

Media Presentations of Alterity in Terms of Literary Stereotypes and Prejudices: *Zigeuner* (Gypsy) Representations

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On 25th of October 2012 the “Memorial to the murdered Sinti and Roma persecuted during the Third Reich” opened. The history stands exemplarily for the difficult range of interests concerning “Sinti and Roma” in Germany. This opening act is so important because it took more than 60 years after the persecution and mass killing after World War II to build a memorial for “Sinti and Roma” in the Capitol of Germany, Berlin. This memorial stands near the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” which opened in 2005. The German Bundestag had decided on 25th of June 1999 – after eleven years of public debate – to build this memorial near the Brandenburg Gate. The memorial is stage win of the civil rights movement of the 1979 “Sinti and Roma”. First post-war associations to put forward “Sinti and Roma” interests have founded in the 1950s. Since then they have attempted to represent material claims of the “Sinti and Roma”.

In several European countries the present image of “Sinti and Roma” is based on a history of marginalization, institutional exclusion and prejudices. Despite that research people still suffer from a lack of institutional power to protect the members of this minority by law. Bogdal points out that the sustainability of the intellectual construct of Europe might depend on intercultural concepts that arrange equal living conditions for “Sinti and Roma” (2011, 10). To give an example why this thesis weighs a lot, let us look at what is happening to Roma people in the European cultural capital Košice where I have just been. About 6000 Roma live in a Ghetto in Košice’s Lunik IX. The Roma are concentrated there without having public access to electricity, water supply or heating. Image 1 shows two state owned houses for Roma with a gap in the middle where a third building was pulled down due to statist reasons as officials from the city depict it. Though, it must be mentioned that there are



several Roma activists, social workers and even politicians who try to put forward concepts to support better living conditions for Roma. Unfortunately those projects were not included into the Cultural Capital Concept but the activist will keep on trying. One effort they could achieve was the privatization of houses to offer low rents, water, electricity and heat supply. Image 2 shows the buildings with those low-threshold flats.



Building on Bogdal's quantitatively justified observation that stereotypes and prejudices against "Sinti and Roma" have been traded through Middle Ages until now my analysis aims to show their prevalence in contemporary media.

About Interacts of "Zigeuner" Stereotypes with Antiziganism

Prejudices and stereotypes have been researched by many scholars of different sciences. Social sciences examined the connection between stylistic-linguistic stereotypes and socially based prejudices (Elliott & Pelzer 1978, 7). The analysis of stereotypes in popular media has extensively been researched during the last 30 years (Kostka & Schmidt 2009, 42f.). Although the research in the field of literary stereotypes has a long tradition this field of research is still up to date. Nowadays stereotypes of "Zigeuner" are most closely

connected to discrimination against "Sinti and Roma" as Bogdal pointed out recently (2013, 17). The correct term for discrimination against "Sinti and Roma" is antiziganism. This term is a result of Gronemeyer's, Münzel's and Streck's research project called "*Tsiganologie*" during the 1980s (Zimmermann 2007, 337). It is a disputed term because of the underlying pejorative term "Zigeuner" (341). Nevertheless in 1995 it had been translated into "antigypsyism" by Ian Hancock and furthermore been chosen as terminus technicus for the discrimination against "Sinti and Roma" including racial, ethnical, religious reasons (Zimmerman 2007, 339; cf. Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma 1985). An antiziganistic case in point of high actuality is given by Balcanu, who writes about the situation of "Sinti and Roma" in Romania: A country where

during Ceausescu's era the Roma minority did not have the right to exist and where calling someone a *tzigan* is worse than insulting someone's mother being a 'gypsy' cannot be easy. As a European country belonging to the European Union, Romania has to ensure equal chances for all its citizens, no matter what ethnic group they belong to. Reality is far from the written rules – some Romanians are more equal than others. Discrimination against the Roma minority goes beyond Romanian borders. Italy, France and other EU countries reject the difference of a people that does not have the same notions of social life. (Balcanu 2008, 67)

Moreover there is an internet platform called Antiziganism Watchblog (antizig.blogspot.de) which informs about actual discrimination against "Sinti and Roma" in Europe. Indeed the occurring question is how can such discrimination exist in different countries at the same time in varying degrees?

"Zigeuner" – What's in a Word?

To show the long lasting history of antigypsyism I have a closer look at the terms used in that context: The terminological variety concerning the definition of "Zigeuner" or "Gypsy" or "Sinti and Roma" in Europe typifies the historical and social dimensions behind those words. I use quotation marks for all those terms. My reason for this is that I want to show that each word is a categorization to put forward certain means. With regard to Nazi persecution and mass killings there is a lot of research about the

complicated mutual accountability between labeling by scientific surveys and racist policy in Europe (Willems 1997; Cottaar, Lucassen, & Willems 1992). The term “Zigeuner” is to a high degree linked to the “Sinti and Roma” genocide during World War II when about 500 000 so called “Zigeuner” were annihilated. The substitution of the pejoratively used term “Zigeuner” by the term “Sinti and Roma” can therefore be interpreted as achievement of the “Sinti and Roma” civil rights’ movement of the 1980s (Rose 1987, 82).

All language communities have the right to refer to themselves by the name used in their own language. Any translation into other languages must avoid ambiguous or pejorative denominations. (Art. 33 UDLR 1998; cf. Harnisch 2011, 28)

“Gypsy” initiatives, organizations and spokesmen intended to “claim financial and moral compensation for acknowledgement of their persecution during the Nazi regime” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 252). The problem was that reparation payments had been denied for sexually abused women as well as for “Zigeuner” because courts had still been arguing in the Nazi-jargon:

So wurden regelmäßig Entschädigungsansprüche von Frauen abgelehnt, die wegen sexueller Beziehungen mit Kriegsgefangenen oder Zwangsarbeitern in Konzentrationslagern verbracht worden waren. Aber auch Opfer rassischer Verfolgung litten unter solchen Auslegungen. Manche Gerichte griffen bei der Ablehnung der Entschädigungsansprüche von Sinti und Roma auf die Argumentation der Verfolger zurück, indem sie deren Maßnahmen mit polizeilichen und militärischen Sicherheitserfordernissen rechtfertigten. Wiederholt traten dabei ehemalige nationalsozialistische Rasseforscher als Gutachter auf. Gleichzeitig schoben die Gerichte den Zeitpunkt, von dem an eine kollektive Verfolgung der »Zigeuner« angenommen wurde, immer weiter hinaus. (Goschler 2005, 194)

The German federal high court of justice disclaimed racial reasons for the genocide of “Zigeuner” in 1956. As consequence victims did not have the right to claim for compensation payments. Though, the German federal high

court of justice accepted the so called 1943’s *Ausschwitzserlass* of Heinrich Himmler as beginning of genocide out of racial reasons but ignored the *Festsetzungserlass* and the *Grenzzonenverordnung* from 1940 (Döring 1959, 418). Those restrictions forbade so called *Zigeunern* to stray around in their certain way of living. While the German federal high court argued that this nomadic way of living was the reason for genocide and therefore a criminal danger outgoing from “Zigeunern,” Döring showed that actually it had been racial reasons (1959, 424f.). He argues that the nomadic way of living was supposed to be a genetic matter. So the restriction and deportation of “Zigeuner” had been because of racial reasons. From today’s point of view it seems far paradox that reparation payments for genocide were measured by the question whether people were annihilated because of behavior or racial reasons and the high court’s decision from 1956 has to be criticized as unacceptable (Stengel 2004, 58f.). In order to represent material claims and compensation payments for the victims of the Holocaust (*Porrajmos*) the civil rights movement needed to emphasize an “identity of all “Gypsy”-groups” (Willems 1997, 3). “Gypsy” intellectuals like Ian Hancock and political leaders use medial communicators like the internet to show that Gypsies are a people or “even a nation” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 257). The Romani scholar and political advocate Ian Hancock emphasizes that the Romani language originates from an Indian language.

Often referred to collectively by the generic term “Roma”, Roma and Sinti and other groups share common cultural, linguistic, and ethnic ties, and constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Because of the centuries-old societal prejudice, intolerance, and pervasive discrimination that they continue to face, they experience problems in accessing rights and services in most areas of life and are poorly represented in the public and political life of their societies” (osce.org 2012)

Though, it is still disputed that a closed group of “Sinti and Roma” is fictionally constructed because of the geographical and cultural differences between “Sinti” and “Roma” (Bogdal 2011, 15; Eder-Jordan 1999, 51).

In short, [...] we do not know with precision the historical reasons for the Roma diaspora, and for their nomadic lifestyle. Harassment

certainly figures into these reasons, but we do not know to what extent it mingles with human agency, or choice. (Malvinni 2004, 65)

Willems and Lucassen (2000, 252) criticize the “umbrella concept Gypsies” using the example of Cohen (1997). He has introduced four “features” of the diaspora concept: “an often traumatic dispersal from an original homeland; the collective memory of an escape from an homeland; be it mythologized or not; an ethnic consciousness that spreads across group members in several countries and over a long period of time; a troubled relationship with the “host” society; and the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host societies” (Willems and Lucassen 2000, 253; cf. Cohen 1997, 180). They point out that these features do not fit suitably to the term “Gypsies” except the point of the difficult relationship between the minority and major society. In terms of labeling an ethnic identity Willems and Lucassen are certainly right to expose that Cohen’s diaspora concept leaves sociologists “empty-handed” (ibid. 2000, 268). Furthermore the order of the term “Sinti and Roma” set the German “Sinti” not only literally in the first place (Zimmermann 2007, 23). The English term “Gypsy” refers to the so called “Great Trick”, how Fraser (1995, 60) calls the “status as Christian pilgrim” which granted the travelers free access and protection (80): The “Great Trick” was that “some Gypsy groups identified themselves as penitents from “Little Egypt” during the Turkish conquest (Malvinni 2004, 64). Besides some theories say this is why they were called “Egyptans” which is short today’s “Gypsies”.

The emphasis on “Little Egypt” when the Gypsies were explaining their origins to the startled westerner possibly indicates that the early bands had recent connections with the Peloponnese. They were not the only refugees from those parts. Though many of the nobles stayed behind and embraced Islam, the advance of the Turks into Europe did set others, together with numbers of the priests and people, fleeing in search of a safe haven and, eventually, wandering west and subsisting on charity. (Fraser 1995, 82)

The documents tell that in the early years of their appearance the charity was granted to them, because those people were seen as “needy people” (Fraser 1995, 68) and were treated favorably (82). Fraser sees in this

“favorable treatment and their pose as pilgrims” reasons for the Gypsies’ “westward migration” (82). Later “attitudes towards Gypsies [...] began to harden” (87) and Gypsies “had become unwelcome” (88). Chronicles are sources for the “deterioration in public attitudes towards Gypsies”. They were blamed for “suspicion of espionage” and for “their failure to succor the Holy Family on the flight into Egypt” (85).

“Gypsy” Stereotypes from the Middle Age

Uerlings’ survey concludes that the exclusion of “Sinti and Roma” is a result of mixing semantics and practice (Uerlings 2007, 87). Researchers are focused on the tripartite classification of three main stereotypes that could have led to exclusion: (1) religious, (2) sociographic and (3) ethnic stereotypes (Uerlings 2007; Zimmermann 2007b; Willems & Lucassen 2000).

Bodgal showed that religious stereotypes have been traded as legends evolved from the Bible and became “(hi)story” (2011, 37f.). Up until the 20th Century legends which originated from the Middle Ages have been passed on.

For something like half their history, there are few written records we can usefully turn to in following the Gypsies’ trail. Then, once historical references do begin to accumulate, they invariably come from outsiders, and may have been written in ignorance, prejudice and incomprehension. (Fraser 1995, 10)

According to sources from the 15th century, in 1417 “Gypsies came as a new phenomenon to Europe west of the Balkans” (Fraser 1995, 61). The words “Cigan”, “Cygan”, “Chickan”, “Czyganychyn”, “cigány” or “cingari” appear in early sources like chronicles, myths, legends, mandates, “municipal accounts”, “imperial letters of protection” and other documents by law (Fraser 1995, 60 and 87; Bodgal 2011, 39 and 61).

Travelling out of Egypt to show solidarity with Jesus’ fate is a practical legend for people travelling with their family.

It is probable that the church also made its contribution to this stigmatizing process, as was the case with the social ostracism of Jews in Europe. In the wake of the theological stigma that the Jews were the killers of Christ,

a series of prejudices subsequently developed, varying in function to suit changing social circumstances. [S]ome myth or other was continually being concocted about other undesirable groups, with or without any basis in reality, in order to identify these people as a source of social decay who deserved to be driven out of Christian society so that they then could be subjected to persecution including the appropriation of their property their freedom and even their lives. [...] The ongoing stigmatizing of Gypsies as heathens in West Europe (in combination with their foreign origin and – in part – mobile way of life) conforms admirably with the pattern of persecution just sketched, where victims were regarded as religious deviants. (Willems 1997, 7)

Indeed the image of being a member of the folk who denied access and shelter for Maria and Joseph must have influenced the collective memory of both, the “Gypsies” and the major society. I guess that the decreasing of religious stereotypes can be interpreted as an example for how volatility can abolish simplistic stereotypes: The question is whether (a) the development from national to global or (b) the deterioration of the church’s image has been the power to draw back those religious stereotypes. In my opinion the religious stereotypes were allocated to the sociographic and ethnic stereotypes. Bogdal says that legend-like embroidery of biblical happenings can be interpreted as early forms of popular fiction. Therefore “Gypsies” became:

- descendants of Kain.
- bodyguards of King Pharaoh, which stopped behind at the opening Red Sea.
- forgers of Jesus cross’ pins.
- those who denied night’s lodging to the Holy Family on their flight to Egypt. (Uerlings 2007, 95; Fraser 1995, 85)

For instance let us have a look at *Imagerie Pellerin*¹. The *Imagerie Pellerin*, which is titled with “*Les Cinq sous de Bohémiens*”, is an undated French sheet of pictures from late 19th or early 20th century combines the connection to the Holy family and the social situation of “Gypsies”: A “Gypsy” woman who is barefoot meets the also barefoot Maria and Joseph – being barefoot is since ancient time a symbol for divinity. The Holy Family is running away from Herodes’ soldiers. The “Gypsy”-woman hides the little Jesus child and rescues his life. As reward God allows, that

“Gypsies” may steal five Sous a day without being punished (Bogdal 2011, 37f.). We can observe at least three major resulting or causal stereotypes: First, “travelling with a family while using tents or caravans” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 254); second, “Gypsies” as beggars or even thieves and third, self-determined women. The motif of travelling is linked to the linguistically researched origin of the “Gypsies” in India. The leader of this theory is Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann of Göttingen University (1783) who published *Die Zigeuner: ein historischer Vergleich über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksahle dieses Volkes in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprungel* translated into English in 1787: *Dissertation on the Gypsies* in 1783. So the religious stereotypes are closely combined with ethnic stereotypes. As Grellman’s research of language proved the language of “Gypsies” *Romanes* has a wide range of similarities with Indian Sanskrit. That “linguistic evidence as it was then understood” led to a generally acceptance of India as the origin of “Gypsies” (Fraser 1992, 195). Already in these early years of research we recognize a dangerous mutual accountability between science and real life politics:

For those who subscribe the ethnographic viewpoint, it is assumed that the “Gypsies” constitute a single people with a number of specific characteristics of their own. In other words, Gypsy studies are dominated by a primordial standpoint that interprets their ethnic identity as, in essence, an incontestable given. (Willems 1997, 4)

Indeed there is a case given that shows catastrophic impacts of Grellmann’s study:

He [Grellmann] extended the currency of various bits of scandal-mongering, such as unrestrained depravity among Gypsy women, and accusations of cannibalism. On the latter, he gave considerable exposure to lurid comments in Hungarian and German newspapers on recent proceedings in Hungary (Hont county, now part of Slovakia) involving over 150 Gypsies, 41 of whom, after confessions extracted under torture, were executed by a variety of means (beheading, hanging, breaking on the wheel, quartering) for crimes said to include cannibalism. (Fraser 1992, 195)

Sources for ethnic stereotypes are less passed on in literature than in modern sources like websites: “Gypsy” intellectuals and political leaders use the internet as communicator. Their intention is to show that “Gypsies” are a people or “even a nation” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 257). The “work of politically motivated scholars who identify” an ethnic group “easily leads to the creation of new myths” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 269). In order to represent material claims and compensation payments for the victims of the Holocaust (*Porrajmos*) there are interests in emphasizing an “identity of all “Gypsy”-groups” (Willems 1997, These interests might be again motivated by Cohen’s diaspora concept (1997): Some representatives of the International Romani Union wish to represent a Romani people internationally and wish to accept collective reparations similar to those paid to Israel. By the way Willems and Lucassen point out that the United Nations do not recognize any other way “to plea for the human rights of minorities” (267).

Furthermore, historical research has shown that a sustained categorization over time can strongly stimulate ethnic group feelings. (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 254)

To sum it up one can say that there has always been a close relationship between pseudo-scientific or even scientific research about “Gypsies” and real life politics. The vicious circle of fiction and real politics leads to exclusion: Myths served as “pretext[s] for intolerance” (Fraser, 1995, 85). The “work of politically motivated scholars who identify” an ethnic group unfortunately “easily leads to the creation of new myths” (Willems & Lucassen 2000, 269). So, history of Gypsies is until the years after World War II a history of alterity. The image of Gypsies during the European history is drawn by the major society. There is no documentation by the Gypsies themselves.

In the following I examine the connection between media stereotypes and the invention of the “Gypsies” referring to Bogdal’s thesis. In the following I show that literature has been a major medium to pass on stereotypes for centuries.

Literary Representations of “Zigeuner” in Contemporary Popular Media

Literary stereotypes of “Zigeuner” are very well researched: The title of Bogdal’s book about

stigmatization of “Gypsies” in Europe is ad lib translated by “Europe invents the *Zigeuner*” (2011). Bogdal’s main thesis is that there is no “Zigeuner”, one is created as “Zigeuner” (cf. Uerlings 2007, 88). Hagen (2009) and Bogdal (2011) point out that literary works enable both, the establishment and exposure of images and stereotypes in terms of continuity and interruption.

Die natürliche Inszenierung fremder Innenwelten ist gewiss einer der Gründe für die anthropologische und kulturelle Bedeutung der Fiktion. Der Leser kann aus sich heraustreten, nicht nur ein fremdes Leben führen, sondern auch in eine fremde Subjektivität schlüpfen, fremde Weltwahrnehmungen und Lebensentwürfe tentativ durchspielen. Kein Gespräch und kein psychologisches Dokument kann so viel Alterität gewähren. Erst das Eintauchen in die Innenwelt des fiktiven Anderen gibt dem Menschen die Möglichkeit, sich eine Vorstellung von seiner eigenen Identität zu machen. (Schmid 2008, 36)

In this context Hagen (2009) analyzed how alterity is constructed in popular media like film, opera and literature using the example of Gypsy characters in works of Jean Potocki, Victor Hugo, Antonio García Gutiérrez, Giuseppe Verdi, Prosper Mérimée, Georges Bizet, George Sand, Jules Verne etc. A German encyclopedia of literature supplies us with the definition of alterity as otherness due to spatial, temporal, cultural or historical distance. According to the article becoming aware about the impacts of alterity would help to understand the others (von Wilpert 2001, 20). Kostka and Schmidt (2009) give a similar but more detailed definition of alterity in a handbook for methods in German language and literature studies. Their field of research is the so called *Alteritätsforschung* or *Interkulturalitätsforschung* (2009, 34) which examines the interaction between self-attribution and attribution of others. They define alterity as opposite of identity and show that in terms of literature self-discovery is influenced by cultural, social, spatial, lingual, temporal and poetical differences respectively similarities (34 and 50). In terms of cultural alterity they point out that the paradigm shift concerning the German term for *culture* was fundamental for a research on that field. Bachmann-Medick (2010) has summed up the interpretive, performative, reflexive, literary, postcolonial, translational, spatial and iconic turn

as cultural turns (Turk 2003). She considers the singular turns as categories which offer methods for literary studies and develops Clifford Geertz's culture as text theory. Her aim is to promote the opening of the culture as text theory for different kind of readings and interpretations (Bachmann Medick 2004, 316). Instead of culture-specific meanings a new attention should be drawn on cultural and formative action models, action repertoire and perception settings. According to her literature was a revealing medium for that new kind of analysis (313).

Hagen concludes that in terms of literature, film, opera and popular media it was often difficult to distinguish between cultural features and cultural attributions by others. According to her in Non-“Romani” art there are more projected stereotypes of how Gypsy culture is seen by others than certain kinds of shibboleth of “Sinti and Roma” culture (Hagen 2009, 217). As I mentioned above the problem concerning “Zigeuner” stereotypes is that negative as well as positive stereotypes influenced the everyday life of “Gypsies”. So, the outstanding phenomenon about the persecution of “Gypsies” is that they are discriminated against and embraced at the same time: For example the gypsy music is a big part of European dance and party culture: Since several years the so-called Balkan Party capture of dance floors all over Europe (Engelbert 2008).

Simply to live and to enjoy living is an art which is less and less feasible, although the commercialization of life offers everything desirable: at present the music and the arts of the Gypsies, Sinti and Roma embody a life affirming perspective, connected for example with the innovative tendencies of hybrid music. A vital culture has sprung up on the periphery and has moved into urban centers. Balkan Beats is such a cultural phenomenon. Fleeing from the first civil war after the foundation of the European community an urbane music mix has developed among immigrants above all in Berlin, the geographic crossing point of cultures, popularized through DJ Shantel from Frankfurt and RJ Robert Soko from Berlin. Of course the problems of migration can't be solved through this, but perhaps they *can be made more conscious*². A cultural dismantling of barriers has a huge power, which is noticeable from the first tones in Balkan Beats. The borders of cultural belonging are fluid and find their frame in the European Balkan Project: A style to live by.

(Engelbert 2008, http://ebp.arthur-engelbert.de/?page_id=10)

Those double featured “Zigeuner” images from the European Middle Ages are still represented in modern media like newspapers, magazines, TV channels, web sites etc. At the same time the images corroborate the yearning for spatial and physical transgression. A proliferation of exotic fantasies of wild physicality and disorganization is observable in terms of Carmen or Esmeralda figures (Hagen 2009, 15).

Der Carmen-Mythos ist in besonderer Weise geeignet, die Figur der Zigeunerin in unterschiedlichen medialen Ausformungen, von der Novelle über die Oper, bis zum Film und neueren Performances zu untersuchen. (Hagen 2009, 106)

In contrast to Esmeralda, the character of Carmen is deconstructed in later adaptation (Hagen 2009, 86). Esmeralda's character seems to stay specified on stereotypes. The oldest character between Carmen and Esmeralda in movies is played by Marlene Dietrich in “Golden Earrings” from 1947: Bogdal criticizes Marlene Dietrich for playing a role that is full of stereotypes.

Erschreckend, was Marlene Dietrich, der man keinerlei rassistische Vorurteile unterstellen kann und die sich als Antifaschistin verstanden hat, als authentisches Aussehen und Verhalten von Zigeunern betrachtet. Die eigentlich belanglose Episode zeigt schlaglichtartig, wie die die Vorstellung von den zivilisationsfernen, jegliche Hygiene missachtenden Zigeunern in das kulturelle Gedächtnis eingebrannt ist. (Bogdal 2011, 428)

To tell the truth I liked the movie because of its story. In the contrary, seeing the connection between social exclusion and stereotypes I must say that the movie won't exposure stereotypes. To the background of genocide reality and fiction are linked too far.

Vor dem Hintergrund der Massenvernichtungen, die deutlich erwähnt werden, erscheint die abenteuerliche und romantische Flucht- und Liebesgeschichte als problematische, ja unangemessene Situationsbeschreibung, auch wenn es sich dabei um ein Loblied auf die Solidarität der

Verfolgten und ihren Überlebenswillen handelt. (Bogdal 2011, 427)

Recently the wilderness of “Gypsy” women has been for a British TV show called “My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” of Channel 4. In this TV show stereotypes like young girls as sex symbols or were depicted without reflecting consequences for the people concerned (www.theguardian 2012). One more example for mixing reality with fiction comes from the far right-winged Swiss newspaper *Die Weltwoche*: The headline of the article warns *The Roma Are Coming: Raids on Switzerland*. The subtitle is called *Family Business of Crime*. In the photograph one can see a little child with a gun which is directed into the camera (fr-online, 2012). The child’s skin is looking dark and the face seems to be a little dirty. While looking at the background of the child one can’t determine the exact location where the photo has been taken but the headline suggests that it has been taken in Switzerland. Actually the photo has been taken on a toxic trash dump near a reception camp in Kosovo. The child holds a plastic gun which he has found in the dump. It is not clear whether the child is a “Gypsy”, Albanian, Serb, Bosnian or member of any other group. It can be presumed that not every reader of *Die Weltwoche* would have been astonished that this child was a “Gypsy”. Maybe many readers would have felt that their image of a “Gypsy” is exactly met by the photography. What kind of stereotypes can be found in that picture? The subtitle says that “Gypsies” abuse their children to commit a crime. We find the stereotype that “Gypsies” are not civilized.

Bachmann-Medick explains stereotypes by the fact that each society might contain and reflect its counterpart (2004, 26). Communication in volatile times also means that the power and influence of literature had been transformed into new popular media. Stereotypes which lead to prejudices and exclusion can be found in magazines, newspapers and especially in the world wide web. Especially the negative images of a discriminated minority like “Sinti and Roma” implicate the question for responsibility of popular media. In my doctoral thesis I am going to analyze the contemporary literature of “Sinti and Roma” to support the inclusion of “Sinti and Roma” as equal writers into Germany’s literary scene. The following thesis underlies my project:

Recently an increasing number of Romanies have started to represent themselves in public

to counter prevailing attitudes of hatred and discrimination against them by sharing their life experiences with the gadjes, the non-Gypsies [...]. This seems to me to mark a fascinating historical turning point in Rom culture. Since the 1980s, we have witnessed a growing number of autobiographies written by Romanies themselves. Given that the Romanies have relied primarily on oral traditions to pass on historical information and cultural knowledge, and that illiteracy among them is still very high in most countries where they reside, this sudden shift to the public non-Gypsy realm and to the printed word is striking indeed. [...] This new literature by Romanies challenges traditional dualistic images of Gypsies as either asocial criminals or as a romantically idealized people close to nature. (Grobbel 1999, 1)

In my doctoral thesis I use methods from literature sciences to do the literature of “Sinti and Roma” justice.

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¹ *Série aux armes d'Epinal. N° 22, Histoires & scènes humoristiques, contes moraux, merveilleux. Les cinq sous des bohémiens : [estampe]* <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6938697j/f1.zoom>

² My emphasis.