roma. There are no two stories that are alike.

9 CONCLUSION

I have made a journey to a world that was new to me. Being a Roma and an artist at the same time perhaps seems to be much more normal, or should I say easier and more natural than I had previously imagined. This was the case for the six Roma I interviewed for this work at least. That doesn't mean that applying for grants or getting gigs, in other words doing their jobs, is any different from the same battle for existence fought by many other Finnish artists as well.

There have always been creative and artistically talented people in every family in the Roma community, whose own group, the Roma, perhaps didn't hold to a high enough esteem, because as stated there have been many of them, particularly musicians. The prevalent thought also believed by the Roma population itself that they are particularly talented and artistic remains a mystery; as such a study that would verify the claim has never been conducted.

My study does appear to verify the idea that Romany and artist identities are not separate, but my subjects rather seem very natural in that role and identity they consider themselves to be. They do not seem to experience much of an artist identity. The exception to this was the one artist who stated they don't consider themselves to have any clear identity.

It was interesting and pleasing to find that being Gypsy/Roma showed in the art of all my subjects unintentionally and automatically. That result would seem to strengthen the common perception about the strength and sensitivity of the emotional side of the Roma. There have been few studies on this subject as well, not considering Laura Ruohonen and Veijo Rantala's 1991 interview study "Aito mustalainen on lämmin

ihminen” “A True Gypsy is a warm person” , where the subject was dealt with somewhat in the interviews of 15 Roma.

As a final conclusion of this study you could say that being Roma and an artist is very natural to the artist themselves, and they are not separate roles. Their experience suggests they generally feel appreciated by the Roma community, with the exception of one respondent, towards whom the Roma community has often been hostile. In addition to their families, most of them find their closest friends and supporters in the main population. The idea of community also seemed to find broader dimensions in the responses of my subjects, as they appeared to have three communities to be a part of.

After this almost a year long process and a journey with this thesis I got two thoughts for this end: *There are a lot of artists in this world, but few of them are remembered. History is not as it is written, but rather as it is remembered.*

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