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**REIMAGINING ROMA HERITAGE: *PARUBANKA*, A
DEMOLISHED ROMA SETTLEMENT IN VILNIUS, LITHUANIA**

Master of Arts in Cultural Heritage Studies – Track: Academic Research and Protection
of Cultural Heritage

Central European University Private University

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Reimagining Roma Heritage: *Parubanka*, a Demolished Roma Settlement in Vilnius, Lithuania

by

Gopalas Michailovskis

(Lithuania)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University Private University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies – Track: Academic
Research and Protection of Cultural Heritage.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Goapalas Michailovskis**, candidate for the MA degree in Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies – Track: Academic Research and Protection of Cultural Heritage, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 11 May 2025

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dichotomic nature of Roma heritage —a heritage that is valued by the community and official perceptions of Roma heritage. As a case study, the case of *Parubanka*, a demolished Roma settlement in 2020 in Vilnius, Lithuania is presented in the thesis. It argues that official perceptions and management of Roma heritage is far too often rooted in racialized and reductive conceptions pertaining to the supposed “Gypsy” culture which overshadows and may lead to destruction of heritage that is valued by Roma communities.

Drawing on interviews with the former residents of Parubanka, the study demonstrates the significance of the settlement by displaying its affective heritage qualities embedded in concepts such as places of memory, identity, or belonging. These concepts, as observed in the study, are absent from institutional narratives. I argue that these omissions reveal official attitudes impacting the way Roma heritage is perceived and managed. As a result, the voices of the Roma community are marginalized, and structural inequalities and epistemological violence reinforced.

Using a critical heritage approach, this thesis frames the prevailing narratives on Roma heritage as an Authorized Heritage Discourse. I propose a move towards recognizing Roma heritage as a dynamic, community-driven, inclusive, plural, and emotionally resonant process that grants agency to individuals and communities. It suggests that the loss of Parubanka can be meaningfully addressed through reconciliation — a concept pertinent to a racial justice framework. In this regard, the thesis concludes that the destruction of Parubanka cannot be fully addressed until such a perspective is adopted.

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Introduction

What comprises the heritage of the European Roma? Does it concern singular or plural heritages? How should these heritages be perceived? Who defines them? In this thesis, I argue that there are inner and outer dynamics within which Roma heritages are often perceived, defined and taken care of. The inner dynamics are interpreted as the heritages that are cherished and valued within Roma communities but are largely omitted, ignored, and confused by/with the outer perceptions of what Roma heritage is. Thus, the outer perception of Roma heritages I construe as a manifestation of structural and institutional phenomenon encompassing two authorized discourses: the discourse of heritage and racialized discourse pertaining to the construction of the “Gypsy” subject and the supposed homogeneous culture of its people. In this thesis, the perpetual consequences of these intermingling discourses are discussed in relation to the agency of Roma communities and individuals in defining, enjoying, or having the means to protect their heritages. By presenting the case of Parubanka, a destroyed Roma settlement in Lithuania, I argue that the consequences of these discourses are fatal when it comes to historically oppressed communities such as Roma.

Where Roma are recognized as an ethnic or national minority in European countries, it implies, in principle, that they have the right to protect and manage their own heritages. In most of these countries, however, the idea of heritage in policy frameworks is still largely dominated by a traditional approach to heritage, comprising a material embodiment of specific cultures and their customs. Necessarily, this type of heritage is claimed to possess an inherent value that is inherited by future generations responsible to revere, curate, conserve, or preserve this property. This approach tends to draw on monumentality, materiality, or nationalism, which

may often result in an overly authoritative management of heritage.¹ Roma heritages, thus, have not escaped authorized institutional management and interpretation, which limits the potential heritage may have on its possessors.

The authoritative management in relation to Roma heritages often falls into the traps of multiculturalist tokenism whereby governments, due to various legal and political commitments towards Roma communities, are obliged to ‘do something’ with Roma culture and heritage. Far too often this ‘do something’ features the masquerading or displaying of Roma culture in a stereotypical and one-dimensional, folkloric way featuring dance, songs, or attire. I do not want to imply here that music performed by Roma, their dance or attire should be condemned. Rather, the critique is aimed at the reductionist approach towards Roma culture, which influences how the heritages of these communities and individuals are perceived and accommodated within contemporary societies.

The somewhat tragic part of this situation is that Roma themselves can hardly define their heritage outside what has been prescribed to them by historical-enduring perpetuation of the “Gypsy” image constructed within structural and institutional dimensions. The agency and heritage of people, therefore, are obscured within this dynamic. Hence, in this thesis I argue for a move away from this authorized, outsider, perspective on Roma heritage that conflates it with the generic, racialized discourse connected to the supposed culture of an imagined “Gypsy” trope. Conversely, I argue that a different perspective on Roma heritage is needed, one which gives agency to individuals and communities in defining their own heritages and identities and shaping their future according to their wills. In other words, the internal Roma communities’ and individuals’ perceptions about their heritages must be at the forefront before any attempts are made to define and manage them.

¹ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge, 2006), 29-23, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

In light of this desired outcome, by presenting the case of Parubanka — a Roma settlement that was destroyed in 2020 in Vilnius, Lithuania — one Roma community's unauthorized, unofficial, and unrecognized heritage can be analyzed and given agency within the framework of this thesis. I will examine the repercussions of the abovementioned discourses with the aim of understanding how they influenced Parubanka's ultimate fate.

Background

Parubanka, a Roma neighborhood, was located around seven kilometers from the historic Vilnius UNESCO-listed city center in Lithuania. This neighborhood was called *Parubanka* by its residents, while, parallelly, the general public called it — *čigonų taboras*.² What this difference in naming the place implies regarding the perception of the community is discussed in the third chapter. Despite Parubanka's long existence as a Roma village, over more than 70 years, the settlement was completely destroyed in 2020 and people evicted from their homes by the local authority of Vilnius city. This socially corrosive process lasted over a period of around sixteen long years. The settlement was inhabited by the largest group of Romani in Lithuania, more than 500 people, about one-fourth of the Roma population in the whole country.³ These numbers, however, fluctuated over the course of its history and ultimate destruction.

Tracking the origins of the settlement reveals both a long history of Roma people's connection to the site and the legacy of the Soviet sedentarization policy against 'itinerant gypsies'. It seems that the settlement grew substantially, developed and was tolerated by the authority during the Soviet era. However, soon after the Lithuanian transition to liberal

² Translated from Lithuanian language, *čigonų taboras* means a temporary encampment or camp of 'Gypsies'.

³ According to recent census data of 2021, 2,251 Roma live in the country, and this number has remained stable for two decades. Daumantas Stumbrys, "Lietuvos romų socialinis demografinis portretas: ką atskleidžia 2021 metų gyventojų surašymas?" [Lithuanian Roma socio-demographic portrait: what does the 2021 census reveal?] (Vilnius: Lietuvos socialinių mokslų centro, Sociologijos institutas, 2022), https://tmde.lrv.lt/uploads/tmde/documents/files/TMD%20romai_lietuvoje_2022.pdf, accessed May 7, 2025.

democracy, the buildings within the settlement were declared to have been illegally constructed. The newly proclaimed ‘illegality’ issue was accompanied by the settlement’s gradual association with criminal activities, specifically drug trafficking. This criminal aspect of the settlement is connected to the disintegration of the previous regime, when many Roma lost their jobs in various factories or abandoned the ‘traditional’ economic niches of selling deficient products such as denim, sunglasses, or sports shoes after the introduction of the liberal market economy.

Given the relatively small number of Roma people in the country, the criminality centered in Parubanka was virtually the only way Roma were perceived by the wider public. The site, in popular parlance, was usually regarded as a “drug space.”⁴ In addition, a survey conducted in 2020 by the Institute for Ethnic Studies identified that 58% of Lithuania’s population expressed an unwillingness to live in the same neighborhoods with Romani individuals.⁵ The latter attitude would become crucial during and after the destruction of Parubanka. Although evicted individuals were given financial aid for housing rent, only a small minority of people could benefit from this local policy despite it being the guiding logic of the local authority supposed to solve the problem of relocation.

I argue that the criminal character under which the settlement was largely subsumed by the outside world, largely neutralized and hindered more nuanced ways of understanding the whole issue while still dealing with the situation. It overshadowed and dehumanized the very

⁴ For example, in her content analysis of Lithuanian press rhetoric concerning Roma during the years 2005–2006, Vida Beresnevičiūtė demonstrates that in most of the 156 articles analysed, the key word *čigonas* (an analogue of “Gypsy”) was commonly associated with the settlement, and this combination was largely interpreted within a criminal register. She adds that, in this context, Roma are portrayed as an “impersonal group,” meaning that Roma automatically signified criminality in connection with the settlement. See: Vida Beresnevičiūtė, “Prievartos retorika prieš visuomenės nebyliusius: Lietuvos spaudos tekstų apie romus analizė” [Rhetoric of violence against voiceless minorities: Analysis of press reports on the Roma in Lithuania], *Etniškumo studijos* 1–2 (2010): 86–104.

⁵ Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, *Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centro Etninių tyrimų instituto užsakymu atliktos visuomenės nuostatų apklausos 2020 m. rezultatai* [Surveys of public attitudes in 2020, commissioned by the Institute of Ethnic Research of the Lithuanian Social Research Center, results] (Vilnius: Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, 2020), accessed May 7, 2025, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Visuomenės-nuostatos-apklausos-rezultatai-20201.pdf>.

human beings standing behind the scenes. By the means of this rhetoric, the systemic, structural, and institutional impetus of their struggle was rendered invisible and reduced to the ‘backwardness’ of the “Gypsy” culture.

Research problem

Paradoxically, the destruction of people’s homes was considered a notable milestone in the matter of Roma “integration.” In Lithuania, however, I argue that the destruction of this long-lived settlement was actually a failure of the so-called Roma “integration.” Not only was it mostly predicated on racist epistemology and practice manifested in brutal and violent evictions without alternative and acceptable housing options, but this destruction tore apart the core of Parubanka’s community with all the social and cultural network of systems the word implied. Thus, the settlement’s symbolic and emotional significance to its former residents was utterly ignored. I argue that this symbolic significance must be understood in heritage terms.

While this symbolic and affective layer of heritage embodied by the people and their settlement was never considered, much less addressed, the one-sided view of Parubanka, its neglected history, significance to its former residents ingrained within their grief for lost homes, community, or place is problematized in this thesis. While delving into the heritage aspects of Parubanka, the given phenomenon was approached through critical theoretical frameworks connected to Critical Heritage Studies, Critical Romani Studies, or Postcolonial Studies shedding light on the structural and institutional oppression that was behind the official push to demolish Parubanka.



Figure 1.

1. Location of Lithuania within the map of Europe. *Image from Google Maps, 2023.*
2. Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. *Image form Google Maps, 2023.*
3. Location of Parubanka. *Image form Google Maps, 2023.*
4. The three sections of Parubanka. *Image from Google Maps, 2023.*
5. Post-destruction situation of Parubanka. *Photo by Giedrė Peseckytė, 2020.*

Relevance of the thesis

There is an urgent need to reexamine Roma heritage beyond authorized discourses and give individuals and communities agency to shape their own pasts and futures. In general, far too often the power of Roma communities and individuals to define themselves and their heritages has been marked by continuous struggle. The discourse on who Roma are and what they value as heritage is still shaped by authoritative institutions that in some cases may work hand in hand with the Roma civil society.⁶ In this light, moving away from top-down narratives, defining Roma heritage from the outside, towards a heritage derived from the experience of the Roma

⁶ Julius Rostas, Márton Rövid, and Marek Szilvási, "On Roma Civil Society, Roma Inclusion, and Roma Participation," *Journal of the European Roma Rights Centre* 2 (2015): 7–11.

community that reflects a sense of belonging, identity, or attachment to place gives agency to individuals and communities.⁷ This exploration of Parubanka's heritage and the goal of properly addressing its loss represents both the agency of the community and dispensing proper justice.

Although there are various policies in place that assume a smooth process exists giving agency to Roma communities in having a say about their heritage, the reality falls far from this ideal situation. Neither international or Lithuanian national and local legislation nor Roma "integration" policies could have helped to secure a future for the heritage of Parubanka despite their articulation and emphasis on culture.

For example, article 5 in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe states that:

"The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage."⁸

Similarly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation 1203 from 1993 entitled "Gypsies in Europe" illustrates specific articulations pertaining to the Roma minority in culture, education, information, or equal rights sectors.⁹ Minority rights protection at a national level is addressed in articles 37 and 45. These articles postulate that ethnic minorities have a right to nurture their language, culture, and customs.¹⁰ The Department of

⁷ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; David C. Harvey, "The History of Heritage," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. B. J. Graham and Peter Howard (Ashgate, 2008), 19-36; Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Routledge, 2013).

⁸ Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, Article 5, 1995, accessed May 7, 2025, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/coe/1995/en/39412>.

⁹ Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, Article 5, 1995, accessed May 7, 2025, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/coe/1995/en/39412>.

¹⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, Articles 37 and 45, adopted October 25, 1992, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalActPrint/lt?category=TAD&documentId=TAIS.206072&jfwid=rivwzvpvg>.

National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania is responsible for making sure that this right is properly accommodated.

Regarding Lithuanian Roma policies, by the time Parubanka was demolished, four national and two local policies from the Vilnius Municipality, have been implemented. Nationally, all the policies enacted between 2001 and 2020 aimed to address housing, discrimination, and emphasized Roma cultural “integration.” The first national policy of 2001-2004, for example, within the fifth section entitled *The Protection of Ethnic Identity*, attempts to promote and support Roma culture and arts by providing six measures focusing on the creation of books on the Roma language, history, and culture, among other things.¹¹

The second national policy of 2008-2010, likewise, emphasized culture within the second section entitled *To Protect the Ethnic Identity of Roma*. It focused on the protection of language, traditions and the creation of “tangible” cultural heritage.¹² Thus, support for cultural and artistic development, investigation of the Roma Holocaust, and establishment of Roma history and ethnographic museum were anticipated.¹³ The museum was, however, never established.

Similarly, the third national policy of 2012-14 aimed to increase intercultural dialog by encouraging the openness of Roma culture and societal tolerance. Akin to the previous policies, this policy placed emphasis on language, publishing materials on Roma culture and traditions.¹⁴

¹¹ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, *Nutarimas dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2000–2004 metų programos* [Resolution on the Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2000–2004 Program], no. 759, July 1, 2000 (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.104285?jfwid=rivwzvvpvg>.

¹² Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, *Resolution on the Approval of the 2008–2010 Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society* (*Nutarimas dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2008–2010 metų programos patvirtinimo*), no. 309, March 26, 2008 (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.317530?jfwid=>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministras, *Isakymas dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2012–2014 metų veiklos plano patvirtinimo* [Order on the Approval of the 2012–2014 Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society], no. IV-196, March 20, 2012 (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministerija), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.420934?jfwid=rivwzvvpvg>.

The fourth national Roma “integration” policy also had a section for culture and focused on issues similar to those mentioned above.¹⁵ What is common in these policies is that all of them aimed to support and promote Roma culture, identity, and heritage, although the latter was not explicitly articulated in any of the documents. By the same token, none of these policies included mention of Roma settlements as a possible heritage.

Parubanka itself, however, did appear in the policies. The first local policy of 2005-2010, however, did not have much emphasis on culture, if at all, but instead the largest amount of funding was devoted to surveillance measures within Parubanka including the establishment of a police post or installation of surveillance cameras.¹⁶ The second local policy of 2016-2019 focused on the Parubanka’s community “integration” into society. Among the aims addressing drug trafficking and consumption, building a safe neighborhood, and others, this program also attempted to *Increase the Openness of the Distinctive Roma Culture*, as it elaborated within the fourth policy goal. Two measures foresaw support for projects involving Roma and conferences on Roma culture.¹⁷

Within these local policies, however, Parubanka was neither perceived as heritage nor as a place to be suitable for living. Here a paradox can be observed: while the policies claimed to deal with Roma culture, heritage, or identity, Parubanka was being gradually destroyed.

¹⁵ Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministras, *Isakymas dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2015–2020 metų veiksmų plano patvirtinimo* [Order on the Approval of the 2015–2020 Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society], no. IV-48, January 29, 2015 (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministerija), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/6caa6010a8cb11e4a854e1c2026e476c/rpBnEixRmj?jfwid=-kyrux3m4g>.

¹⁶ Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės taryba, *Vilniaus romų bendruomenės ir šalia taboro esančių teritorijų priežiūros ir saugumo užtikrinimo bei romų segregacijos mažinimo programa 2005–2010* [The Program for Ensuring the Maintenance and Security of the Vilnius Roma Community and the Territories near Taboras and Reducing the Segregation of Roma 2005–2010], approved by Resolution No. 1-838, June 22, 2005 (Vilnius: Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Savivaldos-ir-romu-bendradarbiavim-o-galimybiu%CC%A8-studija-2016-08-10.pdf>.

¹⁷ Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės taryba, *Vilniaus (Kirtimų) romų taboro bendruomenės integracijos į visuomenę 2016–2019 metų programa* [Vilnius (Kirtimai) Roma Tabor Community Integration into Society Program 2016–2019], approved by Resolution No. 1-410, April 19, 2016 (Vilnius: Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2016%E2%80%932019-METU-PROGRAMA.pdf>.

The EU policy framework for Roma inclusion created in 2020 “[...]provides guidance on promoting (awareness of) Roma art, history and culture and social innovation and policy experimentation.”¹⁸ However, in parallel, across Europe, hundreds or maybe thousands of Roma settlements – nobody has ever inventoried them – face threats of destruction and it seems that respective institutions find this brutal tactic to be a plausible solution for advancing Roma “integration” or inclusion. When it comes to the EU institutions, the eradication of marginalized Romani settlements is supported within the explicit rhetoric of the EU Parliament and Commission. Specifically, this rhetoric is observed within the European Parliament’s resolution passed in 2022, October 5; *The situation of Romani people living in settlements in the EU* and the EU Commission’s response to this resolution.¹⁹ In essence, the eradication of Romani settlements, within this rhetoric, is seen as a means to achieve Roma “integration.”

Similarly, some scholarship within Critical Romani Studies, while focusing on the nature of Roma settlements being ingrained within structural power oppression, seems not to engage with the possibility of heritage layers within these settlements, an attitude which seems to strengthen the above-mentioned institutional approach. For example, in a relatively recent seminal publication by Giovanni Picker entitled *Racial Cities: Governance and the Segregation of Romani People in Urban Europe*, Roma settlements constitute what he interprets as the

¹⁸ European Commission, *Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation in the EU*, October 7, 2020, accessed May 8, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en.

¹⁹ For example, in the European Parliament’s resolution passed in 2022, October 5 entitled *The situation of Roma People Living in Settlements in the EU*, in the 28th column the Parliament “urges the Commission to step up its efforts to gradually eradicate marginalized Roma settlements across EU by launching an EU action plan to eradicate Roma settlements by 2030, with the aim of reinforcing the use of existing policy and financial instruments; emphasizes that this action plan should provide guidelines, establish priorities and concrete targets and envisage a component of transnational cooperation and exchange of positive practices between Member States.” The EU Commission’s response to the proposition is the following: “[...] The Commission would welcome additional and new commitment from the Member States for desegregated housing and the eradication of settlements. This could complement the commitments taken in the 2021 Council Recommendation. See: European Parliament, *Texts Adopted – Situation of Roma People Living in Settlements in the EU – Wednesday, 5 October 2022* (Strasbourg: European Parliament, October 5, 2022); European Commission, *Follow up to the European Parliament Non-Legislative Resolution on the Situation of Roma People Living in Settlements in the EU* (Brussels: European Commission, January 17, 2023), accessed May 8, 2025, [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2022/2662\(RSP\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2022/2662(RSP))

Enlightenment's legacy of race and racial thinking and of "[...]colonial experiments of race-space intersections."²⁰ Therefore, explorations of the heritage aspect within these "colonial experiments of race-space intersections," to borrow Picker's rhetoric, might constitute a shocking enterprise for some scholars. To put it simply, any association of an impoverished Roma settlement with heritage may for them perpetuate the marginalization and stigmatization of the Roma community. Their living conditions in segregated and often inadequately equipped spatial arrangements might be seen as being romanticized and glorified or mistakenly celebrated as part of their heritage and identity. In other words, one risks racializing the poverty while attempting to discuss Roma heritage within a neglected settlement.

I cannot agree more with Picker's convincing and well-articulated argument, but while it does explain the deep-rooted structural racism and colonial legacies, it tends to obscure the possibility that heritage aspects may exist within these spaces despite their basis in structurally driven inequality. Dismissing this element reduces the complexity of the whole phenomenon and downplays the agency of the subjects, who besides being racialized, probably have something more to say about what their homes mean to them as individuals and communities.

Research questions

In this thesis I have explored three questions in order to understand the process and impact of Parubanka's destruction in all their complexity:

- 1) To what extent does Parubanka constitute heritage for its former residents? What forms does this heritage take?
- 2) Why were the responsible institutions in Lithuania, which claim to protect and preserve Roma culture and design Roma "integration" policies, not able to recognize this heritage and try to protect it?

²⁰ Giovanni Picker, *Racial Cities: Governance and Segregation of Romani People in Europe* (Routledge, 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750460>.

3) What should be done in the future with the Parubanka site that would provide some measure of healing for the community and the individuals who lost their homes?

Before explicating the research methodology, I note that the philosophy guiding this research is connected to social constructivism. In this regard, the categories I deal with in this thesis such as heritage, ethnicity, or race are understood as socially constructed phenomena. This philosophical approach, on which my theoretical position is based, is further detailed within the first and second chapters analyzing the formation of the “Gypsy” subject and an authorized heritage discourse relevant to its substantiation within the institutional management of its supposed culture.

Methodology

In this research, I applied a complex methodology to collect and analyze data relevant to this thesis. In order to understand and critically approach the discourse on Roma culture and identity, I carried out desk-top research, reviewing relevant literature and scholarship within Critical Romani Studies in the first chapter. Similarly, this methodology was used in the second chapter, where the literature and scholarship of Critical Heritage Studies were reviewed to explain my analytical framework for heritage regarding Parubanka. To (re)construct the history of Parubanka, I carried out historical research, building on various data types. I conducted online research: consulted digital archives, reviewed the secondary literature and went to the Vilnius Regional State Archive during the fieldwork phase. I found four documents relevant to understanding Parubanka’s development during the Soviet era in the period between 1956-1957.

For the fourth chapter, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews: eight with former residents of the settlement and two with the director of the Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the director of the Roma Community

Centre. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. The participants were chosen both after prior consideration and using a snowball method based on on-the-spot factors.²¹ Since I worked in Parubanka during its demolition between 2017 and 2020, I knew the people before going into the field. To create a safe space for expression of feelings and obtain a deeper understanding about the meanings and values held by the formerly displaced residents of Parubanka, all eight interviews were conducted in the Roma language.

Some people, however, refused to give interviews as they feared punitive actions by the police or other institutions. Consequentially, six participants consented to the use of their actual names, while two preferred to be cited anonymously. The participants' consents and dissents were recorded on an audio recorder and documented on a consent form with their signatures.

Nevertheless, the observation that some people refused to give interviews out of fear of possible punitive reprisals by the authorities raises a dilemma of whether any of the names of the participants should be revealed. On the one hand, anonymity renders the unique and intimate experience nameless. On the other hand, the use of original names could cause unanticipated and unjustifiable troubles and pain in the future, especially given the misery of the post-destruction period these people are undergoing. Therefore, I decided not to reveal the names of any of my participants as the aim of this work is not to cause more pain but to mitigate it. I gave the participants pseudonyms (see Appendix 1). Interviews were analysed by employing content and thematic analysis, with the aim of understanding the significance participants attribute to Parubanka, and, in turn, draw a connection with heritage-related concepts, such as places of memory, identity, or sense of belonging.

²¹ Snowball method, or snowball sampling method, refers to a sample recruitment strategy by which a researcher does not recruit all or a portion of participants relevant to a specific research, but does so through the help of other persons. See: Bernd Marcus, Oliver Weigelt, Jane Hergert, Jochen Gurt, and Petra Gelléri, "The Use of Snowball Sampling for Multi-Source Organizational Research: Some Cause for Concern," *Personnel Psychology* 70, no. 3 (2016): 627–658, <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12169>.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork took place during December of 2022 and lasted for circa two weeks, from the 9th to the 23rd. It included participant observation during visits to homes of the former residents, spending almost every day in the Roma Community Centre, conducting interviews, visiting the regional archive, and the site of Parubanka village. I also attended a few events: the National Human Rights Forum of 2022, a yearly initiative on topics related to human rights. I attended the panel “Is Lithuania capable of implementing an effective Roma integration policy?” Also, I attended a concert by a dance group, *Roma de Drom*,²² a group that consists of teenage Roma girls and their coach, who is a Roma woman, all former residents of Parubanka. The concert was performed at a day center in the town of Lentvaris, located close to Vilnius. Of course, during the trip we had a long discussion about Parubanka. I was curious to hear their experiences and the current Parubanka visiting practice. In general, all my visits were related to Parubanka, I wanted to observe the current state of affairs regarding the institutional actions and emotions and housing struggles of former Parubanka’s residents in the post-destruction phase.

On positionality

To sort out my role in this research took a considerable amount of time since, in some way, it was about me as well, which greatly complicated matters. Firstly, “Gypsy” is stated on my birth certificate and my brown skin color was a source of structural and institutional oppression predetermined by the discourse about what constituted this imaginary “Gypsy” subject. I grew up in an orphanage where I was defined as a “Gypsy” and told that I was defective by my very

²² In Roma language, *Roma de Drom* means - Roma on the road. The dance group, *Roma de Drom*, was initiated within Roma Community Centre while it was still situated within the territory of Parubanka. Although the dancers would change from time to time, the dancers would usually be comprised of the former residents of Parubanka. Four dancers that performed at the concert had around 5-6 years of experience within the group.

nature. It took some time to grow away from this mentality and try to perceive myself as a ‘normal’ human being. It would not have happened if I had not met the members of my family, learn the Roma language, studied opera singing, and most importantly begin my studies at Central European University, firstly in the Roma Graduate Preparatory Program and later in the Cultural Heritage Studies Program which was complemented by my attendance of an Advance Certificate in Romani Studies.

Indeed, CEU marked a critical synthesis of my personal past and present, presenting me with a broad arsenal of instruments that facilitated deep self-reflection. Thus, my experience gained from Parubanka as a friend of many of its former residents and a worker at the Roma Community Centre was revived and rethought. In light of this, I began to think about that demolished settlement, about its community, people, their homes, memory, identity, sense of belonging, or interrupted attachment to the place. As a result, these acts of thinking led me to seek forms and prospects of addressing the suppressed struggles of this community.

However, it is very clear that compared to many Roma, especially the former Parubanka’s residents, my position is still very privileged. Only a few Roma, if any, have been able to enjoy the academic journey I followed. Hence, the epistemological tools and English language I employ in this thesis perhaps cannot be understood by many of the people I interviewed and by those former residents of Parubanka. In this sense, my position is one of an epistemologically grounded and mediated translator (translator in the literal sense as well, as I translated interviews from the Roma language) of the story of Parubanka and the experience of its community into an academic and institutional context. It is my hope that the results of this thesis will raise more empathy for humanity, where past injustices are rectified. It is my contention that heritage is a medium through which the latter phenomena may be envisioned and critical perspectives on Roma heritage developed. The analysis of Parubanka’s case, in this

light, may be seen as part of future epistemologies contributing to the practical implementation of these aims.

Structure

To support my arguments and to answer the research questions, I advance the discussion in four core chapters. The first chapter builds a general understanding about the institutional, racialized discourse through which the imaginary “Gypsy” subject and its supposed culture have been constructed and reproduced globally. Thus, the foundations of this discourse and its influence on policies as expressed in the Critical Romani Studies scholarship are explored. Further, I explore how this discourse influenced Lithuanian scholarship and some national policies impacting Roma communities in the country. Analysis of a few scholarly or semi-scholarly publications have been quite revealing in this regard. Additionally, this chapter locates my understanding of the terms “Gypsy” and Roma and presents contemporary debates on Roma identity.

The second chapter is dedicated to understanding the concept of heritage and its possible application to the lost heritage of the Parubanka community. Conventional heritage approaches are difficult to apply directly to Parubanka as this method would risk strengthening conventional ideas about Roma culture, fostered by mainstream society. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the nature of Roma culture is generally accompanied by notions of backwardness, nomadism, laziness, or deviancy. Moreover, often it is seen as static, inherent, and applicable to all diverse Roma communities. The understanding about Roma heritage largely stems from this understanding of Roma culture. . I argue that a different approach must be taken when discussing Roma heritage, as exemplified by the case of Parubanka. I draw on critical heritage scholarship that understands heritage as a process and grants agency to the experiences of individuals and communities. Thus, instead of an abstract analysis of Roma culture, this

approach helps to build a methodological path towards understanding Parubanka's heritage ingrained in lived experiences encompassing the notions of memory, identity, community, sense of belonging, or attachment to place. Additionally, by advancing this approach, I intend to facilitate construction of a future policy framework to preserve Parubanka's memory and contributing to healing the trauma inflicted upon many residents during and after the destruction of the settlement.

The third chapter is focused on the case study settlement. The historical development of Parubanka and its relationship with its lost community is explored by tracing its beginning as a site of temporary sojourn of Roma in the pre-WWI period to the tolerated and encouraged establishment of the Roma settlement during the Soviet era, and finally to the independent Lithuanian period when it was arbitrarily demolished. The history of this settlement has escaped accounts in general historiography, which complicated the research. To address this gap, the (re)construction of this history builds on the analysis of relevant maps, archival photographs, the Soviet policies relevant to Parubanka, and personal narratives from semi-structured interviews.

The fourth chapter aims both to understand how two major institutions responsible for the management and protection of Roma culture perceive Roma heritage, as well as to comprehend the experiences and significance of the destroyed settlement to the former residents of Parubanka. Thus, the chapter analyses and discusses ten semi-structured interviews. It commences with the institutional perceptions of Roma heritage in which Parubanka is not seen, or even mentioned, as heritage. Finally, I assess the former residents' perspectives on Parubanka. These perspectives are analyzed along the themes of expressed loss of homes, belonging to the community, communal practices, physical and symbolic connections to the place itself.

In the conclusions I provide a summary of the results of the analysis and, based on that, offer some insights on what could be done to the site of Parubanka in order to offer a pathway to healing and justice for its former residents.

1. Authorized discourse over the construction of Roma identity

In general, within social and institutional discourse and practice, the ethnic terms ‘Gypsies’²³ and Roma have been used as overarching categories for various attempts to ‘catch’ a multitude of diverse people that are usually known as ‘Gypsies’ or other derivations of this notion. The usages of these terms greatly matter and differ in terms of who is using them, for what reason, or with what intention. Thus, I distinguish between institutional, general societal (external) usage of these terms and internal usage – the way communities refer to themselves. This dichotomy, indeed, is the central point of this chapter, as it focuses on how the external perceptions and constructions pertaining to the notions of ‘Gypsies’ or Roma have shaped the history of the subjects behind these categories. In other words, the way these two terms are used represents a semiotic dialectic between the signifier and signified.

To begin with, the institutional process of labelling the subjects understood as ‘Gypsies’ or Roma shall be understood as authorized discourse that has been mobilized within scientific and political institutions to govern, and, importantly, to justify that governance over the individuals collectively perceived as ‘threatening’, ‘backward’, ‘uncivilized’, ‘exotic’, etc., ‘Gypsies’. Notably, within this discourse, the prescribed ‘culture’ of ‘Gypsies’ has gained a fixed characteristic featuring a homogenized and racialized notion of culture. I argue, that to a great extent, this (mis)understanding of Roma culture may influence how Roma heritage is perceived, as later epitomized by the case of Parubanka and the way it was demolished. In short, Roma heritage is often widely understood through a limited folkloric dimension, while people’s or communities’ expressions within this dimension are rendered invisible.

²³ By no means should these two categories be used interchangeably for the reasons explained below.

In order to better understand this dichotomy, this chapter discusses the foundations of the racialized discourse pertaining to the construction of the “Gypsy.” Firstly, to locate my understanding of the terms “Gypsy” and Roma I will briefly discuss both notions. Second, I will summarize the current debates on Roma identity circling around essentialist and constructivist approaches. Further, I advance the discussion of the foundations and predominance of racialized scholarly discourse that in Critical Romani Studies is known as Gypsylorism. Later, I illustrate the relationship between the epistemological influence Gypsylorism and Lithuanian scholarship concerning Roma. I will do so through a brief analysis of a few of key scholarly or semi-scholarly publications that, in my opinion, are particularly characteristic of this relationship.

The relevance of this chapter lies in its aim to evince and understand the institutional and structural discourse and practice through which the “Gypsy” subject and its supposed culture have been constructed. Exploring this discourse builds a more nuanced understanding of why and how Parubanka came into existence and what might have been the driving forces behind the destruction of the village together with the heritage it contained.

“Gypsy” vs. Roma

It is my assertion that when it comes to “Gypsy” and Roma notions, there must be a fundamental distinction between ethnic endonyms and exonyms.²⁴ Although the terms Roma and “Gypsy,” including the latter’s derivation, may be used as an ethnic endonym, this should not be confused with the generic, exonymic — institutional and structural — discourse pertaining to the aforementioned construction of the “Gypsy” subject. The latter, exonymic, utilization of the term, features the processes of enduring historical racialization of people perceived as

²⁴ Ethnic endonyms refer to terms that are used by a particular group to refer to itself. In contrast, ethnic exonyms are terms used by outsiders to refer to that group.

“Gypsies.” Within this discourse, the term “Gypsy” and its derivations, and by this virtue the term Roma, refer to supposedly homogeneous, nomadic communities with inherited, fixed cultural and biological features. The usual descriptions of these features alternate between pathological and exotic interpretations: idleness, criminality, children of nature, free souls, etc. Thus, this discourse subsumes groups known as Cigáni, Cikáni, Cyganie, Čigonai, Čigāni, Cigany, Ṭigani, Αθηγγανοί, Цигани, Цыгане, Zingaro, Zigeuner, Gitano, Gitans etc. Usually, many of these communities do not use the term “Gypsy” but instead refer to themselves as Roma in addition to sub-family or sub-group names such as Kaldarash, Vlax, Kotliari, etc.²⁵

The term Roma, besides being an ethnic endonym for many communities, is also a political category. The political dimension of this category is associated with the nationalistic appeals to bring all the above-mentioned groups under a single umbrella term: Roma. The first such attempt occurred when a small community of Roma intellectuals gathered in Orpington, Great Britain, in 1971, to organize the First World Romani Congress proclaiming that Roma people belong to a single nation. The group adopted a national flag, anthem, and requested to be referred to as Roma instead of various forms of the term “Gypsy.”²⁶

Nevertheless, there are some groups who may not agree with this umbrella term. For example, the Ashkali in Albania, the Sinti in Germany, Gypsies in the UK, etc. However, within the European Union and external EU institutional arrangements, the umbrella term Roma still refers to all these diverse groups.²⁷

²⁵ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, “‘Gypsy’ Groups in Eastern Europe: Ethnonyms vs. Professionyms,” *Romani Studies* 23, no. 3 (January 2013): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.3828/rs.2013.3>.

²⁶ Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, March 12, 2001), accessed May 8, 2025, https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Mirga-Andrzej_Gheorghe-Nicolae_2001_The-Roma-in-the-Twenty-First-Century_A-Policy-Paper_Eurozine_12th-March.pdf.

²⁷ For example, the Council of Europe states that “the term ‘Roma’ includes not only Roma but also Sinti, Kali, Ashkali, ‘Egyptians’, Manouche and kindred population groups in Europe, together with Travellers, so as to embrace the great diversity of the groups concerned.” See: European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), *ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on Combating Antigypsyism and Discrimination against Roma* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020), 4, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-13-on-combating-anti-gypsyism-an/16808b5ace>.

However, I take neither of the notion for granted, nor encourage the reader of this thesis to do so. I want to emphasize that the ethnic endonyms must not be conflated with ethnic exonyms. For that matter, I consider the term “Gypsy” pejorative when it comes to its institutional and structural usages. Seen through these lenses, this term facilitates investigation of the epistemology of the pseudo-scientific field known as Gypsyiology, which I discuss below while critically assessing the politically correct usages of the term Roma. In short, the brutal demolitions experienced by the inhabitants of Parubanka demonstrate the historical practice of governments to assimilate or obliterate the ‘Gypsies’.

Roma identity within essentialist and constructivist epistemology

The constructed nature of the above-discussed ethnic terms heated debates about who the Roma are, or in what terms one must think about them. These debates, in a broad sense, are embedded within essentialist and constructivist epistemological paradigms. The latter’s, constructivist, account critiques essentialist notions of “Gypsy” culture and identity and is employing Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Postcolonial or Critical Romani Studies theoretical frameworks.²⁸ In a nutshell, these debates embody a transition from essentialism to constructivism in terms of Roma identity by exposing the nature of the racialized discourse, its key actors, and agency surrounding it.

²⁸ Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé, “The Roma in Contemporary Europe: Struggling for Identity at a Time of Proliferating Identity Politics,” in *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Huub van Baar and Angéla Kóczé (Berghahn, 2020) 3-45, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789206432-005>; Angéla Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, eds. Immanuel Ness and Zack Cope (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) 1-9, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91206-6_124; Angéla Kóczé et al., “‘When They Enter, We All Enter ...’: Envisioning a New Social Europe from a Romani Feminist Perspective,” in *Romani Communities and Transformative Change: A New Social Europe*, eds. Marius Taba, Andrew Ryder, and Nidhi Trehan (Bristol University Press, 2021) 179-192, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv18gfz6v>; Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution* (Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315810225>; Leo Lucassen et al., *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26341-7>.

In summarizing and critiquing these debates, essentialism and constructivism, Angéla Kóczé, a one of the founding and leading scholars of Critical Romani Studies, argues that:

“[...] the first language and culture-centric approach [essentialist] (consciously or unconsciously) uses socially constructed racial categories that inevitably form the basis of social identities while the second school of thought [constructivism] aims to eliminate any kind of ethnicized or racialized term at the expense of neglecting and obscuring Roma identity and its interplay with structural racism.”²⁹

Thus, the essentialist epistemology entails the processes of othering, racialization, inferiorization, exoticization, or romanticization of Roma peoples based on ‘culture-centric’ interpretations – all notions that are strongly objected to within the constructivist account of Roma identity. However, in their attempt to depart from this negative legacy of the Enlightenment, namely the oppressive, essentialist systemic labeling and subjugation of Roma people, constructivists assume that positing Roma people as a “suffering, homogenized, and continuously victimized ethnic group” is counterproductive.³⁰ According to some, it may become a ‘death-trap’ or a ‘straitjacket’ that further perpetuates stereotyping, exclusion, or racialized governance.³¹

In light of this critique, essentialists would argue for de-ethnicization, de-politicization, or de-essentialization of Roma politics, policies, and identity.³² For Kóczé, their critique dismisses the collective political agency of Roma, their knowledge production, and complex reality.³³ In their account, Roma people are not considered active agents in shaping, altering, or subverting the representations historically imposed onto them.

²⁹ Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 3.

³⁰ Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 3-4.

³¹ Ian Law and Martin Kovats, *Rethinking Roma* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-38582-6>; Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma”; Wim Willems, “Ethnicity as a Death-Trap: The History of Gypsy Studies,” in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, eds. Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, Annemarie Cottaar (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 17-34.

³² van Baar and Kóczé, *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, 26–27.

³³ Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 4.

By employing critical race theory, intersectionality, or postcolonial frameworks, Kóczé offers a way out from the vicious circle of essentialization and blunt constructivism that further racialize Roma people. She prioritizes the agency of the oppressed subjects in order to subvert the oppressive discourse and expose it by “deconstructing the existing literature on Roma, explaining the changes, continuity, and resistance of Roma in the various gendered and racialized orders.”³⁴ Kóczé’s proposition is embraced within the below paragraphs and chapters.

The process of constructing the imaginary “Gypsy” subject

Following Kóczé’s suggestion, the paragraphs below discuss the process of institutional authorized construction of the “Gypsy” subject. This construction is associated with a scientific approach investigating their origins, culture, or later measuring the skulls of subjects perceived as ‘Gypsies’ under the aegis of racial biology. It is a discourse based on a power/knowledge dichotomy, as argued in poststructuralist and postcolonial epistemological frameworks. Thus, it has been an active agent informing the unequal institutional and social treatment of Roma people and reproducing white supremacy, classism, or sexism.

This process of inferiorization of Roma people throughout different spaces and times has been executed in the manner that Edward Said described in his book *Orientalism*.³⁵ Namely, by utilizing Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, Said contends that “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”³⁶

Said’s groundbreaking work is of crucial importance for dealing with racialization, dehumanization, and stigmatization of Roma people. This importance is reflected in a key article “Orientalism and Gypsylorism” that was written by Ken Lee in 2000.³⁷ In the article,

³⁴ Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma,” 8.

³⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979).

³⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

³⁷ Ken Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 44, no. 2 (2000): 129–56.

Lee admits that “a parallel and similar system of discourse to orientalism, Gypsylorism was developed in relation to ‘The Gypsies.’”³⁸ Lee further contends that the term ‘Gypsies’ is a discursive mechanism that is externally imposed with underlying *essential* reality.³⁹

The conceptualization of Gypsylorism as Orientalism is a reference to the epistemology and global influence of the Gypsy Lore Society established in 1888 in Great Britain. This institution was the most influential scholarly source of information on the matter of the “Gypsy” subject.⁴⁰ Theoretically, the Society was an extension of the earlier, late Enlightenment era’s scientific, racialised approach. This approach, by employing a comparative linguistic method and comparing Roma and Hindi languages, assumed that Roma origins were to be found somewhere in the East. Lee notes that “once Romani Otherness had been explained by Heinrich Grellmann through an exotic Oriental origin in India, the discursive task of locating them as Other became more manageable, and the study of Gypsies was expanded and elaborated.”⁴¹

While the racialized discursive foundations of the Gypsy Lore Society can be traced back to the 1783 dissertation by Grellmann entitled *The Gipsies*, the medieval and early modern constructions of the “Gypsy” subject can be found within cultural representations of this group in arts and literature.⁴² Although not ethnicized, these representations paved a path to essentialization and homogenization of Roma by mystifying, demonizing, or othering them. By studying the most prestigious medieval French art collections related to the representation of Roma, Sarah Carmona contends that these representations “create a structure for anti-Gypsyism.”⁴³ According to her, the dominant themes of these representations, define the “Gypsy” subjects as tramps, chicken thieves, spies, poisoners, fortune tellers, or child eaters.⁴⁴

³⁸ Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 132.

³⁹ Ibid. My emphasis .

⁴⁰ Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 133.

⁴¹ Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 140.

⁴² Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, trans. Matthew Raper (Printed for the editor by G. Bigg, 1787), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/dissertationongi00grel>.

⁴³ Sarah Carmona, *Representation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections*, vol. 1 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2019), 54, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/representation-of-roma-louvre-en/16809d7303>.

⁴⁴ Carmona, *Representation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections*, 53.

However, since Grellmann's study, the imaginary "Gypsy" subject has developed an ethnic character, and, as Ken Lee notes, ethnicity proved the Oriental origin, which shored up a more rigid intervention by using specific institutional methods and classifications. Grellmann's book was translated into English, French, Dutch, and German, let alone the multitude of references to it, as, for example, some Lithuanian scholarship on Roma below indicates. Moreover, by being a 'master-text', it has largely influenced the succeeding scientific and popular social perceptions about Roma even in the postmodern era.⁴⁵ Lee argues that Grellmann's book was an entrance point in the constitution of the "Gypsy" subject "as a discursive subject for systematic study."⁴⁶

Scientific dimensions of the discourse of the "Gypsy" subject

Grellmann's study proposed three perspectives in relation to the "Gypsy" subject: sociological, anthropological, and linguistic. The sociological perspective focused on the control of subjects of the modernizing nation-states by preaching inclusionary and assimilationist measures. Anarchic anomalies threatening social constellations had to disappear. In the nineteenth century, sociological developments led to the classification of various Roma communities combining heredity with scientific racism.⁴⁷ Thus, the sociological perspective harnessed the anthropological perspective that in its approach exoticized and alienated Roma by portraying them as outsiders, exotic primitives that could be studied from the perspectives of linguistics, customs, music, or dance.⁴⁸ This perspective was influenced by the Romantic era which idealized nature and freedom in opposition to the Enlightenment's rationalism and the forces of the industrial revolution. Hence, the "Gypsy" gained a romantic character, usually appearing as

⁴⁵ Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, 12.

⁴⁶ Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 134.

⁴⁷ Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 135.

⁴⁸ Lee, "Orientalism and Gypsylorism," 136.

a ‘free’ being separated from the social world or having the nature of a ‘child’. The main tenets of the linguistic perspective, the most durable as a research paradigm pertaining to Roma people, albeit differing among linguists, maintain that the Roma origins are the central theme in this paradigm.⁴⁹ Due to its interlinkages with anthropological and sociological perspectives, the linguistic approach has greatly contributed to Orientalization and essentialization of Roma as bearers of an Indian language into the European geographic context.⁵⁰ Lee argues that these three categories were not mutually exclusive but may be seen as synergetic discursivity.⁵¹

Therefore, after Grellmann’s work, various folklorists and linguists conducted ‘expeditions’ into various Roma communities to search and document the “Gypsy.” These investigations have been lumped together within the Gypsy Lore Society’s *Journal of Gypsy Lore Society*, first published in 1888. Many of these folklorists and linguists attempted to find the “true Romany.”⁵² Finally, the belief that such a subject existed led to biological classifications and the extermination of Roma people during the Nazi era.⁵³

Nowadays, the *Journal of Gypsy Lore Society* has changed its title to *Romani Studies*. The journal still remains an important reference point within scholarship on Roma people. The society has never acknowledged its racist past regardless of a few requests to do so in 2012 and 2016 by various scholars and activists.⁵⁴ In light of this problem, Critical Romani Studies must

⁴⁹ van Baar and Kóczé, *The Roma and Their Struggle for Identity in Contemporary Europe*, 27.

⁵⁰ Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 136.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The notion “true Romany” was introduced by George Borrow and it posited the probability of a “true,” authentic “Gypsy” subject that is racially uncontaminated. The authentic “Gypsy” subject was artificially opposed with the racially and culturally impure miscellaneous nomads who were considered to be a hybrid mix, racially and culturally. Another important notion that Borrow introduced was “Romany Rye” (later Romany Rai), which stood for a scholar (necessarily a non-Roma scholar) who was represented as a figure with a special status within Roma communities. Thus, this figure had to be conceived as “a patron [...] whose familiarity with and generosity to Gypsies has earned him an honoured status among them.” These scholars, as Lee notes, had no interest in so-called degenerates – racially and culturally impure “Gypsies.” By their alleged authentic source of knowledge, the Romany Rais gained an ownership over the normative discourse concerning the “Gypsy” subject. As one Gypsylorist would note: “they were our Gypsies, and we were their Rais.” See: Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 138-9.

⁵³ Willems, “Ethnicity as a Death-Trap: The History of Gypsy Studies,” 26–32.

⁵⁴ Jan Selling, “Assessing the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society in Light of Romani Subaltern Challenges,” *Critical Romani Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 13, 2018): 44–61, <https://doi.org/10.29098/crs.v1i1.15>.

be distinguished from Romani Studies. Critical Romani Studies may be seen as a counter-discourse, harnessing poststructuralist, postcolonial, or intersectional theoretical frameworks to address systemic injustices against Roma people that are predicated upon structural and institutional racialization practices pertinent to the Eurocentric attitudes towards self and its peripheral or inner ‘Others’.⁵⁵

From “Gypsy” science to “Gypsy” policies

The discourse of the “Gypsy” subject, historically and presently, will be seen as a key factor in defining the policy interventions towards Roma. These policies have varied from assimilation to obliteration and, to some extent, the current rhetoric of Roma “integration”/inclusion. For instance, Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II aimed to assimilate Roma and convert them into new peasants or new Hungarians by prohibiting Roma cultural manifestations and forcibly removing Roma children from their parents’ custody. The Nazi regime attempted to utterly eliminate them by drawing upon the discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society and connecting it to eugenics.⁵⁶ The European and Lithuanian policies, in the name of “integration,” destroyed Parubanka.

The role of the scientific discourse, therefore, is not only about a rhetorical construction of Roma identity but also the legitimization and rationalization of brutality against them. According to Lee, Grellmann’s paradigmatic shift has become ingrained within the “scientific and lay discourse” rationalized within scholarly studies and legitimized within state practices.⁵⁷ Similarly, Wim Willems contends that Grellmann’s study introduced a notion of the “Gypsy”

⁵⁵“Introducing the New Journal Critical Romani Studies,” *Critical Romani Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 2–7, <https://doi.org/10.29098/crs.v1i1.19>.

⁵⁶ Selling, “Assessing the Historical Irresponsibility of the Gypsy Lore Society in Light of Romani Subaltern Challenges”; Angéla Kóczé and Nidhi Trehan, “Racism, (Neo-)Colonialism, and Social Justice: The Struggle for the Soul of the Romani Movement in Post-Socialist Europe,” in *Racism, Postcolonialism, Europe*, ed. Graham Huggan (Liverpool University Press, 2009), 50–77, <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9781846312199.003.0004>; Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*; Leo Lucassen et al., *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*.

⁵⁷ Lee, “Orientalism and Gypsylorism,” 137.

that has acquired an ethnic dimension leading to the evil practices of the Nazi regime: “there can be no mistaking this development when one traces the criminological tradition within “Gypsy” studies culminating in its criminal biological variant during the Nazi era.”⁵⁸

Why does it all matter for Lithuania?

After having introduced the discourse of Gypsylorism, I argue that this scholarship has influenced how Lithuanian scholarship and state practices have treated Roma people. First, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the institutional and scholarly reference to Roma people was *Čigonai*.⁵⁹ In Lithuania, the majority of people belonging to the Roma community speak Romanes and do not use this reference to define themselves. Instead, we would say ‘*ame sam Roma*’ (translated from Romani as ‘we are Roma’). As discussed in the above sections, I believe that this distinction between institutional language and self-reference is of crucial importance. Within Lithuanian society and institutions this usage of terminology indicates the authorized discursivity on the “Gypsy” subject.

Within the general institutional and structural parlance, there is no clear understanding of the difference between the categories of Roma and ‘Gypsies’. Usually, they are used interchangeably. The uncritical institutional usage of terminology, I argue, affects how Roma culture and heritage is perceived. Thus, instead of protecting and managing the heritage of actual people and communities, the policies may tend to deal with the exoticized, and stigmatized imaginary “Gypsy” subject. This is not only because they aim to do so, but because of epistemic barriers entangled within the terminology which has never been challenged. In the below passages I demonstrate that the institutional usage of the term ‘Čigonai’ is an extension of the global discourse discussed in the previous sections.

⁵⁸ Willems, “Ethnicity as a Death-Trap: The History of Gypsy Studies,” 30.

⁵⁹ ‘Čigonai’ is the plural form of the English plural form ‘Gypsies’. Consequently, ‘čigonė’ is the singular feminine form, and ‘čigonas’ is the singular masculine form. Similarly, in the central and eastern part of Europe, Roma people have been called Цыгане (Tsygane) in Russia, Cigányok in Hungary, or Cyganie in Poland.

Merging the global and Lithuanian scholarship on 'Gypsies'

The first historical studies on Lithuanian Roma appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their connection with Grellmann's book is obvious. For example, Ignacy Daniłowicz (1788-1843), in his book *About Gypsies*, without giving a credit to Grellmann, when describing Roma people writes:

"Africa does not make them blacker, Europe not more white; in Spain they do not learn to be dishonest, in Germany not be diligent, among the Turks not to worship Mohamed, and among Polish not Christ."⁶⁰

Daniłowicz believed that the unchanging nature of 'Gypsies' had to do with their 'oriental' origin that firmly stuck to their traditions. According to him, once a tradition came into the lives of 'Gypsies,' it was impossible to change it. "Each tradition, image once settled down, even a harmful or funny, they last for a thousand years."⁶¹ Likewise, Grellmann reasoned that 'oriental' origin is indivisible from 'Gypsies' customs and only by deception or force could such evils be removed.⁶²

Similar attitudes are observed in Teodor Narbutt's (1784- 1864) 1830 study *Historical Outline of the Gypsy People*.

"By no means do I intend to write an apology of Gypsies, conversely, I think that they are not useful members of our society. However, a deeper knowledge about the history of this nation convinces that past and present circumstances, more than their nature, are

⁶⁰ Ignacy Daniłowicz, *O cyganach: wiadomość historyczna, czytana na posiedzeniu publicznem Cesarskiego Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego, dnia 30 czerwca 1824 roku przez Ignacego Daniłowicza, z dodaniem wyrazów i wzorów odmian gramatycznych języka tego narodu* [About the Gypsies: A Historical Message, Read at a Public Meeting of the Imperial University of Vilnius on June 30, 1824 by Ignacy Daniłowicz, with the Addition of Words and Grammatical Forms of Their Language] (Vilnius: A. Marcinkowski, 1824); Ignacy Daniłowicz (1788-1843) was a Polish-Russian historian who studied and lectured law in the Imperial University of Vilnius. Likewise, as Daniłowicz, Grellmann wrote: "Africa makes them no blacker, nor Europe whiter; they neither learn to be lazy in Spain nor diligent in Germany: in Turkey Mohomet, and among Christians Christ, remain equally without adoration." See: Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gypsies*.

⁶¹ Reda Griškaitė, "Žvilgsnis į seniausią Lietuvos čigonų istoriją [A Glimpse into the Oldest History of Lithuanian Gypsies]," in *Čigonai Lietuvoje ir Europoje [The Gypsies in Lithuania and Europe]*, eds. Severinas Vaitiekus and Elena Vaitiekienė, 46–68 (Tyto alba, 1998), 64.

⁶² Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, 28.

guilty of the decline of this nation. Exactly because of this it became the scum of human race.”⁶³

Narbutt proposed civilizing measures that would ‘fix’ ‘Gypsies’ vices by submitting his projects to the Tzarist Censure Committee.⁶⁴

Later, global and local synergies aimed at producing knowledge about Roma could be found in the initial issues of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. Two articles on Lithuanian ‘Gypsies’ were published between 1888-1889 and 1890-189. They were authored by a Lithuanian folklorist Mieczysław Dowojno-Sylwestrowicz (1849-1919). In his articles, besides Romani language vocabulary, the author describes Roma as deviants, savages, thieves, criminals, uncivilized, or precarious in their nature.⁶⁵

Subsequent literature on the “Gypsy” subject emerged in the Interwar period. A brief study *The Gypsies*, authored by Antanas Salys (1902-1972) and Izidorius Kisinas (1904-1958) in 1936, provides a historical, and linguistic overview on Roma people that drew heavily on Grellmann, Pott, Miklosich, Wliskołki, Daniłowic, Narbutt and others.⁶⁶ They claimed that:

“Despite the fact that Gypsies lived among sedentarized and *civilized* peoples, they nevertheless retained their language, customs, and belief. [...] Gypsies are vindictive [...] by *nature* gifted an excellent musical-ear [...] their music is full of *wild* melodies [...] their children are grown up as Spartians-like [...] majority are nomads [...] Gypsies lavishly drink and smoke...”⁶⁷

By summing up the themes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Lithuanian scholarship concerning Roma people, it becomes conspicuous that they draw on pre-existing racialized discourse pertaining to essentialized cultural or biological interpretations of Roma people. These themes revolve around key concepts such as savagery, laziness, thievery, etc. The moral, normative, character in most of this scholarship can also be observed in their

⁶³ Griškaitė, “Žvilgsnis į seniausią Lietuvos čigonų istoriją, 54.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mieczysław Dowojno-Sylwestrowicz, “The Lithuanian Gypsies,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2, no. 2 (1890): 107–9; Mieczysław Dowojno-Sylwestrowicz, “The Lithuanian Gypsies and Their Language,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 1, no. 5 (1889): 251–57.

⁶⁶ Antanas Salys and Izidorius Kisinas, *Čigonai* [The Gypsies] (Akc. b-ves “Varpas,” 1936).

⁶⁷ Salys and Kisinas, *Čigonai*, 11-12. My emphasis.

propositions to introduce ‘civilizing’ measures against Roma. These themes are further observed later in the twentieth century scholarship on Lithuanian Roma.

The Gypsies in Lithuania and Europe, published as recently as 1998, remains yet another racialized account discussing the ‘nature’ of ‘Gypsies’.⁶⁸ This book was commissioned by the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre and funded by the Council of Europe. Its editor, Severinas Vaitiekus, worked on Roma issues within the Department of National Minorities. The book consists of seven essays by scholars, activists, artists, or lawyers. None of the authors, however, belong to the Roma community.

Overall, they tended to attribute the precariousness and struggles experienced by Roma to their imagined lifestyle and family traditions. The editors write:

“[...]it has been already a half of millennia that beside us live people with *dark complexions, south-like temper*, distinguished by their apparel, and mostly not settling in one place. We admire their songs and dance, and we sometimes are jealous of their *innate sense of freedom*. [...] *They live a separate, close, not resembling to ours, lifestyle.*”⁶⁹

They further include the accounts provided by a doctor, J. Cukanov, who oversaw Roma people from Parubanka settlement. He declared that the main disease among “Gypsy” women is goiter, and, among men, bronchitis or pneumonia, which is partially caused, according to him, by the ‘Gypsies’ culture. “Gypsies start to smoke once they learn to walk.”⁷⁰

A historian Reda Griškaitė confirmed that “Gypsies, this vivid, playful, and most importantly *secret* nation, was a perfect research *object*” for Narbutt, Daniłowic, and other historians who devoted themselves for studying such a *barbaric* nation.⁷¹ Griškaitė uncritically recites the racialized scholarship without any remarks on its racialized and oppressive component. Another author, Kristina Bradaitytė concludes:

“While Gypsies now are settled, *psychologically* they have not lost the feelings for nomadism and freedom. [...] *Civilization* is penetrating Gypsies’ society, despite the fact

⁶⁸ Vaitiekus and Vaitiekienė, *Čigonai Lietuvoje ir Europoje*.

⁶⁹ Vaitiekus and Vaitiekienė, *Čigonai Lietuvoje ir Europoje*, 7–10.

⁷⁰ Vaitiekus and Vaitiekienė, *Čigonai Lietuvoje ir Europoje*, 32.

⁷¹ Griškaitė, “Žvilgsnis į seniausią Lietuvos čigonų istoriją, 54, 16, 46, 47. My emphasis.

that the integrational processes, *due to their different lifestyle* and difficult socio-economic circumstances, are complicated.”⁷²

These remarks are similarly manifested into the opening paragraphs of the first Lithuanian Roma “integration” policy entitled as *Resolution Regarding the 2000-2004 Program for Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society*:

“[...] it has not yet been possible to fully integrate Roma people (hereinafter referred to as Roma) into Lithuanian society *due to their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identity*.”⁷³

Therefore, it is obvious that, as in the international arena, in Lithuania too, the racialized scholarship has channelled into Roma related policies.

This discourse, within scholarship and policies, as some Roma feminist scholars would persuasively argue, continues to embody a segregationist and assimilationist rhetoric. Instead of exposing the racialized and gendered structures, it attributes oppression of Roma to their supposed ‘culture’, which, according to them, corrosively affects the contemporary thought surrounding the subject matter.⁷⁴

Conclusions

This chapter addressed the institutional, authorized discourse pertaining to the construction of the “Gypsy” subject, or the political, cultural and social identity of Roma people. As discussed, this discourse has become a justificatory, legitimizing and rationalizing instrument used by governments to govern the Roma people, their culture, social and political life. Through this discourse constructed Roma identity embodies essentialist epistemology that prescribes fixed

⁷² Kristina Bradaitytė, “Čigonai apie save ir gyvenimą” [The Gypsies about Themselves and Life], in *Čigonai Lietuvoje ir Europoje*, 65–86. My emphasis.

⁷³ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, *Nutarimas dėl romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2000–2004 metų programos* [Resolution on the 2000–2004 Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society], no. 759, July 1, 2000, Vilnius, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.104285?jfwid=rivwzvvpvg>.

⁷⁴ Kóczé, Matache, and Trehan, “When They Enter, We All Enter ...”: Envisioning a New Social Europe from a Romani Feminist Perspective,” 185.

biological and cultural nature to Roma people. The constructivist account on Roma identity dismisses the political agency of Roma.

Angéla Kóczé's critique of both accounts is understood here as a productive way to proceed while dealing with questions of Roma heritage or culture. Following Kóczé's proposition urging the deconstruction of oppressive literature and institutional practices directed towards Roma people, I argued that this discourse has historically and currently been a key actor informing governmental policies for Roma people. This phenomenon was observed by connecting global scholarship with the Lithuanian scholarship on Roma.

While this chapter serves as an entry point for understanding the external, institutional authorized discourse connected to Roma identity which largely defines what Roma heritage is by drawing on the static and malevolent interpretation of an overarching Roma culture, the next chapter aims to understand the notion of heritage and its possible application to the case of Parubanka.

2. Understanding Heritage and its Relevance to Parubanka

In this chapter, the idea of heritage will be explored with the aim of conceptualizing Parubanka as heritage. The straightforward application of this idea to such heritage requires elaboration on what heritage means and does in such social contexts, as well as who participates in this process. A cautious step needs to be taken at this point because far too often the idea of Roma heritage has been instrumentalized to reproduce the ‘imaginary’ culture, discussed in the previous chapter. In this light, the idea of heritage is never a neutral representation of a past and people but a controlled, authorized practice doing its work in a subtle, even unconscious way.

Authorized discursive practice pertaining to the idea of heritage has been inseparable phenomenon within Western world featuring Eurocentric aesthetics and ethics. Thus, in critical heritage scholarship it is known as authorized heritage discourse, a concept coined by Laurajane Smith.⁷⁵ Not only does this discourse significantly contribute to continuous reproduction of the supremacy of the Western culture by taking away agency from individuals and communities in defining their heritages, but it also does the same work with the heritage of excluded groups, or subaltern heritages by possessing and constructing the discourse of their assumed cultures that are conflated with or applied to their heritages.⁷⁶ Here, the relevance of the first chapter is apparent insofar as the construction and possession of the discourse of the imaginary culture of the “Gypsy” subject has been far too often equated with Roma heritage.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

⁷⁶ The term subaltern was adopted by the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci who used it as a reference to the marginalized groups living within hegemonic power structures, groups subordinated by virtue of class, gender, caste, or culture, although some scholars argue that his usage of the term was more limited – referring solely to proletariat. In the contemporary usage of the term, subaltern refers to any person or group that are of inferior rank in society as a consequence of discrimination based on their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. According to Robert Young, the term generally embraces marginalized groups and the lower classes, or, as he puts it, “a person rendered without agency by his or her social status.” See: Robert Young cited in Hemangi Bhagwat and Madhavi Arekar, “On the Margins: Theorising Spivak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’” *Ars Artium: An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 6 (January 2018): 38–44, (accessed May 9, 2025). <http://www.arsartium.org>.

Through authorized heritage discourse and its critiques, I argue that a different approach must be taken when discussing Roma heritage, in this case, the past and future of Parubanka. Specifically, I draw on critical heritage scholarship that perceives heritage as a concept beyond homogeneous, essentialist cultural representations. This approach focuses on structural power imbalances connected to class, gender, or race and explores affective qualities of heritage ingrained in the experience of individuals and communities. Insofar, as it delves into the notions of memory, identity, community, sense of belonging, or attachment to a place. Importantly, this approach can give agency to individuals and communities, seeks deeper understanding of heritage, aims to heal the trauma caused by destructions of heritage.

Firstly, I discuss the concept and nature of authorized heritage discourse and its relation to subaltern heritage. I later present critiques of this discourse and the challenges that arise in attempts to subvert it within heritage management practices. Here, the concept of multicultural tokenism is introduced. Finally, I advance the discussion by presenting a critical approach to heritage that conceives it as a process rather than a static phenomenon. I argue that this understanding is crucial in perceiving and managing Parubanka or other Roma related heritage.

Authorized Heritage Discourse and why it matters?

The possibility of public expressions and institutional protection of subaltern heritage is a relatively recent development reflecting the so-called ‘post-modern’ turn which marks a striving for the liberation of suppressed histories and heritages. The idea of heritage, hence, has been subjected to critiques concerning its instrumentalization, or uses and abuses in sustaining white supremacy, the nation state, the patriarchy, or hierarchical social orders that have largely excluded different perceptions and understandings of heritage.⁷⁷ This mode, within which the

⁷⁷ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Stuart Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation” *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (December 1999): 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528829908576818>; Rodney

idea of heritage has predominantly circulated, facilitated the ‘othering’⁷⁸ of all those social groups that supposedly differed from the Western idea of ‘self.’

The systemic process of ‘othering’⁷⁹ when it comes to western thought is reflected in the authorized discourse of heritage that historically and currently may manifest as an authoritative, institutional tool to interpret and validate ‘other’ cultures via systemic practices of classifying, positioning, comparing, or evaluating them against hierarchical perception of human nature and aesthetics. This process is described by Edward Said in his ground-breaking book *Orientalism*. Said theorizes that the systemic, authorized discourse of the West is based on a sense of a superior ‘self’, treating the imagined ‘Orient’ as inferior. This discourse, according to him, is sustained through institutionalized forms of representation, be it in academia, politics, or culture.⁸⁰

When it comes to the West, according to Smith, authorized heritage discourse is presented as self-referential, unquestionable and refers to a high, monumental culture.⁸¹ It denotes a privileged discourse that prioritizes Eurocentric aesthetics and ethical norms that are applied to material objects, sites, places, or landscapes. This type of heritage is usually posited as a ‘thing’ that the current generations are obliged to pass onto posterity by protecting and revering it. This overwhelmed reverence, according to her, is aimed at constructing a sense of common identity that is inherently based on a glorious past, the myths of nations. For Smith, its predication on the past disempowers the present from active engagement in challenging and rewriting the cultural and social meanings. Thus, this discourse pre-defines the practices and

Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203108857>; Jo Littler, “Heritage and ‘Race,’” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. B. J. Graham and Peter Howard (Ashgate, 2008), 89-103, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613031-5>.

⁷⁸ Within postcolonial studies the term ‘Other’ refers to particular treatment and representation of the East and its imagined Oriental culture as demonstrated in Edward Said’s book *Orientalism*.

⁷⁹ This term has been coined by Gayatri Spivak to conceptualize and challenge systemic hierarchical orders of the West in constructing the imagined periphery as “others,” the process by which, paradoxically, it creates and constitutes its own dominant self. See: Hemangi Bhagwat and Madhavi Arekar, “On the Margins: Theorizing Spvak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’”

⁸⁰ Said, *Orientalism*.

⁸¹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 36.

perceptions of heritage. In other words, it defines what counts and what does not count as heritage.⁸²

Smith's articulation about the universalist set of cultural values pertaining to the Western elite correlates with Stuart Hall's critique towards institutional heritage practices. According to him, heritage reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context that are always embedded in the power/authority dynamics of those who have "colonized the past, whose versions of history matter."⁸³ Therefore, this discourse is privileged, 'sanitized', and to a huge extent reflects class and ethnic and racial divisions.

When it comes to the interlinkages between authorized heritage discourse and 'race', heritage can be seen as a mechanism that constitutes and naturalizes the superior/inferior racial dichotomies predicated on institutionalized representations of westernized aesthetic norms and values. Heritage becomes an instrument by which the 'reality' of these imagined cultures is reinforced. Jo Littler contends that it is mainly upper or upper middle-class white people who were able to define and, for that matter, possess heritage. According to her, via this process "their whiteness was naturalized."⁸⁴ She adds that heritage became a site, among other cultural sites, through which the "discourse of superiority and power could be naturalized and sustained."⁸⁵ Other, inferior heritages, therefore, as Littler argues "simply did not count."⁸⁶ Therefore, subaltern versions of heritage have been excluded from this discourse due to determinant conceptualizations of heritage.

Authorized heritage discourse, thus, may be conceived of as a tool defining the supposed cultures and heritages of various groups. After having read the first chapter and briefly reviewing the problems ingrained in the institutional idea of heritage one may ask to what extent

⁸² Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 29.

⁸³ Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation," 6.

⁸⁴ Littler, "Heritage and 'Race,'" 91.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Parubanka might have been conceived as heritage by relevant institutions and whether the former residents had a say, if at all, in what the place meant to them. In the fourth chapter, it will be seen that within the locus where racism against Roma persists, the esthetic form of Parubanka could not withstand the ‘requirements’ of grand idea of heritage, nor did its community act as the source for institutions to engage in the work that heritage does.

Towards democratization of the idea of heritage

The above-discussed heritage discourse has been challenged in post-structuralist and post-colonial scholarship that critically assess Western epistemology connected to the Enlightenment’s ideals of universal knowledge and its repercussions on dehumanized subalternity. While post-structuralists thought has proposed a theoretical avenue for a Western critique of Western civilization, post-colonial thinkers, although adhering to post-structuralists ideas regarding Western domination of knowledge/power dynamics, embarked on an analysis of the material effects and implications of colonialism that, according to them, stemmed from the “epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality.”⁸⁷

The turn in heritage discourse towards a more empathetic, inclusive, or multicultural heritage has been dominant since the so-called ‘deep slow-motion revolution’, as Stuart Hall suggests.⁸⁸ This transformative turn, according to him, is epitomized by a number of shifts in intellectual culture such as increased awareness amongst marginalized groups of the symbolic power embodied in representation; the growing understanding of a sense of culture and its connection to identity; a heightened emphasis in politics of recognition intertwined with pre-politics of equality; a decline in an acceptance of authority and its legitimacy in writing the cultures of others. This new understanding is pertinent to a growing understanding of its

⁸⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2020), 27, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116714>.

⁸⁸ Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation,” 7–8.

constructed and therefore contestable nature. In general, this transformational turn can be seen, as Hall proposes, as an attempt to relativize prescriptive truth, reason “and other Enlightenment values” to “context-related conception of truth-as-interpretation – of ‘truth’ as an aspect of what Michel Foucault calls the will to power.”⁸⁹

This revolution can be divided into two phases, the first is democratization of heritage and the second a critique of Enlightenment’s notion of a universal knowledge. Both phases are important for understanding Roma heritage beyond authorized cultural representations. The first phase of this revolution, according to Hall, features the increased inclusion into the discourse of heritage of what has been called ‘history from below’.⁹⁰ The German historian Alf Lüdtke suggests that ‘history from below’ prioritizes silenced and excluded voices that are “largely anonymous in history – the ‘nameless’ multitudes in their workaday trials and tribulations.”⁹¹ Thus, it prioritizes the agency of individuals, who are not mere objects of the history, but its subjects or agents.⁹² As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya argues, the impetus or a driving force underlying ‘history from below’ is “to humanize history.”⁹³

However, although these steps were important, they had predominantly resided within the “continued dependence on relatively uncritical pre-existing narratives of whiteness and empire.”⁹⁴ This paradigm is observed in general national histories in which Roma histories, let alone their struggles, are not represented. For example, the almost total silence concerning Roma slavery in the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia, Romania, that lasted from the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Andrew I. Port, “History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., vol. 11, ed. James D. Wright (Elsevier, 2015), 108, <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-097086-8.62156-6>.

⁹² Port, “History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory,” 109.

⁹³ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, “‘History from Below,’” *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (1983): 4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517020>.

⁹⁴ Littler, “Heritage and ‘Race,’” 92.

thirteen until the middle of the nineteenth century, or still weak recognition of Roma Holocaust are prevalent.⁹⁵

Therefore, the second phase of ‘revolution’ emerged where the critiques against the ideals of the Enlightenment and notions of universal knowledge, offered by post-colonial thinkers, dominated. The second ‘revolution’, as Hall calls it, reflects a post-colonial attempt to de-center the “West and western-oriented or Eurocentric grand-narratives.”⁹⁶ Therefore, although the inclusion of ‘other’ cultures within museums and galleries displays increased, questions were raised regarding the role and claims of Euro-American museums “to be able to speak on behalf of other peoples.”⁹⁷ Thus, as Hall notes, “the questions – “Who should control the power to represent?” ‘Who has the authority to re-present the culture of others?’ – have resounded through museum corridors of the world, provoking a crisis of authority.”⁹⁸

The dilemma posed by such representations, which tended to talk on behalf of subalterns, features the unshaken pasts of empires and therefore, within the critical scholarship of heritage studies, is interpreted as multicultural tokenism. The latter term is oriented towards superficiality of benevolent attempts to adhere to neo-liberal, multicultural political dynamics. According to Jo Littler, this approach towards heritage is uncritical to ‘race’ or as she puts it the: “white past, multicultural present” approach, is a manifestation of multicultural tokenism.⁹⁹ When the relevance of these debates are connected to Roma with the goal of finding a meaningful concept applicable to the heritage of Parubanka, it could be said that simply having a display within a museum does not necessarily mean that the community’s versions of heritage,

⁹⁵ Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyryna Dunajeva, “Introduction: Re-thinking Roma Resistance: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery,” in *Re-Thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*, eds. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyryna Dunajeva (European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, 2020). 13-26.

⁹⁶ Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation,” 7.

⁹⁷ Ibid; Littler, “Heritage and ‘Race,’” 92.

⁹⁸ Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation,” 8.

⁹⁹ Littler, “Heritage and ‘Race,’” 94.

along with all relevant aspects contained within them, are properly represented, healing the traumas of destruction.

Within the critical approaches of Heritage Studies, multicultural tokenism is associated with assimilationist policies that are not only implemented by employing a top-down model of decision-making but which also do not challenge the pre-conceptions of authorized heritage discourse. Laurajane Smith suggests that these types of policies, “assimilationist and top-down in nature,” do not pose many real challenges to the authorized heritage discourse.¹⁰⁰ This approach, that she would frame as “gestural politics,” according to her, does not challenge underlying preconceptions.¹⁰¹ She adds that recognition of the diversity of society “does not itself challenge power relations and control over the process by which heritage is defined and managed.”¹⁰² Therefore, mere consultations with communities should not be equated with active sense of negotiation of heritage understandings and values, but rather such limited approach “can simply,” she suggests, “become gestural politics.”¹⁰³

When it comes to gestural politics and Roma, references are not needed. The case of Parubanka and the whole socio-economic situation of the majority of this community across Europe symbolizes the way governments have failed to seriously engage with historical, enduring structural and institutional injustices against the Roma community.¹⁰⁴ Roma heritage in this sense, therefore is under constant threat of being abused by tokenization.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ Margareta Matache, “Biased Elites, Unfit Policies: Reflections on the Lacunae of Roma Integration Strategies,” *European Review* 25, no. 4 (2017): 588-607, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798717000254>; Kóczé, “Racialization, Racial Oppression of Roma;” Márton Rövid, “From Tackling Antigypsyism to Remediating Racial Injustice,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 9 (July 4, 2022): 1738–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1972126>.

Expanding heritage consciousness and the impact of the demolition of Parubanka

The above discussion about the nature of authorized heritage discourse urges us to move towards a notion of heritage that gives agency to communities and individuals. Therefore, this understanding of heritage escapes, but also takes into consideration, the universalist portrayals of inherent and unchanging cultures through which the heritage of particular groups was formerly perceived. As Visnja Kisić argues, in this understanding, heritage is about social construct, economic and social concerns, facilitation of various powers to ‘stake claims’, articulate identities, or subvert “the pertaining power positions.”¹⁰⁵ She adds that in this sense it is both a “threat and cure in assisting intercultural dialogue and pluralistic democracy, as well as in peace and reconciliation efforts.”¹⁰⁶

This approach to heritage focuses on notions of identity, memory and its work within communities including also the sense of belonging, or attachment to place. I argue that this is a crucial approach through which Roma heritage should be understood. Not only does this approach give agency and instruments to individuals and communities to express and protect their heritages, but it also expands general consciousness connected to the affective qualities of heritage. Therefore, while analyzing the case of Parubanka and the impact of its destruction, as well as thinking about the future of Parubanka’s memory, this approach serves as a guiding epistemology for the way heritage, identity, memory, community, sense of belonging, and attachment to a place are intertwined. In addition, it facilitates a deeper understanding about the role of the reproduced power structures in creating the heritage of the Roma, on the one hand, and ignoring its own product on the other. Finally, this approach understands heritage as a

¹⁰⁵ Višnja Kisić, *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies* (European Cultural Foundation, 2016), 27–28.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

process and relationship among humans regardless of whether it represents an official or unofficial form of heritage.

The official - unofficial heritage dichotomy is extremely important when thinking about Roma heritage, in this case, Parubanka. The village was never officially recognized as heritage. If official forms of heritage, as discussed above, are institutionalized and extremely hierarchical, unofficial heritage is not institutionalized and, as such, not recognized by institutions. In this regard, Harrison defines unofficial heritage as follows:

“I use the term unofficial heritage to refer to a broad range of practices that are represented using the language of heritage but are not recognized by official forms of legislation. Unofficial heritage may manifest in the rather conventional form of buildings or objects that *have significance to individuals or communities* but are not recognized by the state as heritage through legislative protection or may manifest in less tangible ways as sets of social practices that surround more tangible forms of both official and unofficial heritage but are equally not protected by legislation.”¹⁰⁷

Therefore, heritage is not only about the official status but rather about its affective qualities that evoke intimate meanings for individuals and communities. In this light, the objects are conceived as being important agents by virtue of their interrelational connection with humans. In discussing heritage approaches to material culture, Harrison considers that human and non-human agents work “together to recreate the past in the present through everyday networks of association.”¹⁰⁸ He further suggests that focus on heritage from this perspective will “refocus our attention on the affective qualities of things and the important role of materiality and non-human agency in heritage.”¹⁰⁹

Following the interrelated nature of heritage that is manifested amongst human and non-human actors, the impact of heritage destruction on these Roma communities becomes of crucial importance, as heritage destruction may have profound consequences due to the way it impacts its owners directly. The emotional resonance of heritage becomes apparent if it is

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 15. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 37.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

thought of as a storage place for cultural or collective memory, supporting a sense of belonging, community, or identity. Veysel Apaydin argues that collective identities and senses of belonging are the products of constructed cultural memory that stems from the life of a community and group membership.¹¹⁰ As a term in relation to heritage, cultural memory has been borrowed from the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who developed a theory of cultural memory in his work “*La mémoire collective*.”¹¹¹ Like heritage, memory marks a continuous process between remembering and forgetting, a process via which communities and individuals reshape their relationship to the past and their positions to “established and emergent memory sites.”¹¹² Therefore, remembering should be understood as an active process of social interaction amongst communities and groups that may develop collective and individual memory and heritage via landscape and nature.¹¹³

Apaydin’s ideas correlate with what Laurajane Smith discusses concerning the importance of heritage of Aboriginal Waanyi women in the Boodjamulla National Park landscape in Queensland, Australia. According to her, the site itself did not represent heritage, but rather heritage was what was happening on it while the Waanyi women were there. It was a vital place of socialization, she argues, remembering and forgetting, passing knowledge on to future generations, asserting their cultural identities and being proud of them. The function of the physical place was to provide an aid to memory, or as she puts it by drawing on the Samuel Raphael’s concept ‘theatres of memory’:

“Boodjamulla landscape or country, did play a mnemonic role, they also provided background, setting, gravitas and, most importantly, a sense of occasion for those both passing on and receiving cultural meaning, knowledge and memories.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Veysel Apaydin, “The Interlinkage of Cultural Memory, Heritage and Discourses of Construction, Transformation and Destruction,” in *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage*, ed. Veysel Apaydin (UCL Press, 2020), 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787354845>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Apaydin, “The Interlinkage of Cultural Memory, Heritage and Discourses of Construction, Transformation and Destruction,” 14–17.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 44.

Thus, Smith argues that it is important to move beyond conventional, authorized heritage ethics and to explore holistic themes of what heritage could be.¹¹⁵ She concludes that the processual nature of heritage is something that is being carried out in a wide range of activities that “include remembering, commemoration, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories, asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings.”¹¹⁶

The above theoretical exploration of the idea of heritage shows that in order to see Parubanka as heritage, one must move beyond conventional authorized interpretations. Specifically, one must move from narratives that are homogenic, essentialist, nationalized, fixed, or take agency away from individuals and communities towards a pluralistic, community-based place where heritage is happening. Particular attention, thus, must be paid to the affective qualities of heritage that focuses on notions of memory, identity, sense of belonging, community, or attachment to place. Needless to say, this work must go beyond mere official Roma heritage discourse. In other words, heritage that hurts, connects, or generates feelings of home must be taken into consideration first and foremost. Parubanka exactly falls under this understanding of heritage, a heritage that to date has been overlooked.

Conclusions

In this chapter concepts of heritage were explored that may comprise the Eurocentric, authorized heritage discourse that has long perpetuated hierarchical power dynamics, excluded marginalized groups, and/or promoted a static, past, and object-oriented view of heritage. This discourse privileged Western values connected to the ideals and aesthetic norms of the Enlightenment. Although the revolutionary stages through which the idea of heritage was

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 45.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 83.

challenged and urged to retrieve unwritten histories contained important work, the question of lack of agency and tokenism prevailed within the rubric of subaltern heritages. Therefore, the move towards different understandings of heritage is desirable.

I argued that any heritage approach must go beyond the essentialist, homogenic view of particular groups. Parubanka's heritage should be seen in terms of memory, identity, sense of belonging, community, or the former inhabitants' attachment to this place. This critical approach facilitates a more empathetic, inclusive approach to heritage that recognizes diverse narratives and grants agency to communities and individuals. Therefore, this critical approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of Parubanka's heritage, but also can serve as the foundation for a practical policy guideline for the preservation of its memory that can help heal the trauma inflicted upon many residents after their settlement was demolished.

3. (Re)constructing a history of Parubanka from its inception to its destruction

This chapter explores the historical development of Parubanka since its beginning as a site of permanent habitation to the tolerated establishment of Roma settlement during the Soviet era, up to the independent Lithuanian period when the village was arbitrarily destroyed. This chapter builds on the analysis of maps, archival photographs, archival documents connected to the Soviet policies, and semi-structured interviews with former inhabitants of Parubanka.

The history of this settlement has been ignored by historians and left out of the historiography of Vilnius in general. To get around this limitation, I first explored the area where Parubanka had been located. Secondly, its existence as a permanent site for Roma in the pre-War period is discussed. Thirdly, I assess the settlement's development during Soviet period. Lastly, I discuss its existence and destruction during the period of Lithuanian independence.

Parubanka: from a whole district to a Roma settlement

In Lithuanian, the use of the word Parubanka has become obsolete. It seems that only Roma people kept it to denote their settlement. However, what is today called Kirtimai – an industrial district in Vilnius within which the former Romani settlement was located – is a Lithuanized version of a Polish word *Porubanek*, which, when translated from Polish language means a location near forest clearings.

The first identification of the area can be found in a 1887 publication called the *Dictionary of Geography of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries*. Here, two locations named Porubanek are identified. The first Porubanek is identified as a village in Vilnius inhabited by impoverished *szlachta*s, or Polish nobility. This village was located in the

sixth county of Poland at a distance of 5 *versts*¹¹⁷ from Vilnius. It consisted of 3 houses and 36 residents. The second Porubanka denotes an area in the same sixth county which included 2 houses and 12 residents. It also contained *karczma*¹¹⁸ owned by *szlachta*.¹¹⁹

It is clear that the name of the Roma settlement derives from the *Porubanek* neighborhoods mentioned in the nineteenth-century publication. This denomination remained in use until Lithuania regained the Vilnius region from Poland after the *Mutual Assistance Pact* between Lithuania and the Soviet Union was signed. Subsequently, the names of various places in Vilnius underwent a process of Lithuanization, during which they were changed according to the so-called principle of general consistency. Thus, Lithuanian forms were substituted for all Slavic names or they were translated into Lithuanian equivalent versions. This work was carried out by the Institute of Lithuanian Studies.¹²⁰

Thus, the small village once called Porubanek was renamed Kirtimai. Later, during the Soviet era, the area developed into an industrial and residential district. In 1950, a school, kindergarten, library and cinema theatre were built in the district. The most notable feature of the area was the Vilnius International Airport. The airport was opened in 1932 when the region of Vilnius still belonged to the political unit of Poland. Today, the district accommodates around 800 various companies such as *Aerosol Baltija*, *Coca Cola HBC Lietuva*, *Schenker* and *Ikea*.¹²¹

However, it seems that changes in the name of the place, occurring due to the Lithuanization process, did not impact the way the Roma community named their settlement. Thus, only the former residents of the Roma settlement still continued to use the historical name

¹¹⁷ A *verst* is an obsolete Russian unit of length equivalent to 1.0668 kilometres.

¹¹⁸ It is a Polish term referring to inns, taverns, and alehouses—social gathering places and sites of food and drink consumption.

¹¹⁹ Filip Sulimierski and Władysław Walewski, *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich* [Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries], vol. 8 (Warsaw, 1887), 829.

¹²⁰ Laimutis Bilkis, “Vietovardžiai – mūsų būties liudininkai [Place Names – Witnesses of Our Existence],” *Pasaulio lietuvis*, May 2, 2025, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://pasauliolietuvis.lt/vietovardziai-musu-buties-liudininkai/>.

¹²¹ “Kirtimai,” in *Vikipedija*, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://lt.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kirtimai&oldid=7135884>.

of the entire district to refer to their settlement. However, outsiders commonly called the village, *čigonų taboras* or “Gypsy” camp. The term *taboras* does not originally refer to a permanent Roma settlement but rather to itinerant Roma groups. It also suggests a possible threat, or something that arouses curiosity. For instance, the popular Lithuanian slogans such as ‘a “Gypsy” *taboras* has settled nearby’ or, as way to describe one’s home arrangement in a negative sense, ‘here it is like a gypsy *taboras*’ are embodiments of the way this word can be used.

Nevertheless, Parubanka was not a mobile settlement, it was a place of permanent residence, and its name derives from an actual historical denomination that was officially used until, at least, the 1940s. The use of this name has a unique historical significance and continuity compared to the general designation embodied in the word *taboras* that rather refers to the infamous “Gypsy” trope discussed in the first chapter.

Roma within the area: from pre-War until the Soviets

It is not clear, however, when Roma began to inhabit the place. In the testimonies of Parubanka’s former residents, a pre-WWII connection of Roma people with the site was noted. For example, a Romani woman, Olia (name changed), lived her whole life in Parubanka until it was demolished in 2020.

“I was born in Parubanka in 1956, and my parents had a small wooden house there [...] The Roma knew the place even before WWII. Not only did they know the place, but the surrounding areas as well.”¹²²

This narrative would appear in the thoughts of Mykolas who was a former resident of Parubanka: “Perhaps, Parubanka started before WWII or after [...] I came to live there in 1964...”¹²³

¹²² “Kirtimai,” in *Vikipedija*.

¹²³ Agnieška Avin, Gopalas Michailovskis, and Aušra Simoniukštytė, *Litovskone Romengyro Rakirybnitko Archyvo: Lithuanian Roma Oral History Archive*, 2nd ed. (Padėk pritapti, Romų Visuomenės Centras, 2022).

These memory fragments may be further advanced by hypothesizing why Romani people chose the area to temporarily reside in. Namely, since the second half of the nineteenth century (the precise date is unclear), a brick factory was located within the area. It operated until at least the beginning of WWII, as historical maps and aerial photographs carried out during the flights of the German Air Forces in 1941-1944, suggest (**Figures 2-5**). I hypothesize brick factory was an important factor in bringing Roma people to the area. In short, at that time, factories usually required a lot of manual labor, which probably offered an earning opportunity for Roma. Moreover, the site is located nearby a forest and was surrounded by meadows, which could have facilitated feeding their livestock.

However, permanent constructions from the Roma settlement cannot be identified either on the maps nor on the photographs. This lack of evidence may be due to the fact that many Roma at that time would have been living an itinerant life as a necessary condition to maintain their business activities or escape oppression.



Figure 2. Part of Vilnius city in 1892. The location of the brick factory is marked in the black circle (Rus. кирпичный завод). Albertas Kazlauskas, *Užsienis eina per laiką [Užsienis Goes through Time]* (2017)



Figure 3. Part of Vilnius city in 1933. The location of the brick factory (Pol. Cegielnia (the letter ‘a’ cannot be seen on the map) is marked by the black circle. Albertas Kazlauskas, *Užsienis eina per laiką* [*Užsienis Goes through Time*] (2017).



Figure 4. The photo was made in 1944 on July 19 by German Air Forces for reconnaissance purposes. The Letter C indicates the location of the brick factory (Germ. Ziegelei). The yellow circle indicates the territory of the upper part of the Romani settlement. The lower part of the settlement was located in the territory of the factory (C). The blue circle indicates the third part of the settlement. “*Vokiečių oro uostų pėdomis* [In the Footsteps of German Airports],” *Pamiršta.lt*, accessed May 9,

2025, <https://pamirsta.lt/vokieciu-oro-uostu-pedomis-apeista-kuro-saugykla/>.



Figure 5. This photo was made by the Nazi Air Forces in 1941 on August 15. The black circle marks the territory of the brick factory. The yellow circle indicates the upper part of the settlement. In this image, it is

possible to see some patterns reminiscent of a settlement. The blue circle marks the territory of the third settlement. “*Skrydžio TUGX_462_SK aero foto nuotraukos* [Aerial Photos of Flight TUGX_462_SK],” *Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas*, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://lcva.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>.

The contemporary image of the area where Parubanka was located can be seen in **Figure 6**. The image depicts Parubanka’s location after its destruction.



Figure 6. 100%. “*Skrydžio TUGX_462_SK aero foto nuotraukos* [Aerial Photos of Flight TUGX_462_SK],” *Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas*, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://lcva.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>.

Parubanka during the Soviet period

The first official mention of the Roma settlement occurred in a resolution from 1956 entitled *Engaging Gypsies in the Labor Force*.¹²⁴ The resolution was issued by the Executive Committee of the Vilnius City Council of Workers’ Deputies. This document both marks the first official mention of the existence of the Roma settlement and features the Soviet authority’s attempt to block the free movement of Roma. This official effort can be seen as a cause for the more substantial development of the settlement that lasted until the Lithuanian independence period.

Perhaps, for the respective authorities it was convenient to not seriously engage with the housing issue connected to the Roma who already resided within the established settlement.

¹²⁴ Executive Committee of the Vilnius City Council of Workers' Deputies, “Решение о приобщении к труду циган no. 399 [The decision to introduce gypsies to work no. 399],” 1956, *Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas* [Lithuanian Central State Archive].

Lack of action was beneficial for both sides, as the authorities did not need to allocate financial resources, and the Roma could stay in a place they were familiar with. According to a Lithuanian anthropologist, Aušra Simoniukštytė, after the Soviet sedentarization drive, the Roma attempted to inhabit territories that previously would have been their sites of temporary residence. Based on her interviews with Roma individuals, conducted at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, she posits that these territories were important for the self-perception of her respondents: “this territory was not only called ‘homeland’ but [they] also identified with it.”¹²⁵ In Chapter 4, it will become evident that this theme resonates in the narratives of the former residents of the settlement when they reflect on Parubanka’s significance.

The history of the Soviet sedentarization policy began in 1956 on October 5, when Soviet authorities adopted Decree no. 450 entitled *On Engaging Vagrant Gypsies into the Labor Force*.¹²⁶ This document criminally rendered the mobile life of the Roma impossible and forced them to fix their place of residence. For example, the Lithuanian resolution of 1956 enacted on November 17 stated the following: “[...] in cases where Gypsies arbitrarily leave their permanent places of residence and avoid work that is good for the society, respective measures should be taken to search for them and enforce their criminal responsibility on them as articulated within the Decree of the Supreme Soviet.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Aušra Simoniukštytė, “Lietuvos romai: tarp istorijos ir atminties [Lithuanian Roma: between history and memory],” *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos* 6, no. 16 (2006): 140.

My translation.

¹²⁶ “Decree 450 on involving vagrant Roma in labour activities gave instructions to the Councils of Ministers of the Soviet Republics to take measures to settle vagrant ‘Gypsies’ in permanent domiciles and established that those individuals who wanted to evade socially useful labour and live a vagrant lifestyle should be punished under a sentence passed by a Peoples Court to exile in conjunction with corrective labour for a period of time not exceeding five years.” See: United Nations General Assembly, *Application of Resolution 60/251 of the General Assembly of March 15, 2006, Titled “Human Rights Council”: Report Submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance*, Doudou Diène – Additive Mission in the Russian Federation (2007), 53, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/601017?ln=en&v=pdf>.

¹²⁷ “Dėl valkataujančių čigonų įtraukimo į darbą Nr. 552 [On Engaging Vagrant Gypsies in Labour No. 552],” (Lietuvos TSR Ministrų Taryba [Presidium of the Supreme Council of Lithuanian SSR], November 17, 1956), Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas [Lithuanian Central State Archive].

Moreover, the Soviet authorities obliged relevant institutions to provide housing for Roma and foresaw giving them financial assistance through bank loans. For instance, the same resolution stated the following: “to oblige the executive committees of cities and districts to employ Gypsies in *kolkhozes*, collective farms, and other firms, to provide them with accommodation, if necessary, bank loans to be provided [...]”¹²⁸

This resolution obliged the Ministry of Interior and executive committees of cities and districts “in the time span of three months to identify all vagrant Gypsies and accommodate them in the permanent place of residence.”¹²⁹ As a result, the resolution by the Executive Committee of the Vilnius City Council emerged, which is the first official document marking the settlement’s existence. They write:

“[...] the commission appointed by the city executive committee to register Gypsies and assist them in finding employment, at the current time revealed three *tabors* of Gypsies in the territory of Vilnius’ city. All three *tabors* are located in Kirtimai, the Soviet district.”¹³⁰

Soon after this resolution, the Committee issued another resolution entitled *On Building a barrack – dormitory for Gypsies*.¹³¹ In the resolution the committee obliged “the Department of Construction and Architecture to allocate a site for the construction of a barrack-dormitory in Kirtimai, in the area of the brick factory within a week and to determine the location of the water well construction; to take into account the possibility of subsequent construction on the site of two more such buildings.”¹³²

While this barrack-dormitory was erected and was inhabited by Roma until its demolition in 2020, the other two buildings foreseen in the resolution were never built. These documents represent significant sources for understanding the forces behind Parubanka’s

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Решение о приобщении к труду циган No. 399”

¹³¹ “Решение о строительстве дома-общежития для циган No. 254” [*Decision on Construction of a House-Dormitory for Gypsies No. 254*], Исполнительный комитет Вильнюсского городского Совета депутатов трудящихся [Executive Committee of the Vilnius City Council of Workers’ Deputies], 1957, Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas [Lithuanian Central State Archive].

¹³² Ibid.

substantiation as a dwelling site. Parubanka's development was encouraged by the Soviet authority as an attempt to deal with the housing deprivations faced by Roma people. This attempt resulted in the transformation of the settlement into a permanent dwelling site that encapsulated many personal attachments, family networks, and community life.¹³³ Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions of this policy feature anti-Roma racism whereby the imaginary "Gypsy" continues to be haunted and 'tamed', or forcibly assimilated into the Soviet regime.

'Democratic' preparations for the destruction of Parubanka within independent Lithuania

Among other things, the years of independence in Lithuania saw the development of a neoliberal market economy, strengthened a sense of Lithuanian nationalism, and introduced overt manifestations of antigypsyism. According to Valdemar Kalinin, in 1991, the first pogroms against Romani people took place, accompanied by looting of property, burning or vandalizing their cars, and even killings. At least three individuals in the cities of Kaunas and Šiauliai were murdered. "Go to Russia – it will be quieter there" the police would respond to those who turned to them for protection.¹³⁴

However, although the years of independence encouraged a burst of deep-seated antigypsyism, Parubanka's eradication was not part of the agenda for local or governmental authorities. Quite the opposite, in 2001, as a result of the first national Roma "integration" strategy of 2000 – 2004, a Roma Community Centre (hereafter the Center) was established within the territory of Parubanka by the Department of National Minorities, two NGOs

¹³³ Shmuel Shamai, Sara Arnon, Izchak Schnell, "From Home to Community and Settlement: Sense of Place in Different Scales," *Studies on Home and Community Science* 6, no. 3 (2012): 153–63, [doi:10.1080/09737189.2012.11885381](https://doi.org/10.1080/09737189.2012.11885381).

¹³⁴ Voldemar Kalinin and Christina Kalinin, "The Baltic, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova: Reflection on Life in the Former USSR," in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 245–46.

“Romani Fire,” the “Lithuanian Children Fund,” and the Vilnius City Municipality. The Municipality of Vilnius City allocated a land plot for the construction of the Center, which was made possible by financial contributions of NGOs from the Netherlands. The Center aimed to advance the pre-school education of Roma children within the settlement, organized various cultural and social projects and, represented Roma community on the local, national, and international level. The Center, however, was never led by Roma themselves.

Initially, a sauna including a few shower cabins and laundry machines was built within the Center’s territory. The settlement’s residents could use it for a symbolic fee. The municipality of Vilnius city allocated circa 40,000 euros and installed four water stations and lighting poles.¹³⁵ The municipality also installed 8 garbage containers in spite the fact that they were not emptied regularly. Additionally, the municipality renovated the roads on the fringes of the settlement, installed a playground for children within the Center’s territory and wi-fi internet access. Electricity supply contracts were signed with the former residents of the settlement, as reported in a newspaper article.¹³⁶

General structure and demography of Parubanka

The whole area of the settlement consisted of three parts that were called by its residents: Lower Parubanka, Upper Parubanka, and Third Parubanka (Figure 13 - Figure 19). This division may correspond to the 1956 resolution by Executive Committee of the Vilnius City Council of Workers’ Deputies, which describes the existence of 3 ‘tabors’ found within the area. However, whether there is an actual correspondence between the document and the contemporary tripartite structure of the settlement is not clear.

¹³⁵ The lighting poles have been disconnected since at least 2016.

¹³⁶ “Vilniaus taboras niekur neiškeliaus: jau rengiamas detalusis planas” [The Vilnius Ghetto Will Not Move: A Detailed Plan is Already Being Prepared], *Klaipėda*, November 2, 2009, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://m.klaipeda.diena.lt/dienrastis/miestas/vilniaus-taboras-niekur-neiskeliaus%3A-jau-rengiamas-detalusis-planas-246032>.

All three parts were somewhat distinct in terms of their inhabitants and historical development. For example, Lower Parubanka was inhabited by a Roma community called *Kotliarai* (Kotliarian Roma), whose language, traditions, customs, or attire differed from the *Litovska Roma*, who mainly lived in the Upper and the Third Parubanka. While *Litovska Roma* (the largest community within the country) lived in both Upper and Third Parubanka, the Third Parubanka housed only families closely connected through kinship. Nevertheless, none of the occupants living in these three parts were hostile to each other and, generally speaking, the village could be construed as a single community.

In terms of demography, it is not clear how many houses lay within the settlement. For example, according to the First National Roma Integration Strategy of 2000-2004, only 70 houses stood within the territory, while a newspaper article from 2009 indicates the presence of 139 houses. According to the article, 139 homes were constructed and housed circa 500 people.¹³⁷



Figure 7. General depiction of the three distinct parts of Parubanka.

All three parts are identified in the yellow circles.

The Upper Parubanka is indicated by number 1, the

Lower by number 2, and the Third by number 3. The image depicts the post-destruction period, 2020. Image from Google Earth, screenshot, 2023.

¹³⁷ Ibid.



Figure 8. Lower Parubanka around 2010-2012,
image by Microsoft Bing, screenshot, 2023.



Figure 9. Upper Parubanka around 2010-2012,
image by Microsoft Bing, screenshot, 2023.



Figure 10. Third Parubanka around 2010-2012,
image by Microsoft Bing, screenshot, 2023.

Parubanka between 2012-2014. *All images are screenshots from Google Maps Street View, between 2012-2014, 2023.*

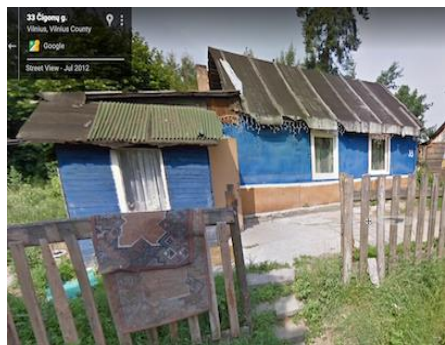


Figure 11.

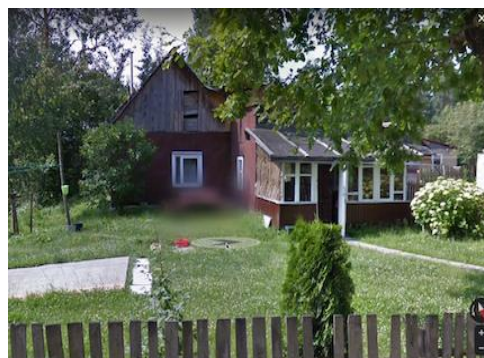


Figure 12.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.

From infrastructural development to arbitrary demolition

One may wonder why no attempts were made to destroy Parubanka until the very eve of Lithuania's integration into the European Union. Before that, mainly during the accession to the European Union period, the municipality of Vilnius city and the state demonstrated a rather nuanced approach towards the settlement with its poor infrastructure and lack of official legal status. The settlement became deeply immersed in drug trafficking after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This aspect of Parubanka became the main rubric under which it was publicly

discussed whether in the media, society, or institutions. It over-shadowed the history of the place and created a sort of ‘vacuum’ within which Parubanka began to decay from within.

Indeed, this problem was fatal for Parubanka. Not only did many people engage in this criminal activity, but they would also become its victims. It would be hard to count how many human fates were broken within this place. Nevertheless, regardless of its criminal character, Parubanka was home to many who were trapped within the settlement’s past and present. In other words, many would have found it difficult to cope with the changes that were taking place within the settlement, but simultaneously they hoped that Parubanka will return to the way it used to be.

The gradual institutional intervention was largely ascribed to the drug trafficking. Initially, the implementation of the first Roma “integration” policy in 2000-2004 was intended to resolve this issue.¹³⁸ This policy also aimed at reducing the so-called segregation of Roma living in the settlement and to deal with legal status of suitable houses. The above-mentioned infrastructural development of Parubanka began following this policy. However, the benevolent approach to the complex situation ended once the country joined the European Union. Soon, a police station and 8 surveillance cameras were installed within the territory of Parubanka. The first wave of demolitions of a few buildings occurred in 2004 and on December 2-3, the municipality of Vilnius city demolished 6 buildings.¹³⁹

On June 22, 2005, the municipality of Vilnius City adopted Decision No. 1-838, which approved the *Program for the Supervision, Security, and Reduction of Segregation of the Vilnius Roma Community and Adjacent Territories for the Years 2005-2010*. The municipality enacted three measures for the successful desegregation and mitigation of the housing problems of

¹³⁸ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, *Nutarimas dėl romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2000–2004 metų programos*.

¹³⁹ “Tadas Leončikas: Kodėl turi rūpėti griaujami čigonų namai” [Tadas Leončikas: Why Should You Care About the Demolition of Gypsy Houses], *tv3.lt*, December 6, 2004, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/projektai/tadas-leoncikas-kodel-turi-rupeti-griaunami-cigonu-namai-n265601>.

Roma. The first was to provide information about social housing and legal assistance to Roma who were on the waiting list for social housing. The second measure concerned provision of temporary accommodation. Relocations of those who wished to leave the settlement (subject to the possibilities) began.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, in 2005, the City Development Department of the Vilnius City Municipality Administration cut off any potential discussions regarding the future existence of the settlement. This attitude was communicated by declaring that no detailed plan project would be prepared for the territory where the settlement was located.¹⁴¹ It should be noted that no evidence of any such discussions could be found while conducting this research.

The second wave of demolitions began in 2012 and lasted until 2020. It occurred after the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania acknowledged that the rights of Roma had been violated during the first demolitions.¹⁴² However, while the court recognized the unjust actions of the municipality, it did almost nothing to restore the physical or moral harms inflicted on the people. Each claimant was awarded around 300-700 euros.¹⁴³ An old woman, who was one of the plaintiffs, would reflect on the situation as following: “I have three illnesses, they deconstructed my small house, I had no place to live for three years...”¹⁴⁴ The sixteen years of demolition forced people to live in constant fear that their home could be torn down at any time.

To legitimize the destruction of homes and secure the residents’ consent, the authorities exploited the illiteracy of some Roma people. They were given confirmation documents to sign stating that they were obliged to tear down their houses within a certain period of time, usually from 2 weeks up to 2 months. When they did not stick to these terms, the authorities imposed

¹⁴⁰ Jurgita Venckutė et al., “Vilniaus romų būsto problema: teisinė analizė [Housing problem of Roma in Vilnius: legal analysis],” Vilnius: Žmogaus teisių stebėjimo institutas, 2006.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “Nuasmeninta nutartis byloje [A-444-1003-10]” [Depersonalized Order in the Case A-444-1003-10], *Lietuvos vyriausiosios administracinės teismas* [Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania], October 29, 2010, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaieska/tekstas.aspx?id=8c183a1b-467e-494f-b631-2875c72eb3d3>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ishvires, “Vilniaus Getas 2009 / Vilnius Ghetto,” *YouTube video*, 2009, 18:39–18:45, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKWykRVa1fY&t=452s>.

penalties of up to 6000 euros. However, many of these people did not know what they were signing, or, to some extent, felt forced to sign. Some of the Roma were illiterate, some just signed the documents because the officers from the State Territorial Planning and Construction inspectorate under the Ministry of Environment were accompanied by police officers. The 16-year process of the destruction of Parubanka settlement was necessarily marked by constant police violence and brutal evictions without any alternative housing solutions being provided. Many people were just evicted, unprepared for evictions physically and mentally. One can just imagine what it felt like to leave one's birthplace and see it being destroyed.

Retrospectively, it may be concluded that there never was a clear plan where the people should be relocated to after their houses were demolished. There were no preparations made before these evictions and the outcomes of it have had lasting effects, something that became apparent when interviewing the director of the Roma Community Centre. According to her, 28 individuals took advantage of the municipality's compensation for renting. Social housing was received by only 21 people, while 91 are still awaiting housing help.¹⁴⁵ These numbers do not cover the situation of the entire population as it includes only 44 houses.

Parubanka reached its end in 2020. This process was marked in an official city policy entitled *The Program for the integration of the Vilnius (Kirtimai) Roma camp community into society for the years 2016-2019*.¹⁴⁶ When the settlement was destroyed and many people evicted, the then mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, on his Facebook profile published a post entitled *Farawell to Taboras that was Demolished without Bulldozers*. A few sentences from the introduction provide an insight on the mayor's position:

“In childhood, there is always some place like a shed, a storage room or an attic that you do not want to go to because it's messy and it is a corner that feels insecure. But you know such a place exists. In old English-style parks, it was trendy to have a den where a hermit lived. Nobody wanted to go there. But everyone knew such a place existed. Sometimes, people went there out of strange curiosity. In Vilnius, the Roma

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the Director of the Roma Community Centre 2022, December.

¹⁴⁶ Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės taryba, *Vilniaus romų bendruomenės ir šalia esančių teritorijų priežiūros ir saugumo užtikrinimo bei romų segregacijos mažinimo programa*.

settlement was such a place. To tell the truth, it was worse. It was a place of disorder, broken fates, and programmed poverty. When I became the mayor five years ago, I knew that the day would come when I would speak about the camp in the past tense. Only a few believed me. The camp issue always came up as a final pessimistic argument when the city had something to celebrate — new buses, bike paths, lighting, public spaces, school equipment. ‘What about the camp?’ someone would always ask with a hint that mayors come and go, but the camp remains.”¹⁴⁷

This post by the mayor, however, omits any reflection on the events unfolding behind the scenes, including brutal police violence, manipulation of peoples’ illiteracy and the distrust in public institutions. In addition, the post totally ignored the significance of Parubanka for its residents. In this Facebook post everything is “sanitized,” one observes nothing but that all the Roma from Parubanka got better places to live in, all were happy to say farewell to their ‘shaky’ houses, and none of them suffered from the effects of these demolitions. Challenging the official narrative by delving into the voices of the former Parubanka inhabitants is exactly the aim of the next chapter.

Some fragments from the destruction at Parubanka, 2012 – 2020



Figure 15. “*Vilniaus tabore griaujami neteisėti statiniai*” [Illegal Structures Are Being Demolished in Vilnius Camp], *Delfi*, February 13, 2012, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vilniaus-tabore-griaujami-neteisėti-statiniai-55424885>.

¹⁴⁷ The original title of the Mayor’s Facebook post is the following: “*Atsisveikinimas su taboru, kuris nugriautas be buldozerių* [Farewell to the tabor that was demolished without bulldozers].”



Figure 16. “*Vilniaus tabore griaujami neteisėti statiniai*” [Illegal Structures Are Being Demolished in Vilnius Camp], *Delfi*, February 13, 2012, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vilniaus-tabore-griaujami-neteisėti-statiniai-55424885>.



Figure 17. “*Vilniaus tabore griaujami neteisėti statiniai*” [Illegal Structures Are Being Demolished in Vilnius Camp], *Delfi*, February 13, 2012, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vilniaus-tabore-griaujami-neteisėti-statiniai-55424885>.

Some fragments from the post-destruction of Parubanka, 2021. All photos by Giedrė Pešekytė, author's personal archive.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.

Conclusions

By using various sources such as maps, archival photographs and documents, as well as interviews, a history of Parubanka could be reconstructed and presented. It is possible that the Roma community's connections with the site, date back to a time from before the WWI and WWII. Later, Parubanka's development was encouraged by the Soviet authority. This encouragement is exemplified by the first barrack-dormitory construction by the Soviet authority within Parubanka's territory. Two more such barracks were scheduled to be erected as part of the Roma sedentarization policy.

Despite the promises of the new democratic order after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'progress of "integration"' reflects the enduring challenges faced by Roma community. The conflicts are reflected in the institutional destruction of Parubanka and its post-destruction phase. Not only were the homes of Roma destroyed, but also the majority of the former inhabitants of Parubanka have not yet received alternative, proper housing after being evicted.

In the fourth chapter, the former residents' perspectives on what this history means to them are presented. They describe what they have lost and what can be recovered.

4.Parubanka as lost heritage

After having discussed how the authorized heritage discourse constructed the imaginary “Gypsy” subject, legitimized violent governance and predefined its supposed culture, the history of Parubanka and its destruction leads to this chapter concerning the implications of these discourses. Namely, in this chapter I aim to understand the experience of the former residents of Parubanka and understand the significance they ascribe to the demolished settlement. Through conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews, the significance of Parubanka as heritage is discussed along with the sense of loss experienced by people after their eviction from it. The themes of this loss circled around community, homes, attachment to the place, a sense of belonging, memory and identity.

I argue that the destruction of Parubanka was not only about the eradication of an ‘illegal’ settlement that lacked infrastructure and whose inhabitants had become immersed in drug trafficking. Neither was it about Roma “integration.” Rather, the loss of the physical village was also about the destruction of a heritage that appears imperceptible if looked at from the perspective of the essentialist, homogenic and racist discourse of the imaginary “Gypsy” subject.

Therefore, I go beyond this discourse, following the critical approach that understands heritage as a process, experience, memory, identity, sense of belonging, attachment, or community, as presented in the second chapter. These are the concepts that allow us to imagine the idea of heritage beyond static ideas of culture, giving agency to individuals and communities to make sense of their own past and shape their own future.

Methodology and structure

By following this liberating and vitally needed understanding of heritage when discussing the heritage of Parubanka, I analyze eight semi-structured interviews with the former residents of Parubanka. I contrast them with the institutional perceptions of Roma heritage manifest in two semi-structured interviews with representatives of two institutions: the head of the Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (hereafter the Department) and the director of the Roma Community Centre, an NGO that is an extension of the Department, as the latter is the founder of the former. Importantly, I could not conduct any interview with the mayor of Vilnius city as my email simply remained unanswered. This analysis explores how major institutions in Lithuania responsible for Roma heritage management or protection understand Roma heritage and manage the related policy and developmental processes.

Firstly, I discuss and analyze the institutional perception of Roma heritage and how it is managed. Secondly, I advance this analysis by discussing the perceptions of Parubanka as provided by its former residents in interviews. Thirdly, I discuss their experiences of violence connected to the brutal destruction of their homes and evictions from the settlement. In the fourth section, I discuss Parubanka as heritage by exploring the unofficial practice of former residents who visit and remember the place of the former settlement. Lastly, I explore possible future dimensions of Parubanka's memory by presenting respondents' accounts of what they think ought to be done with the place to preserve the memory of Parubanka for future generations.

The institutional perception of Roma heritage

I must note in the beginning that the paragraphs below hardly suffice as a general account of how all Lithuanian institutions perceive Roma heritage. Rather, it is an attempt to illustrate how

the two most important institutions responsible for Roma “integration”/inclusion¹⁴⁸ perceive it. One thing that is common between both institutions is that during the interviews they did not even mention Parubanka as a possible heritage site for its former residents while simultaneously talking about generalized, folkloric images of Roma culture. For them, the culture of the imaginary “Gypsy” subject was equivalent to Roma heritage. For example, the director of the Centre said:

“Roma heritage lies in their music, dance, songs, their lifestyle. Did you notice, everyone dances from almost the moment they are born...”¹⁴⁹

This director’s account concerning the perception of Roma culture and heritage is accompanied by a somewhat indifferent attitude towards the management of Roma culture and heritage. For example, within the regulations of the Center, it is stated that it collects and systematizes historic and demographic data about Roma people in Lithuania. No systematized data, of any kind, however, could be found within the Center. In a somewhat irritated tone, the director said that:

“Our Center is not a scientific institution; we only collect information but do nothing with it. It is the scholars’ job to interpret, not ours...”¹⁵⁰

A similar attitude was observed in the director’s systemic, authorized practice in decision-making towards management of Roma culture and heritage. During my fieldwork, I was told by some colleagues that the director had attempted to build an interactive Roma bench in Vilnius city center. Naturally, I instantly thought – why not in Parubanka. The director said that:

“Indeed, I was in Warsaw and saw the interactive musical stands where people could push a bottom and listen to Chopin’s music. I thought it would be a good idea to do

¹⁴⁸ The terms *integration* and *inclusion* are used interchangeably by the Department of National Minorities, despite shifts in terminology in the most recent EU Roma inclusion framework. For example, a recent seminar organized by the Department was entitled “*Roma Integration Strategy – What Goals and Measures Will We Implement by 2030?*” (Department of National Minorities, accessed May 9, 2025, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/seminaras-romu-integracijos-strategija-kokius-tikslus-ir-priemones-igyvendinsime-iki-2030-metu/>).

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Svetlana Novopolskaja, the director of Roma Community Centre

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

something similar in Lithuania – a Roma stand. I have already found a company that could start working on it.”¹⁵¹

For her, it was clear what this bench would be about. However, the community again was not consulted.

“There would be some fragments of their music and some simple phrases in the Roma language. I have not yet consulted the community since I have only started to develop this idea. I will consult with the community later [...] as well as with you or some other activist. You know, not everyone is interested in this subject...”¹⁵²

Likewise, the top-down decision-making was observed in the Centre’s decision to give up its previous premises within the territory of Parubanka. It was built with great financial support from Nederland Funds and from the Lithuanian Government, as well as through the advocacy of some Roma activists. I believe that it could have been used for establishing a museum dedicated to Parubanka’s history. I was told that:

“Unfortunately, we already relinquished it to the Turto Bankas.¹⁵³ We decided not to use the building anymore, it is too far for Roma and us to go there, everyone now lives in the city center.”¹⁵⁴

Again, the “we” did not include any consultations with the community. The director mentioned that the decision was made by:

“The members of our founders, the Vilnius City Municipality, the Department of National Minorities, the Lithuanian Children Fund, and Gypsy Fire.”¹⁵⁵

This act of giving up the building is yet another example of the effect of the authorized narrative about Roma. It will be seen below in the respondents’ testimonies that Parubanka for them is not about the distance from their current homes, it is about memory, identity, sense of belonging, or community – something that is totally missing in the director’s account. After all,

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Turto bankas* is the only state-owned enterprise that centrally manages state real property for administrative purposes. It manages, uses, and disposes of state immovable property held in trust, and organizes auctions and lease tenders for the sale of unnecessary state property (Turto bankas, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://turtas.lt/en/about-us/>).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Svetlana Novopolskaja.

¹⁵⁵ The Lithuanian Children Fund and Gypsy Fire are non-governmental organizations. However, Gypsy Fire is no longer active. Interview with Svetlana Novopolskaja.

Parubanka is only circa 7-8 kilometers from the city center, a historic old town that is inscribed on the UNESCO's heritage list.

A more sophisticated interpretation of Roma culture and heritage was offered by the head of the Department of National Minorities. Perhaps because of her academic background, a PhD in history, she was cautious in her labelling. She immediately mentioned that the narrative about Roma lacks a professional historic revision. Not surprisingly, she constantly preached about the supposed achievements connected to Roma "integration" and the improved attitudes of the general society towards Roma. A Freudian slip, however, can be observed in the following passages.

"The Roma community lacks historians and financial resources that leaves them in a disadvantaged position. History is a science of power, one must have resources to shape the desired history [...] Gradual emergence of memory days, Gypsy Fest, Roma festivals, or conferences in the parliament signifies the acceptance of open Roma culture. They are not somewhere secluded in the tabor¹⁵⁶ plotting crimes, but instead they are a joyful, colorful community with their songs and culture [...] You may disagree, but Gypsy women practiced fortune telling. As the Gypsy women said, so it came to pass, one cannot deny the wisdom of the folk. Honorable Istvan¹⁵⁷ has proposed developing this skill as it is a part of Roma identity. You may disagree, but well... women practiced magic, and they possessed a talent for it... people went there not because there was nowhere else to go, but because their spells probably came true, and legends spread [...]."¹⁵⁸

One can observe how Roma culture is somewhat exoticized in her rhetoric. Expressions such as a "colorful community with their songs and culture" are meant to portray a 'true' Roma culture compared to criminalized Parubanka. In this light, Parubanka could hardly be understood as heritage in the director's account of this community. The epistemological barriers manifested in the culture of the imaginary "Gypsy" subject hindered a more nuanced perception of Roma heritage. Roma heritage, therefore, had no active agents; it was prescriptive, fixed and generic. Also, her use of the term "Gypsy" felt indifferent. Although there was an important

¹⁵⁶ It is meant in Parubanka.

¹⁵⁷ Istvan is the director of an NGO called "Lithuanian Roma Community."

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Vida Montvydaitė, the head of the Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. My emphasis.

expression about history being a ‘science of power’, no word was said about the continuing and reproduced repercussions that this power entails for Lithuanian Roma. For her, the history was either about the Holocaust or some undefined past. Although she constantly preached the achievements of the Department in commemorating the Roma Holocaust, no mention was made that Lithuania still has not erected a monument in the Panerai Mass Murder Memorial site for Roma victims of the Nazi regime.

The loss of Parubanka: heritage, memory, and identity

In order to understand Parubanka as heritage, one must look at the expressions used by the former residents to understand how they perceived this place in terms of heritage in the sense it was discussed in Chapter 4. Since Parubanka was their home and community, I observed that the resident’s expressions were inseparably connected to the affective qualities of heritage. These expressions unfolded from their sense of loss. Reoccurring themes, revolved around an idealization of Parubanka, stressed the lifetime of experience there, lost communal practices, or physical connection with the place. For example, the following excerpts from the interviews demonstrate how Parubanka was connected to identity and memory for the interviewees, which is a result of memory-work-in-action occurring within routine individual and communal practices. Armando, for instance, said:

“Now, after the tragedy, everything has changed, such emptiness in my heart, no one to talk to at any moment as I was used to... Next to me, three generations have grown up, I would see them every day. Now, I am not healthy enough to visit everyone, and people became somewhat closed, perhaps the tragedy affected their psychology. I grew up without my parents. I came to Parubanka and found my home. I never went out from there and the settlement fell into my heart. I remember it as a beautiful village where every house was open to me - to a stranger. I married there, built a house and lived there until they destroyed it.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Armando.

In Armando's testimony, it is apparent that he misses and grieves the loss of the community and its practices. Such expressions as: "no one to talk to in any moment as I was used to", or his emphasis on the generations that he happened to live with when he lived in Parubanka. These aspects show how he understands himself and his identity that was abruptly interrupted by the destruction of Parubanka.

Similar expressions are observed in the interview with Zina:

"I came to live in Parubanka when I was three years old, around 1962. My father built our house, a very big, two-floor house. He never would have sold this house. Such a good and beautiful place was Parubanka: the people, they were just, happy and wise. I swear to my death, all were like this, young and old, our community was strong, everyone would support each other... Parubanka was a resort area, do you believe it? We would often meet in front of the bonfire there, our parents would tell us stories about our ancestors and the history of Parubanka... When I remember Parubanka, my mood immediately becomes better... Indeed, this is the place that we must talk about, such people lived there in the past, now it is very pitiful... They destroyed Parubanka. One may say whatever, but many people lived there, you saw it yourself. And why did they do so, no one now is in a good mood, people just pass by, it makes them feel bad..."¹⁶⁰

In Zina's testimony, one can observe the significance of Parubanka as a place of community and communal practices linked to an idealization of the past and nostalgic sense of loss. For example, articulations such as "our community was strong", supportive, as well as the rituals around the bonfire manifested in storytelling about the history of Parubanka and ancestors testify to a memory and identity that were communally shared, shaped or reshaped within the life in Parubanka. This significance could also be understood in words of Joy Sather-Wagstaff who states that heritage, as a social and discursive construction, is intrinsically attached to individual and collective memory and memorywork-in-action that in the everyday world operates as a medium to articulate diverse identities.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Zina.

¹⁶¹ Joy Wagstaff-Sather, "Heritage and Memory," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, eds. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 91, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565>.

Not all respondents grieve the loss of Parubanka to the same degree. For instance, Tania, who lost her child there due to a drug overdose, positively assessed her end with Parubanka.

“In the past, very good people lived there and I miss them a lot. Likewise, I miss my home and that place. I was born in Parubanka in 1969. The Soviet times were really good for the Roma, do not even attempt to equalize that and this period, everything has changed, people and traditions. It’s very good I got out of Parubanka, after all...”¹⁶²

Nevertheless, Tania’s nostalgic memory of the Soviet times in Parubanka can be associated with a sense of loss, the loss of community and its traditions connected to the place.

Conversely, Germano’s testimony again brings the theme of grief ingrained in the loss of Parubanka as a home and community. It also illustrates his physical attachment to the place, his own manual work in building his home and shaping its environment.

“I was born and grew up in Parubanka. I lived there until my house was destroyed... I married there, built my house near my parents’ home, and thought I would live there forever. If I had known that my house could be demolished, I would have lived differently... I had even had an offer from the Soviet authorities to live in an apartment in the city because I worked in a factory. I refused it, Parubanka was my home, my garden, my planted trees were there... In the past, Parubanka was a paradise, people were friendly. If one had to go to hospital or the police, the whole community went together. You could easily borrow money from anyone, we all knew each other well, we grew up together...”¹⁶³

Here, Germano’s sense of identity is intimately connected to Parubanka. The loss of community, home, and place are the aspects that he built up and lived through during his entire life course.

The testimony provided by Maria demonstrates similar attitudes towards Parubanka, the loss of homes, community. She expressed the following:

“Oh, old people lived there when I came to live in Parubanka. You could expect everyone’s help and support, we would visit each other’s homes, all celebrations were spent together. Until all homes were not visited, it did not count that one had celebrated. Although this remained until the end of Parubanka, it was not the same, drugs changed everything...Nevertheless, we did not believe they would destroy Parubanka. But it happened... God... For whom was it needed, to whom do the Roma matter..?”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Interview with Tania.

¹⁶³ Interview with Germano

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Maria.

Again, the practice of visiting each other's homes during various celebrations, which, as I understood during the interview, was an unwritten rule, shows the customs of the community, an important aspect that builds the identity of an individual and community. Our interview took place just about Christmas time, and this matter may have made Maria even more sensitive. At the time of the interview, Maria still was struggling to find a home. She was temporarily staying at her niece's home where eight people occupied one room. Besides her age, over 70, she was ill and felt alone.

The loss of Parubanka as a community and home is observed in the testimony provided by Sofia:

"It is strange and difficult to wake up somewhere else and not in Parubanka. I lived there from the time I was four years old until now. I am 52 years old. My children grew up there. I always remember how good this place was before the drugs came in. It was like an old village; people would never lock their homes, would help each other not only materially but also morally. My father built two houses in Parubanka, the second was built for my family. Although everything changed when drugs came and Parubanka became very different, I always hoped that the drug problem would somehow be solved. However, one by one our homes were destroyed and people left without anything of what our ancestors left to us..."¹⁶⁵

In Sofia's interview, it is apparent that her sense of identity is closely tied to Parubanka due her entire lifetime having been spent there. Her memories are embedded in the place. The sense of Parubanka as a place of lost heritage connected to homes and community is shown in the phrase: "and people left without anything that our ancestors left to us."

Likewise, the testimony of Zora illustrates the significance of Parubanka as she expressed her sense of belonging to the place because of ancestry and having spent a significant part of her life there.

"I am 32, I grew up in Parubanka, it is my home forever no matter what is being said about it. It is the place of my ancestors, how can we forget it? I understand that for

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Sofia.

*gadže*¹⁶⁶ it was a hell because of the drugs, but they did not need to destroy it as it was dear to us.”¹⁶⁷

The testimony provided by Almaza entails the struggle of self-perception ingrained in the loss of Parubanka’s community and some practices mentioned above.

“I am not the same person anymore... It is difficult to think that my home was lost. I was born and grew up in Parubanka. Some part of my soul was torn apart after the destructions. Although I can meet the people who lived there in the city, it is not the same. We cannot have bonfires, go out and call our neighbors to come over, we are dispersed...”¹⁶⁸

The significance of Parubanka as a place connected to Almaza’s identity is encapsulated in her emotional and artistic association of Parubanka’s loss with the loss of some part of her soul. This theme occurs in some other interviews as well. In critical heritage scholarship, the significance of place as a representation of heritage for particular individuals or communities is an important way of approaching the subject. By drawing on Tim Creswell and Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto, Sara McDowell asserts that significance of places for individuals and communities is manifested within the ‘invested meanings’ pertaining to their affective qualities that connect people physically or emotionally as well as they are “bound up in notions of belonging (or not belonging), ownership and consequently identity.”¹⁶⁹

McDowell draws on Gillian Rose’s elaboration of place which is useful to recall here for a deeper understanding of the significance of Parubanka:

“One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It’s a place that you feel comfortable, or at home in, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ In the Romani language, the term *gadžio* refers to a non-Roma individual, while *gadže* is its plural form.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Zora.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Almaza.

¹⁶⁹ Sara McDowell, “Heritage, Memory and Identity,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. B. J. Graham and Peter Howard (Ashgate, 2008), 37–38, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613031>.

¹⁷⁰ Gillian Rose, “Places and Identity: A Sense of Place,” in *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalisation*, eds. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (Oxford University Press/Open University, 1995), 81, quoted in McDowell, “Heritage, Memory and Identity,” 37–38.

Likewise, the significance of places as representations of heritage for individuals and communities were discussed by Laurajane Smith when addressing the heritage of the Aboriginal Waanyi community. Specifically, for the Boodjamulla, landscape has relevance as a mnemonic space for this community.¹⁷¹ This space, provided them with a sense of belonging, community, identity, and history, as explored in the second chapter.

Police violence and evictions

In this subsection, I will shortly introduce excerpts from interviews that present the resident's experiences of the evictions. Their testimony provides an important insight into how the place that was so important and dear to them was approached by the institutions aiming to 'integrate' Roma. While talking about the evictions and police violence, all respondents were highly emotional and somewhat angry. I learned that some individuals not only were not given enough time to prepare for the demolitions but were brutally evicted from their homes without an alternative housing option. Also, some of the interviewees said that they signed documents that supposedly were presented as an alternative home option, which in fact were the confirmations that they would demolish their homes themselves, within a certain period, usually between two weeks to two months. Moreover, the document they signed included financial penalties up to 6000 euros if the terms of the signed papers were not fulfilled. Thus, a sense of betrayal was observed. Additionally, many mentioned brutal police behavior, unnecessary violence, and abusive treatment of their property.

According to Armando:

"Our house was destroyed and we with our children were evicted into the street, literally into the street... No one even told us in advance that the house would be destroyed. Police came, broke everything around us and boarded up the windows. Soon, the house itself was destroyed. Generally, the police would beat us, come into our houses as if

¹⁷¹ Smith, *Uses of heritage*, 44-48.

they were theirs, would do and take whatever they want, and this would happen again and again until the end of Parubanka.”¹⁷²

Similarly, Germano notes when asked to reflect on the demolitions:

“The further Parubanka went, the scarier it was to live there: police violence, constant attacks by setting houses on fire by strangers... What is my reaction: I got five minutes to get out, I did not have anywhere to go... What can you - a powerless person - do? It was a hard experience, not only for me but also for my sister...”¹⁷³

Maria’s testimony perfectly catches and summarizes the extent of the brutality of the destructions.

“I am 74 years old, my health is very bad. They destroyed my small house where I had lived since 1972 and now, I do not have my corner, I live like a dog, staying at my niece’s apartment that has only one room and kitchen. Eight people live there... Although my house was poor, it was mine. I left all, my bedding, utensils, even photographs. They came one day before and told me that tomorrow I had to leave. “Where,” I asked them? “Wherever you want, it is not our problem.” I was waiting for tomorrow. They came and gave me a half hour to leave everything, I was only able to take some of my clothing. My house was destroyed soon after that... They did not give me any other accommodation. Actually, the state deceived us, they would collect our signatures saying it is because they will give us other houses. But to whom did they give them...? They gave us compensation to rent a house, but it is too low, it was only around 80 euro per person. My family consists of 2 people: my child and me. What can one rent in Vilnius for 160 euro, let alone that no one will rent houses to Roma...”¹⁷⁴

In the face of what Parubanka meant for the residents, family, community and sense of belonging, the institutional authorities appear to have been extremely brutal. Perhaps, the cruelty was not only connected to these institutions’ attempts to make “progress” towards their idea of Roma “integration” but it also unleashed long-standing prejudices against Roma people. It seems that the destruction of their heritage was a symptom of a larger societal problem, namely, anti-Roma racism or antigypsyism. Antonio González Zarandona, Emma Cunliffe, and Melathi Saldin argue that heritage destruction can be associated with the aim of erasing communities from the present for political, social, or cultural reasons by destroying sites, or traditions. They note that heritage destruction is less about an abrupt action or “the cause or end

¹⁷² Interview with Armando.

¹⁷³ Interview with Germano.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Maria.

in itself “but rather it is about “a symptom of a larger (societal) problem, a process that various actors embrace “for different reasons: to erase history, to attract attention, to demoralise the enemy, to divide audiences, to scandalise, to carve out a new national identity or nation building project, or to advance development and progress.[...]”¹⁷⁵ The motives of destruction can vary; in the dynamics of the Global South they can embody a colonial and racist impetus, while in more “developed nations”, they feature the processes of modernization and progress.¹⁷⁶ When it comes to the destruction of Parubanka, the motive for its demolitions mirrors both these latter paradigms.

Visiting Parubanka after its destruction

Although the field where Parubanka was situated is now almost levelled, with only the remnants of houses silently and gradually disappearing into the ground, it is constantly revisited by both the young and old Roma people who had lived there. This visiting practice shows that the place remains part of residents’ identity, sense of belonging, community, or memory. I observed that for the residents this place was a tangible manifestation of intangible heritage which is constantly, ‘unofficially’ curated by the Parubanka’s community. It not only represents a place where residents’ identities are reaffirmed through communal and individual practices such as gathering there, making a bonfire, remembering, but it also, perhaps, demonstrates a need to preserve this site for future generations. However, although the place was considered crucial for the current and future generations, many expressed a sense of inner turmoil or difficulty in going there because of the weight of memories and heavy emotions they invoke in them. For example, Armando said this when asked if he visits Parubanka:

¹⁷⁵ José Antonio González Zarandona et al., “A Path Well Worn? Approaches for the Old Problem of Heritage Destruction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Heritage Destruction*, ed. José Antonio González Zarandona, Emma Cunliffe, and Melathi Saldin (Routledge, 2024), 5–6, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131069-1>.

¹⁷⁶ González Zarandona et al., “A Path Well Worn? Approaches for the Old Problem of Heritage Destruction,” 7.

“No, I cannot, everything is in front of my eyes, do you believe me? My heart is crying... how the *gadže* could treat Roma in such a way? I often think about Parubanka... it is always in my mind...”¹⁷⁷

Again, Armando metaphorically connects the place to his heart, which shows that the place was part of his identity.

Similarly, Zina started to weep but kept talking when asked if she visited the place. In her interview, it is apparent how significant the place was to her identity. Although to her it was hard to visit the place, it was also important to go there and remember the past through communal practices such as storytelling around a bonfire.

“It was a nightmare... I cried my face and eyes out... Sister will come from prison, I thought, and she will also find nothing, I cannot even think about that... When I go there, a lot of noise comes to my head, it is hard to be there for a long time, a lot of the homes and the community is lost... We gather there, make a bonfire, and sit, sit and remember and speak: “this person lived there, another there...” Later, when I return home, it is sad... My children do likewise...”¹⁷⁸

And for Tania it was still too painful to visit Parubanka.

“I do not know if I could even see it in real life, I would probably be harmed irreversibly by all those memories of living there, of losing my home and son, who died in Parubanka because overdosing on drugs, or of recollecting the decline of Parubanka that once was a paradise...”¹⁷⁹

A heartfelt and highly emotional account of visiting and remembering Parubanka is provided by Germano:

“I go there very often. Leave my car nearby the forest and go for a walk. I stay there, look around at where I used to walk, where I grew up, where my friends lived. I remember our community when we would gather, visit our homes, it was a daily routine. I even go to worship there when times are difficult for me or my family. Now, there is only emptiness in my heart, the foundations are lost, I just spend my days to exist, no joy, no Roma people around, everything is foreign...”¹⁸⁰

In Germano’s interview one can observe that he associates the place with spirituality: “I even go to worship there,” and the “lost foundation” reiterates his understanding of Parubanka

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Armando.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Zina.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Tania.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Germano.

as heritage that has affective qualities for its former residents. Thus, the visiting practice for Germano can be seen as the will to retrieve the “lost foundations”, to heal the grief and fill his “empty heart.”

The chain of visiting practice is continued by Maria who also goes there to remember, to grieve and to heal the pain in her heart.

“I recently was there with my Roma friends. Oh...it is horrible, one cannot understand anything there... It is very painful for my heart... This is where we once lived, where our children grew up, and everything ended in a single second. We were left on the street...”¹⁸¹

Zora energetically reflects on the visiting practice and reaffirms its importance.

We all go there to remember, to observe the places where the houses once stood, then we remember the owners of these houses. Many emotions are aroused from these sharing of memories: we laugh and cry, or are silent...”¹⁸²

Almaza, took a deep breath before reflecting on Parubanka’s visiting practice, for her it was about remembering and fear of forgetting the place of her ancestors, and self-perception.

“I do not know why I and others visit the place, it became a tradition for us, we even meet there accidentally. Perhaps, it is because there is something to remember, something that cannot be forgotten. It was the place of our ancestors, grandparents, and parents. I will tell the story to my children as well. It is a very precious place. It is also a difficult place, many young Roma became addicted to drugs there and even passed away. Now it is a flat field and only the memories of Parubanka are left...”¹⁸³

Reflections on the future of Parubanka and its memory

This section aims to understand how the respondents imagine the future of Parubanka and its memory that they consider so important to their sense of self, history, community, and belonging. I wanted to know if for them it was important to preserve the place. I also wanted to know how they imagined what preservation should look like. In the absence of ideas, I provided some respondents with hints concerning a possible commemoration of Parubanka that in

¹⁸¹ Interview with Maria.

¹⁸² Interview with Zora.

¹⁸³ Interview with Almaza.

conventional heritage practices are known as monumentalization or musealization. I observed that although for all respondents it was vital to preserve the place and memory of Parubanka, not all could imagine it was possible to do so in conventional heritage way. For others, however, the need to mark the place by conventional heritage instruments was obvious. For example, Armando was rather explicit in his dream:

“To come back there to live will not be allowed by the government anyway, but to put some plaque or photos there, some texts to show the history of Parubanka, this is what I would like to see. It is important because our ancestors lived there, our mums and dads... To retain some memory there, this has been my dream... Although there is no Parubanka anymore, people go there, the youngsters and older people go... You know, the place is very precious for the people, and it gives a lot to them. I know very well, they go there anyways, they remember, sometimes drink there... Something must be done with that memory...”¹⁸⁴

Although Tania had difficulties in talking about Parubanka in general, her reflection reveals her need to preserve Parubanka’s memory. I provided her with an idea of a memorial plaque or a museum within the place.

“I cannot go there; I remember my child... What would this plaque give to me? If there was some museum where I could see some photos, remember my childhood and the good Parubanka, then - yes... It would be interesting so that the new generation could see how it was. This memory would be good to preserve in the name of our ancestors...”¹⁸⁵

I asked how the future of Parubanka’s memory is envisioned by Germano. Initially, he did not have any specific ideas about this:

“I do not need anything... Nothing has happened there, we just lived as everyone does. For me the best memory would be to come back to Parubanka and live there, but it is impossible.”¹⁸⁶

When provided a hint about monument or museum, Germano immediately confirmed that would be important. For him, it was a means for healing the trauma. However, he could

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Armando.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Tania.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Germano.

hardly imagine or perceive that Parubanka could have an equal value with traditional heritage sites.

“This would be amazing, we would come there all, it would be a place where we could meet, remember, talk, see photographs, it would provide, at least, some healing of hearts, but it is impossible. Now the flat field is there. It would be wonderful if Parubanka’s history would not die...”¹⁸⁷

Maria did not think too long, it seemed that it was clear for her that Parubanka’s history must be preserved for future generations. She agreed that a monument would be one way to do so.

“I would like the place to remain for Roma people so that we and our children could come and remember. Some monument could be erected there so that everyone would know what happened there. It would be interesting for young and old to see what Parubanka was like.”¹⁸⁸

Similarly, these feelings are observed in Sofia’s expression:

“It is not even a question, something has to be done there, our people go to the place, old and young, they cannot live without it, there lies their origins, their memory...”¹⁸⁹

Zora was not sure what to do with the memory of Parubanka, besides sharing it within families. After I hinted about a monument or museum at the place, she did not believe it would be possible, while simultaneously confirming that it would be desirable and needed to keep Parubanka’s memory alive.

“I do not know... It is important that parents always remind their children about Parubanka and about our ancestors. Who will permit the Roma to do anything on that land? They are happy we are not there anymore... If they would allow it though, it would be amazing, it would be something more permanent and sustainable...”¹⁹⁰

Similarly, Almaza agreed that this memory should be preserved within families. I asked whether these memories of Parubanka should be preserved beyond this initiative. I subtly suggested a monument or a museum which provoked a rather disturbing reaction. Specifically,

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Germano.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Maria.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Sofia.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Zora.

although for her it was an important prospect to preserve Parubanka's memory, she did not believe it would be possible.

“Are you crazy? It is only a dream, they would even not allow such an idea to come into their minds. They will build some factories there and we will not even be allowed to enter the field. I am afraid these memories will disappear in the future. Something has to be done, but I am not sure what...”¹⁹¹

The resident's perspectives about the future of memory of Parubanka display the need to preserve it. According to them, it is the place of their ancestors, their identity, sense of belonging, or community. While some were not sure about the means of preservation, when provided by hints about a monument or museum, they were eager and willing to see such initiatives there. For others, it was clear that a monument or memorial plaque must be installed. I observed that some respondents could not believe it would be possible because the place is not valued to the same degree by institutions and society in general. Here, the dichotomy and the need to merge the local, unofficial heritage practice, namely by visiting Parubanka and remembering it, and conventional, official heritage such as monuments or museums, comes to the fore. While the residents have developed their own practices to remember, their desire for a material, official embodiment of Parubanka's memory can be seen as a vehicle transforming this heritage into official heritage, which would provide them with more recognition, sense of ownership, and guarantees that the place would be preserved for future generations. It would also provide a means of healing.

Conclusions

From the interviews conducted with the institutions, it may be concluded that their interpretations of Roma identity, culture and heritage is largely based on the supposed culture of the imaginary “Gypsy” subject. In both accounts, Parubanka was not even mentioned as a

¹⁹¹ Interview with Almaza.

possible heritage site, an attitude which epitomizes how these institutions perceive Roma heritage. From the interviews conducted with Roma people it became obvious that Parubanka was a highly important place to them. It encompasses the heritage qualities that the respondents expressed along discussing their sense of loss. Thus, it revealed that for them, Parubanka and its memory, was about their sense of history, identity, sense of belonging and community. The loss of Parubanka inflicted a severe sense of grief and nostalgic yearning on former inhabitants of this settlement.

The former resident's interviews also illustrated how institutions treated this heritage during the demolition process. Brutal evictions and police violence were prevalent and inflicted traumatic experiences on many respondents who were not given enough time to prepare for demolition of Parubanka and were not offered alternative housing options.

Understanding Parubanka as destroyed heritage could be further facilitated by the newly emerged visiting practice among the members of Parubanka community in the post-destruction phase. The interviews showed that the former residents need Parubanka as a place of memory where their identities can be reaffirmed, or the lost homes and community can be grieved for. Subsequently, they would like to preserve the memory of Parubanka by using some conventional heritage practices, whether by erecting a monument plaque or establishing a museum dedicated to the history of the place. Their aspiration is to transmit the memory of Parubanka to future generations in a way that would reimagine the image of the place and also would serve some educational purpose for the wider society. Conventional heritage practices combined with the unofficial forms of heritage preservation may imply a kind of recognition, a public means of expression and the physical and emotional connections with the place. In light of this, such a combination would provide some sort of justice, or at least would open a forum for discussions about it.

Conclusions

Main findings

In my research, I aimed to understand the extent to which Parubanka constitutes heritage for its former residents. What forms does this heritage take? I operated within the definition of heritage that understands it as an intricate, socially constructed process encompassing such concepts as places of memory, belonging, identity, agency or justice. In this regard, I contrasted it with the Authorized Heritage Discourse that far too often tends to bypass the later phenomena while dealing with Roma heritage.

It became clear that Parubanka was associated with significant heritage values by its former residents. As the semi-structured interviews revealed, for them the settlement was about memory, identity, sense of belonging and attachment to the place. The interrelational nature of these concepts as regards their testimonies can be construed by looking closely at how the respondents' attached memories to the settlement constituted a cornerstone in defining their understanding of who they were. These understandings were largely pinned down to the place that due to its demolition no longer exists although it remains a place the former inhabitants constantly return to for refreshment of the memories and reaffirmation of their identities.

Moreover, Parubanka emerges as heritage through the practice of visiting. Not only does storytelling around a bonfire, acts of worship, and visiting to remember and pay tribute to ancestors (which is never an easy act for those who have lost their homes and community) exemplify the significance of Parubanka's heritage, but these practices also seem to provide individuals with a sense of healing in the post-destruction phase that generated a severe sense of loss to the former residents. This loss was expressed along the recurring themes of idealization of Parubanka, stressed emphasis on the life-time of experiences there, grief for the lost communal practices and community, physical connections with the place, and a psychological grappling with their sense of displacement.

My second research question addressed why the responsible institutions in Lithuania, which claim to protect and preserve Roma culture and design Roma “integration” policies, were not able to recognize this heritage and try to protect it. The interviews with the institutions demonstrated that Parubanka was not associated in any way with heritage or any concept relevant to it such as memory, identity, community etc. By analyzing the interviews provided by institutions and putting them into a broader historical context, I argued that it is largely because of the epistemological barriers mirroring racialized discourse connected to the supposed culture of ‘Gypsies’. As was discussed in the first chapter, this discourse homogenizes heterogenic cultures of Roma communities portraying them as exotic villains whose heritage is mainly represented within the rubric of folklore involving such elements as music, attire, or the like. When this discourse is combined with the Authorized Heritage Discourse, Roma heritage — as per institutional management — often becomes not empowering but instrumental in (re)producing hierarchical power dynamics based on race, class, ethnicity, or gender.

My thesis work also aimed to come up with some suggestions on what could be done in the future with the Parubanka site in order to provide some measure of healing for the community and the individuals who once lived there. In light of an Authorized Heritage Discourse combined with the discourse on “Gypsy,” I argue that a critical heritage approach perceiving heritage as process rather than static monuments is the most appropriate means to construe the heritage of Parubanka. According to this understanding of heritage, the values associated with heritage are extrinsic rather than intrinsic. They are therefore negotiable. In this regard, first and foremost, it is crucial to take into consideration the affective qualities heritage has on the people, which, one assumes, grants a measure of agency to individuals and communities. It is my contention that employing this heritage concept would provide a very much needed epistemological guide to develop the idea of what Roma heritages could be beyond the detrimental “Gypsy” trope. Perhaps then the loss of Parubanka could finally be

critically assessed, the struggle of its former residents addressed, and their sufferings compensated for, as well as producing an official guarantee that such acts would never again be repeated. I offer a further answer to this question below in the section on the future of Parubanka.

I emphasize that this thesis is not an attempt to encourage the establishment of new Roma settlements, nor is it intended as a forum to argue that all such settlements are the same in terms of their developments, special arrangements, infrastructure, history, and embedded heritage values, if any. It is rather an attempt to build a path towards a more nuanced institutional approach when dealing with already existing Roma settlements. Specifically, a top-down destruction should not take place without the consent and decent relocation and accommodation of Roma communities. If the demolition of the settlements is unavoidable, a clear and nuanced strategy must be deliberated considering not only the mechanical relocation of the people, but also empathetic treatment of their communal heritages.

Limitations

As regards the limitations of this thesis, they may be seen as a proposition for developing this research in the future giving it a broader geographical, social, political, and historical scope. Thus, more demolished Roma settlements across Europe could be studied as regards the omitted or recognized heritage patterns they represent. Such a research strategy would help build a deeper understanding of the way this type of heritage is created, treated or mistreated across different societies, political systems and historical periods. In this regard, such a broader analysis would serve as an analytical map facilitating ways to approach this heritage within the academic discourse on Roma and their heritage. Specifically, while this heritage may be seen as a byproduct of Roma racialization, it is important to recognize the significant heritage qualities it holds to Roma themselves.

As regards racialization, this heritage could be connected with this phenomena's broader processes. Parallels exist with black communities, aboriginal, and indigenous people such as Native Americans, Sami, and others. This initiative could access the similarities and show the systemic difficulties of protecting heritage for racialized and oppressed communities in different geographical contexts. Furthermore, intersectional dimensions related to gender, sexual orientation, social class, or physical ability could be further extended in approaching this kind of heritage allowing generation of better understanding of how this kind of unofficial heritage should be addressed and managed.

Finally, when it comes to my suggestion that the case of Parubanka should be addressed through the lens of racial justice by applying a concept of reconciliation, I believe that continuing a version of this research would greatly benefit from developing a broader and more nuanced theoretical and practical analysis of implementing reconciliation in the context of racial injustice connected to the destroyed heritage of Roma communities.

Parubanka in the future

Within this section, I would like to address the future of Parubanka's memory and heritage. What should happen next with the history, site, people and community of Parubanka? What should be done to preserve Parubanka's memory and who should decide what that memory comprises? How can the above-mentioned critical understanding of heritage facilitate bringing justice to people who suffered the brutal loss of their heritage?

Recently, within heritage scholarship, debates have emerged about the way preservationist ethics are attached to the idea of memory. Some scholars believe that some things should be allowed to vanish - deliberate forgetting is a process essentially constitutive to humans' relation to the present and future. However, some would argue that it is not necessarily material erasure causes that cultural amnesia and that such erasure may, paradoxically, be a

catalyst for tenacity of memory and significance.¹⁹² The question related to this debate is whether preservation or non-preservation of Parubanka's material remains would generate the meanings and values that the community and individuals identify with.

Remaining wary of generalizations in offering a path forward as well as avoiding any attempt to resolve the problems pertaining to the debates between preservationist and non-preservationist, I remain attuned to the reflections of Parubanka's residents. Thinking about what some of them had to say in their interviews, I argue that it should not be heritage experts or other authoritative institutes who predetermine what has to be done with Parubanka and its memory, even if funding is normally channeled through those institutions. The experts should, rather, find meaningful ways — even if it means letting physical things go — for the community and its individuals to deal with their heritage. The reflections on the future of Parubanka by its former residents made apparent their need to preserve the memory of the Parubanka settlement. Besides their own heritage practices, my respondents expressed an interest in conventional heritage tools such as monuments or building a museum. It seems that using such tools might provide them with a sense of ownership and build mutual trust between the Roma community, institutions and the broader society.

However, do monument or museum installations bring justice to the people? To what extent do these objects target the deep racism against Roma in the country? I suggest that the conventional heritagization of Parubanka should avoid simple gestures or tokenism. Rather, there should be an attempt to remedy the injustices that Parubanka's destruction produced. Indeed, the discussions about remedying racial injustice are observed within the nascent scholarship of Critical Romani Studies. According to Márton Rövid, "the antigypsyism turn can be seen as an emerging claim for racial justice."¹⁹³

¹⁹² Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 3–5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1359183506068808>.

¹⁹³ Rövid, "From Tackling Antigypsyism to Remedying Racial Injustice," 1739.

The most common frameworks of racial justice concern three interrelated notions: recognition, reparations, and reconciliation. Within Western liberal democracies reconciliation has become highly influential as a way of addressing contemporary struggles of historically oppressed groups. As a concept it synthesizes recognition and reparation. Thus, it should include tools and techniques such as reparation, compensation, apology, truth-telling, memorials, commemoration practice, rehabilitation and/or amnesty.¹⁹⁴ Reconciliation emerges as a key concept in addressing the destruction of heritage in the context of Parubanka.

However, in spite of my contention that the racial justice approach is vital in remedying the ills inflicted on Parubanka's community and individuals, I remain cautious of any generalizations. While combining a critical heritage and racial justice approach for advancing the struggles of the former Parubanka's residents, I hope to contribute to a general mitigation of racism and to open up a space for other similar cases across Europe that could be brought into the academic discourse.

¹⁹⁴ Rövid, "From Tackling Antigypsyism to Remedying Racial Injustice," 1742.

Appendix: List of Interviewees

Name	Sex	Age	When	Where
Armando	Male	50-60	12 th of December, 2022	Roma Community Centre, Vilnius
Germano	Male	50-60	13 th of December, 2022	Roma Community Centre, Vilnius
Zora	Female	25-30	14 th of December, 2022	Roma Community Centre, Vilnius
Almaza	Female	25-30	14 th of December, 2022	Roma Community Centre, Vilnius
Maria	Female	65-75	18 th of December, 2022	Roma Community Centre, Vilnius
Zina	Female	50-60	19 th of December, 2022	At the participant's home
Sofia	Female	50-60	20 th of December, 2022	At the participant's home
Tania	Female	55-65	21 st of December, 2022	At the participant's home

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