

“The Romani language as instrument of cultural identity”

**Introductory word of the Foundation Social-Cultural of
Roma “Ion Cioaba”**

By Luminita Mihai Cioaba

Ladies and Gentleman, distinguished organizers of Nevo Drom: the New Way, thank you for inviting me here , in the beautiful and sunny city of Bari.

I consider this event as a great opportunity to emphasize some of the aspects of the history, the culture, and actual political situation of the Romani population. In behalf of the many Romani people I would like to thank the organizers of this event ; Cooperative in collaboration with the romani "Artezian" Cooperative, the "CEDAM-Onlus" Association and the "Vox Popoli" Association.

My topic is : "The Romani language as instrument of cultural identity"

The Roma people are a nation of free people. They are among the first travellers of Terra, and this is the main reason for which they are known as nomads.

Their Love for life and freedom is what describes them best. This love is the symbol of their flag.

The flag for Roma people has representations of the sky,blue, the earth, green and a wheel as a symbol for the road.

Over the centuries, nobody tried to understand them or to come closer to them. While , Romani people managed to learn everything from the people that they lived with.

Only gifted and wise people, also great artists, always loved the Roma people and tried to understand the magic of their life and paint or play the beauty of their soul.

As a result, a form of art was born, an art that last forever.

The Roma people always lived near forest and water, in the middle of the nature. Of course the fire in front of their tent is a well known image.

They did not choose a place to permanently live because they don't like limits and frontiers.

They are the essence of freedom.

The Roma people managed to find the colours of life being surrounded by love.

There comes a time when one can feel he can't have complete freedom.

Only few of us know what the feeling of walking barefoot in snow or fresh grass feels like.

There has been fights with time and against time, because they love to remain simple.

How can we make a free man like this live in an apartment, when all his life he was used to sleep under the moon and stars?

How can we take his happiness away, when he watches the fire?

These people were born free, and this is how they will remain.

Who are the Roma people? They are warm, sociable, with hearts full of good and they believe in God, the one who created the world.

Our history is marked by anti-ziganism (Anti-gypsies), slavery, discrimination, persecution, expulsion, violence and genocide and this history has been written with our people's blood.

Hundreds and thousands of our people became victims of the Holocaust, abused for pseudo-medical experiments and finally gassed in concentration camps. This injustice to our people has been concealed to this day and at best treated as a side note of history.

Even after the WWII, thousands of Roma children were taken away from their parents, forced to be adopted and torn away from their roots - a measure that runs like a red thread through our people's history.

The Roma people neither provoked or started any war. They passed through wars without getting any revenge.

Traditionally, we are treated as a social fringe group or as a social problem.

The unwritten laws of the Roma people are named by specialists as Romanipen - this is respected by the whole community.

One of the most important rules is that the old people should be trusted and listened to, as they are wise and balanced.

For the Roma people, the Romanipen is a kind of „10 commandments“ that God gave to Moses, a reason that makes it be respected and efficient in keeping the community united and pure.

Even if the civilization from which the Roma people come doesn't exist anymore, the traditional and old people still exist.

The fundamental principle of the Roma tradition is named pativ, that tells about respect and good understanding in the community and also that it brings baxt, meaning luck.

„Pricaza“ is the name of the opposite of all these good principles.

The Roma philosophy is based on a simple principle, the distinction between pure and impure.

Pure means balance, in harmony with everything near. Physical purity is also important.

The Bible says that "although ships are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue/language is a small part of the body," but it turns life to whenever it wants to direct.

Language is mainly what reason uses to express, to communicate ideas and establish relationships between people.

Language is one of the most powerful characteristic of a nation. Language's heritage is what perfects a nation. Improving one's language is often made by writing, that mostly the foundation of a culture.

Right usage of the language indicates the amount of culture you have gained in life.

The language of communication and reason forces us to sense its limits, to be a part of its ethos and atmosphere, to a specific universe created by a nation.

The cultural heritage of a people is mainly shown by its language.

A nation without a language can't exist. This nation will be wiped out of world's map.

And language, of course, a mean of communication, is shaping itself by practicing literature. Without the long-tested suppleness of poetry, a language is like a pocket full of stones, said Platon.

Great poets, instead of receiving the word with love, they choose to give it to those who will follow them.

Their path is made holy by those who came after. It is a duty of respect to mention the name, their traces, the legends of their souls and houses they lived in.

Let's take, for example, Bela Italy. Poets represent the pride of Italy of today and tomorrow.

Where are Roma's poets? Where is Roma's country? Are there any buildings made by them? The list can be longer, of course.

There are 300 Roma writers in 12 millions of Roma citizens. It is very little. Yet, it is a start. Less than 50 years ago, Roma writers and poets showed up in literature.

Romni poet - the princess Waza Bronislawa of Poland (1910-1986) She gave us the opportunity to express ourselves. Gave us the chance to learn from each other.

Roma people do not have a country, yet they are everywhere.

Because of life's difficulties, different kinds of Roma people lost themselves or they were assimilated.

They lost their touch with Roma culture and especially with Roma language.

It is interesting to notice that Roma people kept their language, customs and manner by work.

As Roma people manage to learn the language of the countries they lived in, it is time for the majority to step up and try to learn more about Roma people, so the majority is called to learn more about Roma people, in order to understand and help them find The New Way, along with those who live with.

Roma people kept their culture by oral transmission from one generation to another. This culture was not written down, yet it remained, for it is the most precious treasure - the spring of Roma people's live.

Great writers tasted this spring and described Roma's life in operas, which will last forever.

In 15th century when the father European literature Miguel Cervantes Saavedra was born. A cousin of Cervantes, the family of Maria Maldonado become nomadic because her father fall in love with a gypsy girl and Cervantes shows his extraordinary knowledge of the life and spiritual of Roma. Cervantes witnessed the persecution of other races such as Jews, and Moors and he evoked these problems in his work in particular in the Exemplary Stories (1613) such as the Little Gypsy Girl, Don Quixote, Lady Cornelia and The Dialog of Dogs.

The Little Gypsy Girl was the first completely original work in the history of European literature. While writing it the autor used everything that he and others knew about the life and culture of the Roma. The history show us that this story influenced many writers and artists such as: Aleksander Hardy in his La Belle Egyptienne, Thomas Middelton and William Rowley, Aleksander Sergeyvich Pushkin who wrote such novel collections as The Gypsies, Victor Hugo who wrote such novels as Notre-Dame de Paris (The Hunchback of Notre-Dame), Les Miserables and Esmeralda, Prosper Merimee who wrote the opera Carmen, and Johan Wolfgang Goethe who wrote for example Goetz von Berlicingen, Frederico Garchia Lorca who wrote the collection of poems El Romancero Gitano (ending the quoting).

Several well known European composers have lived together with Roma communities and piked up musical themes from their music backgrounds and turned them into well-known clasical music works. One could mention: von Weber, Rahmaninov, Bizet, Brahms, Tchaikovski, Stravinsky, Haydn, List, Ravel, Enescu, Bartok... I will stop here, thus the list could be a longer one. The Roma music and dance have clearly left its characters as well to the temperamental Hungarian music and to the Spanish flamenco and to many other national cultural characters.

When speaking about the dramatic art and the artistic performanece, one can say with no doubts, the Roma brought that know-how to Europe. When they arrived in 11th century there where no theaters in Europe. Travelling Roma groups where invited by European kings and principalites to perform and bring entertainments to Nobel folks all around Europe. They

sang, they danced, they showed tricks and they made short dramatic spectacles. In return these gypsy-performers were given protection letters which allowed them to travel freely from one region to another. This travelling circus and theater groups were laying the basement for the today's theaters, movies and performing entertainments.

All this described earlier on is part of the European Cultural Heritage in which the European Roma has played a significant role in past centuries.

There have deep connections with spirituality.

Understanding the astrology makes people feel some lack of balance near them.

For the Roma people, the most important aspect of time is the present.

It is considered that past does not matter and that future belongs to God.

This is why, Roma people live their lives at full.

Roma people believe in good and bad, in complementary forces.

For example, the couple is made from two different parts, that have different roles. The mother is made for growing her children and taking care of the community.

Old women have special force, as they can communicate with the divinity, and can solve problems and make new destinies.

The man represents force, protection, balance.

It is sad that the Roma people live in duality nowadays, too.

They are seen as good and bad.

The Roma people should not be seen as an expression of poverty.

The modern life made them feel they can't be free, because today everything has an owner.

Does this mean the wish for traveling is over? No, the dream of being free and of traveling.

It is each country's duty to get involved in finding ways and solutions to Roma people's problems.

It is time to increase the knowledge of people in Europe about Roma history, culture, values and lifestyle, to encourage the contribution of Roma to Europe's cultural diversity and ultimately contribute to giving a positive value to an image of Roma which are, more often than not, perceived in a negative and stereotyped way.

To achieve this, the Cultural Route should first develop as a network of organisations (associations, museums, cultural centres, art or education centres, festivals, etc;) which work together towards developing a common set of activities.

As a second stage, the Route may evolve towards the development of tourist itineraries across different cities and territories of Europe, which would allow visitors to gain a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of Roma culture.