

# Finnish Romani Music, Gender (Masculinity), and Sexuality : Opportunity, Flexibility, and Reflexivity

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## **Finnish Romani Music, Gender (Masculinity), and Sexuality: Opportunity, Flexibility, and Reflexivity**

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### **1. Introduction**

Compared with Romani studies and gender studies, musicology in Finland has not been the subject of substantial research within a framework of interpretation based on age, masculinity, and the culture that is bound to them. A few ethnomusicologists outside of Finland have aptly acknowledged the importance of gender in the formation of a Romani identity (Pettan 1996: 42; Silverman 2012), but unfortunately, that has not influenced Finnish musicology.

In this chapter, I consider how gender influences empirical musicology, with a particular focus on the traditional music-culture of the Finnish Roma. What kinds of traditional music materials are constructed with gender? How does the researcher's gender (mainly masculinity) affect the material that is produced? In considering these issues, I tried to avoid questions that were limited to describing ethnographic fieldwork from a masculine perspective or as 'men's notions of music'; I also asked questions from a feminine perspective. Self-reflection with respect to the research should also lead to the deconstruction of hegemonic power relations and representations; the mere description or analysis of one's own underpinnings and their influence on the produced material is sufficient.

### **2. A Brief History of the Kaale and the Culture of the Finnish Roma**

Finland has the largest and perhaps the most homogeneous Romani population in Europe. The Kaale population is comprised of groups of Roma who arrived through Sweden as early as the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the Russian Roma merged with the Finnish Kaale. At present, approximately 10,000–12,000 Finnish Roma live in Finland, and about 3,000 are living in Sweden, mainly in the Stockholm area (Figure 1).

Due to the ethnic landscape changes, including immigration, Finland became more multicultural during the 1990s than ever before. The growing number of foreigners coming to the country has raised awareness about human rights, tolerance, and discrimination.



only remnants of the other original northern Romani dialects of Scandinavia survive in the vocabularies of itinerant groups (Granqvist 2007: 12).

The Romani language of Finland has changed a great deal over the last four hundred and fifty years. According to Kimmo Granqvist (2007: 18), the rapid change that is observable in the language is a result of the internal universals, a multilingual setting, and decreased use of the language. Finnish Romani also lacks a literary tradition, which is usually conservative and resistant to change. On the other hand, the situation has now changed, so that there are active Romani writers in many countries, and not only in Europe (Cederberg 2006: 122). According to recent studies in Finland (Kopsa-Schön 1996; Pulma 2006), at present, only elderly Roma, over sixty-five years of age, are able to communicate fluently in the Romani language. Middle-aged people (32–64) have a satisfactory command of the language, whereas young people (under 32) tend to have only a passable knowledge of Romani (Granqvist 2007).

## **2.2 Marriage and Practices Associated with Weddings**

Endogamy is generally regarded as an ideal form of conjugal relations among the Roma of Finland. However, in recent decades, mixed marriages have increased significantly (Kopsa-Schön 1996). In Finland, as in other parts of Europe (Casa-Nova 2007: 105; Pettan 2002: 198), a liaison between a Romani man and a woman of the majority (“white”) is more acceptable than the reversed situation.

## **2.3 Economic Structure**

Across the world, the occupations of the Roma are dependent on the economic activities that are generally practised, regardless of the areas they inhabit (see e.g., Adams et al. 1975; Sutherland 1975; Lucassen 1998). Anna Maria Viljanen (1986: 35) notes that the Roma are not completely self-sufficient in any of the places where they have lived in the West. Their means of livelihood have always been linked to non-Roma society and its economic structures, even to the extent that benefiting from the mainstream culture has been regarded as part of Romani ideology (see Sutherland 1975: 65). Seen from one perspective, this explains why in Finland, the music performed by the Roma achieved public recognition relatively late, since at the time when most Roma toured the countryside, very few Finns in the rural communities supported themselves through music.

## **2.4 Education**

Although the level of education among the Finnish Roma has improved in recent years, it remains lower, on average, than that of the majority (see also Casa-Nova 2007: 108). This is the case even though basic-level comprehensive schooling is free and education is mandatory in Finland until the age of 16. Reforms in basic rights and educational legislation have aimed to provide an equal level of education in different parts of the country, which would strengthen minorities’ position and rights. Very few Roma in Finland have received professional training in music. Many trace this to racism against the Roma. My research, based on participant observation, has indicated that factors other than racism, such as Romani customs, norms, and values, also encourage the Roma to

seek alternatives (non-formal musical education) for their professional lives (see also Casa-Nova 2007: 108).

## 2.5 Religion

At present, the majority of Finnish Roma belong to the Pentecostal movement (Kopsa-Schön 1996; Lange 2003; Casa-Nova 2007; Thurfjell 2013; Åberg 2014). Religious revivalism peaked among the Roma in the 1960s. In 1964, the Free Finnish Evangelical Roma Mission was jointly founded by a number of non-conformist congregations, including the Pentecostal movement, the Baptists, and the so-called Free Church. The Mission has borne witness to the various stages of Roma religious revivalism in Finland, more so than any other organisation. Although approximately 90% of Finland's Roma are members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church—'Almost all Roma are registered Lutherans'—they regard the Pentecostal movement as their spiritual home (see Kopsa-Schön 1996: 144–152; Åberg 2014; cf. Thurfjell 2013).

## 3. Roma Culture and Gender

To begin, I will briefly clarify my theoretical stance on music and gender. I have previously written about topics such as the male domination of Finnish Romani music culture (Åberg 2002; Åberg and Skaffari 2008), an alternative tradition of female and feminist musicians (Åberg 2015), and the gender politics of religious and popular music (Åberg 2014; see also Soilevuo-Gronnerod 2008). Although the Roma's music culture in Finland seems to be male-dominated, I reject the commonly held notion, following Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie (2007), that 'natural' sexuality is expressed in music; instead, I argue that the most important ideological work that is done by music is the construction of sexuality, which depends on the musical genre and the context of performance. Therefore, changes in musical style and form have generally been reflections of changes in society and gender (Blacking 1995: 49) and vice versa. As in the case of other cultural activities, music is inherently linked with issues of gender (Williams 2001: 68; Biddle and Gibson 2009). Common to all these disciplines—anthropology and sociology—is a commitment to the notion of masculinity, both as a field that can constitute itself (a field that places emphasis on ideology critiques, discourse analyses, and the analysis of power relations) and as a field that relies fundamentally on the feminine as its other.

In Finland as elsewhere, the Roma have their shared ideas of what is right, that is, the ideal way of following Romani customs (Viljanen 2012). While being a *Hortto Kaalo* ('real Roma') is for the most part 'doing' and 'acting' in accordance with a predetermined normative code, this ideal model does not always work as such; rather, it varies in everyday life. However, the Roma have their own traditional style of interaction within the family and among kin (Kopsa-Schön 1996: 253).

Symbols interpreted from the human body are reflected as both the physical and social behaviour of avoidance. Even though not all Roma follow similar practices with regard to customs and the norms of ritual purity, the main sets of norms steering the

behaviour of Finnish Roma, the so-called key scenarios (see Kopsa-Schön 1996), can easily be classified, as in Table 1 below (also Åberg 2002; 2015).

**Table 1** The main forms of behaviour, following divisions of age and gender (Source: Kopsa-Schön 1996: 68–69; Åberg 2002)

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prohibitions concerning women, mothers, and children (control of sexuality)</li> <li>2. Old vs. young (age-group control and sexual taboos)</li> <li>3. Men vs. women (gender and age-group divisions, control of sexuality)</li> <li>4. Vessels, clean places, clothing and laundry (age-group and gender divisions)</li> <li>5. Rules concerning the dead (respect)</li> <li>6. Obligations and prohibitions concerning the control and movement of the body (gender division, control of sexuality)</li> <li>7. Interaction between Roma and non-Roma (avoidance)</li> </ol> |
|---|



|   |
|---|
| Manifested as: avoidance, silence, respect, and shame |
|---|

All the above-mentioned forms of behaviour are associated with notions of honour and shame. According to the general logic of the purity rules, it is important to avoid mixing categories of any sort. Each time, place, role, or object has its proper place and function that should not be transgressed.

#### 4. The Traditional Music of the Finnish Roma

The study of Romani music in Finland should begin with its division between the private and public spheres (cf. e.g., Åberg 2002; Kovalcsik 2003: 85; Radulescu 2003: 79; Blomster 2012: 290). At the same time, the variety of ‘Gypsy music’ reflects the diversity of Romani groups in general. In Finland, the public sphere of Romani music has consisted of the religious Romani groups and groups performing international Romani music such as Hortto Kaalo and Anneli Sari, Kai Palm & Romales, and numerous tango singers and pop artists. The private sphere of music making includes traditional Romani songs. Although the musical interaction between these categories is constant, music performed by the Finnish Roma can be roughly divided as shown below in Table 2 (see Åberg 2002, 2015; Blomster 2006, 2012).

**Table 2** Conceptual dyads related to music performed by the Roma (Source: Blomster 2006)

| Sphere         | Public                  | Private               |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Audience       | The general public      | One’s own people      |
| Tradition      | Formal                  | Oral                  |
| Types of music | Professional and global | Traditional and local |

Today, the boundaries between these categories are fluid. An individual’s musical orientation subsumes many different genres of music and forms of musical identity. Since this chapter takes traditional Romani songs as its subject, I will now provide an overview

of the characteristics of traditional Finnish Romani music.

#### 4.1 Melodies

*Rekilaulu* (literally meaning ‘sleigh song’ in Finnish) is a type of folksong in Finland that has rhymed stanzas. This musical form was influenced by the German, Swedish, and British traditions of ballads and broadsides. The term *rekilaulu* may be a Finnish adaptation of the German terms Reigenlied or Reihenlied.

Originating in Finland and the surrounding areas, the musical models for the widespread layers of *rekilaulu* and romantic songs in traditional Romani tunes in Finland differ by gender (Åberg 2015). The melodic models for the *rekilaulu* favoured by the Roma have mainly been two- and four-lined songs from the Finnish folk repertoire, the so-called *rekilaulu* (Figure 3).

ESISÄEPARI      Esisäe      Jälkisäe

Ei nyt e-nää, ei nyt e-nää ke-sä-mar-jat au-ta

JÄLKISÄEPARI

Mi-nun kul-tain rak-ka-us on ruos-tu-nut kuin rau-ta

INITIAL COUPLET    Not any more | not any more | will summer berries | help  
FINAL COUPLET    My dearest's | love is | rusted like | iron

**Figure 3** Notation of the *rekilaulu* rhythm, with the literal translation of the song's lyrics. (Source: Åberg 2002)

As in Finnish *rekilaulu*, Romani *rekilaulu* combines seven beats in the sung text with eight beats in the melody to create the *rekilaulu* form. The single most important criterion for identifying *rekilaulu* pertains to the end of the second and fourth lines, which conclude with an accented poetic foot preceded by an unaccented beat. This can be observed in the Romani *rekilaulu* as a rule (Blomster 2006: 105). The following song provides an example of a *rekilaulu* verse (Figure 4).

**RUUNA SE JUOSTA ROIKUTTELLEE**

Ruu - na se juos - ta roi - kut - tel - lee ja re - ki - rau - ta nä - ri - see

juok - se juok - se Ju - ma - lan luo - ma I - I - man vai - vo - ja - si.

2. Lippusutet minä laitan  
äkäsele ruunalle  
että siä passois vaihotella  
vaikka pansniekoille.

1. The gelding trots along  
and the runners under the sleigh creak  
run, run, God's creature  
without any cares.
2. I will put the finest reins  
on that skittish little gelding  
so he could pass for sale  
even to the gentfolk.

**Figure 4** ‘Ruuna se Juosta Roikuttellee’  
(‘The Gelding Trots Along’) (Source: Åberg 2015)

Four-line songs are more common than two-line variations in the materials I have collected. An example of the former is the song ‘Kengitä sä Poika’ (‘Shoe the Horse, Boy’) (Figure 5).

**KENGITÄ SÄ POIKA**

Ken - gi - tä sä poi - ka se vai - va - loi - nen var - sa vain  
 te - rä - vä - hän ren - gas - kenk - kään vain  
 et - tä se jak - sai - si puo - les - sa tun - nis - sa  
 vii - na - kau - pan vä - li - ä vain juos - ta.

2. Kun hoila kun se kiroili ja kiljahteli tuolle  
 vaivaselle varsalle  
 kun vieterit ne paukkas rilloissani  
 ja hoila istui rinnallani.
  3. Kun mitäs minä pidän tuosta kolmesta markasta  
 kun olen juonut kymmeniä  
 kun pappa mulle antoi sen tuhannen markkaa  
 ja senkin olen viinassa juonut.
1. Shoe that little foal, boy, that little foal  
 with sharp horseshoes  
 so she will be able in a half an hour  
 to run the distance to the liquor store.
  2. The boy swore and shouted at that  
 little foal  
 when the springs banged in my carriage  
 and that girl sat next to me.
  3. But what do I care about those three marks  
 since I have drunk dozens away  
 since Father gave me thousands of coins  
 and I have drunk that away as spirits too.

**Figure 5** ‘Kengitä sä Poika’ (‘Shoe the Horse, Boy’). (Source: Åberg 2015)

Comparing the tunes reveals that four-line *rekilaulu* from the Finnish Romani repertoire are modelled after the Finnish folk repertoire. Although some of the songs form a coherent, standalone whole, there are many couplets and quatrains that do not present a logical story or description. Some of the lyrics are from another song, while others are from yet another. For example, the following song combines the traditional Romani song ‘Liinaharjahevonen ja Liputtomat Suitet’ with the Finnish folksong ‘Eihän Mistään Saa’ (Figure 6).



## LIINAHARJA HEVONEN JA LIPUTTOMAT SUIKET

$\text{♩} = 120$

Lii - na - har - ja he - vo - nen ja li - put - to - mat sui - tet  
 voi kun näyt - ti val - lan ko - mi - al - ta ei - hän  
 mis - tään saa niin - pä ko - mi - a - ta hei - laa kun  
 toi - sen po - jan kai - na - los - ta.

A long-maned horse and a leather bridle  
 Oh, how handsome she looked  
 You'll never find so pretty a girl  
 As under another boy's arm.

**Figure 6** 'Liinaharjahevon ja Liputtomat Suikeet' ('The Horse With the Long Mane and Leather Bridle'). (Source: Åberg 2015)

## 4.2 Romances

Next to *rekilaulu*, another distinctive genre in the Romani repertoire is the newer romance. These songs are characterised by an emphasis on the minor sixth intervals (sol-mi and do-la), minor tunes, upward melodic jumps or third progressions, harmonious tonal deep structure, and the combination of a certain poetic metre in the lyrics with the metric structure of the music. The formal structure of the lines is ABB'A' or ABCA'. Compared to the *rekilaulu* style, modal variants are few. An example of the newer tonal romance style is the song 'Merille, Oipa Merille', which a 15-year-old Romani boy performed for me, accompanying himself on the guitar, in 1997. The structure of the song puts it in the ABBA' group. One element in the melody that is worthy of special attention is the lift in the B lines to the upper octave third (sol-mi), which is not very typical in Finnish folksong melodies (Figure 7).

## MERILLE, OIPA MERILLE

Me - ril - le oi - pa me - ril - le nyt mun -  
 sy - däm - me - ni ha - la - jaa kun en mä  
 viih - dy näit - ten kaa - leit - ten vain seu - ras - sa viih - dyn  
 me - ril - - lä vain aal - to - jen.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2. Kun ensiksi petti minun armaani<br/>         ja se jätti minut suremaan<br/>         ja senkö tähden nämä kaalet mua halveksii<br/>         kun olen köyhä ja näin juomari.</p> | <p>4. Isä ja äiti ne lepäävät<br/>         tämän siunatun mullan vain alla<br/>         ne jättivät yksin minut suremaan<br/>         tähän avaraan maailmaan.</p> |
| <p>3. Mikään vain lintu niin korkealla lennä<br/>         kun kotkan vaan poikia kuusi<br/>         eikä mikään tauti mua rasita<br/>         kun tuo salainen kaipaus.</p>           | <p>5. Voi jos sinä vain heräisit<br/>         tämän elämäni kurjuuteen<br/>         ne jättivät yksin minut suremaan<br/>         tänne Imatran kuohuihin.</p>     |

1. To the sea, oh to the sea, now my heart desires  
 since I am not happy among these gypsies  
 I am only happy on the wide, open sea
2. First my love betrayed me  
 and left me to mourn  
 and is that why these Roma have such scorn for me  
 since I am so poor and given to drink
3. No other bird but the eagle flies so high  
 as the eagle's six sons  
 and no other disease afflicts me  
 than that secret longing.
4. Father and Mother are resting  
 under this blessed soil  
 they left me along to mourn  
 here in this wide, wide world.
5. Oh, if you would only awake  
 to the misery of this world  
 they left me alone to mourn  
 here by the roiling rapids of Imatra.

Figure 7 'Merille, Oipa Merille' ('To the Sea, Oh, to the Sea') (Source: Åberg 2015)

### 4.3 Performance Styles

Although Romani singers themselves rarely describe their music using Western musical terminology, their singing has its own recognisable features. The use of vibrato and glissandos must be regarded as the most characteristic features of traditional Romani singing. While it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of these stylistic features and the reasons for their longevity, we can nonetheless assume that the sources of the manner of

performance were the general aesthetic ideals of Romantic music and possibly the Roman's even earlier singing style, with its more Eastern origins. In the eighteenth century, the main elements of Romantic intonation that became established towards the end of the nineteenth century, such as vibrato, glissando, and rubato (cf. Kovalcsik 2003: 88), were still markedly rare means of vocalisation, since the ideal of tone was 'secco' or direct voice. Rubato singing was also influenced by the fact that traditional singing among the Roma of Finland did not include dance (cf. Kovalcsik 2003: 88–89).

In the following, I consider different styles of singing, with reference to a variant of the same basic melody. Of the singers, the women (Examples 1 and 4) sang without accompaniment, while the men (Examples 2 and 3) accompanied their singing with a guitar. The chosen example is the popular Romani song 'Kengitöpäs Poika' ('Shoe the Horse, Boy').

The notations (Figure 8) show that women use different vocalisation effects, like grace notes (melisma in Finnish) and glissandos more often than men. We can assume that without accompaniment, women lent rhythm to their singing through various means of vocalisation, while men could maintain the beat with accompaniment. In general, feminine–masculine differences are evident in the use of instruments in the Roma's

esim. 1  
♩ = 52

esim. 2  
♩ = 54

esim. 3  
♩ = 54

esim. 4  
♩ = 52

The figure displays four musical examples (esim. 1-4) of the Romani song 'Kengitöpäs Poika'. Each example consists of two staves of music. Examples 1 and 4 are for women and are marked with a tempo of ♩ = 52. Examples 2 and 3 are for men and are marked with a tempo of ♩ = 54. The notation includes various vocalization effects such as grace notes (indicated by small 'v' marks) and vibrato (indicated by wavy lines above notes).

Figure 8 Ways of performing Romani songs. (Source: Åberg 2015)

musical cultures (as many cultures); that is, women do not use melodic or accompanying instruments as much as men do (cf. Pettan 1996: 43).

Songs performed by women were also slightly slower in tempo, permitting them to apply vibrato more often than men. Generally speaking, the lack of accompaniment makes Romani songs miniature portraits of a kind, in which the singer can also describe the theme, such as the honour of kin and family, horse trading, markets, imprisonment, wandering, or love, melodically, rhythmically, and through performance. The performance of unaccompanied songs in particular is a deep form of cultural communication, in which musical communication constitutes a distinct means of expression. On the other hand, the Finnish Roma's performances of their traditional songs differ externally from the Roma's performances in other countries. Specifically, the singing is restrained, devoid of movement, gestures, or dancing. The singers focus on the tune and the story the song tells rather than theatrical gestures or mimes.

#### 4.4 Accompaniment

Instrumental music spread quite late among the Roma of Finland. According to material collected as late as the 1960s and 1970s, there was hardly any accompaniment (cf. Kovalcsik 2003: 88). However, a few examples from older material might suggest the forms of accompaniment used by Romani musicians in Finland. They also provide examples of the process of adopting accompanying instruments among folk musicians in general in Finland.

Romani songs collected between 1968 and 1972 contain three types of accompaniment for the modal *rekilaulu*, namely drone, melodic, and chord accompaniment. It follows that:

- 1) The accompaniment of modal melody without any distinct tonal effects calls for specific solutions.
- 2) In melodic accompaniment, any instrument suited for playing the melody can be used, such as the accordion, the mandolin, the guitar, or the violin.
- 3) In chord accompaniment among the Roma, the guitar is the predominant instrument for both men and women. This is associated with the spread of the guitar in popular music in general (Kovalcsik 2003: 92).

### 5. Masculinity and the Traditional Songs of the Finnish Kaale

Let us return to the link between masculinity and the traditional music of the Finnish Roma, Kaale songs. In my doctoral thesis, I proposed that horse, market, and liquor themes were emphasised in male singers' repertoires. The young boys who often performed these songs remarked that the songs about liquor have a strong meaning with respect to initiation. By emphasising the pleasure of getting drunk, they demonstrated their admittance into the group of grown men (Åberg 2002: 253). However the song's meaning depends on the social context in which the music was created and performed (Blacking 1995: 51). Like any other music, Roma songs can assume many meanings

depending on the performance context.

### 5.1 Songs about Love

Love appears to be the most popular theme, though it was seldom mentioned in the interviews I conducted. Traditional Romani families strictly observe moral codes about gender. For instance, persons of opposite genders (barring close kin) must not be alone together, and discussing (traditional or popular) music or song topics pertaining to sexuality and reproduction is considered highly inappropriate between men and women (see also Greenfields 2006: 42). Even today, in sharp contrast to masculine boasting or drinking songs, love songs are perceived to be about romance and emotion and are expressed in non-sexual terms, with men portrayed as being in need of support and sympathy. Among the Roma, the love song constitutes a genre in which gender codes are generally over-determined; femininity constitutes a problem for this ideology because it suggests a loss of male power, as shown in Example 1 below.

1. Why did you play with my heart, o dearest?  
 Why did you betray my life, take my life,  
 A traitor you must have been, you alone  
 Why did your love destroy me so playfully?
  
2. One more thing I ask, o please agree  
 If I die, please come to my grave  
 A traitor you must have been, you alone  
 Why did your love destroy me so playfully?
  
3. One more thing I ask, o please agree  
 If I die, please come to my grave  
 Bring a flower, a white lily  
 And remember that once I was like you

**Example 1** A love song sung by a 15-year-old boy, Jari Sinitaivas (Recorded in Viinijärvi in August 1997 by the author)

Ideally, men are expected to discard all ‘unmanly’ emotion, behave in a respectable fashion, and achieve financial independence. This type of lyric goes against ‘hegemonic masculinity’, hence the male code of honour holds men to a double standard. Social expectations of Romani males are ambiguous as either the performance of their virility (their sexual power over women) or their status as emotionally-orientated males as evidenced through marriage.

### 5.2 Prison Songs

Regardless of ethnicity, a sedentary versus a nomadic habit, age, gender, or other characteristics, every community includes a small number of individuals who behave in an anti-social or anti-cultural manner. The Roma’s prison songs represent different kinds

of pessimistic masculinity. In these songs, as shown in Example 2 below, some men are portrayed as victims of a demanding society.

1. Come with me to the gloomy house  
To hear a song that'll break your heart  
Where instruments lie silent, a tear is shed  
Bars tell of suffering and sighs
  
2. The prisoner on his sickbed  
Seeing deluded visions  
There's my loved one  
Coming to me  
I fall on the floor of the cell  
Sleeping in my hallucinations
  
3. The sun is rising  
Birds are starting to sing  
But behind the gloomy walls  
The poor prisoner can't hear it  
As much as I want to  
Bringing it back to mind

**Example 2** A prison song sung by a 55-year-old man, Urpo Nyman (Recorded in Joensuu, in June 1995 by the author)

In this song, there is a direct link between the singer and his own real-life story. After his performance, the singer told me: 'This song tells about the feelings and the time when I was in prison.' All societies and cultures result from individuals' attempts to express their inner experiences and share them with others; in other words, musical expression comes from the individual. Culture also consists of stories about our lives, and we all live as gendered creatures (see Ryan 2010: 31).

Sometimes, the lyrics represent a kind of pessimistic masculinity. In the prison song, the Romani man is a victim of blind destiny, but he can redeem himself by being the same sort of male as his ancestors were, thereby regaining an honourable identity. The intense bond between mother and son is a common topos in prison songs and in masculinity in the mainstream imagination. The song implies the singer's rite of passage into manhood, perhaps becoming the kind of man who has to leave home. Such men ask the mother goddess to bless them. At the same time, they assert the rightness of their choice.

### 5.3 Boasting or Fighting Songs

Masculine status is a powerful marker of social standing. Hence, the boasting or quarrelling song is one of the most prominent musical representations of the male Romani identity. For many Romani people, boasting songs elicit powerful feelings related

to family. Triggered by singing or simply hearing boasting songs, many informants instinctively began telling me stories about their ancestors. A 40-year-old man, for example, told me, ‘This song tells about the time when my kin was the powerful head of the family, and everyone was afraid of this man.’ Fighting songs are usually sung during times of conflict between two families. By defending the family, a man fulfils his obligations and responsibilities as the male head of the family. The knife is imagined as a necessary part of Romani male garb. In the song in Example 3 below, the man sings about his honour.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Laulu se vaatii rallatusta<br>veitellä lyönti sitä uskallusta<br>näinhän se lauleli<br>tämän puolen Kaale. | <i>I sing because I like but it<br/>take courage to strike with a knife<br/>like the boy of this<br/>family of Kaale sings</i>         |
| 2. En ole mikään tappelija<br>baarin sanan sanoja<br>tavallinen mustalaisten<br>lapsi.                        | <i>I am not a fighter<br/>I am not the boaster in a bar<br/>I am just an ordinary<br/>Gypsy child</i>                                  |
| 3. Astelin tupaan astellen<br>Kaaleita silmiin katsoneeksi<br>näin se lauleli tämän puolen<br>Kaale.          | <i>I walked into the room<br/>I looked at the eyes of the other Kaale family<br/>Like this I sang<br/>the boy of this Kaale family</i> |

**Example 3** A song sung by Jari Sinitaivas (Recorded in Viinijärvi in August 1997 by the author)

This song demonstrates how the experience of violence and victimisation has become central to many Roma adults and their conception of masculinity. In this way, an individual’s reputation will impact their network of relatives and friends, so that family members share moral responsibility for their kin’s reputation and actions.

When performed at young men’s gatherings, such songs assume new meanings, i.e. deep-seated associations with masculinity, home, history, and family become juxtaposed with the notion of an ideal member of a family bonded by a shared history (see McDonald 2010: 203). The topos of the singing young man has a double dramaturgical function given that physical strength and stamina were highly prized, together with self-control and determination. In these contexts, to attain and articulate one’s masculinity requires honouring one’s family. At the same time, men are defined by their actions and identities within and in relation to larger social institutions such as family, community (Kaale), and nation (Finnish Kaale).

#### 5.4 Songs About Horse Trading

Horse themes are emphasised in male singers’ repertoires. These themes are connected with the earlier way of life and the livelihood of that time because the horse was

frequently an important piece of property for Roma families. The family's livelihood was heavily dependent on the man's success in horse trading. The horse is also connected with a certain ritual purity, and for this reason, it is not appropriate for a woman to step over the shafts of a wagon or harness. Example 4 below presents the song 'Kun ne Hippoksen Portit Oli Avattu' ('When the Gates of Hippos Were Opened').

1. When they opened the gates at Hippos  
And we were invited guests  
And I drive a poor foal  
Just to spite these *kaale* (another Romani family).
  
2. And that put the kaales in a fury  
When Kaisu mare danced for the money  
And I drive a poor colt  
Just to spite these *kaales*.
  
3. Guess, boys, how we get along  
We don't work nor do we beg  
We buy from stores  
And pay with thousand-mark notes.

**Example 4** A song sung by a 40-year-old man, Harri Nyman (Recorded in Kontiolahti in June 1995 by the author)

### 5.5 Songs About Drinking and Women

Songs about liquor are also a part of the male singing culture. Drinking was dealt with humorously as well as didactically. Young boys often perform these songs, which signifies the songs' strong association with initiation into manhood. By emphasising the pleasure of getting drunk, the younger singers demonstrate their admission into the group of men, as shown in Example 5 below.

1. When the boys went from the village to the road  
With a bottle of spirits in their pocket  
And I sat in Kaisu's café  
With a bottle of brandy under the table, and
  
2. Kaisu of the café was a pretty girl but  
Kaisu of Räsikorpi was ugly  
and in her album Kaisu of the café  
has a picture of the boy who drinks.

**Example 5** A liquor song. This story was told to the author by a 60-year-old woman, Aino Nikkinen (Recorded in Joensuu in May 1995 by the author)



This song narrates a situation in which the boys and men are drinking and includes 'what they will tell to the wife when they come back'. Hence, by performing these songs, the participants embodied a cultural ideal, an engendered normative of what the community should feel. In the process, such songs serve to inscribe culturally appropriate practises, beliefs, and values, that are iconic of the way men ought to behave and interact with one another (McDonald 2010: 202). However, such songs not only reflect beliefs about gender relations, they constitute those very relations through performance. Male participants are in many ways engendered through their singing and masculinised through song lyrics of what it means to be a real 'Finnish Kaale'.

Song lyrics and song concepts continue to demonstrate how gender identity is a combination of 'given' characteristics (e.g., being male, being Finnish Roma) and 'earned' or ascribed factors (e.g., being a father, brother, strong fighter, good horseman, etc.); as an individual 'performs' the behaviours that are culturally ascribed to each of those roles, he internalises the concomitant actions and reinforces them as a key part of that identity (Greenfields 2006: 31). For example, when a man is described as 'a good traditional singer', he usually has a reputation as the head of a family, a horseman, a strong fighter, etc. Thus, certain actions cause people to say, 'He is a good singer', and, in turn, he incorporates this culturally-defined concept of himself as a good Roma singer into his identity.

## 6. Gender, Musical Creativity, and Orientation

The conceptualisation of creativity as a truly masculine phenomenon was widespread in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; musicians themselves, as well as other artists, scholars, critics, and scientists, all sought to explain how a creator could only ever be a man (Taylor-Jay 2009: 184). This conceptualisation seems to reduce women to the role of muse: women, or a generalised feminine principle, can at least give the artist inspiration, although they cannot be creative themselves. Relationships may be found to follow dissimilar patterns among Romani groups. When I asked the singers about the authorship of the songs they perform, the answer was always male (usually an anonymous old man), never female. Most of the songs are written in prison. Hence, as with Romanticism, the idea that the creation of music involves work, pain, and suffering, like giving birth, has emerged.

A number of studies report that some musical instruments are viewed as being more feminine (e.g., the flute, the violin, the clarinet, and the cello), while others are considered more masculine (e.g., the saxophone, the trumpet, the trombone, and the drum). It has also been reported that young children reproduce these adult perceptions in their choice of musical instruments. Thus, girls tend to prefer 'feminine' instruments, while boys select those that are viewed as masculine.

I have already described how musical changes reflect social changes in Finnish society, and the same phenomenon has been observed in folk music traditions. When we research the gendering of musical instruments among Finnish Roma in a cultural context, we notice that the effects of 'global Gypsiness' and its transnational stereotypes and concepts are shifting the traditional instruments within the musical style of the Finnish

Roma. Among the Finnish Roma, global trends manifest in terms of interest in other countries' music. Occupying a central place in the young singers' songs are the Andalusian Gitano's flamenco and Gypsy jazz with its Sinti roots. These two genres' virtuosic guitar styles have recently enjoyed great publicity in Finland, as elsewhere in Europe and the world, specifically as music genres that construe the Roma identity, while simultaneously painting a new identity as a continuation of the somewhat faded tradition of the 'Gypsy fiddler'. This is one reason the acoustic guitar is clearly the most important instrument for both sexes.

## 7. Conclusions

When we discuss the context of the Finnish Roma's traditional music, it is often a question of recognising traditional elements that have been successfully adapted to newer styles. However, singing the songs or discussing their content are not just acts that reproduce the traditional way of life because the songs tend to acquire different meanings in the various musical practices that are suited to different everyday contexts. They are a means of maintaining a sense of community, underlining gender identity, and drawing a boundary between the minority and the dominant population. In this way, Romani songs have served as a forum for the Roma to discuss important values and norms, such as gender roles. Even if male and female roles are quite clearly defined in the social contexts of traditional Romani music, many good Romani singers are women. An interesting phenomenon, however, is that nowadays, the traditional music context facilitates the directing of women's and girls' 'private' music outside of the community. Although described in masculine terms, traditional performances have designated a culturally-respected place for women. These songs carry a wide range of meanings, according to the context in which they are sung.

How is it possible for such a great change to take place in the performance of one dimension of cultural identity? First, the revival of ethnicity and the universal search for roots in the 1960s and 1970s emphasised minorities' rights in accordance with a pluralistic ideology with regard to their 'own' culture, with its own inherent value and measures for its preservation. Romani culture too became something valuable in need of preservation. In fact, the 'Gypsy culture' became an almost incomprehensible concept to the ordinary Roma. Now, Romani culture is something the Finnish people are interested in, and yet it is something that belongs to the Roma. In the space of a few years, the concept of 'culture' has become familiar to the ordinary Roma too; it is no longer the sole property of people representing Gypsyism. Second, permanent long-term changes in gender identity are possible because the community boundaries are elastic enough to adopt cultural innovations that do not necessarily align with the community's traditional cultural foundations. Society is sufficiently heterogeneous to permit changes brought about through a shift in gender identity. Third, I argue that as in traditional Romani music, female singers escape patriarchal definition. At the same time, they threaten to break out of the definitions of femininity by challenging women's alienation from Roma's musical practices.

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